



Nalandabodhi Connecticut Paramita of the Month Newsletter



"If millions upon billions of blind people are without a sighted guide and do not know the road, how can they enter the city? Without wisdom awareness, the five eyeless perfections, being without a guide, will not be able to reach enlightenment."

-Condensed Perfection of Wisdom Sutra

This month we complete our first cycle of the six paramitas with the paramita of wisdom awareness. It is said that the perfection of wisdom awareness is like a guide that brings all of our virtue accumulated through the practice of the previous paramitas onto the path of Buddhahood. *The Condensed Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* states:

"Having completely understood the nature of phenomena by means of wisdom awareness, one perfectly passes beyond the three realms."

This would appear to imply that one need only master wisdom awareness to achieve Buddhahood. However many warnings are given to those who might hold this misconception. *The Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* states:

"Method without wisdom awareness and wisdom awareness without method are bondage. Therefore do not abandon either."

In *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation* by Gampopa we are told that a Bodhisattva who depends only on wisdom awareness will descend into the extreme of the nirvanic peace of the Hearers and will be bound there. Further, if one depends only on method without wisdom awareness one can not escape being an ordinary person, and becomes bound to samsaric existence. Thus, wisdom awareness can be seen as the capstone to all of our other paramita practices, the one that gives them appropriate meaning and allows us to bring them onto the path to Buddhahood.

The Collection of the Abhidharma defines wisdom awareness as "perfect and full discrimination of phenomena." *The Ornament of Mahayana Sutra* explains this discrimination as having three aspects: wisdom of the mundane, wisdom of the lesser supramundane, and wisdom of the greater supramundane. Wisdom of the mundane refers to wisdom arising from the study of the arts, medicine, science, and language. Wisdom of the lesser supramundane refers to the wisdom that sees the skandhas as impure, the nature of suffering, impermanent, and without self.

The wisdom of the greater supramundane refers to that wisdom that arises from reflection and meditation in the Mahayana tradition. In *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation* Gampopa describes this final wisdom through six knowables:

- Refutation of grasping things as being existent.
- Refutation of grasping things as being non-existent.

- The fallacy of grasping non-existence, that is, the fallacy of holding a belief in non-existence as a cause for liberation.
- The fallacy of both graspings, that is, holding a view of existence or non-existence, the extremes of realism and nihilism.
- The path that leads to liberation: not abiding in the two extremes.
- The nature of liberation: the complete exhaustion of all thoughts which grasp existence and non-existence.

In the same text Gampopa offers us some guidance on how to practice the perfection of wisdom awareness. He describes four stages of this practice:

- Settling the mind into its natural state.
- Set the mind free from effort, without conceptualizing, in equipoise. Leave the mind free from exertion.
- See everything to be like a magical illusion in the post-meditative state.
- Equipoise and the post-meditative state become undifferentiated.

As *The Accomplishment of Dharmadatu Sutra* states: "When emptiness is seen, there is no seeing." Gampopa tells us that mastery of wisdom awareness makes the accumulation of merit through generosity and the other paramitas almost effortless. Thus abiding in this state of perfect awareness is seen as being of limitless benefit to all beings.

In closing we can reflect upon these words from *The Condensed Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*:

However much there is of the phenomenal happiness and comfort of the Buddhas, bodhisattvas, hearers, solitary realizers, all the gods, and all the migrators, it has all arisen from the supreme perfection of wisdom awareness.

References:

1. Gampopa, Khenpo Konchog Gyaltzen Rinpoche, tr. *The Jewel Ornament of Realization*. pp. 233-256 Snow Lion Publications (1998)