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

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We can practise a little bit of meditation as usual. First, please sit in a comfortable and appropriate physical posture before attempting to subdue the mind.

Here, 'subdue the mind' means taking control of one's mind, which is the opposite of being controlled by the mind. One should take control of the mind in such a way as to make it more stable and serviceable. What do we mean when we say making the mind more serviceable? It means that the mind is able to remain on virtuous meditation objects for however long one wishes it. To be able to do this, one has to avoid letting the mind get distracted by the arising of disturbing thoughts.

So, we free the mind from the disturbing thoughts that try to distract it outside and bring it home 100%, focusing it completely inwards. We then concentrate the mind single-pointedly, in a relaxed and subtle manner, on the coming and going of the breath. The mind can then remain peacefully on the coming and going of the breath. *[Pause for meditation.]*

It is good to meditate regularly and accustom the mind to good, positive and virtuous states. If we meditate regularly, we will increase our inner qualities. Then, if we are able to develop both our Dharma qualities and our worldly qualities, we will have a very good life.

If one only has worldly qualities but no Dharma qualities, delusions will arise freely and strongly in the mind – there is nothing to stop disturbing mental states arising. However, if we have developed our Dharma qualities, we will be able to oppose the delusions and, through opposing the delusions, we will be able to experience a particular kind of mental happiness.

This is not to say that one doesn't also need worldly qualities. Worldly qualities are also necessary so that we are able to a living. However, all your worldly qualities are already well developed. You all went to school and so on, so you should think that, on top of this, if I can develop my Dharma qualities, then these Dharma qualities will complement my worldly qualities and benefit my life. In this way, we can see the benefit of practising the Dharma.

We started with the outline or section [in the text] that deals with transforming adverse conditions into the path. Through our practice, problems and difficult circumstances will not adversely affect us, and we will even be able to transform those problems and adverse circumstances into conducive conditions for spiritual development.

The first type of adverse condition or problem is having our belongings stolen. Verse 12 [of the translated root text *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*, Snow Lion Publications, New York 1997] reads:

Even if someone out of strong desire  
Steals all your wealth or has it stolen,  
Dedicate to him your body,  
possessions  
And your virtue, past, present and  
future –  
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

When somebody takes away our wealth then, according to worldly convention, we would say we have to do everything in our means to prevent that happening. So, according to our ability, power, strength, etc., we would try as much as possible to prevent somebody from taking away our wealth.

However, as it says here, from the point of view of the practice of a Bodhisattva, one cannot do that. The reason is that, although it looks as if one is receiving a loss, one is actually receiving a very great gain if one gives up one's possessions.

Even in ordinary worldly terms, we would happily give up a small amount of our wealth to gain greater wealth. This is the principle that one has to apply here. Ordinarily, if someone said: "Tonight you can't go to sleep. You have to work all night, but you won't get anything for it", then we would find it very difficult to give up our sleep. However, if we can see that we could get a handsome profit from working all night, we would happily give up the happiness of sleeping and forgo sleep to work. Even the next morning, we would not feel regret but would feel happy.

In my [Geshe-la's] home country [Tibet], if a farmer has an animal stolen, immediately the whole village will set out on horseback, well-armed with guns, swords and knives, to catch the thief. The verse here says that, if someone has strong desire and through the force of that strong desire either steals all our wealth directly, or orders someone to steal our wealth indirectly, then as a Bodhisattva you would not reply in kind or in a harmful manner. Instead, as well as not generating aversion to that person, you would dedicate all your virtues, all your possessions, and even your physical body to he or she. Here, it even refers to all your possessions, virtue and physical body of the past, present and future.

At this point, one meditates on the patience of not being affect by harm from others. One reflects on why the other person is stealing one's possessions. Initially, it will appear as if the other person is stealing our possessions because that's what they want to do. However, if you look more deeply at the cause of the other person stealing our possessions, it is because that person is overcome by desire. Because that person is experiencing strong desire, he or she is driven by great dissatisfaction and the desire to steal our possessions.

If one reflects further on the situation, one arrives at the recognition that the other person is not someone to be angry with but someone to be pitied because they are driven by their desire and dissatisfaction. If there is an object for anger, it is that person's delusion, but certainly not the person who is driven by their own dissatisfaction and desire. When we recognise the incredible dissatisfaction of the other person, from our heart we

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will freely be able to offer our possessions, virtues and physical body of the three times [past, present and future] to that person.

So, by meditating on patience, we can contemplate the fact that, on the surface, it appears as if that person has complete freedom in deciding that they want to steal our wealth. If we analyse more deeply, we find that they are actually driven to do that action by strong desire.

Another way of looking at the situation is to reflect on cause and effect – at some time in the past, we ourselves created the cause to have our possessions stolen, and now we are only experiencing the result of our actions. If we reflect in this manner, it can help us overcome anger, deal with the situation, and meditate on patience. There is no need to get angry with the other person because we ourselves created the karma to have this experience of having our possessions stolen.

Reflecting in this manner is important. Otherwise, if we let the mind be overcome by anger, worry and distress, we will start to engage in an internal, never-ending, negative dialogue that goes on and on and around and around. One will just make oneself more depressed, and will lose one's strength and confidence. One will not be able to sleep well at night and will lose appetite. Sometimes, people can become so negative and worried, they make themselves mentally sick and in danger of falling seriously ill and dying. One should try to avoid this.

Another way of looking at such a situation is as the great bodhisattva Shantideva says – that we will definitely have to be separated from our possessions sooner or later. We cannot keep our possessions within us. Therefore, why get upset if we are separated from them? Our possessions are something we have to leave behind anyway. However, when we get angry because of losing our possessions, the karma we create through getting angry is something we will *not* be separated from, but will have to take with us to our future life.

Therefore, by reflecting on the benefits of practising patience and remembering the disadvantages of getting angry, although one might feel one has received a great loss by losing one's possessions, it is actually not such a great loss. However, one will receive a great loss if one lets the mind be overcome by attachment and anger, which create a lot of non-virtuous karma.

Practising meditation and using the various thought transformation techniques – reflecting and thinking in a skilful way – is definitely beneficial for one's mind. There was a case of one of my students who used to practise meditation. Within the space of one week, his mother died and his son died in a car accident. When he came to me he said that he could not have imagined anything worse happening to him than what had happened to him in that one week. However, through his Dharma practice, he still felt he could deal with this very difficult situation, he could make it mentally bearable for himself through his practice of meditation. It was beneficial for that person to practise meditation. Thinking in a skilful way by using thought transformation techniques is definitely beneficial for one's life. Not relying only on outer circumstances but

supporting our happiness through our way of thinking – this is the good way to go.

Chandrakirti once said that 'this situation wasn't created by other sentient beings; it was created by my delusions. Therefore, I will not let my mind get disturbed and agitated and I won't generate anger towards others.'

Lama Tsong Khapa said in his commentary on Shantideva's text, *Entering the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, that if one continuously meditates on patience and is continuously endowed with patience, one's mental happiness will not degenerate and one will be able to spend this life in happiness. Not only that, but the practice of patience will also close the door to rebirth in the lower realms in future lives, and is the substantial cause for a higher rebirth. In short, the practice of patience both brings us happiness in this life as well as happiness in future lives.

If one becomes adept in the practice of patience, if one is able to generate some patience within one's mind, then one should feel very joyful. In worldly terms, if we receive great wealth, we will be happy because we think that wealth will bring us great happiness and alleviate our suffering. In the same way, we should also feel happy if we generate some patience within our mind. Although this is not the actual place [in the text] that deals with patience – the actual practice of patience comes further along in the text – there will be many more verses dealing with the practice of patience.

Reflecting on practising patience in this way it is very beneficial and we should try to do so.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama remarked: "Our teachers are able to teach us the techniques for the meditation on patience – but the actual meditation on patience we cannot do in relation to our teachers. The actual meditation on patience we have to do in relation to our enemies."

We can leave it here for tonight. Perhaps you have some questions?

*Question from student about the practical application of the bodhisattva practice of offering one's body to other beings.*

*Answer:* There are various ways of offering one's body. There are times when one can offer parts of one's body, for example, offering one's eyes. Quite often, you hear about a relative giving a kidney to another relative and so on. So, you can offer a part of your body to someone else.

Another way is using up your body in working for others, and not saving your own body at the expense of others. Let's say you would not allow your work for others to be hindered by concerns for your own physical welfare, health, etc. You would thus be using up your body in working for others.

As mentioned in the sutras, there was once a time when Shakyamuni Buddha offered his body as food to a dying tigress and her cubs. There was a great famine and there was nothing to eat, so because of hunger, the tigress was just about to eat the cubs. Seeing this, the

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Buddha generated great compassion, and actually offered his body as food to the tigress and the cubs.

There are examples of people giving up their body and life for the welfare of many. We can find examples of people who gave up their life for the welfare of their country, for example, Australia or India. Their attitude is that no what happens, regardless of whether I get sick or die or whatever, I'm willing to give up my life for India for Australia. If we people can do this on a worldly level, then it is possible to have the same attitude for the Dharma.

We find many cases in India and other parts of the world where people are willing to give up their life for a cause they believe in – strapping bombs to their body and exploding themselves. Some of these people believe it will benefit their country. Regardless of whether they are driven to that action through anger, aversion or compassion, a certain strength of mind is required to be able to do that. It takes very great courage to do such a thing. So we should have the same type of courage for one's Dharma practice, being willing to give up even one's life for the benefit of others.

If a suicide bomber engages in such an action out of anger, he or she will obviously become an object of our compassion, because his or her anger has not only driven them to inflict great harm to others, but it has also driven them to completely destroy themselves. So, just from the point of view of thinking that they are driven by their anger to completely destroy themselves makes it obvious how they should become the object of our compassion.

If we reflect in this way, it will become clearer to us what the practice of patience and meditation of patience is all about.

As explained at the beginning, please bring the mind back home, and focus it inwards. Then, as we recite, focus single-pointedly on the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

*Transcribed from tape by Gaye Lewis-Radcliffe  
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