
The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas
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24 April 2004

We will practise a little bit of meditation as usual. First, we have to sit in a comfortable and proper posture, and free the mind from the control of the disturbing thoughts.

At present, our mind is distracted and scattered because of these disturbing thoughts – thinking about what has happened in the past and worrying about what will happen in the future, not to mention the distractions of the present moment. The mind is [continually] distracted by thinking about the three times [past, present and future]. As long as the mind is under the influence of disturbing thoughts, it will be difficult to attain inner peace and happiness. Therefore, it is important that we free the mind from the control of the disturbing thoughts, and focus it inwards, bringing it home.

After focusing the mind inwards in this way, and leaving it [abide within] that space for a short time, we then concentrate single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. The breath should flow naturally and should not be forced in any way. We can meditate in this way for a few minutes. *[Pause for meditation]* Please arise again from your meditative equipoise!

There can be a misunderstanding regarding the concept of subduing the mind. Subduing the mind and practising meditation has nothing to do with imprisoning the mind or making the mind smaller. It would be a misconception to think that meditation means that. Rather, meditation means analysing the workings of our mind, and how it functions.

For example, some people find that their mind will be distracted by worries about not having enough material possessions. Even if they do find enough material possessions, they worry about how long those possessions will last, and what to do once the possessions are gone. By focusing the mind on this situation and thinking about it over and over, one creates anxiety and unhappiness within the mind. This seems to happen to some people.

It would be better to have the attitude that we must work to have enough material possessions – money, food, etc. – but once we have enough, we should be able to enjoy what we have. The function of being able to enjoy a good life, of being able to enjoy our possessions and our good situation, is fulfilled by our consciousness.

By mentally getting involved in all kinds of worries, anxiety and unhappiness arise in the mind. Since the body and mind are related, that mental unhappiness often translates into physical/health problems. On the other hand, if we have a happy mind, this would positively affect our physical wellbeing. To begin with, if we are happy, this will be conducive for us to have a

long life, because if one is happy, one automatically will want to live long. This creates the dependent-arising or the conducive condition for a long life. Also, since a happy mind benefits our physical wellbeing, our physical body will be healthier. This will also be conducive to a long life, because once our physical body dies, our life is finished.

Therefore, one has to check up and put into practice the methods of attaining mental happiness.

Last time, we left [the text *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*] at the generation of bodhicitta through the meditation on taking and giving. By meditating on taking and giving, which is actually a meditation on compassion and love, and by acquainting one's mind more and more with that meditation, and expanding the meditation's focus more and more, automatically the thought will arise: "I have to take on the responsibility for the happiness of all sentient beings; I myself have to take on the responsibility to liberate all sentient beings from suffering".

After this thought has arisen naturally within one's mind, one has to check up: "Even though I have taken the responsibility upon myself, I really don't have the ability to help all sentient beings at the moment". So, one checks up on who has this ability, and one finds that only a Buddha, a completely enlightened being, has the ability to help all sentient beings. Through this reflection, one will automatically want to become a fully enlightened being for the benefit of all sentient beings. This would be the generation of 'aspiring' or 'wishing' bodhicitta.

When we practise this meditation of taking and giving, the meditation on giving includes mentally giving away all our possessions to sentient beings, giving away the root of our virtues and our qualities to sentient beings, and even giving away our body to sentient beings.

As well as training the mind in this way during meditation – giving away everything we have – it is important that we also put this meditation into action. In one's daily life, outside of the meditation session, one should be more generous – giving away things in order to make sentient beings happy, trying to make sentient beings happier. In the same way, one should apply the meditation on taking – the meditation on compassion – in one's daily life.

This completes the outline and steps describing the generation of bodhicitta in meditative equipoise.

The next outline is dealing with non-conductive conditions, and dealing with problems in between meditation sessions. Transforming problems and adverse conditions [that arise] between meditation sessions into the path is very important. Although we may practise the meditation, in between meditation sessions, we will encounter all kinds of adverse conditions and problems that may discourage us and cause us to abandon or neglect our Dharma practice. So here, the first practice is to transform these adverse conditions and problems into the path. These problems

will then actually become conducive conditions for one's Dharma practice; they will help one's Dharma practice.

There are many ways in which one may become discouraged in one's Dharma practice. For example, we might lose all or most of our possessions, which might cause us to abandon our Dharma practice. We might experience a serious sickness, which might cause our mind to become depressed and thus cause us to abandon our Dharma practice. We might become depressed because of losing a good friend, and that also might cause us to abandon our Dharma practice.

Thus, it is important that we are able to transform the problems and adverse conditions we experience into conducive conditions, and transform them into the path. For example, in relation to the meditation on patience, everyone is able to meditate on patience or compassion while sitting in meditation. However, if we go out and meet someone who shows anger towards us, it is difficult when we are actually confronted with it to meditate on patience or compassion, so anger will arise [within us]. This happens to everyone. In that moment, anger becomes an adverse condition that harms one's practice of patience and compassion because, at that moment when anger arises, one's compassion and patience are lost.

To prevent this happening, one must be able to transform the adverse condition one experiences – for example, the other person's anger. Not only should we not be affected by their anger, but we should also transform the situation into a conducive condition for generating patience.

Our mind is impermanent, and the happiness in our mind changes in dependence upon causes and conditions. We may lose the happiness in our mind if we meet with adverse conditions. One moment we are happy, then we meet with adverse conditions, which cause us to lose the happiness in our mind. Practising patience means that if one meets with adverse conditions, one is able to keep the happiness within one's mind. One is able to bear those conditions and be patient – being patient here means that one does not lose the happiness within one's mind, and does not let the mind become disturbed and agitated by the adverse conditions. This would be called the practice of patience.

Some people might think that the practice of patience is difficult and makes the mind uptight, because it requires one to keep their anger, annoyance, etc. inside. This is not the practice of patience. The practice of patience is being able to stay happy in the face of adverse conditions, and being able to prevent one's mind from becoming agitated and disturbed. For example, the happiness of being able to live together harmoniously depends on the practice of patience. To experience the happiness of harmonious living, two people need to be patient with each other's faults and mistakes. Patience means not getting upset about the other person's faults and mistakes.

So, patience is a matter of not allowing the mind to be agitated by disturbing thoughts in the face of adverse conditions. If adverse conditions don't act as a cause or condition for disturbing thoughts to arise within our

mind, then one is practising patience. This is the meaning of patience. If you think about it, this will be beneficial for our mind. Mothers usually say, once children arrive in their life, that their children give them plenty of opportunities to practise patience – they have to take care of their children, which teaches them about Dharma practice, the practice of patience and compassion.

Actually, the practice of patience can only occur when one meets adverse conditions. If one is able to be patient when experiencing adverse conditions, one is really practising patience. At the moment, our practice of patience occurs in the absence of adverse conditions, and it is easy to be patient if one is not experiencing adverse conditions.

Geshe-la says there was once a practitioner meditating beside a stupa, while another practitioner was circumambulating it. After some time, the practitioner circumambulating the stupa asked the meditator, "What are you meditating on?" The meditator said: "I am meditating on patience". The one who was circumambulating the stupa then insulted the meditator, who immediately became angry. The meditator had been meditating on patience in the absence of adverse conditions, so he had this level of patience. However, he was not able to meditate on patience in the face of adverse conditions, so this aspect of his practice was missing. Actually, patience has to be practised in relation to adverse conditions. That's why we say that the object of our patience is our best friend, because it is teaching us about patience.

I might stop here for tonight. If you have some questions, we can do some questions and answers, and continue with the root text next Wednesday.

Question: How do you transform anger?

Answer: One way of transforming anger is by focusing the mind inwards and investigating the anger – the reasons for the anger, the disadvantages of anger, and so forth. Don't let the mind be distracted outside, but focus it inside and investigate the anger – why one got angry, etc. Through this process alone, the anger will die down. It is in the nature of the mind that if one focuses inwards, sometimes the mind calms down by itself.

We can also contemplate the situation of the other person, the object of our anger. We can think about the reasons why the other person got angry, and that they are under the control of their own negative mind. We can think that, at that moment, because they are experiencing anger, they are not happy. We all know about the unhappiness that anger generates within the mind – the other person is experiencing that very unhappiness at that moment. By thinking about the unhappiness of the other person, one generates compassion and love for them, and in this way, can overcome one's anger.

Whether we generate anger towards the other person or not has a lot to do with how the person appears to our mind. Does the person appear pleasant to our mind? Does the person appear undesirable to our mind? Here,

we can reflect that at the moment, we generate anger towards the other person because we think they are in a good situation.

However, this could change very quickly. If we find out that the other person has a sickness, like a serious disease or some other illness, then in our mind a change will happen. The anger we previously had for the person will go away, and we will think: "My God, that poor person, how much suffering are they experiencing. What can I do to help?" Normally, once we see another person experiencing suffering from a serious disease, we will generate compassion for that person.

Question: What is the best way to stabilise the mind...? [remainder of question inaudible]

Answer: You have to learn how to forget about that person, because it happens that our mind automatically, without control, goes to certain objects, certain memories, etc. that cause us mental suffering. We have to forget about the past and its objects. This is done through the process of meditation.

Perhaps at the moment the mind is distracted by those memories. However, by bringing the mind back from those memories again and again to a virtuous object – familiarising the mind more and more with the virtuous object of the meditation – slowly, slowly one will be able to let go of those memories and forget about them.

If our memories of deceased friends etc. come up in the mind, one can pray for them, pray that will again take a happy rebirth, that they will have all the conducive qualities and conditions needed for a happy life and for Dharma practice. In this way, the memory of the deceased friend is transformed into Dharma practice, and the mind will be less unhappy. So, that memory will become a conducive condition for one's practice of virtue. You can also relate that memory to the meditation on death and impermanence.

The mind's grasping at memories has a great capacity to disturb our mind and our happiness. This happened to me when I [Geshe Doga] was very young, after I had entered the monastery. From time to time my mother would come to visit me in the monastery. While she was there, I was very happy for an hour or two, but then she would go back to her home, and my mind would become very sad and disturbed. I couldn't do any kind of Dharma practice, I couldn't memorise, etc. So my teacher told me to sit in my room and just calm down my mind. Through doing that, I could let go of that grasping, and I could forget about my mother in there.

While I was studying in the Tibetan University in Varanasi, there was a student who remembered the times he was fed by his older brothers and sisters when he was younger. When he came to Varanasi, the conditions were not good: the food was bad and he constantly remembered how he had been fed by his older brother. Even the hand with which he had been fed would physically appear to his mind continually. His mind became completely fixated on how he had been fed by this hand. So it became impossible for him to remain in the Tibetan University in Varanasi, and he had to go back home!

As we said at the beginning, bring the mind back home, freeing it from the control of disturbing thoughts, then concentrate it single-pointedly on the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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