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# *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga  
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The great Bodhisattva, Shantideva said that if one doesn't know how to control one's mind, even though one wishes to attain happiness and to pacify suffering, one's activities in that regard will become completely meaningless. Therefore, one should try to control one's mind.

This verse has a great meaning. One can think expansively about the meaning of this one verse and then apply the meaning expansively. Everybody wants to attain happiness and eliminate suffering. All the activities we engage in are actually motivated with that aim. But, as long as we are not able to control the mind, we will not be able to attain that aim. As long as we don't know the way the mind works and don't know which objects to acquaint our mind with or to place our mind on – as long as we don't know those things, it will be difficult for us to attain happiness and pacify suffering.

The purpose of meditation is to enable us to control the mind. At present, when we analyse our mind, it seems to be quite weak and very distracted. The potential or the power that our mind has seems to be dispersed, to be spread quite thin. Also, our faculty of wisdom and understanding seems to be dull, weak and unstable.

In order to make the mind more stable, powerful, and clearer, and to sharpen our single-pointed concentration and increase our wisdom, we have to engage in the practice of meditation. Now, we can meditate for a little while.

Please sit in a comfortable meditation posture. Bring the mind back home, focusing it 100% within. We don't let the mind escape to outside objects, to dwell on any type of outside object. Whether it is a good object or a harmful or disturbing one, we don't let the mind dwell on any type of outside object, but bring the mind home focusing it 100% inwardly. If we are able to do this, it will generate a certain amount of happiness and mental bliss.

It is not useful to dwell on the thought: "I'm not able to do this. I'm not able to meditate properly. I'm not able to concentrate my mind 100% inwardly". There is no use dwelling on this type of attitude. It is far more useful to actually engage in the meditation.

When we have fully focused our mind within in a relaxed way, we have to adjust the mind during the meditation. We may find that the mind is too tight. Tightness is usually a sign of mental excitement. If mental excitement becomes too strong, we have to relax the mind a bit. If we find that the mind falls into the fault of mental laziness or dullness, we have to tighten it up a bit. In this way, we tune our mind to the right level of sharpness.

Please meditate in that way for a few minutes. *[Pause for meditation]*

We can go through a few verses from the text. The next verse [Verse 10, page 41 in the prescribed text, *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*, Snow Lion Publications, New York 1997] starts with the meditation of the great capable being:

When your mothers, who've loved you since time  
without beginning,  
Are suffering, what use is your own happiness?  
Therefore to free limitless living beings

Develop the altruistic intention –  
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

This path that unifies both compassion and emptiness will lead one to the nirvana free from the two extremes. The two extremes are the extreme of existence and the extreme of peace. In order to become liberated from those two extremes, one has to meditate on the unification of emptiness and compassion.

First, the meditation on emptiness will liberate us from the extreme of existence. It will liberate us from cyclic existence. But if one doesn't unify one's meditation on emptiness with the meditation on compassion, one will go from the extreme of existence to the extreme of peace, such as the Hearer Arhats, and so forth. To free oneself from the extreme of peace, one needs to meditate on compassion.

If one practises method and wisdom on the basis of the two truths [conventional and ultimate truth], one will attain the two Buddha bodies. If we only practise wisdom devoid of method, it will not lead to the state of enlightenment. In the same way, if we only practise method devoid of wisdom, it will also not lead us to enlightenment. We need to practise the unification of method and wisdom.

Whatever aim or activity we do, we need to have discriminating awareness or the wisdom that understands the conducive conditions that will help us accomplish our aims and the adverse conditions that will obstruct or prevent us from attaining our aim. But having that wisdom alone is not enough. We also need to have a method with which we can increase the conducive conditions and with which we can overcome and pacify the obstructive conditions. Regardless of what aim we want to accomplish, we need to have both method and wisdom.

It is important that we are able put up with obstacles and obstructive conditions in accomplishing our aim. Even for accomplishing some small aim or purpose, we will only achieve it if we can put up with difficulties, if we are willing to put up with obstructive conditions. Only by putting up with obstacles will they become exhausted and stop.

The [explanation of the path of the great capable being] has three divisions: first, the generation of the mind of enlightenment or bodhicitta; second, the meditation on bodhicitta or the mind of enlightenment; and third, the various practices one engages in afterwards.

The verse I read before was verse 10. That verse deals with the first of these divisions, generating the motivation of bodhicitta.

I think maybe we can stop here for tonight. I am not feeling too well, it seems like I'm running a temperature, a bit of fever. We can do a further commentary on this verse next time.

As we explained at the beginning, bring the mind back home, focusing it inwardly 100% and then recite the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha, concentrating on the mantra single-pointedly.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed from tape by Gaye Lewis-Radcliffe  
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