

2010-09-05 The Ten Paramis Overview

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SPEAKERS

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So because of starting this year long series on Fridays on the power armies, the perfections, I'd like to give an introduction to them today. These are very important topic in Theravada Buddhism, and they have to do about the qualities of character inner strengths that support ongoing Buddhist practice. And so if you look at Buddhist practice, there's many different perspectives to look at it. The Buddha said that the course the development of the growth in spiritual on the path of Buddhism can happen four ways. It can happen quickly, and enjoyably. It can happen slowly and enjoyably and it can happen quickly and uncomfortably And it can happen slowly and uncomfortably and all the kind of combinations of that I suppose. But I think many people tend to put themselves in the last category and what is it that makes it different? What makes that difference? Why is if some people that hear teachings and it's really easy for them and they kind of wake up or they just kind of enter deeply into the stream of practice and it just kind of very just seems just right and easy and other people it's one of the most difficult thing they've ever done their life challenges them to no end every possible button is pushed and all their fears and all their attachments feel like they're being ripped out of there, you know, like nails being pulled out of your heart. You know, who would want to do that voluntarily. That or keep all those nails in there. And you know, and so why is it Why is it different for different people? And then it's can be, it can be also challenging. You have find many different Buddhist teachings here in the modern West. Some teachers who emphasize how immediate and direct practice should be, that it's not a matter of gradual growth and development. There's a direct pointing to the truth to reality to Ultimate Reality right here now. And some people hear that pointing here that instructions and something dramatic happens to them and they get changed and transformed and other people will listen to those pointing out instructions for decades and nothing happens. And, and so why the difference What's going on here? Sometimes it's said that Buddhist practice is one of those things which is one of those easy things which are difficult it's difficult to do. And I you know remaster it kinds of things which after we've mastered them seemed really easy. And but to master them is quite difficult. I remember when I was a little kid I think it's the cling on where they say they separate out your that was a Vulcans, the Vulcans is the Vulcans set you know they were they separate out their fingers. So then the ring finger in the middle finger pulled apart like a v. So when I was a little kid I didn't know about the you know, Star Trek but but I remember like I was I know seven or eight years old. trying and trying to figure out how you do that. Somehow my muscles my nerves just couldn't. And I tried and tried. And then I got it. And it was easy. Easy thing which was difficult to do. And then for some people, Buddhist practice is a difficult thing which is easy to do. And the you show up And the easy thing is you show up, you're present, really present really, really present for this life. And it's difficult because of what you're present for. So the practice is easy, but what you have to face is difficult. So there's many things that happen. And, and but in one way or the other Buddhism focuses on the gradual path of development, because that's a path which can hold everyone within it. It kind of kind of goes along with the idea of a way people

mature naturally from childhood on, you know, through childhood, through gradual maturation to gradual growth, the developmental process. And so Buddhism described Buddha described spiritual growth as a developmental process. He didn't put a lot of emphasis on this, you know, sudden awakening school that exists later in Buddhism, but rather emphasized more that may be making sure to be inclusive to be able to include everyone. He laid Kind of a gradual path or practice of development.

And in terms of meditation practice, the gradual path of development has a lot to do with developing what's called the seven factors of awakening, which was a subject of the Dharma practice days last year last series. And those are kind of inner qualities that get developed as one meditates. There's a whole other emphasis on inner growth and development, that has to do with what's called the, the perfections, or the armies. And these are 10 qualities, or strengths that can be developed any place at all, but in particular, they're really relevant for daily life everyday life. Were seven factors of more about meditation. So the 1010 perfections, or something are actually sometimes better cultivated in daily life situations. And so for people who can't go on retreat and can't do a lot of meditation, this is a place this is a pointing to how ordinary life can be a source of spiritual growth and development. And that growth and development has a lot to do with developing qualities of character as opposed to developing insights or developing realizations or developing having a particular experiences or understandings. Some people have really focused on having an experience I have the right experience that's gonna be the magic that makes me change forever and live happily ever after. And there's a kind of experience addiction that many people have who go on retreats and do a lot of meditation as an experienced as it and then there's some people think it's all about understanding, if I can just kind of read enough books, I can somehow come to some understanding of what Buddhism is and so all intellectual Buddhism is has certainly has intellectual side, but the primary thing has to do with tapping into a wellspring of of expansivity wellsprings of of emotionality, wellsprings, of of character that well up from within, from the heart out rather than you know from ideas in. So, how do we develop these inner qualities? Now, I want to before I talk about this and tell you what these 10 qualities are, I want to say that Buddhism emphasizes impermanence, many of you know, but it also, but not everything is impermanent at the same rate. You know, some things come and go quickly and some things can stay a long time before they go away. So, experiences can come and go pretty quickly. Things can come and go pretty quickly, relatively, a relationship sometimes can change very quickly. qualities of character that we develop inside of ourselves, tend to be much more enduring And so if we want to rely on something it gets in support us through our life for a long time. It's good to kind of cultivate and develop these qualities of character qualities of heart that we carry with us. And in some traditional societies, some societies, that was one of the most precious treasures that person felt that they had was their character. And they that's what they develop. That's what they would take care of. That's what they would guard and express in their world was the character they had. Not that the life was not about what you had, but these inequalities that you lived your life in. So the 10 parties are. First one is generosity. The second one is virtue. The third one is renunciation. The fourth is wisdom. to fifth is energy, effort. The second the sixth the seventh were minor sixth so energy the sixth is truthfulness. And the seventh is resolve or determination then I'm sorry, date that I've lost count Let me see. Yes baby click on patients after energy. So, see if the patient with me here. So it's generosity, virtue, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, truthfulness, resolve determination, loving kindness and equanimity and 10 qualities 10 character, qualities of character that can be developed These that list

is something that appeared after the time of the Buddha in Buddhism. And what seems to have happened is as centuries of Buddhism kind of evolved and developed in India, people are more more interested in this difference between why some people get awakened quickly and some people slowly. And what are the contributing factors to that? And this was one of the answers to that question. It

depends on the degree in which these inner qualities are developed in a person. Some people have been developed or have them naturally or something, and they bring that to the practice. And so they had these really strong qualities, they have all these qualities well developed. And so something about the strength of those allows them to take in the teaching, engage in the practice, and it bears fruit very quickly. Other people don't have those qualities well developed. If you don't have a lot of patience, it's going to be the first thing you learn in meditation practice. And it can be very hard to meditate if you don't have a lot of patience. And so if you don't come with that naturally or for whatever reason, then you're going to have to work on that for a while and have that become a stronger thing. And so, it's very common in Southeast Asia, if someone progress and meditations really slow, they or it gets to a plateau, it doesn't go any further. The interpretation of the teacher is, oh, that person's permies these qualities only allow them to go that far. And now what they need to do is to go back in the world and develop these qualities some more so they can continue their practice. So develop more of a sense of generosity, more qualities of character of being a generous person or virtue, or renunciation, building let go. Wisdom understanding, patience, effort, some people don't really have the ability to apply themselves. Just do it. And so they don't do it. You know, as I like to say, Buddhist practice doesn't work whatsoever if you don't do it. And so you have to do it. So that takes effort and engagement. And some people will hear these teachings read about them. They make a lot of sense, this is really great and behind it, but they never translated into doing into action. So that particular quality needs to be developed in the quality of action or engagement. So one of the things is very beautiful about this, I think, again, has to do with emphasis on practicing in ordinary life. There's lots of opportunities in ordinary life, to develop greater generosity of practice generosity, develop virtue, develop patience, loving kindness, equity and equanimity determination. And, and so as we go about our life, and we're visited by all kinds of challenges or all kinds of things, opportunities to be the agent to feel like you're the agent who can act who can do something here, that it you don't have to be the recipient or you don't have to be the victim. You don't have to be the, the kind of the past and passive person the world is acts on. But rather, you can take some ownership or some action or some responsibility for what you can do. And I think that's an important quality of Buddhism emphasis Buddhism is for each person to take responsibility for themselves and become their own actor, their own agent for change, as opposed to waiting for magic for something around them to happen. There are terrible things that happen to people. Absolutely. And, and sometimes we need to kind of fix things in the world. But Buddhist practice has more to do not about fixing things in the world, but rather can include that But it has to do with not being passive in the face of the world. But taking some responsibility here as an actor, to acts upon the world acts upon yourself. And so, seeing the situation, how can I engage here to cultivate these qualities? Even if the situation is disastrous? This is not working out. Can I cultivate patience? Can I pay cultivate equanimity? Can I cultivate loving kindness even here, compassion, you know, what are the what are the armies which of these perfections can be developed here can engage in right now. So you'll see that particularly with the first one, with generosity, over and over again in Buddhism, and the path is described as beginning with generosity, it's often the first to the list.

And I love it because what it means what it implies is that generosity is only done in relationship to other people. When you can do gender you can be generous to yourself, but generally has to do with With outwardly directed, and so Buddhist practice begins not with meditation and being inward, but classically begins by cultivating healthy relationships with the world around you. generosity is the means for that. How can I be generous? How can I cultivate greater generosity in a wise way and appropriate way. And becoming generous, again is another way of being the agent, the actor, as opposed to being the recipient, the point of it gets and receives. I was told recently of a coming of age program that particular religion has, and how it used to be that it was really clear that not coming of age, you became an adult, and it's all about what you were going to contribute to your society as an adult. And as it's been transformed, especially in America is coming of age kind of thing. It's all about

getting presence. And, and in fact, when I was 13, or 12 My parents who were atheists gave me the options to get confirmed as a Lutheran because we're in a region, right? So that's what you do. And, and so the Oh yeah. And I'll do that I thought because because I had this idea that there all these presents. But then I learned that in order to do that you had to spend a year going further going to take these classes, Bible classes. So the trade off just didn't work for me, so I never went with it. But this, you know, this change from something it was meant to kind of be outwardly directed, make you a contributing citizen, to it's all about me, what can I get from this? And we have a society that I think much too much has been forced to about me myself. Many people have raised their kids in the last 1520 years, it seems it's been many people already. About this desire to increase, improve self esteem, they say and empower them, and rather has kind of given them everything, especially in more affluent situations. And so they feel like they deserve life. They deserve things be given to them as opposed to something you work for. I think Buddhism is more halfway done if you don't take it as something you deserve to get enlightened. But rather, it's something you work towards something you engage yourself in. So generosity is one of these things you engage in being generous, something you have to do, and you become the agent, you become the persons empowered. When you decide how what can I do here that's generous, as opposed to what can I do here that I could get. And as we engage, we cultivate qualities of character. We cultivate the quality of engagement of being the agent, the actor, of acting of doing, we cultivate our relationship to other people, we cultivate hopefully a capacity Let go. And we cultivate your generosity itself, which is a beautiful, beautiful thing that a generous heart that's willing to give and support others and help others is a really beautiful thing. And then there's virtue, cultivating virtue. It's a it's was one of the big surprises for me when I started doing Buddhist practice got seriously involved in it, that virtue is a beautiful thing. I, I was basically virtuous growing up and I don't think I was really did anything. I didn't have enough imagination to do anything. But but the, but if anything, I thought that people who are virtuous were kind of good at goodies was the expression I had, you know, kind of, and, and, and so it was a surprise to me discovered the tremendous beauty, the beauty, beauty, the beauty and the heart. The beauty in the mind. The purity that's can be their virtue, the virtue is not an issue of puritanical rules. virtue is really about uncovering and expressing the clarity, the purity, the beauty that resides in the heart. And so, to cultivate those qualities, to be interested in those, to develop those is a great thing to do. If there is kind of movements to things which wouldn't be considered virtuous, to engage in those and look at them and practice with them, is a great thing. Like for example, speech. There's so many people that I encounter, who are not careful with how they speak.

And so they say things that my heart sometimes cringes when I hear things that are mean, judgmental, cynical, slanderous, you know, all kinds of things. And part of virtue is being careful with what We speak not to burden ourselves with some kind of big, you know, you know, ethical should more appear, right rather, so something beautiful inside of us can come forth. So in terms of virtue and how beautiful it is. I discovered the beauty of it on retreat when my first long Vipassana retreat was 10 weeks long. And one of the really important experiences for me there was discover the clarification this beautiful emptying or cleansing cleansing of the heart that happened in that retreat. And it's from that experience of cleansing cleanliness or purity or that I became a fan of virtue. And what I experienced or experienced that through retreat, and then oh, it became more important was I could really see how that clarity that lack of conflict, that openness, that transparency that can come with virtue, then in a turn, supported by meditation practice, and allowed practice to go further. So here you see, you know, what is it that what, why is it easy for some people to go quick and develop quickly and practice and some people not one of the issues has to do with their virtue. And I'm sure that all of you are virtuous in a kind of conventional sense. But, but in Buddhism, we asked to look at it in a deeper way, not just conventionally kind of what looks on the surface as being virtuous. But what about deep inside even what you think if some of you kind of we could broadcast what you think, is everyone heard what you think? Yeah, I think most of us would be shocked. And, and I just want one thing to care for your

speech. It's nothing to care for, or to say to yourself, so to be interested in this and Take some responsibility for that and cultivate some inner capacity there. And then there's renunciation, which is an unpopular topic. But renunciation, the benefit of it is that if we hold on tight we cling to things. It's it's difficult to let go. And the big definition of freedom in Buddhism is having the hand the clenched fist of the hand open the clenched fist of the mind, open, the clenched fist to the heart open. And so there has to be some capacities to be able to loosen up and not hold on tight, to self identity, to our things, to our relationships, to our fears, to our sense of being a victim to our hurts, to our desires, to our ambitions, to our past, to our future, but to open up and to renunciation, to have the capacity to let go to develop that as a muscle that or maybe it's more like a hinge when you lubricate over and over and over again, then when you find yourself engaged in the practice of Buddhism, the teachings of it, if that hinge is really well lubricated, then it's a lot easier to let go in a deep way. But if that hinge has been rusted shut, it's gonna be hard to let go. So part of cultivating these qualities is to cultivate the capacity to let go. And that can be done in small ways. small ways built over time to create character. It's one of the one of the principles of character building, is that builds over many small things that we do over time. You can't just suddenly from one day to the next, change your character in a big way. But it's a small little steps that accumulate over time. And then there's a wisdom and understanding a big topic. There's effort I mentioned earlier. There is With effort and applying ourselves, it's important to be patient. Because you can put make a lot of effort and see very little change. And so maybe what's needed here is to greater capacity to be patient to, to have a long enduring mind sometimes referred to, to be able to hang in there. And then there is truthfulness. It's kind of interesting that truthfulness now I think, is if I'm counting right the seventh in the list. And rather than the first, maybe because truthfulness is hard to come to exhibit one of the more challenging things to do, it's easier to be generous

and be truthful. And, and so at some point, as we mature in our practice, the emphasis on truth becomes more and more important. How not to lie to ourselves and not to deceive ourselves or being diluted, diluted and how to be committed to being truthful. One of the one of the things I'm often said to say, I get inspired by people a lot. When I see in people how they live their lives and moved by it, it's very meaningful for me. And one of the things I see in people that most me a lot is when I see their truthfulness or dedication to being truthful, and some people have this have this to a real great degree. I don't know why, but they seem incapable, and they feel that you could see and you're with them and they're just not going to do it. They can't go there in any kind of say something that's deceptive or the kind of bends the truth in any kind of way. And it's beautiful quality to see when people have that really strongly. And it's required for Buddhist practice. A lot of what for some people what goes on in Buddhist practice over time meditation practice, retreat, practice, practice, practice. In general, is a slow process of becoming really understanding themselves to become honest about themselves to discover what the truth is about themselves. We often tell ourselves stories about who we are, that's not really true. Some of the stories we tell about ourselves are quite negative and detrimental destructive. Some of the stories we say about ourselves are over the top. delusions of grandeur and, and their stories and so how can we encounter the truth of who we are independent of the stories that we tell ourselves that might not be so true, or their stories we tell about other people, or their stories we tell about what life is all about. Some people tell stories that life is all about threat. World is all about danger, or life is all about getting life is all about receiving. You know, all kinds of things. And then determination, resolve is a very important quality to have resolve. Now this to give a plug for resolve, I've considered myself to not have native, very good native ability for concentration. I've done a lot of meditation, I should know by now. And so, you know, some people have a really good natural capacity for concentration just comes easy to them. But what I do have, what I seem to have is a strong sense of determination and resolve. And so I've compensated for my poor concentration with resolve. And so when I set myself down, to do something like meditate on retreat, you know, I'm just gonna determine this is what I'm doing. I'm just kind of like, I take a stand and I'm this you know, and let everything else go and resolve.

This is what I'm going to do. And it's a beautiful quality, to have resolve to terminate. Just follow through on one thing really well, and it develops a capacity to stay focused. We have a multitasking culture. And as I've kind of been starting to get influenced by all the different media and computers now unless I see how easy it is for my mind to lose its resolve to lose its focus, how easy it is to the mind to jump around to do this and that and check the email and this and that. And as I do that, I see that my mind my who I am, and my mind seems to rise into the surface of my mind. Rather than being centered kind of deep inside. I see that the more I think I do more, I bounce around and answer email and all that the more I seem to reside more in the surface of my mental mind than deep inside. And so I think our resolve is being one of those things that is like an anchor, or a ballast that keeps us and maybe a comparator that keeps us focused and directed at what's most important. There's a lot of messages we get from our society, that we have all these different things we're supposed to be doing. But to be able to do something really well, sometimes we have to kind of just stay focused and, and put aside a lot of things which are even worthwhile to do to engage and be present and do it. And then there's loving kindness. The ninth of these qualities, almost every situation we're in, we can see what's what would be the kind thing to do here how to have greater sense of friendliness, like can I offer this to others? How can I offer this to myself? And when all else fails, when everything else fails, then there's equanimity.

So how can I cultivate greater equanimity grid balance? Less and less? How can I cultivate a capacity not to be reactive to this? stay centered, stay independent of what's going on, not pushed around by it. So as in different circumstances, you can ask yourself This question these questions, you know which of these qualities would be useful to cultivate right now? Which is needed right now? And what would it take to engage in it, to learn about it, to develop it? And to do that is to take responsibilities take become the agent of your practice, as opposed to waiting? Well, eventually I'll get to the question, and then I'll really be able to practice. This is just a difficult situation. Now it doesn't count. But rather all this is a difficult situation. This is an opportunity for generosity, virtue, patience, loving kindness, equanimity, whatever it might be. And so these armies then are the qualities that support practice, but they also can be turned around, reversed. And these are the qualities of character that get expressed by awakening. As a person develops in practice, it becomes more and more natural to live and express these things in a natural way. It's like this generosity flows out. have us, wisdom flows out of us loving kindness flows out of us, rather than something that we have to kind of work at getting. And so there's kind of this beautiful thing where when we have to practice it, develop these, we practice it, and when they are expressed things that want to be expressed through us and then we make room and allow them to be to flow out of us into the world. And gradually over time, as people practice, it shifts gradually from less and less something we practice and do, and more and more something which is kind of kind of a natural expression of how we are becomes how we are rather more than what we do when we develop. As these qualities get developed, it becomes easier and easier to do meditation practice or be on retreat or do all the other things that Buddhism emphasizes

And these these qualities, any one of these qualities, then support us. They're there because their character is something that you don't have to rely on only on doing. They become, you know, there's there in the background, as strengths that are supporting us as we go through challenging situations, the greater patience you've developed as a strength, the more patient you'll be in almost easily in situations that are trying. So to look for situations to develop these, if you'd like, and discover how they're supportive, is a beautiful thing. The last thing I'll say about these armies is they are in that they're directly tied to the path of liberation in Buddhism. There are two factors that make each of these qualities apart. Perfection. So there are a lot of people are generous. And just being generous by itself is not as it's not a part of me. That's good to be generous. It does develop qualities. But when generosity becomes a part of me when it's when it's directly connected to liberation and to compassion when the question about being generous is not just what's the generous thing here now, but how can I

be generous here in a way that supports my liberation supports me to be able to let go and it appropriately beautiful way? And how is it that being generous now is compassionate thing to do for the world? How is it that being virtuous supports me and my liberation? And how is it that allows my compassion for the world to be expressed through virtue? How is it that wisdom is connected to liberation to compassion is the connection to those two, that that make these qualities, really the parameters of the path. And so Buddhism edits over and over again, has these two important qualities. It's said to be the wings of Buddhism, the wings of liberation, freedom, and the wings of compassion. And the birds can only fly if you have both. And so if you're interested in the compassion side of Buddhism, cultivate the armies. If you're interested in liberation part of Buddhism, cultivate the parties. If you're interested in both cultivate the parties. And if you're interested in neither cultivate them anyway. It's a good thing to do. And it's a list seems daunting and big and long and just do 111 will take you a long way. In fact, sometimes it's said if you do one really well the other nine following its wake. So in the course of the year, we will explore these 10 qualities on Fridays. Some of you might want to come, we'll spend a whole day on one day on each of them. And then some people will then go home and practice those that quality for the month. And what I thought I would do is perhaps on Sundays, once a month, maybe the day after the Sunday after the class is to give a talk on that particular perfection of the month. And so it happens to be the classes on Friday on generosity. So in that sense, in that case next week. I'll talk about the perfection of generosity. hope that's okay. So thank you so much