

Paramis (7 of 10) Truth

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Today the topic is the seventh of the Ten *Paramis*, which is truth. Truthfulness can be one of the qualities of character that are built through practice and that support practice. In fact, discovering the truth, being the truth is considered to be one of the primary forms of character that support the unfolding and ripening of Dharma practice.

In the mythology of Buddhism, it says that in the many lifetimes the Buddha lived before he was a Buddha, he broke all the precepts except the fourth one. He never told a lie. He was always truthful. A quality of mature

spiritual people is that they never lie to themselves. We have a capacity for self-honesty. We are able to tell ourselves the truth, even if we can't necessarily say it out loud and it might be difficult interpersonally to say what is true and we have to be wise about it.

A wise person is always true to themselves and always recognizes what's happening. Even if the truth is not necessarily good news about ourselves, a tremendous benefit and peacefulness or ease can come when we tell ourselves the truth: this is what's happening.

Truth has a lot of benefits. If we know the truth and can be truthful, it's a lot easier to go through the world. There is less conflict; there are fewer things to keep in mind, and fewer things to try to protect and to remember. We can just be plainly how we are.

When we're truthful, it tends to bring along other qualities. It tends to bring along honesty, of course. Truthfulness also tends to bring along greater clarity and mindfulness of what is. It tends to bring with it compassion and kindness. When we're allowed to be truthful, it tends to bring with it some of the better qualities of who we are. Or to say it differently, when we're not truthful, the tension of lying and fabricating ideas and stories – protecting ourselves that way, or whatever we're doing – tends to limit and prevent the

good qualities of our heart from flowering and being there fully.

It is noteworthy that we're now getting towards the end of the paramis, and as the seventh parami, truth is built on all these other capacities. I think this suggests that we need to plumb deeply into the truthfulness and truth of the moment in ourselves. This is not necessarily an easy thing to do, and so we prepare ourselves for it. We practice in such a way that we get to the point where we can flower into the truthfulness of the present moment and speak it truthfully.

So the dedication to practicing generosity, ethics, renunciation, wisdom, engagement or effort, and patience all build towards the capacity to be truthful and honest. The truthfulness of *vipassanā* practice, which I'd like to think of as a wonderful foundation for more complex social and interpersonal truths, is the ability to be connected in a direct way to the truth of the moment-to-moment experience. There is a clarity and the ability to settle in and not be swept away in thoughts, commentary, conversations, judgments, or analysis. (Some people love to think about wonderful ideas and plans and figure things out. That can be a wonderful capacity of the mind.)

Instead, we practice the ability to rest and settle into the flow of the moment-to-moment experience so that we're

there as things appear – so as a thought arises, we're present enough to see: that's a thought, that's a commentary, that's starting a conversation in the mind. If there's a feeling – a kaleidoscope of emotions might come through – we recognize: that's discouragement, that's joy, that's aversion or anger, that's compassion, that's kindness.

We recognize what's coming through. We recognize the sensations of the body and the sounds around us. The idea is to be able to stay in the flow of the present-moment experience and recognize that simple direct experience is a way of being with the simple side of truth – that which can be true in the moment. In *vipassanā* practice, that simple direct present-moment experience is what goes in deep to realize the deepest truths.

On the way there, we realize the truth of how much and easily we get caught and entangled, aversive, and attached. Because in that flow of the present moment, when we leave it and get wrapped up in something, resistant to something, or involved in thinking and relating to what just happened – all are highlighted. We begin to see more and more clearly all the different tricks of the mind to not stay present in the flow of the river of experience. Seeing that is phenomenal information about ourselves.

It isn't as if we're never supposed to get involved in distracted thoughts. But the idea is to be in meditation moment-to-moment and see all the little tricks of the mind, all the ways we get attached and caught, and to be honest about that – “Wow, look at that. There I am, caught again. I'm doing it again. I'm aversive. I'm filled with desire. And that's where I left the flow of the present moment. That's where I'm not really present for what's going on moment by moment.”

Seeing the truth of ourselves that way is sometimes not comfortable. But rather than dwelling on the discomfort, the encouragement is to dwell on the tremendous value and importance of our capacity to see clearly what's happening. This is the joy of truthfulness, the joy of seeing things as they are, and the power of being on a path that leads us onward moment by moment through our ability to see honestly what's going on, including what's difficult for us.

As we go deeper and deeper into this present-moment experience, we start to see the truth of freedom, the truth of not clinging, the truth of keeping an open hand, an open heart, and an open mind to all things. The joy of freedom, of liberation, of being awake to what our experience is, is one of the great truths of life. Then we can

savor and register deeply what it feels like to have glimpses of real freedom where we're not operating under attachments, habit, or entanglements.

These are some of the truths that we delve into with *vipassanā*. They become a wonderful foundation for knowing ourselves well enough to be able to check ourselves when we need to speak the truth out loud in the world. We can know ourselves well enough to be able to do that without hostility, without attachment, and without clinging. We know how to do it in an open-hearted, open-minded way. We have the courage to do it.

We are no longer as caught by or influenced by our fears.

When we feel it's really necessary to speak the truth to someone else, we check ourselves to know that, “Yes, I have no attachment, I have no hostility. This is a timely thing. This is a useful thing to say. This is a kind, supportive way of saying it.” Then we have the ability to speak the truth, to say when a relationship is challenged – “You know, what's happening between us is difficult.” We can say when someone has hurt us – “You know, I want to come back to you and say that when you said such and such, I felt quite hurt. It had a big impact on me.”

We can tell the truth like that rather than, “You’re terrible because of what you said.” I don’t know if that’s really the truth – it is more of an interpretation, a judgment. But we really stay close to what’s true and speak it – “You know, that really hurt me. I felt impacted.” This way we are more likely to be in a conversation that can be collaborative. There is space for the other person to participate. When we say what’s not purely and simply true, it’s more complicated for other people to be part of the conversation. If we speak our judgments as if they’re true, then it’s harder for people to participate.

The idea of discovering the truth, being with the truth, and knowing ourselves with truth is one of the great, powerful means for reconciliation and deep connection to other people. Not everyone is able to reciprocate, but when we’re able to find the truth together, then there’s power. There’s reconciliation. There’s connection. There’s love. There’s knowing someone deeply.

Whether it’s to know ourselves in a deep way, or to know other people, or to know the relationship that’s being formed between people, the truth is such a powerful and liberating force in us. We can have within our own practice and minds our truth and reconciliation committee. We sit and meditate practicing truth and reconciliation, truth and compassion toward what we see in ourselves and what’s here.

Truth is the seventh *parami*. The more patient we can be, the more we can take the time to discover what's true.

As we become more connected to the truth, that can lead to a certain kind of power, which is the topic for next time.

For the next 24 hours, please consider what your relationship is to the truth. Is truth something that you welcome? Is it something that you're resistant to? Is it something you have doubts about and mistrust? Is the truth something that inspires you or dispirits you in some way? What have you learned about the value of truth? How do you find out what's true? How do you share the truth with other people?

There is a whole bunch of areas to explore. Maybe you'll find some friends you can talk with today. Or you could journal about your relationship to truth and the relationship of the truth to your Buddhist practice.

And someone asked, "I see the Pali word for truth. It's *sacca*. In Sanskrit is *satya*. *Satyagraha* was the famous term by Mahatma Gandhi that means sticking to the truth, holding to the truth.

Thank you very much.