
The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas
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27 February 2002

To start with, we can do a bit of meditation as usual. First, place your body in an upright comfortable position, and then place the mind in the correct state as well.

After having taken up a comfortable correct physical posture, it is also important that one adjusts the mind accordingly. We know from our own experience that even if we are physically relaxed, if our mind does not abide calmly and is following its ordinary mistaken habits, we won't feel particularly comfortable. So we can see the importance of placing the mind in the right state.

What we call meditation is habituating the mind to positive and good mental states. We can see from our own experience the importance of habituating the mind to positive mental habits. If we just sit in the correct comfortable meditation posture and close our eyes, but leave the mind in its normal state – under the control of mistaken conceptions and wrong mental habits – we cannot call this meditation. For this to become meditation, we would need to establish a positive, good mental state, which will also give us some inner experience of inner happiness.

If we rely only on outer conditions for our happiness and don't work with our mind, we will not be truly successful – success will not be certain. On the other hand, when we meditate, we can generate true inner happiness and inner strength and we can share this quality of inner happiness with others. We can definitely become mentally more independent and generate true inner happiness in our own mind.

Keeping this in mind, focus the mind inwards, freeing it from the control of the disturbing thoughts that try to distract it outside. Bring the mind back home, focussing it inwards. When we focus the mind inwards, it should be correctly adjusted – it shouldn't be too lax, or too tight.

If we meditate with the mind in the right state, even for a minute, this will be a very good meditation, and we can build upon that one minute of good meditation. When we build a house, we always start with the lowest bricks first, then put other bricks on top of them. If we sit for a long time and meditate with a mind that is not in the correct state, we will habituate our mind to that incorrect state. The only result of such meditation will be further confusion.

Please meditate in this manner for a few minutes. [*Pause for meditation.*] That's enough!

When we meditate, it is good at times to analyse one's own mind: Atisha said that one has to apply the teachings to one's own mind. If we check up on our mind and how it works, we will be able to identify its positive and negative states. After having identified

them, we will be able to increase the positive qualities of the mind and lessen the not-so-positive and harmful qualities. This is a very important point.

Last time, we started discussing the meditation on bodhicitta. The text says that the meditation on bodhicitta has three divisions. Verse 10 of the text (*The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*, Snow Lion Publications, New York 1997) deals with the first division. We will read it again:

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.

What is bodhicitta? Bodhicitta is the intention or the wish to attain the state of enlightenment for the benefit of other sentient beings.

As it says in the first two lines: “When your mothers, who've loved you since time without beginning, Are suffering, what use is your own happiness?”. We have been in cyclic existence since beginningless time, and during all that time, other sentient beings have been our mothers again and again. In this way, they have shown us a great kindness since beginningless time.

With all of those mothers of all our lives undergoing suffering, what would be the use of only achieving one's own happiness? What is the use of just abiding within one's own nirvana, like a Hearer or Solitary Realiser Arhat? This verse is saying that this is not necessarily a good thing.

Even when we apply this idea to this life, if our parents of this life are suffering or experiencing problems and we just sit back and enjoy our own happiness, this would not be regarded as a good thing. If somebody who has helped us a lot and has shown us much kindness cannot count on us when they need us, what does that show? We have to help those people who have shown us great kindness again and again, especially during a time of need. It is not appropriate just to enjoy one's own happiness during such a time.

We have to apply our Dharma practice. Although the text talks about the mothers of countless lives and the kindness that has been shown to us over countless lives, we also have to apply the principle to our situation in this life. Our Dharma practice has to start with our present situation.

By recognising that enjoying one's own happiness is not appropriate when mother sentient beings are suffering, the Bodhisattvas generate the altruistic intention, the mind of bodhicitta, to attain the state of complete enlightenment in order to free the limitless living beings from their suffering. This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

Amongst you, there are probably some people here who have already generated bodhicitta. It is also possible that there are some who haven't yet generated bodhicitta. Whatever the case, for everybody it is important to have a mind that is concerned with the wellbeing of others. If you don't have this mental

attitude, of being concerned with the wellbeing of others, your life will be quite difficult.

We need to have the mental attitudes of love and compassion. If you think about it, all sentient beings want happiness and don't want suffering. Love is the attitude of wanting sentient beings to have happiness, and compassion is one of wanting them to be free from suffering. Since all sentient beings want happiness and don't want suffering, the mental attitudes of love and compassion can give them exactly that. So, the wish for sentient beings to have happiness and to be free from suffering establishes the purpose of others.

In this context, when we talk or hear about the kindness shown to us by all sentient beings, if you cannot remember the kindness of the sentient beings close to you, which has been shown to you directly in this life, it will be difficult to remember and repay the kindness of all sentient beings. So one has to be able to have love and compassion for those who have shown us kindness in this life, such as our parents. If one is not able to do that, one won't be able to have love and compassion for all sentient beings.

It should be easy for us to recognise the importance of love and compassion. There are many people in this life who have been kind to us – our father, our mother, various relatives, and many others. It is important that we are mindful of that kindness and repay that kindness, having love and compassion for these people, being kind to them, and so forth. If one of our acquaintances is sad or depressed, it would be good to give that person a hug and comfort them; tell them a few jokes or nice stories to lighten up their mind. That is the practice of love and compassion. It would also be good to take that person out for lunch or dinner, or for a cup of tea or coffee somewhere.

If we practise love and compassion, if we are kind to others, they will repay in kind and will also be kind to us. So, without going into the happinesses of liberation or enlightenment, but just by the simple practice of love and compassion in our daily life, our quality of life will be greatly improved and we will experience greater happiness.

That doesn't go only for one's own life – it also applies to a whole country. If the mental attitude within a country is one of harmful intent, then the situation in that country is usually not very pleasant. But if the mental attitude prevalent in a country is one of love and compassion and of harmony, then that country is normally a harmonious and comfortable place to live in.

For example, in Australia there is not much strife going on between the people. So, in general, one can say that Australia is quite a harmonious and peaceful place to live. Why is that? Because there is an absence of strong harmful intent, anger, strife, and so forth. Also, in Australia we don't find epidemic diseases, and so on. So, we can see from our own experience the importance of love and compassion.

Everybody accepts the importance of love and compassion, regardless of whether they practise the Dharma or not. Everybody at the end of their letter will

sign their letter "love, so-and-so". So seeing the importance of love and compassion should be easy for you. When you receive a letter from a boyfriend or girlfriend or relative or acquaintance from whom you haven't heard in several years, at the end of the letter they may sign off "love, so-and-so and I wish you all the best". When we read that letter, it will make our mind very happy. So, if our mind is happy just from reading those words somebody wrote to us, how much happier would it be if one were always practising love and compassion?

By practising love and compassion, one's relationship with other people and with acquaintances will become very harmonious. Normally, a person who is loving and compassionate also has good relationships with the people around them. If you are loving and compassionate with the people close to you, it will create a harmonious environment.

It is unskilful to ignore the people who are close to you in your everyday life and focus your love and compassion on somebody far away. If we focus our attention on somebody far away, we won't experience a harmonious relationship with the people we deal with in day-to-day life. It is much better to start one's practice of love and compassion with those with whom one has daily contact – one's circle of friends, acquaintances, and so forth.

Anyway, from my [i.e. Geshe Doga's] side, I think that love and compassion are definitely important. From your side, you can check up and decide for yourself.

It is important to relax one's mind and let it be peaceful and calm, because it is easy for a dispute to arise. Disputes arise easily, even within harmonious families and relationships – even with somebody you would ordinarily call your best friend. Sometimes, it needs only one or two harsh words for a dispute to arise. Then, immediately, from being your best friend, the other person becomes the opposition.

This comes about through human nature. It is important to know this because, if such a situation were to happen – if for example one's partner or boyfriend or girlfriend were to start a dispute and say some harsh words – instead of immediately being transformed into the opposition, it would be much better for you to meditate on a peaceful and calm mind, and not immediately assume an angry expression on your face. Rather, let your expression be calm and peaceful and don't reply in kind to your friend. If the situation were to repeat itself several times, eventually you would find the other person will realise: "Every time I try to start a fight, he or she doesn't want to get involved, doesn't reply in kind, doesn't take up the challenge". So then they might think: "Maybe from my side it would be much better to be calmer, kinder and more peaceful". This change of attitude, through one's own example, can definitely happen in the other person.

Also, in such a situation where another person attacks us we might think: "I haven't done anything. You are angry at me, but I haven't actually done anything to you". Then we get angry and self-righteous. We have been attacked without having actually done anything.

This is also a situation in which we have to be very careful, because the other person may be attacking us, even though we appear not to have done anything to them, for various reasons – maybe they had a bad day in the office, or boyfriend/girlfriend or husband/wife trouble.

Whatever the cause, clearly one can see that the other person is in distress and is showing aggression and anger. Recognising that the other person is in distress helps us to keep our mind in a compassionate and calm state for the other person. It is very important, that in the heat of the moment one doesn't get drawn into the fight by saying: "What do you want from me? I didn't do anything to you". This just aggravates the situation. At such a time, practising love and compassion is very important.

In the next session, we can talk about the benefits of bodhicitta and how to meditate on bodhicitta. We must keep remembering the importance of love and compassion, particularly showing love and compassion to those who have been kind to us in this life, such as parents.

For example, the 85-year-old mother of a student I know – a nun from England living in New Zealand – got sick and needed help. I asked that nun: "What is the use of practising compassion for all sentient beings, saying 'I want to help all sentient beings', then neglecting your mother of this life? Going to England and taking care even of this one person, your mother of this life, regardless of the motivation will be a virtuous Dharma action". Practising love and compassion is very important. If we cannot take care even of one person, how can we take care of all sentient beings?

As at the beginning, we can free the mind from disturbing thoughts, bring it back home, focus it 100% inwardly, and then concentrate single-pointedly on the name mantra of the Buddha.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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