

The Practice of the Ten Paramitas

Compiled by Taizen Verkuilen

“All Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are wholly devoted to the emancipation of all beings. This purpose is constant and spontaneous on their part, and its wisdom and beneficence are universal. All beings without regard to individuality are moved to think of or to recollect all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, so that sometimes seeing them, sometimes hearing them, all beings acquire a measure of spiritual benefit that will ultimately bring them to the Path. All beings will become able to overcome hindrances as they are met with, will gain insight, will realize Enlightenment, and finally will be able to enter into the presence of all the Buddhas.”

Ashvaghosa, *Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana* p. 37



The Practice of the Ten Pāramitās

When I first became Matsuoka Roshi's student in 1970, I inquired, "What is the first thing I need to know." He did not give me a direct answer, but instead asked me to come with him that night to help at a memorial service at a member's home. I accompanied him and afterwards he asked what I learned? I mentioned a number of items, but then I expressed my perplexity at the formality of the presentation of Dana. He left my confusion hanging, not offering any answer except to ask me to join him again next week for another home service. After many of these services, I came to understand the presentation of Dana was really the high point of the service. The formal passing of the appreciation envelope obviously helps monks and priests care for their worldly needs, but more importantly it is a manifestation of the relationship of shared generosity that exists between the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and sentient life. The Pāramitā of Dana is the doorway where Buddhist Dharma first manifests within a practitioner's heart, as magnanimity and joy of giving. This is why Dana is first on the listing of the Ten Paramitas.

This booklet contains a group of definitions, and teaching guides on the Pāramitās from a number of different sources, contemporary and ancient. Pāramitā is a Buddhist term often translated as "perfection." It is described in Buddhist commentaries as qualities of noble character generally associated with enlightening beings.

The Pāramitās are the bases of training for those looking to achieve enlightenment. They are described as a set of ideals that guide self-cultivation. They are concrete images of the Buddhist way of seeing and being in the world.

In Tsung-mi's Analysis of Mind, the third Enlightened Aspect instructs the practice of the Pāramitās as the means to rid oneself of the defilements of anger, greed, and ignorance.

The Tibetan teacher Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche renders "Pāramitā" into English as "transcendent action" and then frames and qualifies it:

"When we say that Pāramitā means "transcendent action," we mean it in the sense that actions or attitude are performed in a non-egocentric manner. "Transcendental" does not refer to some external reality, but rather to the way in which we conduct our lives and perceive the world – either in an egocentric or a non-egocentric way. The Pāramitās are concerned with the effort to step out of the egocentric mentality."

The six presentations of the Pāramitās' listed below provide varying views on how they are introduced to those treading the preparatory path of resolving conditioning, and how their continuing emphasis is at the center of cultivation and integration of the path of awakening.

SECTION 1

THE RIGHT PRACTICE OF THE TRUE PATH:

EXCERPT FROM CHAPTER NINE OF *THE AWAKENING OF FAITH IN THE MAHAYANA* BY ASHVAGHOSA [Anabotei Dai-Osho]

The Pāramitās are shown to be connected with and serve as skillful means in enhancing the Buddhist articles of faith.

“In the foregoing sections a distinction has been made between the awakening of faith and the awakening of aspiration. The first stage of awakening must necessarily be based on partial knowledge. Faith is a trust in something at first dimly apprehended, or accepted on authority, or merely hoped for. As knowledge increases there is the awakening of aspiration to become identified with Truth itself. The goal of aspiration is the spiritual realization of this identity of the self with the perfect Oneness of Mind-essence. *Thus it can be said that faith leads to the transcendence of the non-enlightenment that characterizes the physical plane, while aspiration leads to the transcendence of ignorance that characterizes the mental plane. Enlightenment is therefore seen to be the goal of an unfolding process that clears away hindrances and illusions, and reveals actuality. It is not a process of accumulation, but a process of getting rid of, first of false imaginations and attachments, and second of getting rid of all particularization and discrimination.* These things having been gotten rid of there is realization of Wisdom.

This part of the discussion is intended for those who have not yet entered into the order of Constant Truth. It is devoted to the elucidation of the practice and discipline that first awakens faith and then through aspiration leads on to Enlightenment. Four aspects of faith may be distinguished.

First, there is instinctive belief in the wisdom and goodness of Ultimate Reality by reason of which one thinks confidently and joyfully of it.

Second, there is a belief in Buddha as manifesting Ultimate Reality and as enfolding within the practitioner efficient and sufficient merits to warrant one in joyfully and confidently paying homage to Buddha, making offerings, listening to the teachings, disciplining oneself according to the teachings, and aspiring after full realization of Ultimate Truth.

Third, there is a confident belief in the Dharma as embodying all Truth that encourages one to joyfully practice the Pāramitās.

Fourth, there is sincere belief in the Sangha as embodying true morality, that warrants one in trusting it, making generous offerings to it, allying oneself with it, and accepting its discipline as being beneficial both to oneself and others.

Again, faith will be changed into confident certainty by the sincere and earnest practice of the Pāramitās: Dana – charity, Sila – good behavior, Kshanti – patience, Vīrya – zeal, Samadhi – concentration, and Prajna – wisdom.”¹

¹ Translated by Dwight Goddard, *Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana* [New York: Little and Ives, 1935] pp. 81-82

SECTION 2

PĀRAMITĀS: THE TEN PERFECTIONS OF MAHAYANA BUDDHISM

BY BARBARA O'BRIEN

“Mahayana Buddhism developed six Pāramitās or perfections early in its history. Later, the list was fleshed out to include ten perfections. The Six or Ten Perfections are virtues to be cultivated and practiced on the path to realizing enlightenment. To add to the confusion, Theravada Buddhism has its own list of Ten Perfections. They have several items in common, but they are not identical.

Although the Six Perfections are complete in themselves, the additional items in the list of Ten Perfections add the dimension of the bodhisattva path. A bodhisattva is an "enlightenment being" who has vowed to bring all other beings to enlightenment. The bodhisattva is the ideal of practice for all Mahayana Buddhists.

With the additional four "perfections, we see the fruits of wisdom manifested in the world. In some ways this recalls the Ox Herding Pictures of Zen Buddhism, which represent stages of enlightenment. Realization of great enlightenment is represented in the eighth and ninth pictures. The tenth shows an enlightened master walking in a marketplace, bestowing blessings. Read on for the complete list of the Mahayana Ten Perfections.”

I. DANA PĀRAMITĀ: PERFECTION OF GENEROSITY

Perfection of Generosity is about more than just charitable giving. It is generosity as an expression of selflessness and an acknowledgment that we all inter-exist with each other. Without attaching to possessions or to ourselves we live to benefit all beings.

II. SILA PĀRAMITĀ: PERFECTION OF MORALITY

The Perfection of Morality is not about living according to rules -- although there are Precepts, and they are important -- but living in harmony with others. Sila Pāramitā also touches on the teachings of karma.

III. KSHANTI PĀRAMITĀ: PERFECTION OF PATIENCE

Kshanti means "unaffected by" or "able to withstand." It could be translated as tolerance, endurance and composure as well as patience or forbearance. It is patience with ourselves and others and also an ability to bear hardship and misfortune.

IV. VIRYA PĀRAMITĀ: PERFECTION OF ENERGY

The word Virya comes from vira, an ancient Indo-Iranian word ancient that means "hero." Virya is about tirelessly and courageously overcoming obstacles and walking the path as far as it goes.

V. DHYANA PĀRAMITĀ: PERFECTION OF MEDITATION

Meditation in Buddhism is not done for stress relief. It is mental cultivation, preparing the mind to realize wisdom (which is the next perfection).

VI. PRAJÑĀ PĀRAMITĀ: PERFECTION OF WISDOM

The original Six Perfections ended with wisdom, which in Mahayana Buddhism is equated with the doctrine of sunyata, or emptiness. Very simply, this is the teaching that all phenomena are without self-essence. And wisdom, the late Robert Aitken Roshi wrote, is "the raison d'être of the Buddha way."

VII. UPAYA PĀRAMITĀ: PERFECTION OF SKILLFUL MEAN

Very simply, Upaya is any teaching or activity that helps others realize enlightenment. Sometimes Upaya is spelled Upaya-Kausalya, which is "skill in means." One skilled in Upaya can lead others away from their delusions.

VIII. PRADHINANA PĀRAMITĀ: PERFECTION OF VOW

This one is sometimes called Perfection of Aspiration. In particular, it is about dedicating oneself to the bodhisattva path and living the bodhisattva vows.

IX. BALA PĀRAMITĀ: PERFECTION OF SPIRITUAL POWER

Spiritual power in this sense could refer to supernormal powers, such as an ability to read minds. Or, it could refer to the natural powers awakened by spiritual practice, such as increasing concentration, awareness and patience.

X. JNANA PĀRAMITĀ: PERFECTION OF KNOWLEDGE

The Perfection of Knowledge is the implementation of wisdom in the phenomenal world. We can think of this as something like the way a physician uses knowledge of medicine to heal people. This Perfection also ties together the previous nine so that they can be put to work to help others."

SECTION 3
THE TEN STAGES OF THE BODHISATTVA PATH
BY BARBARA O'BRIEN

Bhumi is a Sanskrit word for "land" or "ground," and the list of ten bhumis are ten "lands" a Bodhisattva must pass through on the way to Buddha-hood. The bhumis are important to early Mahayana Buddhism. A list of ten bhumis appears in several Mahayana texts, although they are not always identical. The bhumis also are associated with the Perfections or Paramitas.

Many schools of Buddhism describe some kind of path of development. Often these are extensions of the Eightfold Path. Since this is a description of the progress of a Bodhisattva, much of the list below promotes the turning from concern for self to concern for others.

In Mahayana Buddhism, the Bodhisattva is the ideal of practice. This is an enlightened being who vows to remain in the world until all other beings realize enlightenment.

Here is a standard list, taken from the Dashabhumi-sutra, which is taken from the larger Avatamsaka or Flower Garland Sutra.

I. PRAMUDITA-BHUMI (JOYFUL LAND) [*Dana*]

The Bodhisattva begins the journey joyful with the thought of enlightenment. He has taken Bodhisattva vows, the most basic of which is "May I attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings." Even at this early stage, he recognizes the emptiness of phenomena. In this stage, the Bodhisattva cultivates Dana Paramita, the perfection of giving or generosity in which it is recognized there are no givers and no receivers.

II. VIMALA-BHUMI (LAND OF PURITY) [*Sila*]

The Bodhisattva cultivates Sila Paramita, the perfection of morality, which culminates in selfless compassion for all beings. He is purified of immoral conduct and dispositions.

III. PRABHAKARI-BHUMI (LUMINOUS OR RADIANT LAND) [*Kshanti*]

The Bodhisattva is now purified of the Three Poisons. He cultivates Kshanti Paramita, which is the perfection of patience or forbearance, Now he knows that he can bear all burdens and hardships to finish the journey. He achieves the four absorptions or Dhyanas.

IV. ARCHISMATI-BHUMI (THE BRILLIANT OR BLAZING LAND) [*Virya*]

Remaining false conceptions are burned away, and good qualities are pursued. This level may also be associated with Virya Paramita, the perfection of energy.

V. SUDURJAYA-BHUMI (THE LAND THAT IS DIFFICULT TO CONQUER) [*Dhyana*]

Now the Bodhisattva goes deeper into meditation, as this land is associated with Dhyana Paramita, the perfection of meditation. He pierces through the darkness of ignorance. Now he understands the Four Noble Truths and the Two Truths. As he develops himself, the Bodhisattva devotes himself to the welfare of others.

VI. ABHIMUKHI-BHUMI (THE LAND LOOKING FORWARD TO WISDOM) [*Prajna*]

This land is associated with Prajna Paramita, the perfection of wisdom. He sees that all phenomena are without self-essence and understand the nature of Dependent Origination -- the way all phenomena arise and cease.

VII. DURANGAMA-BHUMI (THE FAR-REACHING LAND) [*Upaya*]

The Bodhisattva acquires the power of upaya, or skillful means to help others realize enlightenment. At this point, the Bodhisattva has become a transcendent Bodhisattva who can manifest in the world in whatever form is most needed.

VIII. ACHALA-BHUMI (THE IMMOVABLE LAND) [*Pradhinana*]

The Bodhisattva can no longer be disturbed because Buddha-hood is within sight. From here he can no longer fall back to earlier stages of development.

IX. SADHUMATI-BHUMI (THE LAND OF GOOD THOUGHTS) [*Bala*]

The Bodhisattva understands all dharmas and is able to teach others.

X. DHARMAMEGHA-BHUMI (THE LAND OF DHARMA CLOUDS) [*Jnana*]

Buddha-hood is confirmed, and he enters Tushita Heaven. Tushita Heaven is the heaven of contented gods, where there are Buddhas who will be reborn only one more time. Maitreya is said to live there also.

SECTION 4

SUMMARY OF THE TEN STAGES OF BODHISATTVAHOOD: EXCERPT FROM THE FLOWER ORNAMENT SUTRA

The last pages of the two hundred page description of the Ten Stages of the Bodhisattva Path within the Flower Ornament Sutra summarizes each stage, clarifies its connection with its associated Pāramitā, and shows how perfecting its practice leads to the path of the next Pāramitā.²

[1] When the will for enlightenment is attained, those who practice giving
Then, having reached **Extreme Joy** will become lords of the land.

There, protecting beings by providing what they require,
Having established their own giving, they can get others to do so.

Having settled all in enlightenment, they will have **perfected giving** [*Dana*];
By following this principle they will arrive at **discipline**.

[2] Having achieved right conduct, they will become well behaved;
Thence having reached **Purity**, they will become lords of four continents.

Stationed there, protecting beings by stopping evil,
Abiding in their own moral conduct, they can get others to do so too.

Having settled all in enlightenment, they will have **perfected morality** [*Sila*]
By maturation of this practice, they will come to the practice of **forbearance**.

[3] Maintaining the practice of right forbearance, they will become good bearers of patience;
Thence having reached **Refulgence**, they will become lords of the thirty-three heavens.
There, protecting beings by stopping the courses of afflictions,
Abiding in their own practice of forbearance, they can get others to do so too.

Having settled all in enlightenment, they will have **perfected patience** [*Kshanti*];
By maturation of this virtue, they will come to the practice of **vigor**.

[4] Having concentrated right energy, they will become good at maintaining vigor;
Thence having reached **Blazing**, they will become lords of the heaven of timely portion.

The protecting beings by stopping wrong views,
They will establish right insight and foster enlightenment by effort.

² **Bolded Caps** are names of the Stages; **bolded small letters** are the names of Pāramitās associated with the stage; **bolded words in italics** are synonyms for the following stage's Pāramitā.

Stable in their own practice of vigor, they can exhort others as well;
Having settled all in enlightenment, they will have **perfected vigor** [*Vīrya*].

By the results of this virtue they will come to the practice of meditation;
Having conquered all afflictions they will become stabilized in **concentration**.

[5] Having concentrated on right meditation, they will become skilled in concentration;
Thence having reached the **Difficult to Conquer**, they will
become lords of the heaven of the satisfied,

There protecting beings by stopping wrong paths.
Having established right teaching and fostered enlightenment by effort.

Abiding in their own practice of meditation, they can urge others to do so too;
Having established all in enlightenment, they will have **perfected meditation** [*Dhyāna*].

By the results of this virtue they will come to the practice of wisdom;
Having conquered all demons, they will possess **wisdom, higher knowledge**, and spiritual power.

[6] Having accomplished true wisdom, they will become skilled in mystic knowledge;
Having thence attained **Presence**, they will become lords of the heaven of pleasant emanations,

There protecting beings by stopping conceit,
Having settled them in emptiness and fostered enlightenment diligently.

Abiding in their own practice of wisdom, they can induce others to do so too;
Having settled all in enlightenment, they will have **perfected wisdom** [*Prajñā*].

By the results of this virtue they will practice right means; having conquered all views, they
will be skilled in **right teaching**.

[7] By the exercise of right means they will lead beings into enlightenment;
Thence having reached **Going-Far**, they will become lords of the heaven of control,

There protecting beings by awakening realization,
Enlightening them after having set them in the way of enlightening beings.

Abiding in their own skill in means, they will also exhort others;
Having settled all in enlightenment, they will have **perfected skillful means** [*Upāya*].

By the powers of this virtue, they will come to good vows;
Having conquered false views, they will be wise, having attained **right insight**.

[8] Settled in true enlightenment by a rightly resolved mind,
Thence having attained **Immovability**, they will become Brahma lords of a thousand worlds,

There protecting beings by teaching the Three Vehicles,
Enlightening them by establishing them in comprehension of the world.

Abiding by their own vows, they can also induce others;
Having settled all in enlightenment, they will have **perfected commitment** [*Pradhinana*].

By the power of this virtue, they will come to the **practice of power**,
Certain of perfect enlightenment, once all views are conquered.

[9] By the combined exertions of right power, they will overcome all those in error;
Thence having attained **Good Mind**, they will become Great Brahmas, powerful.

There they will protect beings by teaching the Buddha Vehicle,
Enlightening them by establishing them in the knowledge of beings' minds.

Steadfast in their own power, they can also induce others;
Having settled all in enlightenment, they will have **perfected power** [*Bala*].

By the results of this virtue they will come to **the practice of knowledge**,
Enlightening beings, mines of virtue, having conquered the four demons.

[10] Having attained right knowledge, they will be skilled in true teaching;
Having thence reached **Cloud of Teaching**, they will become great lords, adept.

There they will protect beings by enlightening them in all ways,
Enlightening them by establishing them in highest omniscience.

Stable in their own knowledge, they will also guide others;
When they have settled all in enlightenment, they will have **perfected knowledge** [*Jnana*].

By the powers of this virtue, they will be victors, lords of the ten powers,
Imbued with all virtues, omniscient, in the course of nature.

Having contemplated this, the noble should practice with concentrated minds,
*To attain the state of perfect enlightenment, having fulfilled the ten ways of transcendence.*³

³ The ten ways of transcendence is The Tenth Stage of perfected knowledge elucidated in the Ten Steps of the Eleventh Stage: attainment in both the Personal and Universal.

Thus having attained enlightenment and liberation, and conquered the four demons,
Having settled all in enlightenment, you will attain perfect peace.
Having heard this and thoroughly known the means and accomplishment of enlightening beings,
You will attain unobstructed enlightenment, the state of the Felicitous.

This has been a summary exposition of the ten stages of enlightening beings, to be seen in accord with omniscience complete in all aspects.

At that point the billion-world universe quaked in six ways, all kinds of flowers rained steadily. Celestial and human music played, and the intoxicating sound was heard to the very summit of existence.

Then the Buddha said, addressing Moon of Liberation and all the other enlightening beings, "Good people, this complete perfect enlightenment, developed over countless eons. I commend to you, entrusting it to you, with the ultimate charge that you will yourselves hold this teaching and also fully elucidate it for others.

To put it succinctly, if the Buddha were to remain alive for an eon expounding the glories of this teaching day and night, neither would the glory of this teaching be ended nor would the eloquence of the Buddha be exhausted. Just as the Buddha's conduct, concentration, wisdom, liberation, knowledge, and vision are measureless and endless, likewise is the case of those who will take up this teaching, preserve it, recite it, write it down, cause it to be written down, master it, put it into action, and fully expound it in the community, who will tell it to people faithfully and respectfully with consideration of how these people might attain the lofty teaching, and get them to reflect on it reasonably, who will write it down in a book and have it kept, respected, taken seriously, and honored in the home, who will tell the glories of this teaching without envy and speak it so it may be written, told, recited, honored, and revealed: their virtue has no end.

SECTION 5

THE WIDE VIEW OF THE TEN PĀRAMITĀS: DEFINITIONS OF THE PERSONAL AND UNIVERSAL ASPECTS

This version of the Ten Pāramitās presents their transcendent personal and universal sides based on the teachings of The Ten Stages of the Bodhisattva Path of the Flower Ornament Sutra Book 39 *Entry into the Realm of Reality*. The Ten Stages are in essence equivalent to Tsung-mi's Enlightened Aspects, Reconstruction of the Resolution Sequence, and the Fourth Rank of spiritual knowledge where the Personal and Universal Minds beneficially interact refining the attributes of the Personal.

1. The heart of **transcendent generosity** [*Dana*] is the practice of bestowing goods and teaching with an attitude of “completely given.”

Personal Aspect: Embodies the process of awakening that in turn offers its benefits to the world with open hands.

Universal Aspect: Shows the path of entry into the wide Sangha of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

2. The discipline of **transcendent morality** [*Sila*] is creative engagement, carrying others to the far shore but not staying there or on this shore.

Personal Aspect: Following the precepts provides order and protection leading to moderation and contentment.

Universal Aspect: Leads to a discipline similar to the natural flow of a river.

3. **Transcendent acceptance** [*Kṣhanti*] impartially embraces the world without judgment or preference.

Personal Aspect: An attitude infused with humility, forbearance, and a deep commitment that refrains from hurting others.

Universal Aspect: Knowledge that the intention and actions of each being in the world profoundly affects the welfare of all others.

4. **Transcendent energy** [*Virya*] creates skillful means to successfully negotiate the Way.

Personal Aspect: Practitioners free themselves from mental poisons and direct their energy towards ending psychological afflictions.

Universal Aspect: Replaces the urge to indolence with a zealous desire to help all beings.

5. **Transcendent meditation** [*Dhyana*] acts in the spiritual realm where myriad beings exist.

Personal Aspect: Tranquility [stopping, composure] cures the mind of ingrained habits.

Universal Aspect: Insight [viewing, intuitive perception] engenders and integrates thusness.

6. **Transcendent wisdom** [*Prajna*] is the essential attribute of Buddhist practice.

Personal Aspect: Deeply engaged with an intuitive understanding of the universe and its functions.

Universal Aspect: Realization of the intimate unity of the Personal and Universal Minds.

The Buddha in the Lankavatara Sutra described the sixth stage of the Ten Powers of the Bodhisattva as completing personal awakening and can be accepted as Nirvana. The seventh stage, if one desires to consciously take the step, offers the path of saving all beings. To save all beings recognizes Universal awakening as interdependence without reference to the self. Personal awakening in contrast clings to interdependence with a sense of self. The difference seems minor, but evokes substantial distinctions in behavior and relations. In Mahayana, waking up occurs together, acknowledging the teaching of shared joy and wisdom, transforming individual efforts to joint ventures where the benefits are portioned out equally among all the participants. Daily life becomes magnanimity and joy for no other reason than being together.

7. Each individual practitioner must craft a **transcendent skillful means** [*Upaya*] that directly addresses the wants and needs of their life's circumstances.

Personal Aspect: Non-attachment is the heart of all skillful means, where practitioners do not form attachment to the sacred nor aversion toward the mundane.

Universal Aspect: Skillful means are crafted to embrace the vast and intricate relationships beings have with one another.

8. **Transcendent vows** [*Pradhinana*] and intentional activity lead directly to attainment of spiritual autonomy and effortless knowledge.

Personal Aspect: Vows engender humility and unaffected gentility. Practitioners energize the Mahayana vow of universal salvation and join in the effort to convey universal liberation.

Universal Aspect: A practitioner's true home exists in the intention and efforts to help others awaken.

9. Teachers may use their mastery and **transcendent power** [*Bala*] to teach concepts, work directly on transforming the hearts of others, or both at the same time.

Personal Aspect: The power of elucidation comes from one's intellect, insight, and commitment to enlightening activities.

Universal Aspect: Having attained effortless knowledge, practitioners study Buddha's teachings and methods and learn to become expert teachers.

10. With **transcendent knowledge** [*Jnana*], appropriate teaching methods arise with the same ease as echoes are made from an original sound.

Personal Aspect: Practitioners develop knowledge of faculties, consequences, paths in life, the nature of relationships, and the intimacy of meditation.

Universal Aspect: Living at the heart of Indra's Net, each being in the vast web becomes an intimate friend.

SECTION 6

THE SIX PRINCIPLES OF ENLIGHTENED LIVING:

THE SIX PĀRAMITĀS DESCRIBED BY AN UNNAMED TIBETAN TEACHER

This offering on the Pāramitās was part of a Dharma talk by a Tibetan teacher at a Shambala Center in 1995.

“Now I would like to look further into the six principles of enlightened living, which I have started to think of as principles of enlightened leadership, to talk about them more in a Western way. But in the old-fashioned way, they are called the six Pāramitās, the six perfections. I would like to look into this in the outer, inner, and innate fashion since nobody has discussed this to my knowledge and I have become interested in thinking about it this way.

The first Pāramitā -- the first principle of enlightened living -- is Dana Pāramitā: the perfection of generosity. This is what is called charity (*caritas*) in the Christian sense, which means love; it doesn't just mean giving pennies to the poor. *Caritas* means unattached generosity, boundless openness, and unconditional love. Open heart, open mind, open hand. That's why it comes first among the six. It is extraordinarily pertinent to our lives and our path.

The second is Sila Pāramitā: virtue, morality.

Third is Kshanti Pāramitā: patience, tolerance, forbearance, acceptance, and endurance.

This ties into the fourth one, Virya Pāramitā: energy, diligence, courage, enthusiasm, and effort.

The fifth is Dhyana Pāramitā: meditation, absorption, concentration, and contemplation.

The sixth enlightened principle is Prajna: transcendental wisdom.

Since each of these is an enlightened principle, a Pāramitā, wisdom is in each and all of these. For example, the first one is Dana Pāramitā, generosity: It is wise, isn't it, to let go? Why is that? Because resistance is suffering (this is explicit in the Second Noble Truth). Craving, attachment and resistance is suffering. So it is wise to let go. Externally, Dana Pāramitā implies being more generous, open, giving, serving, and donating our time and energy. Internally, it is being more generous with our emotions and generous with others, open-hearted. Not suppressing our emotions, not being miserly with our emotions; rather, allowing them and appreciating them. And innately, being generous, spontaneous, total unbounded energy. Why squelch that limitless, innate energy like a miser, as if saving your energy for "the real thing"? Here is the problem of commitment, which many people suffer from: holding back and fearing intimate engagement or total involvement. You miss your whole life that way.

Dana is the wisdom of openness, internally, externally, and innately. Just *being* is innate generosity. Everything is available within the natural state. Don't be a miser regarding being and always be lost in doing and squandering your energies in frivolous, scattered activities. Everything is available in the natural state of pure being. Don't take my word for it. Master of old Padampa Sangyay said so, the Buddha of Tingri, Tibet.

We can go through this outer, inner, and innate scheme and find that it is all within us; we can cultivate it externally and internally, and discover that we are actually involved in it already. That's the good news. The bad news is our own way of seeing it, of feeling far from it and inadequate. Even though we are all supposed to be

perfect in the Great Perfection, somehow we don't feel perfect enough. Never quite perfect enough. Never truly satisfied. But this is just a habit, a distorted way of perceiving, which enlightened vision can rectify.

Secondly, we talk about morality: it is wise to not harm. That is the essence of virtue. Externally, taking the five basic lay vows or precepts: "I shall refrain from killing and stealing and lying and sexual misconduct (exploiting others) and intoxicating myself." Internally, isn't it just as wise not to deceive ourselves and to have integrity and develop our own character? Innately, of course, we all have that purity of heart and basic goodness, and feel love naturally. Let's not lose touch with that. Let's exploit that innate, natural resource, rather than exploiting others for what we think we need and want. Let's exploit our own natural resource within, our own true spiritual inheritance. That is something we can never really lose; no one and nothing can take it away from us.

The third Pāramitā is patience, Kshanti Pāramitā. Sometimes it is mistranslated as peace, but it really means patience, forbearance, tolerance. So externally, it means, say, counting to at least ten before we kick back. Having some balance and sense of restraint. Being patient instead of being totally irritable and reactive. It means persevering through whatever twists and turns the path requires, to the goal of our aspirations. Internally, it means being patient with ourselves and having some acceptance and tolerance for ourselves, with all of theirs as well as our foibles, hang-ups, and neuroses. It is good to be cracked. It lets the light through! Recently, I read a poem that I really liked by Wendell Berry: "It is the impeded stream that sings." So let's not try to be too perfect and dull. It will just frustrate us anyway. Having a few rocks in the stream makes it sing. Even stumbling blocks can become steppingstones.

Innately, we are all here for the whole show, so we must be interested in seeing this through. We are not going anywhere else; this is it! That's why as people get older, they get wiser, because they realize that no matter what they do, they are going to keep on keeping on. That's the most secret, mystical meaning of the Kshanti Pāramitā. And even if you think, but what about so and so who committed suicide, even then there is on-going-ness. We are all in it for the whole journey. Don't be deceived by mere appearances.

Fourth is Virya Pāramitā: energy, diligence. It is often translated as effort. But that sounds so one-sided. What about effortless effort? What about the great passion of our true vocation, which we do day and night out of love? Not just the effort to get through our forty-hour week and forget about it at Friday at 5:00. How about effortless effort? Externally, it seems like effort, but internally it can be effortless effort and passion for our true spiritual life. Aren't we all interested in well-being? Does that take an effort to pursue? Are we not pursuing it? That's Virya Pāramitā: courage, fearlessness to pursue continuously our highest good.

Innately, of course, there is boundless energy and interest and curiosity and wonder and beauty and awe in everything, every moment, if we open to it, if we don't close ourselves off from it, if we don't dull ourselves. Inexhaustible resources and the potential is always available to find everything we seek just in pure being. Endless being, inexhaustible field of being, primordial being.

We can make great efforts to improve ourselves, to learn, to grow, and to develop -- to relinquish what is negative and adopt what is wholesome and positive -- but in the end I think it is the updraft of our joy in just being alive that carries us aloft and puts wind in our sails.

Fifth is Dhyana Pāramitā: meditation or absorption, presence. Externally, it shows up as presence of mind or collectedness, meditation, contemplation. Internally isn't it wise to be focused and centered and aware and see what is going on, rather than being heedless, mindless, absent-minded and distracted? Not just be lost in fabrication, but to really see what is going on, right here and now. We can do that, with a little attention and focus.

Innately, we are all totally absorbed. We can never be anything else. So don't feel like you are lost and just looking at everybody feeling lost. You're *found*. Innately, there is total presence, although we waste it, we overlook it, we refract it with many cracked mirrors and distracted, pointless activities. We feel like we are only operating on one or two cylinders. But we are just using the other cylinders to hold ourselves in. All the cylinders are going all the time. We ourselves are actually the long-sought-after perpetual motion machine. How can we not meditate on, contemplate upon, and reflect upon our lives?

Whether doing sitting meditation, walking meditation, chanting, visualization, yoga, martial arts, breathing exercises, prayers, or whatever, the joy of meditation rewards us deeply.

And sixth, Prajna Pāramitā: the highly touted transcendental wisdom, said to be indescribable. I would like to tell a brief story about Vimalakirti, the enlightened layman of Visali in India. He lived in the time of the Buddha. The Mahayana sutra called Vimalakirti Nirveda Sutra tells his story. He was a layman with a family. He was an impeccable member of the community, an enlightened businessman. He was the sagest person in the city of Visali. All the Bodhisattvas and enlightened monks and nuns came to him and had a discussion. They all came to his bedroom, which was very small, about 6 feet by 6 feet, and somehow all the enlightened ones fit in there through the magic of interpenetration and emptiness. This august sangha gathering also included all the Bodhisattvas, including Manjusri, Avalokiteshvara, Vajrapani, and Tara. Maybe they all made themselves as small as those angels that reportedly dance on the head of a pin. The sutra says they were all there, Arhats and Bodhisattvas alike, with their seats, thrones, and mounts, all in Vimalakirti's tiny chamber.

Each member of this Dharma assembly gave their views on what is transcendental wisdom. That was the subject of the discussion that day. Each one gave a description of the indescribable; this is why we love the Vimalakirti Nirveda Sutra. It is marvelous. With each progressive description, you think, "Ah, now we have really got it." Yet, the truth expounded seems to get better each time. Each expounder outdoes the previous, not in the sense of competitiveness, but the Dharma teaching just goes deeper and deeper. They finally get to Manjusri, the God of Wisdom. He gives his spiel. It is so marvelous. It is the ultimate spiel on nondual truth, transcendental wisdom. Then everybody bows to reverently to him -- including us the reader. What else can be said? we wonder.

Finally they all turn to Vimalakirti, and ask him to pronounce the final word on transcendental wisdom. (All this is part of the Prajna Pāramitā Sutra, which has dozens of thousands of Sanskrit verses.) So Vimalakirti answers. And the sutra says -- I am always overcome with emotion here, at this point -- that "his silence resounded like thunder." That was the last word on what is wisdom, what is enlightenment. It is truly ineffable, inconceivable, beyond the mind; and yet, it is so palpable, experienceable, and demonstrable. Vimalakirti lived it; he embodied it. That's the principle of enlightened living: embodiment, enactment, not just merely knowing about something. That's self-realization: enacting it; embodying truth; wisdom in action as love, compassion, and impeccability.

These are the six principles of enlightened living, the Six Perfections. Please look into Buddhist books that talk about the six perfections. There is a new one by Robert Aitken Roshi that is good. See what you find for yourself in your own life, that is a way to train in them, that is a way to embody and live them, and that you are already participating in. It might be very growth-ful, also very empowering and gratifying to see that we are already participating in this. This is not something far away that only old man Vimalakirti embodies or knows about. I love the stories of Vimalakirti, of father Marpa, and of layman Pang and others. These are the enlightened yogis and laypeople who showed enlightened living is an enactment of truth, not just withdrawal. It is about integration, not restriction. It's about freedom; everything is part of the way. It is about enhancing your meditative awareness by taking it out into life. It is about walking our talk. If it moves and inspires you, you can find teaching tales and books about all of them. There is a wonderful book about the Chinese Zen layman Pang and his daughter, two basket-weavers who became enlightened in ancient China.

One real question is: what is our enlightened life going to look like? Not just what color clothes we should wear, or what meditation position to sit in. Enlightened life doesn't imply the need for Asian furniture, much as we might occasionally enjoy it. Actually, enlightened life doesn't imply the need for anything in particular, but that's a little steep. Probably, there are no enlightened people; there is only enlightened activity. Let's manifest it, for the benefit of one and all.

The word Pāramitā means gone beyond-ness; each of these six principles of enlightened living is a transcendental virtue. We don't have to make it very airy-fairy either. It doesn't just have to be to find "the truth." It could be just as simple as being honest and straightforward. Wouldn't that be pretty intense? To be straightforward and genuine. That's extremely profound. That is truth. To be our self, as New Agers often say. It's not trite. Just to be one's self, wholly, through and through, and be genuine and allow others to be themselves as they are. That is love, acceptance, and ahimsa (non-harming). That would really be wonderful. Let's try for that, and forget high-faluting notions of perfect enlightenment for now. I think a little goodness and warmth will go a long way today.

I was thinking that these principles of enlightened living are really also, in Western terms, principles of enlightened leadership, impeccable leadership -- ways we can really be leaders and bring out the best in others, empower others and engender leadership, rather than followership. Let's give birth to leaders, rather than just create more followers. Be beacons in the world, be models to the young ones and illumine the way."