

SIX PARAMITAS MOUNTAIN PILGRIMAGE

Mountain pilgrimage is a diligent practice of body and mind; with the head and four limbs touching the ground, one prostrates every three steps. The mouth recites the Buddha's name; the mind also recites the Buddha's name. By being diligent in body, speech, and mind, we eradicate karmic obstacles and transform karma; then blessings and wisdom will increase and everything will be auspicious.

Most people think that Buddhism is just a spiritual reliance and do not know that the foundation of Buddhism is this very mind. The most important thing in practicing Buddhism is to have the right resolve, give rise to a mind of compassion, a bodhi mind, a diligent mind, a mind of great vow. Conventional truth also needs resolve, but its aim is no less than to become rich, to obtain fame, wealth, and sex. Practicing Buddhism is completely different as its aim is to attain the fruit of buddhahood and the merits of the bodhisattva. When the resolve is great, merits are naturally inconceivable.

Mountain pilgrimage is a very meaningful practice; it is a practice that fulfills the six paramitas—charity, precepts, tolerance, diligence, meditation (samadhi), and prajna wisdom. The bodhisattva cultivates the six paramitas and myriad conducts; therefore, cultivating the six paramitas is the bodhisattva way. The meaning of practicing mountain pilgrimage is profound and far reaching; it benefits self and others, helps to extinguish vexations, to attain enlightenment, and resolves to attain nirvana. If we do not know to make a good resolve in our mountain pilgrimage, it is just like doing routine tasks, exercising, having fun with others, or sightseeing. That is not true and proper mountain pilgrimage and does not have great merits.

Charity (Dana) Overcomes Vexations

The first of the six paramitas is charity. Why must we practice charity? Charity is to “give”(renounce). Our mind is filled with vexations and attachments, like carrying some baggage; if we have a mind of giving, we can overcome these vexations and attachments.

There is “supreme giving” “middle giving” and “small giving.” Their merits and retributions are different. It is not easy to give up things, therefore we must begin by fulfilling the practice of “charity.”

“Supreme giving” is to give up all our possessions on earth such as our spouses, children, parents, land, and dwelling. In the past, when Shakyamuni Buddha cultivated the bodhisattva way in order to attain enlightenment and liberate sentient beings, he gave of his skin as paper, his bones as pen, his blood as ink, and even his head, eyes, and brain. Only those who have truly given rise to the supreme bodhi mind can practice such “supreme giving.” Most people cannot achieve this.

If we can give up everything, our karmic obstacles will be eradicated, because karmic obstacles generate from our physical body; our physical body is created from our attachments, and these attachments are the result of our mind’s creation and discriminations. Therefore, if we have a mind of “supreme giving,” of relinquishing our body, naturally, we will not have any attachments. With no attachments, we will have no delusive thoughts. With no delusive thoughts, we will not have karmic obstacles. If we can relinquish everything, we will realize the unconditioned dharma. This is the aim of practicing Buddhism. “Supreme giving is like having a torch before us.” If we can relinquish all our vexations and attachments, see everything with total clarity, it is like having a torch in front of us, illuminating all things, then we can see all things clearly and will certainly not lose our way.

What is “middle giving”? For example, if we have ten million dollars in the bank and took out one or two million, or half of it and donated it to others, that is not “complete” giving. We should practice the Way, meditate, listen to the Dharma as well as practice charity; cultivating these virtues and merits will increase our blessings and wisdom.

When our blessings and virtues increase, we should also do some work for society. Because of blessings and merits, our path becomes brighter and brighter, and blessings will increase more and more. After earning money we should continue to practice charity, make offerings, and cultivate all kinds of good deeds. This is “middle giving.” Therefore, “middle giving is like having a torch next to us.” If we give one measure we will reap one measure; if we given ten measures we will reap ten measures, and gradually relinquish our greed and attachments. Yet, we still have many ingrained bad habits and have not totally renounced our attachments. But our wisdom gradually unfolds. It is like having a torch next to us, but it is not as bright as having a torch in front of us.

“Small giving” is when we have ten million dollars, only give ten thousand dollars and ask the Buddha and bodhisattvas to bless us and our family, hoping for response and psychic powers, for our luck to turn around, for our studies, career, and finances to be favorable. This is like doing business with the Buddha and bodhisattvas and setting conditions. This is “small giving” The aim of this type of resolve is not to cultivate the Way or benefit sentient beings; it is only done for the self. The charitable mind is not sincere or generous enough, giving only because of greed and attachment. This type of giving lacks wisdom. Therefore, “Small giving is like having a torch behind us.” It lacks the light of wisdom, with only darkness before us; we cannot see the bodhi mind, nirvana mind, and the truth of causality and birth and death. When the original mind is deluded, it is like having a torch behind us.

There are three types of giving: material giving, Dharma giving, and giving of solace and courage.

“Material giving” is the giving of money or possessions. For example, when others have difficulties, based on the mind of compassion, we help them with monetary or material goods. However, when we donate money to the Three Jewels, because it is given with a mind of respect, it is called an “offering,” [and is different from material giving.]

“Dharma giving” is to spread the wonderful truth of Buddhism to the multitude so that everyone can hear the Buddha Dharma, be freed from suffering, and attain happiness.

“Giving of solace and courage” is when we see others undergoing difficulties and give them spiritual help and encouragement; or, if we see many forms of injustice, we bravely give assistance so that others will be free from fear and attain peace and joy.

Mountain pilgrimage is also a practice of charity—“offering our sincere heart to all the world is to repay the Buddha’s kindness.” In making the mountain pilgrimage by paying homage and by our repentance, we eradicate all our past karmic obstacles and even make a vow to take on the infinite sufferings of sentient beings. While making our prostrations, we completely ignore any sorrow or joy. Every prostration shows the empty quiescent nature our ability to worship and what is worshipped; subject and object are both empty as we forget both body and mind.

Furthermore, to participate in the pilgrimage, we may take a day off from work and that could incur a loss in pay. We cultivate with the hope of eradicating karmic obstacles and attaining enlightenment and liberation. We use the time of earning money to make the mountain pilgrimage. By offering our time, body, and money, we not only benefit ourselves but also the Buddha Dharma and sentient beings. Therefore, mountain pilgrimage is a practice of charity.

Purifying the Three Karmas is to Uphold the Precepts

The aim of upholding the precepts is to purify the three karmas of body speech and mind. This involves both practice and principle. The layperson should take the five precepts of no killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct, no lying, and no intoxicants. When making a mountain pilgrimage, the mouth recites the Buddha’s name, the ear listens to the Buddha’s name, the body prostrates after every three steps. During this time we do not smoke, drink alcoholic beverages, kill, steal, lie, commit sexual misconduct or other offences. Therefore, making a mountain pilgrimage is to uphold the precepts. The

precepts have form and essence; the essence is this very mind. Yet practicing mountain pilgrimage is not just to uphold the precepts; the mind is devout and concentrated. When the mind is pure, body speech and mind karma are pure. This is to truly uphold the precepts.

In Practicing Tolerance, Motion and Stillness Complement Each Other

Making a mountain pilgrimage is a practice of tolerance. The Chinese character for “tolerance” (忍) is composed of a knife (刀) on top of a heart (心), meaning that even when a knife is placed above our heart, we are not the least bit disturbed. That is “tolerance.” Mountain pilgrimage involves prostrating—the head and four limbs touch the ground that is made of cement or stones; it is painful and exhausting. If the mind that seeks the Way is not firm in its resolve, we will not be able to tolerate the practice, or we may quit half way and lose our aspiration to continue this pilgrimage. Therefore, mountain pilgrimage is a practice of tolerance. Whether it is windy, rainy, or hot, whether we are thirsty, cold, or hungry, we must be tolerant.

Tolerance is very important in Buddhism. There are five levels of tolerance: First, tolerance of restraint; second, tolerance of faith; third, tolerance of compliance; fourth, tolerance of non-origination (uncreation) of dharmas, and fifth, tolerance of extinction.

First, “tolerance of restraint.” “Restrain” is to “subdue.” Whether we encounter good or bad situations, we must subdue our vexations, anger, and even our pride. For example, the first time we make a mountain pilgrimage, our legs are painful and numb; it is true suffering. Some people may even mock us by saying, “This is really boring; wouldn’t you rather sit at home to watch television and enjoy the air conditioning? Why do you want to make this pilgrimage?” When facing such situations, if we find it difficult to practice tolerance, and give rise to vexations, ignorance, and regression of our bodhi mind, then our skill in practicing “tolerance of restraint” is not sufficient. Or, if someone praises us by saying, “You are very diligent; you have truly given rise to the bodhi mind,” we should also be tolerant so that we do not give way to pride. Therefore in cultivating

the Way, we must be tolerant both in practice and in principle. In practice, we must tolerate all external obstacles. In principle, we must subdue the mind's vexations and continue on our prostrations.

Second, "tolerance of faith." From our mountain pilgrimage we gradually give rise to the joy of the Dharma, the mind is refreshed and happy, we are able to face difficulties with tolerance, our faith in the Buddha Dharma is firm, and we no longer have any doubts. This is "tolerance of faith."

Third, "tolerance of compliance." From practicing repeated mountain pilgrimages, we cultivate the patient acceptance of all hardships with an unmoving mind. In times of either good or ill fortune, we can naturally comply with the principle with a peaceful and tolerant mind.

Fourth, "tolerance of non-origination of dharmas" By unceasingly practicing this Dharma method, the level of our tolerance increases. Tolerance of non-origination of dharmas includes tolerance of sentient beings and tolerance of dharmas. Tolerance of dharmas is not to be affected by external circumstances such as natural disasters, earthquakes, wind, rain and snowstorms, and to be able to face difficulties and irritations with tolerance. Tolerance of sentient beings is to bear all the mind's vexations, or all external states brought about by all sentient beings and remain content. Therefore, tolerance of non-origination of dharmas is to realize that external circumstances and the mind's vexations arise and cease and are illusory,... understand that all dharmas fundamentally neither arise nor cease. Therefore, our mind of tolerance is always unmoving and we truly achieve the tranquil state.

Tolerance of non-origination of dharmas is to reach the principle through practice, transcend from the mundane to the divine, and attain buddhahood. From tolerance of restraint, tolerance of faith, and tolerance of compliance through our mountain pilgrimage, we gradually subdue our pride, sloth, karmic obstacles, and other bad habits, constantly move forward without retrogression so that the mind is free from grasping and

rejecting and from deluded thoughts,... until there is not even the thought of tolerance, and we reach a perfectly calm and peaceful state. The pure and lucid mind will then manifest and we arrive at the tolerance of non-origination of dharmas. Although this is the highest stage in our practice, we still need to advance further on the principle, continue to study diligently so that we finally arrive at the tolerance of extinction—then this mind will completely enter the unconditioned. This is the supreme stage in cultivation. Therefore mountain pilgrimage is one of the best Dharma methods for cultivating the Way.

Tolerance Brings Peace of Mind

Meditation is also a cultivation of tolerance. It is not easy for us to maintain a tranquil mind and body. If we have not practiced deeply or disciplined ourselves, body and mind cannot become calm during meditation; we cannot be free from all kinds of delusive thoughts, confusion, and drowsiness. Therefore, we must penetrate mountain pilgrimage, going from practice to principle, and practice meditation, then we will be free of delusive thoughts or confusion. Furthermore, if we can make a great vow to take on the sufferings of sentient beings, our merits will be inconceivable because our mind is boundless, with no concept of self or others, right or wrong; then we will extinguish greater vexations.

We can see that mountain pilgrimage and tolerance paramita are in accord with each other. Practicing Buddhism is to be tolerant. Whether we are laypersons or monastics, if we are skillful in practicing tolerance, we can be successful in everything that we do. If we can face all discords in the family, the workplace, or society with tolerance, that is cultivating the Way. People with deeply ingrained (bad) habits always find fault in everyone and everything, creating vexations everywhere; naturally their minds cannot calm down and they cannot practice the Way with a peaceful mind. Therefore the *Paranibbana Sutra (the Sutra of Bequeathing the Teaching)* says, “Tolerance is a virtue; the precepts and asceticism cannot surpass it. One who can practice tolerance can be called a “powerful great being.” Mountain pilgrimage is an ascetic practice; it is also a practice of tolerance. If we can be tolerant, and our mind has no vexations, it is extremely

meritorious. Therefore, we must be diligent and never regress, make great vow, practice the great Way, then we will attain supreme bodhi and nirvana.

Achieving Merits Through Diligence

In practicing Buddhism, we must be diligent. Cultivating charity, precepts, tolerance, meditation and prajna, and even the 84,000 Dharma methods, all need a mind of diligence. Otherwise, if we are not steadfast in our practice, neither our studies nor our career and cultivation will be successful.

Mountain pilgrimage is also a practice of diligence. From our initial resolve to enroll in the mountain pilgrimage, there may be certain obstacles to overcome—we may have business to attend to, or have to attend social events with friends; these can extinguish our resolve to participate in the pilgrimage, making us miss a good cause/opportunity. Therefore, we must let go of all things and make a firm resolve to practice mountain pilgrimage; this is a kind of diligence.

We must not only be diligent, but must have “right diligence.” If the direction of our practice is wrong, not only will there be no benefits, but we will incur bad secondary effects. For example, some people go dancing or play video games all night, or even play mahjong continuously for three days and three nights—this may seem very diligent, but it is not right diligence; therefore, there will not be any good retribution. Even though people pursue these pleasures untiringly without sleep, their karmic obstacles will increase more and more, until they finally plunge into the evil realms.

In Buddhism, the “Four Right Efforts” is similar to “right” diligence. “Let good thoughts that have arisen increase; let good thoughts that have not arisen quickly arise; let bad thoughts that have arisen be eradicated; let bad thoughts that have not arisen never arise.” Mountain pilgrimage is to give rise to the bodhi mind, repent, and eradicate karmic obstacles. Prostrating every three steps overcomes our own vexations. We must also make great vow to take on the sufferings of all sentient beings. After perfecting our

merits, we should dedicate them to our parents, teachers, dear ones, and enemies in the Dharma realm. This is the great mind of compassion and right diligence.

If we wish to achieve success in our cultivation, we must abide by what the Buddhist sutra says: “Not interrupting our practice at all hours of the night (day and night?)” With this mind of diligence, we are mindful of the Buddha, the Dharma, the sangha, the precepts, charity, cultivate the six paramitas, not only constantly think of the Dharma, but truly put it into practice. As the ancients say, “Reciting with the mouth; thinking with the mind; practicing with the body.”

Therefore, we should have right diligence in everything that we do. Mountain pilgrimage is a method of diligent practice. We must also make a long term resolve. If we regress and regret after we encounter even small difficulties, and no longer dare to go on a mountain pilgrimage, that is not being diligent. Not only should we be diligent now, but in life after life we should make great vow, give rise to the mind that seeks the Way, the mind of great resolve that never regresses. That is true diligence. Just as Shakyamuni Buddha, who perfected the Buddha’s wisdom and merits after three asamkheya kalpas; that is the greatest diligence.

There are innumerable stories of the Buddha’s diligent cultivation. According to the Buddhist sutra, in Shakyamuni Buddha’s past life, when he was the Immortal Lo Ji, he diligently meditated unceasingly night and day until “a bird built its nest on his head and the grass grew above his knees.” The bird laid eggs in the nest on top of his head and flew back and forth, but he paid no attention to it. The grass encircled his knees, yet his mind did not move a single bit. He let go of body and mind, remained tranquil and unmoving, without a single thought. That is right diligence, great diligence. Therefore, the Buddha had infinite samdahi power. This is the result of daily diligence and effort.

The Sincerity of the Charitable Prince Moves the Heavens

In another lifetime, when Shakyamuni Buddha was the great charitable prince, he wanted to give away everything in the palace. His father, the king, thought, “This is disastrous! If you give away all the treasures of the palace, how can I remain king?” Therefore he expelled the prince from the palace. The prince had practiced the bodhisattva way, the six paramitas and myriad conducts life after life. He saw that people were suffering from hunger because of the drought, and many had starved to death, but because he was exiled from the palace, he had nothing to give these people. What could he do? He suddenly remembered that the Dragon King had a mani pearl that could grant all of one’s wishes. He vowed to get this pearl from the Dragon King so that he could deliver the people from their suffering and cultivate the bodhisattva way.

Although the prince did not have the miraculous powers of the deva eye or the deva foot, his sincerity moved the King of the Ocean, who stole the mani pearl from the Dragon King and offered it to him, but the Dragon King immediately discovered this and used his miraculous powers to regain the mani pearl. Without the mani pearl, the prince could not save the people who were starving to death, so he decided to empty the ocean and go to the Dragon King’s palace to ask for the mani pearl. He hauled the ocean water away pail by pail; it was more difficult than moving a mountain; one cannot accomplish that in one lifetime because the mountain cannot change. It would need several lifetimes to finally remove a mountain. But how could the ocean be emptied? Each time it rained, the waters would increase again. But the prince did not fear the hardships. Day and night, he continued to haul the water away until he became exhausted and emaciated, but he did not rest and finally collapsed. This moved the four Heavenly Kings, who came to help him. The Heavenly Kings had great miraculous powers; within a few minutes, they had emptied half of the ocean’s water. This worried the Dragon King, because if the ocean dried up, all his family would die; so he offered the mani pearl to the prince. This diligent act of charity is right diligence, great diligence.

Therefore, no matter what we do, if we are diligent, we will be successful. The great successes achieved in society by industrialists and businessmen are all the result of diligent effort and hard work. Even when starting from nothing, one can gradually

achieve success. Cultivating the Way is just like that. Mountain pilgrimage involves diligence of both body and mind. The body prostrates every three steps, the mouth recites the Buddha's name, the mind also recites the Buddha's name. The three karmas of body speech and mind are all diligent. When the three karmas are pure, we can eradicate karma, transform karma; blessings and wisdom will increase, and everything will be auspicious. Therefore, we must continue to make unceasing effort, make a great resolve, and cultivate the great Way. That is right diligence.

Concentrate the Mind, Attain Samadhi

Meditation (samadhi) is one of the six paramitas. The “Three Liberating Doctrines” are: precepts, samadhi, and prajna—Mahayana, Theravada, and other schools of Buddhism all stress the importance of samadhi. The practitioner of the Pure Land school also practices reciting the Buddha's name and prostrating to the Buddha. What is important is to concentrate the mind. “Every thought arises from the mind; every thought is not apart from this mind; every thought reverts to our self nature.” This is cultivating samadhi.

Mountain pilgrimage is also a method of cultivating samadhi. Some people may doubt this by saying “Prostrating every three steps, the body is moving, how can there be stillness/samadhi?” Actually, in all our actions, and at all times and places, we can cultivate samadhi. When making a mountain pilgrimage, we let go of self and others, of right and wrong, gain and loss, grasping and rejecting, kindness and enmity, see through all things and let go of them, single-mindedly reciting the Buddha's name, hearing the Buddha's name, without a single deluded thought. The mind that is reciting and what is recited are totally clear. Even though we prostrate every three steps, the mind is free from the concept of prostrating. Body and mind are one, thus arriving at the state of stillness. If we are thinking of this and that, or if our body is making the pilgrimage but our mind is trading stocks, visiting friends, taking care of household chores, there will be no merit. It is the same with meditation: if only our body is making effort but the mind is not, even if we sit for a thousand or ten thousand years, it will be futile.

The merits in making a mountain pilgrimage are great. Because we have made a great resolve and great vow, which embody charity, upholding the precepts, tolerance, diligence, and single-mindedness, we are free from deluded thoughts or confusion; we are immediately cultivating samadhi. With samadhi we will obtain response. In the past when Master Xu Yun made the vow to practice mountain pilgrimage, due to his samadhi and sincerity, he moved Bodhisattva Manjushri to come and protect the Dharma, obtained response and communicated with him. Therefore, where there is samadhi, there is response. The Confucians call this “sincerity.” Buddhism calls it “samadhi.” It can truly produce response. Response can be deep or shallow. The shallow is called “responsiveness.” When we reach the state of obtaining a deeper response, that is to attain miraculous powers. Therefore, making a mountain pilgrimage is also cultivating samadhi.

When the Mind is Empty and the Environment is Still, Prajna Arises

In the six paramitas, prajna is the wisdom of emptiness. It is different from conventional intelligence and knowledge. It is to realize that all dharmas are conditionally arising and empty in nature, to realize triple emptiness. When we prostrate during the mountain pilgrimage, there is no worshipper and no worshipped one. Body and mind are empty and cannot be grasped. That is prajna. Therefore, in making a mountain pilgrimage we must first understand prajna, then we can advance from practice to principle. The mind is empty and the environment is quiescent; absolute reality will then manifest and we can truly attain liberation.

Mountain pilgrimage is the coming together of causes and conditions. If we cling to the thought that it has great merit, with the notion of a self, a person, or of sentient beings, then there is no prajna. Therefore, in mountain pilgrimage we must not be attached to form, know that all dharmas conditionally arise and are empty in nature, and not crave the merits of mountain pilgrimage; our empty nature will then manifest.

Therefore, in practicing charity, precepts, tolerance, diligence, and meditation/samadhi, there must be prajna/wisdom. When practicing “charity” we do not cling to merits, achieve “triple emptiness”—without the notion of the giver, the receiver, and the gift. When upholding the precepts, there should no thought of the one who upholds and that which is upheld. Diligence means that we should never cease to pay homage to the Buddha and should unceasingly recite the Buddha’s name. In our practice, we should be diligent. In principle, this mind is empty of subject and object, with neither the concept of the one who recites nor that which is recited, with neither the one who honors nor that which is honored, without a single thought, and arriving at no thought. That is true diligence, great diligence. It is the same in practicing “samadhi”—not clinging to stillness or samadhi joy, not clinging to any states, maintaining one thought until the end and continuing our efforts. Without prajna wisdom—when there is only samadhi and no wisdom, it is very difficult to attain liberation and to realize the true reality.

Practicing mountain pilgrimage, we obtain blessings, wisdom, and a great compassionate mind; we are in harmony with the bodhisattva’s “compassion, wisdom, great vow and conduct.” Making a resolve to practice mountain pilgrimage is not to benefit ourselves; it is to wish for all merits to be dedicated to all our dear ones and enemies, to our teachers, superiors, and sentient beings in the Dharma realm. This is the mind of “great compassion.” This is to be in accord with the Bodhisattva Guanyin. We must have “great vow;” it must be perfected in all kinds of weather; we must vow that “If the hells are not emptied, I vow not attain buddhahood.” We must pay homage until the end—not only now but continue to practice this dharma method unceasingly, accumulate merits to dedicate to all sentient beings. Furthermore, encourage others to join in this practice; this is to be in accord with Bodhisattva Ksitigabha’s great vows. Mountain pilgrimage is a great practice. One prostration every three steps, body, speech, and mind karma are pure, eradicating the mind’s vexations. This is “practice.”

After accomplishing all of the above, the mind is free from obstacles; we act without acting, think without thinking, universally liberating all sentient beings, yet without the notion of liberating any sentient beings—that is wisdom. Practicing mountain pilgrimage

and cultivating the Way with this viewpoint, we will truly obtain the benefits of the Dharma in this life.

Going from “language prajna” to “meditation prajna,” and from “meditation prajna” to “reality prajna,”—that is wisdom. Therefore, in mountain pilgrimage, we go from practice to principle; it is replete with the six paramitas, compassion, wisdom, great vow and great conduct. One dharma is replete with all dharmas—one in all and all in one—this is the mind of all of you listening to Shifu teaching the Dharma. All wisdom, merits, and six paramitas are generated from this mind. If this mind does not adhere to the practice, the mind of stillness and *wu wei* will not easily manifest. Going from practice to principle, and then practicing meditation, the mind of *wu wei* will promptly manifest.

If everyone understands the principle of the six paramitas mountain pilgrimage, they can obtain the benefits of the Dharma and realize practice and principle without obstacles. If we only know practice and not the principle, we can only increase a few blessings. If we cling to blessings, we will delude our original mind. If we do not understand that practice and principle do not obstruct each other, if we have mistaken views, we may feel that “meditation is enough,” that “single mindedness is everything, that there is no need to do anything more—we can hold this view only if we have truly achieved supreme samadhi. If we do not have samadhi skills, we must make preliminary efforts. Mountain pilgrimage is the best preliminary practice in cultivating the Way. When we have made this preliminary effort, we will gradually achieve success in our cultivation.

