

Mindful Relationships: Cultivating the Six Perfections

“ One should raise up the self by oneself, and not degrade oneself. For the self is its own best friend and its own worst enemy. ”



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CLASS ONE: BEGINNING RELATIONSHIPS

I. The Foundation: Self-Confidence

A. What You Can Change and What You Can't

From the *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*:

bhūmiṃ chādayitum sarvāṃ kutaścarma bhaviṣyati |
upānaccarmamātreṇa channā bhavati medinī | |

**How could you ever find enough leather to cover the earth?
Just the leather on the sole of your shoe is enough to cover the ground. (5.13)**

bāhyā bhāvā mayā tadvacchakyā vārayitum na hi |
svacittam vārayiṣyāmi kiṃ mamānyairnivāritaiḥ | |

**And so, although I am unable to exercise control over external phenomena, I will
restrain my own mind. What else do I need to dominate? (5.14)**

B. You are Your Own Refuge

From the *Attadīpa Sutta*:

attadīpā bhikkhave viharatha attasaraṇā anaññasaraṇā dhammadīpā
dhammasaraṇā anaññasaraṇā attadīpānaṃ bhikkhave viharataṃ attasaraṇānaṃ
anaññasaraṇānaṃ dhammadīpānaṃ dhammasaraṇānaṃ anaññasaraṇānaṃ
yoniyeva upaparikkhitabbā1 kiñjātikā sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā
kiṃpahotikā"ti

**O monks, be islands unto yourselves, be your own refuge, having no other; let the
Dhamma be an island and a refuge to you, having no other. Those who are islands
unto themselves... should investigate to the very heart of things: "What is the source
of sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair? How do they arise?"**

C. Taking Responsibility for Yourself and Your Relationships

From the *Bhagavad Gita*:

ātmaupamyena sarvatra samaṁ paśyati yo'rjuna |
sukhaṁ vā yadi vā duḥkhaṁ sa yogī paramo mataḥ ||

One who sees that everything is equally coming from oneself, whether it is suffering or happiness, is to be considered the supreme yogi. (6.32)

From the *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*:

triṣu māno vidhātavyaḥ karmopakleśaśaktiṣu |
mayaivaikena kartavyamityeṣā karmamānitā ||

Self-confidence should infuse these three: your actions, your battles to overcome the mental afflictions, and your belief in your own abilities. "I will do it all by myself" is self-confidence when it comes to actions. (7.49)

II. Setting the Motivation

A. Being Your Own Best Friend

From the *Bhagavad Gita*:

uddharedātmanā"tmānaṁ nātmānamavasādayet |
ātmaiva hyātmano bandurātmaiva ripurātmanaḥ ||

One should raise up the self by oneself, and not degrade oneself. For the self is its own best friend and its own worst enemy. (6.5)

bandurātmā"tmanastasya yenātmaivātmanā jitaḥ |
anātmanastu śatrtve vartetātmaiva śatruvat ||

The self is the friend of the one who conquers himself, but for one who hasn't it is like an enemy at war with itself. (6.6)

B. Selflessness and Interconnection

From the *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*:

upadravā ye ca bhavanti loke yāvanti duḥkhāni bhayāni caiva |
sarvāṇi tānyātmaparigraheṇa tat kiṃ mamānena parigraheṇa ||

Since all the disasters, sufferings, and fears in this world come about from the grasping to a self, then how is this grasping beneficial to me? (8.134)

ātmānamaparityajya duḥkhaṃ tyaktuṃ na śakyate |
yathāgnimaparityajya dāhaṃ tyaktuṃ na śakyate ||

Without abandoning the self, suffering cannot be abandoned, just as without avoiding fire one cannot avoid being burned. (8.135)

anyasambaddhamasmīti niścayaṃ kuru he manaḥ |
sarvasattvārthamutsṛtya nānyaccintyaṃ tvayādhunā ||

Hey, my mind! Make this resolution: "I am connected to others." Now you must have no other thought than pursuing the welfare of all living beings. (8.137)

III. Staying Mindful of the Motivation

From the *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*:

saṃsargaṃ karma vā prāptamicchedetena hetunā |
kathaṃ nāmāsvavasthāsu smṛtyabhyāso bhavediti ||

When one encounters any acquaintance or is involved in any action, one should reflect with this as one's motive: "How can I practice mindfulness in these kinds of circumstances?" (7.73)

IV. The Six Perfections as the Guide to Mindful Relationships

From the *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*:

uttarottarataḥ śreṣṭhā dānapāramitādayaḥ |
netarārthaṁ tyajecchreṣṭhāmanyatrācāraśeṭuḥ | |

The perfections of giving and the rest are presented in a hierarchical order. One should not reject a higher one for the sake of a lower one, unless it is to shore up one's practice. (5.83)

V. The Perfection of Giving

From the *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*:

sarvatyāgaśca nirvāṇaṁ nirvāṇārthi ca me manaḥ |
tyaktavyaṁ cenmayā sarvaṁ varaṁ sattveṣu dīyatām | |

Giving up everything is nirvana and my mind longs for nirvana. Since I need to give up everything, it's best that I bestow it on all living beings. (3.11)

phalena saha sarvasvatyāgacittājjane'khile |
dānapāramitā proktā tasmātsā cittameva tu | |

It's been said that the perfection of giving is the wish to give away everything, along with the karmic results of that act, to every single living being. That's why it is really just a state of mind. (5.10)

yadi dāsyāmi kiṁ bhokṣye ityātmārthe piśācatā |
yadi bhokṣye kiṁ dadāmi parārthe devarājatā | |

"If I give, what will I have to enjoy myself?" Such is the selfish thinking of demons. "If I enjoy it myself, what will I have to give?" Such is the selfless thinking of divine beings. (8.125)

VI. The Gift of Service

From the *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*:

upādhyāyānuśāsanyā bhītyāpyādarakāriṇām |
dhanyānām gurusamvāsātsukaram jāyate smṛtiḥ | |

Among those who are fortunate and exert themselves, mindfulness easily arises through submitting to the instruction of a religious teacher, through fear, or because of cohabitation with one's spiritual mentor. (5.30)

EXERCISE FOR CLASS ONE

Spend fifteen minutes a day this week in contemplation and meditation on which parts of you – which voices speaking inside your head – are your own “best friend” and which are your own “worse enemy.”

Additionally, everyday do at least one *anonymous* act of generosity for someone else.

CLASS TWO: MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

I. The Perfection of Ethical Living

From Nagarjuna's *Precious Garland*:

kāyavāñmānasam karma sarvañ samyakparikṣya yaḥ
parātmahitamājñāya sadā kuryātsa paṇḍitaḥ (7)

He is truly a wise man who always acts having first correctly examined all actions of body, speech, and mind, and having realized what is beneficial to himself and others.

ahimsā cauryaviratiḥ paradāravivarjanam
mithyāpaiśunyapāruṣyābaddhavādeśu saṁnyamaḥ (8)

Not harming, refraining from theft, forsaking the partners of others, restraining oneself from false, slanderous, harsh, and loose speech.

lobhavyāpādanāstikyadrṣṭinām parivarjanam
ete karmapathāḥ śuklā daśa kṛṣṇā viparyayāt (9)

Turning away from greed, and malice, and nihilistic worldviews – These are the ten white paths of action. Otherwise they are dark.

II. The Perfection of Tolerance

From the *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*:

na ca dveṣasamañ pāpañ na ca kṣāntisamañ tapaḥ |
tasmātkṣāntiñ prayatnena bhāvayedvividhairmayaiḥ || 6.2 ||

There is no evil like hatred, and no spiritual hardship like tolerance. And so you should practice tolerance in many different ways.

manaḥ śamañ na gr̥hṇāti na pr̥tisukhamaśnute |
na nidrāñ na dhṛtiñ yāti dveṣaśalye hṛdi sthite || 6.3 ||

When the dagger of hatred is lodged in the heart, the mind can know no peace. It obtains no joy or happiness, no sleep, and no resolution.

pūjayatyarthamānairyān ye'pi cainaṁ samāśritāḥ |
te'pyenaṁ hantumicchanti svāmināṁ dveṣadurbhagam || 6.4 ||

Even dependents who are honored with wealth and respect wish to destroy a master who is miserable because of hatred.

suhṛdo'pyudvijante'smād dadāti na ca sevyate |
saṁkṣepānnāsti tatkiṁcit krodhano yena susthitaḥ || 6.5 ||

It leaves your friends and family tired of being with you; they refuse to stay with you even though you may entice them with gifts. To put it simply, there is no one with anger who can be happy.

evamādīni duḥkhāni karotīyarisamjñayā |
yaḥ krodhaṁ hanti nirbandhāt sa sukḥiḥa paratra ca || 6.6 ||

Recognizing that the enemy brings us these and other sufferings as well, one who perseveres and destroys his anger achieves happiness in this life and the next.

cetanācetanakṛtā dehināṁ niyatā vyathā |
sā vyathā cetane dṛṣṭā kṣamasvaināṁ vyathāmataḥ || 6.66 ||

Harm comes to living beings at the hands of sentient beings or inanimate things and forces. Whether you are harmed or not is a mental decision, and so the belief that you are harmed can be counteracted by forbearance.

mohādeke'parādhyanti kupyantyanye vimohitāḥ |
brūmaḥ kameṣu nirdoṣaṁ kaṁ vā brūmo'parādhinaṁ || 6.67 ||

Some people, because of delusion, do wrong. And others, deluded, get angry at them. How can we say that either of them is without fault or guilt?

kasmādevaṁ kṛtaṁ pūrvaṁ yenaivaṁ bādhyase paraiḥ |
sarve karmaparāyattāḥ ko'hamatrānyathākṛtau || 6.68 ||

Where did this come from? What deed in the past has led to others harassing me now? If everything depends on karma, how can I now change the thing into something else?

EXERCISE FOR CLASS TWO

Think about your relationship with someone close to you – your partner, child, parent, best friend – and review the list of the ten ethical “white paths of action.” How could you improve your practice of one or more of these principles in order to maintain this valuable relationship?

CLASS THREE: DEEPENING RELATIONSHIPS

I. The Perfection of Joyful Effort

From the *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*:

evaṃ kṣamo bhajedvīryaṃ vīrye bodhiryataḥ sthitā |
na hi vīryaṃ vinā puṇyaṃ yathā vāyuṃ vināgatiḥ ||

Once you have cultivated tolerance, you should then begin the practice of joyful effort, for Awakening depends on making effort. Just as nothing moves without wind, without effort there is no merit-making. (7.1)

kiṃ vīryaṃ kuśalotsāhastadvipakṣaḥ ka ucyate |
ālasyaṃ kutsitāsaktirviṣādātmāvamanyanā ||

What is joyful effort? It is being happy about doing good things. The obstacles to it are said to be laziness, attachment to contemptible things and depression or low self-esteem. (7.2)

evaṃ vipakṣamunmūlya yatetotsāhavṛddhaye |
chandamānaratityāgatātparyavaśitābalaḥ ||

And so one should make efforts to increase joy and uproot whatever is contrary to it. Use the energies of desire, self-confidence, chilling out, dedication, and will power. (7.32)

yadevāpadyate karma tatkarmavyasanī bhavet |
tatkarmaśauṇḍo'tṛptātmā krīḍāphalasukhepsuvat ||

You should be addicted to whatever action you undertake. Like someone who craves the thrill that comes from playing a game, you should be insatiable and intoxicated with that action. (7.62)

yadi prītisukhaṃ prāptamanyaiḥ stutvā guṇorjitam |
manastvamapi taṃ stutvā kasmādevaṃ na hr̥ṣyasi ||

If joy and happiness can be obtained by praising the good qualities of others, why, o my mind, do you not also join in the praising and rejoicing? (6.76)

idaṃ ca te hr̥ṣṭisukhaṃ niravadyaṃ sukhodayaṃ |
na vāritaṃ ca guṇibhiḥ parāvarjanamuttamaṃ | |

Taking pleasure and happiness like this is an exemplary way to bring about more happiness. The virtuous do not forbid it and it is the best way to win over others.

(6.77)

nakiñcidasti tadvastu yadabhyāsasya duṣkaraṃ |
tasmānmṛduvyathābhāsāt soḍhavyāpi mahāvyathā | |

There is nothing at all which remains difficult if you practice it. So practice with small problems and you'll be able to endure the big ones. (6.14)

aśramopārjitastasmādnṛthe nidhirivotthitaḥ |
bodhicaryāśahāyatvātspr̥haṇīyo ripurmama | |

Like a pot of gold effortlessly stumbled upon in your own house, one should appreciate an adversary who assists you live the life of bodhisattva. (6.107)

II. The Perfection of Meditative Concentration

From the *Mahasatipatthana Sutta*:

katame cattāro idha bhikkhave bhikkhu kāye kāyānupassī viharati ātāpī sampajāno
satimā vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassaṃ | vedanāsu vedanānupassī viharati ātāpī
sampajāno satimā vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassaṃ | citte cittānupassī viharati ātāpī
sampajāno satimā vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassaṃ | dhammesu dhammānupassī
viharati ātāpī sampajāno satimā vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassaṃ |

What are the four? First, one who is watching the body stays focused on the body with fierce intensity, awareness, and mindfulness, detaching from worldly longing and repugnance. One who is watching the feelings stays focused on the feelings with fierce intensity, awareness, and mindfulness. One who is watching the state of mind stays focused on the state of mind with fierce intensity, awareness, and mindfulness. And one who is watching thoughts stays focused on thoughts with fierce intensity, awareness, and mindfulness, detaching from worldly longing and repugnance.

From the first book of the *Bhavanakrama* by Kamalashila:

saṅkṣepeṇa sarvasyaiva samādheḥ ṣaḍ doṣā bhavanti| kausīdyam
ālambanasampramoṣo layauddhatyam anābhogaḥ ābhogateti|

There are, to put it concisely, six flaws that thwart meditative integration: laziness, drifting away from what's happening, day-dreaming, arrogance, not taking an interest, and being overly engrossed.

teṣāṃ pratipakṣeṇāṣṭau prahāṇasaṃskārā bhāvanīyāḥ| tad yathāśraddhā chandaḥ
vyāyāmaḥ praśrabdhiḥ smṛtiḥ samprajanyaṃ cetanā upekṣā ceti|

The antidote to them is to cultivate eight habits which will eradicate them: confidence, will, exertion, assertiveness, mindfulness, full attention, consciousness, and equanimity.

tatrādyāṣcatvāraḥ kausīdyasya pratipakṣāḥ|
tathāhisamādherguneṣvabhisampratyayalakṣaṇayā śraddhayā tatra yogino'bhilāṣa
utpadyate| tato'bhilāṣād vīryamārabhet| tadvīryabalena kāyacittakarmanyaṭām
āsādayati| tataḥ praśrabdhakāyacetasāḥ kausīdyam āvartate| ataḥ śraddhādayaḥ
kausīdyaprahāṇāya bhāvanīyāḥ|

The first four, then, are antidotes to laziness. For it is through confidence, an indication that one has a strong belief in the good qualities of integration, that will arise in the practitioner. From will, effort is produced, and through the force of effort, the body and mind get into gear. And when there is physical and mental assertiveness, laziness is averted. And so, confidence and the rest should be cultivated in order to eradicate laziness.

smṛtirālambanasampramoṣasya pratipakṣāḥ|

Mindfulness is the antidote to drifting away from what's happening.

samprajanyaṃ layauddhatyayoḥ pratipakṣāḥ| tena layauddhatyayoḥ
samyagupalakṣaṇāt|

Full awareness is the antidote to day-dreaming and arrogance; with it, both are correctly perceived.

layauddhatyāpraśamanakāle tvanābhogadoṣaḥ tatpratipakṣeṇa ca cetanā bhāvanīyā |

When day-dreaming and arrogance are not brought under control, the flaw of not taking interest occurs. The antidote to it is the cultivation of consciousness.

layauddhatyapraśame sati yadā cittam praśamavāhi tadā"bhogadoṣaḥ
tatpratipakṣastadānīmupekṣā bhāvanīyā |

When day-dreaming and arrogance are brought under control, which brings about mental tranquility, then there is the flaw of being overly engrossed. The antidote to that is to cultivate equanimity.

EXERCISE FOR CLASS THREE

While this class emphasizes the cultivation of mindfulness in relationships, the *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* also includes the importance of “chilling out” and resting when needed in order to prevent burn-out.

This week, take one day off and have a real holiday, either on your own or with your partner, family, or friend. Unplug from the computer, the smart phone, the telephone, the TV, and all other communication devices and just enjoy yourself and the company you keep. Relax! Honoring the “Sabbath” is mandated by most, if not all, of the world’s spiritual traditions.

And consider integrating a weekly day off into your schedule on an on-going basis as an important tool in maintaining and deepening your relationships.

CLASS FOUR: LETTING GO

I. The Perfection of Wisdom

From the *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*:

imaṃ parikaraṃ sarvaṃ prajñārthaṃ hi munirjagau |
tasmādupādayetprajñāṃ duḥkhanivṛttikāṅkṣayā | |

**The Sage has taught this whole set of teachings in order to prepare us for wisdom.
So with a strong desire to end suffering, one should cultivate wisdom. (9.1)**

saṃvṛtiḥ paramārthaśca satyadvayamidaṃ matam |
buddheragocarastattvaṃ buddhiḥ saṃvṛtirucyate | |

**Truth about reality is considered to be of two kinds – deceptive and ultimate. How
things really are is inaccessible to the intellect, for the intellect is said to be
deceptive. (9.2)**

yathā dr̥ṣṭaṃ śrutaṃ jñātaṃ naiveha pratiṣidhyate |
satyataḥ kalpanā tvatra duḥkhaḥeturnivāryate | |

**It is not things that are seen, heard, and known that is being refuted here. It is the
conceptualization of those things as truly existing – which is the cause of our
suffering – that is here repudiated. (9.26)**

II. Embracing Impermanence and Change

A. No One to Blame

From the *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*:

ārogyaṃ divasaṃ cedaṃ sabhaktāṃ nirupadravam |
āyuhkṣaṇaṃ viśaṃvādi kāyo yācita ko'pamaḥ | |

**Today there may be health, enjoyment, and no problems, but life is fleeting and
deceptive and the body is just on loan. (4.16)**

lokaḥ pratyakṣatastāvatsarvaṃ hetumudīkṣate |
padmanālādibhedo hi hetubhedena jāyate | |

Worldly people observe, with direct perception, all kinds of causes. The various parts of a lotus – its stalk and the rest – arise due to various causes. (9.117)

kiṃkṛto hetubhedaścet pūrvahetuprabhedataḥ |
kasmāccepthalado hetuḥ pūrvahetuprabhāvataḥ | |

And what produces this variety of causes? The variety of causes previous to them. And why does a cause bring about its effect? Because of the existence of previous causes. (9.118)

B. No Self to Get Hurt

From the *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*:

yadduḥkhajananāṃ vastu trāsastasmātprajāyatām |
śūnyatā duḥkhaśamanī tataḥ kiṃ jāyate bhayaṃ | |

Fear arises when one encounters something that produces suffering. Emptiness pacifies suffering, so what is there to fear from it? (9.56)

yatastato vāstu bhayaṃ yadyahaṃ nāma kiṃcana |
ahameva ca kiṃcicedbhayaṃ kasya bhaviṣyati | |

If there was anything whatsoever we could call an "I," then fear could arise from any object. But if there is no self at all, who will there be who fears? (9.57)

III. The Problem of Grasping

From Nagarjuna's *Root Verses on the Middle Way*:

saṃnipātastrayāṇāṃ yo rūpavijñānacakṣuṣāṃ |
sparśaḥ sa tasmātsparśācca vedanā saṃpravartate | |

26.5

Contact is the conjunction of the three:

Form, consciousness, and the eye.

And from contact

Arises feeling.

vedanāpratyayā tṛṣṇā vedanārthaṃ hi tṛṣyate |
tṛṣyamāṇa upādānamupādatte caturvidhaṃ | |

26.6

**Dependent on feeling, there is craving.
One craves on account of the feeling.
Because of the craving, one grasps
To the fourfold kinds of grasping.**

upādāne sati bhava upādātuḥ pravartate |
syāddhi yadyanupādāno mucyeta na bhavedbhavaḥ | |

26.7

**When there is grasping,
The existence of a grasper arises.
If there were no grasping
One would be liberated.
There would be no further becoming.**

mametyahamiti kṣīṇe bahirdhādhyātmameva ca |
nirudhyata upādānaṃ tatksayājjanmanaḥ kṣayaḥ | |

18.4

**When thoughts of “me” and “mine” are destroyed,
Regardless of whether the self is looked for outside or inside,
Grasping is destroyed.
Because of the destruction of grasping,
Rebirth comes to an end.**

yena gṛhṇāti yo grāho grahītā yacca gṛhyate |
upaśāntāni sarvāṇi tasmādgrāho na vidyate | | 15

23.15

**That by which there is grasping, the grasped, and the grasper –
They are all pacified.
Therefore there is no grasping.**

IV. Perfecting the Perfections

From the *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*:

adaridraṃ jagatkṛtvā dānapāramitā yadi |
jagaddaridramadyāpi sā kathaṃ pūrvatāyinām | |

If the perfection of giving means freeing everyone from beggary, then how can it be that anyone has ever achieved it since there is still even now poverty in the world? (5.9)

phalena saha sarvasvatyāgacittājjane'khile |
dānapāramitā proktā tasmātsā cittameva tu | |

It's been said that the perfection of giving is the wish to give away everything, along with the karmic results of that act, to every single living being. That's why it is really just a state of mind. (5.10)

matsyādayaḥ kva nīyantāṃ mārayeyaṃ yato na tān |
labdhe viraticitte tu śīlapāramitā matā | |

Where could fish and other beings go to escape being killed? It is regarded as the perfection of ethics when the mind of abstention is acquired. (5.11)

kiyato mārayiṣyāmi durjanān gaganopamān |
mārite krodhacitte tu māritāḥ sarvaśatravaḥ | |

How many bad people, more numerous than space itself, will I need to kill? When the angry mind is slain, then all enemies die. (5.12)

bhūmiṃ chādayituṃ sarvāṃ kutaścarma bhaviṣyati |
upānaccarmamātreṇa channā bhavati medinī | |

**How could you ever find enough leather to cover the Earth?
Just the leather on the sole of your shoe is enough to cover the ground. (5.13)**

bāhyā bhāvā mayā tadvacchakyā vārayituṃ na hi |
svacittaṃ vārayiṣyāmi kiṃ mamānyairnivāritaiḥ | |

And so, although I am unable to exercise control over external phenomena, I will restrain my own mind. What else do I need to dominate? (5.14)

EXERCISE FOR CLASS FOUR

Change is the only constant in life. This week, contemplate the changes that are occurring in your present close relationships and see if you can accept them without resistance, blame, or recrimination. What is the wisest and most compassion attitude you could take in response to these changes?

Secondly, spend some time each day reviewing the most difficult of your past relationships and, through applying the perfection of wisdom discussed in this class, see if you can view even the most traumatic of these transitions with equanimity, forgiveness, gratitude, and appreciation.