

The 10 Paramitas: Buddhist Ethics of Heart and Conduct for Spiritual Caregiving

Presentation Notes - June 22, 2012
National Conference: Association of Professional Chaplains

Description: The ethical core of the Buddhist path is one of its most important features. This presentation introduces the 10 Paramitas, the specific qualities of heart and modes of conduct that support and express Buddhist ethics. They are present to some degree for all who engage in the Buddhist Path, and have become central goals of training and conduct for Buddhist chaplains. Through lecture, clinical examples, and experiential exercises, participants will learn the importance of the 10 Paramitas (generosity, virtue, renunciation, wisdom, perseverance, patience, truthfulness, resolve, loving-kindness and equanimity) for use in multi-faith clinical settings. Particular emphasis will be placed on decision-making and cultural norms that impact the provision of care in clinical settings. Appropriate for spiritual caregivers of all faiths.

Learning Outcomes: at the end of this presentation, participants will be able to:

1. Articulate the importance of ethical conduct in relation to the overall practice and purpose of Buddhism
2. Incorporate Buddhist ethics into the provision of spiritual care in regards to decision making and cultural norms
3. Understand how Buddhist chaplains make use of Buddhist ethics for pastoral formation and functioning

Definition

ETYMOLOGY

(*Paramita*: Sanskrit)

(*Parami*: Pali)

<i>Parama</i>	highest, primary, most excellent
<i>Para</i>	beyond, the further bank, shore or boundary
<i>Mita</i>	that which has arrived
<i>Ita</i>	that which goes beyond

Paramita that which has gone beyond or goes beyond, that which crosses over to the other shore

The Paramitas carry one across to the further shore and they are of foremost importance in formulating the purpose of one's life.

WHAT & PURPOSE

Three Motivations: In engaging in Buddhist practices

- 1) One realizes the problems one can encounter in the next life, and is concerned about working to achieve a good *rebirth*.
- 2) One realizes that within *cyclic existence* there is no real happiness to be found, and one strives for personal liberation or *Nirvana*.
- 3) One realizes that all *sentient beings* are suffering within cyclic existence, and one strives to free all beings from suffering.

For people in the modern world who are wrestling with the issue of how to practice the Dhamma in daily life, the perfections provide a useful framework for developing a fruitful attitude so that any activity or relationship undertaken wisely with the primary purpose of developing the perfections in a balanced way becomes part of the practice.

- Path of development/maturation; Buddha described path as gradual (later teachings=sudden)
- necessary on the path of transcendence or realization
- cultivated in daily life as well, as compared to on retreat
- helping the aspirant to live an unobstructed life w/self-responsibility, requires effort/not magic, etc
- inner qualities to develop, then expressed outwards (while reaching the goal of enlightenment)
- virtues of attitude and behavior cultivated by practitioners on the path
- the paramitas are not commandments, but rather guidelines for learning how to be wiser spiritual beings, and for clarifying how we can best serve others.
- Study/practice to live our lives more consciously, mindfully and joyfully.
- The condition for the paramis: great compassion, aspiration, skillful means
- *paramis* are viewed as the essential elements of the path to buddhahood and hence closely identified with the bodhisattva path
- One of the beautiful features of the *paramitas* is that these qualities can be developed in daily life

Through the Paramitas one perfects the character of a Buddha, through compassion the ability to perform the work of a Buddha.

Paramita in Prose

The Paramitas “are neither in the heaven above nor in the earth below, nor are they to be found in the east, or the other quarters, but reside in my heart of flesh.”

Compassion	<i>Karuna</i>	As the Boddhisattvas thousand eyes behold the world's suffering Compassion awakens to perform the work of a Buddha.
Generosity	<i>Dana</i>	As a brimming water jar, overturned by anyone, Discharges entirely all the water, and retains none within Even so, when thou seest any that ask, great, small and middling, Do thou give away all in alms, as the water-jar overthrown.
Virtue	<i>Sila</i>	As a yak cow, when her tail has got in aught entangled Then and there awaits death, and will not injure her tail Ever guard the Sila as the yak guards her tail.
Renunciation	<i>Nekkhamma</i>	As a man long a denizen of the house of bonds, oppressed with suffering, Feels no pleasure therein, but rather longs for release, Even so do thou look upon all births as prison-houses.
Wisdom	<i>Prajna</i>	And as a monk on his begging rounds avoids no families, Either small, or great, or middling, and so obtains subsistence, Even so thou, constantly question all wise men.
Strength	<i>Virya</i>	As the lion, king of beasts, in lying, standing, and walking Is no laggard, but ever of resolute heart, Even so do thou also in every existence strenuously exert thyself.
Patience	<i>Kshanti</i>	And as the earth endures all that is thrown upon it, Whether things pure or impure, and feels neither anger nor pity, Even so endure the praises and reproaches of all men.
Truth	<i>Satya</i>	And as the Planet Venus, balanced in all her times and seasons, In the world of men and devas, departs not from her path, Even so do thou not depart from the course of truth.
Resolve	<i>Adhitthana</i>	And as the rocky mountain, immovable, firmly based, Is unshaken by many winds, and stands in its own place, Even so do thou also remain ever immovable in resolution.
Loving-kindness	<i>Metta</i>	And as water fills with its coolness Good men and bad alike, and carries off all impurity, Even so do thou look with friendship alike on the evil and the good
Equanimity	<i>Upekkha</i>	And as the earth is indifferent when things pure and impure are cast upon it Even so be evenly-balanced in joy and grief.

In Particular

1

Generosity: the characteristic of relinquishing; its function is to dispel greed for things that can be given away; its manifestation is non-attachment

- *Giving is the greatest fortune.*
- *By giving one unites friends.*

2

Virtue: purifies both the donor and the recipient; while giving benefits others, virtue prevents the affliction of others; its function is blameless conduct; its manifestation is moral purity

- *Refraining from*
 1. *harming living beings* (correlated with practicing loving kindness)
 2. *taking the non-given* (correlated with practicing generosity)
 3. *committing sexual misconduct* (correlated with practicing contentment)
 4. *false speech* (correlated with practicing truthful communication)
 5. *intoxicants* (correlated with practicing mindfulness).

3

Renunciation: contemplates the benefits in renunciation, with a mind inclining toward the happiness of renunciation, solitude, and peace.

- *Whatever is not yours, monks, -- abandon it! When you have abandoned it, this will lead to your welfare and happiness for a long time. And what is not yours? Material form is not yours – abandon it! Feeling is not yours – abandon it! Perception is not yours – abandon it! Formations are not yours – abandon them! Consciousness is not yours – abandon it! This will lead to your welfare and happiness for a long time.*

4

Wisdom: penetrating the nature of phenomena, like the penetration of an arrow shot by a skillful archer; greed, hate and delusion create blindness, while wisdom restores sight.

- *And what is the wisdom of one who is in training? There is the case where a monk discerns as it actually is that 'This is suffering... This is the origination of suffering... This is the cessation of suffering... This is the path of practice leading to the cessation of suffering.'*

5

Energy: literally, the state of a hero or strong person; variously translated into English as vigor, effort, exertion; the characteristic of energy is strengthening and support.

- *It is for you to make strong effort, the Buddhas only tell you how.*
- *As an old house stands when strengthened by new pillars, so, when strengthened by energy, wholesome states do not fall away or deteriorate.*

6

Patience: endurance, forbearance, forgiveness.

- *And how is a practitioner patient? By being resilient to cold, heat, hunger, and thirst; to the touch of flies, mosquitoes, wind, sun, and reptiles; to ill-spoken, unwelcome words and bodily feelings that, when they arise, are painful, piercing, disagreeable, displeasing, and menacing to life.*

7

Truth: the characteristic of non-deceptiveness; without truthfulness, there can be no practice in accordance with one's compassionate vows.

- *Without a commitment to truth there is no Buddhist path. Dharma is a synonym for truth and Dharma practice is synonymous with living a life of truth.*

8

Determination a.k.a. resolve: utmost dedication; its manifestation is being unshakeable in that task: Four resolves: wisdom, truth, relinquishment, peace.

- *As if one's head were on fire a practitioner should live mindfully.*
- *Though skin sinews and bones wither away, though flesh and blood of my body dry up, I shall not give up my efforts till I have attained whatever is attainable by heroic perseverance, energy, and endeavour.*

9

Loving-kindness: benevolence.... the characteristic of loving-kindness is to promote wellbeing; its manifestation is the removal of annoyance. Its proximate cause is seeing the loveliness of beings.

- *Loving Kindness succeeds when it makes ill will subside, and it fails when it produces selfish affection.*
- *When one practices Loving Kindness:*
 1. *One sleeps happily.*
 2. *One wakes happily.*
 3. *One has no bad dreams.*
 4. *One is loved by others.*
 5. *One is loved by non-humans.*
 6. *One is guarded by devas.*
 7. *Fire, poison, or sword won't touch one.*
 8. *One's mind becomes concentrated quickly.*
 9. *One's complexion becomes clear.*
 10. *One dies with a mind free from confusion.*
 11. *If no higher attainment is reached, one is reborn in the Brahma realms.*

10

Equanimity: to see things impartially as the outcome of actions; generated by reflection on the fact that beings inherit the results of their own karma and life unfolds according the law of karma. ...

- *Equanimity is a protection from the "eight worldly winds": praise and blame, success and failure, pleasure and pain, fame and disrepute.*

More information/learning:

- *The Ten Paramis* course by Gil Fronsdal
www.insightmeditationcenter.org/books-articles/articles/theparamis
- *The Ten Perfections: A Study Guide* By Thanissaro Bhikkhu
www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/study/perfections.html
- *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics* by Peter Harvey, (Cambridge University Press, 2000)
- *Buddha Does: A Practical Guide to Enlightened Living*, by Lama Surya Das (Harper SF, 2007)