

THE PERFECTION OF WISDOM

Quotes from the Theravada Tradition

Wisdom is the chief cause for the practice of the other perfections. Without wisdom, giving and so forth do not become purified and cannot perform their functions. Without wisdom there is no achievement of vision, and without the achievement of vision there can be no accomplishment of virtue. One lacking in virtue and vision cannot achieve concentration, and without concentration one cannot even secure one's own welfare, much less the lofty goal of providing for the welfare of others.

Wisdom has the characteristic of penetrating the real specific nature (of phenomena) like the penetration of an arrow shot by a skilful archer; its function is to illuminate the field of experience, like a lamp; its manifestation is non-confusion, like a guide in a forest; concentration, or the Four (Noble) Truths, is its proximate cause.

Wisdom is mentioned immediately after renunciation: a) because renunciation is perfected and purified by wisdom; b) to show that since concentration is the proximate cause of wisdom, there is no wisdom in the absence of meditation (which requires renunciation or letting go).

Great compassion and skilful means (directed toward liberation) are conditions for the perfections. Skilful means is the wisdom which transforms giving (and the other nine perfections) into requisites for awakening. Through wisdom a bodhisattva brings him or herself across (the stream of suffering), through compassion he or she leads others across. Through wisdom one understands the suffering of others, through compassion one strives to alleviate their suffering. Through wisdom one destroys all attachments, but because of compassion, one never desists from activity that benefits others. Through wisdom one is free from "I-making" and "mine-making," through compassion one is free from lethargy and depression. Through wisdom and compassion one becomes one's own protector and the protector of others.

Wisdom opposes greed, hatred and delusion in so far as greed, hate and delusion create blindness, while knowledge restores sight.

Adapted from *A Treatise on the Paramis* by Acariya Dhammapala

A fool conscious of her foolishness is to that extent wise.

But a fool who considers himself wise is the one to be called a fool. (Dhammapada 63)

Like someone pointing to treasure

Is the wise person

Who sees your faults and points them out.

Associate with such a sage. (Dhammapada 76)

One is not wise

Only because one speaks a lot.

One who is peaceful, without hate, and fearless

Is said to be wise. (Dhammapada 258)

"All things are impermanent."

Seeing this with wisdom,

One becomes disenchanted with suffering.

This is the path to purity. (Dhammapada 277)

Wisdom arises from [spiritual] practice;

Without practice it decays.

Knowing these paths to gain and loss,

Conduct yourself so that wisdom grows. (Dhammapada 282)