
The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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We can practice a little bit of meditation as usual.

We need to shape our minds. If we don't shape our minds then we won't have much purpose. But, we have to be very friendly to our mind. We should treat our mind as parents would treat a very well behaved child. Our mind should behave like a very well behaved child. If parents said to a very well behaved child, "Don't do this" then the child wouldn't do it. And if they said, "Do this" or "Go there" then the child would do this and go there. That is a sign that the child is very well subdued and well behaved and well educated and doesn't give much trouble to the parents.

In the same way, by applying skilful methods, we should also be able to subdue our own mind. If we have subdued our own mind and it is like a well-behaved child it won't give us much trouble. We practise meditation as a method for subduing the mind. The mind needs to be very well subdued so we can take control of it. If our mind is not subdued, and is under the control of the disturbing thoughts, then regardless of whether we try to take control or not, the mind will just do as it likes.

First of all sit in a comfortable and correct physical posture. Then place the mind inside, focus the mind inwards, freeing it from the outside objects. Regardless of which type of object the mind wanders to, it may be a beneficial object or a harmful object, free the mind from these outside objects and bring it back home, focussing it completely inwards.

After having freed the mind from outside objects and focused it inwards the mind needs to have some object of meditation, some object of engagement. When parents call their child inside and tell the child it has to stay in it's room, it will be difficult for the child to stay in it's room without having anything to play with. In the same way, when we recall our mind from outside objects and place it inwards, we need to give the mind some object of engagement. As long as that object of engagement is a meditational object that doesn't produce any of the afflictions that's beneficial. Now we will focus the mind on the coming and going of the breath. As long as the mind is focused on the coming and going of the breath afflictions won't be generated. We can meditate in that way for a few minutes.

Last time we talked about how internal anger is our actual enemy and how we have to subdue and turn the enemy of anger with skilful methods. The skilful method we talked about last time was meditation on love and compassion. Everybody has a certain measure of love and compassion. We should recognise our love and compassion as being a very beneficial and wholesome mental attitude.

The Buddhadharma is called the "peaceful dharma"; the dharma of non-harmfulness. One has to relate the dharma of non-harmfulness and the practice of non-harmfulness to one's own self. By increasing one's love and compassion, by practising love and compassion one will practise the dharma of non-harmfulness. In the sutras it states that, "Harming others is not dharma practice". So harming others is never virtuous.

Love and compassion are very important mental states. It is very good for us to recognise our own love and compassion, recognise their value and try to follow them as much as possible.

If one practises love and compassion then one will receive great benefit from that practice. Of course there is very great benefit for future lives but even without looking at future lives there is great benefit in this life from practising love and compassion. For example; if one wants to have a peaceful and happy life one definitely needs love and compassion because without them one won't be able to live together harmoniously with others.

Whether it is two people or a small group of people who live together, or it is a large group of people such as a whole country; the practice of love and compassion is needed for them to experience happiness and peace. Sometimes it appears as if happiness and peace can be created or brought about through external means; through having various things, etc.. We have to analyse these situations For example; within a small group of people, how do they feel if everything is harmonious? Do they experience happiness and peace at that time? The answer is, yes. What happens within that group of people if anger arises? That peace and happiness that has been experienced previously is completely destroyed. In order to be able to experience happiness and peace within one's life, love and compassion are essential, both within a small group of people and also within a very great group of people such as one's country.

We always talk about making other sentient beings happy. Making other sentient beings really happy comes about by practising love and compassion with them. The happiness in the other beings, in the other person's mind, is not generated by giving them presents, things, but by practising love and compassion with them. Then they will be happy within their mind.

Having love and compassion within one's mind is very important because it brings about concern for others. It brings about the attitude of wanting to benefit others. If we have love and compassion for others, for example for our father, our mother, or other members of our family, then automatically we will also have a concern for them and will want to benefit them. If we have some success within our life, such as a material success, we will immediately want to share it with the rest of our family.

If one lacks love and compassion one will also lack concern for others and the attitude of wanting to benefit others will be more under the control of the self cherishing thought. Even though one might talk a lot about how concerned one is about the rest of one's

family and how much one wants to benefit the rest of one's family, when one actually has some material success, and comes into the position where one could benefit the rest of one's family, one won't do it because one has fallen under the control of the self cherishing thought. Therefore it is very important to have love and compassion. Often there is also that complaint that one is not getting on well with such and such a person. There is often some dispute or one is not getting on well within the family or with other people. By practising love and compassion one will receive very great benefit oneself.

We are all ordinary people, so in our relationship with others we always find there is a certain measure of attachment. What we should try to do is have more love and compassion for others than attachment. Practising love and compassion for others is very important in order to experience the happiness of harmonious living. When we have love and compassion for others we should have the very strong thought of wanting to benefit the other person. By having the very strong thought of wanting to benefit the other person and wanting to make the other person happy, then the motivation is already there, and one will act accordingly. It is the same with compassion. If one has the very strong thought of wanting to help the other person with their problems, wanting to alleviate their problems and wanting to free them from their problems, then on the basis of that thought we will also act accordingly.

It is very important if we live together for a long time with another person that we treat them with love and compassion and by treating them with love and compassion we can experience the happiness of harmonious living. The happiness of harmonious living is one of the most important happinesses that we experience. Of course there is also the happiness that comes from having material comfort but the happiness of being able to live together harmoniously with others is very, very important to have a happy life. That happiness comes about through the practice of love and compassion.

If we don't practise love and compassion we will lose the happiness of harmonious living. Then regardless of what one is doing, whether one is eating, drinking, sleeping, sitting up or lying down, standing up or walking, one won't experience happiness and peace within one's mind. If one loses that happiness of harmonious living one's own unhappiness can even go to the point where one can't sleep, even though one is tired, and one can't eat even though one is hungry and food is placed in front of you. There is a danger that one will make one's pillow very wet by crying the whole night! (laughter)

Recognising very clearly the danger that losing one's love and compassion would bring for one's own life, should we become aware that we are about to engage in an action that would be contrary to love and compassion, or if we recognise that a state of mind arises that is contrary to love and compassion, we should be

very apprehensive, very careful, and not follow that way of action, be it mentally, physically or verbally.

By practising love and compassion one will be able to live together harmoniously with others. One has to really practise it. It is not a question of understanding the importance of love and compassion - everybody is able to understand the importance of love and compassion - one has to actually put it into practise instead of thinking, " Oh yes that's a very nice idea".

Of course, in order to be able to live together harmoniously with another person, both parties need to practise love and compassion. Sometimes one cannot control the actions of the other person, but from one's own side one should at least put it into practise as well as possible and not put the responsibility for harmony on the other person.

A person who is very warm, loving and compassionate will have many friends because everybody is attracted to those qualities. Then if one loses a friend to whom one is very attached to, one will not be completely alone, one will still have a very great circle of friends and it won't be that great a loss. Who creates our friends and who creates our enemies? Our friends and our enemies are created either through our love and compassion or our anger. If one practises love and compassion, that love and compassion will attract people who want to be friends. It will also transform people who actually at first dislike you, who might fall more into a category of your enemy, into becoming your friend.

On the contrary, anger is what creates enemies. Anger is what creates dislike in other people for oneself. Anger that is focused on other people will create dislike in their mind for ourselves. In this way our anger creates our own enemies and it transforms even our friends into our enemies. It pushes our friends further far away from us while love and compassion pulls people more closely to us.

It is good to reflect on the qualities and benefits of practising love and compassion and then to put them into practise. We have to analyse the state of our own mind at the time when we are loving and compassionate and then at the time when our mind is under the control of anger. At the time our mind is under the control of anger it won't experience happiness while at the time of love and compassion the mind is experiencing inner happiness. Here one can very clearly see the benefits of love and compassion and the disadvantages of anger.

When another person is angry at us we should recall the mental suffering that anger causes and reflect on how the other person is experiencing that mental suffering at that moment. Contemplating the suffering that the other person is experiencing will help us to not get angry ourselves. It will help us to keep a calm and happy mind and it will help us to keep our love and compassion.

I didn't do that tonight. I didn't continue with what I planned to talk about in the Text and I started to talk

about other things. Maybe you might have some questions.

Question Inaudible

Answer: It is very good to reflect on the problems and sufferings of an angry person. As I mentioned before, anger brings suffering and problems to the person and they are probably angry in the first place because they are experiencing a particular difficulty or suffering in their life. By remembering that, and reflecting on that, we can create a space in our mind not to get angry and to have some love and compassion for them.

Question: I've got an interesting dilemma. I'm trying to communicate with someone who is in hospital at the latter stages of life and they are not responding. They've only got their eyes open and they're as close to death as can be. I'm wondering if communicating with them could be a negative... disturbing their going into their next rebirth or into future life. Do you see that there is a point whereby if someone is alive that could be interpreted as disturbing that process if they are not able to communicate to you, or do you see that is potentially beneficial to them? I'm just curious about this stage .

Answer: Once the breathing has stopped, then that person won't be able to recognise you anymore. At the time just before the breathing stops recognition is also probably difficult. Once the breathing has stopped completely then all the coarse consciousnesses have been become non-manifest. Once the breathing has ceased then only the subtle consciousnesses are still active. The coarse consciousnesses that form the connection with the outside world ceased at the time of the ceasing of the breath.

Before that those [coarse]consciousnesses are still active in various degrees. Of course just before the breathing stops, it will be quite difficult to make contact, but if one tries to make contact there are probably two or three different scenarios. If the person is someone who practised the dharma or was a religious practitioner who has a faith in a refuge, it can be on a Christian basis in Jesus and God, or on Buddhist basis or whatever, reminding them of their refuge and of their religion places them in a virtuous state of mind. It is good to try to do that, trying to encourage a virtuous state of mind, by talking to them about religion, reminding them about their refuge, etc. There is another type of person whom might become afraid if you try to do that. It is much better to just leave the person very calmly and not disturb their mind. One has to go according to the case, according to the person.

If the person is already in a stage of equanimity then it is much better not to disturb that state of equanimity. If you tried to talk to that person it might cause various negative concepts to arise in the person's mind and the person might become angry and that would bring about complications for the person. So if they are in a calm and peaceful state, then it is much better not to disturb them.

Question Inaudible.

Answer: Do you know when you are going to die? We never know when we are going to die. Sometimes you are sick but have impression that you can still live for some time and then one dies. The time of death is always indefinite. I have been told about a case where a person's mother's mind had degenerated to the point where she didn't even recognise her own children. That shouldn't become a reason for children not to take care of their mother. Even though the mother has lost recognition of her children because of her mental dementia the children haven't lost the recognition of her as their mother. That shouldn't be a reason to leave the mother in an old people's home and not go there and take care of her.

It seems that there are also certain cases when the memory fades because of too great an accumulation of blood in the brain. The blood accumulates in the brain to the point where you can see spots outside and nothing, no operation, can help. That can cause the memory to decline. As the disease progresses the person completely loses their memory, so it is very good to take good care of one's blood, one's blood pressure, blood flow.

There are many people who feel that they are very capable and that they can do many things and eat anything. Then they lie down in the evening and go to bed and in the morning they can't get up because they have some kind of blood congestion in their brain. That also happened in the monastery. It also happens to monks. They may feel that they are very capable and very intelligent, very good in their studies, and then in the morning, because they had some problem with their blood flow in the brain, they completely degenerate.

It is the same as the petrol line in your car (laughter). It gets congested if you don't keep it clean and the engine won't work properly. In the same way, if you don't keep your blood vessels very pure the blood can't flow freely and the body doesn't work very well. It is very good to take good care of it. (laughter)

There was a ??? who lived in Sydney who was quite well built as he was into body building. He felt he was quite powerful and strong and he was still comparatively young. Then one day we got the phone call he had died. He had gone to bed in the evening and didn't wake up in the morning. So you don't know when you are going to die.

Question: Geshe. What about those highly realised practitioners who actually know the body signs who actually know that it (death) is going to occur in the next day or so?

Answer: Highly advised practitioners can roughly know the time when they are going to die. I have had personal experience of that among people I have known. When they see that soon they are going to die they will distribute all their possessions among their friends and students, they will give their final advice to individual students and friends and then, quite soon after, they will die. It is quite difficult to say the exact hour and minute but maybe it can be known approximately .

It doesn't necessarily need to be a highly advanced practitioner. Quite often ordinary people can feel when death approaches. We have many such cases in Tibet. This happened particularly in Tibet because people there had a very relaxed mind. They had the space of mind to feel or recognise the signs of their coming death. Then they would give their final advice to their other family members, tell them what to do in the future and what not to do, etc. and then do all their final things in this life and soon afterwards they would die.

I also know of cases in Australia.

As was explained at the beginning, bring the mind back home freeing it from outside objects and then, after having focused it inwards, concentrate single-pointedly on the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE
SOHA*

Transcribed from tape by Gaye Lewis-Radcliffe

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Edited Version

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