
The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas

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We will practise a little bit of meditation as usual. Please sit in a relaxed physical posture, if possible in the full vajra position. If that is not possible, then it is good to sit in the half-vajra or half-lotus position. The body should be straight, and the hands should be in the mudra of concentration, folded below the navel.

If we sit in a good physical posture during meditation, it is possible for other people to generate faith when they see us. It is possible that they will think, "That looks very nice, very good", and it can have a calming effect on their mind. But apart from the effect the posture has on the other people, it also makes our own mind calm and clear when we sit in that position.

Sitting in the posture, we should bring the mind to a positive, happy, undisturbed state. Everybody needs such a state of the mind. But how will such a state of the mind come about? Only through one's own effort, the effort of applying certain mind-training techniques.

We have to apply mental techniques for inner happiness. Such techniques exist, and if we ask ourselves whether it is possible for us to apply those techniques for inner happiness, the answer is 'yes', it is possible for everyone to apply these techniques. Everyone wants to attain positive states of mind, and there are techniques to attain such states of mind. We can apply these techniques, and we have the potential to attain the result. Applying the techniques to attain inner happiness, to attain positive and virtuous states of mind, is the supreme way of training the mind.

To place the mind in a positive state, we have to take care that it does not fall under the control of the disturbing thoughts.

Now we will practise for a few minutes. While sitting in a comfortable posture, bring the mind back home, focusing it 100% inwards, and not letting it fall under the control of the disturbing thoughts, which try to distract the mind to the outside. Then, having placed the mind within, concentrate the mind single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. This has to be done in a relaxed and gentle manner. With clear mindfulness and stability, focus on the coming and going of the breath for a few minutes. (*Pause for meditation.*)

Please arise from your meditative equipoise.

If we practise a little bit of meditation, it will be possible for us to identify which kinds of thought disturb the mind. It is possible that, during meditation, we will experience the peace that comes with the calming down of disturbing thoughts.

We may also observe that out of this peaceful state, a certain thought will arise that has the power to disturb the mental peace we have attained. At that moment, we can observe, "This is one of the mental states that is contrary to mental happiness and peace. This is one of the thoughts that disturbs mental happiness". This disturbing thought might be about something pleasant or unpleasant. There are many choices. But practising meditation allows one to gain insights into one's own mind, and identify which mental states are conducive to happiness and which mental states are not conducive to happiness.

One may experience mental states in which one never feels happy, regardless of what one is doing – walking around, sitting, eating, meeting good friends, or being alone. There is a certain mental state that brings about continuous dissatisfaction and unhappiness. If we can identify this mental state that causes our unhappiness, we will have made a great step in our Dharma practice, because it is the mind that

determines whether we are happy or whether we have suffering in this life.

Last time (in reference to the text, *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*), we introduced the three kinds of beings with the three capacities. The verse we did last time dealt with the being of small capacity, which mainly refers to a person who is primarily concerned with the happiness of future lives. The verse reads:

The Able One said the unbearable suffering
Of bad rebirths are the results of non-virtuous karma.
Therefore, even at the cost of one's life,
Never creating negative karma is the practice of a
Bodhisattva.

Previously, we talked about the meditation of impermanence and Taking Refuge. While we meditate on impermanence and Refuge, we remember the sufferings of the lower realms, which will generate fear within one's mind. When this happens, one should realise that just having that fear is not enough.

So, we need to ask, "Where do those sufferings come from? What is the cause of those sufferings?". When a sick person understands they have a disease, that they are sick, it is of no benefit to them to just worry about it. What they have to do is to analyse the cause of the sickness. One goes to the doctor for a check-up, and when the doctor has identified the cause of the sickness, he or she will prescribe a medicine that one has to take as prescribed. Only in this way will one be freed of that sickness.

In the same way, if we ask where the suffering of the lower realms, the suffering of death and so forth come from, they do not arise from no cause at all. They also do not arise from a disparate cause, but from a concordant one. In this verse, the Able One, the Buddha, said that the sufferings of the lower realms arise from non-virtuous karma. He identified the cause as non-virtuous karma. Therefore, it is the practice of a Bodhisattva never to create negative karma, even if it were to be at the cost of one's life.

The Buddha identified non-virtuous karma as the cause of the suffering of the lower realms. If we relate this to The Four Noble Truths, the first truth is knowing about the suffering of the lower realms. Then we have to analyse the cause of those sufferings. The cause of those sufferings was identified by the Buddha as being non-virtuous karma. This is the second truth, the truth of the origin of suffering.

Non-virtuous karma is that which has to be abandoned, the origin of suffering, and this is done by practising virtue, by practising the ten virtuous actions. By practising the ten virtuous actions, one stops the sufferings of the lower realms, which is the (third) truth of the cessation of suffering. The actual practise of the ten virtuous actions would be the practise of the path (the fourth truth) to cessation.

So, the being of smallest capacity aims for rebirth as either a human or in one of the god realms, and the method for attaining this is the practice of the ten virtuous actions.

We can apply this method of analytical meditation to other problems, such as headaches. If we have a headache, we can investigate the cause, which is non-virtuous karma. The cause of non-virtuous karma is the delusions, and the cause of the delusions is ignorance. If we apply this way of investigating to other problems, it can be very beneficial. If you distract your mind from the problem with this analytical meditation, then automatically you will have fewer headaches (*Geshe-la laughs*).

The mind is quite funny, because sometimes it grasps very strongly in one direction. But if you start thinking about something else, it loosens the grasping. This can even be beneficial in the case of a headache.

The text refers to something called 'happy suffering' –

something which is suffering, but because of the way one views it or because of one's state of mind, it can still be perceived as happiness.

Before, we said that the path to be practised by the lower capable being is that of abandoning the ten non-virtuous actions – three of body, four of speech, and three of mind. The three of the body are: killing, stealing and sexual misconduct. The four of speech are: lying, slander or divisive speech, harsh speech and idle gossip. The three of the mind are: covetousness, ill-will, and wrong view. Abandoning these ten non-virtues becomes the practice of the ten virtuous actions.

The first of these ten non-virtuous actions is killing. To abandon killing is very important, because having a non-harmful attitude – abandoning harmful intent, cruelty and anger – is the root of world peace. It is also the essence of the Buddhist path.

In Buddhism, there is a special emphasis on not harming others. When Buddhism was prevalent in India, it was known as the religion of compassion, the religion of peace and non-violence. So there is a certain significance to saying that abandoning harmful intent towards others is the essence of the Buddhist path.

From the point of view of peace in the world, having a harmful attitude is really what destroys peace. Peace is based upon an attitude of not harming others. It depends on having compassion and love.

We say that love and compassion are the root or essence of the whole path, because if we have love and compassion for another sentient being, then in our mind, anger and harmful intent for that sentient being will not arise. By having love and compassion in our mind, we abandon harmful intent and anger towards that sentient being. So, love, compassion and a non-harming attitude are the essence of all the Buddhist paths, and are the root of peace in the world.

If we kill another sentient being, we cut short their lifespan, which means that in the next life we ourselves will experience a short lifespan. We will experience in a future life the same result, the same suffering that we have given that other being now.

There is also another kind of karmic result, the environmental result, which is that we will be born in a place where food and medicine have very little power, because by killing another sentient being we have harmed their life energy. By harming their life energy now, in a future life, the environmental result will be that we will be born into a place where even the conditions that normally support life will have little power.

Before, I forgot to mention that when one kills another sentient being, that being experiences a lot of fear at the time of death. So in a future life, one will be born in a country where there is a lot of killing, stealing, and so forth. The environment will be very uncomfortable. Wherever one goes, one will be worried about losing one's life or one's possessions.

On the contrary, in a country where all people practise non-harmfulness, one will be able to live very comfortably, with a relaxed mind and much less worry. Everybody wants to live a happy life, without fear, so it is very important to make an effort to abandon harmful intent. This is the real object of our prayers. We should pray, "May I be able to completely abandon harmful intent".

From one's own point of view, generating the mind of wanting to harm somebody – which, for most of you, probably will not happen! – but in case it does happen, remember that by generating such a mental attitude, one's own happiness is harmed. So, one should make a strong aspiration and strong prayers not to let harmful intent arise within the mind.

Also, if we harm others, we have to spend a lot of time in prison. Even from the point of view of common law, in most

countries, people who kill or steal have to go to prison. There are also prison sentences for sexual misconduct. And all know that nobody likes a fierce person who has a very harmful and violent attitude to others.

To accumulate the complete karma of killing, four conditions need to be completed. The first condition is the motivation, the second is the action, the third is the object, and the fourth is the completion. The object of the action of killing needs to be a sentient being other than oneself. So, if one kills oneself, one will not create the complete karma of killing.

There are three parts to the motivation. Firstly, there is the motivation or the intention of wanting to kill. Secondly, the intention of wanting to kill needs to arise from any of the three types of delusions – anger, attachment or ignorance. For example, if one thinks it is OK to kill, that there will be no suffering result from that action, then that would be killing out of ignorance. Thirdly, one needs to unmistakably recognise the object that one wants to kill. If one makes a mistake with regards to the object of killing, this also would not create complete karma.

So, within the motivation, there are these three parts – the recognition, the motivation or the intention, and the force of the three delusions.

The action of killing can be performed either by oneself or by somebody else acting upon one's orders. Even if we order someone else to kill, we still accumulate the same karma. The completion is when the life force of the other person or being is cut short, when the life of that sentient being ends.

It is said that the only good quality of negative action is that it can be purified. Negative karma can be purified, and the way it is done is by what is called the four powers. Next time, we will discuss how we purify negative karma using the four powers.

So, if you have some spare negative karma you want to get rid of, you can put it in the small room over there (*laughter*). That is the storeroom of non-virtuous karma of a previous practitioner (*more laughter*)!

As was explained at the start, bring the mind back home, focusing it inwards and not letting it fall under the control of the disturbing thoughts. Then, concentrate on the name mantra of the Buddha.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNA YE SOHA

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