

**THE SIX PARAMITAS**  
**BY**  
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Now I will teach in some relative detail about the six paramitas. I say relative detail because if I go into full detail of the paramitas then I would have to teach some major text like the *Bodhisattva's Way of Life* (Skt. *Bodhisattvacaryavata*ra). This kind of text reveals all the details of the ten paramitas and ten bodhisattva levels etc. Also when it comes to sutra, there are many enormous sutras that will be the discourse of the Buddha on the paramitas. Therefore what I will cover here will be very small, very basic, and very simple aspects of the six paramitas.

The six paramitas somehow summarize the entire view, meditation, and action of a bodhisattva. The word paramita actually represents the final outcome of each one of the practices. For example, with one of the paramitas, generosity, the first one, generosity will become a paramita at the end, not at the beginning. Somehow it became customary that when we talk about generosity it is also titled as a generosity paramita because that is what is intended. Generosity actually means that whatever you are able to do for others you do with no reservation. You are not holding anything for yourself You are totally open and dedicated to do whatever you can for others, that is generosity. Otherwise many times when you say generosity people think about food, clothes, money and things like that, but it goes beyond that, and what you can give does not have any kind of limitation. The only limitation is that it has to be good for them, not bad for them.

*Generosity*

Now with all six of the paramitas, each of them are elaborated into three. So first is generosity. The first aspect is material generosity. This is described as meagre generosity—it is not very deep, because the material that you give to others will only benefit them in a very superficial kind of manner. So food, clothes, money, property, medicine, etc, whatever others need which will be good for them is material generosity.

The second is the generosity of protection, protection from fear. If somebody is afraid then you protect them so that they don't have to be afraid; that is protection.

Also that protection has to be protecting them from what will be harmful for them, for this life

as well as for the next life, but mostly for this life.

Then the third and most superior aspect of generosity is the sacred (not secret) generosity, which is the generosity of dharma. Dharma is the most superior generosity because it will not only benefit them for this life but also for the next life. Also it will not only benefit them for this life and the next life, but until total liberation and freedom from all limitation. For example, the first generosity, which is material, can only liberate them from limitation, which is very limited; limited limitation. For example, if you give somebody shelter, anything can happen to that person, even after they've been given shelter. Normally, with due respect to poor people, I respect them, but having said that, they are poor because of their karma, they are not poor accidentally, therefore if you give somebody who doesn't have anything something very big, they don't know how to handle it. Therefore if you give them a house, they might sell it for a very cheap price.

I will give you a very personal example. One time I was living in a city in India and I had a person who came to clean my house—I paid him and he cleaned my house. Everyday he had to walk about half an hour and he was very thin, not very strong, so I felt very sorry for him and I bought a bicycle for him. Three or four days later he came back and told me his bicycle was stolen. I'm not sure if it *was* stolen or if he sold it, I don't know. Anyway, I didn't buy him another one. I thought it was no good for him. That is a personal experience. So if something like that was not there, then they would not be poor. It is their karma. So instead of just helping them with material goods, you also at the same time should educate them, so that they will learn how not to be poor.

Another example, at about the same time I used to have a gardener who came for a very short time, just one hour because it was not a big garden, it was very small. When I looked he used sticks and all kinds of things to take care of the garden; he had no tools. So I bought all the tools for the gardening, then I left and went back maybe after three or four months and nothing was there, it was all gone! The person also was not there, I couldn't find him. So it is a vicious cycle. The karma is such that you can't get things together. It may be simple for us, we know—to get something like that together is very simple. If your job is gardening why do you want to destroy your fingers? Why do you want to use a stick? You get some tools then use them for my garden and

for the next garden, it is very convenient, good for one's health and easy to do. But somehow some people don't get it together, it gets all mixed up, and that is, I think, nothing but karma. It can't be anything else. It is very easy to say "Oh, that person is stupid." But I don't think they are stupid because those people, the two of them, compared to me, in many things they are more clever than me.

This way the most superior generosity is the generosity of knowledge, the generosity of wisdom, which is from the dharma. Finally they will reach Buddhahood and that is the ultimate of all wisdom; that is the becoming of primordial wisdom. Now you know that generosity is a very vast subject, not just giving something from your wallet.

### *Morality*

Next is the paramita of morality. Again many times when we think of morality the first thing that comes to mind is "Oh, you are not supposed to do something. This is what you are not supposed to do, that is morality." But actually it goes both ways. You should not do that and if you do it is immoral. Then, you're supposed to do that and if you don't do it is immoral. Now, even after you've heard that you still have the idea of morality as somebody's set of rules. Somebody made some rules—you must do this, you cannot do that. So some kind of rules made by somebody, perhaps by some committee.

I call that kind of morality or rule a 'rule of convenience' or 'rule of majority'. It has nothing to do with truth. It just suits some people who have the power to make those rules, it is convenient for them. So they make those rules and if you break them you are in trouble and if you follow them you are okay. But that has nothing to do with what is right and what is wrong, most of the time. Sometimes it might be based on that, but most of the time it is not.

I will give you a very simple example. It is like mass produced medicine. Everybody who is diagnosed as having a certain problem they give them one particular pill. Whoever is diagnosed as having some other problem, then give them another particular pill. It is the same pill for everybody. Traditional doctors make medicine; let's say a combination for each patient because each patient's sickness is different. All of you catch colds, but each one of your colds is different. Therefore, the doctor checks you and that way the doctor can make the perfect dose for you, which will not be the same for the next person who might have the same sickness, but a

different level, so different doses. There are so many people who complain that our medicine, modern medicine, has many side effects—that it is good for something but at the same time bad for something else. These kinds of experiences are being expressed by so many thousands of people. Now, I believe, I could be wrong, but I believe this is because of the same kind of uniform medicine for everybody.

I remember when I was a child some old doctors had a very precise scale and so many small bags of medicine. Then they would measure the combination with the scale, and then they mixed them, making the right dose like a small package, a small paper package for each person for each day. It is very interesting, and of course, lots of smells, because all of these medicines are open so lots of medicine smells. It's not like a modern medicine pack where until you open it you don't even know what the color of it is. These ones were all in the open and you could smell the medicine in the whole room as they made these combinations for each person.

In true Theravada morality, the rules are the same for everybody. It says that a monk or nun who becomes a monk or nun today must follow the same morality as monks and nuns who were ordained a hundred years ago. But of course, nobody lives a hundred years, but it says that. So that means whether you become a monk or nun today, or you became a monk or nun twenty or thirty years ago, you follow the same rules. That is the Theravada.

But in Mahayana morality is dependent on the intention, it depends on the nature. If it's a benefit to others you must do it; you must do whatever is right, if it is of benefit for others. If it is harmful for others, even something that is supposed to be a good thing to do, if you do it, it is bad because it is harming others. It is like giving a knife to somebody who wants to kill somebody. That is very bad. It is generosity to give a knife for free, but if that person is going after somebody with it, then it is bad.

Another example is if there are five people chasing after someone and that person comes to you and asks you to hide them, then you hide them. Maybe under a big dust bin turned upside down with all the garbage on them. Then when the five people chasing him reach you, if you tell the truth, "Oh, the guy you are looking for is right here" they will open it up and beat him, kill him. So there you have to lie, you say, "Oh, actually yes, he ran that way, way over there! A few blocks away." Then those people will chase him over there and you open up the garbage can and

send him the other way. So you save the person. In that way lying is good, whereas normally lying is bad. So in Mahayana it depends on what it does, it depends on the motivation. It is not just black and white.

So that is two: do what you're supposed to do, that is one morality, and don't do what you are not supposed to do, that is another morality. Now the third one is, whatever acts are beneficial for sentient beings, you conduct them, you do them. And that benefit should not be just for short term benefit and then long term harm. No. It has to be short term benefit as well as long term benefit. You have to be wise enough to conduct this kind of morality—you know it is beneficial in the short term as well as the long term. Otherwise you have to stick with the first two and not do the third one.

### *Tolerance*

The third paramita is patience or tolerance. The first is that any suffering, any pain, any unwanted situation that you are in you are able to tolerate without being destroyed or affected by it, that is the first patience. I think everybody knows that is what patience is. When you are in trouble you don't react to it, you are able to keep your mind calm, keep your mind cool, and keep your mind clear. That is the first one, what everybody knows as patience.

The second one is also very closely related and is: whoever is doing harm to you, you are able to keep equanimity towards them; that is the second tolerance, equanimity. It is very difficult to keep equanimity when somebody is purposely doing everything he or she can to harm you. But if you don't have a clear understanding, even if you are letting them harm you and you are indifferent, it is also bad karma because you are making them a criminal; you are allowing them to become a criminal. So that needs some clear understanding. No one can harm me if I refuse to be harmed. What they do is their business, but how it affects me is in my control. If I am a thief and somebody says "he is a thief" that is true. It is not harmful, it is actually helpful. But if I am not a thief and somebody says I am a thief, I will never become a thief because I am not a thief. Maybe I have been a thief a hundred lifetimes back and that karma might be ripening now. So let that be purified by this.

Another thing is that you should feel compassion for somebody who is hysterical. If you haven't done anything but some person is going hysterical against you, you should feel sorry and

compassion for that person. In my level, I can keep equanimity with that kind of reason. Otherwise if somebody is doing something against me intentionally, to just keep equanimity with no reason is difficult for me. I am not at that level. I can pretend to be dumb for some time, but not forever. Pretending to be dumb is not actually tolerance; that is just pretending to be dumb. When you are not dumb and you pretend to be dumb, sometimes it is very good for you, because you can avoid lots of people's jealousy, lots of other people's unnecessary misunderstanding because they think "poor thing, he is dumb." Like some animals, they have a special defense system, so when an enemy comes to them they pretend to be dead, but that's not tolerance, that is just being clever.

The third tolerance is tolerance of understanding dharma, which will take a lot of merit. For example, I heard people who say "How can I believe that Prince Siddhartha became Buddha?" I have even heard Buddhists who said that. Also, "Don't you think there is a lot of possibility that it is a fairy tale?" What I am supposed to say? So one needs a lot of merit in order to have faith in the right thing. For me it is no problem. I didn't see Prince Siddhartha attain enlightenment under the Bodhi tree but I know, I have faith, I believe, I trust that one thousand percent. There is no question. But people with no merit have that kind of question. So that is the third tolerance, the tolerance of understanding.

Sometimes peoples' reason is "I have to see it. If I haven't seen it how can I believe it?" But with due respect I think that is rubbish. For example, I have not seen somebody jump off the twentieth floor of a building. Obviously I did not jump off the twentieth floor because I am still here in one piece. I haven't done that. But I know and believe what will happen if I do, actually it doesn't even have to be the twentieth floor, if I jump off the fifth floor I will be dead. I don't have to see it, I know. I believe. So for this kind of thing we don't need merit, we just know. But for something so holy and sacred we need lots of merit in order to know, in order to believe. So understanding karma, understanding emptiness, understanding Buddha, understanding all aspects of dharma is the third tolerance.

### *Diligence*

The fourth paramita is diligence. The first thing is that it is like armor, it is like something that is indestructible—indestructible diligence. That is your one-pointed determination at the

beginning. No matter how many lifetimes it takes, you wish to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings to attain Buddhahood. You made that vow and that is very strong, that is very clear, that is very complete, therefore nothing can affect it. Nothing can stop you from it. Nothing can avert you from it. You will succeed in it because of this armor-like diligence.

The second diligence is the joy of doing good things, right things. That also has a lot to do with merit. For example, when we do some useless thing we spend so many hours and so much money and we are totally exhausted but we think it is fun. But when we do dharma practice, we just sit and relax, chant, pray, do some prostration, do some good and beneficial things for others, and we think that it is boring, “I am tired, and I am bored,” why is that? Obviously something is missing. What is missing? Merit is missing. Therefore, for good things, even if it is very comfortable it is tiring, but for useless things, even if they are very tiring it is fun. So that is the second diligence—that you like to do good things, it makes you happy. Doing good things is fun, doing good things is nice—enjoying doing good things comes because of merit.

The third diligence is doing what is beneficial for others. It is that voluntarily doing something for others is a joy and you want to do more. That is diligence in doing things for the benefit of others, but it has many levels. One is just a basic thing and another is a spiritual dharma transmission.

### *Meditation*

The fifth paramita is meditation. The first is, whatever you have seen, you are able to remain in it, in peace. There are two aspects in this. The first is whatever you have seen or realized through whatever practice you have done, you are able to apply this in every aspect or situation in life so that everything becomes practice. Second is, whatever is happening in front of you and around you does not affect you negatively, it affects you positively, and that will naturally mean you will affect it positively. For example, when you go to holy places you take small stones home for a blessing. You take some dirt home for a blessing. You take some water home for a blessing, why? That is where Buddha attained enlightenment. That is where Guru Rinpoche attained enlightenment. That is where Milarepa attained enlightenment. That is where these enlightened ones performed their activity, therefore everything becomes part and parcel of them. Every single grain of dust is blessed because it has become part of the enlightened ones.

So because of that then we take this home for a blessing. Otherwise dirt is dirt, a stone is a stone, water is water, there is no difference. But there is a big difference between that and other dirt, stone and water, relatively speaking. In Vajrayana, every water, every piece of dirt, every stone, everything is sacred—everything is the mandala of Buddha. But that is not for here, here I am teaching the Mahayana. I should remember that, although it is hard for me. I have to somehow pretend that I am just talking Mahayana, but I know Vajrayana somehow comes out here and there.

The second aspect is progressive accomplishment meditation. That is every aspect of meditation, like prayer, visualization or just sitting quietly, is to progress you, step by step, towards enlightenment.

The third is meditation to benefit all sentient beings. I will give you an example, which is very befitting for this because this is a Mahayana teaching and Prajnaparamita is part of the Mahayana. The essence of the Prajnaparamita is the *Sherab Nyingpo*, I think you call it the Heart Sutra. When the Heart Sutra manifested then Buddha—according to the Mahayana, in Vajrayana our understanding of Buddha is a little bit beyond this—was in the holy place called Shagu Ponpo Rig, or Vulture’s Peak. Rajgir is better I think, Vulture’s Peak does not translate well. Anyway, Buddha was there and was in the samadhi known as *samo nangwa*, which can be translated in many ways but I will call it ‘deep light’. Then Shariputra, through Buddha’s blessing, asked a question to Avalokiteshvara, and Avalokiteshvara, through Buddha’s blessing, answered, and in that way the Heart Sutra came about. So Buddha was in the meditation of deep light and then Buddha’s blessing blessed the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara and the Heart Sutra manifested. Then at the end Buddha just smiled and that was the acknowledgement that it was correct. Also Buddha said “Good! It is good!” That way it became Buddha’s teaching, it is not Shariputra’s teaching. It is in the Kangyur which is Buddha’s teachings; it is not in the Tengyur which is the commentary by the learned and enlightened masters.

Another kind of title for this sutra is ‘Nine Sharipu’ because Avalokiteshvara repeated ‘Shariputra’ many times. The text also says Shariputra asked Avalokiteshvara. When I was a child and memorized this I had to be sure that I said Shariputra nine times and then I had



memorized the text correctly. If one was missing then I would be missing something and I would get into trouble with the teacher. So I would have to go back and read it again.

So that is one example of meditation for the benefit of others. But this is a very high benefit, it is the Mahayana level of benefit. But there is also the Theravada level of benefit, as well as the benefit for ordinary sentient beings who are not even able to comprehend Theravada; the Buddha's or meditators' meditation benefits them. So all of that is the third aspect of meditation.

### *Wisdom*

Now the sixth paramita. The first aspect is the deep knowing exactly as it is—that means recognition of the truth, realization of the truth. You can also call it realization of emptiness.

The second is vast recognition of everything. The first is deep and the second is vast. You can also understand this as the wisdom of clarity.

The third is stainless primordial wisdom.

In this way the first, second and third wisdoms become non-dualistic, they become one. You can say one, which is much easier for everybody, but one is not very good because it is the opposite of two. But somehow I think a little bit of incorrectness is more correct for us.

These three wisdoms can also be understood as the wisdom of learning or hearing; the wisdom of contemplation; and the wisdom of meditation. After receiving teachings, after hearing teachings, after receiving the transmission of the lineage of the teachings, then you can practice and you can contemplate. Then after contemplating you can meditate. That way it is a perfect sequence.

Teaching and listening is very dualistic, contemplating is still dualistic but less dualistic, and meditation is the least dualistic. So through meditation you can become whatever you are meditating.

There is a very strong connection, an almost inseparable connection in Mahayana between wisdom and emptiness. Primordial wisdom derived out of emptiness. If it is not emptiness, then it is something. If it is something, then it can never be primordial wisdom. There is no example or comparison which is suitable for primordial wisdom. There is no dualistic example that will suit the non-dualistic primordial wisdom that is the essence of everything, that is the essence of you, and the essence of you is the essence of your mind. There is no example that can

describe the essence of your mind precisely. You can say mind is clear like the sky or mind is empty like space; you can give a partial example but you cannot give a perfect example. A perfect example for the mind is mind itself. If somebody asks you how is the nature of mind, your answer should be that the nature of mind is exactly like the nature of mind, nothing else, there is no other example.

So these are the six paramitas and I am sure you've heard about ten paramitas. When we say ten paramitas, then the first five are exactly the same as in the six paramitas but the sixth paramita, the wisdom paramita, is elaborated into four—method, strength, aspiration, and primordial wisdom. So the ten paramitas are: generosity, morality, tolerance, diligence, meditation, wisdom, method, strength, aspiration, and primordial wisdom.

Now when each one of these becomes a paramita is when your practice of each paramita becomes non-dualistic, or more accurately we can say free of three spheres. In Madhyamaka texts it is mentioned very clearly. For example, with generosity, “what is to give,” “who is to receive” and “who is to give or who is giving,” when these three become inseparable, then it is the generosity paramita. Until then we can call it the generosity paramita but it is not really, it is just generosity. It is also the same with the other paramitas.

Paramita means complete; reach the other side, *para du chinpa*, that means completed. Although when we learn we have to say the generosity paramita first, then the morality paramita second, etc. We have to say it like that because we can't say everything at the same time. If I want to say everything at the same time I would need one mouth to talk about the generosity paramita, another one to talk about the morality paramita, another to talk about diligence etc. I would need one, two, three, four, five, six mouths to talk at the same time and even that would not work, so I have to talk one by one. Therefore you cannot only have one paramita because when you accomplish one of the paramitas you accomplish all of the paramitas. I will give you a very simple example, with generosity. There is the morality of generosity, then patience of generosity, then diligent generosity, meditation generosity and wisdom generosity. You cannot have just the generosity paramita, it has to be all of them.

So that is a teaching on the six paramitas, the essence of Mahayana practice. The Mahayana view, the Mahayana meditation, and the Mahayana action are all included in these six paramitas.

With this we have now completed our connection in the teachings of Mahayana. Then dedicating the merit of all this for the benefit of all sentient beings to reach Buddhahood is how we can practice bodhichitta.