

The Discourse on a Bodhisattva's Inner Practice of the Six Perfections

Translated into Chinese and edited by
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A lousy translation into English by W.F. Wong*

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The Buddha speaks thus, “One who wishes to practice the bodhisattva path should begin thus: (1) counting, (2) following, (3) ceasing, (4) observing, (5) returning, and (6) purifying.”

The Buddha says, “(1) counting refers to *dāna-pāramī* . The mind of one who counts his breath reaches the heavens. He thus gives up his mind that is in his body. (He does so) till he attains *srotāpanna*, *sakṛdāgāmin*, *anāgāmin*, *arhat*, *pratyeka-buddha*, (all the way) to (full) Buddha-hood. This is the inner (practice of) *dāna-pāramī* ; attaining salvation through giving.”

The Buddha says, “(2) following refers to *śīla-pāramī* . Volition and mind follows one another within and without. Without evil thoughts, with unwavering determination, one refrains from breaking the precepts: this is the inner (practice of) *śīla-pāramī* ; attaining salvation through non-breaking of precepts.”

The Buddha says, “(3) ceasing refers to *kṣānti-pāramī* . When craving, lust, anger, hatred or worry arises, one is able to persevere and not act. When one's mouth craves for the sweet, the fatty, the good taste, when one's body desires the soft and the smooth, one is able to control the urge and abstain. This is the inner (practice of) *kṣānti-pāramī* ; attaining salvation through patience and perseverance.”

*Permission is hereby granted to anyone to freely distribute and copy this translation. If you have suggestions about how to improve on the translation, I gladly welcome them. Please email your comments and criticisms to wongwf@comp.nus.edu.sg. May all beings be well and happy!

The Buddha says, “(4) clearly observing refers to *vīrya-pāramī* . Internally observing the three bodies¹, externally observing the myriad of things; that they are subjected to decomposition, and none of which exist permanently. Never giving in to greed, with mind set on the path, meditating constantly on the unconditional (*nirvāṇa*), always discerning, never lazing; this is the inner (practice of) *vīrya-pāramī* ; attaining salvation through the exertion of right effort.”

The Buddha says, “(5) returning refers to *dhyāna-pāramī* - cutting off the six entrances, returning the five *skandhā*. Which are the six entrances? Form entering the eyes (causes) *duḥkha*. Sound entering the ears (causes) *duḥkha*. Fragrances entering the nose (causes) *duḥkha*. Tactile (feelings) entering the body (causes) *duḥkha*. Chaotic thoughts entering the mind (causes) *duḥkha*. These are the six entrances. These are also the six *duḥkhā*. There are also the five *skandhā*. What are the five *skandhā*? Form (*rūpa*), pain-itch (*vedanā*), thoughts (*saṃjñā*), becoming (*saṃskāra*), consciousness (*viññāna*): these are the five *skandhā*. Forsaking the body, maintaining purity, ending craving, meditating on emptiness: this is the inner (practice of) *dhyāna-pāramī* ; attaining salvation through one-pointedness.”

The Buddha says, “(6) purifying refers to *prajñā-pāramī* . Knowing that humans and all things will decompose; that impure volition leads to birth-death, love, lust, and breakages; that a pure mind attains wisdom: this is the inner (practice of) *Mahāprajñā-pāramī* ; attaining salvation through pure wisdom.”

Question: “What is ‘*dāna*’? What is ‘*śīla*’? What is ‘*kṣānti*’? What is ‘*vīrya*’? What is ‘*dhyāna*’? What is ‘*prajñā*’? What is ‘*pāramī*’?”

The Buddha says, “‘*Dāna*’ is giving. ‘*Śīla*’ is keeping the precepts. ‘*Kṣānti*’ is patience-perseverence. ‘*Vīrya*’ is progressive effort. ‘*Dhyāna*’ is abandoning evils. ‘*Prajñā*’ is pure wisdom. ‘*Pāra*’ is the crossing over from life-and-death. ‘*Mi*’ means ‘limitless.’ Hence the six *pāramī*.”

Question: “For what purpose do we have these six *pāramī*?”

The Buddha says, “Because the ordinary person has lust, anger, hatred, worries, ignorance, and doubt. The practice of giving is for the elimination of evil greed. Keeping the precepts is for the elimination of lust and anger. Patience-perseverence is for the elimination of hatred and worries. Progressive effort is for the elimination of procrastination and laziness. One-pointedness is for the elimination of chaotic thoughts. Wisdom is for the

¹Tri-kaya of the Buddha?

elimination of ignorance and doubt. The ordinary person wishing to eliminate the six issues (should) practice the six pāramī.”

The Buddha says, “Humans have six hidden thieves (whose) evils must be rid. dāna-pāramī mainly subdues the body. śīla-pāramī mainly subdues the eyes. kṣānti-pāramī mainly subdues the ears. vīrya-pāramī mainly subdues the nose. dhyāna-pāramī mainly subdues the mouth. prajñā-pāramī mainly subdues the mind.”

Question: “Why does the body correspond to dāna-pāramī ?” The Buddha says², “Humans are connected to their heads, and heads are connected to their eyes, and eyes are connected to the flesh, and flesh is connected with sacrificing one’s body to hungry tigers because of giving. Thus dāna-pāramī .”

Question: “Why do the eyes correspond to śīla-pāramī ?” The Buddha says, “The eyes do not follow form (and) the mind is not confused because of the keeping of precepts. Thus śīla-pāramī .”

Question: “Why do the ears correspond to kṣānti-pāramī ?” The Buddha says, “The ears on hearing evil sounds do not give rise to hatred and worries because of patience and perseverance. Thus kṣānti-pāramī .”

Question: “Why does the nose correspond to vīrya-pāramī ?” The Buddha says, “The nose senses the entry and exit of one’s breath, always alert, never waivering because of progressive effort. Thus vīrya-pāramī .”

Question: “Why does the mouth correspond to dhyāna-pāramī ?” The Buddha says, “The mouth does not utter harsh speech, does not double-talk, does not lie, and does not flatter because of calm concentration. Thus dhyāna-pāramī .”

Question: “Why does the mind correspond to prajñā-pāramī ?” The Buddha says to Ānanda³, “You all who walk the path should constantly abide in the concentration of absolute wisdom, that all impurities as well as purities are by nature non-arising, non-ceasing, completely eliminating all roots (of suffering). With the elimination of all roots, rebirth is no more. All practitioners should generate (a mind/vow of) equality, universally saving all (beings); build Dharma bridges enabling all to enter the doors of Dharma. (He should) proclaim and teach everywhere, without limits, without bottom,

²I am completely unable to make sense of this response although it is obvious that the Jataka story about the Bodhisattva prince sacrificing himself to save hungry tigers is involved.

³A distinct change in style that is reminiscent of the last chapter of Śāntideva’s *Bodhicaryāvatāra*.

without shapes, without sound, without borders, without boundaries, without up, without down, establishing the teaching as a gift (to all). (He should) keep the Dharma in the original void, enabling Tathāgathas to seek the path. (He should) in his mind, firmly establish the will to negate the volition for the incorrect path. (He should) eliminate all impurities in the original void (establishing) purity within and without. From this purity, (he obtains) pure vision such that what natural appears to him is the purity of emptiness. The pure replicates the pure. The empty replicates the empty.⁴ The nothingness of emptiness is the path. The path is originally empty - nowhere to rely on, nothing above to aspire to, nothing below to be based on, nothing on the left to attach to, on the right nothing to hold. Naturally establishing purity as the source.⁵ The emptiness of the empty emptiness is thus known as nirvāna. Because existence is non-existent, thus it exist. Because non-existence is not non-existent, thus it is does not exist. Because in attaining there is nothing to attain, thus it is attainment.

First, the Bodhisattva Generate Will.

Second, the Bodhisattva Maintaining Grounds.

Third, the Bodhisattva In-accordance Practicing.

Fourth, the Bodhisattva Born Precious.

Fifth, the Bodhisattva Practice Accomplished.

Sixth, the Bodhisattva Practice Climbing.

Seventh, the Bodhisattva Never Regressing nor Turning.

Eighth, the Bodhisattva Youthful Innocence.

Ninth, the Bodhisattva Ending Birth.

Tenth the Bodhisattva Patching Places.

⁴I am not sure how to translate this.

⁵Now for the koans.