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# *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*

## Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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Please sit in a relaxed posture so that we can meditate for a little while as usual. After sitting in a comfortable posture, put the mind into a relaxed state. On the basis of first sitting in a comfortable meditation posture, we can then work with our mind to free it from the control of the disturbing thoughts.

As long as our mind is under the control of the disturbing thoughts, we will not be able to utilise and harness its power, which is usually dispersed by the disturbing thoughts and distraction. In order to harness the power of the mind, we must concentrate it single-pointedly on one object – the object of meditation. When the mind is concentrated in this way – single-pointedly on the object of meditation – its power is focused and concentrated at one point, rather than being dispersed.

Lama Tsong Khapa said there is great significance in generating a single-pointed state of mind, because when our mind is under the control of the disturbing thoughts, it will be very difficult for us to generate positive states of the mind. If we generate this state of single-pointed concentration, then virtuous states of the mind will follow. But, as long as our mind is obscured by the disturbing thoughts, the positive states of mind are also obscured. Therefore, it is very important to free one's mind from the disturbing thoughts. If we generate this single-pointed state of mind, it will help us to generate virtuous states of mind.

So, as we explained before, while sitting in the meditation posture, try to bring the mind back home, focusing it inwards and not letting it be distracted by the disturbing thoughts. First, try to focus the mind 100% within, and then focus it on the coming and going of the breath. When we try to concentrate on the coming and going of the breath, it shouldn't be a case of the subject (oneself or one's mind) looking at the object (the breath). Rather, the subject-mind should enter the breath – it should become one with the breath. We will try to meditate in this way for a few minutes. (*Pause for meditation.*)

Thinking about the purpose of meditation will make it very clear to us, and drive home to us the importance of having a single-pointed mind, which is not possible if we don't control our mind. If our mind is well controlled and focused single-pointedly, we can generate great mental happiness. But, as long as we don't control our mind and cannot focus it in a single-pointed way, then mental happiness won't arise, and the power of our mind won't be harnessed but will remain dispersed.

Now we will go to the text, *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*, where we are at the second verse, where it says that abandoning one's homeland, which is a cause for the generation of the three poisons, is a practice of Bodhisattvas. The root text says:

Attached to your loved ones you're stirred up like water.  
Hating your enemies you burn like fire.  
In the darkness of confusion you forget what to adopt and discard.  
Give up your homeland –  
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

If we don't give up the attachment to our homeland, then our dharma practice will suffer. If we cannot give up attachment to our homeland, it means we have not given up attachment to that which appears to us as pleasant, or aversion to that which appears to us as unpleasant. Through being attached to one's homeland and through having this discriminating attitude, one's mind will be clouded by ignorance, which will make one

forget what is to be practised and what is to be abandoned – that is, virtue is to be practised, and non-virtue is to be abandoned.

If, during the course of our dharma practice, we generate attachment to people who are near and dear to us, to our loved ones, then that will stir us up like water. The meaning here is that by generating very strong attachment to those we regard as close to us and as being our loved and dear ones, we will stir up the 'water in the ocean' of cyclic existence through this attachment.

On the other hand, generating anger and aversion towards people you dislike and whom you regard as enemies will burn you in the fire of anger. Fire has this nature of being hot and burning – anger does the same thing to the mind in which it arises. It burns that mind and the person who is getting angry. Also, it destroys the roots of virtue, all the merits one has accumulated.

When the text says "In the darkness of confusion you forget what to adopt and discard", it means that even if a person knows how to practice the dharma, once ignorance arises in the mind, the mind becomes dark through the power of ignorance and confusion. Even a person who normally knows what to do and what not to do, what to practise and what not to practise – they will completely forget what they knew before.

So, abandoning attachment to people one likes and abandoning aversion and anger towards people one dislikes becomes very important. We need only to analyse what gives our mind happiness and what gives our mind suffering. In general, we become attached to people we regard as close to us, and we generate aversion towards people we regard as enemies, people whom we don't like. Even then, sometimes we generate anger towards the people we like.

Our anger is generated within the mind. It is like fire. Fire burns up wood. In the same way, the anger generated in the mind burns up mental happiness. The function of anger is to destroy and eliminate the happiness in the mind. It burns up our happiness.

It is difficult to abandon attachment to all our friends. So, in balancing attachment and affection, it is better to have more affection and less attachment. If we have a boyfriend or girlfriend, it will be very difficult to abandon our attachment completely. However, we need to be careful that, of the two feelings of affection and attachment, the attachment has less power. There must be more affection for the other person than attachment.

Attachment is a misleading mind that projects more qualities onto the object that it really has. We all know that, first, attachment will project all these qualities onto the object. After this, it's as if one's mind becomes completely crazy and is not able to stay without that object even for one moment. But we also know that these qualities projected by attachment are not all necessarily there. Attachment has this characteristic of exaggerating the pleasant qualities of the object to the point where it makes the mind completely crazy with desire for that object.

In the same way, anger is regarded as a wrong mind. Anger also has an exaggerating quality, but in the opposite direction – it exaggerates the negative qualities or faults of the object of our anger. In this way, our mind gets more and more disturbed.

Both of those minds – anger and attachment – are what are called wrong minds or misleading minds, which distort reality. They don't let us see reality as it actually is.

Of the two, anger and attachment, the disadvantages and faults of anger are more easily seen. The disadvantages and faults of attachment are subtler, so it is harder to recognise the way in which attachment gives us unhappiness and suffering.

Attachment is a mind that exaggerates the qualities of the

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object. It builds the object up in such a way that it appears as if that object is completely indispensable for one's happiness – that if one doesn't possess that object or is not close to that object, it will be impossible for one to attain happiness. The mind becomes completely drawn to that one object. Attachment tells us that this is the one object that will make us completely, 100% happy, that this is where all our happiness lies. In this way, the mind becomes more and more fixated by and obsessed with the object.

Because attachment is an awareness that exaggerates the qualities of the object and distorts reality, we believe that the object is permanent, and we want to hold onto it until the end of time. But the object is actually of a different nature. Even though attachment wants to hold onto the object and wants it to be permanent and everlasting, the object is actually constantly changing and will eventually leave us. This is inevitable.

Once the object has separated from us, it feels as if we will never be happy again, as if our whole foundation has collapsed. When a table has had two of its four legs taken away, it falls over. This is how one feels when one is separated from the object of one's attachment. However, when we have been separated from our object of attachment or try to give up attachment to the object, even though at the beginning it appears as if this is a very painful process that will take away all one's happiness, there are various methods of dealing with this.

Attachment is this misleading mind that tells us happiness will only be found from the side of those various objects, and it completely fixates the mind on those objects of desire. One places one's hopes for inner happiness on those outer objects, and somehow expects to gain inner happiness from them, which of course is never forthcoming. We become locked into a cycle of dissatisfaction in which we are constantly separated from the happiness we are looking for. When we are separated from the object of our attachment, because the mind is so fixated on that object and has placed so much hope in it, then we experience the suffering of separation. The greater the attachment, the greater the suffering of separation when one separates from the object.

If one has no attachment, there is no problem. When one experiences the object and is close to it, that's fine. But, when one is separated from the object, then it also doesn't matter, because one is not attached to the object and doesn't experience the suffering of separation.

Attachment can make one's whole life miserable, because so much of our life focuses around attachment to boyfriends, girlfriends, and so forth. Then, through the force of strong attachment, one constantly experiences not only the strong suffering of separation, but also the suffering of dissatisfaction and instability.

There are many faults and sufferings caused by attachment. After recognising the disadvantages and faults of attachment, we will recognise that to generate real happiness, there are better ways of thinking. There are other ways to look for happiness, so we try to train the mind in those other ways of thinking, and of looking for happiness. This is what one should do.

Out of attachment and affection, it is important to have more affection and love than attachment. If we have more affection and love than attachment, then we will also experience less suffering, such as the suffering of separation. For example, if your girlfriend leaves you and goes off with somebody else who is more handsome, has more qualities and so forth, instead of experiencing suffering, you will be happy!

Similarly, a mother will have more love than attachment towards her son. When the son finds a nice and beautiful girlfriend, the mother may feel jealous but for the most part she will be happy for the son. The more beautiful the girlfriend, the

more happy the mother will be.

And the other way around – a father will have more love and affection than attachment for his daughter. If the daughter finds a handsome boyfriend, the richer and more handsome the boyfriend, the happier the father will be for his daughter. Of course, it is possible that he also will be a little jealous of the boyfriend!

If we can have more affection and love for the other person than attachment, our relationship with that person will be better and more stable. Many people have a relationship based initially on attachment, and after some time they may break up. But their attitude towards each other may have changed, and they may now regard each other with affection and love, rather than with attachment. So, actually, their relationship has become much better than before, when it was based on attachment. This is a very common experience.

Our relationships with other sentient beings depend upon us. They depend on whether we can change our mind to positive ways of thinking. When we understand the psychology of the mind, and recognise that whenever we just follow attachment we are devoid of happiness in all our activities – eating, drinking, working, going here and there, and so forth – then we can analyse our own mind to see how this has come about. Even though one may have many possessions, or be in a very good situation – with a nice house, nice car, nice partner, children, sister, brother, parents, all those things – in the midst of all of this, one's mind remains unhappy.

If we analyse what is making the mind unhappy – even though we have all these possessions and a good outer situation – we will realise that the mental unhappiness is given to us by those disturbed states of mind, the disturbing emotions such as attachment and anger and so forth. If, instead of letting one's mind be taken away by these delusions, one can take control of one's own mind and place it in a virtuous state, and accustom one's mind to a virtuous state, then this is the meaning of meditation.

This is where the importance of meditation comes in. After having recognised the suffering given to us by attachment, if we sit down and put on the yogic belt of a meditator, and just sit down and meditate, our mind will become free from attachment. The attachment will flow away from our mind, and it will attain a calm and a peaceful state. This is definitely possible.

I [Geshe Doga] am not going to explain more about the faults of attachment, because it might seem as if I am being too critical. There is still this view that if we don't have attachment, we won't be happy – so I'd better stop now!

About three years ago while I was teaching about attachment, there was a young girl who got very worried and asked me: "Do we have to give up all of our attachments?". I knew that she was very worried that if she gave up all her attachments, she would be giving up all of her happiness. So I reassured her by saying, "Oh no. It's OK if you keep some small attachments". She was very happy then, and told me I was very kind!

We can focus the mind inwards, not letting it be distracted by the disturbing thoughts, and then concentrate single-pointedly on the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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