
The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas

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First, we will do a bit of meditation as usual.

What is the purpose of meditation? If we cannot focus the mind, we cannot utilise its potential and power. Because we cannot focus, even though we may start a certain activity or project, we find we cannot complete it. Even if we generate strong self-confidence, because the mind is scattered, we can't maintain that strong self-confidence, and eventually that self-confidence wanes. It is like a powerful river – if water in the river were diverted and spread out over a large flat area, the river's power would be lost. In the same way, if the mind is scattered, then we cannot utilise its potential and power – we cannot complete projects, and so we cannot maintain our self-confidence.

While sitting in the correct meditation posture, we have to bring the mind 100% home, focusing it completely within. In this way, we can attain single-pointedness mind. The mind also will become clearer and more stable, and our self-confidence and strength of mind will increase. Don't let the mind fall under the control of the disturbing thoughts, which distract the mind towards wrong objects, but focus it 100% within, then concentrate it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. This helps prevent the mind from being distracted towards the outside. If we do this well, we will also gain some mental peace, strength and intensity of focus. (*Pause for meditation.*) Please arise from your deep meditation.

It is important that one takes care of one's mind, and controls it. This is done with the help of mindfulness and introspection. Mindfulness is the function of not forgetting the object of meditation, of always being mindful of the object of meditation. Introspection is the part of the mind that checks up upon the actions of the three doors of body, speech and mind, and what those three doors are doing.

We must check up on changes that happen in our mind, and whether a change is for the better or for the worse. Is the mind happier than it was last year, or has it become unhappier? It is important to be clear about where one is at, whether one's mind has progressed or degenerated, because if we engage in the practice of meditation over, say, a year, and the mind becomes unhappier and unhappier, it is very important to be aware of this.

One has to control the mind and take good care of it. If it happens that we practise meditation, yet our mind becomes unhappier and unhappier, this is a sign that we have not been taking good care of the mind, and have not been controlling it. We have to make our mind better – more positive and . If we make our mind better and more positive, we will also become more honest and more straightforward.

If this doesn't happen, and a person is dishonest and not very straightforward, they will use the power of their mind and their material possessions for harmful purposes. However, what should happen is that, through the practise of Dharma, one is able to use one's mind and material possessions for the purpose of one's own happiness as well as for the happiness of others. Therefore, it is important that one straightens out one's mind, making it good and positive, and thereby also becoming honest and straightforward.

If someone has a good mind, then you can say that he or she will have a good life. A good life doesn't depend on having good outer circumstances. A good life is defined by whether someone has a good mind or not. If someone has a good and happy mind, and is honest and straightforward, that person

will be beneficial for others. Other people will recognise it and say, "That person is trustworthy. That person is honest". People will start to trust that person, and in this way that person's happiness will increase. If he or she is good to and honest with other people, they will reply in kind. They will be good to that person, and like that person, and respect that person for his or her honesty. They trust that person.

So, this person will be happy and others will be happy, because the more people that like one and have affection and trust for one, the happier one's life will be. If we practise meditation, this positive development of our mind will happen.

Last time, we talked about the various faults and disadvantages of cyclic existence. We went through the six disadvantages of being in cyclic existence. This meditation is called meditating on the disadvantages or faults of the truth of suffering. So, since one we have been reborn within cyclic existence, today we will talk about the five benefits of experiencing problems.

1) The great Bodhisattva, Shantideva, said that if we don't experience the problems of cyclic existence, we wouldn't generate renunciation. This is the **first benefit** of experiencing the problems of cyclic existence - without experiencing problems, we wouldn't generate renunciation. By experiencing problems, we become tired of them, and generate the wish to be free of them. We generate the wish to attain complete liberation from all problems.

When we generate such a motivation (of renunciation), the mind will have less neurotic grasping. The more one generates the wish to attain liberation, the less neurotic grasping in one's mind. And the less grasping one has within the mind, the happier and more peaceful one's life will be.

If we try to compare the life of a person who has developed renunciation to the life of one with no renunciation, we see they are completely different and beyond comparison. We all know someone with a neurotic grasping mind, and how much suffering that person experiences – more worry, many problems, and so forth. On the other hand, a person with less grasping in the mind has a happier and more peaceful mind.

So, one benefit of experiencing the problems of cyclic existence is that they direct us towards liberation. By experiencing these problems, we generate the wish to be free from them. Once we have that wish, we start to look for liberation, and only when we start to look for liberation will we attain liberation.

2) The **second benefit** of experiencing problems is that they will reduce our pride. If someone has a strong problem with pride, then the more problems he or she experiences, the more humble he or she will become.

3) The **third benefit** of experiencing problems is that they will teach us to be apprehensive about non-virtuous karma. When we experience problems, we also have think about the cause of those problems. When we look for the cause of those problems, we arrive at non-virtuous karma. Therefore having experienced problems will automatically make us apprehensive about generating further non-virtuous karma. This motivation is what (a Dharma) practitioner needs.

4) The **fourth benefit** of experiencing problems is that they teach us to be happy about creating virtue, because what one wants is happiness, and the cause of happiness is virtuous karma. Therefore, one will become enthusiastic, happy and joyful about creating and accumulating virtuous karma. While we are in cyclic existence, we have a lot of opportunities to create various karma. There is no benefit in saying that one is always creating non-virtuous karma and not doing anything about it! It is up to you to change your course of action and create virtuous karma.

5) The **fifth benefit** of experiencing problems is that they will induce us to generate compassion for other sentient beings. We should always remember that other people are experiencing

exactly the same sufferings and problems as us. So, whenever we experience problems, we can more easily empathise with the situation of other sentient beings and generate compassion for them.

So, experiencing problems and suffering can bring these five benefits. Then, suffering become purposeful. Instead of just experiencing problems without any purpose apart from suffering, when we experience problems it will begin to have a purpose. This completes the section on the disadvantages of cyclic existence.

Meditating on the cause of one's problems is a profound and important meditation to do when we experience problems and sufferings. We can investigate and meditate on where those sufferings come from. Then we arrive at the conclusion that the cause is non-virtuous karma. Through this understanding, because we don't want any further suffering, we will automatically generate apprehension about the cause of suffering, which is non-virtuous karma. This profound and important meditation gives purpose to our experiencing problems.

In the context of the Four Noble Truths, we can use the analogy of an illness. When someone is sick, first they have to know what kind of sickness he or she has. The sickness has to be identified, and it also has to be acknowledged that there is an illness. Secondly, the sickness has to be abandoned. In order to reach a state of well-being free from the sickness, one needs to take the medicine.

In the same way, first, we have to understand the First Noble Truth of suffering. This is the 'sickness' that has to be acknowledged. Then we come to the cause of the suffering, which is the Second Noble Truth – the Noble Truth of the origin of suffering, that which has to be abandoned or the cause of our problems. We have to recognise what must be abandoned. The Third Noble Truth, the Noble Truth of cessation, is the abandonment of suffering and the causes of suffering, and the attainment of the state of happiness. Finally, we need to practise, or to take the 'medicine'. We need to practise the Fourth Noble Truth, or the Noble Truth of the path.

When we look at the relationship between the Four Noble Truths, we see that the way they are listed here is in order of the results first. First we have suffering, and then the causes of suffering. Next, we have cessation or liberation from problems, and then the path that leads to that cessation. The reason why they are listed in an order contrary to the order in which they are generated within the mind is because this is how we have to understand them. That is the way we have to meditate on them. First, we understand the problem, then we understand the cause for the problem. Next, we understand what we have to abandon, which leads us to the wish to be free of problems. Then, we understand that there is a certain medicine we have to take to attain that freedom.

Within the Noble Truth of the origin of suffering, we have two parts. One is karma, and the other is the delusions. So, the causes of our suffering are karma and delusions. Actually, the delusions are the cause of karma, and the cause of the delusions is the ignorance grasping at the self, the root of cyclic existence. To overcome the root of all problems (the ignorance grasping at the self), one has to meditate on the truth of the path. One has to generate the wisdom realising selflessness, and one has to meditate on or train in the three higher trainings.

So, to overcome the root of all problems – the ignorance grasping at the self – we have to generate wisdom realising selflessness and practise the higher training of wisdom. This wisdom realising selflessness depends on us first generating concentration or training in the higher training of concentration. In turn, the development of concentration depends on the practice of ethics, so one has to train in the higher training of ethics or morality.

Thus, to realise emptiness effectively, we need to train in the three higher trainings of morality, concentration and wisdom. In the same way, if there's a certain form we want to see and if that form is too far away to see clearly, we have to first bring it closer to us so that we can see it. But if we hold it in front of us and if our hand and arm are shaking, we will also not see it clearly. In this example, the form held in the hand symbolises emptiness, and the eye is the wisdom realising emptiness. The hand that holds the form (emptiness) signifies concentration, and the rest of the arm signifies morality.

As we see in the example, if the arm is not stable and shakes, our eye cannot see clearly what is held in the hand. In the same way, if our practice of morality is shaky, this will affect our concentration, and if our concentration is not stable, this will affect our wisdom realising selflessness, which will not be very clear or effective.

On the other hand, if we have a stable arm or a stable practice of the higher training of morality, on that basis, the hand can hold the form very still. In the same way, our concentration can be strong and stable on the basis of the higher training of morality.

The second higher training of concentration depends on the higher training of morality. If the higher training of concentration is stable and strong, then the wisdom based on that concentration can also be clear and effective. When the hand is very still, the eye can see clearly what is held by the hand. In the same way, if concentration is strong, the higher training of wisdom based on that higher training of concentration will be very clear, sharp and effective, and can oppose the ignorance grasping at the self, which is the root of all problems.

However, all of this depends on having the good foundation of a stable arm, or having a stable practice of the higher training of morality.

If we want to subdue our mental continuum, we must do it with the practice of the three higher trainings. If we explain how that works, then first of all, the higher training of morality will subdue the coarse disturbing states of the mind. At the moment, the mind is scattered and distracted, particularly towards outside objects. So, if we have a good foundation in the higher training of morality, this will subdue those coarse mental distractions. If we have a good higher training of morality, the mind will already be more focused inwards, and will already be more stable. What distracts our mind most is the disturbing thought of attachment. The mind doesn't get distracted too much by anger, but what distracts the mind most is the disturbing thought of attachment. So, having a good foundation in the higher training of morality will subdue those coarse disturbing thoughts.

After having subdued those coarse mental disturbances, and the mind is already focused inwards and quite stable. At this stage, there are two levels of mental distraction to overcome – a coarse and a subtle one. The coarse level of distraction we have to overcome is mental sinking, which we overcome through the higher training of concentration. The subtle distraction which is still to be overcome is the ignorance grasping at the self. This we will overcome with the higher training of wisdom.

So, this is how we subdue the mind with the help of the three higher trainings. In case somebody asks you, "How do I subdue my mind with the three higher trainings?", this is what you would say. You can also show off a bit and say, "That is just the condensed version"!

As we said at the beginning, bring the mind back home, focusing it inwards, and letting it relax. Then, while you are relaxed and undistracted, focus single-pointedly on the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha.