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*The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*  
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We can practise a little bit of meditation as usual. Please sit in a good physical posture.

As I always say, if we can't control our mind, it will be difficult to attain mental happiness. To attain mental happiness, we need to control the mind. Therefore, it is useful if we keep reminding ourselves of the benefits of controlling the mind and the disadvantages of not controlling it. If we are mindful of these benefits and disadvantages, this will also benefit our meditation.

While remaining in a relaxed physical position, place the mind in a relaxed state, free from the control of the disturbing thoughts that try to distract it outside. Bring it home 100%, focusing it totally inwards.

Having focused the mind completely inwards, remain in this non-conceptual state for a little while. When you see the mind again trying to escape to the outside, focus it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. (*Pause for meditation.*)

It is important to know how the mind works, to know the various psychological functions. If we know how the mind works, we can recognise when it is going in an unwholesome direction and reverse its direction away from those objects.

A famous Geshe said that if one doesn't know the workings of one's mind, what good is any other type of knowledge? As long as we don't know how our mind works, whatever else we know will not cause us to be mentally happy. However, practitioners who know how the mind works and how the mind conceptually elaborates reality can transform even adverse conditions into the causes of happiness and virtue.

Meditating on impermanence is beneficial for the mind. We need to be mindful of the meaning of the first [of the four] seal[s] of Buddhism – that all compounded phenomena are impermanent. If we can keep this in mind and apply it to outer [difficult] situations, these situations will not affect our wellbeing, because we will recognise them as impermanent. Further, the situation itself will become a condition for our meditation on impermanence – it will actually become a conducive condition for our spiritual development.

As we have said, it is important to practise controlling one's mind. If we just let our mind go wherever it wants, following whatever arises in the mind and letting it run wild, this will not be conducive for attaining mental happiness.

The idea of controlling the mind might seem difficult when we are young, because we are very much engaged in the experiences of the five senses. Because we are living in a desire realm, we primarily get our experience of happiness by engaging with the objects of the five senses. Then, depending on whether we experience pleasurable or unpleasurable objects, we

receive a certain amount of pleasure or suffering from them.

However, it is good to be aware of the potential of one's consciousness and to investigate which types of mental states facilitate one's wellbeing and thus facilitate a happy life, and which types of mental states are harmful to one's wellbeing and thus harmful to a happy life. After becoming aware of which types of mental states are beneficial, we can then try to pursue these conducive mental states with the help of mindfulness and mental introspection.

Continuing with this topic of experiencing the five sense pleasures, in our world we are primarily engaged in experiencing the objects of the five senses. So if, for example, one of our friends invites us for dinner and we don't like the food, we immediately show some kind of dislike or expression of disapproval. This is not surprising – if experiencing the various sense pleasures is the only way a person knows how to attain happiness, then of course when that person encounters something unpleasant, they immediately become unhappy.

However, it is worthwhile investigating whether it would be better to find some other means of, or resources for, attaining happiness. Therefore, it becomes important to investigate one's mind. Which mental states are conducive for one's mental happiness, and which emotions or mental states cause us mental suffering? After having checked up in this way, one tries to accustom one's mind to the mental states that bring about happiness. We try to familiarise the mind more and more with them, so that we can attain some true inner happiness.

Otherwise, [you will find yourself in the situation of people] who, when I ask them how they have been, they reply, "I haven't been so well – I haven't been happy because I have been so busy". That happens quite often. People say they are not happy because they are very busy. Then, if I ask them a week later: "How are you now?" they reply "Now I am not happy because I have nothing to do"!

It can happen, of course, that when we are very busy and the mind gets agitated and disturbed, so at that time we are not happy. But, funnily enough, if we have nothing to do the mind also is also not happy.

So, generating calm, peaceful and stable mental states that facilitate inner happiness can be worthwhile, regardless of which type of situation one is experiencing. Then, if one has nothing to do, one can just sit there very relaxed and happy and enjoy one's cup of tea. In Tibet, we have a saying, "Today I stretched out my legs and let the sun shine upon me!". That is regarded as an indication of being very happy.

If we have some inner resources and some control over our mind, even if you find your dinner to be not very tasty, by having some control over your mind and being able to engage it [skilfully], you can remember that even though the dinner may not be tasty, if you show displeasure, the other person will be sad. You can also remember the effort that has been put into the dinner and think, "If I show my disappointment, the other person will be sad". So, instead of showing

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displeasure because the food wasn't good, one can still smile at the other person, saying nice things like how good the food is and so forth. In this way, your response is beneficial to both of you.

Through working with one's mind, making use of the mind, and utilising the power of thought, one has the potential to make oneself happy as well as the other person. If we can act like this in a more thoughtful manner, it will benefit us and we will be regarded highly wherever we may go. Also, since we are living in a society, we have to always try to be harmonious with [others in] that society.

Otherwise, if we don't want [good] relationships with anyone, we can sit alone in our room and be depressed and angry.

I always recommend that, for example, that people engage in sports or activities such as running or jogging because engaging in such activities takes our mind off the unpleasant experience of thinking about a problem, and we can direct our mind to more beneficial thoughts. This is also how we make use of our knowledge about how the mind works.

This is why I think it can be very beneficial to do sports. But I also have to give you some warning based on my observations about running – it seems that many people end up with hip problems from doing lots of running! So, for me personally, I think that walking is probably the best. If we get health problems from our exercises, we just add more problems to our life. Then, of course, you might get big prize money from your running – that's a different situation. In this case, because you will receive something in return, [risking health problems to run] has some purpose!

Last time [when we discussed the text], we talked about bodhicitta and we said that bodhicitta is the uncommon door for entering the Mahayana Path. There is no other way of entering the Mahayana Path besides going through door of bodhicitta.

We also said there are various benefits from generating bodhicitta. One benefit is that all negative karmas accumulated in previous lifetimes will be exhausted and purified. Also, one will attain the results of what is called the highest status and definite goodness. When one generates bodhicitta within one's mind, one has attained the essence of the Buddha's teachings. Bodhicitta is the essence of all the Buddha's teachings in the same way that butter is the essence of milk.

Then, by remembering, our present situation – that we have a precious human life with the various endowments and freedoms – we should generate joy within our mind and try to develop some bodhicitta.

After having completed the benefits of bodhicitta, the next point for discussion was the practice of how to meditate on bodhicitta, the mind of enlightenment. Here, we have the meditation on conventional bodhicitta and the meditation on ultimate bodhicitta.

Ultimate bodhicitta is not attained in the early stages of the Path, but is only realised or generated within the

mind once one has already gone a certain way along the Path.

Now, we will concern ourselves with the generation of conventional bodhicitta, [more specifically] the type of conditions that facilitate conventional bodhicitta, and the causes we need to have to generate conventional bodhicitta.

Meditating on conventional bodhicitta has two further paths: how to practise in the meditation sessions, during meditative equipoise; and how to practise during the post-meditation period, in between meditation sessions.

During the meditation session, we meditate on what is called exchanging self and others. During the post-meditation period, we meditate on taking harmful conditions or problems into the Path.

In general, there are two methods for generating conventional bodhicitta. The first method is called the 'seven point cause and effect method'. The second method is called 'exchanging self for others'. The mind-transformation teachings to which this text belongs usually emphasise the second method, i.e. exchanging self for others. Both methods are similar, in that they establish within one's mind the view that sentient beings are pleasant – one generates a mental outlook that views other sentient beings as being pleasant.

If we go quickly through how one applies the first method of seven-point cause and effect, the first step is meditating on immeasurable equanimity. Normally, our mind categorises other sentient beings into friend, enemy or stranger. We categorise sentient beings who we regard as pleasant and agreeable as friends. We place other sentient beings, who we regard as unpleasant and disagreeable, in the category of enemy, and generate dislike for them. Then we have the third type of category – people we regard as neither pleasant nor disagreeable. We have neither attachment nor aversion to that type of person, but more some type of neutral feeling of not caring much at all for them. To overcome this very strong categorising mind, one first meditates on immeasurable equanimity.

Having overcome this categorising or discriminating mind – which has aversion to some and attachment to others – one goes on to recognise that other sentient beings have been one's mother in previous lives. One remembers the kindness of one's mother in this life and the kindness of one's mothers in previous lives.

The third step is making the determination to repay the kindness of one's mother. The fourth step is generating love – a particular type of love that comes about [through seeing other sentient beings in] a pleasant aspect. The fifth step is great compassion. The sixth step is superior intention, and the seventh step is generating actual bodhicitta, the mind of enlightenment. This covers the various steps very briefly.

According to the text, we now go onto the method of exchanging self and others. So, we will now briefly go through the steps of generating bodhicitta by the second method, exchanging self and others. First, one meditates on equalising self and others. The second step is meditating on and contemplating the disadvantages of

self-cherishing. The third step is meditating on and contemplating the benefits of cherishing others. The fourth step is exchanging self and others. The fifth step is meditating on taking and giving.

We meditate on the first step, equalising self and others, using the simple reasoning that both oneself and others are equal from the point of view of wanting happiness and not wanting suffering. We recognise that, just as we want happiness and don't want suffering, in the same way, all other beings want happiness and don't want suffering.

By recognising that other sentient beings want happiness in exactly the same way we do, we will automatically want to benefit them. By recognising that they don't want suffering in the exactly the same way we don't want it, automatically we will want to protect them from suffering.

If you think about it carefully, other sentient beings are something to be cherished. Instead of cherishing oneself, one should think instead of cherishing others, who are the same as oneself in not wanting suffering and wanting happiness. If you understand this, you will find it difficult to give somebody else suffering just to achieve your own happiness. If we truly understand that the other person doesn't want suffering in exactly the same way we don't want suffering, we will find it difficult, just for the purpose of our own happiness, to give the other person suffering.

If you like, we have some time for questions and answers, and we will continue next time on this subject.

*Question from student regarding a particular story or anecdote.*

*Answer:* We were talking about how that King understood phenomena to be merely imputed by conception and not inherently existent.

Normally, phenomena appear to us as existing from their own side and as not depending on causes and conditions. That King, however, understood that phenomena do not exist in this [normal] way, and perceived the nature of them as being merely imputed. So, at that time, he realised emptiness. 'Phenomena are merely imputed by conception. Phenomena don't exist from their own side, but are merely created by the mind.' This is what he said.

Doesn't modern science say something similar these days? Scientists say that when you investigate very, very small particles, you find that there is a definite relationship between the mind observing those particles and the particles. Also, the more you try to look for them, the more difficult they are to find. Anyway, I've heard that modern science goes a little bit in the direction of what is explained in the Madhyamika [Middle Way] School. Of course, it is not exactly the same but it seems at least to be similar.

In the Prasangyika school, one talks about the unfindability of the imputed meaning at the time of analysis. So modern science can be supported by Chandrakirti [author of the text *Entering the Middle Way*].

*(Another question)*

*Answer:* Your situation is quite common, I think! Here is some advice that I have given to some people, who told me they found it beneficial. I don't know if it was actually beneficial but at least they told me that they found it beneficial!

Reflect on the situation of the other person. Because the other person is very angry and aggressive, they must have some unhappiness in their own life. Be mindful and reflect upon that other person's unhappiness, which causes them dissatisfaction and anger. Also reflect that they are under the control of their own miserable situation, under the control of their delusions. By reflecting in this way – that they are not experiencing any happiness – automatically, it will generate some compassion within one's mind.

You can remember too that because they are angry and aggressive, they probably won't have many friends. Nobody wants to be with them, so they don't experience much happiness within their life, regardless of whether they are rich or not. Reflecting on their suffering helps to generate compassion for that person.

It can also be useful to ignore that person. If there is someone at work like this, all you need to do is in the morning, when you meet that person, say, "Good morning, how are you?" . Then, in the evening, you say, "Good-bye" as you leave. During the day, you just concentrate on your work, and accumulate your money, and save the money! Do your job to the best of your ability. The purpose of going to work is to make some money. So you can just concentrate on your work, and save up your money, and say, "Good morning" and "Good evening" (*laughter*). Quite often, the other person will have a change of mind, and start to think, "Maybe from my side I did something wrong". And quite often, it happens that this person becomes one's friend.

As explained at the beginning, free the mind from the disturbing thoughts that distract it towards the outside, focus it single-pointedly inwards, and concentrate on the name mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed from tape by Gabrielle Thomson  
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