

# 2010-10-17 The Paramis Virtue

Sun, 8/16 9:46AM • 34:04

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

virtue, people, cultivate, qualities, brahman, mind, wisdom, brahmin, virtuous, posture, buddha, integrity, surpasses, support, encounter, ethics, buddhism, life, buddhist, ethical

## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

This morning, I'd like to continue a series of talks that I've given that there's giving them once a month. And then the topic of the 10 perfections, attend parties. And the last month I think, was more like the introduction to it. No, so it was I talked about generosity and introduction to it. And then this month, we're doing virtue, that perfection of virtue. And as an introduction to this topic of the perfections, their their qualities or character characters or inner virtues that get cultivated in doing Buddhist practice, and then in turn, support further practice. So there's a wonderful reciprocal relationship that goes on and it and in many ways, in most ways, one of the things we cannot Rely on when we do Buddhist practice is our monkey mind. The monkey mind is the mind that is jumping around all over, can't settle at all anything, always wanting something to be different wanting, wanting, pushing, pushing away. Sometimes the monkey mind is always analyzing, trying to think think its way out of its quandaries. And there's certain kind of activity of the mind, which is just a dead end. It's worse than dead end. It's kind of like you'd dig your own grave. Like if you're constantly trying to you know, like, if you're standing if you're in a city, new city, and you're trying to find your way and you're lost, and you sit down on the curb, and start thinking about all the possible ways you can possibly find your way out. probably pretty soon it's gonna get dark on you, and then it's gonna be really hard to find your way out. So same thing with a spiritual life. If you try to fight think your way too much about it. With a monkey mind it's going around that you pretty soon it's gonna get dark for you and you won't find your way out. And some people rely too much on that monkey mind to try to understand and figure out rely on their mind that's anxious line the mind is desirous or despairing or something. Luckily, there are other things we can rely on besides our own monkey mind or our own kind of self centered preoccupations or concerns or approaches. And one of them is a whole series of things. So for something very simple for example, you can rely on your posture. And some people who've done a lot of meditation can notice that if you have all kinds of things can be going on for you you can be you know, your mind can be a little bit crazy, anxious, overactive, you can have strong emotions and feelings going on. And it can be very difficult. If you sit down and hold an upright posture for Half an hour an hour, something changes. Somehow the posture is a container that holds all the different challenges that go on inside of us. And things kind of have a chance to settle down. It's mostly a matter of getting out of the way rather than perpetuating our monkey mind or preoccupations. So if you can kind of step out of the preoccupations of the mind just sit there, something happens, something changes. And it's not unusual for people to feel a transformation as things fall away. So something as simple as a posture. And that's true in daily life as well. If you sometimes if you hold your posture upright, it's much more difficult to succumb to some of the strong emotions and feelings that can take over. Sometimes if we like if you feel depressed, if you just kind of collapse your posture and become the ultimate couch potato. The chances are that that's that postures will strengthen and reinforce the mediations that might be supporting the depression but if You can sit upright and straight and keep it on Earth, dignified posture, you that's going to that kind of cuts through some of the Not always, but sometimes some of the depressive things going on. So there's a whole

series of things that support us which are not exactly direct that directly our own doing. Or we make we make them happen, but then they support us. So, and this line, I love that line from the movie, Field of Dreams, race, they say build it, and he will come. For Buddhists, it's build it and it will come the Dharma will come. We build something with our practice, we build something with our body. We put our body on the cushion, we engage ourselves physically in the practice, we we create, recreate and feel the virtue of ethics around us. So whether ethically we develop our loving kindness, withdrawal or generosity Develop a variety of different things we build the heart, we build a

character of who we are, change our character. And then when doing that something is allowed to come, something comes to support us. The Buddhists call it the Dharma, but you don't have to call it that if you don't like that, but, but there's a lot of things that come. So today The topic is the perfection of virtue or the perfection of ethics. There are 10 of these perfections there are qualities of character that are developed in practice, and as I said, they then support us. They're like, they're we're building, we're building something beautiful, build it, and then something can happen. And these 10 for those people having been part of this so far, our generosity, virtue, renunciation, wisdom, effort, patience. truthfulness, resolve, loving kindness and equanimity. And so, today's topic is virtue or ethics. When I teach, when I've taught precepts, the five precepts to children here at IMC I have made the point to them that when they were just babies, little kids, they could do nothing for themselves. And everything they needed was provided by their parents, you know, the parents protected them took care of them. And, and then as they grew up, at some point, they could walk by themselves at some point, they could feed themselves at some point, they could go to the bathroom themselves. At some point, they could walk to school themselves, perhaps some point they could take the bus by themselves. They can go out into the world. And so as people grow up, become more self reliant. You don't know at some point you no longer rely on your parents to protect you to take care of You. But even as you get older, it's good to have some protection. And so in Buddhism, I tell the kids, we have five protections that will protect you. We have the protection of not killing, or not harming. If you don't cause harm, you create protection for yourself. If you don't steal, you create a field of protection for yourself, if you don't engage in sexual misconduct, it's protective for you to do that. And if you don't lie, it's protective for you. And if you don't engage in intoxicants, that's a protection for you. And so I offer that to the children because I don't want to rather give him that sense that the precepts as important as they are, are not not moral commandments, but rather they have these benefits. They're not moralistic or puritanical like Thou shalt not do these things. That look here are some ID if you really want to take care of yourself and protect yourself and benefit yourself. The simple ways of doing that. for grownups, I don't usually say that protections, but they're their ways of building something beautiful. So something that can come, the idea of creating, having quality of virtue within us, not just by how we act, but the character of our heart is one of the most beautiful things that a person can create. To have a certain purity of heart or simplicity of heart or, or to have a heart which is or an inner life, which is not being motivated by forces of hate forces of ambition or greed, or selfishness, forces of contraction of attachment of clinging, forces of great resistance and fear. To have a heart that's freed of these things is a beautiful feelings, one of the most beautiful things to have In a top of that, and so to discover that capacity to discover this kind of inner beauty, that's possible for all our hearts as part of the task of Buddhist practice. I can remember when I was one of my early Vipassana retreats, the surprise that I had to discover, on retreat, this level of inner inner purity that had to do with ethics with virtue, where it just didn't see I could feel in this kind of sense of peace, calm that I had, that I just couldn't muster up the motivation to do some of the things that were not exactly unethical, but maybe unethical. You know, there were certain ways of thinking about people and maybe treating people that were not so kind are so sensitive to them or respectful to them. And I was such a big shift to feel it coming from inside. Rather than thinking that these were,

you know, the two commandments thou shalt Be respectful to others you're supposed to do that. Just like you know, it was a violation to this beauty inside to be disrespectful to someone else. So in Buddhism, we put a tremendous emphasis on the value of virtue, value of living virtuously because of what it what it comes out of it comes out of this beauty that we have, and it supports that beauty supports that freedom in ourselves. So I wanted to read a passage a Buddhist passage on these has to do with perfections and specifically has to do with virtue.

Even the waters of the Ganges cannot wash away the stain of hatred, yet the water of virtue is able to do so. Even sandalwood cannot cool the fever of lust virtue is able to remove it. virtue is unique is the unique adornment of good people, surpassing adornments cherished by ordinary folk such as necklaces and earrings. Virtue should be reflected upon as the basis for rapture and joy, as granting immunity from fear of self reproach to reproach of others punishment and an evil rebirth. It should be reflected point as praised by the wise as the root cause for freedom from remorse as the basis for safety. Virtue surpasses material well, because thieves cannot confiscate it because it enables one to achieve supreme sovereignty for one's own mind. Virtue surpasses the sovereignty of warriors and kings. Virtue surpasses the achievement of beauty Ford makes one beautiful even to one's enemies. It cannot be vented By the adversaries of aging and sickness, since it is the foundation for states of happiness, virtue surpasses such dwellings as palaces and mentions, and accomplishing the difficult task of self protection. virtue is superior to troops of elephants, horses, chariots and infantry, as well as such devices, as magic mantras, spells, and blessings, for depends on oneself, not on others. Thus esteeming virtue is the foundation of all achievements, as the soil for the origination of all the Buddha qualities, the beginning footing head and chief of all qualities issuing and Buddhahood one should guard diligently and thoroughly perfect virtue as a hand guards its eggs. I kind of love that last image Sit on your virtues a hand guards next they close by keep it warm. Keep it safe. Keep your sense of integrity, warm.

So there are a number of ways that people safeguard their own virtue or ethic or integrity. One is from a sense of fear. They're afraid that if they transgress the precepts or do something, that somehow it'll come back and then and harm them. You find some people who live very unethical lives, killing and stealing and raping and things. And those kinds of situations. Sometimes Buddhist teachers and other teachers have voted period teachers have used very strong statements to really kind of frighten them back into Be more ethical. And so you find in Buddhism teachings of, you know, dramatic teachings of fire and brimstone kind of sermons. You don't get that much from my emcee. Maybe because you're pretty ethical. But, you know, sometimes you have dramatic descriptions of the hills you're going to go to, if you do these kinds of things. And so there are Buddhist tells, the only thing that's good about Buddhist hills compared to other hills is the Buddhist one Buddhist ones are temporary. Temporary, you know, it's only going to be for you're only going to be there for a few hundred million years. Eventually, you'll get out. So I don't really believe in that, that cosmology, but you find that kind of teaching to kind of frightened people to behave and sometimes that's the only thing that gets people's attention. Sometimes there's teachings of you protect your, your, yourself from remorse, regret. And that's a that's a beautiful thing because walk around with all this kind of self reproach, anger, or fear fear that someone's going to catch you is a is a not a good feeling to be able to walk through the world blameless. Knowing that no one can blame you for anything, is a beautiful way to walk through the world and dignified way. So be very careful with how we behave and what we do and so that no one would ever be upset or angry or discouraged. But knowing what you've done is a beautiful thing. When I was in Burma, my teacher Anita was very fond of telling us stories of people who had lived unvirtuous lives dramatically so. And then they'd come to the monastery to meditate, do intensive retreats. And inevitably the story when something like this, that they would start sitting and meditating, and they'd make some progress in their meditation and get certain level of calm, and then they would not make

any further progress. And they would really try hard and really try hard. And usually there was kind of like a braking moment where something very dramatic would happen where they'd had to confront the legacy of their unethical behavior. They had dramatic memories of what they had done, or something inside of them symptomatic pain inside of them associated with what they'd done. But somehow or other, they had these dramatic encounters of having to somehow there's they're always very difficult, always very painful because, you know, and then, and the way these stories were told to us, they would break through to the others. Once they kind of really owned up and seen through and work through what they had done in the past, then they would do some meditation be able to continue after that point. So, some of people, some people get away with being mildly unethical, maybe they cheat on their taxes that mildly. I don't know if that's mild, but, or they, you know, they manage all kinds of ways people take what's not given. And my members being right now remember people who, over on the to at the freeway over here, if you exit for el montay if traffic is really backed up on the freeway, you can get off on the exit and stay straight, and then takes you on to the entrance again. And so you can bypass all those cars standing still, you know, you're like going on a freeway, you know, thing. And that's kind of mild, isn't it? unethical thing but I think that's I think, I think that's kind of unethical. It's kind of taken was not given, it's kind of forcing yourself into other people. So there's a whole range of things, you know, range of things and we'll come back and bite you.

You know, that's, that's the teaching your karma is it's got stored up someplace inside and it affects you in some way. And, and so some people want to protect their meditation. So sorry, I was gonna say was an ordinary life, that level of mild ethical transgressions. It's not really going to affect you too much. You're not going to notice the effect. And Muse could continue living your life speeding around doing getting what you want doing everything. And you might think there's a problem at all. Yeah, he was yesterday. It was downtown. Yesterday, Saturday, maybe yesterday downtown Redwood City and there was a lot of traffic and And I was I was driving on the street and stop, stop and go stop and go. And, and somehow I hadn't noticed that the person who was parked next to me was trying to get out. So I just continue to walk, drive down. And the person window is down. A yelled a swear word at me. It was quite something. And I just felt sorry for her. I mean, I feel sorry, I have been with delight to letter for letter three If I'd known if I'd noticed, but I thought my crime, what didn't warrant the punishment. And because of the ferocity of this woman's anger, right, mostly felt sorry for her. What kind of karma is that for her? What kind of pain and suffering is she carrying with her? So, as someone who does meditation practice, especially in a serious meditation practice, sooner or later has to encounter your karma encounter? how you behave and what goes on in your life. And it's a profound and very important thing to encounter your unethical behavior. Don't recoil from that, welcome it and work through with either side. It's a great thing to do. But it wouldn't be great if you didn't have to encounter that at all. And you can sit down to meditate and didn't have to deal with you know, your remorse and you regret in the stored up tension that these things have. Because you don't know when we'll come back. No, no when I've been surprised I've been on retreat, and merrily doing my practice, and then boom. Oh, that thing I did a long time ago. I guess I have to go back and deal with it now. I couldn't just you know, it wasn't just a matter of working through the medicine on the cushion. I had to actually go in the world and somehow clean up my mess. So I love it. Really great, I think the Dharma is a wonderful protection. Because the Dharma makes us forces us I think sooner or later to be really honest about his inner the quality or the integrity of our hearts. And, and then when we start really appreciating that integrity, then the Dharma supports us and how to maintain it and continue it and support it and let it grow and develop further and further.

There's a discourse and the long discourses of the Buddha have a conversation between a Brahmin that kind of priest caste in ancient India and the Buddha and the Buddha asks the Brahmin What are the five true qualities of a Brahmin and the Brahman race, then lists five he says

Brahman is well Born on both the mother and father side of pure descent for seven generations. So this is where you're, you have to be born into a Brahmin family to be a Brahmin. He is a scholar, well versed in the mantras and scriptures of the ancient Vedic tradition. He is a handsome and pleasing. It says he is virtuous and he is wise. And the Buddha says to him, is it possible to admit one of these five qualities and the person who would still be a Brahmin? And so the Brahmin who's answering says, Oh yes, it is possible. You can leave out the appearance thing, you know, being handsome, but what it because what does that matter? If a Brahmin had the other four qualities, he would, he could be recognized as a true Brahmin. And the Buddha said, but could not one of those four qualities be omitted. And so then the Brahman says, Oh yeah, it's possible to leave out one of those four. We could leave out the mantras. What does that matter? If he had the other three qualities, he could be recognized through Brahman. But Buddha continued, could not one of those three qualities be omitted? Oh, it is Buddha. You could leave out birth. For what does that matter if a Brahmin is virtuous have increased virtue and if he is wise, then he can be recognized as a true Brahman. And then the other Brahmins who are listening to this conversation got upset. Don't say that. Don't say that.

So then the Brahmin defends himself. why he's why he has this view. And he ends with this. He says all these other things, those first three can be dropped. But if one more to admit one of the last two points, that is being virtuous and wise, could one truthfully declare I am a Brahmin? No. This is the part I want to read to you. For wisdom is purified by virtue and virtue is purified by wisdom. Were one is the other is the moral person has wisdom, and the wise person has morality. And the combination of morality and wisdom is called the highest thing in the world. Just as one hand washes the other, or one foot the other. So wisdom is purified by morality and the combination is called the highest thing in the world. I love that image of, you know, washing washing your hands. You know, most people have people have two hands, they you know, you need both hands to wash them really well or easily. And so in the same way, your virtue and your wisdom go hand in hand. They support each other work together. And there's a very important reason for this wisdom in Buddhism. The core essential aspect of wisdom in Buddhism is more like discernment. It's more than ability to discern or to discriminate. To see clearly what it is that causes suffering, and what it is that brings happiness. What is it that causes harm? And what it is that brings benefit to be able to make that distinction is the core distinction that all of Buddhism comes out of. You don't have to have, you know, some great wisdom about metaphysical things are the true nature of reality of the true nature of the mind. You have to be able to see this very simple distinction between what were the what causes tension, conflict, stress, suffering, Alcoa, and what causes peace, what causes freedom, what causes brings benefit for you brings happiness. If you can see those two, then when you encounter your behavior in the world, you can begin seeing how being virtuous is beneficial. You can see that how virtue How you know killing or harming someone that causes harm to others and probably to yourself as well. Lying does the same to all these kind of things causes harm. And you can see that other behavior brings benefit and happiness. And the other part this this positive part is very important part of Buddhist spirituality, Buddhists, spirituality is not not about the emphasis should not be people who are developing the practice on the ethics of restraint, avoid killing and stealing and lying and sexual misconduct, intoxication. It's kind of assumed that you're not going to do those things. It's really important not to do them. But if, if that was all that Buddhist ethics was about, I think we'd all become, you know, uptight or you know, it wouldn't be so much fun but the other part of the reason to love virtue and Buddhism, Richard is meant to be something you care about and love, is because it also entails developing these beautiful qualities of hearts as well. These beautiful qualities of character. And, and so it's not just a matter of avoiding certain behavior, it's also a matter of cultivating other behavior. So instead of avoiding killing, we cultivate compassion. Instead of avoiding stealing, when instead of but you know, I said the wrong way deny. Yeah, instead of killing, we develop compassion. Instead of stealing. We develop generosity. Instead of engaging in sexual misconduct. We cultivate



respectful love, instead of engaging in lying, we cultivate our capacity for truth. And instead of engaging in certain intoxication, we cultivate the mind's clarity. And so we're kind of also cultivated. These positive things as well and attend parties these 10 perfections are part of the class of these ethical class in Buddhism, of qualities that can be developed and strengthened. Some people will spend a lot of time cultivating these, some people find that some of the qualities of virtue are best cultivated in daily life. And

in encounters with people at work and places like that. That's the place where you cultivate generosity, that's the place you cultivate your compassion, your respect for others. You know that you don't, and meditation practice, maybe you don't cultivate those directly there. But there you cultivate the mind's ability to be still and peaceful and calm and settled. So that you have a reference point for understanding better, what is what causes harm and what brings you benefit if the mind if the heart is really calm and stable, still peaceful, you have a very different relationship to yelling someone out your window. You know, you just feel that feels that feels really, you know, awful to yourself to swear at them in the traffic. If you're really agitated and upset, then you know, all kinds of things stressed out. It's, you know, it's really easy to yell at someone. But it's hard to do it if you're settled. It's hard to so it isn't. So to be settled and peaceful, gives you a reference point for the wisdom site to operate. And it said that a lot of the virtues in Buddhism get cultivated, developed naturally or automatically. Through a strong meditation practice. You will naturally become more ethical naturally more generous, naturally more patient naturally more able to let go naturally more. You know all these different beautiful qualities as in mind settles down if the as the mind gets less caught up and tied up in itself and preoccupied with the mind and the heart becomes more free.

One of the things I like about the story about the Brahman and you find this kind of kind of teaching different examples given over and over again by the Buddha, that who you are because of how you were born is Nothing, it's not really that important for the Buddhist life for their spiritual life, that what's important and how a person is measured or how it is by their virtue and by their wisdom, by their how they are, not what they are. And so no matter who we encounter, we may be kind of many, many people who are very different from ourselves. It's not, it's not what they are, that's important, but how we are in relation to them and how they are to us. And how we are is defined by, by do we treat people in unethical ways or treat people with integrity. So Buddhists, and I think, champions infinite respect, lots of respect for our fellow human beings, no matter what their circumstances that they're in, that we try to meet them with our wisdom, our support, and our virtue. And not only do we protect ourselves that way, but we protect the world when we're virtuous. When we're ethical, and we live a life of integrity, it's the Buddha called our ethics, our gift to the world. It's a beautiful thing. So if there's one thing I'd like you to remember, as you leave now from this talk is that that that your capacity for being virtuous, being ethical, having integrity is not something to believe in. So much as something to love. Somebody they care about. And your care for that your love of that is what will you help find your way. But if you just believe in it, then enough, that's good enough. So thank you. And in a half an hour, we'll have those of you stay. We'll have Tony Bernhardt here.