
The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas

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We will do a little bit of meditation as usual. Please sit in the correct physical posture.

We are all 'beings' – we can't say 'people', because the meaning of 'beings' is more expansive than people, but we are all 'beings'. When we say 'being' or 'person', it implies that we have a certain kind of potential. Since we are all humans, we are also beings and, as beings, we have a certain type of potential. The potential we are talking about is the potential to accomplish both our temporary and ultimate aims.

Since we have this potential, it is up to us to take control of it and make use of it. This is very important to think about, in order to generate self-confidence and overcome the laziness of thinking, "I'm not able to do this, I am unworthy, I don't have any potential". If we think in this type of negative way, we will fall under the control of laziness. On the contrary, if we think about our potential and how to make use of it and take it into our own hands, this will help us overcome that negative type of thinking and laziness.

As a human being, one has a very great potential. One has the potential to accomplish any type of happiness one wants to attain, and the potential to completely eradicate suffering. It is completely within our own hands. This is a very important point: that it is up to us only, and that we have the potential to achieve this.

We have now the method as well as the potential to accomplish those aims. Since both the potential and method have come together for us, if we did not make use of this, it would be very sad.

We are able to achieve inner mental happiness. There are two types of happiness – mental and physical. We can all achieve physical happiness, especially living in Australia. Even very poor people here probably have the possibility to have physical happiness. Even very poor people, for example, will have various sets of clothes, maybe three, four or five suits or changes of clothing. So we can definitely achieve physical happiness.

Here is a very important point to investigate – how does it come about that even though one can achieve perfect physical happiness, one is still mentally unhappy? This is an important point to investigate.

If one could attain mental happiness on top of having physical happiness, then one would have both types of happiness and be content. At the moment, if we investigate why we don't have mental happiness, we will probably find that even though our mind has great potential, this potential is scattered because our mind is distracted, always going off here and there outside to different parts of the city. When the mind 'goes for walks', it wanders to different parts of the city, and takes with it the mind's potential. Whenever the mind gets

distracted, it also draws away its potential, and one is not able to make use of that potential.

To overcome this, one has to practise meditation, focusing the mind on one object and training it in single-pointedness. There are various benefits from doing this. If we can learn to be more concentrated, then firstly, we can make use of the mind's potential. Our mental potential will be concentrated or focused on one point. Also, the mind will become clearer, and one will attain greater clarity of mind. One will also attain greater stability of mind – the mind will become more stable.

It is very important to purify and clarify one's mind. We all know from our own experience what happens if the mind falls under the control of unsuitable and disturbing states. We can investigate for ourselves what happens if the mind falls under the very strong control of attachment. Through the force of attachment, when the mind is focused on one object, such as another person, it becomes completely attached to that person.

As long as one does not attain what one wishes for, one will not be mentally happy. Regardless of the type of activity one engages in – walking, eating, sleeping or going out with other friends – nothing will be satisfactory. Even if one eats nice food, because of this strong attachment, the food won't taste good. One might also have a nice place to live, a nice flat, but the mind won't be happy there because of this very strong attachment. Even if one meets other friends, the mind still won't be happy. This comes about through the force of very strong attachment. So you can see the great benefit in overcoming that thought of attachment, and this benefit can be attained through meditation.

Being aware of the benefits of meditation, we focus the mind inwards, freeing it from the control of the three poisons [i.e. poisonous minds of anger, attachment and ignorance]. We take the mind away from the control of the three poisons, and bring it home, focusing it inwards. After having thus placed the mind inwards, we concentrate single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath, and remain like this for a few minutes. *[Pause for meditation]*

We have already finished with the second and third steps [of the practice of exchanging self with others], which were:

- reflecting on the disadvantages of self-cherishing in various ways; and
- reflecting on the advantages or benefits of cherishing others in various ways.

What one basically reflects on here is that cherishing others is the door through which one will achieve all one's aims, and accomplish whatever one wants to do. Self-cherishing, on the other hand, is the cause for all one's problems and difficulties, and one's lack of success, and so on. After having reflected in such a manner on the benefits of cherishing others and the disadvantages of self-cherishing, then slowly, slowly, a change should happen in the mind, wherein the self-cherishing should become less, and the attitude of cherishing others should become greater.

Then one arrives at the fourth step, which is the actual exchanging of self and others. When we do this practice of exchanging self and others, it doesn't mean that we actually become others and that others become us. What it means is that in one's mind, one regards the happiness and purpose of others as important as one previously regarded one's own happiness. A change happens in one's mind.

Once one regards the happiness and aims of others with the same intensity with which one previously regarded one's own happiness, one has come to the point of exchanging self and others. This practice of exchanging self and others is done in conjunction with the practice of taking and giving – the practice of [visualising] giving away all one's happiness, and so on, which becomes a meditation on love. One also does the practice of taking on other sentient beings' sufferings and problems, which becomes a meditation on compassion.

This meditation deals mainly with increasing one's concern for the happiness of others. We can investigate from our own experience the benefits of having an attitude of being concerned for others. When someone is truly concerned with others and wants to benefit them, what effect does this have on that person's mind? We have to relate it to our own life. If we have such an attitude of wanting to make others happy, of wanting to benefit them, what benefit do we get from that in our own mind? After we have seen the benefit of cherishing others in our own mind – that one is happier – we then start to think, what benefit can we give to others? If we are more loving, warm, compassionate and happier, then we will also be able to benefit the self-cherishing mind of those around us. So we should reflect on the benefits of cherishing others, of being concerned for them, and the disadvantages of self-cherishing.

What happens in the case of a person who is very self-cherishing, and always acts in a self-cherishing way? Very likely, that person will alienate any friends they might still have. The people with whom they are already their enemies will distance themselves even further from them. The self-cherishing person will end up with no friends at all. Because of the faults of a very strong self-cherishing attitude, everyone around them is transformed into enemies; they become alienated from everybody they know.

On the other hand, if we have a very strong attitude of cherishing others and having concern for others, exactly the opposite will happen. We will become closer to the friends we already have, and the people who may have disliked us will start to like us.

These are some of the benefits and disadvantages of self-cherishing and cherishing others.

Now we will go on to love and compassion, which is the essence of the Buddha's teachings. No matter how we look at it, concern for others, love, compassion and bodhicitta are the essence of the Buddha's teachings.

If we think about it, what every sentient being wants from the depth of their heart is to be happy. This is the essential wish of every sentient being. From this, we can begin to understand how love, compassion and a

concern for others are the essence of the Buddha's teachings. To have concern for others, we need to have love and compassion. We need to have the wish for the other person to be happy, and to be free from suffering. Without those two types of wishes, it will be impossible to have concern for other sentient beings.

Love and compassion are highly regarded around the world – whether a person is a religious practitioner or not, or a practitioner of a particular religion or not, love and compassion are always regarded very highly. If we analyse whether we have this love and compassion in our continuum or not, we have to say yes, everyone has love and compassion, everyone has engaged in actions that were beneficial to others. Everyone already has done something beneficial for others, and helped someone to overcome problems. These actions came about through the thought of love and compassion. Therefore, one can definitely say that everyone has love and compassion. If we want to practise such love and compassion, we have to start where we are at the moment, and with the people we usually encounter.

Love and compassion are very important. Love is the wish for a sentient being that is devoid of happiness to be happy; the wish to give another sentient being happiness is the thought of love. The thought of compassion is wishing a sentient being that we see suffering to be free from that suffering. If we see that someone is afflicted by suffering, then we wish that sentient being to be free from suffering. This thought would be the thought of compassion.

If we relate this to our own experience, think about a time when we were feeling devoid of happiness, feeling sad, suffering, etc. At such a time, if a friend or partner took great care of us, tried to make us happy, to lighten up our mind, to alleviate our problems and suffering, then through the help of the other person, we experienced the benefits of that person's love and compassion. Our friend, at a time when we were down, had this thought of wanting to make us happy, wanting to free us from suffering. He or she also had the thought of personally taking on the responsibility of making us well again. At such a time, we experienced the benefit of the other person's love, compassion and sense of responsibility for our wellbeing.

So, after seeing the benefit to our own life, we can generate love and compassion, meditate on love and compassion and practise love and compassion for our friend. We can take personal responsibility for the wellbeing of our friend. In such a way, with both parties taking care of each other, you can experience a happy situation, and you can both give great benefit to each other. If the other does need our help, and we don't help them, at that point we are devoid of love and compassion. One can say that no matter how many pledges one made previously – "I love you", and so on – they were all just empty words. Anyway, I [Geshe Doga] don't need to explain this too much to you, because you know it already. I'm just talking away a little bit!

In relation to the different phases in our life, it is obvious how we rely on the love and compassion of

others at the beginning of our life, because it was our parents who were responsible for our upbringing. At the beginning of our life, we relied on the love and compassion of our parents. And at the end of one's life, when one is old, one can't do various things and life becomes more difficult. Again one will rely on the love and compassion of others.

Since one relies on the love and compassion of others at the beginning and at the end of one's life if, during the middle part of one's life one has this "I don't care about anything and I can take care of myself, I don't need anybody", this would be a mistaken attitude, because all the conditions we need for a happy life and all our happiness come about through the kindness of others. Our life-force comes about through the kindness of others. Various things we need to have a happy life also come about through the kindness of others, so one is never as independent of others as may like to think.

Also, if we look at the benefits that love and compassion give to the mind of the person who possesses them, there is a great variety of benefits. The mind of a person with love and compassion is calmer, more peaceful and more stable. A loving and compassionate person will have more friends. People will be more pleasant and friendly to us if we are loving and compassionate. One will experience fewer disturbed states of mind, and fewer delusions. If one has love and compassion, one will have less ill-will and less harmful intent within one's mind.

There are many benefits that the practice and generation of love and compassion brings to the individual. We should reflect on those benefits and then reflect on how we possess these priceless and special mental attitudes of love and compassion, and make a determination to practise them.

If we treat each other with love and compassion, this also generates confidence and trust in the other person. This is also a benefit of love and compassion. If we have love and compassion, it will generate peace, not only within one's own mind, but also within the country in which one lives. So there is a further benefit for us and for society.

If we are loving and compassionate people, automatically the attitudes of harmful intent and ill-will will be reduced. We will have less ill-will, less aggression and less harmful intent towards others, because love and compassion are the antidotes to those negative attitudes. They cancel those negative attitudes out. This is what we mean when we talk about the Dharma – the religion of non-harm, of having an attitude of non-harm. This attitude of non-harm or peace comes about through love and compassion, because it becomes impossible to have the wish to harm another person if one has love and compassion for that person.

We should contemplate on the importance of love and compassion, on the pricelessness and importance of love and compassion, and reflect on how we have those two attitudes. All we need to do now is to increase them. Because the mind is trainable, through habituating one's mind and increasing one's love and compassion slowly, the mind will slowly become more and more familiar

and acquainted with love and compassion, which will increase more and more.

Do we have some questions? We have time for some questions. Did all the questions disappear?!

Question from student: Sometimes when you really attempt to be loving and compassionate towards people, they abuse you, and I'm just wondering whether, how to deal with a complex situation like that. Is it good to allow somebody to abuse you, or how do you kind of deal with that?

Answer: You don't always have to be submissive. In such a case, it can be quite good to be more assertive towards the other person. Sometimes, that's what they need – a show of strength.

If another person abuses us despite us having shown them love and compassion, the reason why that person is abusing us is because they are under the power of ignorance, they are completely deluded. If we think about it, even animals can appreciate love and compassion. If we show love and compassion to an animal, that animal will also treat us well in its own way. So even animals can understand love and compassion.

Now, how does it come about that a human cannot appreciate being shown love and compassion? Because that person is completely overcome by ignorance and delusion. Understanding this will generate compassion in our mind, and will not let anger arise or ill-will arise in our mind. If we understand how pitiful the other person is, this will prevent the arising of ill-will towards them.

Sometimes, there are situations where what the other person needs is a show of strength from our side; it may be that we need to be more assertive from our side, and reduce their pride a bit. If somebody attacks us, we don't necessarily need to adopt a submissive attitude. For lack of a better word, you 'take up the challenge', but the way you reply is not in a harmful and negative way.

You don't have to just take what everyone gives to you: you can also react in a positive way. You can try to sort it out. You can try to act in a compassionate and understanding way and sort it out with the other person. If somebody looks at us with a very 'black' face, we don't just have to look away. We can look back, but the way we look back is at the other person is with a smile.

For example, once when I [Geshe Doga] went to Queensland, my neighbour in the plane was one of those people with a very black face. I started a conversation, but he just looked straight ahead with a very black, very grim face. So then I just gave him a very nice smile and later he said to me: "Your smile is really beautiful, it was the best thing that happened to me today. Would it be possible for me to take your photograph?" [Laughter]

Later he sent the picture back here to me. When some of my friends saw the picture and the address it came from, they said "Geshe-la, that was somebody really important who took your picture!". Maybe he was

somebody high up in the newspaper business. Anyway, you can always overcome a grim face with your smile. Other people will have to smile back in response, without control!

It happens quite frequently that people on the street tell me: "Today, seeing your smile was the best thing that has happened to me". People who I never met before...I have many stories to tell! *[More laughter]*

Some people also come to me crying, but then when I laugh at them, they also have to laugh. Some people cry in any situation, whether they are happy or sad. Some people only cry when they are happy, and when they have problems, they can't cry. Some people cry on most occasions, but when there is actually something to cry about, there are no tears left. For example, when their father or mother dies, they can't cry, and they wonder, "Why couldn't I cry today?".

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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