
The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas
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We have to reflect on the fact that we are all human beings with intelligence. Since one is a human being, one has certain potential and advantages. Because human beings have potential and intelligence, they are superior to other beings such as animals.

We have to make use of that potential and intelligence. We have to practise a path that brings us happiness, a path through which we can fulfil our own purpose. We have not yet achieved our own purpose – perfect happiness – because we have not followed such a path. We can, however, ascertain such a path through our intelligence. One's mind is the tool that ascertains the unmistakable path leading to liberation.

Through an unmistakable path and an unmistakable method we can accomplish our wishes. What are our wishes? What do we want out of life? Whether we live a busy, hurried life or a leisurely life, what we all want out of life is happiness. Happiness is what every human being wants, and happiness is attained through an unmistakable method and unmistakable path.

There are two possibilities for happiness – physical and mental happiness, both of which are very important. Once one has achieved these two types of happiness, that's really all one needs in life. Everything else is unnecessary, inessential. Even if you are a beggar, if you have attained physical and mental happiness, there is nothing further to be gained in this life; there is no further happiness that could be added to that.

Physical happiness and mental happiness do not arise without a cause, but arise through certain causes and conditions. One has to engage in certain methods, certain ways and means to attain physical and mental happiness.

To attain physical happiness, one has to rely on outer conditions and create supportive outer conditions for physical happiness. Therefore, I always advise young students to study well, so that they can get a good job and earn enough money to have sufficient physical happiness. This is important, because physical happiness is attained through creating the necessary outer means and conditions.

Once one has attained physical happiness, one also needs to attain mental happiness, because if one is materially and physically comfortable but mentally unhappy, it's not enough. We also need to have mental happiness, which is created by subduing the mind, the disturbing mental states within the mind. Then, one will slowly attain mental happiness. In this way, one will achieve complete mental and physical happiness. This is why I always say it is important to protect both our body as well as one's mind.

There are two ways through which we can look after our body. The first is from the point of view of thinking

about our actions. Stopping non-virtuous physical actions and engaging in virtuous, wholesome physical actions is one way of looking after one's body. This is [how we look after our body] from the point of view of virtue or non-virtue.

We can also look after our body from the point of view of physical health, making sure we don't drink or eat anything that harms our health. Here, it can be useful to reflect on the various sicknesses one can get if one doesn't look after one's physical health, and if one drinks or eats things that are harmful to one's health. Normally, when we see someone with one of these sicknesses, our mind will immediately generate apprehension or even fear, and we will automatically want to avoid the causes of that sickness. We will automatically not want to eat or drink anything that could give us such a sickness. Therefore, it is good to reflect on the future result of unhealthy living. In such a way, one can look after one's physical health.

As well as this, one has to look after one's mental health. Ordinarily, if our mind meets with an attractive object, attachment is generated. And if we meet with an unattractive object, aversion and anger are generated within our mind. Therefore, looking after our mind means reducing these unwholesome mental states, which would be called subduing the mind. When we lead the mind away from non-virtuous objects and non-virtuous mental states to virtuous mental states, this is the meaning of subduing the mind. This is also the meaning of meditation. If we train our mind in such a way, we will also be able to attain mental pliancy or flexibility.

If we have a healthy mind that is positive and wholesome, it will make a great difference to our lives. A person with a healthy, wholesome mind will have a happier life. So, meditation is a process of habituating our mind to wholesome mental states.

If our mind is happy, loving and compassionate, then this happiness, love and compassion will radiate out to those around us, and affect them in a positive way. In this way, one will already benefit others. On the other hand, if we are unhappy and miserable, not only do we suffer, but there is also a danger that we will affect those around us. So, we should clearly recognise the benefits and disadvantages of accustoming and not accustoming our mind to a wholesome state. On the basis of having a happy, loving and compassionate mind and on the basis of wisdom, we can engage in appropriate actions to help others and make them happy.

If we have a happy disposition, other people will automatically respond. For example, recently I [i.e. Geshe Doga] went to Geshe Loden's centre. While I was there, a woman I didn't know came up to me and said: "Thank you very much for being so happy. Last year when I met you, you seemed so happy, it helped me throughout the year. Now I am seeing you again, and again you are happy, so again my year will be happy. Thank you very much for making both of those years happy!" She was obviously very grateful that she had met someone who was happy, and she benefited a lot from that.

Therefore, we should try to control and subdue our mind – meaning that we should subdue disturbing mental states – through meditation. Otherwise, if we don't subdue our mind and accustom it to unwholesome states, it will just continue being neurotic. Some people are always absorbed in an inner conversation, focused only on themselves. They worry all day long. Some days, when they are able to stop this negative self-talk, they may feel happy. However, because their mind is so accustomed to neurotic states, it will eventually be overcome by disturbing thoughts, and once again they will experience mental suffering. Therefore, one should habituate one's mind to happy and wholesome states. This is where meditation comes in.

Now, we can practise meditation for a few minutes. Sit in the correct physical posture. On the basis of sitting in a good physical posture, we will subdue our mind. Subduing our mind means freeing it from the control of disturbing and harmful mental states. If our mind is under the control of disturbing and harmful mental states, then one is not being kind to oneself and is inflicting harm on oneself. So, it is important to free the mind from disturbing thoughts and harmful mental states, and focus it inwards.

In a leisurely and relaxed manner, we place the mind inwards, and let it remain there single-pointedly for some time. We free the mind from the control of the disturbing thoughts that try to distract it, and bring the mind home, focusing it completely within, and we do this in a relaxed and leisurely manner. Then, from that state, we focus the mind single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. Here, the mind's focusing should be adjusted just right. Our focus on the breathing shouldn't be too tight or too loose. It should be just right.
[Pause for meditation.]

Maybe that's enough meditation. Do you have some questions?

Question: What should you do if you start entering into [an inner] dialogue in meditation? Like you start off with one thought and you make more of that thought, more and more and more...what should be done then?

Answer: The question was how to stop the continuous inner dialogue that happens while one is meditating.

The answer is that it is probably better to start out trying to achieve very short periods of calming meditation, because probably we are only able to remain calm for short periods. We should not initially try for extended meditation periods, but short ones. By repeating these short meditations over and over, automatically we will be able to extend them.

Otherwise, it is a common experience that at the beginning of a meditation, the mind is a little calm. However, slowly, as the inner dialogue starts again, many things start to happen in the mind. That is a common experience. Sometimes it seems like meditation can cause lots of problems! *[Laughter.]*

It is a common experience that once we resume thinking, we start an inner dialogue. Then, one thought leads to the next, and before we know it, the floodgate has opened again. Imagine the roof in this hall with

many holes in it. If you switched on the light, light rays would go out through all of those holes, letting light through everywhere. So, first, we need to try and habituate the mind to calm states by starting out with very short periods. Then, by repeating these short meditations over and over, they will become more and more natural.

Another thing we can do is use discriminative awareness to recognise when a certain train of thought will bring us mental suffering. By becoming more aware that this train of thought will cause us mental suffering, automatically we will generate a fear of going there, and the mind will automatically go in another direction.

If the mind is obsessed with a certain object, grasping strongly at it, one can start thinking about something else. For example, if you are experiencing relationship problems, and the mind starts going round and round thinking about the person you have lost etc., start thinking about something else more pleasant. Automatically, the mind will forget about the relationship problem, and your mind will be less troubled.

Most of our problems are given to us by our mind. There are really no great outer problems that can cause all that mental anguish. Our mental anguish is really given to us by our own attitude and way of thinking.

I think that, these days, there's a greater danger for disturbing thoughts to arise than there was 300 or 400 years ago. This is because the environment in which we live presents many objects and situations that excite the senses and the mind, which gives rise to a great variety of disturbing thoughts. Sometimes, I think that the minds of those who lived 300 to 400 years ago – who didn't have those exciting and disturbing situations – were perhaps a bit more peaceful and happier than those of modern human beings. For example, 200 or 300 years ago, it was almost unheard of for a married couple to separate. Divorce was basically unheard of, and even if it happened in isolated instances, it would be regarded as very bad. These days, anything goes!

I really believe that people lived 200 or 300 years ago had greater mental happiness than people today. When we talk to older people who are maybe 90 or 100 years old, they tell us how in their time, they didn't have any electricity or cars. When they had to go somewhere, they had to go on horseback and so on. They didn't have things like washing machines, which these days we regard as being indispensable to living a happy life. Even though they didn't have these things, they still had a happy life.

These days, on the other hand, people form a partnership, but are unable to experience the happiness of harmonious living. They are unable to generate happiness for each other.

It is good to take a lesson from the lives of older people who have had these experiences. Today, from the point of view of outer conditions, there is really no reason for suffering, because all the conducive outer conditions for happy living are there. Rather, the problem lies within

the dissatisfied mind, the mind that wants to have more – that wants to have more perfect outer conditions, possessions, more of this, more of that, and so on.

For example, during holidays or whenever they have free time, some people dress up smartly and if they are women they may apply lots of make-up, make their hair nice etc., and walk around the city. However, if they see someone wearing nicer clothes or with a nicer hairstyle or whatever, jealousy will be automatically generated within the mind, and it becomes unhappy. Here, the cause for the unhappiness lies in not being satisfied.

Do you have some other question?

Question (paraphrased): I've just started meditating and reading the *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* and during meditation I feel very comfortable with everything, then I walk out my front door and something happens or I there is some distraction and I don't know what to do. Should I go back to meditating immediately?

Answer: Even though it might be difficult at the beginning, if you encounter some circumstance that disturbs the mind, the thing to do is to apply your meditation, trying to bring the mind back to a non-disturbed state. This might be a bit difficult at the beginning, but through habituation and training, it will slowly become more natural to have an undisturbed state of mind or to go back to that undisturbed state of mind.

If we are really successful in our meditation, our mental consciousness will become very powerful, and the disturbances we receive through our sense consciousnesses will no longer matter much. During a successful meditation, the mental consciousness will become engaged, even if we leave our eyes open – we don't need to squeeze our eyes tightly shut. We can actually leave them open, because when we meditate with our mental consciousness, even though the eyes are open, the sense consciousnesses will be inattentive. We all know this experience. For example, if we are mentally engaged with some beautiful form, we think very intensely about it. Even if someone says something to us or we hear a sound, we do not direct our attention there. We hear the words or sound but don't listen to them.

[Further question/comment from same student.]

Answer: In Buddhism, we don't talk about a force that is higher than or above the mind and has some kind of power over the mind.

For example, although we say that the mind of the Buddha is fully developed, an enlightened mind, this only came about because the Buddha made the use of the potential of his mind. By making use of the potential of his mind, he purified it of all the faults and obscurations, and he perfected all the mental qualities. Through this, he could fulfil the potential of his mind and become enlightened. But that came about only through the Buddha making use of his mental potential.

It didn't come about through some other higher type of power.

The Buddhist view is that there is no higher power than the mind. However, some spiritual traditions, for example certain Hindu schools, say that everything that exists was created by Brahma. I don't know whether this means there is something higher than the mind or not. I don't know if all Hindu schools accept this belief, but anyway some Hindu schools do say that everything that is created was created by Brahma.

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

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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