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# *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*

## Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

### Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

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Does somebody have a watch for Geshe-la please? So, he won't give it back now! (*Laughter.*)

We will meditate for a little while as usual. Sit in a comfortable and appropriate physical posture and place the mind in a relaxed state.

Everybody wishes for physical and mental happiness and mental peace. We should think about our meditation time in this context – that it is a time for physical and mental happiness and inner peace.

It is important to understand that if we look for happiness only by concentrating on physical happiness, which we normally do, and neglect mental happiness, there will be no way we can achieve real happiness. To achieve real happiness, we need to work towards mental happiness.

After sitting in a comfortable and correct physical posture, we need to free the mind from the control of disturbing thoughts. As long as the mind is controlled by such thoughts, our meditation will not go very well. We will not be able to focus on the meditation object and see the nature of the mind clearly. So we have to try and free the mind from the control of the disturbing thoughts, and place it in a state free from their control.

Then, focus the mind 100% within, bringing it home and not letting it fall under the control of disturbing thoughts that try to distract it outside. After having placed the mind 100% within, focus it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. This has to be done with full concentration because if, from the beginning, we don't start our meditation with 100% concentration, it will not develop properly. To develop concentration properly and purely the technique has to be done correctly from the very start. (*Pause for meditation.*) Please arise from your meditative concentration.

Of the two alternatives – having a good quality (shorter) meditation or having a long meditation session – it is more important to have a good-quality meditation. This reason people who have been meditating for a long time can't concentrate properly is that they didn't do the meditation well from the beginning.

If we had a choice between having many possessions, or of having only a few possessions of very good quality, we would want the few possessions of very good quality. In the same way, it is more important to have a short meditation of good quality, which can become longer over time.

We shouldn't lose courage and enthusiasm, because the way our meditation practice develops is up to us. It is important not to lose courage or get depressed and give up, but to maintain our courage. Understanding how our mind works can be of great interest and, over time, this will enable us to attain greater inner happiness. If we become happier people, we can share this with others. In the company of others, we will be able to laugh and make jokes, and other people will also laugh, and everybody will be happy. We all know that if there is someone around us who is always frowning, we too can get depressed. So it is important to be happy and to share that happiness with others, and to treat each other well.

Having this attitude of cherishing others and wanting to share our good fortune with them is an inner jewel, our most prized possession. Finding ourselves in a good material situation and wanting others to enjoy the same situation – this attitude is our most precious possession. Wherever a person with this attitude

goes, he or she will be appreciated and be of benefit to society. This attitude is also a benefit of meditation, which is good to keep in mind.

It is important to treat each other well, particularly the person with whom you live and with whom you spend the most time. For a boy, his girlfriend is important, and for a girl her boyfriend is important. Since they are both so important to each other, they need appreciate each other, and treat each other well. If both parties treat each other well, some trust will develop. If each appreciates and values the other and shows that through their actions, a certain trust will develop between these two people and they will become more comfortable with each other. Whatever they do, they will be happy and relaxed in each other's company and their relationship will develop well.

The basis of this is having a good mind – not letting it fall under the control of inappropriate, disturbing mental attitudes, but to place it in a virtuous, beneficial, positive state. This is the essence of meditation.

Previously (regarding the text *The Thirty-seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*), we covered the motivation of the small capable being – understanding that, by practising the ten virtuous actions, one will close the door to the lower realms. But then we saw that even if one was to attain a higher rebirth in one's future life, this is not satisfactory, so one develops the motivation aiming for complete liberation. This is where we left the text last time.

To understand why samsaric happiness is without essence and unsatisfactory, it is important to meditate on the shortcomings of samsara (cyclic existence). This will lessen one's grasping for the happiness of cyclic existence, which will make one's life happier.

The first of the six shortcomings (of cyclic existence) is that there is no definiteness within cyclic existence. For example, one can be happy in the morning but unhappy in the evening; or one can be unhappy in the morning but happy in the evening. All other situations in cyclic existence are just as uncertain. It is also important that we understand that there is no definiteness in cyclic existence with respect to our relationships with other people.

The second disadvantage is that one will find no satisfaction within cyclic existence. No matter how much samsaric happiness one enjoys, there is no end to it – one will never gain satisfaction from such types of happiness. For example, no matter how much alcohol or beer one drinks, there will never come a time when one will have attained complete happiness. Also, people who drink a lot of beer tend to get very big stomachs. The bigger their stomach gets, the more they have to drink to be satisfied! (*Laughter.*)

The same with money. If you have \$100, you will want to have \$1,000. Then if you have \$1,000 you want \$10,000. And once you get the \$10,000, you want \$100,000. Once you have the \$100,000, you aim for \$1,000,000! There is no end to the desire and attachment. In fact, the more one accumulates, the more attachment is generated. The more attachment is generated, the more difficult it becomes to satisfy that attachment. If one has a lot of attachment, one needs to do more to satisfy it. This brings more complications.

Who is happier – a person with less desire or a person with a lot of desire? The person who has a lot of desire may be able to fulfil his or her aim, but it doesn't stop there. After having engaged in all kinds of complicated actions and achieving that aim, one has not really attained satisfaction. Rather, one has more desire and the complications one has to go through to fulfill that desire will be greater, and one will have to endure many more difficulties.

On the other hand, if one has less grasping, one's mind can

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abide happily and peacefully, even if one has few possessions. Satisfaction is attained within the mind, not through the accumulation of outer possessions. If we try to attain satisfaction by the accumulation of possessions, we will not be successful. The more our desire increases, the more worries and complications come with it. For example, if somebody attains \$100,000, but the idea comes into their mind that \$100,000 is not enough and that they need \$200,000 and take out a loan for another \$100,000, then taking out that loan for \$100,000 will bring many worries with it. In short, the rule is that the more desire one has, the more complications, worries and problems come with it.

Also, if we cling to whatever we have earned and achieved only for our own purpose, grasping very strongly to it, it will not bring us happiness and it will not be useful for others because we cling for it for our own sake. Yet it will be gone sooner or later, so there is not the slightest benefit in clinging to it. Contemplating the disadvantages of cyclic existence in this way will reduce the grasping attitude within our mind.

The point here is that the fault does not lie with possessions or with money. Rather, the fault lies with our *attachment* to possessions and money. This is an important point to understand. It is a good thing to have money. Money benefits oneself and makes one's life comfortable, and it can also benefit others. The fault lies with one's attachment to money.

Some people have so much attachment – they change partners constantly, but never find satisfaction. Maybe they marry two, three, or four times and after their fourth marriage they are no longer able to find a good husband (or wife) because it is too late. The first husband wasn't good enough, the second husband wasn't good enough, the third husband wasn't good enough, there was some problem with the fourth husband, and after separating from the fourth husband it's too late. They can't find a good husband anymore. I [Geshe Doga] once met somebody like this at Chenrezig Institute. This person said, "I can't find a new partner, I'm constantly alone".

Therefore, it is very important to establish a good relationship with your partner from the very beginning. Whether the partner is satisfactory or not really depends on the level of one's own desire and satisfaction. Some people stay together for fifty or seventy-five years, never changing partners. They marry and are still together after seventy-five years. If you have found another person who likes you and is attracted to you and loves you, then it really depends upon your own mind whether this relationship will be satisfactory or not.

The third fault of cyclic existence is that one has to again and again give up one's body. At the moment, we are quite attached to our body, and perhaps we think that it wouldn't be too bad if we could stay with this body all the time we are in cyclic existence. But it is not like that. One has to continually give up one's body and take a new one. Not only does one have to give up the body to which one is attached again and again, but one has to also again and again take rebirth in cyclic existence.

The fifth disadvantage of cyclic existence is that one is constantly going from high to low and from low to high. We can see this clearly. People who are completely unknown one day may be famous the next. Other people are famous one day, but are completely forgotten the next. Also, within our own life, we can observe how we go from high to low, and from low to high. Actually, it changes moment by moment.

Someone may be completely unknown, and then during a soccer game may shoot a few goals. All at once, they become world-famous. This player goes from being completely unknown to becoming very famous. Other people may be president one day then a nobody the next. Keeping this in mind, one doesn't need to feel depressed if one is at a low-point, because one should know that things will not continue like that. In the same way, if one enjoys a high position or a good

situation, one shouldn't be too proud, because it is definite that this also will not last.

The sixth fault of cyclic existence is that one goes through cyclic existence with no friends but totally alone.

Contemplating the disadvantages of cyclic existence by meditating on those six faults we just mentioned is related to the four noble truths (that suffering exists, that suffering has causes, that there is a state free from suffering or liberation, and that there is a path to liberation).

Next time, we will talk about five benefits of suffering. The Bodhisattva Shantideva explained that suffering has five qualities or benefits, which we can go through next time.

As explained at the beginning, please bring the mind back home, 100% focusing it inwards, and freeing it from the control of the disturbing thoughts that try to distract it outside. Having done that, concentrate the mind single-pointedly on the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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