

PĀRAMITĀS OF PERFECTION

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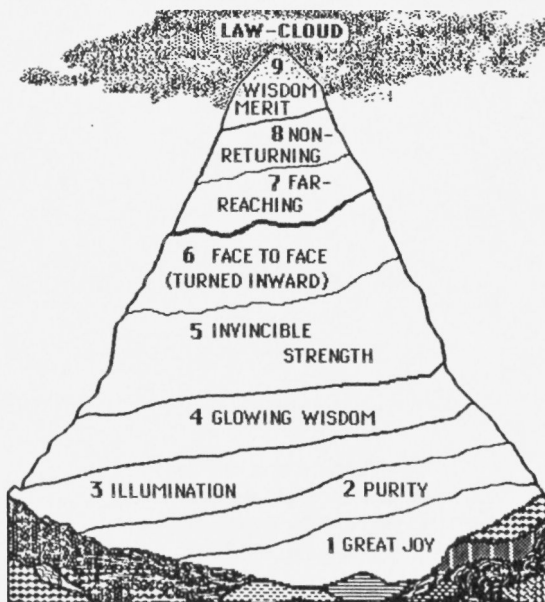
The Blavatsky Lecture, 1987

PĀRAMITĀS OF PERFECTION

Muriel Daw

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**TEN TRANSCENDENTAL PERFECTIONS GIVE BASIS
FOR TEN EARTHS**

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| 6 Wisdom of Insight | 10 Cognition of Enlightenment |
| 5 Rapt Meditation | 9 Power |
| 4 Vigour | 8 The Vow |
| 3 Patient Acceptance | 7 Skilful Means |
| 2 Moral Precepts | |
| 1 Giving | |

"Yea, Lord; I see the PATH; its foot in mire, its summits
lost in glorious light Nirvanic. And now I see the ever
narrowing Portals on the hard and thorny way to Jñāna."

Voice of the Silence (The Seven Portals) p.47

"... O weaver of thy freedom, thou hast to master these
Pāramitās of perfection - the virtues transcendental six and
ten in number - along the weary Path."

Voice of the Silence (The Seven Portals) p.48

"The 'six and ten transcendental virtues', (the
Pāramitās), are not for full-grown yogis and priests alone, but
for all those who would enter the 'Path'."

Written to "H.P.B." by her Master

Collected Works 12, p. 598

PĀRAMITĀS OF PERFECTION

".....O weaver of thy freedom, thou hast to master these
Pāramitās of perfection - the virtues transcendental six and ten
in number - along the weary Path."

Most of us, as students of Theosophy, are already very familiar with this quotation from THE VOICE OF THE SILENCE. However, although we may have meditated for years on the first six of the transcendental virtues so richly described in THE SEVEN PORTALS, for some of us there remains a burning question: 'Ten pāramitās are mentioned; what about the other four?'

It may be thought that perhaps these other four are unimportant, otherwise H.P.B. would have given us more information about them; but this is not true. In fact Buddhists call them 'The Four Great Perfections.' They are so important that they are never given to beginners, only to students well advanced along the Way. It should also be noted that, in the Buddhist Scriptures, the Path of the Ten Pāramitās is always linked with the Ten Bhūmīs (Stations, or 'Earths') experienced along the Way.

We may ask: Did H.P.B. know the Path of TEN Pāramitās, and would she regard it as a proper practice for us? In other words, may we regard the Four Great Buddhist Perfections as orthodox Theosophy?

On November 29th, 1889, she wrote in a letter:

" That the MASTERS do, in proportion to their respective temperaments, at stages of Bodhisattvic development possess such Pāramitās, constitutes their right to our reverence as our Teachers. It should be the aim of each and all of us to strive with all the intensity of our natures to follow and imitate them."¹

¹ Blavatsky, Collected Works 12, page 504

Then, in E. S. Instruction No. 3, H.P.B. quotes from a letter received from her Master:

"The 'six and ten transcendental virtues,' (the Pāramitās), are not for full-grown yogis and priests alone, but for all those who would enter the Path."²

It would seem, therefore, that for spiritual training, even lay people like ourselves could profit by knowing more about this particular Way towards Enlightenment.

Madame Blavatsky tells us in her preface that the Scripture from which THE VOICE OF THE SILENCE was translated contains about 90 distinct little treatises, 39 of which she had learnt by heart during her own apprenticeship. However, not all of them were suitable to be given to a too selfish world; and for the rest, she was too near the end of a life burnt out in working for the sake of humanity. Therefore, for her last work, THE VOICE OF THE SILENCE, she chose only the three fragments best suited to the mystics of the Theosophical Society, and she dedicated them "To the Few."

The first fragment she chose deals with training in Dhyāna, which is the precursor of Prajñā, or Samādhi, the state of faultless vision. This first vision or glimpse of the True Self is the immediate aim of all sincere Buddhists and Theosophists. (Indeed, expressed in different terminology, this experience is the aim of all religions and philosophies.)

Such a preliminary vision leads to the choice which will influence all the rest of this particular incarnation, and is fully explored in THE TWO PATHS.Is the student moved so deeply by this peep-hole into truth that he will devote the rest of this life to the "Open Way" towards more wisdom, the direct journey out of Samsara to Nirvana? Or will he be even more moved by the suffering of the world and choose the "Secret Way," following the Path of Compassion?

² Blavatsky, Collected Works 12, page 598

As we all know, the Masters of our Lineage, when they reached this stage, chose the Path of Compassion and took the Vow to help all beings towards Enlightenment. This Bodhisattva Vow is the motive and path of training for all Mahayana Buddhists: 'To attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.' The would-be Bodhisattva is not interested merely in personal enlightenment, but in the Cosmic Desire of Universal Enlightenment.

As Madame Blavatsky often referred to herself in humble tones as the very lowest of chelas, it is perhaps an unusual idea to think of her as a bodhisattva. However, only someone who has taken such a Vow could have been accepted by her particular teachers; and, considering her life, would any of us doubt for a moment that her total energies were spent in absorbing as much of the Ancient Wisdom as she could, and then passing it on to us?

From the moment anyone undertakes the Vow (the point reached at the end of the second fragment, THE TWO PATHS), he becomes a fledgling bodhisattva. Traditionally his entire career has been divided into several parts and stages. He or she works at the Ten Perfect Virtues, the Pāramitās, rising and advancing from one stage to another until reaching Enlightenment. These stages are called bhūmis. Bhūmi means earth or ground. It also means a plane of awareness or state of being.

Having been trained herself, Madame Blavatsky, in her turn, passed on to us as much of the teaching as possible. By translating the third fragment, THE SEVEN PORTALS, she started all of us on the Path of the Pāramitās, the Transcendental Perfections.

To sum up: H.P.B. gave, as her last gift, what amounts to an initiation, dedicated to the Few, an introduction to the first Five Perfections, culminating in the Wisdom of Insight as the Sixth. We are also given a pointer to the fact that, when the time is ripe, we shall find it necessary to work on a yet more transcendent group of Four Perfections.

Is the time ripe? H.P.B. gave us all this richness almost a century ago, and several generations of students have been earnestly meditating on THE VOICE OF THE SILENCE since then.

The world is just as greedy as it always was, but science is less materialistic, and Christianity has lost some of its icy dogmatic grip. There is even a social trend in the West nowadays towards meditation in order to attain enlightenment! Indeed the climate is more receptive; and perhaps during the second century of our Theosophical Society, it is time for the West to accept the idea of Ten Pāramitās and discuss this Path of Ten Perfections.

Knowledge of the classical background gives us an opportunity to find even more richness in THE SEVEN PORTALS. It is also of interest to know that the 10 Bhūmis (or Grounds of Awareness), and the remaining Four Perfections would have formed the basis of some of the other 33 treatises which H.P.B. had learnt by heart.

Let us begin at the bottom of the mountain shown in the frontispiece, and climb up towards the top. We will try to join the Questioner in THE SEVEN PORTALS, who says:

"Yea, Lord; I see the PATH; its foot in mire, its summits lost in glorious light Nirvanic. And now I see the ever narrowing Portals on the hard and thorny way to Jñāna."³

(Jñāna! - Here H.P.B. refers to the tenth and highest stage of the Pāramitā Path.)

Ten Bhūmis - The Ten Earths, or Levels of Experience

When you consult your map⁴ you will see that it describes ten actions to be carried out, not by you or me, but by the True Self, in order to ascend the ten

³ Voice of the Silence (The Seven Portals) page 47

⁴ Of course, such symbols as the frontispiece are 'as if' meditation guides. One Scripture describes such maps:

"Like pictures that are painted in the air;
Like trace of wind in empty space."

levels of the mountain; and that these ten levels, or planes of awareness, are called 'ten earths.'

'Earths' is a strange name, but it represents that which is under our spiritual feet. It means the state of consciousness achieved as each level is attained.

As always, the higher up one travels, the farther one can see, and the perspective completely changes. Not only that, but underneath one's feet are all those previous levels. They are the basis upon which one now stands. The newly-gained experiences have become the earth beneath the feet.⁵ We all know what ground feels like under our physical feet - it may be slippery mud or short springy turf, but sometimes we must consider our spiritual feet!

Before travelling upon any spiritual path, it is essential to learn the nature of the earth under our feet. Our under-standing, the things we take for granted, are completely different for each individual.

The traditional way of the bodhisattvas, or would-be bodhisattvas like us, is to walk straight on; just walking on the ground and doing our best to practise Ten Virtues or Perfections as we go, until, by the very virtue of those Virtues, we become fully-fledged bodhisattvas.

The first spiritual level of awareness is entered at the moment the Vow is made. Immediately a person accepts this Vow as his ground of being, a Great Joy suffuses him - the deeper the commitment, the deeper the Joy. We are not now speaking of happiness in all the phenomenal things that happen; but of a deep basic ground of joy that is always present, and continues even though the person concerned is undergoing deep suffering. This spiritual joy completely transcends happiness/unhappiness.

⁵ Zen Master Upagupta, who lived about two hundred years after the Buddha, was considering this when he wrote the following verse:

"When one falls on the ground
One stands up by the help of the ground.
To attempt to stand up apart from the ground
Is, to say the least, unreasonable."

While based on this deeply Joyful Ground the natural instinct is to Give, and so it comes about that at this first level the Bodhisattva specialises in training himself in the Perfection of Giving. He practises the other Virtues to the best of his ability, but his Special Virtue or Perfection at this stage is Giving.

Dāna Pāramitā – The Perfection Beyond Giving

Giving is the first of the Perfections because it is the only one which develops by itself; the others we have to work for, and belong to higher states of evolution. This first natural stage beyond sheer egoistic self-centredness is the giving of a mother to her child, if necessary she will remain hungry herself. All of us find pleasure when we give something to a child and see a face light up with joy. However, what we are talking about is beyond this. It is the PERFECTION of Giving – and that means neither ME giving to YOU, nor YOU giving to ME. The 'Pāra' (of Pāramitā) means 'that which is beyond the relative,' and the whole word means 'passed beyond to the other shore.' This 'Perfection which is beyond relative perfection' is the Giving which the True Self gives. This is what the bodhisattva training is about: getting self-centredness out of the way so that the True Self can play his own part. He knows that we are not separate. We are all part of one whole. But, after all, whose hands has he to give with? Only ours.

The Buddha tells us that selfish grasping is the cause of suffering, so it is simple to see why this first Perfection of Giving is such a wonderful antidote. However, we are not talking about our ordinary giving, but the Perfect Giving which the True Self practises; and in this case we are told: "In Perfect Giving there is no giver, no gift, and no receiver."

When the throat is thirsty, the hand does not personify the problem and think about it. It simply lifts the glass. The lips do not say "Thank you," it would be quite unnecessary. When we are all members, one of another, then emotions, thoughts, and self-separateness have no place – just the simple Perfection of Giving.

Occasionally during our everyday practice of the First Perfection, we feel a flicker of sheer Joy of Giving and for a moment the heart shines forth. Then we know we are on the right road; the earth beneath our feet is steadily becoming the First Earth of Great Joy.

Traditionally there are four kinds of Giving: the ordinary giving of material goods; the special gift of teaching; the great gift of fearlessness; and the secret gift of giving away oneself. If we can only give away all sense of separate self, then nothing remains but sheer Joy.

As Far as the gift of Material things is concerned, Madame Blavatsky told us in THE KEY TO THEOSOPHY: When you give, give with your own hands, not through someone else.⁶ Such advice is all part of the training. These ideas were not set down in all the great religions as any kind of pious sentimentalism. They exist for good hard practical reasons.

The special symbol for Dāna, the Perfection of Giving is Liquorice Root. A sweet is always a pleasant thing to offer, but this is also a medicine. In this way we learn that only if we give what is both wanted and needed will it be helpful. Examples are only too common of things being given that are wanted but not needed, and the other way round.

Even right at the very beginning, we can all try to make one voluntary gift - attentiveness, with no thought of oneself at all. To listen fully and attentively is a sharing, and is of far more value than a mental consideration of the problem, and then advice "If I were you". In this separate sense I am not you, and never will be. No one can solve another's problems. Attentive listening is a gift which strengthens the troubled one, and offers a mirror to help him solve his own problems.

⁶ See page 244 in 1968 edition

The moment we take this idea of giving ourselves seriously, as a practical proposition, is associated with what is technically called the THOUGHT OF ENLIGHTENMENT. This new motivation becomes, in itself, the ground under our feet; that on which we base ourselves and all our thoughts, feelings and actions. This is the Ground of Great Joy. Joy at having overcome former difficulties and now knowing our real vocation in life. One is, in fact, making the first step on the path to Buddhahood, however many lives it may take.

Gradually during this stage one's intention takes form; and the commitment flows into new shapes; with deepening insight, one becomes more aware of what is needed.

The aim is Universal Enlightenment, with each one of us taking an individual and yet harmonious part to the best of our ability. This thought of enlightenment makes one joyful at all times and, as the practice of constant giving starts to cure attachment, the bonds of clinging to things and people gradually loosen. This, too, gives its own form of joyful freedom. However, we must remember that all these things come about by degrees. Everyone can experience at least inklings of them. The important thing is a change of centre, the true heart becoming central instead of the greedy ego.

THE AVATAMSAKA SCRIPTURE says:

"At the First Stage of Great Joy he beholds for the first time the holy nature, through his pure wisdom of non-distinction. Having eradicated the dichotomy of subject and object, he is able to benefit himself and others in various ways. A Bodhisattva of this stage is said to be extremely joyful at all times; he is unusually generous and nothing pleases him more than to be asked for charity. Hence he practices all the ten Pāramitās, but stresses and consummates the first one - the Perfection of Giving"⁷

⁷ Garma Chang, page 34

In the First Stage of Joy, the great vows of a Bodhisattva are brought forth, and step by step they become deeper. We are traditionally told: "Joyful through certainty of the Path, he knows the maps are true."

When we are completely committed to anything, there is always an eagerness to do whatever is possible to carry out our objectives. Our whole energy goes into the project. So, as soon as we begin realise the truth of the first level, we search in our maps to find out what to do next.

Shīla Pāramitā – The Perfection Beyond Precepts

The next of the Ten actions we learn to carry out is the Perfection of Moral Precepts. All Buddhists accept Five Precepts, plus any others they feel might be helpful. These Five Rules of Training are: Harmlessness; Not to take what is not given; and Purification of Body, Speech and Mind. This training, when sincerely followed, steadily diminishes greed and the sense of separateness.

The first is: I UNDERTAKE THE RULE OF TRAINING OF HARMLESSNESS. Originally, one simply accepts this as not killing; but as we continue our training, we begin to see it covers quite small actions – such as closing a door quietly. Naturally it includes harmlessness to oneself. 'I am neither more nor less important than anyone else, and must be treated as precisely equal.'

I UNDERTAKE THE RULE OF TRAINING NOT TO TAKE WHAT IS NOT GIVEN. A short meditation will show that this is NOT the equivalent of 'thou shalt not steal'.

When undertaking THE RULE OF TRAINING OF PURIFYING THE BODY, we must remember that there is no list of 'thou shalt not's'. I must accept my own karmic responsibility for all actions of my body, sexual or otherwise, and train myself in its purification.

All the Precepts are simply rules of training, and are cheerfully accepted because we find them so useful. After all, travelling the Path is a spiritual form of mountaineering, and what climber would attempt the summit without arduous

training beforehand? He enjoys his training, knowing that every hardship undergone brings his goal nearer. Our mountain is Mount Meru, the centre of the Universe. Each one of us is the centre of the Universe. Each one of us IS Mount Meru.

I UNDERTAKE THE RULE OF TRAINING OF PURIFYING SPEECH. One way of practising this is to say only things which are TRUE, KIND, and USEFUL; otherwise keep quiet. For most people of ordinary moral standing the things we say are true [at least we think so]. Some of them are useful, and quite a lot are kind [even if only a friendly contact like Good Morning]. But when we honestly look - are most of our words really worth saying: TRUE? and KIND? and USEFUL? This discipline, purification of speech, IS strongly recommended. The next step is to work on purification of mental speech - all that inner chattering!

Then, we undertake THE RULE OF TRAINING OF PURIFYING THE MIND Obviously we must be abstemious in any use of drink or drugs. But how much deeper must it go? Is it all right to read a 'whodunnit' to relax at bed-time, or is it perhaps drugging the mind with unnecessary thoughts? There is no set rule - we each guard our own precepts.

When we remember that Madame Blavatsky and Col. Olcott accepted these precepts, we may imagine that they are probably good ones for all Theosophists.

In the early stages of the Rules of Training, as in the early stages of Giving, these virtues mainly affect relationships between ourselves and others; but when we work to try and make them become PERFECT Giving and PERFECT Rules of Training, a new quality emerges.

In ordinary giving - "I give this gift to you."

In Perfect Giving - No giver, no gift, no receiver.

Just the rightness of natural human giving.

In ordinary moral precepts – “I will train myself in moral behaviour.”

In Perfect Moral Precepts – No “I”, no training, no myself to be trained, no morality/immorality.

Just the rightness of natural human behaviour.

[Notice that this rightness of true human behaviour, is very different from the rightness of animal behaviour, whether or not in a human body. That, in its ignorant unthinking of consequence, is bound to the karmic wheel.]

When the ego has been tamed and trained to get out of the way, then the Earth of Purity is present – purity has a transparent quality, which means that the transparent behaviour of the True Self can take over. Right Behaviour is trackless, timeless, and in harmony with all other Right Behaviour. At this stage one becomes more and more conscious of synchronicity.

Now there is still another dimension and quality to the ground underfoot. The bodhisattva-in-training finds himself on the next spiral up the mountain path, the Ground of Purity. Here he will specialise in practising the Moral Precepts. He will practise all the Ten Perfections to the best of his ability, but he will specialise in Moral Precepts. Continuing in this way, the Path will unfold.

The Scripture tells us:

“He who reaches the Second stage of Spotless Purity is able to keep perfectly the Bodhisattva’s discipline. He is immune from the slightest transgression of the Precepts. By nature free from hatred, malice, grudges and impatience; he is always gentle, kind, forgiving and benevolent. He practices all the Ten Pāramitās, but stresses and consummates the second one.”⁸

You will have noticed that the first pair of Virtues relate to the body and outward behaviour. While they are developing, greed diminishes, and a sense of purity and space prevails: this seems to make space within us; but, as yet, we don’t

⁸ Garma Chang, page 35

know for what. We only accept that there is something to be known, and that this something is more important than anything physical outside us.

During this period the emblem is the Three-Fold Jewel (which represents the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sacred Community); and one's standard of behaviour is that of a person in the constant presence of the Buddha. No energy need be frittered away on "what should I do?" One simply does whatever presents itself.

Kshānti Pāramitā – The Perfection Beyond Patient Acceptance

Patient Acceptance concerns total acceptance of everything which happens to us and around us. All the suffering of life as it is – can we accept that everything happens RIGHT?

It means getting rid of any idea of: "Why should it happen to ME?" "Why are there wars?" Such questions are of no practical use. It also means learning to dispense with any thought that something 'should' have happened like this. Whatever it was happened exactly as it did, and every ounce of effort regretting it, or wishing it otherwise, is an ounce of effort stolen from energy which can be much better used.⁹

The Way of the True Self is to accept, forgive, and be tolerant. He knows that the Universe is precisely as it is. All living beings exist on and through other living beings; and the miraculous interdiffusion of all hierarchies of these beings is quite beyond our understanding at this stage. It becomes us to show a little natural humility and accept that we do not know cosmic answers. Our training is to accept full responsibility for the way in which we re-act to world events, and to start recognising our own part in causing such events to happen. There is no such person as THEY who ever do anything. WE do it.

⁹ e.g. A United Nations committee which sat for many months spending public money. They ended by solemnly announcing: "We have decided that Terrorism is a bad thing."

Yet, paradoxically enough, when we accept that "I" (my greedy ego) can never understand cosmic events; when we have undergone long and painful self-training in this; when the True Self is allowed to reflect in the mirror of his transparency; insight arises, and, standing on this Ground of Illumination, even cosmic trends start to become clear.

What is particularly interesting about the Perfection of Patient Acceptance is that, if practised really deeply, it helps far beyond this present stage, and the deepest level of all is reached on the Eighth Stage of Non-Returning; there the Bodhisattva's full acceptance of this Truth gives insight into the real Law and Truth of the whole Universe. Obviously, it takes life after life to study these Perfections and Earths; let alone to meditate on each, and to attempt to practise this way of action in everyday life.

There are many levels of the discipline of Patient Acceptance in everyday life; and each leads to clearer insight regarding the sufferings of all living beings. The more we accept life itself as a gift, and the shaping of it as a result of our previous actions, the more pity is aroused for beings who do not understand and are shut up in the prison of birth and death.

Here the symbol is a Jewelled Mirror, and it is said:

"He who reaches this stage of Illumination masters many samādhis, performs many miracles, and acquires heavenly vision; whereby he sees clearly the karmas and incarnations of many sentient beings. He develops a superb intelligence and memory, which enable him to recollect all the things he has ever experienced, including those in remote past lives. He practices all the ten Pāramitās, but stresses and consummates the third one - the Perfection of Patience."¹⁰

In this third Stage of Illumination, the Bodhisattva discards all that which pertains to words and letters in this world, and his Ground of Being becomes truly luminous.

¹⁰ Garma Chang, page 35

Vīrya Pāramitā – The Perfection Beyond Vigour

Then, it is said, Great Vigour is aroused by the thought of how necessary is the Great Vow, and the Bodhisattva redoubles his search for Truth and for skilful ways in which to help mankind.

The Perfection of Vigour includes Sincerity and Mindfulness – how to keep the mind on fundamental principles during ordinary, everyday activities.

One can play games. Suppose the family are watching television when one wishes to meditate; practice as a lay-person must not cut a person off from family life in any way. The exercise would be: to watch television calmly and steadily, remaining consciously alert, seeing both the white screen itself and the simultaneous māyā-images being thrown upon it. Half an hour of such complete mindfulness is just as useful as formal meditation.

One learns to sit loose to life; to have fun. The aim is not to be deadly serious, but constantly to keep in mind the reality behind appearances. Mahayana Buddhism encourages this in arts such as calligraphy, archery, gardening – or even embroidery or cooking.

Do not think that vigour and determination can give the religious experience of meditation, but, as Krishnamurti says, it sets the scene in which a space can more easily be found. We not only need a springboard to leap from, but a way of daily living which will steadily earth our insight.

Above all, the Perfection of Vigour is virility – the sheer courage to give up one's life-force to the unknown. This burning determination enriches the Glowing Wisdom in the field of awareness.

These two Virtues, Patience and Vigour, are the sexual qualities of the spiritual character. Physical sexuality has been left behind (to use or not in the physical world, as seems appropriate), but spiritual duality must be developed by turns

within the one personality. This constant interchange will continue to take place – the fight to know the unknown, and the struggle to accept lovingly the new insight. (When we are told that the Buddha always has a male form, this has nothing to do with physical characteristics.)

To establish an equipoise of male/female within oneself gives a centredness, an equanimity, a dispassion, described in THE SEVEN PORTALS as the Gate of Virāga. This centredness marks the point at which we start to become the Path itself.¹¹

The Bodhisattva needs to train his strength and determination. This practice is sometimes likened to the forging of the sword and shield we all need in the struggle against our own lower ego. All sense of "I" and "mine" must be burnt away. At this stage of constant mindfulness and energetic cultivation of Vigour, a Glowing Wisdom arises in him with which he burns away all desires and passions. It is said that a Bodhisattva of the Fourth Stage enters the Tao. He practices all the ten Pāramitās, but stresses and consummates the fourth one – The Perfection of Vigour, or Diligence.

Dhyāna Pāramitā – The Perfection Beyond Rapt Meditation

The Perfections of Rapt Meditation and Wisdom of Insight form an inseparable pair. As you can see, their Grounds take up the whole central part of the Mountain. The Ground of Invincible Strength is that attained by a trained mind which can be still in single-pointedness.

Dhyāna, Meditation, being a Perfection is a single-pointed Rapt Meditation. It is a virtue of omnipotent devotion, capable of invoking a vision of the Heart. Only from this still centre can arise the true Wisdom of Insight – sometimes a tiny flicker of "Oh! Yes, of course;" sometimes a twinkle, a flashing spark, or even one of the rare and wonderful experiences which take place like sheet lightning.

¹¹ There is an ancient tradition of Seven Bhūmis, and in this connection the extra mid-way gate in THE VOICE OF THE SILENCE is most interesting. This system is not practised in any present-day School of Buddhism. For more details see THE BODHISATTVA DOCTRINE, Chapter 6.

Traditionally there are Three Realms to be transcended - Realms of Desire, of Form, and of Formlessness.

We have, by this stage of training, left the Realm of Desire far behind us, and we are in the archetypal Realm of Form, striving by single-pointedness to open ourselves into the Realm of Formlessness. Beware! There is a very real danger in the passage from Form to Formlessness. It needs the courage of a great hero to face Fear of the Unknown. This is indeed the Earth of Invincible Strength; when Gautama, the future Buddha, sat under the sacred tree, he called upon the Earth to witness as he faced all the armies of Māra.

There is even more danger in remaining lost in the Realm of Formlessness. Each of the three Realms must be passed through, cognised, and transcended.

The way of meditation is, like all spiritual truths, a paradox; it is completely without form and self, yet without these it cannot be cognised. We are at fault if we do not do our best to realise the formless spirit, but we are equally at fault if we do not offer it the beauty of a desireless form in this relative world.

The symbol of this Perfection is the hands held in Meditation Position; each person who sincerely meditates experiences true insights over and over again. They are ever deeper in quality; but the taste remains the same. This leads to an ever-increasing awareness of Unity, and the relative unimportance of all seemingly separate things.

The Perfection of Dhyāna is a special favourite for us - after all, the whole of THE SECRET DOCTRINE is a commentary on the 'Stanzas of Dzyan' or Dhyāna.

When asked about the practice of concentration, H.P.B., while warning of its dangers, advised: "Genuine concentration and meditation, conscious and cautious, upon one's lower self in the light of the inner divine man and the Pāramitās, is an excellent thing."¹²

¹² Blavatsky, Collected Writings 12, page 602

THE AVATAMSAKA SCRIPTURE tells us:

"He who reaches the Fifth stage of Great Triumph, or Invincible Strength, can achieve the most formidable task ever confronting a Bodhisattva, for he conquers 'the cleavage between insight and concept.' He thus unifies the mundane intellect of distinction with the transcendental Wisdom of non-distinction, and causes both of them to arise simultaneously without obstruction. This implies that he can now bridge the gulf hitherto separating the 'this' and 'that' sides of duality. He practises all the ten Pāramitās, but stresses and consummates the fifth one - the Perfection of Dhyāna."¹³

Prajñā Pāramitā - The Perfection Beyond Wisdom of Insight

Prajñā, Insight, follows Samādhi (or Rapt Meditation); it is the thorough penetration into a problem and the absorbing of everything concerned.

This Perfect Virtue of Insight begins with little things - perhaps you are reading a book and something suddenly flashes. You may look for the place again and not find it, but for a second, you KNEW. Something has happened outside time and space.

You may read a text and suddenly know what it means. You had always known that hackneyed text and taken it for granted, and suddenly - it becomes REAL; it lights up. Later on we must cease to look for the Wisdom of Insight in books and texts; it lies within ourselves.

There are many flickers of Insight at all levels, including ours. Zen Master Hakuin said: "Six or seven times I have had the great bliss of passing through, and times without number the little visions, the sparkles that make one dance."

¹³ Garma Chang, page 35

At lower levels the Wisdom of Insight, following Meditation, gives sudden insight into a phrase or thought. (Not the words, but what the words mean - The word and its meaning conjoin). At the highest stage, under the Bodhi Tree, this Perfection of Insight Wisdom is transformed into omniscience.

We have already been told that "He who reached the Fifth Stage of Invincible Strength conquered 'the cleavage between insight and concept.' Now: " When a Bodhisattva of this Fifth Stage, in deep contemplation, observes that all things are devoid of substance, are immanently pure, transcending all 'playwords,' and are like phantoms, dreams, reflections ... he comes to the realisation of the great equality, and reaches the Sixth Stage. The Prajñā Truth will then appear nakedly before him." ¹⁴

When he is Face to Face with the naked Truth, this is his first glimpse of Reality. The Stage of Direct Presence is the open way of wisdom, above definitions of purity/impurity.

You may ask what is Reality?¹⁵ Perhaps such a glimpse of Reality might be something like this - as we grow out of babyhood, we realise that there is something called "I" or "me." We learn to relate everything we see around us to "what affects me?" Do I like it? I will grab at it. If I don't like it, I hastily push it away. We do this so often that gradually it seems that "I" am the only important thing in the universe. We quite naturally behave like this all the time, and this basis on which I act is simply NOT TRUE - I perhaps live my whole life based on a lie. Then, suddenly, if I have worked hard at the Six Perfections (and this is what they are for) this false ground is whipped from under my feet, and I see reality - a world suddenly swept pure and clean; the state of how things really are. Now the world is a new place. It cannot be too often repeated. These Six Perfections are training in enlightenment.

¹⁴ Garma Chang, page 36

¹⁵ Needless to say I cannot tell you anything real about these realms; but after many years of study, some meditation, and a very great deal of help from other people, naturally I wish to point the way as much as possible.

The great mountain is Mount Meru, the centre of the Universe. Each one of us is the centre of the Universe. Each one of us is Mount Meru. In varying degrees we all have at least momentary flashes, but as seen on the map, this Section of the Path is marked by a great ravine. Having passed this gulf, the world will never again look the same.

This is why as beginners we are always set these first Six Perfections to work on. We need to pass the great gulf and reach the point where the Perfection of Insight shows us that all hearts are identical with the Heart of the True Self, and the Heart of Cosmos itself. Just because of this identity and inter-diffusion, when some-one has either a tiny sparkle or a great searing vision, a catalytic change in the heart affects the whole universe.

The True Self never departs from its own nature. It always has been, is, and will be the spiritual reality of our essential nature.

Insight shows the emptiness of all conceptual positions and taken-for-granted ideas. It shows the transparency of all relative things, and solidity gives way to a sense of wonder.

All-is-One. One-is-All.

The Virtue of Insight shows us that all hearts are identical with the Over-Heart. This is the wisdom of the Heart. Each one distinct; but no separation of my heart, your heart, Buddha's heart, the Heart of the Universe. Just HEART.

The symbol for this stage is a double-edged sword. The Middle Way of Buddhism, esoterically speaking, is the Way of the Heart - right here - in the middle of my heart and yours - all circles with no edges to them anywhere. When there are no edges or obstacles, then the heart abides nowhere, and is free.

With this Sixth Perfection ends the intriguing and inspiring fragment of THE SEVEN PORTALS. In the traditional way, we have been given clues for the Path leading to Enlightenment. Until we have reached that point, further guidance is unnecessary.

However, this Sixth Level, although the peak experience, is not the end. Experience, to be real, must be earthed. The Perfection of Insight Wisdom itself unfolds into four further Perfections which must be made real within ourselves. However, only those who have experienced the new vision beyond the gulf are able to play in these areas, therefore it is not helpful to explore them in too much detail. We may simply remain firm in the constant consolation of knowing they are on the map; they do exist; one day, if you and I are sincere, loving and open-hearted, we shall experience them. Only of course, "I" can never experience enlightenment, it is only the True Self who can do that. Still, he has to have our help. Without a human body to earth it, he can't experience it. The responsibility rests on our shoulders.

One thing is certain, if H.P.B. had lived longer, whenever one of her pupils was ready, he would have been started on the second part of the Path. For all we know, perhaps some pupils were - it is not something they would have talked about. She did not allow her pupils to run too fast. In the East it is traditional to keep our noses to the grindstone with the first six practices, and H.P.B. followed this tradition by leaving us, as her last testament, the first Six Perfections to meditate on and practise.

The first five levels on our map of Mount Meru prepare us for the first five stages, and the break-through takes place at the sixth level - the Wisdom of Insight. Then what?

She would have helped us to continue on the Path towards ".....the ever narrowing Portals on the hard and thorny way to Jñāna."¹⁶

¹⁶ THE SEVEN PORTALS, page 47

Upāya Pāramitā – The Perfection Beyond Skilful Means

Perfection Number Seven is Skilful Means, the expression of the Bodhisattva's love for all beings. This has two sides. The outer aspect is that, by virtue of the Vow, whatever is learned must be passed on when the time is ripe. How is it possible to pass on this new knowledge of the heart which cannot be put into words? This problem sorely perplexes young bodhisattvas – it even puzzled the Buddha himself at first. However, impossible as the task is, it must be attempted. To live the truth is the only answer, but until we can aspire to that, at a low level you might call the outer aspect 'Teaching Aids.'¹⁷

The inner aspect of Skilful Means is developing our new insight. Now I know my heart is not a separate thing, indeed nothing is separate, I see that I stand in my own shadow. My true nature is that of the Higher Self, but egoistic greed, hatred and stupidity lie between us; therefore, I cannot live up to the vision of the heart in everyday life, and must skilfully learn means of purifying the personality so that body, heart, speech and action become steadily more in correspondence with the True Self.

This is where every fibre of being will start vibrating in a new dimension – the deep turning around in the heart of consciousness. It marks the start of a new series of spirals on the Path.

From a practical point of view, it is extremely important that the Wisdom of Insight be always followed by the Practice of Skilful Means. However great or small the flicker, if we do not use it, we lose it. How many dreamers have wonderful visions that are not earthed! Too much wisdom becomes indigestible unless transmuted into compassion.

The Skilful Means practised by this Bodhisattva enables him to enter undesirable settings in order to help other people. His inner purity will remain

¹⁷ This piece of work being offered is only a low-level Skilful Means. Don't believe a word of it! It is just a game we are playing together, and if any one of us gets a little sparkle, hurrah!

untouched, although his outer appearance will be suitable for the environment he is in. Although seeming to be engaged in worldly activities, he continues to practise the world-beyond-teachings. He is so far removed from thoughts of himself and his own progress that he has lost even the remembrance of the thought of rebirth, or reincarnation. This is why the Earth from which he operates is called 'Far-Reaching.' He has gone far beyond ideas of self in order to help others; and from this height his wisdom is immense, capable of deep observation.

Again, let us refer to THE AVATAMSAKA SCRIPTURE:

"When a Bodhisattva reaches the Seventh Stage, he has completed all spiritual preparations, so he can enter the realm of Wisdom and free acts, but he cannot fully overcome the desire-passions in his acts ... only when he enters the Eighth Stage from the Seventh will he be able to transcend all desire-passions. He acquires great wisdom in the choice of expedients for helping others. This stage witnesses the complete fulfilment of the practical aspects of the Bodhisattva's discipline, and now he begins to attach more importance to its meditative and metaphysical aspects. He works without effort or ulterior motive."¹⁸

One more stage before another ravine. We might say that as far as Stage Six we can just about see with a very well-trained naked eye, for Seven and Eight we need the most powerful telescope we can imagine, and after that ... well!

Pranidhāna Pāramitā – The Perfection Beyond The Vow

The Eighth Stage is a very Great Virtue – the Vow. Now the transcendent motive of being is constantly re-assessed and renewed.

What kind of Vow did the young, would-be bodhisattva make in the beginning? Something like: "I will not enter Nirvana until the last blade of grass has become enlightened." or "I will do my best to attain enlightenment for the salvation of every living being." ... But now in the ever-changing dimensions of spiritual insight,

¹⁸ Garma Chang, page 36

the world is seen with new eyes, and - THERE ARE NO OTHER BEINGS TO SAVE. All is One.

Here lies the greatest paradox of all. The true Bodhisattva knows that there are no separate parts of the whole, and at the same time he expends his utmost being, life after life, ensuring that each separate part gradually gains deeper and deeper awareness of the light.

Bodhisattvas who complete this stage are irreversible. Nothing can ever stop one who holds the Vow centred in his heart; but now the Vow **is** the heart. The great acceptance has taken place. This heroic one will certainly become a Buddha.

Stage Eight marks the point of No-Return. Now the Bodhisattva fulfils the Perfection of the Vow. He is so steadfast and calmly unperturbed that he **becomes** the Vow and is irreversible - never again can he fall back, and never will he abandon a single sentient being.

It is the stage of the Royal Prince; the stage of accomplishment, because here the vows are truly realised; the stage of laying the foundation; the stage of Spontaneity.

There is great beauty in the fact that there are so many irreversible Bodhisattvas. Each is unique, and there are so many different kinds of beings stretching out their hands to help us. Mahayana is the only religion which stresses the importance of good friends on all worldly and spiritual levels.

Here THE AYATAMSAKA SCRIPTURE says:

"When a Bodhisattva of the Seventh Stage ... enters the realm of infinite Wisdom, he sees that all dharmas are from the beginning unborn and unproduced, devoid of form, substance, or extinction ... He sees that all things are of Suchness, equal in the past, present, and future. He realizes that this is a realm of non-distinctive Wisdom, unreachable by the mind and its acts. He is then detached from all thoughts and discriminations. Without any clinging he enters the Void-like nature of all dharmas ...

When he comes to this state he is said to have accomplished the 'thorough realisation of the unborn reality' and to have reached the Eighth Stage, the Stage of Steadfastness (Non-Returning), which is the inner abode of Bodhisattvas, difficult to describe and to comprehend, transcending discriminations, forms, thoughts, and attachments. It goes beyond all calculations, limitations, and disturbances, and surpasses the sphere of great sages ...

He abandons all works-of-effort and reaches a state of effortlessness; wherein all mental, verbal, and physical strivings come to an end.....¹⁹

In this bhūmi he can read the thoughts of all; he serves the Buddhas by serving all beings; obtains insight into the Dharmakaya; acquires sovereignty of the universe, and renounces it. He is never deprived of communication with the Buddhas.

Bala Pāramitā – The Perfection Beyond Power

While practising the Ninth Perfection of Power the emblem of the Bodhisattva is a lion cub, and he must create all needful attributes for fulfilling the Vow. He will recognise the Ten Great Perfections as Universal Forces, and by touching the well-spring of Living Origin he will acquire true Authority and Creativity.

We are also told that his Transcendent Power, his Force of Purpose, is related to the Ninth Earth – Meritorious Wisdom, this is the finest discriminating wisdom, knowing where and how to save, and possessed of the Ten Powers.

In the Ninth Stage of Meritorious Wisdom, the Bodhisattva attains the deep liberation. He lives in the world, but never acts in an extreme fashion.

In the Scripture we also read:

"He who reaches this stage clearly and unmistakably knows all the good, bad, and neutral acts ... the pure and the defiled acts, the worldly and

¹⁹ Garma Chang, page 37

transcendental acts ... With such great Wisdom, this Bodhisattva discerns the difficulties of sentient beings' minds ...

He knows the mystery of karma's momentary extinctions and yet its unfailing production of effects. He also knows the karma that produces effects and the one that does not produce them ... the karma that, like a field, contains infinite forms, the karma that distinguishes a common from a holy person, that ripens in this life or in after-lives, that leads one to the various Paths ... If a Bodhisattva can follow this Wisdom, he reaches the Stage of Meritorious Wisdom. He is then said to be able to know sentient beings. He can then teach, guide, and lead them to Liberation.

Again, with the unimpeded Wisdom of dharma, he knows that all things are devoid of a self-being; with the unimpeded Wisdom of meaning, he knows the arising and extinction of all things; with the unimpeded Wisdom of words, he knows the illusory nature of all words, and yet he abandons them not; with the unimpeded Wisdom of eloquence, he uses illusory words to deliver infinite discourses.

If all the sentient beings in the infinite universes came before this Bodhisattva, and every one of them asked him a different question in an infinite number of languages, in a split second he would comprehend them all and give proper answers with full explanations in one voice, and thus make all questioners fully satisfied and pleased ...

This Bodhisattva practises all the Ten Pāramitās, but stresses and consummates the ninth Pāramitā – the Perfection of Power.²⁰

Jñāna Pāramitā – The Perfection Beyond Cognition of Enlightenment

Jñāna is the undying knowledge, the enlightenment, of a Buddha. Try to imagine, if you can, what the beyondness of that might represent!

From our present perspective, we cannot get even a glimpse of the Tenth Perfection of Cognition. Young bodhisattvas, at the early stage of Acceptance, know that there is something to know. The Bodhisattva at the stage of Insight

²⁰ Garma Chang, page 41

KNOWS. Now arises the man who HAS KNOWN. Experience is rooted within him, and the whole of his living being displays it. Each word and action is in itself the whole truth, leaving no karmic trace behind. When he effortlessly demonstrates the Law, all living beings, great and small, are nourished, and the fruit of this stage is known as 'Dharma-Meghā' - attainment of the fertilising powers of the Rain-Cloud of the Law.

This stage is that of a fully-enlightened Buddha after his enlightenment under the tree.

Many and glorious are the descriptions of this Final Stage in the Scripture:

"A Bodhisattva who has reached this Stage of Assembling the Dharma Clouds knows clearly and exactly the change of sentient beings' desires and of their views ... He enters the secret of Buddhahood ... the secret of body, words and mind, of taming sentient beings, and of demonstrating different paths ...

The Bodhisattva of this stage is endowed with the illumination and penetrating Wisdom. He can perform all sorts of miracles. At will, he can make a small world into a large world, a defiled world into a pure world, and a pure one into a defiled one. He can place the (different world systems) in an anomalous order ... reverse order, or regular order. He can place a whole world system into a small dust-mote, with the mountains and rivers therein remaining as usual; neither the dust-mote changes its form, nor the world system reduces its size. The Bodhisattvas, including the Bodhisattvas of the Ninth Stage, cannot know this Bodhisattva's acts, Wisdoms, glories and wonders; nor can these wonders be exhausted by description through aeons of ages ... This Bodhisattva practises all the Ten Pāramitās, but stresses and consummates - the Perfection of Wisdom.²¹

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²¹ Garma Chang, page 43

This Inner or Esoteric Path within the heart must be travelled simultaneously with our outer practice. We must work through the True Self.

The Mountain looks forbidding; the Way indeed means hard work, and denial of the personality we cherish so much, but there is no need to be disheartened. The process goes on at all levels - huge, wide-spreading orbits for the Great Bodhisattvas - large spirals for the medium ones, and tiny little loops for those like us. We each have our place in the great evolutionary scheme of things, and our only job is to play our part well and do the best we can, starting here and now.

We are given much help on the Way.

The Buddha said:

"My friend, within this very body, six feet in length, with its sense impressions, thoughts and ideas, I declare to you are the world, and the origin of the world, and the ceasing of the world, and likewise the Way that leads to the ceasing thereof."²²

IN THE SEVEN PORTALS, H.P.B SAID:

"Such is the Arya Path, Path of the Buddhas of perfection."²³

She also said:

"Thrice great is he who climbs the lofty top."²⁴

And she ended it, as now, with:

PEACE TO ALL BEINGS

²² Anguttara Nikāya. II, 46

²³ Page 70

²⁴ Page 46

	PĀRAMITĀ The Perfection Beyond	BHŪMI Earth or Stage (Plane of Awareness)	SAHAYA Symbol
1	Dāna Giving	Pramuditā Great Joy	Liquorice Root
2	Śīla Moral Precepts (Discipline)	Vimalā Spotless Purity	3-Fold Jewel
3	Kṣhānti Patient Acceptance (Humility)	Prabhākari Illumination	Mirror
4	Vīrya Vigour (Diligence)	Arcismatī Glowing Wisdom	Lance
5	Dhyāna Rapt Meditation	Sudarjayā Invincible Strength (Great Triumph)	Meditation Mudrā
6	Prajñā Wisdom of Insight	Abhimukhī Face to Face (Turned inward) (Direct Presence)	Double-edged Sword
7	Upāya Skillful Means (Contrivance) (Tact)	Dūrangamā Far-Reaching (Proceeding Afar)	Noose
8	Pranidhāna The Vow	Acalā Immovable Steadfastness (Non-Returning)	Water-Filter
9	Bala Power (Force of Purpose)	Sādhumatī Meritorious Wisdom	Lion Cub
10	Jñāna Cognition of Enlightenment (Knowledge of a Buddha) (Gnosis)	Dharma-meghā Assembling Clouds of the Dharma	Book of The Law

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