
The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas

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We can practise a little bit of meditation like we normally do.

Please sit in an upright posture, with the hands in the mudras of meditation.

Then on the basis of sitting in the correct meditation posture, we have to take care that our mind does not become distracted towards the outside by disturbing thoughts. Rather, when we meditate we should be able to generate a positive mental state.

We talk all the time about the practice of meditation, but what is the practice of meditation actually about? It is about establishing positive, good mental patterns, to bring the mind into a good, positive state. If we are able to do that, then the mind also will become clearer and more stable.

When we practise meditation we have to take care that our mind is not under the control of disturbing thoughts, or delusions. If our mind is not under the control of the delusions then there is nothing that can harm it. What is harming our mind are the delusions. Therefore it is important to take care that to free one's mind from the control of the delusions.

So in a very gentle way we have to free the mind from the control of the delusions, and focus it inwards in a gentle and relaxed manner. Then we stay in that relaxed state for a certain time. When we find that the mind again wants to escape to the outside, then we focus the mind on the coming and going of the breath. It is important to have an object of meditation or concentration for one's meditation. So let us practise in this way for a few minutes. (*Pause for meditation.*)

It is important to practise meditation in that manner, even if it is just for a short while. Meditating on a state of mind that is free from the delusions is very important for us, if we are to recognise the difference between a state of mind that is overcome by delusions, and the state of mind that is free from delusions. If we are not able to understand the difference, then we will not be able to free our mind from delusion.

In the final analysis, what prevents us from experiencing the happiness for which we wish, lies within the mind. The final causes don't lie somewhere outside, but they lie within the mind, and ultimately they are the delusions. So it becomes very important to know the difference between what is a disturbing state of mind or a delusion, and what is not. For that purpose it is important to meditate, and experience a state which is free from delusions.

Our intention will always precede whatever kind of activity we are engaging in, whether it be walking or any kind of activity. Therefore it is very important to check up upon one's state of mind before engaging in various types of actions and activities. If we engage in actions with a negative state of mind, so then that action will turn out to be harmful. Even if we have opportunity of engaging in beneficial actions, because we don't have a beneficial state of mind the action won't turn out that way. On the other hand if we have a beneficial and positive state of mind so then the actions that we engage in out of that state of mind will follow suit. They will also be beneficial and pleasant to others.

The great bodhisattva Shantideva said that before engaging in any kind of action one always has to check up on one's mind. If one's state of mind is peaceful, affectionate and loving then the actions which one does with body and speech will follow suit. They will be affectionate and loving, and then one will laugh,

make jokes and make the other people at the table also happy and so forth.

On the other hand, if we engage in actions with an angry state of mind, or in a state of jealousy and so forth, then we all know that what we say, and the actions in which we engage, will not make others happy. They will not generate a good, pleasant energy. From our own experience we know very well the harmful effects brought on ourselves by those negative states of mind, like anger and jealousy, etc. For example, if our mind is very agitated by those emotions, then it even becomes very difficult to fall asleep. Actually, that is also a sign that one didn't meditate very well.

If our mind is agitated by the disturbing states of the mind then it can rob us of our sleep. When our agitated state prevents us from falling asleep, the mind is very much distracted towards various outside objects and situations, and that is why we cannot fall asleep. This is because, in order to fall asleep, the mind also needs to come home; it needs to be focussed more towards the inside, and that is not possible if our mind is agitated by the various delusions.

In the same way, if our mind is agitated by the various delusions, then that also counteracts our meditation. Meditation is about bringing the mind back home, focusing it inwards, and not allowing it be distracted towards the outside. Rather we focus the mind inwards, and establish in it a positive, good state of mind.

The more we are able to prevent our mind from being agitated and disturbed by the delusions, the more mental happiness we will experience. Therefore it becomes very important to practise investigating one's own mind, to practise introspection and to control one's own mind. Then, the more we develop a good and positive mind, the more the actions in which we engage out of that positive state of mind will also be pleasant and beneficial. Our actions will follow suit with our mind. It is very important to do that.

We experience various different states of the mind. Some states of the mind are beneficial for our happiness, and some states of the mind harm our happiness. So we have to check up for ourselves what way of thinking causes us mental happiness, and what attitudes cause us suffering. Then, once we have identified the mental attitudes that cause us happiness, we realise that they are positive and good mental attitudes. Then that will be a very beneficial tool for us to transform our mind, in order to experience more mental happiness. Also our actions of body and speech will become beneficial and positive. We can check this up for ourselves

If we only engage in what we call worldly activities, as opposed to Dharma activities, and if we only look for worldly happiness somewhere outside, as opposed to looking for Dharma happiness inside, then which kind of activity is more beneficial? Which kind type of happiness is more stable? Maybe we already know the answer from experience.

The happiness that one attains through Dharma practice will only increase. No matter how much one practises the Dharma, that happiness will not cease. It will not turn into suffering or completely cease, but it will actually increase more and more.

On the other hand, there might be some happiness out there, but in general the more one engages in worldly activities, and the more one strives for worldly happiness, the more it seems to have the effect of agitating the mind, and leaving it dissatisfied. Anyway, we can investigate for ourselves which activities are the most beneficial.

If through our practice we can unify our mind with the Dharma, then it will have a very beneficial effect for us, and the result will also be very beneficial. It will make the mind more

focused and stable, and also increase the potential of one's mind. The more one can unify one's mind with the Dharma, the more it will increase the potential of one's mind.

Therefore it becomes very important not to forget about one's Dharma practice. When we concentrate on looking for worldly happiness, something strange happens. Even though it looks like it gives us happiness, somehow it seems to always have the effect of disturbing the mind. Of course we are in a situation where we do have to engage in various worldly actions and worldly activities. It would be very difficult, if not impossible, to give them up. It is, however, important not to forget about one's Dharma practice, which is having a good mental attitude. It is very important not to forget about that, even though one has to engage in various worldly activities for one's own benefit.

We have to investigate the benefits, and the disadvantages, of the alternatives of having a mind that is overcome by delusions, and having a mind that is unified with the Dharma. What having a mind that is overcome with the delusions does, is to take us away further and further away from the happiness for which we are looking. On the other hand if we have a mind that is unified with the Dharma it will be a mind that is completely filled with mental happiness.

If we have a mind that is overcome by delusions, then we will have a very strong grasping towards our various worldly achievements. We might have accumulated a certain number of possessions, or a certain amount of money or whatever, but this accumulation of possessions of worldly happiness will not actually cause happiness within the mind - later it will just cause more suffering. This is a very peculiar effect, which has been reported by many famous and rich people. They say that, "It doesn't matter whether or not I have all the possession that I have accumulated, because they don't give me mental happiness. In fact they cause me more and more suffering". Because one has this very strong grasping for those possessions one cannot let them go.

On the one hand, one cannot let the possessions go, and give them to others, because one has worked very hard in order to own them. So one cannot give them away to others. At the same time, one constantly worries about not losing them, and what to do with them.

It is the nature of impermanence that all those worldly happinesses, which one is grasping, are actually constantly moving away from oneself. So just trying to hold on to them is destined to failure, and so to cause suffering. We don't say that the fault lies within the possessions. There is nothing wrong with having possessions, or with having lots of money and so forth. In fact it can be very beneficial to have possessions and money. Where the fault lies is within one's own mental attitude. So, regardless of whether or not one has many possessions, it is very important to recognise the correct mental attitude that will cause mental happiness, and the mistaken mental attitudes that will cause only suffering.

When our mind is unified with the Dharma, then our mind will experience mental happiness, and furthermore we can retain that mental happiness. If we engage in various worldly activities the mental happiness that we gain disperses in various directions.

To return to the topic of possessions, there are two attitudes; there is a worldly attitude to possessions, and a Dharmic attitude to possessions. We can talk about using one's possessions for the benefit of all sentient beings. It is also in accordance with the Dharma if somebody, who has spent most of their life accumulating possessions, money, wealth and so forth, uses that money to provide for their children, instead of thinking, "This is what I have worked for all my life" and

grasping at that. It might be buying a house for each of the children, and setting up each of them up very well. That is also a Dharmic attitude, as it is practising Dharma in the context of the family. It is not benefiting all sentient beings, but it is practising the Dharma, as it is unifying one's mind with the Dharma in the context of a family situation.

We can observe very often the people who have worked for the greater part of their life to accumulate lots of wealth, and then they hold on to that. Then something happens in the family and they separate from their first wife and the children, and go a different way with their money. They take a new wife, and in that way cause a great deal of suffering and problems. This is the fault of having a worldly attitude. We don't say that the person is bad. What we say is that the worldly attitude which that person has is bad, and that's where the fault lies.

We can leave the teaching here. Maybe you have some questions?

Everything is clean crystal clear? (*laughter*)

Student: I have a question about practising compassion. It seems that in the beginning you generate enthusiasm and practising compassion with the motivation of finding personal happiness, so your focus is really on yourself. Eventually your compassion becomes focussed solely on benefiting others. Is that a correct understanding?

Geshe-la: It's like that, and it is also not like that. (*laughter*) You have to be able to discriminate the finer points.

Student: Is it the case that if you really want to look after yourself and others, what you really need to do is practise compassion with intelligence?

Geshe-la: You don't need to worry about your own happiness because if you practise compassion then your own happiness is automatically established through that. There is a specific example used to explain the relationship with one's own purpose in the context of meditating on Bodhicitta. There is famine and there is this family which has six members, and they are already quite starved. Then one day they get some food which, if divided among all six members, would be just a very small amount for each one. It wouldn't really sustain them for very long. So the father says, "I'm going to eat it all, in order that I can be strong enough to go out, and look for more food". That is how it works with Bodhicitta. The father had enough strength to go out and look for more food, which he brought back for the whole family.

The meaning of this example is that if we haven't accomplished our own purpose, then we are not able to fully help others. First, we have to completely repair ourselves, and then we can help others. If we are not well developed ourselves, then we cannot help others, and that's why we need to accomplish our own purpose.

If you want to help others, you need to have something with which to help them, such as material possessions or qualities. If you need all those things too, then it will be very difficult to help others. One time Geshe Dawa had a young monk student. This young monk was sitting outside and every day when an older monk, Geshe Doshapa went by he saw this small boy. He used to say to the student "In the future when I have some money, then I will give you a some as a present". The small boy came to Geshe Dawa and said, "Oh, Geshe Doshapa says in future when he has some money then he will give me some". Now this old monk Geshe Doshapa always looked at the ground as he walked, as was the fashion of the monks. The joke was, 'Maybe I might find some money (*laughter*), and once I find some money then I will give you some'. (*laughter*) The point is that you need to have something in order to be able to give something.

Also we don't begin with meditating on compassion. First we have to generate renunciation. Having meditated on renunciation, we then meditate on compassion.

Student: What can one do when events of the outside world become too strong for you to be able to harness the Dharma?

Geshe-la: When you find that you have many difficult outside situations, and therefore your mind becomes more and more separated from the Dharma, then we again have to bring the mind and the Dharma closer together. It is completely in your own hands whether or not that happens. For example, you have to meditate on compassion. When you meditate on compassion you actually generate compassion in your mind, so then you have unified your mind with compassion. So benefiting others and having compassion for others doesn't then become something that you just talk about. When you actually meditate on compassion and generate it in your mind, then it becomes really unified with your mind. Whether or not that happens is up to oneself.

Basically, most major religions say don't kill other sentient beings, don't harm others and so forth. Even so we find many people who follow the various major religions engaging in those actions. Whether or not your mind becomes unified with the Dharma is in your own hands. When you experience difficult external situations, try as much as possible, according to your potential, to benefit those who are harming you and so forth.

The important part lies with one's own practice - putting the Dharma into practice. Quite often we find in relationships that the partners say to each other things like, "I like you so much" and "I love you so much" and so forth. Then later we find that when difficult situations arise, or maybe one of the two gets angry and upset, then the other one also gets angry and upset. What has happened is that the love and compassion, which they talked about before, was mere words - there wasn't any real practice of compassion. Losing one's patience when the other person gets angry is a sign that there was no practice of the Dharma. Even at times where there is no disagreement, if you are not kind to those close to you, but instead ignore them and focus on others, looking further afield for happiness and being kind there, that too is a sign of not practising the Dharma.

Whether or not our mind is unified with the Dharma depends on our practice. If somebody has meditated a lot on patience, knows all the disadvantages of anger, knows all the benefits of meditating on patience, knows all the techniques and so forth, but then still gets angry when some situation arises, then where does the fault lie? The fault is that the person didn't really practise the Dharma. That's where one has to look.

As was explained at the beginning, please bring the mind back home focusing it inwards, not letting it fall under the control of disturbing thoughts. Then concentrate single-pointedly on the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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