

The Fullness of Truth:

Sacca Pāramī



This *pāramī* highlights the capacity to be truthful, a quality that can be understood in two ways. Most obviously there's truthfulness in terms of intention and behaviour — the determination to refrain from telling lies or reporting rumours and gossip. This is *sacca*, truthfulness, an aspect of morality. But truthfulness also refers to perception, to the ability to see or know things in an undistorted way.

To free the mind from distortion, tunnel vision or blind spots takes more than a moral sense. For this we need to check out the nature of our thoughts, attitudes and biases through introspection and meditation. Through such practices, we begin to get a feel for the pressure that our preferences and expectations create; and also, how to get free of that. It's often a matter of distinguishing our assumptions and wishes from the way things actually are. It's through the clear awareness that we develop in meditation that these pressures lift, and as the mind comes out of bias and stress, that awareness senses and eventually rests in its own purity.

Consequently, when awareness is experienced as a bright inner balance and clarity, this is truthfulness in the sense of 'being filled with truth.' The rarity of 'being filled with truth' is evident in that it is one of the special attributes of a Buddha. He generally referred to himself in terms of this truth-filled awareness, as 'Tathāgata,'

which means ‘Gone Thus’ or — to extend the meaning — ‘One who has Gone into How It Is.’ This term encompasses both understanding and behaviour.

... whatever in the entire world ... is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, attained, searched into, pondered over by the mind — all that is fully comprehended by a Tathāgata. That is why he is called ‘Tathāgata.’

... whatever a Tathāgata speaks, utters and proclaims from the day of his self-Awakening up to the day of his remainderless Nibbāna — all that is just so and not otherwise. Therefore he is called ‘Tathāgata.’ (A. 4.23)

Cultivating Truthfulness

If you look at the *pāramī* as a sequence of development, you get the sense of what it takes to experience truthfulness in terms of both behaviour and perception.

The first two perfections, generosity and morality, arouse the heart and create a sense of empathy with other beings. We are willing to share with other beings and are concerned for their welfare. We don’t want to harm or hurt others. Through these *pāramī* we get in touch with our own affective mind/heart, with what wounds and numbs it, as well as what makes it feel right, true and steady. Clearing and steadying our intentions through generosity and morality is an essential beginning and ongoing support for truthfulness.

Renunciation takes that process further by differentiating the knowingness, or awareness, of the mind from the impulses and feelings that it experiences around sense objects. This is the ability to step back in order to gain perspective on how the mind is being affected, and to be clearer as to what sights, sounds and the rest of it we want to pick up — and with what intention. This doesn’t mean not having things and only rejecting things. It means knowing that the most important thing is to be guided by clear awareness. So a skilful letting go will also fill the mind with clarity, steadiness and understanding. As we develop that skill, it grows

to include an even more vital detachment towards psychological persuasions and inclinations — such as what views we hold, or the attitudes we have about ourselves. Trying to bolster or bury our personality creates pressure and stress, which distorts knowing it as it really is. Pressure distorts truth. But with the balance of truthfulness, we're aware of feelings, thoughts and attitudes. We're not dominated by them, but we're not dismissing them either. We get them in perspective and act with less compulsiveness.

Next is wisdom, the ability to discern. This *pāramī* discriminates in terms of what is skilful and unskilful, and sets up mindfulness as a monitor. With mindfulness we notice the pushes and drives that distract the mind from what it is supposed to be bearing in mind. And when this is coupled with wisdom, we begin to recognize any stress (or unsatisfactoriness) in our moods and mental behaviour. So check it out: spend a regular five minutes every day sitting still and getting a feel for the emotions and energies. That's not a waste of time; even a business meeting will work better if people sit quietly for five minutes at the beginning. So mindfulness-based discernment establishes a reference point from which we can witness our psychological actions — our caring impulses as well as our reactions and anxious defences. We get to know what causes them and their results. This understanding helps us to know how our mind operates and is affected, and where it needs guidance.

Balanced energy arises once we have begun to establish this inner guidance. Energy supports and empowers wisdom. Instead of being hesitant, or reckless, instead of hanging back in confusion or blindly surging forward, one begins to see more truthfully, 'This is true, this is right, this is to be done. This is false, invalid and to be put aside.' One applies oneself to what is good, true and useful. So applied energy is the vital food for ongoing cultivation. However, as the mind gets freer from the topics and behaviours that use up its energy, we recognize that free awareness itself has an energetic component. Awareness contracts when it's stressed, spins and scatters when it's confused, and calms and steadies when it

receives care and wholesome input. It has a sense of vigour and vitality that is not about doing, but about being collected, whole and balanced. So through cultivating truth we taste the pleasant truth of awareness when it is at rest.

Next is patience, the ability to bear with something. This is most significant when we have to bear with disagreeable impingement, failures, abuse, blame and sickness. This forbearance, backed up by the preceding perfections, gives us the strength to hold and sustain our aware presence, rather than be blown around by blame, doubt, pain, worry, fear, passions, convictions and beliefs.

When we can find a stable abiding place in awareness, we can witness moods, feelings and impulses changing. That is their truth; and that is the truth of all conditions. If I'm in touch with this truth, I experience doubt or irritation as superficial. They may happen, but they don't have to be adopted, rejected, blamed or reacted to. They're not me, not mine, not self. They arise and pass in awareness, and are what they are. Accordingly, our actions can be based on the awareness of the thought, mood or impulse: we're not in their grip. We can act upon them or let them pass, with a clear understanding of consequences. So through being filled with the truth of awareness, one acts in terms of truthful behaviour. This full truthfulness, its brightness and peace, is what is meant by terms like 'realization,' 'seeing things as they are,' and 'Awakening.' Enlightenment is a matter of getting real.

Clear Awareness is Deep Honesty

Truthfulness as behaviour, and truthfulness as understanding and realization, are related. So are dishonesty and confusion. We find ourselves being dishonest, or exaggerating, or being economical with the truth because it's more convenient that way, or we want a result that will favour us. Then again, we're not always aware of how our words and deeds affect others. This is ignorance — not being directly in touch with truth. So we adopt assumptions, in line with our preceding assumptions. It's easier that way. Even if

the assumptions are not based on truth, it seems as if they will fend off results that we fear. We can use well-tried strategies to defend ourselves against the monsters that we assume dog our steps. Better that than face them! But what if the monsters aren't there? Haven't you found that being straightforward and truthful gives you a quiet strength; and, that most people will respect and sympathize with your honesty? The real monster is the one that gets us to tell a lie or offer partial truth because we fear the emotional backlash that may come when we say how it is. As long as we don't use truth, we let ignorance make us insecure and fearful.

We might say, 'This is very interesting, but I have a lot to do right now,' rather than make the more truthful statement, 'I'm not interested in this at all.' Why do we do this? One way of looking at it is that I don't want to hurt somebody's feelings — which is sensitive. However, such an attitude implies that I already know what will hurt their feelings, and that's not entirely true. Perhaps it would be more truthful to say, 'I don't want my feelings to be hurt. If I hurt their feelings, they are liable to blow their top, and then I'll be hurt.'

Connected to avoiding pain is the tendency to be less than truthful because we're ashamed to reveal how our mind is behaving. Maybe when we want something, we say, 'I really need it.' We say 'need' rather than 'want,' because it is a more respectable term. Or when things don't go our way, we might think, 'It's not fair.' We put the desire or the pain into the impersonal, referring to and even blaming 'it.' Our hankering or resistance hides under such abstractions as 'my turn,' 'my rights' and 'my needs,' when it may be more honest to say, 'I want it, whether it's fair or not.' But we don't say that because it makes us look bad — so we deflect the direct truth onto some abstract principle. Or, we project the heart of the matter onto someone else: 'You did this, it's your fault,' rather than, 'I am upset, I am angry.' When we say, 'You do this to me,' there may be some truth in that, but it isn't truth based on our direct experience. A more direct truth is to say, 'I am feeling

this, and because of that I'm lashing out.' That's closer to a realization of what's happening, though still not completely true.

This is because in the fulfilment of truth there is the realization that the agent of events, of virtue and vice, is intention (or impulse) not self. And intentions arise from assumptions and perceptions as to what is or will be agreeable or disagreeable. Yet we can examine our perceptions, assumptions and impulses. Most have a degree of truth in them (pursuing what attracts the mind can be enjoyable in the short-term) — but they all benefit from being questioned. Because we can be aware of and investigate the feel of attraction, repulsion, defensiveness and the rest, they're not fundamental states. They're not self; they are as they are, and there's no one behind them to defend or approve of. There's no one to claim, or be toppled from, the moral high ground.

To take an instance: like many celibate monks, I've had to meet and struggle with sexual desire. Part of me has recognized that sexual energy draws the attention outwards in ways that use up a lot of juice and don't come up with much in the way of long-term benefit. So I have agreed to not act upon that energy, and the trust that I have with other people is based on holding to my word and not looking out for sexual advantage with women. All fair enough: but one part of my system hasn't made that agreement, and is wired to the biological program of sexuality.

So there's a struggle, particularly when women wear clothes that are fashionable and are designed to accentuate the attractiveness of the female form. Thus, one notices a ripple in awareness, sometimes amounting to a wave, in the presence of women. And behind that wave comes another wave of confusion or guilt, because the script in the head says that one is 'not supposed to experience sexual desire.' Sure enough, if it's lingered upon, that first ripple turns into an emotional turbulence which persists for hours. But on the other hand, adding guilt and aversion isn't a peaceful response either.

I remember one time a friend of mine who was a wildlife warden showed me a letter that he was writing on the headed notepaper of his trust. Up in the top right corner was the letterhead, which consisted of a drawing of a roe deer, a female seen from behind with her head turned to the left. With the foreshortening and perspective, the most immediately striking detail of the picture was the rump of the deer, which had a central white blaze. Somehow my eye snagged on that rump for a microsecond as I glanced over the carefully drawn picture. My friend, noticing this, commented how men and women's reactions to the letterhead differed. The women found the image charming, whereas men reported feeling slightly embarrassed.

I found that very revealing. It dawned on me that my consciousness was just doing exactly what it was hard-wired to do: to respond to sexual signals. But that's all it was — I certainly had no interest in having a sexual liaison with a deer, however charming she was. So that ripple of perception did not have to imply or link to any behaviour or even inclination. I could just be accurate about what was going on and know it for the program that it was. The truthfulness of seeing a ripple exactly — knowing where it was and what it was, with a clear conditioned arising — also allowed it to fall back into awareness without a trace. When we can do this, what remains is a bright watchfulness. In relationship with other beings, it tends to resonate with warmth and happiness.

So the real issue is not one of being affected, but of the proliferating tendencies and assumptions of lust (or fear, irritation, guilt, etc.) that jump onto that affect. That is, there are latent tendencies in how the programmed mind forms our experience. These tendencies conjure up a blur of pleasure or apprehension or irritation. In that blur the mind believes that lasting pleasure, satisfaction, annihilation or damnation are just one step away. That's the assumption called ignorance — it's worth checking it out.

Many of our assumptions and impulses are biologically or socially conditioned; we don't decide to have them. And yet, that voice in the brain or that surge in the heart is so familiar and habitual that it may seem like the real me. But what is it that witnesses it? Which is the 'real me,' the thought or the watchfulness? Maybe neither. Isn't it the case that you remember a song because it just pops into your head when you're in a certain mood? And that a thought arises out of an intention to work something out? And that sometimes you forget things you knew? No thought or mind state is there all the time, so how can any of them be a permanent aspect or possession? And if none of these can be possessed or under one's control, what kind of possessor or controller lives in our mind? In truth, there's not some self in charge of all this; nor do we seem to be able to be apart from this changing show. It all arises dependent on causes and conditions.

The Inheritance of Kamma

What keeps it all going? Is there something beyond this passing show — and what would that be like? These are the kinds of questions that arouse people in the search for spiritual truth. And at the heart of such a quest is the need to acknowledge and put aside false assumptions: assumptions that are generated by the floods of sensuality, becoming, views and ignorance. It means paying attention in an appropriate, enquiring and in-depth way. This is the intention based on truthfulness — not to have some experience, or become something, but to come out of false assumptions.

A basic assumption is that things have a fixed or predictable nature. Even though rationally we know that isn't true, our emotional reflexes get confused and upset by changes in the weather or our health, by delays in transport and by changes in other people. The reflex assumption is that sense objects provide a true and lasting feeling — that the impression of a taste, sound or sight as either pleasant or unpleasant is true. And that sets up 'must have' or 'can't stand it.' But when we contemplate the

experience from a wider and more long-term perspective, we notice that the feeling depends as much on our state of mind as on the sense object itself. When we're hungry just about any food tastes great, but as we get satiated that feeling fades, and the focus shifts to something else. In other words, intention, the bent or inclination of the mind, has changed how we experience the food. And at other times, I might barely notice how it tasted because I was talking to a friend. In that case the change has occurred through a shift of attention. Or maybe we feel that the unpleasant taste of the food ruined the whole evening. In this instance the issue is one of contact; that is, the impression 'unpleasant' has coated the mind, so the unpleasantness is transferred — everything we experience during the evening is perceived through the filter of that contact impression.

Such transference is very common. For instance, person A is in a bad mood because of being stuck in a traffic jam and late for an appointment. Feeling irritable, he or she finds human contact irritating. So he/she speaks dismissively to person B, who then feels that person A doesn't like them, or that they've done something wrong, and so person B feels confused. That's how suffering gets transferred. Or you feel that someone else is great fun because everything's going well — the weather, the food, the music — it's a magical evening. So maybe you think you'll do the same thing tomorrow. However, it doesn't quite happen that way, because circumstances have changed. There's a different mood or a different energy in both parties. In truth, the same factors don't ever come together again. So you feel disappointed. Maybe you think that he let you down, or that there's something wrong with you. The truth of the matter is: contact impressions are dependent on changeable factors, and therefore they are unreliable. We ask too much of the sense world by assuming it to be otherwise. Wouldn't it be wiser and more honest to relate to sense data as they actually are?

So it is with the impression of identity. If I believe he or she always is, or always should be, a certain way, I fix a sensitive, changing, affective mind into a stereotyped object called a person. 'He's an

idiot. She's always loving. He's self-centred. She's supposed to look after me.' Through such views we project irritation, adoration or neediness and make others into the heroes and villains of our lives. Now these projections may have some truth in them, but that truth is probably much more specific. For example, 'He's an idiot' might mean something like, 'I notice that his way of chairing the meeting yesterday didn't bring the results I'd wish for.' The falsehood is that a piece of behaviour has been made into a three-dimensional person and cast in stone. That's what 'becoming' does: it stretches an event into an entity. If I believe in this creation, it will affect the way I relate to that person, and the way I talk about them; which means I help and participate in the creation of these caricatures, demons and angels. And to do that limits my responsiveness and our freedom.

This mental activity is *kamma*: as your mind acts, assumes and projects, so you create an inheritance. We end up stuck in a world of 'them and me' with its fixed opinions, disappointment and confusion. *Kamma* means action; it's based on intention, attention and contact. It has results, and this is what's running your life. In this respect, the first step towards abiding in truth is to be clear about good and bad *kamma*: to recognize and refrain from the bad, and to pick up the good. So it's better to know that one feels irritation, admiration, or jealousy and look into that, rather than keep making our emotional responses into 'other people' who then control your life.

When we look at things in terms of truth, we can acknowledge contact impressions in terms of pleasant and unpleasant feelings: perhaps as familiar, poignant or uncomfortable perceptions and impressions. We can witness skilful, unskilful, compassionate or confused psychological intentions and states of mind, and we can sense whether attention is weak, bright or obsessive. Contact, intention and attention, and all of this kammic stuff are changeable. There are no fixed things, entities or people. But there is an inheritance and potential furtherance of habits and biases. As we see that our world is dependent on contact, intention and attention, we start to take steps to generate bright impressions,

based on kindness, compassion and wise understanding. And as we develop those intentions, and all the intentions that the *pāramī* represent, our attention gets clear and well focused.

Relationship: A Vital Learning Ground

If we stand on truth, there is no abiding self or other; only pain or attachment to be released; only ignorance to be cleared away. However ignorance is, by definition, something that we're not clear about: we can't see our blind spots. So we have to explore our reactions and assumptions as they play out in terms of behaviour. This is where other people can be a great help. When we acknowledge the dependent nature of you, me, them and it, the realm of relationship becomes a vital learning ground.

Once again, intention is important: to aspire to truth, and to do so with kindness and respect. Generally speaking, our behaviour is angled towards getting positive results. With other people, our intention is for approval, friendship, or at least non-conflict; and we may well be anxious about making mistakes. But if someone else's behaviour doesn't give rise to those positive impressions, you may feel that he/she doesn't approve of you; so you try harder to get the positive impression, or you defend yourself, or you acquire a sense of inadequacy. So you either walk away retaining that negative impression or try to appear good to the other person, whilst still feeling anxious and uncertain. Intentions get mixed up. The relationship gets infused with the need to become, and the suffering of that. Through the process of transference, this suffering is blamed on the other person, from whom at the same time one is trying to win praise or attention.

Experiencing anxiety and resentment whilst trying to win approval is a confusing process! The confusion is heightened by lack of in-depth attention: not admitting that this is going on, and probably not checking out whether one's initial assumption is correct. That will again affect your intentions: you might decide it's better to live alone, or shut your heart down. But this has negative effects: you've created more confused *kamma*, you

haven't entered truth, and so you haven't released the source of your suffering.

This kind of thing is normal; only Awakened beings have no transference. Acknowledging this, we know that if we aren't Awakened, we're going to project the needs and fears of our un-Awakened state onto others. And therefore we also acknowledge that for communication, let alone Awakening, we need to establish some *pāramī* and keep them in working order. Is a mind of patience and goodwill established? Are we using wisdom? Are we giving up wanting things to be the way we personally prefer? Are we speaking in terms of verifiable fact, or in terms of assumption?

We need to establish a safe space for communication. For example, we could say to someone with whom we are having difficulty, 'All you have to do is listen. I'll just talk about how a particular behaviour pattern affects my behaviour pattern, and then we can see what comes out of that. So this is not about you or me. This is really just a way in which we can both look at our own behaviour patterns and learn a few things.'

We can also try to be specific. For instance, instead of saying, 'Why are you such a tyrant?' we can say, 'When you told me to get off the phone yesterday that really affected me.' We can say, 'This is what happens for me,' and not 'you did this because you are always like that.' Then we are not left with this 'always' thing and a fixed 'you' or 'me,' but just a particular incident and piece of behaviour. We are being truthful in that we are specific and accurate, even though this means revealing the truth of our conditioned responses. But one result of that is the development of real trust between people, while in ourselves we become less judgemental and more understanding of our conditioning. Another result is that awareness strengthens in terms of presence rather than in terms of activity.

Truthfulness is Its Own Refuge

One of the benefits of tuning in to the linked truths of non-self and *kamma*, is that we're less attached to our behaviour and self-

image. It's a lot easier to accept that we get things wrong at times when we recognize that our actions are conditioned rather than a definition of who we are. But that doesn't mean we don't give action its due importance. These truths also point out that every action has an effect, and that actions affect other minds as well as our own. So we actually want to know when our actions are causing problems, because it helps us understand and work with the kammic habits that we all have.

These truths lead to a sense of openness and enquiry into where our actions come from and what their effects are. That interest in truth makes us more imperturbable: we don't have an investment in being perfect. Truth also provides a stable reference point — such as the admission that you may make mistakes, but it isn't your intention to cause harm. Of course if it was your intention to hurt someone with a verbal stab, you have to take responsibility for that, and look into why you wanted to do that. And maybe reflecting on all that, you realize for yourself that your harmful intentions cause you the pain of furtiveness, guilt and loss of self-respect. We begin to see conditionality, cause and effect and how things are taken and felt. We begin to understand a little more about the human condition, and compassion grows.

So through the wish to be filled with truth, we are much more careful and interested in what kind of causes we are laying down. We recognize that whatever we do has an effect; what we do individually affects others. We can't escape it. We can't say, 'I don't want it to affect you' — because it does. What we experience is a shared flow that affects and ricochets all around us. When we really know this, we can't be irresponsible; there's enough suffering already in pain, sickness, loss and misfortune to be careless about creating any more for ourselves and others.

Even without action or intention, we affect others. A classic example of this led to the formulation of a rule in the monks' code of conduct. The story is that one of the Enlightened monks (an *arahant*) who was on a journey stopped in a guesthouse for the night. The woman who owned the guesthouse was attracted to him and attempted a seduction, but he didn't respond. So she

apologized. When the Buddha heard of this, he didn't blame the woman, but he did admonish the *arahant*. 'You shouldn't have put yourself in that situation, not because you were doing anything wrong, but because people are vulnerable. This woman acted in the wrong way, in a way that makes her feel regret and remorse. As an *arahant*, you have to be sensitive to people who still get caught up with passions. You have to be aware of how you might affect them.' So the rule was made that a monk should not lie down under the same roof as a woman. However rare it might be that a mishap would occur, the rule does express a truth about the conditioned realm. We need to know and be responsible for how we affect others.

The Ground of Truth

In daily life, when there's the upheaval of opinions and rumours and blame, we benefit from having some solid ground. The development of truth grounds us in three ways. First of all, one can be truthful about one's morality, so that one can say, 'I haven't killed, I haven't stolen, and I haven't deliberately told an untruth.' This means that any kind of pain and confusion is not because of these actions. Then we have a place to stand. For example, 'I may have been foolish, I may not have had much mindfulness, but I haven't been evil.' Or if one has acted badly: 'Passion overwhelmed me and I did act unskillfully. Now I acknowledge that and wish to make amends.' Of course, doesn't everyone lose it sometimes? Can't we accept that, and have confidence that others will accept that? Therefore, when one has that place of truth, there's less defensiveness and conflict. The power of truth is that it gives you firm ground and an ability to stand, acknowledge an error and investigate the suffering, confusion or pain.

The second way in which truthfulness provides stable ground is with regard to the quality of awareness. This has to do with clearing the mind of greed, anger and other hindrances by means of meditation. Important aspects of this training are mindfulness and concentration. Mindfulness gives us the ability to keep a frame of reference, so that you can measure the behaviour of the mind. For example, 'There is greed in my mind; it arose with the

sight of that.' Truthful recognition can initiate a review of what triggered the greed, how lasting the pleasure of the desired object will be, and how uncomfortable the experience of greed is. With this honest investigation, you might shift your attention, return to the breathing or develop the intention of letting go. This process clears the mind of hindrances, such as restlessness, confusion, doubt or greed. Then the mind's awareness can shift to the steadiness of meditative concentration.

Third, truthfulness provides firm ground for the development of transcendent wisdom. When the mind is aware of its awareness, it is suspended from the floods and can witness them, with their causes and effects, in terms of the Four Noble Truths. We begin to see things truthfully, rather than thinking, 'She's like this. They are always like that. I should be like this.' This is proliferation — the mechanism that turns the wave of an agreeable or disagreeable impression into a solid thing out there. And that is the origin of the suffering of negativity, craving, loss, covetousness and imbalance. But when the mind is clear and steady enough to witness all that — truthfully — as a process, it can also let go. There is the realization that, 'This is stress, pressure, and suffering; this is the origin of it; this is what it's like when it stops; and this is the way to bring that stopping about.' When one repeatedly undertakes that process with honesty and candour, the proliferating tendencies get cleared.

The hallmark of truth is that one feels clear, open and settled in actuality. There are no grumbles, sighs of resignation, or triumphs; the mind is rested in awareness. Only truthfulness will return the mind to the home of awareness from which it arises. Then we feel clear and balanced. Assumptions, strategies, reasonable defences, arguments and accusations of blame may make us feel righteous, justified or on top, but they won't take us to the peace of Nibbāna. This is why we follow the movement towards truth. Through shifting from ignorance to truthfulness, we can open up to stable, transcendent awareness.