
The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

15 August 2001

PLEASE NOTE: Due to problems with the tape recording of this teaching, the transcript has been supplemented with hand-written notes taken by Damien Busby and Christian Walsh.

We will do a little bit of meditation as usual. Please sit in a relaxed posture. As we have mentioned many times before, the purpose of meditation is to accustom the mind to beneficial, positive and virtuous states, and not let it fall under the control of the disturbing thoughts such as anger. So, we place the mind in a virtuous state, free from disturbing thoughts.

If we analyse our mind and see the various directions in which it can go, we find that it can go in a direction that causes us suffering. So, we have to prevent our mind going in that direction in future, and not let that mental habit build up, because it causes us suffering. The more we accustom our mind to that (negative) state, the more difficult it will be to stop it later on.

If we analyse the way our mind works, we find that sometimes our mind becomes unhappy just by meeting with certain objects. When our mind meets these objects, it causes us great suffering and distress. Yet what we really want is to fulfill our mind's potential for happiness, to attain true inner happiness by thinking in the correct way. So, if we find our mind going in a direction that inhibits its positive potential and actually furthers the potential to cause us suffering, we have to stop it from going further in that direction and turn it to a positive direction.

Now, we will all bring our minds back home, letting go of the disturbing thoughts that cause the mind to suffer. Focuses the mind inwards single-pointedly, initially in a non-conceptual state, then direct it towards the coming and going of the breath, focusing single-pointedly on the breathing. (*Pause for meditation.*)

Please arise from your meditative equipoise!

If we don't establish our mind in a virtuous state, then it will easily get upset, disturbed, angry, and irritable. But if we accustom it to a virtuous state, then we do not get easily disturbed or upset, but remain calm and peaceful.

Now we will return to the text, *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*. Previously, we completed the homage. Now we will explain the verse of the author's pledge to compose the text, which is to explain the practices of Bodhisattvas. The Buddha is the source of all temporal and ultimate happiness. Temporal happiness refers to the happiness of higher rebirth in the human and god realm. Ultimate happiness refers to complete enlightenment. Depending on the teachings of the Buddha one can achieve the two purposes, the purpose of self and the purpose of others, and reach the omniscient stage where one has purified all ignorance and knows all phenomena, knowing all the things to be practiced and to be abandoned. The purpose of others is to achieve the two form bodies of the Buddha through which one can help others and the purpose of self is to achieve liberation. The perfect practices taught by the Buddha are the source of well being and happiness and every virtuous action and every happiness comes from Buddha. These practices bring about higher rebirths in god or human realms, or temporal happiness. Achieving both of these types of happiness is dependent on thoroughly knowing the Dharma as taught by the Buddha.

Here it says the learner's path arises through the Buddha. But there is also another way where the Learner's path precedes the

stage of becoming a Buddha. This is to show that the Buddha was, in fact, an ordinary being who became enlightened by practising Dharma. Every being has the potential to be a Buddha.

Every disturbing emotion within a sentient being can be removed. The disturbing states of anger and attachment are not of the same nature as the mind, in the same ways that clouds are not of the same nature as the sky. We know that the clouds can be blown away to reveal the sky. In the same way, we can understand that, while the delusions temporarily obscure our Buddha nature, they can be removed. So, the reason why every being has the potential to be enlightened is because the disturbing emotions can be removed from the mind.

We need to understand that the nature of our mind is completely clear and pure. While the mind can temporarily be obscured by anger and attachment, in nature it is still pure, like clean, clear crystal. The way to think about the nature of the mind is that this clear nature is like a mirror. Whatever appears before the mind is reflected in the mind, because of the mind's innate clarity.

To reduce the temporary obscurations of the mind, one has to accustom oneself to the pure, clear and virtuous states of the mind. The intrinsically pure nature of the mind has this pure and clear nature. The mind can be coloured by whatever virtuous or non-virtuous factors arise in it, in the same way that cloth can be coloured by blue or yellow dye. Whatever state arises in the mind, the mind will take on that tone. It will reflect whatever state arises.

It is said that the cause for all the problems that one experiences is self-cherishing, whereas the cause for all the happiness that one experiences is cherishing others. To understand this, one just has to look at the Buddha. One has engaged in self-cherishing, but has reaped only suffering. Buddha, however, has engaged in cherishing others, and has reached full enlightenment. So it is important to see the benefits of establishing virtuous states of mind.

Perfect Buddha's arise in dependence on perfect teachings, and this accomplishment comes from knowing the practices. Buddha first listened to the Dharma, and learned what was to be practised. He learned that what is needed to become enlightened is that one must generate love and compassion for every sentient being, as strongly as that of a mother for her only child. With this very strong love and compassion, the Bodhisattva makes the vow to obtain enlightenment for the sake of all beings. After making this vow, they engage in the Bodhisattva practices. To engage in the Bodhisattva practices, one must also study the 'Three Baskets'.

In order for disciples to engage in these practices, the author says he will explain the Bodhisattva's practices for becoming enlightened for benefit of all sentient beings. The Bodhisattva practices take a long time, many lifetimes, in fact many aeons.

If we look at our present situation, we will see that we are in a situation that is conducive to the study and practice of Dharma. However, if we do not have such good conditions, we will find it difficult to practise. So, to find the good conditions for the many lifetimes needed to achieve enlightenment, we have to practise the Six Perfections.

For example, to have good food and good living conditions in future lives, we need to practise generosity now. But having good material conditions is not enough. We also need a physical body that is conducive to practice. This comes about through the practice of morality. Then, to have the support of community and friends, we need to practise patience. Even in this life we can see that the practice of patience wins us friends.

The cause of accomplishing all the aims we set out to achieve is the fourth perfection – perseverance. The fifth and sixth

perfections we also need, even when we have all the outer conducive conditions. The fifth and sixth perfections – concentration and wisdom – are the cause for us not to be led astray. The fifth perfection – being focused in a clear meditative state – prevents us from being led astray by good physical conditions, friends and so forth, because as was mentioned above, the practice of meditation means to focus the mind 100% inward on a mental state free from delusions. In this way one will not be led astray by good outer conditions. The practice of the perfection of wisdom prevents our mind going into wrong direction and falling under the control of mistaken views.

Of the Six Perfections, the first three – generosity, morality, and patience – accomplish the purpose of the others. By the practice of generosity – by giving away gifts, presents, and material goods, and also by giving love – we accomplish the purpose of the others. The practice of morality accomplishes the purpose of others because it is basically practice of not harming others, so it is a cause for their happiness.

Patience also accomplishes the purpose of others because it causes us not to retaliate but to willingly accepting difficulties. Liberation is attained by practice of wisdom. But we can't apply wisdom if the mind is distracted or disturbed. So in dependence on the 5th perfection of concentration absorption we can generate and practice the sixth perfection of wisdom. These two perfections accomplish the purpose of oneself-liberation. The fourth perfection is important for both the completion of both the purposes of others and of oneself.

The first three perfections are important for us to practise Dharma both in this lifetime and in future lifetimes. If you practise generosity, everybody will like it; if you practise morality, everybody will like it; if you practise patience, everybody will like it. So, relating these to our every day practice will be very beneficial.

As usual, we will sit in a relaxed posture and calm our mind as we did at the beginning of the teaching. Then, as we chant the Buddha's mantra, we keep it focused on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

Transcribed from tapes by Gabrielle Thomson

Edit 1: Mary-Lou Considine

Edit 2 & Check: Ven. Tenzin Dongak

Edited Version

© **Tara Institute**