

These wonderful teachings stand as a monument to the compassionate heart of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche." —Pema Chödrön

# THE BODHISATTVA PATH OF WISDOM & COMPASSION



CHÖGYAM TRUNGPA



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question is, what is your state of confused one. You do not know something. But the more you fill your bodhisattva activity, the

ow, you have some understanding have made, and you have some chitta into your heart. But you need an understanding of ego. You can only be a bodhisattva if you are not concerned for yourself. The ideal bodhisattva path, is the person who is not concerned with such a thing as enlightening others with the paramitas, with the

approach may seem to be very close to slave to death if I have no money. You may be quite familiar with your children, "You should get your money from the bank, you should get higher security, a house, and a car. How do you get it? If approach comes from animal greed, which seems to be a problem. Any business deal, could be regarded as animal greed. In a naturally evolved society or a more advanced society, whether your money is in the form of goods or services, get your money's worth. But the deal is not worth it. You could get your money's worth or more. That kind of business approach does not work. In fact, the more you cut your deal, the more you cut your

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF PARAMITAS

is the commitment to dedicate yourself. Building yourself up or perpetuating the ego. Instead of building your

self up, you should continue with your pursuit of helping others. Instead of being selfish, you should empty yourself. The basic definition of ego is holding on to one's existence—and paramita practices are techniques that allow you not to grasp onto or propagate the notion of me-ness, or "I am." Experiencing egolessness is a process of letting go. But you do not regard the ego as an enemy or obstacle, you regard it as a brussels sprout that you cook and eat.

*Paramita* is a Sanskrit word that means "going beyond." *Para* means the "other shore of the river," *mita* means "arriving"; so *paramita* means "arriving at the other shore." The Tibetan word for paramita is *pharöl tu chinpa*. *Pharöl* means "other shore," *tu* is "to," and *chinpa* means "arrived"; so *pharöl tu chinpa* means "arrived to the other shore." It means crossing the turbulent river of mental gossip and continuous passion, aggression, and ignorance. As you go across that river, the captain of the boat is the spiritual friend. You go across with the captain, who has experience, and you get to the other shore by practicing the six paramitas, beginning with *dana* paramita, or generosity. Paramitas are based on not holding on to your personal territory. When you become a bodhisattva, you are going beyond habitual patterns altogether.

Although we have been discussing the six primary paramitas—generosity, discipline, patience, exertion, meditation, and prajna, or knowledge—there are ten paramitas altogether, according to the Buddhist tradition.\*

A natural sense of appreciation of things as they are without poverty mentality of any kind is referred to as *skillful means*, which is the seventh paramita. Having made that discovery, you wish to share your discovery with others. That is the eighth paramita, *aspiration*. Beyond that, you begin to experience *strength*, the ninth paramita. You are not subject to or enslaved by some other entity, but a natural quality of strength takes place. Ordinarily, when you experience something special, it drains the energy out of you and diminishes your strength. But in this case, your strength is not based on struggle. Therefore, it becomes a natural food in itself.

The last paramita is *wisdom*. I would like to make quite clear that wisdom does not come from reading read many books and or collecting a

\* The *ten paramitas* are: (1) generosity, (2) discipline, (3) patience, (4) exertion, (5) meditation, (6) prajna, (7) skillful means, (8) aspiration, (9) power, and (10) wisdom. In Tibetan they are: (1) *dana*, (2) *tsültrim*, (3) *söpa*, (4) *tsöndrü*, (5) *samten*, (6) *prajna*, (7) *thap*, (8) *mönlam*, (9) *bala*, and (10) *yeshe*.

lot of material. Wisdom means that you have naturally settled into the situation. Wisdom is self-contained. Adding these four to the initial six paramitas makes ten paramitas altogether. On one hand, it might be hard to achieve all that or go that far step-by-step; but on the other hand, minute by minute, you can actually achieve the ten paramitas right away.

Sometimes it is said that there are thirty-six paramitas, which is a way of showing the subtleties of the development of the paramitas. For instance, with the paramita of generosity, you could have the generosity of discipline, the generosity of patience, the generosity of exertion, the generosity of meditation, and the generosity of prajna. Dividing each of the six paramitas into six different aspects in that way makes thirty-six paramitas altogether. Such hairsplitting is necessary and important—particularly if you are actually going to practice the paramitas, rather than theorize the whole thing, write your book, and take off on the next airplane to Mexico. If you are going to stick with the practice, it is important to realize the subtleties of the paramitas. You may think you are working purely on prajna paramita or on the paramita of meditation, but maybe at the same time you are still working on the basic generosity level. So understanding the subtleties of the paramitas is very important and necessary.

The idea of the paramitas is that they all should happen at once. But we cannot talk about them all at once; that would be impossible. So we have to speak about them one after another.

Some of the teachings are linear, and some are more environmental. But in either case, there is a process of growth. There is the way you eat your food as an infant, the way you eat your food as a teenager, the way you eat your food as an adult, the way you eat your food as a middle-aged person, the way you eat your food as a very old person, and the way you eat your food as a dead person. That is linear, and at the same time it is equally environmental. We cannot dissect the path by saying this belongs to that, and that belongs to this. But we can say that the development taking place in your own state of mind can be applied to a further evolution.

### THE DELIGHT AND WORKABILITY OF PARAMITA PRACTICE

Paramita practice transcends both the simple, ordinary pain of samsara, and the hinayana notion of peaceful attainment, or nirvana. The traditional phrase for this is: "Not wandering in samsara, not dwelling in nir-

vana." It transcends both worldly views and shravaka and pratyekabuddha notions of virtue. Paramitas do not refer to ordinary ethics, such as the ethics of bank loans or the world of business, nor are we practicing the paramitas in order to achieve spiritual tranquillity or equilibrium. Not at all! Paramita practice is based on the realization that there is no individual here seeking individual little goals. There is no "you." In fact, at this point, your existence and the existence of others are both questionable. The only thing guiding you on this particular journey is a sense of delightfulness, warmth, and sympathy. At the same time, there is also the realization that sentient beings do exist, and that they wander around in their own little world and suffer a lot—and you try to help them. The approach is not that you too are bogged down in the world of sentient beings and trying to struggle out. You are not a worm wandering around in a sewage system; you have greater vision than that.

Paramita practice is the essence of how to be a bodhisattva. A bodhisattva is someone who is brave, and utterly and thoroughly involved in the discipline taught by the Buddha. Bodhisattvas are ideally soaked in the water of helping others in every way. However, paramita practice is not particularly a religious practice. It is different than the missionary approach of trying to convert people into your faith. It is more like teaching people how to be. Paramita practice is based on human decency, and how to be in the world and help others who are suffering.\*

As you gallop along the mahayana highway, it is important to have a good understanding of paramita principles. Some Buddhist traditions say that only when you have already gained some spiritual attainment can you practice the paramitas or even take the bodhisattva vow. But according to my tradition, you do not have to attain a high state of realization in order to enter the mahayana. There is always a place for you: there is always a stirrup for you to put your foot into, and there is always an empty chair for you to jump into as you ride up the ski slope.

According to the practicing lineages of Kagyü and Nyingma, there is always a way for very ordinary and basic laypeople like ourselves to enter the path and experience the teachings. What has been described in the teachings can actually be achieved and worked with. There is always

\* One way to learn more about paramita practice is by looking at the many ways in which a person's actions fail to reflect these transcendent virtues. For a listing of contradictions to paramita practice, see appendix 5, "Forty-Six Ways in Which a Bodhisattva Fails."

the great possibility that you could attain some level of realization. Your realization may be crude; nonetheless, it is workable. So although some traditions say that if you want to be a dharmic person, you have to become worthy first, we say that if you want to become a dharmic person, you are worthy of it in any case. That is the difference between the two approaches.

Some people might say, "If you can't afford to buy underpants, why are you dressed up in a suit and tie?" But somehow or other, we have managed to have a suit and a tie as well as decent underpants. That is how we do it. Otherwise, there would be no way to begin. If we said that you had to be a millionaire in order to become a king, this would make it impossible for you. Instead, we say that you simply begin as a king—and in the process, you could also become a millionaire. The point is that you don't abuse your opportunity, but you use it. Whether we are talking about the hinayana, the mahayana, or the vajrayana, you should realize that we are always talking in terms of something that is reachable.

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF PARAMITA PRACTICE

Paramita practice has four characteristics. The first characteristic is that paramita practice overcomes neurotic hang-ups and defilements.

The second characteristic is that paramita practice develops an understanding of threefold purity. You understand the relationship of actor, action, and object. You realize the relationship of you as the doer, your act as the doing, and the object of the action as the other. The emptiness of those three principles has to be very clear: there is no "you," there is no action to perform, and there is no "other," or object. There is no "you" because you are dependent on yourself, which in turn is dependent on the other, which is purely the working of conceptual mind. There is no "other," because "other" would be your projection; therefore, no other actually exists. There is no "activity" to relate you with the other, because if everything is open and free from conception, there is no activity taking place. No conceptual world of "you," "other," and "activity" actually exists. So bodhisattva activity is free from all debts.

The third characteristic of paramita practice is that your actions are completed. You understand that the paramita practices are necessary not simply as reference points or feedback, but are needed in order to fulfill actions very precisely.

The fourth characteristic of paramita practice is that your actions have benefited others. Through your actions, you have created a proper relationship with others.

#### INTENTIONAL ACTION IN PARAMITA PRACTICE

In paramita practice, the notion of trying is a problem; it's like trying to climb up the Empire State Building from the outside. But with paramita practice, you don't actually try; you just do it. There will be obstacles and problems, but you keep doing it. You do it on the spot. Then there are more obstacles, and you do it again. So you keep on doing it, rather than trying to do it, and at some point it becomes real. When you look back on your past and see how much you have been doing it, you realize that you have done it. Then you keep on doing it, until doing it becomes more real than trying to do it. You have a realistic attitude to the whole practice rather than a dreamy attitude. You are not just listening to a tale.

You should practice the paramitas in spite of your subconscious gossip, such as thoughts about what you are supposed to be doing or feeling, as opposed to what you really are doing or feeling. Such activity is important, because it stops the *nidana* flow. Your intention is secondary. When you have actually done something, you may feel that your intention was dubious, but your intention has followed your action. When you realize what you have done, you may wonder whether you can undo it. But you cannot undo the past, and since you have done it already, you resign yourself. As you go on in that way, the whole thing becomes genuine.

You have to teach your mind. In order to do so, sometimes action is best, because when you are performing an action, your mind follows. At other times, you have a good intention, and your body follows. At the mahayana level, those two approaches are complementary, but when you get to the vajrayana level, action is always the first breakthrough. Action means that you just do it. As an example, many people have difficulty saying "Yes." If you have that difficulty, you could practice saying "Yes." When you say "Yes" verbally, your mind says, "I said it halfway, but I didn't really mean it." You keep a little corner. But the more you say "Yes," the more you mean it. That is the whole idea behind reciting aloud. For example, when you take the bodhisattva vow, you say that you aspire to become a bodhisattva even though you don't really mean it all the way. Having said

it, you have to think about it. You follow the words with your mind, and you actually begin to get it.

Sometimes a physical message is the most direct. It is the best way to deal with a situation like sitting practice. You sit, although you don't really want to sit; you just assume the posture of the Buddha and do it. Then your mind begins to curve toward it and actually do it. It is that way all along, in all three yanās. The first way to bend your mind is to work with what is there.

## Applying Empti

*When dharma is theorized, you work with it. It becomes merely a doctrine. If you apply mahakaruna, if you finally begin to know the*

**I**F YOU are not shown how to practice good generosity, good other paramitas. In terms of the vastness and profundity, the vastness approach and on how you can apply shunyata based on theory and on how far you

In the profundity approach, you practice by using the dialectic system of emptiness. Profundity is a philosophy that is attractive at the beginning, but it doesn't show how to behave as a Buddhist, as a missionary or Red Cross worker. He belongs to the vastness tradition. The vastness is the point of view of practicality in everyday life.

## THREE SUB

Traditionally, the way to apply the disciplines of *shila*, *samadhi*, and *prajna*