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A Study of the Practice and Application of “Giving Paramita”

Intro:

In Mahayana Buddhism, the practice of the Six Paramitas is very important. They are the practice of Giving, Following Precepts, Patience, Perseverance, Meditative concentration and Wisdom. They relate to one another but the practice of “Giving” can be considered as the foundation of the other five practices. This presentation will focus on the discussion of the “Giving Paramita” and will be divided into two main parts. The first is an introduction to the different types of “Giving”, and the second part is on its application in relation to the cultivation of the Ten Wholesome Deeds.

The Three Main Types of “Giving” and the Proper Approach

Dana Paramita is the Sanskrit term for “The Giving Perfection”. Paramita means ‘perfection’ or ‘completeness’, and Dana means “to happily give” or “to donate material goods.” In Buddhism, the act of “giving” is perceived as to selflessly benefit those in need by giving one’s wealth, knowledge, skills, physical support and words of encouragement; it should be an act performed with compassion and wisdom for the purpose of helping others to overcome all forms of hardship. “The Giving Paramita” is the foremost practice in the Six Paramitas, as it can prepare and provide merits for the practice of the other five Paramitas, and through doing this, practitioners can form connections with many sentient beings.

In this section, we will look at the three main types of “Giving”. According to many Buddhist sutras, such as in the chapter “檀波罗蜜” of “发菩提心经

论”, there are three types of “Giving”: they are “the Giving of wealth”, “the Giving of Dharma” and “the Giving of Freedom from Fear”. Giving wealth can improve the material life of sentient beings; Giving Dharma can fulfill one’s spiritual life, and “Giving Freedom from Fear” can comfort one’s emotional pain and help overcome inner fear.

i. The Giving of wealth

This type of Giving is related to the giving of material goods. It is mostly to give financial support to those in difficulties. This act of “wealth giving” is classified into internal and external wealth. Helping others with the money or material goods is known as “External Wealth Giving”; “Internal Wealth Giving” is associated with the contribution of physical support, skills and ability, and in some cases, even giving one’s own life to help others. The practice of “wealth giving” can help us slowly abandon the problem of greed.

ii. The Giving of Freedom from Fear

This type of Giving is related to the giving of courage and comfort for one’s emotional pain or fear. When others are feeling depressed, scared or sad, we can offer kind words and consolation to free them from negative emotions and guide them to meet the difficulties of life with a calm and peaceful mind.

Buddhists follow the five precepts of refraining from killing, stealing, committing adultery, wrong speech and intoxicants that cloud the mind; following those precepts will provide the people around us five senses of security. For example, those who do not kill can free people around them from the fear of being hurt, both physically and mentally. Such “Giving of

Fearlessness ” can also be extended to the protection of all sentient beings, even releasing pests such as flies and mosquitoes. Therefore, the five precepts are also known as the five great “ Givings ” . Providing sentient beings with peace and a sense of security is considered “the Giving of Freedom from Fear”, the practice of such Giving cultivates our virtue of great compassion.

iii. The Giving of Dharma

“The Giving of Dharma” is related to the sharing of one’ s knowledge and appreciation of the Buddha’ s teachings and is considered the most significant “giving” among all. This practice can be done from two aspects, worldly laws and super-mundane dharma.

The giving of "worldly law" means to impart knowledge and skills to others; the receivers can use the skills to improve their job opportunities and living conditions, hence overcome hardship such as poverty. Knowledge and skills can be applied for life; compared with the giving of wealth, the merit from “the giving of Dharma” would be greater. As there will always be a limit in financial support, no matter how much money or material goods are given, they will eventually run out. This is the moral of “to teach someone how to fish is better than to just feed him with a fish.”

From the aspect of "super-mundane Dharma", “Dharma giving” is to explain to others the teachings of Buddhist Dharma, so to educate sentient beings to end any evil act and begin to cultivate goodness, and ultimately attain enlightenment, this is considered the highest level of Dharma Giving. All the Buddhas appear in the mundane world for one purpose, and that is to help all sentient beings end

the suffering of samsara (轮回) and lead them onto a path to Buddha-hood. We can see from the Infinite Life Sutra, Amitabha's vow was also the same, it states that: "I wish to give grand offerings, to help all beings with their afflictions, to liberate them from endless distress; may virtuous roots grow and the fruition of Bodhi be attained." Therefore, it is a Buddhist's duty to "Give Dharma", to spread Buddha's teachings and to assist others to practice properly. And most of the time, teaching by example is more efficient than teaching by words. So we should show the Dharma in our daily speech and deeds, and in dealing with others; setting a good example can be a more powerful way of practicing "Dharma Giving"

Personally, I feel that among the three, "the Giving of Dharma" is the most remarkable. If "wealth Giving" and "the Giving of Freedom from Fear" are like the wind that blows across the oceans to help travellers move forward; "the Giving of Dharma" is like a lighthouse that guides traveller onto the right navigation.

The Proper Approach to Practice Giving Paramita

Buddha taught in the Diamond Sutra that : "as to the act of giving, a Bodhisattva should not dwell anywhere when he gives. He should not dwell in forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects, or mental constructs ... And why? If a Bodhisattva does not dwell in phenomena when he gives, his blessings and virtues are immeasurable." We can see from this verse, Buddha asks Bodhisattvas to not become attached to the act of "Giving" as dwelling in any phenomena is not necessary. This is the proper approach to practicing "Giving Paramita" .

The practice of “Giving” should be a selfless act where we should try and detach our mind from the phenomena of “the giver”, “the receiver” and “what is being given.” This is in line with the concept of Threefold Wheel of Essential Emptiness (三轮体空). It is practiced to become a natural act driven by compassion. The Buddhist approach of “Giving” is not an investment that seeks for higher return, the true act of “Giving” is free of desire for profit.

The Relationship Between “Giving Paramita” And the “Ten Wholesome Deeds”

Through the above content, we can roughly understand the approach to the practice of “Giving”. In my opinion, we could also apply the ways of “Giving” in the cultivation of the “Ten Wholesome Deeds.” The “Ten Wholesome Deeds” refer to “no killing”, no stealing, no misconduct, no lying, no slandering, no harsh speech, no blandish speech, no greed, no hatred, no delusion, all of which are formed by the actions of our body, speech and thought. The practice of the “Ten Wholesome Deeds” is the foundation of all Buddhist practices and should be followed and applied in our daily lives.

Now let's look at how the practice of “Giving” can help us better practice the “ten wholesome deeds” in relation to the deeds formed by our thought. In everyday life, I think thoughts guide our actions, so we must pay greatest attention to our mind. When our mind dwells on kind thoughts, negative bodily and speech actions will not have a chance to manifest.

The foremost possible deed formed by our thought is “greed”. Venerable Master Chin Kung once taught that the practice of ‘Giving Paramita’ is an

important way to treat “greed” . Greed is a desire for possession, wanting to have more and more benefits, such as fame or wealth. We can try very hard to avoid the thought of greed, but when we become successful in something, we tend to want to achieve more and then the thought of greed naturally emerges, this can sometimes lead to further evil deeds in order to obtain more. “Giving Paramita ” is an act of devoting or giving up something, so it is the total opposite to the desire to possess. Therefore, practicing “Giving” can train our ability to “let go” and restrain our thoughts of greed.

In general, it is understood that “hatred” and “delusion” formed by thought can be treated by the practice of “patience” and “wisdom” in the Six Paramitas, although this is true, but “Giving Paramita” can also be applied to achieve this. For example, when we are “giving Freedom from Fear” to help others overcome their hardship, no matter how emotionally unstable they may be, we will try and think from their perspectives to avoid blaming and misunderstanding, in this way, feelings of hatred will not develop. Similarly, when we are practicing the “Giving of Dharma”, we would need wisdom to be able to impart knowledge of Buddha’ s teachings; so we would keep learning to extend this wisdom; if we keep this practice in mind, we would naturally stay away from “delusion” and ignorance.

The problems of the deeds formed by thought can be treated with the practice of “Giving” , and also, the defilement by our bodily and speech action can be treated accordingly. For example, “the Giving of Freedom from Fear” mostly uses speech to encourage and comfort others, while doing this, one will not create bad deeds of lying, slandering, harsh and blandish speech. By the same concept, bodily action will be controlled by the practice of “Giving”. “Giving”

is an act of kindness, so by doing so, one is not likely to harm others for his own benefit

The reason why I think we could apply the ways of “Giving” in the cultivation of the “Ten Wholesome Deeds is because of my personal experience. When my parents decided to teach traditional Chinese culture with professor He in the home schooling village, our family of three became a big family with many students. Students from different places will stay with their teachers for more than ten months in a year. Therefore, in order to look after the emotion of those students, my parents who are teachers were more strict to me. Under this situation, I felt aggrieved at the time as I thought I had lost my own family and my parents because of this, and i fell into a dark place and I am sure that I had created some bad deeds formed by bodily action, speech and thought. Later on, with the deepening study of classic texts and as I matured to undertake more responsibilities, i gradually realized that i needed to let go of the selfish feelings of possessing my parents’ love and I began to try and share it, At the same time, I also tried to help students who were trapped in selfishness like I was. After doing so, I found that I did not lose my family, but I gained a bigger family. This is my experience of giving up my thoughts of selfishness and how it helped me improve my cultivate of the “ten wholesome deeds.”

Conclusion

On the whole, there are many ways to cultivate one’ s practice in Buddhism, but the practice of “ Giving ” in the Six Paramitas is significant and can be extensively applied. It is formed by the Giving of Wealth, Freedom from Fear and Dharma. In my opinion, the practice of “Giving Paramita” is essential in

every Buddhist's cultivation. Not only does it help us accumulate merits, but also solidly establishes a foundation to the path of attaining Buddhahood.