

THE SIX PERFECTIONS - MOTIVATION

The distinguishing characteristic of Mahayana Buddhism is the motivation to liberate all beings from unsatisfactory states. The particular method is to achieve the enlightened state because this is the most effective position from which to help others. The fully enlightened state is one of perfect union of wisdom and compassion - bodhicitta. The bodhisattva embarks on the Mahayana path by developing the altruistic intention to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

The Lam Rim, or the Graduated Path to Enlightenment, is a series of fourteen meditations. These are divided into three main sections, or scopes, reflecting three levels of Buddhist aspiration or motivation. The third, or higher, scope is that of the bodhisattva and it begins with the ninth meditation - the development of bodhicitta. After having reviewed the preceding meditations on such subjects as the fortunate human rebirth, death and impermanence, suffering, refuge and karma, the practitioner generates a feeling of concern for others and understanding of their conditions. The wish to attain enlightenment is established in the mind-stream.

The wish to attain enlightenment is a necessary pre-requisite to actually attaining enlightenment, but wishing alone is not sufficient. The bodhisattva engages in the practice of the six perfections as the tenth meditation on the Lam Rim path. These perfections are: generosity, ethics, patience, perseverance, concentration and wisdom. The first five of these perfections were taught by the Buddha as a means to cultivate ultimate wisdom - the perfection of wisdom.

It is possible to achieve the realisation of emptiness without practising generosity, ethics and so on. This realisation can overcome the afflictive obscurations - primarily confusion, craving and hostility. However, this realisation arises from meditation and such wisdom alone is insufficient for overcoming cognitive obscurations - for example, the appearance of things as being truly existent. Cognitive obscurations are the major hindrance to the achievement of full spiritual awakening.

By engaging in wholesome activities of the body, speech and mind one accumulates a "store of virtue". Such behaviour places beneficial imprints upon the mind. If one habituates oneself with good behaviour towards others such that it becomes wilful, spontaneous and natural, the interdependence of oneself and others becomes increasingly clear. The mind gradually approaches an awareness of the way things really are. This is the process of purification of the cognitive obscurations.

Within the context of the Lam Rim, the purpose of these six perfections is to "ripen the mind-stream" of the practitioner. Thus, although these activities are performed with the motivation of concern for others, the direct results are to bring about more wisdom and compassion in one's own mind. The next meditation on the Lam Rim is the four means of attraction. This is a practice to "ripen the mind-stream" of others - to help others bring about wisdom and compassion in their minds.



Recommended Reading

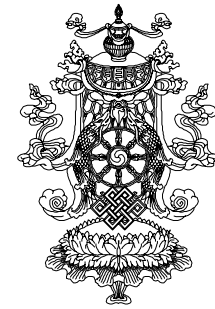
Lam Rim Bristol has both a library and a shop available for use. There are many books suitable for reading in connection with these evenings. The following books are particularly recommended for those interested in the Lam Rim:

Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand, *Pabongka Rinpoche*

The Essential Nectar, *Geshé Rabten*

A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, *Shantideva*

Transcendent Wisdom, *H.H. the Dalai Lama*



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THE BASICS OF BUDDHISM

THE SIX PERFECTIONS

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*"The perfect way is difficult only for those who pick and choose.
It is fully revealed when there is neither greed nor hate".*

Seng-t'san

THE SIX PERFECTIONS

1 GENEROSITY (*dana paramita*)

Generosity is, by nature, the thought wishing to give - body, possessions and all the good results from one's virtuous acts. Its external expression is towards others, further enhancing the thought wishing to give. Generosity is not simply the external act itself, otherwise it could never have been perfected by anyone while beings still live in poverty. Perfect generosity is developed in conjunction with acts of generosity. There are three types of generosity.

Generosity with material things

Ranging from giving simple possessions to the giving of one's own life, generosity should be practised without expectation of anything in return. One should give willingly within one's capacity such that there are no regrets later.

Generosity with the dharma

Greater than all other forms of giving is the giving of dharma. Even when not directly conveying the dharma to others, it is an act of generosity to imagine others listening during study, meditation or chanting.

Generosity of giving others fearlessness

The opportunities to give to others in this way throughout the day are innumerable - allaying the fears of others, saving insects from drowning or worms from drying in the sun.

2 ETHICS (*sila paramita*)

The perfection of ethics, or morals, is the reversal of thoughts of harming others along with the basis of such thoughts, turning them into the thought of abandoning these actions. There are three types of ethics.

Ethics in restraint from misdeeds

Generally, this refers to avoidance of the ten non-virtues: killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, slander, abuse, gossip, harmful mind, desirous mind and wrong view. Where appropriate, it refers to keeping one's vows.

Ethics of gathering virtuous dharma

By following the path - practising, studying, meditating, listening and teaching one acquires virtuous dharma. The entire Lam Rim serves to increase the three type of ethics.

Ethics of working for the sake of sentient beings

Looking after the concerns of others in many ways, this also includes the four means of attraction - the next meditation on the Lam Rim.

3 PATIENCE (*kshanti paramita*)

Patience is by nature the mind being undisturbed by any

harm that is inflicted, or by mental anguish due to suffering.

Patience in remaining calm when provoked

In particular, one must restrain anger when attacked or annoyed by others. Anger is the worst of all non-virtues. One moment of anger destroys ages of accumulated good will.

Patience in accepting suffering

If suffering is not accepted, it becomes more unbearable. Suffering may be seen as purification, removing the problems that were bound to come sooner or later.

Patience in gaining assurance in the dharma

Constantly recall and check the teachings. One should not be impatient if results do not come immediately, but establish confidence that results will definitely come in the future.

4 PERSEVERANCE (*virya paramita*)

Perfect perseverance (also known as joyful effort or vigour) delights in any virtue. There are three types of perseverance. These are in opposition to three types of laziness: sloth; yearning for and engaging in worldly pursuits; defeatism.

Armour-like perseverance

This is the strength to endure discomfort on the path in order to help others. This has the resolve to practise without being diverted to more pleasurable, but meaningless, pursuits.

The perseverance to collect virtuous things

This is collecting merit, purifying oneself, making offerings, persevering in the practice of the six perfections, etc. Thus one avoids defeatism.

The perseverance to work for the sake of others

This is similar to the ethic of working for the sake of others - the joy of so doing increases the benefits. This way, one avoids persevering solely on one's own behalf.

5 CONCENTRATION (*dhyana paramita*)

There are several prerequisites for concentration. Amongst these are: finding a suitable environment; having few wants; being content; having pure ethics; abandoning the demands of society; completely abandoning conceptual thoughts such as desire. On investigation of these, we find that they are largely covered by the other perfections.

Having made some progress toward these prerequisites, one has to overcome obstacles arising in the mind during meditation: laziness; forgetting the object of concentration; excitement and dullness; not applying an antidote to the obstacles; over-enthusiastic application of antidotes.

One's concentration passes through nine mental states. These start with fixing the mind on the object of concentration to the ability to place one's mind with equanimity on the object

without expending any effort to keep it there.

There are four mental processes into which these nine mental states can be grouped. Firstly, continuous effort is required to 'squeeze attention' from the mind. As the attention improves, the interruptions reduce, requiring only occasional corrective effort. Then, keeping the attention steady on the object without interruption, a small amount of effort is still required. Eventually, effortless attention is achieved.

With perfect concentration, or true mental quiescence, one goes beyond these mental states to achieve mental and physical suppleness. One could choose to remain in this very pleasant state but, although it can be long-lasting, this is not permanent. To achieve complete liberation, the bodhisattva uses this state to develop insight - perfect wisdom.

6 WISDOM (*prajna paramita*)

The root cause of all suffering is ignorance. The only way to cut this root is through developing wisdom. We have mistaken concepts of the nature of our existence through grasping at a personal 'I' - which appears independent, inherently existent and permanent. Due to this, delusion prevails and we bring about suffering through unskillful acts. Therefore, our mind is directed towards the nature of 'self'. Firstly, we turn our mind towards the personal self. Then we turn our mind towards the self of external phenomena.

Problems arise in association with the strong feeling of self. Rather than just denying this self to be existent, we start with establishing what it is, or how it appears to us. If we do not establish such a self, we can never investigate it. We then consider all possible modes of existence of such an 'I'. It could be the body, the mind or both or neither, or something else. We consider if the 'I' is the same as one of these, completely defined by it. Not finding this to be the case, we consider if it is different, completely independent. Eventually, the conclusion is reached that the 'self' is merely an imputation on a collection of interdependent phenomena.

We then perform a similar analysis to material phenomena and we find that there is no fixed identity to such phenomena separate from our projections on them. Phenomena appearing to us this way are comprised of parts, each comprised of smaller parts dependent on causes and conditions. Similarly, consciousness does not exist as something permanent and non-changing. Each moment of consciousness has causes and conditions rooted in previous moments of consciousness.

These thought processes may be intellectually addressed, but the special insight is only attained by constant analysis and re-analysis. By practising over and over again, developing concentration and understanding, true insight is achieved. When associated with the other perfections, all obscurations will eventually be removed.