

---

*The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*  
Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga  
Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

**3 April 2002**

---

First, we will do a little bit of meditation as usual. Sit in a correct physical posture.

Lama Tsong Khapa said: "What we understand by meditation is to train the mind to remain on a virtuous object." If the virtuous object goes away, bring the mind back to it again and again.

Even though this is the purpose of meditation, since beginningless time, we have been under the control of our mind. It is not the other way around – we are not the master of our mind, but rather, our mind is our master. Our mind, in turn, is under the control of delusions. Therefore, we are controlled by delusions. To reverse this process and to become master of one's mind, one trains the mind in meditation, acquainting it with virtuous objects so that one can attain a pliant or serviceable mind.

Meditation is for the purpose of becoming the master of one's mind, of re-taking control of one's mind and attaining inner mental pliancy. Rather than allowing the mind to control oneself and fall under the control of delusions, meditation acquaints the mind with virtuous objects so that one can attain mental pliancy, or what could be termed 'mental workability'.

We have to analyse our mind to see when it is under the control of any delusions. What happens to the mind when it is under the control of ignorance? How does our mind appear when it is under the control of attachment or anger? To see the effects of these delusions on our mind, we have to look at it when it is under the control of these delusions.

To free our mind from these delusions and to attain mental pliancy, we practise meditation. If we practise meditation and attain some inner pliancy, acquainting our mind more and more with virtuous objects, we will reduce the delusions in our mind; the arising of the delusions in our mind will become less intense, and we will attain greater inner freedom.

It is good to remind oneself of these points – the way meditation works, or the what, why and how of meditation.

The more we practise meditation, the more purified, refined and virtuous our mind will become. If we don't practise meditation regularly and progressively reduce our delusions, it is unlikely that our mind will be able to remain on an object of meditation. Even if we are able to have a quiet meditation for a few minutes, the purpose of meditation won't be fulfilled. We might have a few relaxed minutes and achieve some inner relaxation, but that will be the end of it, and we won't really have achieved the purpose of meditation.

Last time, we started to explain the root text, and went through the meditations of contemplating the disadvantages of self-cherishing and the advantages of

cherishing others. There are still a few lines of that verse (verse 11) of the root text (*The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*, Snow Lion Publications, New York 1997) left to explain:

All suffering comes from the wish for  
your own happiness.

Perfect Buddhas are born from the  
thought to help others.

Therefore exchange your own  
happiness

For the suffering of others –

This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

Again, we are reminded here of the importance of being aware that when we try to reduce the self-cherishing attitude, this doesn't mean we become weak and lacking in confidence, nor does it mean we give up accomplishing anything in this life nor give up our plans and our work. It does mean, however, that if we give up self-cherishing, our life will go that much more smoothly. The less self-cherishing one has, the more smoothly one's life will become, and the more easily one will accomplish one's purposes. The more self-cherishing one has, the more difficult one's life will be, and the more difficulty one will have in achieving one's purpose.

Last time, we talked a lot about the importance of considering the happiness of others. There is a certain type of person who is always concerned with their own happiness and constantly complaining about their partner: "My partner doesn't do this, doesn't do that, doesn't make me happy, doesn't, etc. etc." While one can think of many things the other person is not doing, one doesn't find any fault with oneself. Further, one doesn't do the good things for the other person that one expects from them. The root of this attitude is self-cherishing.

As we said before, it is good to remind ourselves that, just as we want happiness and self-cherishing, the other person also wants happiness and self-cherishing. From that point of view, the right of the other person to be happy is the same as ours. It is good to remind oneself of this.

Regarding the nature of self-cherishing, sometimes self-cherishing gets confused with what we call 'self-grasping'. There is a lot of debate about the difference between these two and their relationship. One can say that self-grasping is the grasping at the 'I' as arising independently. There is a certain type of grasping at the 'I' as independently arising, which is called 'self-grasping'. Self-cherishing, however, is a mental attitude that focuses on the 'I' but doesn't necessarily grasp the 'I' in a mistaken way. It just regards the 'I' as being incredibly important, and thus cherishes the 'I' or the 'self'. Therefore, one can say that self-cherishing is not necessarily a delusion; it is not necessarily a mistaken mind.

There is a lot of debate about the relationship between self-grasping and self-cherishing. One great scholar said that self-cherishing arises in dependence upon self-grasping. Therefore, in the mental continuum of Arhats, who have abandoned completely self-grasping, we

---

---

would not find any self-cherishing. But other scholars say that even in the continuum of Arhats, who have completely abandoned self-grasping, we can still find self-cherishing. Why? Because they are grasping at their own happiness of liberation. They are in some way attached to the bliss of single-pointed meditation on cessation [of suffering] – and there is a certain self-cherishing involved in the way they relate to that bliss [of cessation].

Sometimes, when the antidotes to self-cherishing are explained, they almost seem like the antidotes to self-grasping. However, whether Arhats have self-cherishing or not, Kaedrub Rinpoche, one of the two main disciples of Lama Tsong Khapa, said that in order to enter the Mahayana Path and generate pure bodhicitta, one definitely needs to overcome self-cherishing. Geshe-la said that as long as one desires the peace of liberation only for oneself, one's own purpose, one won't be able to generate pure bodhicitta. So, the attitude of desiring peace only for oneself has to be overcome in order to be able to generate real bodhicitta.

Also, if one falls under the control of self-cherishing, there is nothing the Lama or virtuous friends can do to help one. Even if the Lama shows the teachings of scripture and insight to the disciple, if the disciple is under the control of self-cherishing and thinks: "You can say whatever you want, I will continue with what I think is best", then the Lama can't help the disciple. It would be difficult to change that disciple's mind. So even if the Lama, or your virtuous friends give you good advice, if you are under the control of self-cherishing, you will have this strong thought that whatever they say you won't listen to; you will just continue with what you think is best. It would be difficult for you to change your attitude.

We have all experienced this situation. At certain times, our good or virtuous friends have given us good advice, perhaps pointed out our faults, but because of our self-cherishing, not only do we not follow that advice thinking, "My point of view is the only correct one and I will follow only my point of view no matter what you say", one may also get angry at the other person and even say to them: "Is it your business what I do? Take care of your own business and I'll take care of mine!" This can come about through the fault of self-cherishing.

Through the fault of self-cherishing, one will perceive only the faults and mistakes of others. Whatever misfortune one experiences will always be the fault of others. We, of course, have never had any faults, never done anything wrong! The fault always lies with others. Since one has this mental attitude and sees other people as a constant source of harm to oneself, they will appear as enemies. Again this perception of other people as enemies comes about in one's mind through the fault of self-cherishing.

After we have reflected in this way on the disadvantages of self-cherishing, we reflect on the advantages of, and reasons for, cherishing others. The reason for cherishing others is that one's happiness arises from them. One remembers the kindness of others, and reflects on the ways in which the happiness

one is experiencing actually comes from others. Here, one reflects upon the kindness of sentient beings in general, and includes all types of sentient beings. Previously, when we talked about the other method of generating bodhicitta, the seven point cause and effect method by which one reflects on the kindness of one's mother and of one's parents, the kindness of one's mother or parents becomes very clear to us. However, here we include all other instances of sentient beings being kind to us.

Here is how one has to meditate on the great kindness of others.

First, the present happiness that one experiences came about through having the attitude of cherishing others – abandoning, killing, stealing, etc. in a previous life. Because one didn't have self-cherishing in the previous life and abandoned killing, one now experiences a long and healthy life, and because one didn't fall under the control of self-cherishing and abandoned stealing, one also experiences material wealth and security of one's possessions.

In order to attain enlightenment, in this life we need to practise the six perfections [patience, generosity, morality, joyous effort, concentration and wisdom]. The six perfections can only be practised in relation to other sentient beings. Therefore, we can say that even the attainment of enlightenment comes about through the kindness of other sentient beings. The perfection of generosity can only be practised in relation to other sentient beings. The practice of morality again is practised in relation to other sentient beings. The practice of the higher perfection of patience is also practised in relation to other sentient beings. So, through the kindness of other sentient beings, one is able to attain enlightenment.

Even if we had a lot of gold and money but found ourselves in a country without any inhabitants – no place to buy food, no one to give us food, etc. – how useful would it be to wear gold rings, bracelets, necklaces, earrings, etc.? How useful would it be in such a country having a whole pocketful of money? So, the wealth one has can only be beneficial if we are somewhere where we can use it, and we can only use our wealth in relation to other sentient beings. Therefore, one's happiness arises from other sentient beings.

It is good to become wealthy, because if one is wealthy, it benefits society. If one becomes wealthy, one can benefit those who are less wealthy by employing them. In this way, one generates more wealth. People who have less wealth depend on the wealthy for employment, while the wealthy depend on the workers for their happiness.

It is good to keep this relationship in mind – that one's happiness arises through the kindness of others – because if we are mindful of the kindness of others, we will generate respect towards them and we will have the mental attitude of wanting to benefit them and not harming them. If we keep the kindness of our parents in mind, we will always be respectful to them, and not

---

be disrespectful, harsh or harmful. We will want to benefit our parents and make them happy.

It is important to respect and hold the happiness of others in the highest regard, because our happiness depends on this relationship with others. Our happiness comes from others. The happiness of employees comes from the employer, and the happiness of the employer comes from the employees. So, instead of the employees getting angry with the employer or the employer getting angry with the employees, they both should remember each other's kindness and work together in harmony.

Of course, you can apply this generally. We should recognise the kindness and importance of others and value their happiness. We should not belittle them or disregard them through having a negative attitude towards them. Rather, one should value other people and have the highest regard for their happiness. This is a good attitude to have.

Maybe you have not been in a situation where you cannot buy anything with money, but I [i.e. Geshe Doga] was in such a situation when we left Tibet in 1959. We had to travel for four days through mountain deserts where there was nobody. During that time, it didn't matter how much money or gold one had – none of it was of any benefit, because there was nobody from whom one could buy food. One could have experienced famine and died because there was nobody to supply food or take care of one's needs.

Just before, I forgot to mention that Geshe-la said in regard to remembering the kindness of others to take the example of this house, this hall. I [i.e. Geshe Doga] have said many times that the person who built this house was very kind to us, because it was ready for us to use. If we just had the money, but there was no house to buy, what use would the money be? But because of the kindness of that person who built the house, [we have benefited].

Before we came here, there were Christians living here who did very beneficial work. Now we occupy this place, and we have come together so that we will not have any more attachment and anger. In fact, one can say that not one word has been said here in this hall since we came here together that was said to increase attachment or anger. This came about through the kindness of the person who built the house.

If there is no one from whom you can obtain food, drink, etc., then no matter how much gold and money you have – as in the example of walking for days through very desolate areas in Tibet – it is of no benefit. On the other hand, one can trust that even if one doesn't have money and gold, once one reaches an inhabited area where there are other people, one won't starve to death. Even though one doesn't have money, people will still give one food and drink. We can see this in Australia. Many people arrive without any money and they are given food and drink. This shows again the kindness of others. Of course, if the person – again through the fault of self-cherishing – says: "I don't like what you are giving me because it is not according to my taste", then that is a different problem.

For example, when I was living in Varanasi, there were many beggars around. A friend of mine went to give some money to the beggars, but he came back and said: "I gave money to the beggars with pure intention, but they complained to me about the way I gave them the money and we ended up having a fight! Those beggars are bad people."

Because there are so many beggars, some of them get jealous and say: "You gave so much money to him, and you gave me less". Then they complain because immediately the mind arises: "The other person got more than me."

If we are under the control of anger or attachment, we are no longer able to see reason. No matter how much we tell someone under the control of anger that they are wrong or that they should stop being angry, they won't listen. No matter how much we tell a person who is under the control of attachment to let go of the object, it will be completely impossible for them to let go once the attachment has fixed on the object.

So, although both of those minds are deluded minds that perceive the object completely unrealistically, our anger makes the other person in our mind a bad person. Our anger fixates on the bad person we perceive in our mind. Once that happens, no matter how much one tries to explain to an angry person: "Look, you're completely wrong", even though the object of their anger is actually a very good person who has not harmed them, this will not matter once someone has fallen under the control of anger.

The same is with attachment. Attachment perceives the object unrealistically, grasping at something that is lacking beauty as being desirable and attractive. Once someone has fallen under the control of attachment, no matter how much one points out the discrepancy between reality and appearance, it won't help.

The reason I am telling you this is because in the West people are always complaining that they are experiencing suffering, even though they have no problems regarding food, drink, accommodation, etc. Their outer material situation is very good. Still, people are experiencing lots of suffering. The question is where is this suffering coming from? Why am I experiencing suffering even though I am so materially well off and have everything? The answer lies with attachment and anger. The suffering one is experiencing is caused by attachment and anger.

Lacking the attitude of cherishing others – having the attitude of disregarding the happiness of others – brings lots of difficulties and problems into one's life. We will find ourselves in situations where we get angry with people towards whom we should be compassionate, and we generate compassion for people with whom we should actually be angry. This comes about through the fault of attachment, always looking for happiness in strangers and new acquaintances, and generating aversion to the people around us. We think that we will find more happiness with somebody outside our immediate circle, and then through the force of attachment, we are very compassionate and kind to those people, while generating aversion to people who

---

actually should be the object of our compassion – the people close to us.

This happens through the fault of attachment. This is a sign of not having the attitude of cherishing others and not being concerned about others.

We have completed the first three steps of equalising self and others, reflecting in various ways on the faults of self-cherishing, and reflecting in various ways on the benefits of cherishing others. Now comes the fourth step of exchanging self and others. Exchanging self and others occurs within one's mind on the basis of having recognised the faults of self-cherishing and the benefits of cherishing others. If, through that recognition, a change happens in one's mind whereby one regards the happiness of others with the same importance as one previously regarded one's own happiness, then one has achieved the fourth stage of exchanging self and others.

We can elaborate on meditating on giving and taking next time.

It is important to keep in mind that when we do this practice of exchanging self and others, we should remember the benefits of cherishing others and the disadvantages of cherishing self. The change that should occur in our mind is that we should start to perceive other sentient beings as being very dear, very near and close to us.

Sometimes, when we fall under the control of the delusions, we forget about the kindness of our father and the mother, of our parents, and we start to disregard them. But it is good to remind oneself of the kindness of the parents. One piece of advice I give, which many students have found very beneficial, is to count how many lunches they have received from their parents. Ordinarily, we regard somebody who has invited us a few times for lunch as being very friendly. So, we can start counting how many times we ate food provided for us by our parents!

By contemplating this, some students have been able to get some understanding of the kindness of their parents. Just reflecting on this very simple point brought the kindness of their parents closer to their mind.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

*Transcribed from tape by Gaye Lewis-Radcliffe  
Edited by Mary-Lou Considine  
Checked and formatted by Lee-Anne Armitage  
Edited Version  
© Tara Institute*