
The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas
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First, we will practise a little bit of meditation as usual. Sit in an appropriate and comfortable posture.

After seating yourself in the correct meditation posture, before engaging the mind with the object of meditation, look at the mind and see which state it is currently in. Then, pacify any disturbing and unsuitable states of the mind and try to generate a virtuous motivation for the meditation session. Do this before starting the actual meditation on the meditation object.

We can either try to generate the motivation thinking that we dedicate our practice for our complete enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, or we can simply have the motivation that we want to pacify the disturbing states of our mind and make our mind more pliant and flexible.

It's good to remember the relationship between our motivation and the nature of our actions. The nature of our actions will always be based on our motivation. If we have a positive and virtuous motivation, the actions we engage in out of that motivation will also be positive and virtuous.

This also applies to our meditation. Before the actual meditation, it is important for us to generate a virtuous motivation, which transforms the meditation into something virtuous. When we meditate, we are basically trying to accustom the mind to virtue and trying to generate more wholesome states of mind. The mind is like a creature of habit – it always follows what it is most accustomed to. If we look at our mind, we will recognise which mental states it is presently most accustomed to.

Because the mind follows habits, through meditation we can accustom it to more wholesome and virtuous states. The more we generate wholesome and virtuous mental states, the more we will benefit.

For example, the more acquainted the mind is with humility – the opposite of pride – the more benefit we will receive from that mental state. It is the same with the opposites of jealousy or competitiveness. The more we train our mind in mental states such as non-jealousy – for example, by appreciating the qualities of other people's lives – the less our mind will be disturbed by jealousy, which will no longer arise automatically. The same goes for other mental qualities such as love and compassion. The more we train our mind in these mental states, the greater is the benefit we will receive.

Meditation is the method through which we can transform the mind, and train it in those virtuous states. It is always said that meditation should be accompanied by discriminating awareness or wisdom. We should combine our practice of meditation with the development of wisdom – for example, the wisdom that understands the benefits of generating wholesome,

virtuous states of mind; the wisdom that understands the disadvantages of disturbing states of mind; and the wisdom that understands the disadvantages of not meditating and the benefits of meditation. Combining our practice of meditation with this type of discriminating understanding is very beneficial.

In the example of non-jealousy, if our mind is not well acquainted with the mental state of non-jealousy, when we see the qualities in another person's life – a good physical appearance, or good material situation, or wealth, etc. – automatically our mind will be disturbed by jealousy. We will lose our inner happiness.

On the other hand, if our mind is trained very well in non-jealousy, when we see the qualities in another person's life, we will generate joy and rejoice in the qualities of the other person's life. This is one example of how meditation and discriminating awareness can make a difference to our life. The same applies to the other virtuous states of the mind.

We're always talking about meditation, but what do we meditate on? We meditate on focusing our mind inwards, not letting it be distracted towards outside objects, but training it to focus inwards. Then, we increase this inner focus, becoming more and more familiar with it.

If we can focus our mind inwards and keep that focus, our mind will not be distracted by the disturbing thoughts, which prevent our mind maintaining this inward, single-pointed focus. We have to free the mind from the control of the disturbing thoughts, place it inwards and allow it to remain in that state single-pointedly. We will meditate like this for a few minutes. *(Pause for meditation.)*

Practising meditation repeatedly is very important. It is good to keep the sessions short, but to have a sharp and clear focus. It is more important to have a sharp and clear focus than to have a long session. The meditation object doesn't matter so much – one can select a meditation object one is comfortable with. But when we practise meditation, our focus should always be directed inwards.

It is important to know that the actual object of our meditation is not an outer one, but rather the reflection of the object that appears in our mind when we are familiar with the colour and shape of the object. So, the actual object of our meditation is the inner reflection that appears in our mind of the outer object. We focus our mind on that inner reflection of the object in such a way that the mind remains focused inwards. The more we train our mind on that meditation object and the more stable our focus on it becomes, the clearer and more vivid will be the reflection of the object appearing in our mind.

When we train our mind on the object, it shouldn't be like looking at an outer object; rather, the mind should merge with the object of meditation.

We will go to the text, *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas* (Snow Lion Publications, New York 1997). We have reached verse 15, which is about transforming problems into the path:

Though someone may deride and
speak bad words
About you in a public gathering,
Looking on him as a spiritual
teacher,
Bow to him with respect –
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

When we read this verse, it might appear to us as if this is a very difficult practice. Of course, this is correct! However, although the Bodhisattva practices are difficult, we have to try to practise them.

The same goes for Dharma practice as for worldly activities. If, from the outset, we decide that we will never be able to do these activities and turn our back on them, we will never be able to accomplish them. However, if, according to our ability, we slowly try to do these practices as much as possible, we will accomplish them. We will slowly be able to practise them completely.

Here, the text deals with the situation of someone being criticised in a public gathering in front of many people. Someone starts to explain our faults to the public gathering, or even speaks in harsh or abusive language about us. We should not become angry with that person. Instead, while remaining patient, we should take that person as a spiritual teacher and bow to him or her with respect.

We might think this implies that we are not allowed to reply at all to the other person. But this is not the point being made here. The point is that if one replies to the other person, which one is allowed to do, it would not contradict the practice of a Bodhisattva – in other words, one should only reply out of an attitude of non-anger.

So, when one is criticised, one should first analyse one's own mind with discriminating awareness, checking up whether the faults being pointed out about oneself are accurate or not. If the criticism is accurate and one has actually made those mistakes or has those faults, instead of being angry, one can be frank and say: "It is true that I have those faults" without any anger. And that's that.

By being aware of the faults of anger and by catching one's anger, one can prevent anger arising with the wisdom that remembers the disadvantages of anger. One can then reply to the person in a calm and patient manner. That will have a good effect on the other person. The other person has abused us in anger and with bad language, and if one doesn't reply in kind, but remains patient and calm and replies in a kindly way, it will leave a good impression on the other person. In fact, if the other person is normally well-mannered, they will feel ashamed! If the other person has some sense of shame and we reply in a kindly way to their abusive language, then they will feel a bit ashamed of what they have said to us.

Reacting in such a manner leaves a good impression in the minds of other people because they think: "That person is practising the Buddhадharma so the Buddha dharma is really something special because it enabled this person to reply kindly and not get angry when they were abused".

Previously, there was a nun, the Venerable Kaye, here at Tara Institute. She was in a situation where she was criticised in front of many people. She didn't reply in kind but very calmly and reasonably explained the reasons why this was like this, etc. Those who were present thought: "That was really special. The Buddhадharma gave that nun the power to remain calm and reasonable even when she was 'under fire'". So, if one calls oneself a Dharma practitioner, one should be able to do this. This is the sign of a true Dharma practitioner. If you are not able to do this, people will not only criticise you as a person but will also criticise the Dharma. At this time, the Venerable Frank was new to Tara Institute. He said that when he observed the situation Kaye was in, he thought: "There is really some special power in the Buddhадharma for her to be able to be like that".

If, for example, we are in a meeting, it is much better when we are criticised not to get angry and upset, even though it might be very difficult. If you cannot avoid anger at all, at least try to prevent very strong anger from arising. Otherwise, our mind will be overcome by anger and will be unhappy and we will still have to remain at the meeting or gathering – if we had to be there for two hours, that would be another two hours of suffering. Also, because we start fighting with others, other people in the gathering will be unhappy and everybody will start to fight with each other. So it would be two hours of suffering for everyone.

Therefore, regardless of whether one has faults or whether others have faults, one should just remain calm and peaceful and speak in a kindly manner. As one great teacher said: "A scholar or someone proficient in Dharma practice will not lose their serenity, even at times of great problems or great accusations." As a Dharma practitioner, we shouldn't lose our inner serenity, even when we are abused or accused or when we face great problems. We shouldn't lose our Dharma mind, our virtuous, calm and peaceful state of mind.

There is no need to listen too much to the praise and criticism of others. As Shantideva said: "If others praise me, what need is there to get excited? And if others criticise me, what need is there to be depressed?". If we grasp at praise and criticism and then judge ourselves according to the praise and criticism of others, it is not very practical.

For example, someone might praise us highly, or a whole gathering might praise us highly. Yet, it is guaranteed that somewhere behind all this, there is someone who will criticise us. Conversely, we might be criticised greatly, but there will definitely be someone around who praises us and thinks that we did well. So it is impractical to depend on praise and criticism – generating attachment to praise and thinking: "Now I feel much better", or generating aversion to criticism and becoming depressed when criticised. This is an impractical attitude.

The Bodhisattva Shantideva also said: "If we actually became a better person when we were praised, there would be a reason to be happy and be attached to praise. And if our qualities would actually decrease

when we were criticised, there would actually be a reason to get angry when you were criticised – but this is not the case".

It is inevitable that people will criticise us. That is just the nature of worldly beings. If what we do appears positive and worthwhile to someone, they will praise us. If what we do appears harmful or not worthwhile to someone else, they will criticise us. That is the nature of the ordinary world. It is said in a prayer to Tara that: "If I do something that people like, they become my friends; then if I do something they dislike, they become my enemies –therefore, you, Tara, are my only real friend and I rely exclusively on you". So Tara is a better friend!

The method and wisdom present in our mind is our real friend. The wholesome method and wisdom with which we can overcome our afflicted states of mind are our real friend. That is what benefits us in a difficult situation.

If you have some questions, we have time for questions.

Question from audience (inaudible).

Answer: So you want to know how to be less hard on yourself? The way to be strict with ourselves in our practices is to be very strict in maintaining wholesome states of mind.

We do not have to be harsh, for example, the way we may be harsh in replying to another person. This is not the type of strictness we apply to our practice. Rather, we have to be very strict about keeping our practice of love and compassion or patience stable. We have to keep that practice strictly in our mind.

If we can keep that practice strictly in our mind, we will not become disturbed if, for example, others criticise us. This doesn't just mean that if others criticise us, we have to have incredible self-discipline and not reply and become uptight or repressed. That is not the meaning. What we mean is that one should be strict in maintaining one's wholesome mental states – one's love and compassion, patience, etc.

Otherwise, if all you do is you say to yourself: "Now I have to be strict with myself and not allow myself to be angry with anyone", and try to achieve this through being very strict with yourself, it will not work.

In relation to keeping one's virtuous mental state stable, some people are very changeable. When their friends say, "I'm a Christian", they become Christians. But when they have other friends who are Buddhists, they say, "Now I'm going to become a Buddhist". That type of mental attitude is normally regarded as unstable, and not beneficial for one's Dharma practice.

It is better to be more self-sufficient. First, we should not focus on the faults of others, but on their good qualities. By focusing only on the qualities of others, we receive those qualities ourselves. Otherwise, if we are constantly engaged in looking at others' faults, we end up with lots of faults ourselves. It is much better to be self-sufficient – not to be always influenced by what people around us are doing, but to be self-sufficient in our knowledge of what is correct and what is incorrect, and only focusing

on the qualities of others, not on their faults, so that we ourselves receive those qualities.

Even if one goes to a restaurant with friends and where everybody else drinks, one should be self-sufficient enough to be able to say: "I'm sorry, I don't drink". We should not just start drinking alcohol because the others are drinking, but have the inner strength and stability of mind to say: "That is something I don't want to do."

The type of situations we experience in our lives depends on us. Some people always have a large circle of friends and acquaintances, and there never seems to be any ill-will or criticism circulating about them. Other people, however, have a limited number of friends and acquaintances, and even within this limited circle, they engage in constant criticism and bickering. We can see very clearly that one's situation in life depends on one's own state of mind, upon oneself.

As was explained at the beginning, free the mind from the disturbing thoughts that try to distract it outside, and instead bring the mind back home, focusing it inwards completely and concentrating it single-pointedly on the name mantra of the Buddha.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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