
The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas
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We can do a little bit of meditation as usual. Sit in a good physical posture. On the basis of sitting in a good, relaxed comfortable posture, we have to work with our mind.

It's normal for everybody to want peace of mind. However, the reason why we are not experiencing peace of mind at the moment is because the mind is disturbed by various thoughts. So, we have to gradually pacify and eliminate those disturbing thoughts. First, we reduce the power of the stronger disturbing thoughts; then, gradually, we will be able to completely eliminate all manifest disturbing thoughts. When our practice progresses even further, we will be able to eliminate the disturbing thoughts from the root. In such a way, the mind can experience a stable kind of peace.

Because the mind is disturbed by coarse, conceptualising thoughts, it doesn't experience peace. Because the mind doesn't experience peace, it becomes agitated. When the mind becomes agitated, one disturbing thought leads to the next, and the next, until we have a whole multitude of disturbing thoughts present within the mind. It's as if we are in the midst of a forest of disturbing thoughts! We could not even differentiate them or count them all if we were asked to.

When the mind is so overwhelmed by disturbing thoughts, if we are told that we need to pacify them and free the mind from these disturbing thoughts, it seems an almost impossible task to accomplish. But the reason the mind is now under the control of the disturbing thoughts is because it is habituated to this way of being. Because the mind is a creature of habit, it follows what it is accustomed to.

This works the other way around. If we gradually train the mind to have fewer disturbing thoughts then, through force of habit, the mind will become more accustomed to mental states that are free from disturbing thoughts, and the disturbing states will gradually subside. We can achieve this through the power of familiarisation. There is nothing one cannot turn the mind to through the power of familiarisation. This is a very important point to remember so that one doesn't lose one's strength of mind.

If we are simply walking along the street and we analyse our mind, we will find it to be very restless. One is constantly thinking about the things one wants, the things one won't get, or the things one has lost. For example, one might worry about whether one will be in time for lunch or dinner, or whether one will be too late. Countless small dissatisfactions and worries preoccupy the mind. Whenever we find the mind to be in such a state, we have to take great care, because such a distracted state disperses the power and the ability of the mind; it prevents us using the power and ability of our mind to focus on one object or aim. When we feel

that our mind is too distracted, we feel that we cannot really practise the Dharma.

However, whether one practises the Dharma or not is really up to oneself. As I [i.e. Geshe Doga] always say, if one wants to achieve anything in life, it is one's own responsibility to go about achieving it in the right way. If one wants to have food, one has to work for food. If one wants to have a good material life, one has to work for it. Similarly, if you want to experience the results of Dharma practice, it is up to you to practise the Dharma. Some people don't do this, and aimlessly go round in circles, never really accomplishing anything.

We all know from experience how the mind becomes unhappy when it meets certain types of objects. By seeing or remembering such an object, or having some other type of contact with them, the mind becomes uneasy and unhappy. To avoid the unease and unhappiness that occurs when the mind meets such objects, we practise meditation, freeing the mind from those objects, and focusing it inwards – bringing it home and focusing it inwards onto a wholesome object. In such a way, one can avoid the suffering one experiences when one meets objects that now cause us to suffer.

After having freed the mind from those disturbing objects, and having placed it inwards, while remaining in that non-conceptual equipoise, we focus the mind single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. By meditating in such a manner, the disturbing thoughts will gradually subside. At the same time, the more positive side of the mind will become stronger, and one will experience Dharma happiness within the mind. We can meditate in this manner for a few minutes. [*Pause for meditation.*] That's enough!

It is worthwhile to meditate and to reflect on the benefits of meditation. If we lack inner happiness, we can get this through meditation. Further, meditation will stabilise whatever inner happiness we have. So, there are many benefits that come from practising meditation.

Now we will go to the text, *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas* (Snow Lion Publications, New York 1997), where it deals with transforming obstacles and problems into the path. The present verses deal with transforming criticism into the path. Verse 17 reads:

*If an equal or inferior person
Disparages you out of pride,
Place him, as you would your spiritual teacher,
With respect on the crown of your head –
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.*

When we first hear these words, we might think that the practice of patience is just too difficult. However, if we try to turn our minds in that direction, it will be very beneficial. If someone disparages us, of course we will feel upset. But, by taking such a situation as a teacher or as a lesson, we should not reply in kind, because we should not want to inflict on the other person the same unhappiness that we have experienced from being disparaged.

The first line says: "If an equal or inferior person". Here 'inferior' refers to appearance, accomplishments, qualities, or wealth – that is, a person who is inferior to us in regard to any of these qualities. Being 'equal' here means being equal from the point of view of looks, qualities, wealth and age. If any such person disparaged us out of pride, we would place him or her on our crown as a spiritual teacher, which it says here is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

We do not get upset with our spiritual teachers because we know that whatever a spiritual teacher tells is for the purpose of eliminating our faults. Everything they teach us is to help us get rid of our faults. Seeing this, we do not get upset with our spiritual teachers. This is the same in all spiritual traditions.

In the same way, as it says here, when a person of equal or inferior status criticises us or puts us down, this is an opportunity to practise patience. When someone has insulted us and we practise patience, this practice rescues us from experiencing an agitated and disturbed mind. Instead, we can experience peace in the mind. For someone whose mind is agitated and disturbed, it is difficult to experience peace. However, if the mind is free from agitation and not disturbed, it can experience peace. This comes about through the practice of meditating on patience.

So, through using the opportunity to practise patience, one can overcome the disturbed states of the mind, and overcome the mind's conditioning to become disturbed and agitated. One has the opportunity to purify many faults from the mind. One establishes the conditions to be happy at that moment because of one's practice of patience, and one also establishes the conditions to have a happy mind in the future. One purifies lots of negativities and lots of faults. Because one reduces the mind's conditioning to become angry, in the future one's mind will become less angry – all through one's practice of patience. If one doesn't practise patience, the mind becomes agitated at that moment, so there is no peace then, and one also creates the causes and conditions to experience unhappiness in the future. If the mind is agitated by aversion, one won't experience happiness.

By being fully aware of the faults of not practising patience and becoming angry and of the benefits of practising patience, one should firmly decide that not to become angry.

If the person putting us down or giving us a hard time is in some way inferior to us – for example, in strength or size – we might feel it would be easy for us to retaliate. We would be more inclined to retaliate if the person were inferior in size and strength than if they were more powerful. However, even though we might feel tempted to retaliate with a weaker person, one definitely shouldn't do it. Regardless of whether the other person is powerful, which might prevent us from retaliating, or weaker than us, we shouldn't retaliate and we shouldn't let our mind fall under the control of anger.

If we did let our mind fall under the control of anger and retaliated, as we said last time, it would just aggravate the anger in the other person's mind, like

pouring oil onto the flame. Then, the other person would feel that from their side they would again have to react more strongly. Then, from our side, we would feel we had to react even more strongly. In this way, both oneself and the other person would become completely overcome by anger.

However, on the other hand, if one avoids anger and doesn't let one's mind fall under its control, not only will one not receive any loss or fault, but also the anger of the other person won't be aggravated and they will calm down. As a result, both parties will not receive any loss. By getting angry, both we and the other person receive a loss, but by not getting angry, both we and the other person receive benefit and avoid loss.

Again, by seeing the benefits of practising patience and the disadvantages of not practising it, one should avoid letting one's mind fall under the control of anger.

Practising patience with someone weaker is a superior practice. If we can practise patience with someone we could easily take retaliation upon and instead restrain our mind and not get angry, this is a special practice of patience.

If one is confronted with someone powerful, one will refrain from retaliating. An example is a child and its parents. If the parents are upset with the child and scold him or her, because the parents are strong and fierce with the child at that time, the child won't retaliate because it is very afraid of the parents. However, if the parents take a humble and soft approach and say something to the child, the child will retaliate and answer them back. It is like this in all types of life situations. If we are confronted with someone powerful, we will think twice about saying something back, while if it's someone weaker and more humble, we will feel confident, so practising patience in this latter situation is a very good practice of patience.

As the Kadampa Geshe Langri Tangpa said, one should regard sentient beings as a precious, wish-fulfilling gem, because all one's temporary and ultimate happiness is attained through the kindness of other sentient beings.

Therefore, one should treat other sentient beings carefully with respect, and softly without rough words, etc. When we start out along the path and generate bodhicitta, this is done in dependence on other sentient beings. Bodhicitta is generated in relation to other sentient beings. Then, in the middle stages of the Bodhisattva path, when we engage in the practice of the six perfections, this is again done in relation to sentient beings. Finally, when we achieve the aim of enlightenment, this is done for the purpose of sentient beings. Therefore, one's temporary and ultimate aims are achieved in relation to other sentient beings.

So, sentient beings are like a precious wish-fulfilling jewel, in dependence upon which one achieves both one's temporary and ultimate aims. All our wishes are achieved in dependence upon other sentient beings. If other sentient being didn't exist, it would be very difficult for us to be happy.

Because one's happinesses come about through the existence of other sentient beings, one shouldn't belittle them. One shouldn't put them down, treat them roughly, cause suffering in their mind, etc. but instead one should respect and value other sentient beings – treat them with love and compassion, make them happy and treat them carefully and softly. If people treat each other with respect and value each other, they will be able to live together, harmoniously. We can clearly see the difference between a family where the members live together harmoniously, and a family where there is no harmony, where people don't value each other or treat each other well. If we treat each other well and don't disparage each other – if we value each other and treat each other with love and compassion – we can live together happily and harmoniously.

Do you have a question? We have time for that.

[Question regarding the need to search for an appropriate spiritual teacher or guide.]

Answer: Yes, you need to have a teacher. You need to have someone who shows you the path. It is the same for Dharma practice as with other worldly disciplines – we need to have someone who shows us how it all works. That's why we go to school and study and why we all have such good results in our study! The same applies to the Dharma. We need to have someone to explain the path to us. Also, as mentioned in the Lam Rim, we can learn from each other.

As His Holiness said [during the recent Australian visit]: "Now I have explained Dharma practice to you, but it is up to you whether you practise or not". The function of the Lama is to explain the Dharma to the disciples, but the practice of Dharma is up to the disciples. It is like in school – the teacher will explain the various subjects, but whether we study or not is up to us.

After Shakyamuni Buddha had taught for many years, he said: "Now I have taught the pure Dharma to you, so it is up to you what you do with it". The Lama is like the doctor, the student is like the patient, and the Dharma is the medicine. The doctor can only prescribe certain medicine and how to take it, but the patient has to take the medicine in the prescribed manner. If the patient doesn't take the medicine in the prescribed manner and is not cured of the disease, it is neither the fault of the medicine, nor the fault of the doctor.

It is the same for the Dharma – if we don't practise the Dharma in accordance with the instructions we have received and don't get the benefit because of our lack of practice, whose fault is that? It is only one's own fault. It is neither the fault of the teacher, nor the fault of the Dharma, but one's own fault, because of one's lack of practice.

As we said in the beginning, bring the mind back home, not letting it be distracted outwards, then focus it single-pointedly on the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA