

The Six Perfections

Friends of the Western Buddhist Order

1. Generosity or Charity
2. Ethics
3. Patience
4. Joyous effort
5. Meditation
6. Wisdom

1. Perfection of Generosity or Charity

The practice of generosity or charity means a sincere wish or desire to give to others without holding any expectations of personal gain or feelings of stinginess. When one engages in this practice of giving, it is important to give things to others in a humble manner, showing respect for the recipient and not looking down at the recipient.

There are three types of generosity: (1) Giving material things, (2) giving protection or fearlessness, and (3) giving spiritual or Dharma teachings. This giving must be sincere and motivated by compassion. One should understand what things should be given and what things one should not give to others. Things that one should give to others are food, clothing, shelter, medicine and things that are necessary to life. Things that one should not give to others are addictive substances like drugs, poison, weapons, and alcohol tobacco.

2. The Perfection of Ethics

Ethics is a state of mind or attitude in which there is a full effort to abstain from unwholesome action or behaviors that are harmful to others, as well as to oneself. Examples are: Abstaining from killing, stealing, lying, divisiveness, harsh or insulting speech, covetousness, ill-will, etc. Engaging in one of these acts, directly or indirectly, hurts and harms others in some manner (hurting their feelings, the relationship, their belongings and material possessions, their life and gradually brings negative consequences to oneself. One should not just abstain from these negative actions, but one should abstain out of compassion and respect with understanding of the negative consequences that the action brings to others as well as to oneself. If we are able to do it that way, it is all the more powerful than mere abstention from the above actions.

3. The Perfection of Patience

Patience is also a state of mind in which there is a full effort to not retaliate when someone causes you harm. It is learning how to remain in a calm state in the face of that person who causes you harm.

4. The Perfection of Joyous Effort

Joyous effort is a mental state wherein the person feels, or takes pleasure in engaging in wholesome actions as well as consciously and deliberately abstaining from unwholesome actions.

5. The Perfection of Meditation

Taking the first four perfections as a foundation, and then engaging in meditation, is the way to practice the six perfections. Meditation is a mental technique to overcome emotional and

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distorted thoughts and to bring inner peace, harmony and balance. A motionless body and a motionless mind. This means maintaining a perfect physical meditation posture and a mind free of thoughts and emotional turbulence. Sitting, or practicing in this way, one will gain perfect mental stability and mental clarity. This leads to the deepest levels of understanding of reality allowing us to see things as they really are, not as they appear, or come to, our deluded minds. One of our problems is that we always see things and objects mixed with our conceptions, assumptions and unrealistic expectations. This creates all emotional problems and mental conflicts. Since no one wishes to suffer with these mental conflicts or emotional pain, whether we are religious or non-religious, believer or nonbeliever, materialist or atheist we all need to practice meditation. Personally, I think that meditation is not a concept of any particular religion, but about improving one's mind. Improving one's mind means becoming a healthier, calmer, less emotional, gentler, more compassionate and kinder person. Meditation also makes one more skillful, efficient and able to see the long term consequences of an action.

6. The Perfection of Wisdom

This wisdom does not refer to ordinary knowledge or understanding. Rather, this refers to the wisdom that realizes the reality of emptiness. The wisdom that realizes the reality of emptiness will come as a result of meditation. Meditation builds the mental energy that serves as a mental detector of the subtlest quality, or nature, of reality. Meditation directly acts as antidote of our inner confusion between our concept and the reality.