
The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas
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We can practise a little meditation as usual.

As I usually mention, we meditate in order to make our body and mind serviceable, that is, to attain physical and mental pliancy. To attain physical and mental pliancy, we have to learn to control our body as well as our mind. Our body and our mind are like two friends who accompany us everywhere. In a way, one is like a king who has power over the body and mind, which are like a king's ministers or his entourage.

What do we mean when we say 'control the body and the mind'? Controlling the mind means freeing it from negative mental states and encouraging it to follow positive mental states. Similarly, controlling the body means stopping all harmful, negative physical and verbal actions, and engaging in or encouraging beneficial, positive physical and verbal actions.

To be able to control our mind, we must do some meditation. As I often say, even if we place our mind in a virtuous state for only one minute and meditate on that positive state of mind for just a minute, by doing that meditation again and again one will definitely be able to increase the length of the meditation and that positive mental state. So, through one's own practice, one can gradually increase the positive actions of body, speech and mind – that would be termed controlling the mind.

If our mind is overcome by negative states and is very distracted, at such times we find that we cannot harness the mind's potential. But if our mind is in a positive state and isn't distracted but is very focused, then we are able to harness its potential.

We can check up through our own experience what happens when the mind is in a positive state and is well focused. What happens at such times when negative mental states arise? What does it do to our mental state generally? What does it do to our ability to harness our potential if we are very distracted and so forth?

It's like the example of the king and his ministers or entourage, understanding the king to be oneself, and the entourage to be one's body and mind. The wellbeing of the king depends on what sort of ministers he has and what they do. For example, everything may be going well in the government until a bad minister turns up. In the same way, we can be in a good state of mind, with everything going well, until a disturbing state of mind or emotion arises. Then we have to do the same as the king would do – after recognising the problem and identifying the minister doing the mischief and harm, he would arrest the minister and put him in prison. In the same way, we have to identify the disturbing states of mind, arrest them, and put them in prison! (*Laughter*)

It is imperative that we practise meditation. If we don't practise meditation, we will be imprisoned by the disturbing mental states, with no way out. Sometimes, it even feels like one is bound by the ropes of those disturbing mental states and that, although one wants to, one is unable to attain mental happiness.

Everybody wants mental and physical happiness. It is up to us whether we take control of our situation and generate mental and physical happiness or not. If we don't take control of our own situation – leaving it up to the various disturbing states of the mind – we will find ourselves easily trapped by those disturbing mental states of the mind.

For example, what happens to the mind of someone overcome by a craving for alcohol? If that person gives into the craving and starts drinking, then the more that person drinks, the more he or she will lose self-control and become overcome by the various disturbing states of the mind – even perhaps to the point of physically or mentally harming themselves or cutting short their own life.

Such a situation is possible because that person is imprisoned by the disturbing states of the mind. The same goes for smoking cigarettes. If one gives into the strong craving to smoke cigarettes, one becomes imprisoned by that craving. Although one doesn't necessarily want to smoke, one cannot stop doing it because of being bound by a craving for cigarettes. So, instead of continuing to say 'I'm powerless, I can't help myself', one has to start taking control of one's situation. One has to start meditating to free one's mind from the disturbing attitudes, while clearly recognising which mental states are beneficial for one to follow and which are not. Then, one follows the beneficial states of the mind. This is why it is imperative that we continue to practise meditation.

To begin the meditation, we should sit in the appropriate meditation posture. First, one sits upright with the legs crossed in the full vajra or lotus position. If that is impossible, the half vajra or lotus position is OK. Next, one's hands are folded in the mudra of meditation, and one's head should be bent slightly forward, with the eyes neither staring straight ahead nor fully closed; rather, they should be half-closed, gazing towards the tip of the nose. The mouth should not open nor should the teeth be clenched together; rather, the mouth should be in a natural position with the tip of the tongue placed against the upper palate, behind the front teeth. One's shoulders should be in a natural position, slightly back. This is the appropriate physical meditation posture.

After sitting in the correct physical meditation posture, one has to also place one's mind in the appropriate state, by bringing the mind back home and focusing it inwards. We try to free the mind from the control of the disturbing thoughts that try to distract it outside. We know that the mind likes to wander towards different objects and, after encountering those objects, it generates various types of disturbing mental states. So, we should prevent the mind from wandering off to those objects and focus it within, freeing it from the control of the disturbing thoughts.

With the mind abiding and focused inwardly, we then concentrate single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. We can meditate in this manner for few minutes. (*Pause for meditation*)

We mentioned the other day that the mental attitude of aiming to attain complete enlightenment for the purpose of all sentient beings is called 'bodhicitta' or the mind of enlightenment.

The next two points in the text explain the benefits of such a mental attitude and how to meditate on it. Now, we will discuss the benefits of bodhicitta.

Before we think about this, however, it is important to think about whether one is actually able to generate bodhicitta or not – whether one has the potential to attain enlightenment or not. When we contemplate this point, we should arrive at the conclusion that we are definitely able to attain enlightenment.

The reason is because one has buddha nature. Without going into a great philosophical definition or explanation of what buddha nature is, essentially one can say that one's mind has the potential to be free of all mental stains. This potential to purify all mental states is our buddha nature. Because one has this potential to fully purify one's mind, one can become enlightened, and is therefore able to generate bodhicitta.

When we investigate whether our mind has buddha nature, first we need to ask, does our mind have the potential to be purified of all mental stains? We can say that it definitely has this potential, because the basic nature of the mind is unstained and clear.

What is the nature of mind – what is mind? First, the mind is non-physical: it doesn't have colour, shape, or form. Its basic nature is clear. Because of this basic clear nature, it has the potential to reflect objects, or arise in the aspect of objects. If we investigate, we can experience this for ourselves. If the mind is in a calm, non-conceptual state in which one is not thinking about anything and then a single mental image appears to the mind, at this moment, the mind has reflected the object or has arisen in the aspect of that particular object. This is what the mind does – it reflects objects and can do this because its basic nature is clear, like glass.

So, the basic, clear nature of the mind is what we refer to as the root mind. The root mind is completely unstained like clear glass. Everyone's mind has his natural purity, but adventitiously this purity is obscured by the various disturbing emotions and disturbing thoughts.

Within our mind, we have this potential to purify mental stains. If we look for where within our mind this potential can be found, it can be found within our basic mind. This basic mind has a natural purity that it is free from any type of stain. But this natural purity or clarity becomes obscured by the various disturbing thoughts – adventitiously, temporarily. This is the way we can think about it.

It is like the example of the clouds in the sky, or dirt in water. Clouds can temporarily obscure the sky – the sky symbolises our buddha nature. While the clouds

temporarily obscure the sky, they are not of one nature with the sky – they are not solidly established as being one with the sky. The clouds are temporary, they come and go. In the same way, the disturbing thoughts and the harmful emotions such as attachment, anger, pride, jealousy, competitiveness, etc. all temporarily obscure the natural purity of the basic mind, but they are not of one nature with this basic mind. This means that one is not established as being one with the delusions.

It is the same with dirt in water. Initially, the water is clean-clear, but if some dirt falls into it, the clarity of the water is temporarily obscured or polluted by the dirt. But again, the dirt is not of one nature with the water, but is actually a separate object from the water, and only temporarily obscures the clarity of the water. Once the dirt has separated from the water, the water returns to being clean-clear. Again, this example shows how our disturbing thoughts and disturbing emotions are not of one nature with our basic buddha nature, but only temporarily obscure it. These mental stains only temporarily obscure our buddha nature, and are not fixed or abiding within our mind.

From our own experience, we can sometimes feel the mind abiding in its basic nature. Then, while we are viewing our environment through this basic mind, it seems as if some other type of adventitious, disturbing mental attitude will come between our basic mind and our environment.

Through our own experience we can also confirm that the various positive and negative mental attitudes are mutually exclusive, or cancel each other out. Anger and aversion will lessen in the mind of somebody who meditates a lot on love and compassion – the more love and compassion generated in that person's mind, the more it will cancel out anger and aversion.

In the same way, if we meditate on selflessness more and more, it will cancel out the disturbing thought of self-grasping.

In this way, we can understand that we can purify the various positive and negative mental attitudes, by meditating on the opposite mind to a negative mind so that they cancel each other out. By developing positive mental attitudes, one can purify the disturbing mental attitudes. Therefore, we can arrive at the definite conclusion that by applying the antidote, one's mind can definitely be purified of attachment. The mind can definitely be purified of attachment and anger by applying the antidotes. In the same way, the mind has the potential to be purified of self-grasping. Self-grasping can be purified by applying the antidote.

So one shouldn't feel 'I have become home to the three types of disturbing attitudes and there is nothing I can do about it'. Sometimes one might feel this way, but there is no need. We can meditate on our buddha nature, recognising that we have buddha nature, and that our mind has the potential to be purified from the various mental stains. By applying the various antidotes we can actually make use of that potential. This is a simplified way of explaining how one gradually attains enlightenment.

Geshe-la says there is no need to rush anywhere, there is no need to hurry! If one purifies the various mental stains and disturbing thoughts, the more one purifies them the more mental happiness one will attain. Our mental happiness depends more on purifying the disturbing emotions than on outer conditions, such as friends and so forth.

We all want both physical and mental happiness. To achieve physical happiness, we take care of our body. In the same way, if we want mental happiness, we have to take care of our mind by making use of our buddha nature.

I [i.e. Geshe Doga] didn't get to explain much about the benefits of bodhicitta today! I will do that next time. Maybe you have a question or two? It is already night-time, so there is no need to rush anywhere!

There is a story I heard about five people taking part in a race. Two of them were friends. One was called Guppa or 'Stupid', because he was regarded as a little bit dull. The other one was called 'Lotus King', who was regarded as being the smarter. Anyway, in the race they both fell behind. The smart one said to Stupid Ogian, 'Now that we've fallen behind, there's no need to rush. Whether we run or not, we will not catch up with the others.'

So, they took the race at a very leisurely pace, and picked something up at a shop and ate it (*laughter*). Anyway, they were just a few feet from the finish line, when Stupid Ogian made a quick jump and arrived before his friend, Lotus King. Even though they were already last, there was still a difference in who would be second-last and who would get some kind of good mark or not.

After this, everybody said to Lotus King 'You are not the smarter one, because he's smarter!' (*More laughter*)

So we have time for a question... (*question inaudible*)

Geshe Doga: Yes, it appears that way because we are so habituated to attachment. But if you think about it, it was explained that attachment does not really abide permanently within our mind.

For example, at certain times we generate very strong attachment for a certain object. But that strong attachment does not remain in our mind all the time. First, it wasn't there, then it was generated, and then after a while it goes away again. That proves the point that attachment, although it arises temporarily within the mind, is not a permanent, intrinsic part of our mind. If you think about it in this way, it may be easier to understand.

This example we can confirm through our own experience – strong attachment doesn't remain within our mind all the time. Sometimes strong attachment arises, but even without applying any type of antidote, that attachment diminishes and disappears. Even if we don't apply any antidote, strong attachment doesn't remain within our mind. This already proves the fact that the mind has the potential to be free of attachment. So, if you are told to apply some type of antidote to

attachment on top of that, then of course one will be able to purify the mind of that attachment.

Also, if we observe our mind when something pleasant appears to us, attachment arises for that object then passes away again. Then, if something unpleasant appears to our mind, an aversion arises to that object and passes away again. Then again something pleasant arises to our mind, and attachment arises. We can confirm this through our own experience.

Because we have not yet abandoned attachment, if we come close to the object of attachment, attachment arises without control. There is nothing we can do, because the three basic conditions are there for attachment to arise. First, because one hasn't abandoned attachment there is the seed or the potential within the mind for attachment to arise. This arising of attachment is facilitated by what we call a misleading conception. If these two inner conditions – the misleading conception or misleading thought, and the potential for attachment to arise – meet with the third condition, which is proximity to the outer object of the attachment, then without any choice or freedom, attachment will arise within the mind.

As an ordinary person, one doesn't need to even think about it, because attachment automatically arises in the mind if these three conditions come together. What we can do, however, is to diminish the potential for attachment to arise through the practice of meditation.

As I said, one does need to make an effort – attachment arises because one is mentally habituated to it. We are talking about mental imprints or patterns of attachment that have been established so strongly that it is difficult to stop attachment from arising. Because one is so habituated to attachment, even though sometimes one may initially be enthusiastic about Dharma practice and abandon manifest attachment for a short time, because of the very strong imprints of and strong conditioning to attachment, later on, one will start to feel that something is missing in one's life.

Because attachment is missing, it feels as if some kind of happiness is missing – as if one couldn't ever be happy again if attachment didn't arise within the mind. It appears to us then as if attachment is necessary for happiness to arise.

Sometimes, this can happen to people who, because of previous good imprints or propensities decide to become a monk or a nun. Then they abandon manifest attachment within the mind. At the beginning, of course, they are very enthusiastic. However, after having been ordained for some time, although manifest attachment was abandoned for a short time, because of the strong conditioning in attachment, later on they will start to feel lacking in something and think, 'In order to be happy again, I should meet with attachment.' Then, a conflict can arise in the mind because one has already become a monk or a nun, but can't follow one's attachment as one did before. This happens because of the very strong mental conditioning in attachment we have.

(*Further comment/question from audience*) In worldly terms, a good family would be one that is harmonious,

where the parents live in harmony with each other, and the children live in harmony with each other, and both parents and children live in harmony with each other – in short, it is harmonious all around! *(Laughter)* In worldly terms, this is what we term a good family.

In the same way, both male and female Bodhisattvas and the Buddha belong to a harmonious family. One reason is that the female and male Bodhisattvas don't talk back to the parent, or Buddha. They don't criticise the Buddha 'parent', and they will practise and listen to what they are told to do. One very important point is that, as in most families, we find both female as well as male Bodhisattvas. Why? Because the Buddha said that there is no distinction between male and female practitioners with regard to the potential to attain the path of seeing. This is a special aspect of Buddhism.

Within the ordained Buddhist community, we find female nuns as well as monks, as we also find male novices and female novices. Women are not excluded – they weren't excluded by Buddha. Also, among lay practitioners who take the Upasika vows, we find both female as well as male Upasikas. So there has been no discrimination going on there.

As explained at the beginning, after having freed the mind from the disturbing thoughts and allowing it to remain calmly focused inwards, concentrate single-pointedly on the name mantra of the Buddha. While doing this, we can recite the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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