
The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas
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We will meditate for a little while. Sit in a comfortable and appropriate posture. After having assumed the physical meditation posture, we also have to put our mind in the correct state, because meditation is actually done within the mind. If we analyse our mind, it will become clear to us that certain parts of it need to be subdued, and this needs to be done in meditation.

When we look within our mind, it will become clear to us that there is one part of it that needs to be subdued and another part that will actually do the subduing. If we don't let our mind become distracted by disturbing thoughts, but are able to remain focused inwardly, we will be able to recognise the natural clarity and wisdom of our mind. We will understand that this is a state of mind we should become more acquainted with, a state of mind that needs to be developed.

We will also recognise that there are other parts of the mind that definitely need to be subdued. There are states of mind that prevent us from becoming a good person, from developing good qualities, and from having a happy life. So we should recognise those states of the mind as such, and then make a definite determination to never again let our mind be controlled by those mental states.

Within our mind, there are certain misleading mistaken conceptions that will prevent us from engaging in the wholesome activities we want to do. Then, there are certain states of the mind that are positive and virtuous, that are conducive to a wholesome and virtuous beneficial lifestyle.

Should mistaken conceptions arise within our mind, we should at least try not to act on these negative states of the mind, because although these negative states may have arisen mentally, at least our actions of body and speech should not fall under the control of these negative states. So there is some harm that will have been stopped.

When we sit in the meditation posture, we are already physically subdued. What is left to do is for us to subdue the mind, to free the mind from the control of the disturbing thoughts that try to distract it towards outside objects. We bring the mind back home, focusing it inwards.

After having concentrated the mind inwards, we place it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. Our placement [of the mind on the breathing] should neither be too tight nor too loose. The grip of our concentration should be just the right strength, and very relaxed. Then if we can overcome the disturbing thoughts and prevent our mind being distracted towards outside objects, we will be able to attain single-pointed concentration and the associated pliancy of body and mind. (*Pause for meditation.*)

Maybe we can stop here. I also interrupted you with my coughing!

Last time, we talked about how one is not affected by the harm of others through the patience that is able to bear suffering. Verse 14 [of the translated root text *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*, Snow Lion Publications, New York 1997] reads:

Even if someone broadcasts all kinds
of unpleasant remarks
About you throughout the three
thousand worlds,
In return, with a loving mind,
Speak of his good qualities –
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

Today, we are talking about the patience of not being affected by unpleasant words and criticism. A person with a lot of attachment would be strongly affected by the unpleasant words of others. The more attachment one has, the easier it is for one to be affected by others' unpleasant words. Because one is attached to always hearing pleasant and complimentary words, the more upset one will become if one hears criticism and unpleasant words. Also, the more one is attached to gain, the more one will become jealous of the qualities one sees in other people's lives, and the angrier one will become when one sees the perfections in another person's life.

The point [made in this verse] is about attachment to pleasant and complimentary words, etc. The verse says: "Even if someone broadcasts all kinds of unpleasant remarks ... throughout the three thousand worlds" one wouldn't be affected and would respond by speaking of the other person's good qualities.

As a rule, one should not talk about one's own qualities, but should talk about one's faults. In relation to others, one should not talk about the faults of others, but should talk about their qualities, because even though it might be true that the other person has certain faults, if we mention those faults to them, they might become unhappy and experience mental distress and pain.

Therefore, we don't talk about the faults of others, but we do talk about their qualities, because talking about the qualities of others makes them happy. Also, we don't talk about our own qualities, because talking about our own qualities is a cause for pride. So, we should not put forward our own qualities, but keep them inside and instead mention our faults. We should not try to keep our faults hidden but reveal them, because we have to change our wrong ways.

We can relate this practice of patience to the meditation on karma – we have created the karma to now have the experience of being criticised, or hearing disagreeable words. One can relate the law and practice of karma to the immediate situation one is facing, because as a rule other people will not criticise or verbally abuse us without a cause.

So, one must have done something disagreeable first to make the other person angry causing them to say something to us in return. One can clearly observe this

– we can relate it to the cause/effect relationship of the immediate situation. We can also relate it to the law of karma – previously one accumulated this karma by criticising someone else, so now one is in turn being criticised or verbally abused.

Also, if we are in the situation of exchanging words with others, it is good to remember how we ourselves dislike being criticised or incorrectly addressed. Since this is something we ourselves dislike, of course the other person will also dislike it. We shouldn't inflict on another person something we ourselves dislike, because the other person will dislike being criticised exactly the same as we would.

Furthermore, the criticism of others can be seen as a mere echo. There is a saying by Atisha that the "criticism and the angry words of others can be seen as a mere echo. What kind of harm can they possibly inflict? No matter what another person says to me, it will not change anything in my mind."

There is no way that angry words can decrease our qualities or increase our faults. In the same way that praise cannot increase our qualities, or gain decrease our faults, praise won't give us physical happiness, and won't increase our physical well-being. Therefore, one can see the words of others as just as a mere echo. The bodhisattva Shantideva said: "Our mind should not be like the mind of a small child who builds a sandcastle on the beach and then gets very upset when the tide comes and sweeps the sandcastle away." Our mind should not be like a child's mind, getting upset by words that actually cannot affect us one way or the other.

The great bodhisattva Shantideva further said that if another person criticises us, it is a sign that this person has lost their faith and trust in us. That loss of faith and trust in us is something that happened in the other person's mind – we cannot do anything about it.

If we are criticised by another person because they have lost their faith and trust in us, this is no reason to be upset. Firstly, if someone else were criticised because of lack of trust and faith, we would not get angry. Also, if we are criticised, this shows a lack of trust and faith in the other person's mind, which is something we cannot do anything about. The faith within another person's mind is his or her own responsibility. So, that person should not become the object of our anger.

The lack of faith in the other person's mind is their own doing and certainly a person lacking faith and trust is not a suitable object for one's anger. The anger and aversion in the other person's mind is their own responsibility, something they have created. Therefore, they should not become the object of one's anger, and there is no reason for one to be upset in that situation.

So, gain and faith are objects of attachment and completely unworthy of our attention. There are certain types of people that will give up their wealth and would be even willing to give up their life in the name of fame by thinking: "I want to become a very famous general, I want to become a very famous soldier". They would be willing to give up everything in the name of fame.

But if we think about it, the word 'fame' is a mere word. There is not the slightest benefit coming from this word. The person will not be healthier from fame nor will he or she be any happier because of the fame. It will not give them more wealth nor can it be taken with them to the next life. When we go to the next life, things such as fame and material possessions have to be left behind. Although some people put a great effort into trying to become famous, it is an empty objective.

By reflecting this way on the uselessness of attachment to praise, we should become unattached to receiving or not receiving praise or criticism and keep a happy mind. Thinking about the pointlessness of attachment will help us have a happier mind in these situations. If we are criticised, it will neither decrease our qualities nor give us more faults; similarly, if we are praised, it will neither increase our qualities nor make us a better person. Likewise, if somebody compliments us on our appearance, it will not make us more handsome or beautiful. And, if someone criticises our appearance, it will not make us uglier than we are already are! *(Laughter)*

If somebody says: "You are really a nice person with such a good mind," what is the benefit? It doesn't change anything. We know our own mind, and because we know our own mind we don't need to get excited if we are praised, or get depressed if somebody criticises us. If we know our own mind, we can mentally remain happy even in the face of criticism.

It is said in the texts that "our mind is our witness." Our mind is the judge of what type of a person we are. So, we don't need to rely on the praise and criticism of others and we don't need to identify with what other people say, but we should rely on how our inner situation really is. That is important.

By reflecting in such a manner again and again, slowly one will become independent of others' views, because one knows one's own situation. Slowly through one's practice, one will be able to improve one's inner situation – increasing one's qualities and reducing one's faults – and there will be no need to be attached to or to identify with others' opinions.

Criticism being spread within a family and within a circle of friends and acquaintances has no benefit whatsoever. It completely destroys the harmony within the relationship. Criticism within a family destroys the harmony in the family, and criticism within friendships and relationships destroys our relations with other people. There is not the slightest benefit to be gained from this criticism.

Quite often, we have the situation where we look forward to meeting someone, for example, within the family or our circle of friends. We often wish that to have a good relationship with that person and to meet with them. However, whenever we meet the other person, old things come up all the time and one starts to bicker and to argue about things that happened in the past. Then the relationship is no longer harmonious. Finally, one actually becomes afraid to meet that other person. Even though one would actually like to meet them and talk with them and do things with that other

person, one is actually afraid just to meet them, because one feels that immediately the criticism and anger and so forth will start again.

Do we have questions? I want you to give me some questions!

Question: In the past, a couple of times when I have been criticised, I haven't liked it because it has been true! (Laughter).

Answer: This type of situation also occurs. Maybe at the beginning stages of our practice, we it may find it difficult to avoid becoming upset.

However, as I have mentioned previously, even though it might be true that another person's actions might be offensive, we should not necessarily say that to them. For example, in the case of a blind person, it is true that the other person is blind and has a defect of the eye. So, there is no reason for the other person to become upset if we point out that they are blind or that they have a defect of the eye. However, depending on the psychological state of the other person, this comment could upset them. To their mind, it sounds like criticism and makes them upset. Therefore, we should not criticise others, even if it is the truth.

Question: What about a situation where you don't want to see someone because even though you feel you want to see them, if you did, you feel you'd be criticised. Therefore you don't see them. How do you overcome that sort of harmful relationship?

Answer: I don't know if this applies to your situation or not. There is a difference between a discussion about different points of view, and criticism arising out of very strong anger. One can have constant discussion about different points of view. This, of course, happens in relationships in the family, etc. But this is different from what we mentioned before, which was really about somebody being verbally abusive or criticising out of anger.

This situation, of course, can come about through habit. This habit is so established within the mind, it feels almost natural to always bicker and criticise. When I lived in Buxa, we had one Indian man who used to do the sweeping. While he had money he was alright. But once his money ran out, he was angry continuously and always criticising everyone. This was just his habit; it was always like that.

We find the same situation within families – that it has become a habit to always fight about this or that. But here we should be aware that there is a difference between fighting and having a discussion. If there are two very strong points of view – one person saying one thing and the other person saying another, with neither of the two parties giving up their point of view, but rather strongly holding to their point of view and not giving any quarter – then lots of problems arise from that type of attitude. So, it is good to analyse the point of view of the other person, and to have some sort of a discussion about the different points of view.

For example, I don't like the bickering that goes on in politics. Often, between the different political parties,

there is quite a lot of fighting and bickering. I sometimes find this very strange because both [opposing parties in government] say that they are there for the benefit of the population. So, if one party does something for the benefit of the population, the opposing party should say: "Thank you very much. You did that very well." (Laughter.) But that's just my own uneducated point of view!

Getting back to families, sometimes we have the situation where the male side of the family sticks together and the female side of the family sticks together and that is often a great cause of disharmony and division within the family. There is a female point of view and there is a male point of view, and both of those points of view exist because we have males and females. So, the females have a right to their point of view, and the males have a right to theirs. However, to have a situation where they won't give up and just completely hold onto their own side – this can cause great disharmony.

It is much better to have a situation where one can have a wholesome discussion – looking at the other person's point of view, discussing the different points of view, and trying to look at it from the other person's side – instead of allowing constant accusations and criticism to come out of anger, with the intention to inflict harm on the other person.

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

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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