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TEACHINGS

The Five Guidelines form the foundation and are the way we progress in our practice. They are:

1. The Three Conditions
2. The Six Harmonies
3. The Threefold Learning
4. The Six Paramitas
5. The Ten Great Vows

We begin our practice with the first principle of the Three Conditions and gradually progress from there. Progressing thus enables us to lay a solid foundation for the Three Conditions are the basis for individual cultivation whereas the Six Harmonies are the basis for group cultivation.

Venerable Master Chin Kung extracted these guidelines from the five Pure Land sutras, which consist of three sutras, two chapters from sutras, and one treatise. The Pure Land sutras and treatise are:

1. The Infinite Life Sutra
2. The Amitabha Sutra
3. The Visualization Sutra
4. "Samantabhadra Bodhisattva's Conduct and Vows" from the Avatamsaka Sutra
5. "The Perfect, Complete Realization of Mahasthamaprapta Bodhisattva" from the Shurangama Sutra
6. The Rebirth Treatise

THREE CONDITIONS

In the Visualization Sutra, we learn how of how Queen Vaidehi, suffering from overwhelming family misfortune, bitterly said to the Buddha, "Life is filled with suffering. Is there not a place without suffering? I wish to live in such a world." Through his extraordinary abilities, Shakyamuni Buddha displayed for the queen all the worlds of all the Buddhas in the

universe.

She vowed to be born into Amitabha Buddha's Western Pure Land, the world of Ultimate Bliss and requested that Shakyamuni Buddha teach her how to accomplish this.

He taught her to practice the Three Conditions explaining that they were "the true causes of pure activities of all Buddhas of the three time periods." Therefore, they are a crucial part and foundation of our practice. This important statement tells us that all Buddhas of the three time periods of the past, the present, and the future, rely on the Three Conditions as the foundation for their cultivation and attainment of Buddhahood.

The First Condition is:

1. Be filial to and provide and care for parents
2. Be respectful to and serve teachers
3. Be compassionate and not kill any living beings
4. Cultivate the Ten Virtuous Conducts. Physically, we are to refrain from killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct. Verbally, we are to refrain from false speech, harsh speech, divisive speech, and enticing speech. Mentally, we are to refrain from giving rise to greed, anger, and ignorance.

The Second Condition is:

5. Take the Three Refuges
6. Abide by the precepts
7. Behave in a dignified, appropriate manner

The Third Condition is:

8. Generate the Bodhi mind
9. Believe deeply in causality
10. Study and chant the Mahayana sutras
11. Encourage others to advance on the path to enlightenment

SIX HARMONIES

The Three Conditions are the basis for individual cultivation whereas the Six Harmonies are the basis for group cultivation. The Sangha is a group of four or more people who properly practice the Buddha's teachings together, especially the Six Harmonies that are to:

The Six Harmonies are:

1. Harmony in having the same viewpoints
2. Harmony in observing the same precepts
3. Harmony in living together
4. Harmony in speaking without conflict
5. Harmony in experiencing Dharma bliss

6. Harmony in sharing benefits

First is harmony in having the same viewpoints, which means establishing consensus in a group. The group members must uphold the same principles and methods that they are studying and practicing for harmonious group cultivation. If we want a stable society, everyone needs to get along with one another.

Second is harmony in observing the same precepts. When we live and practice together, we need to have rules, or else there will be disorder.

Third is harmony in living together as a group. The purpose of establishing a cultivation center is to help every participant in the group succeed in their practice. Living together in a group, practitioners can support each other.

Fourth is harmony in speaking without conflict. By reducing, and ideally eliminating, disputes, people will be better able to focus on their cultivation.

Fifth is harmony in experiencing Dharma bliss. When we learn and practice a Dharma Door, the basic achievement that we should attain is happiness.

Sixth is harmony in sharing benefits. In the sangha, everything is shared fairly and whenever possible, equally. In this way, everyone's basic needs will be met. Special needs are also to be considered. Understanding that everything in the sangha is an offering, nothing should be wasted. This will insure that future needs will also be met.

THREEFOLD LEARNING

The third of the Five Guidelines is the Threefold Learning. To counteract the problems of the people in our world and age, the Buddha taught:

1. Moral self-discipline
2. Meditative concentration
3. Innate wisdom

Moral discipline counteracts our habits for wrongdoing. Meditative concentration counteracts the tendency of our minds to wander and have scattered thoughts. Wisdom counteracts ignorance, our wrong views and knowledge, and our lack of correct knowledge.

We begin with moral self-discipline, with training. On a basic level, we abstain from killing; from stealing; from sexual, or sensual, misconduct; from lying; and from the taking of intoxicants. On a broader basis, we behave in a moral and ethical way in everything we do.

Next is meditative concentration. In meditative concentration, we focus our attention on whatever we choose. There are no distractions or worries, no doubts or drowsiness, no discriminations or attachments: We remain unaffected by our environment and maintain a calm, undisturbed mind.

Third is intuitive wisdom. Intuitive wisdom is not an intellectual pursuit nor is it a measure of academic intelligence. It is knowing and understanding, and it arises from within us when our minds are clear and calm.

SIX PARAMITAS

To interact successfully with others, the Buddha taught us the Six Paramitas. The fourth of the Five Guidelines, the

paramitas are the practices of bodhisattvas, awakened beings who are dedicated to helping all other beings.

The Six Paramitas are:

1. Giving
2. Precept observation
3. Patience
4. Diligence
5. Meditative concentration
6. Wisdom

The first paramita is giving. Giving counters greed, and ensures that in the future we will have ample resources to continue helping others. The underlying meaning of giving is letting go. There are three major kinds of giving.

The first kind of giving is that of wealth, which includes the giving of internal and external wealth. Internal wealth involves all of our mental and physical labors that benefit others. External wealth is giving material objects, for example, money and food. When our giving becomes increasingly unconditional, we will begin to feel more liberated spiritually. The more we give away, the fewer possessions we have to worry about. Soon we will realize that we need very little to be truly content.

The second kind of giving is teaching. By teaching others, we are helping them to learn how to rely more on themselves. We give material resources to help solve immediate needs. But, if we want to solve needs that are more far-reaching, we teach. It is not necessary to have exceptional skills. We can simply teach whatever we are good at and what others are not. The highest form of teaching is the Dharma, which can help people find lasting happiness and liberation.

The third kind of giving is fearlessness. It is to remove the insecurities, worries, and fears of others, whether the “other” is human or non-human. This giving can be the sharing of a kind word, the giving of our strength and stability, or our understanding. When we relieve the worries and fears of others, and help them to feel more secure, they will be able to find peace and self-respect.

The second paramita is precept observation, which counters worries and unhappiness, and enables us to continue on our way to awakening. In a more literal sense, it means abiding by the precepts. In a broader sense, the second paramita means ethical behavior, as we follow the customs and laws of wherever we are. Initially, as we begin our practice of discipline, we can focus on refraining from harming others. Gradually, we begin to develop and increase our virtue. The ultimate form of this practice is to benefit others.

The third paramita is patience, which counters anger and hatred, and helps us to avoid arguments and to achieve our goals. We need patience in almost everything we do. If we are in school, we need patience to persevere in our study. At work, patience helps us to properly accomplish our tasks. At home, patience is the foundation for interacting well with family members. Patience enables us to get along more harmoniously with those around us. For ourselves, patience allows us to recognize our bad habits and to improve ourselves by changing those habits.

The fourth paramita is diligence, or enthusiastic effort. It is the joy that we bring to our practice and to all that is worthwhile in our lives. It is the true delight that arises from deep within us when we are doing what is wholesome. It enables us to keep going when we feel tired or overwhelmed. It is refreshing and inspiring. Cultivating enthusiastic effort counters laziness, and brings joy to our lives as we feel a sense of accomplishment in finishing what we have started.

The fifth paramita is meditative concentration. Our practice and training in discipline, and our not harming others will reduce and, gradually, eliminate our harmful verbal and physical behaviors. Our minds will become calmer and less agitated. When our minds are thus settled, we will be better able to concentrate. Our concentration will initially reduce and, then, gradually eliminate our disturbing thoughts and emotional behavior. We will thus gain meditative concentration, which will enable us to uncover our innate wisdom. From this, we can see how discipline, meditative concentration, and wisdom work together, and are complementary.

The sixth paramita is wisdom. Wisdom counters ignorance, and enables us to know how best to help others and to improve ourselves, including our ability to get along well with others. This wisdom is not that which is gained through intense study and analysis of many diverse subjects. That would be seeking wisdom from external sources. It is our innate, all-knowing wisdom.

If we begin to practice these six paramitas in even just some small measure every day, starting with today, we will gradually begin to look in the right direction. In time, we will awaken to the perfect goodness, perfect contentment, and perfect joy that are already within our true nature, our Buddha-nature.

TEN GREAT VOWS

Only when we have applied the first four of the five guidelines: the Three Conditions, the Six Harmonies, the Threefold Learning, and the Six Paramitas, will we truly be a student of the Buddha and be close to Bodhisattvas. Based on the foundation of the Six Paramitas, we can progress to the next level of our practice, which is comprised of the Ten Great Vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva.

These vows were taught to us by the Buddha in the Avatamsaka Sutra. This is the last stage of our cultivation leading to Buddhahood. We cannot practice the Six Paramitas and advance to the Ten Great Vows until we have fulfilled the first four guidelines. The main characteristic of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva is an immeasurably broad and compassionate heart. Every one of his vows is complete and perfect.

The Ten Great Vows of Samantabhadra are:

1. To respect all Buddhas
2. To praise Tathagata (one of the ten names for Buddha)
3. To make offerings extensively
4. To repent karmic obstacles
5. To rejoice at other's meritorious deeds
6. To request the turning of the Dharma wheel
7. To request the Buddha to remain in this world
8. To constantly follow the Buddha's teachings
9. To accommodate all sentient beings, and

10. To dedicate all merits universally

The distinctive feature of the practice of Samantabhadra is that this bodhisattva has a mind as broad as the universe. As a result, each of his ten vows is ultimate and perfect in itself.

TEN ATTAINMENTS

In our practice, we strive to attain:

True sincerity

towards others,

Purity of mind

within,

Impartiality

towards everything we see,

Proper understanding

of life and the universe, and

Compassion

in helping others in a wise unconditional way.

In attaining these, we will

See through

to the truth of impermanence,

Let go

of all wandering thoughts and attachments,

Attain freedom

of mind and spirit,

Accord with proper conditions

to get along with the situation, and

Be mindful of Amitabha Buddha,

follow his teachings,

and vow to reach the Western Pure Land.

Web link to the article:

<http://www.purelandcollege.org.au/page13.html>

Boston Amita Buddhism Society new website: <http://www.amtb-ma.org/>

Group Buddha Recitation Every Saturday 9:30am

For details please call ABS (857)998-0169 or email to amtb.ma@gmail.com