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# *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*

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We will start off by practising a little bit of meditation as usual. First, sit in a comfortable physical position.

It is said that all freedoms are happiness. If our mind is free, we will be able to experience happiness; if the mind is not free, experiencing happiness will be difficult. In the same way that all freedoms are happiness, if the mind is subdued, that too is happiness. Having control over the mind is happiness. If the mind is subdued, one is able to be happy. The reason why we don't experience mental happiness is because we haven't been able to subdue the mind.

You can relate this to your own experience. Immediately after you wake up in the morning, there may be a brief moment when your mind is lucid and pliant, before various disturbing mental patterns become active, disturbing one's mind again as one begins to remember them, etc. Here, one can clearly see the importance of subduing one's mind. One should make the determination that: "If I don't at least try to subdue my mind a bit, I won't be happy".

Also, if we don't subdue the mind, we won't be able to utilise its power and ability, because its power will be dispersed. To be able to utilise the power of our mind, we have to be able to focus it. We have to free it from the control of the disturbing thoughts. We have to reclaim the mind from the delusions, take control of it, bring the mind back home and focus it inwards.

To focus the mind inwards, we need a meditation object. The meditation object has to be an object with which we are familiar. We don't actually reflect upon the outer object; rather, we take the reflection of the object in our mind as our meditation object. And when we meditate on the object of meditation, it shouldn't be as if the mind is looking at our meditation object; rather, the mind absorbs into the meditation object, becoming non-dual with it.

So, first, we free the mind from the disturbing thoughts that try to distract it outside, then bring it back home, focusing it totally within. Let it remain in that non-conceptual state for a short while. When we feel the mind again trying to escape outside, we place it on the coming and going of the breath. We take the take the coming and going of the breath as our meditation object. When the mind is placed on the coming and going of the breath, the breath should flow very softly. It is mentioned in many great texts on meditation, such as *The Stages of Meditation* by Kamalashila, that the breath should so soft as to not be felt at the nostrils. We can meditate in that way, single-pointedly abiding on the coming and going of the breath, for a few minutes. [*Pause for meditation.*] Now you can arise from your meditative equipoise!

Listening to the teachings is what we call the post-meditation period, where one is not in meditative equipoise. Only a Buddha can teach the Dharma in meditative equipoise. All other beings below the level of Buddhahood have to come out of meditative equipoise in order to teach. It's the same for the listeners – in order to listen, as long as they are not enlightened, they have to come out of meditative equipoise.

We already talked about how one transforms loss into the path. If one experiences material or other loss, one shouldn't let one's mind be overcome by depression, but remain optimistic and positive. We then went on to discuss how to transform gain and so forth into the path.

The next topic is how to transform the object of anger into the path. Verse 20 (of the root text, *The Thirty Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*, Snow Lion Publications, New York 1997) reads:

*While the enemy of your own anger is unsubdued,  
Though you conquer external foes, they will only  
increase.*

*Therefore with the militia of love and compassion  
Subdue your own mind –  
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.*

The first line says that the real enemy is not some outside foe, but our own inner delusions – the inner afflictions of attachment, anger and ignorance. It is against the enemy of afflictions that we must go to war with the weapons of the various Dharma practices and meditations. We need to subdue the inner enemy of the mental afflictions with meditation, study, Dharma practice, etc.

The second line says that, as long as we haven't subdued the inner foe of the afflictions, particularly the inner foe of anger, the external foes will only increase. There are many quotes about this in [*Shantideva's A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*]. This is a very important point. What do we normally regard as an enemy? Whom do we regard as a foe? Someone who takes away our happiness, which we desire, and gives us suffering and problems, which we don't desire. We regard such a person as a foe or enemy.

We have all experienced anger. We all know how it feels when anger arises in the mind. We can confirm through our own experience that an angry mind is not a happy one. Even if one is initially happy, when anger arises, it disturbs the peace of mind, the inner happiness that we had. It is good to look at the disadvantages of anger and view it in a negative light by remembering how anger destroys our happiness. We can confirm how the mind feels when we experience happiness. What happens to that inner happiness when anger arises? It gets completely destroyed by the anger. A mind that has less anger is a happier mind. The less a mind is dominated by anger, the happier that mind will be.

By remembering the disadvantages of anger, we will generate more strongly the motivation of wanting to abandon anger, instead of trying to overcome an outer enemy. Everyone wants to have more friends. Everyone likes to have friends and not enemies. But, over the course of our lives, we have gone through many friends and made many new friendships, which eventually change, and the people who were our friends turn into our enemies.

How has it come about, that our friends have turned into our enemies, that people we liked have turned into people we disliked? This came about because of our own anger. Because of our own anger, friends turned into enemies. So, the real enemy one has to overcome is the inner enemy of anger.

The great Bodhisattva Shantideva says that one should definitely not kill the outer enemy. The enemy that has to be eliminated is the inner enemy of anger, and one has to treat that enemy without any mercy.

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We can deal with the outer enemy by being kind and helping them. For example, if our enemy is sick, we could bring them a present or some food; we try to be kind to them. In such a way, we can vanquish the outer enemy. We can change them from being our enemy into our friend. That is possible with the outer enemy. If we are good to the outer enemy, this will change them into a friend.

But the inner enemy of anger is different. If you are good to the inner enemy of anger, it will become stronger. So, we cannot treat the inner enemy of anger with mercy, but we have to be merciless in dealing with it.

When I [i.e. Geshe Doga] was young, around 12, there was another boy of my age with whom I would constantly fight. We fought quite a lot, and I lost quite often. One day - I don't remember exactly what he gave me, it might have been some food or maybe something sweet, like molasses - the other boy gave me a present. I gave him a present in return, and from then on, instead of being someone with whom I fought all the time, he became my No. 1 friend. We were completely inseparable after that!

Everyone needs the happiness of harmonious living, but living harmoniously together is impossible if one is angry. If two people live together but both have anger in their minds, they can't live together harmoniously, so they won't experience any happiness together. To experience happiness in living with someone, the mind needs to be free from anger. Otherwise, if one is angry, that will translate into a frown. Then the other person will feel offended, and from their side they will also generate anger, and living harmoniously together will be difficult.

So, in order to experience the happiness of living harmoniously together with others, we need to free the mind from anger. If we eliminate anger from our mind, we will get many boyfriends and girlfriends! [*Laughter*]

If our mind is overcome by anger towards someone to whom we are normally very attached, then initially, the attachment causes us to grasp strongly at that person and hold them close. But then, because of the anger, one will push the other person further away. This induces great suffering, because is trapped between one's attachment and anger, pushing away the object of attachment, which brings great suffering. So, one should be very careful.

Also, even if we subdue an outer enemy, that enemy will regroup, and come back with friends to give us a hard time. Once, I [i.e. Geshe-la] fought with someone one-on-one, and defeated him. But that person went away and came back with five friends and I ended up with a lot of wounds on my head! So, to subdue an outer enemy can be quite fruitless, but once one has subdued the inner enemy of the afflictions, this inner enemy will not arise again.

The next line of the verse says: "Therefore with the militia (or the army) of love and compassion subdue your own mind". With the 'General of Love' that wishes the other person to have happiness, and the 'General of Compassion' that wishes the other person to be free from suffering, one should subdue one's own mind. One should wage war on one's own delusions and subdue one's mind. This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

It is more important to overcome the inner enemy of anger than to overcome outer enemies. Once we have overcome the inner enemy, the outer enemy will also be subdued, because outer enemies are generated by the inner enemy of anger. Because one

has anger in one's mind, one recognises the other person as being one's enemy.

Seeing the other person is one's enemy is a creation of our own anger. If we recognise that, we will be able to let go of our anger, and meditate on love and compassion for the other person who we see as our enemy.

At present, one might not be able to meditate on love and compassion for one's enemy. One may be able to meditate on love and compassion for one's friends, the objects of one's attachment, but one can't meditate on love and compassion for an enemy. Why? Because of the inner enemy of anger. If we can subdue the inner enemy of anger and remember how our enemy is also lacking happiness and is experiencing the suffering they don't want, we can meditate on love and compassion for that enemy.

By remembering the disadvantages of anger, one subdues one's anger and can meditate on love and compassion even for an enemy. Love wishes the other person to have happiness, while compassion is the wish for the other person to be free from suffering. When one sees a person lacking happiness - and most people lack happiness - the wish arises for that person to have happiness. The wish for that person to have happiness is love. The thought that it would be completely unacceptable if that person was not happy is the thought of love. And, after realising how the other person is overcome by suffering, one wishes the other person to be free from their suffering, thinking that it would be unacceptable if the other person was not free from that suffering - this is the thought of compassion.

We need to have these two thoughts of love and compassion to be of benefit to others. If we don't have the thoughts of love and compassion, our actions will not benefit others, and we will relate everything to our own egotistical self-cherishing. If we get what we want and receive the happiness we want, we will be happy, and that object will become the object of our attachment. If anything threatens to take away our happiness, this becomes the object of our anger. This is what happens if we don't have the thoughts of love and compassion.

To really be able to benefit others, one needs to have the thoughts of love and compassion, because that's where the actions that benefit others come from. On the basis of having love and compassion, one will engage in actions that benefit others.

Do you have a question?

[*Question inaudible*]

*Answer:* That other person is angry, so you have to engage in some method to pacify their anger. If the other person is the person you live with and they come home in an angry mood, for example, you can pacify their anger by telling them to sit down and relax and cook dinner for them. This is a skilful way of trying to pacify the anger of the other person.

If you directly confront them by asking: "Why are you angry?", this will further inflame them. Instead, if you cook them a nice meal when they have come home angry, they will see that you have done this for them, and their anger will down. Then they will feel sorry for having been angry, especially when they see that you have treated them so well, and they will apologise to you!

[*Comment from the audience*]

*Response:* If the person is under the influence of drink or drugs, you will need to somehow try and get them to go to bed and

sleep! [Laughter] Once they have slept it off, maybe they might return to normal. Basically, the idea is to deal with the situation skilfully, so that the other person doesn't become more angry and upset. If you pour oil onto flames, the flames will just burn more intensely. We have to try to avoid that and somehow defuse the situation skilfully.

Some people might be quite peaceful when they are sober, but once they get drunk, they become aggressive and angry. Another type of personality may be normally aggressive and angry, but then once they are drunk, they become cheerful and happy. You can get all types of personalities, but the basic idea is as explained before.

*Question regarding drugs, alcohol and self-esteem.*

*Answer:* First of all, if the other person's situation is so difficult, you will have to practise enthusiastic effort in helping them, because they are not easy to help. You will have to exert a great amount of effort and time to be able to help such a person.

The great Bodhisattva Shantideva also said in *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* that there are countless sentient beings in the various directions. Among those sentient beings, more than we can imagine, there are countless beings of very bad character and destructive behaviour; they are very, very difficult to help and subdue. Seeing this, Bodhisattvas generate the strong courage and determination to never give up helping other sentient beings, because they recognise that there are many sentient beings who are very difficult to help.

As I began saying, if the other person is a drug addict, it will be very, very difficult to help that person, because their whole mind is focused on that drug. For them, having the drug is happiness, and not having the drug is the problem they are trying to avoid. What they want is to have the drug. If they are completely fixated with such a mind-state, it will be very difficult to help them, because the only problem they can perceive is not having the drug.

Perhaps if it is someone close to you, they will listen if you explain to them about the dangers of the drug and how it harms the body and health. They might get a bit worried if you explain to them about the physical dangers of the drug to their health, and if you ask them at least to reduce their intake of drugs, they might at least reduce it a little bit.

There might also be various substitutes for the drug. In India, they have 'pan' [betel leaf] on which they can chew away.

In the case of smoking, if are trying to give it up, you might still feel the need to keep your mouth active, so maybe there is something you can suck or chew on. In India they have pan on which you can chew instead of smoking. Actually, smoking harms the mind. It makes the mind less clear. People who smoke definitely have a more clouded mind than non-smokers. One can even see it in their face. There is something about the face of someone who smokes, a certain darkness. Once a person stops smoking, after two months, their face will become clearer and lighter. It's definitely something I have observed with some people.

There was another question?

*Question: Geshe-la, if anger is in our own minds, why do we think that it's in the other person's? Why do we think that the other person is making us angry?*

*Answer:* That's just how it is. There are three conditions needed for anger to arise. First, you need to have the karmic seed of anger within your mind.

Another condition needed is the mistaken conception. The mistaken conception completely exaggerates the badness and faults of the object of our anger, and sometimes completely exaggerates the faults, so that one can't actually see how the other person really is. There's a great difference between how a person appears to our mind at the time of anger and at a time when we are not angry. That difference occurs through the negative aspect that appears to our mind. The negative aspect of the other person that appears to our mind during a time of anger is a mental fabrication arising through mistaken concepts.

So once the [karmic] seed of anger in our mind, the **mistaken conception** and the **object of our anger** come together, anger arises within the mind. These three conditions cause anger to arise within the mind. So, to be angry, you need to have an object to get angry at.

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

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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*Edited Version*

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