
The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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We can meditate for a little while, as usual. To meditate, you should sit in a comfortable and relaxed posture. It is important to sit in a relaxed manner, because if you are physically tense, your (inner energy) channels will be knotted. And if your channels are knotted, your mind will be uptight.

The meaning of meditation is to train one's mind single-pointedly on the object of meditation – to habituate and accustom it to a virtuous state. For example, if our mind is under the control of attachment, we have to free it and place it in a state free from attachment, then accustom it through meditation to that virtuous state, free from attachment. Or, if our mind is under the control of anger, we have to free our mind and place it in a state free from anger, then accustom and habituate the mind to that state. That is what meditation means.

A sign of whether our meditation is successful or not is whether our mind remains under the control of delusions. If we manage to free our mind from the control of delusions such as anger and attachment, and habituate it to virtuous states free from anger and attachment, then that is a sign that our meditation is successful. Everybody wants and needs to attain such virtuous states of mind.

The purpose of meditation is to achieve control over the mind. Instead of the mind being controlled by anger and attachment, it can actually be controlled by oneself. The meaning of the term 'my mind' will only be accomplished when we have freed the mind from the control of anger and attachment. Only when we have done that will the mind actually do what we want it to do. Only then will it become perfectly serviceable.

So, please bring the mind home, focusing it inwards, and trying to get it into a state free from attachment and anger. Then, trying to remain in that state, focus single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. We can practise this meditation for a few minutes. (*Pause for meditation.*)

Geshe-la says please excuse him if he has woken you up from your meditative equipoise!

It is very important to take good care of one's mind, to keep it in a happy and virtuous state. This means that we have to analyse the mind and become aware of the way it works. From this, we will find that whether we are happy or not depends on our way of thinking. If our mind goes in a certain direction and we develop certain emotions and start to think in a particular way, we will find that it generates unhappiness. On the other hand, we find that if our mind goes in another direction and we generate a different point of view and think in a different way, we will generate happiness. So, whether one experiences happiness or unhappiness depends on one's way of thinking.

There are some people who say that one has to just let the mind go wherever it wants, and follow whatever comes up. If one leave the mind completely uncontrolled, following whatever comes up – if one practises in that way, then the mind may go in a direction that makes it unhappy. Then, it will be very difficult to control the mind. If we have practised letting the mind run wild and following whatever comes up, later on when we realise that it would be much better to tame the mind because it has been giving one too much trouble, we will find that we have great trouble calming the mind, because we have practised letting it run wild for such a long time.

It is very important to have a clear and calm mind, along with a healthy body. We know that in order to have good physical

health, we need to take good care of our body. In the same way, to have good mental health, we need to take good care of our mind.

If we analyse the way our mind works, we will find that in each situation there are two ways we can react. One way will cause us unhappiness and pain, and the other will create happiness. We can say that there are two kinds of power within the mind. One power has the ability to cause suffering and go into the wrong direction. The other power has the ability to cause happiness within the mind. So if, in a certain situation we find that our mind has reacted in such a way that it is disturbed and unhappy, then as soon as we become aware of this, we need to let go of that way of thinking. Instead, we need to think in the other direction, which causes happiness and which can protect the mind from unhappiness. The more we become accustomed to this practice, the more we meditate in this way, the easier it will become to change from a disturbing state of mind to a correct way of thinking that causes happiness.

It is important to understand these two kinds of potential or power within the mind, and not to lose faith in the power of the mind to change from unhappiness to happiness. If you lose faith in yourself and in your ability to change your mind, you will start thinking, "There's nothing I can do about my situation" and you become completely depressed, and the situation will not change. So, first of all, one must not lose one's faith in one's ability to change the mind.

We must also not lose faith in the power of the mind to change. If we have been practising for some time, we might come to a point where we think, "My mind never changes. I have tried so many things, but it never changes". We must not fall into such a negative way of thinking, but remind ourselves that the mind definitely has the power to experience inner happiness, and that this comes about through the correct way of thinking.

We must try to put the mind into a virtuous and positive state, through the power of generating love and compassion. This is what we really need. Virtuous states of mind like love and compassion are the friends we really need.

If we have these virtuous states of the mind – cherishing other people, having love, compassion and affection for others – then, when we meet others, automatically we will feel some warmth for them, and we will see value in the other person. We will regard their happiness as important. With such a state of the mind that values the happiness and well-being of the other person, we will ourselves experience happiness, because the more one generates those positive states of the mind, the more one will experience happiness oneself.

Also, from the point of view of others – friends, society, and so forth – one will have a good reputation. Others will say things like, "He's a good person. He's always kind, respectful and caring". If you think about what do the people around you – your girlfriend or boyfriend, for example – really need? They need happiness. They need our affection and care. Once we show affection and care for those around us, for our friends, they will see us as a nice person, a good person who has benefited them, and they will be kind to us in return. So, having this virtuous attitude of love and compassion and affection is very important.

It is said that love and compassion are the root of all happiness. If we have love and compassion in our mind, that will stop the harmful mind and harmful intent. Having love and compassion in the mind will stop us harming ourselves and others. It will generate happiness for ourselves and happiness for those around us. That is why it is said that love and compassion are the root of all happiness.

The happiness that everyone needs – ourselves, our girlfriend or boyfriend, our parents, and so forth – comes about through love and compassion. If we act in a loving and compassionate

manner, other people will put their trust in us, and they also will start acting in a loving and compassionate manner, and gain our trust in return. Having trust into each other is the basis of good human relationships. If your actions are based on love and compassion, then trust will arise and the relationship will become stable, but if the relationship is based on attachment then the relationship won't be stable.

If we have love and compassion in our mind, we will be happy, affectionate and loving towards others, and we will automatically like the people around us. And those around us, our friends and so forth, will like us back. Someone who acts in a loving and affectionate manner, a warm person, is always liked. Thus, wherever we go, we will be happy, and the friends we meet with will also be happy. On the other hand, if we act in the opposite way, in a selfish and angry manner, then wherever we go we will experience unhappiness and the people around us won't like us. We won't like them, and they won't like us. So, generating these positive states of mind is very important.

One must check up through one's own experience which practice is beneficial for one's mind. There are many different opinions around that will try and persuade us that certain things are a certain way, even though they are not, or that things are completely get changed around. We shouldn't listen to misleading information from outside, but develop and trust in our own wisdom, the wisdom that knows what is beneficial and what is harmful for our mind.

It's like in a relationship with a partner. I [Geshe Doga] normally advise my students that, even though in a partner relationship it's difficult to be completely free from attachment, at least they should try to have more compassion and love for the other person than they have attachment. From our own experience we can see that if a relationship is based on strong attachment, it won't turn out very well and will be unstable. For example, we know that if we meet somebody on the street and our mind develops strong attachment for that person, this causes us distress and unhappiness. So, even though it might be difficult or impossible at the moment to have a relationship without any attachment, one should try, even when attachment arises, to have more love and compassion than attachment.

Please meditate and check up on which states of the mind you find to be conducive to your happiness – which states of the mind do you find beneficial, and which do you find harmful. Then, try to hold those virtuous states of the mind that you find beneficial, and try to accustom and habituate your mind to those to stabilise them. Harmful states of the mind – you just try to hit them on the head! The way to develop those virtuous states of the mind is explained in this text that are going to go through, *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*. We will talk about how to develop virtuous states of the mind at great length in the weeks to come.

Do you have any questions?...

(Question inaudible) The question (from the student) is, what are the results of lies?

The future result will be that we will find ourselves in a situation where another person is saying the same thing as us, but we may be completely ignored while the other person gets all the attention, trust and belief. So, even though both people are saying the same thing, as a result of having told lies in the past, one person is not believed and is not paid any attention. If we tell lies, people won't believe what we say in the future.

In this life also, if we tell a lot of lies, people will not believe what we say. In the end, even if you tell the truth, people will say, "He just told a lie". Lying is regarded as not a good thing in all religions. So, even though there are slight differences in what Buddhists and Christians regard as the 10 non-virtuous actions, lying is universally (to be avoided). If you want to be truthful and honest, you can't tell lies. On the other hand, of course, if one's aim is to deceive others, then you have to tell

lies!

Next question: What to do in a situation where one's partner has broken the trust, but there are common responsibilities, such as children.

If somebody breaks your trust, normally what happens is that you lose your trust in that person. If that person lies to you and deceives you, you lose trust in them. Of course, if you share a responsibility such as children, you cannot immediately separate from the other person. It is good if you engage in efforts to mend the relationship and renew the trust. It is good to approach the other person and explain why you feel deceived, and that you are experiencing a loss of trust. Try to explain in a reasonable manner to the other person what they are doing, and the harm they are creating to your relationship and to your children by their actions. Hopefully, the other person will see their faults and promise you not to act like that in future and not deceive you again. Don't get angry, but talk with the other person in a reasonable manner.

As explained before, please bring the mind home, not letting it fall under the control of the disturbing thoughts such as anger and attachment. Then, having focused it one hundred percent within, concentrate single-pointedly on the mantra while reciting it.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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