
The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas

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We can meditate for a little while. First, sit straight and in a good physical posture. For our concentration to develop well, we need to practise two types of isolation: physical and mental. Physically, we need to isolate the body from destructive behaviour, and mentally, we need to isolate the mind from disturbing thoughts. Of those two, I think the correct physical posture is easier. To practise mental isolation – isolating the mind from the control of disturbing thoughts – is more difficult.

At the present time, you might find it difficult to immediately free the mind from the control of disturbing thoughts and to have great stability of mind. One should remember what Geshe Chekawa said: “The mind has the quality that, no matter how much it is overcome by disturbing emotions, if one trains it, it will follow anything.” One can train the mind in anything; the mind listens if we talk to it.

If we just resign from meditation practice and say: “My mind is too difficult, because it is too controlled by disturbing emotions and disturbing thoughts”, then of course we will never be able to attain a calm and stable state of mind. One has to continue to meditate and to familiarise one’s mind with more wholesome and beneficial states. We have to free the mind from the control of disturbing thoughts and bring the mind back home, focusing it inwards, reversing the trend of going off towards outside objects.

If you bring the mind back home and focus it inwards, the various disturbing thoughts will subside and the mind will abide in tranquillity and calm. Within that state, we can then direct the mind towards the coming and going of the breath, and take the coming and going of the breath as our meditation object, focusing on it single-pointedly. (*Pause for meditation*). We can stop here.

It is very important to meditate, because through the practice of meditation one can generate and recognise true inner happiness – the happiness that arises from one’s own wisdom and the happiness that arises from having subdued one’s own mind. These types of happiness arise independently of other people. There is a type of happiness that arises in dependence on others. To experience that type of happiness, we have to rely on others to give us happiness, which we achieve when others laugh with us, or smile at us, etc.

However, there is another type of happiness that arises through the power of the mind, through the wisdom of the mind, and through subduing the mind. When one practises meditation, one will be able to generate that type of happiness, and one will recognise the potential within one’s mind to experience that happiness.

If one practises meditation, trains one’s mind, and is able to generate some inner mental happiness, it will be

very beneficial, as that type of happiness doesn’t rely on a good outer situation. Regardless of the outer situation, one will always be able to fall back on one’s mental happiness. The other type of happiness arises through outside conditions, which we get through interaction with others. That type of happiness, firstly, is not stable, as it arises through those outside conditions, through others; and, secondly, it distracts our mind towards the outside. Being able to generate inner happiness will make one more independent, and the happiness one experiences will last longer.

This is an important point to consider. If one is able to generate mental happiness through the power of one’s own mind, one will not depend on others for one’s happiness. If one depends on others for one’s happiness, then if those people go away and one becomes separated from them, one will experience suffering. Then, one will not have the happiness one experiences through contact with other people, and one will also not have mental happiness through one’s own power. At the time of separation, although there is nothing particularly terrible about that situation, because of the way it appears to the mind, the person will suffer greatly because they don’t have inner happiness.

If we investigate the way our mind works, we will find that the way we think is responsible for our happiness and suffering. A certain way of thinking will give us happiness, while another way of thinking will give us suffering.

Here I have a brief story to mention: At one time, an old friend of mine came to me and she was sad because her husband had left her. She was very upset. I told her: “Just because your husband left you doesn’t mean that you lost anything.” She was surprised and I said: “Because you haven’t lost yourself – you still have yourself”. Automatically, she saw the point and it pacified her mind and her worries and she felt better.

If one is in a difficult situation and the possibility for happiness has been closed and one gets depressed, this will obscure one’s mind and prevent one’s mind from finding another way. Someone who can make use of the wisdom within the mind will be able to find another way. When there is a difficult situation, one shouldn’t just stay depressed and feel that all avenues are closed. One shouldn’t feel like that.

Last time, we talked about transforming the objects of attachment into the path. Here, one basically meditates on the knowledge of contentment. As the Bodhisattva Shantideva said: “One has to generate contentment, or knowledge of contentment, and then through that one is able to experience happiness.”

We have now completed the outline of conventional bodhicitta. Conventional bodhicitta has two major sub-outlines: meditating on conventional bodhicitta during the meditative session, and transforming problems into the path during the post-meditation period. Now, we come to the second major outline: meditating on ultimate bodhicitta.

In order to attain enlightenment and to reach the ground of a conqueror, one needs to rely both on

method and wisdom; one needs to practise both ultimate and conventional bodhicitta. In the same way a bird needs two wings in order to cross the ocean from one shore to the other, a practitioner needs both method and wisdom in order to cross the ocean of samsara.

If the practitioner just practises the method aspect of the path, he or she won't become enlightened. Similarly, if the practitioner relies on wisdom alone, he or she won't become enlightened. One needs to practise the unification of method and wisdom, meaning conventional bodhicitta and ultimate bodhicitta – the accumulation of merit and wisdom.

This major outline, meditating on ultimate bodhicitta, has two sub-outlines. The first is meditating on a space-like emptiness in meditative equipoise, and the second is abandoning true grasping towards the objects of attachment during the post-meditation period.

Verse 22 from the text, *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*, (Snow Lion Publications, New York 1997) reads:

Whatever appears is your own mind.

Your mind from the start was free from fabricated extremes.

Understanding this, do not take to mind

[Inherent] signs of subject and object –

This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

The first outline is meditating on space-like emptiness during the meditation period. The environment, sentient beings living in the environment, and oneself are all perceived through one's mind. Everything that one perceives appears within one's own mind. This appearance is an appearance of true existence. To one's mind, outer phenomena and oneself appear to be truly existing. This appearance of true existence is an hallucination. It is a mistaken appearance, and actually phenomena are merely labelled by conception.

The mind that is labelling these phenomena is also free from inherent existence. Both subject and object – the objects that are being labelled and the subject that is doing the labelling, the mind – lack inherent existence or existence from their own side. It says here in the fourth line: "Understanding this, do not take to mind signs of subject and object". So, do not take to mind the inherent existence of subject and object.

Looking at this verse, a misconception might be generated in your mind. You might start to think: "What it is saying is that all phenomena are mere appearances to the mind and don't actually exist". This is not what is meant here. Phenomena still do exist. Phenomena are imputed by the mind, but they don't appear to the mind as being imputed. They appear to the mind as existing from their own side. This appearance of phenomena existing from their own side, this appearance of true existence, is mistaken appearance – that is what doesn't exist. Phenomena do still exist and the way they exist is that they are labelled by the mind.

There is no inherently existent person, no person existing from its own side, but still the person exists. We can confirm that through our own experience. When one moves around or does this or that, there is a person who is doing all of these activities. Just because one says that the person doesn't exist inherently doesn't mean it is non-existent.

The grasping at phenomena as being inherently existent, or the grasping at phenomena as if existing from their own side, is called self-grasping at phenomena. The grasping at the person as existing from its own side, or existing inherently, is called self-grasping at a person.

This self-grasping at a person is the root of all problems. When we look for the root of all our problems we have to blame this self-grasping at the person.

To oppose the self-grasping at the person, one needs to generate the wisdom realising selflessness. Before one can do this, one first needs to find some fault with self-grasping. The way one does this is to reflect both on the situation of oneself and of others, and how one experiences various problems without any control, and then look for the cause of those problems. That investigation will lead one to karma and the afflictions that are the cause of the problems. At the very root of karma and afflictions, one finds self-grasping as being the final root of our problems.

Sufferings don't come into existence without a cause, because sufferings are impermanent phenomena – they are compounded phenomena. Impermanent phenomena arise from a cause – they have to have a cause. Without a cause, impermanent phenomena don't arise. Therefore, suffering has to have a cause. We can also observe that the sufferings experienced by each sentient being are not the same. Every sentient being experiences different types of problems and sufferings. That also indicates that sufferings have to come from a cause.

If we look around us, we will find that everyone experiences different problems. Their problems are personal; the problems of sentient beings are not all the same. Once we understand everybody's experiences of their own personal life or particular problems, we can see that those particular problems come about through a particular cause.

We can see very clearly that not everyone is the same. Different children of the same parents are different. Among brothers and sisters, we can see that some get sick more often than others, some have better health than others. Some have a greater predisposition for anger, while others might have less anger, but might have more attachment. Again, we can find differences in their qualities and their ability to learn, etc. We can see very clearly the individual aspects of their lives and personalities.

By reflecting on the individual aspects of different people's lives, we can see that those different aspects have to have their own particular cause. The particular cause is the karma that that person created in his or her own previous life. The individual situations of the

present life come about through the individual karmas that were created in previous lives of the person.

Understanding this will lead one to the realisation that there has to be a cause, both for the samsara others experience, as well as for one's own samsara. By reflecting in that way, one arrives at the understanding that one's own suffering and the suffering of others do not come about through the power of another person.

If we look at the individual situations of ourselves and others, we will understand that one only experiences the results of causes one has created in the past. One doesn't experience the result of causes that others have created. If one experiences suffering, it is the suffering of one's own non-virtuous karma accumulated previously – not of some non-virtuous karma that was created by others. If one experiences happiness, that is the result of some wholesome karma previously created by oneself, and not the result of some wholesome karma created by another person. One experiences one's own individual result through one's own individual causes created in the past. That applies to oneself and to all other sentient beings.

By reflecting further, we realise that the individual karmas were generated through the faults of the delusions, and at the root of the delusions, we find the grasping at the self of person. The grasping at the self of person is the original source of all problems. By coming to understand that self-grasping is the root of all problems and that as long as one has self-grasping within one's mind one will automatically engage in the creation of unwholesome karma and actions, one can understand the need for identifying this self-grasping.

Within one's mind one will hear one part of the mind that is always saying 'I', 'I' – sometimes louder, sometimes more quietly; (*Geshe-la laughing*) there is one part of one's mind that is always declaring, 'I', 'I', 'me', 'me'. That is self-grasping.

Then, on the basis of asserting 'I', one starts to assert the body as 'mine' and one's various possessions as 'mine', and one's friends as 'mine', and so forth. After having made this division into what is 'mine' and the sides of self and other, one generates attachment for that belonging to 'my' side and to 'I', and generates aversion for what belongs to the side of 'other'. Through the faults of that attachment and aversion, one generates various unwholesome karmas, and these unwholesome karmas bind one to further rebirth and produce further sufferings.

This is very important to reflect upon, and is something you definitely can understand if you investigate your mind. There is a part of the mind that asserts the 'I'. Then, based on the 'I', one starts to grasp at 'mine' – my possessions, my friends, my boyfriend, my girlfriend, etc. Then, one generates strong attachment for what one regards as 'mine', and generates strong aversion for the side of 'other' – the side contrary to one's own side.

For example, any type of war or dispute starts from the feeling that there is something that is 'mine' and that it is producing my happiness, and there is something else that is somehow threatening what is 'mine', and towards

which one generates aversion. One can understand how both attachment for 'mine' and aversion for 'other's' are harmful mental attitudes that bring about great suffering and unwholesome actions, and we need to abandon them.

Next time, we will continue with the nature of self-grasping and how it is not enough just to identify the self-grasping, but how one has to investigate it and try and reduce it. First, we have to investigate whether the self-grasping is a valid state of mind or a mistaken state of mind. If it is a mistaken state of the mind, it can be overcome. If it is a misunderstanding, a misconception, it can be rectified. If it were a valid mind, it couldn't be rectified or changed. It is important to understand whether self-grasping is a misconception or a valid mind. We will talk more about that next Wednesday.

In your daily life one should try to identify this grasping at the 'I' within one's mind, identifying the part of the mind that is asserting or grasping at the 'I.' If we do that practice, it will help us to focus the mind inwards and make it more stable.

So now, do you have some questions?

Question: Is it right that we should think of this as a path to annihilating the ego?

Answer: The nature of the ego is a little bit unclear. We don't eliminate the self because the self exists. What we eliminate is technically called, 'the self of person'. We don't negate the person, but what we call 'the self of person'. We say 'the self of person' is non-existent, but the self exists.

The self is just the person. The self and person are synonymous – they definitely exist, we don't try to negate something that exists. What we refer to as 'the self of person' is non-existent and will be negated. 'I' and 'self' are synonymous. 'I' and 'self' refer to the same thing. We talk about 'my consciousness' – in some countries they would say, 'the consciousness of myself' or 'of the self'. The 'self' and the 'I' are again synonyms.

In the refuge prayer, it says in the second two lines: "May I, by practising generosity...obtain complete enlightenment". In Tibetan, it uses the word for 'self'. Again, one talks about the 'I' that is practising generosity, and the self. So, that is existent. One also talks about the teacher that is one's refuge. The teacher that is one's refuge is the Buddha. The teacher that is the refuge of one's self is the Buddha.

So 'self' and the 'I' are first of all equivalent, and since they exist, they are not being negated. We say, "I go", "I do this", "I do that". That is reality. That we don't negate.

Question: So one says that we annihilate (rest inaudible)???

Answer: The object of negation is 'the self of person.' The 'self of person' refers to the inherently existent person, or the person existing from its own side. You are not the object of negation because you exist. But the inherently existent Wayne or the Wayne existing from his own side – that is the object of negation. If you existed from your own side, you wouldn't need any parents. If Wayne

existed from his own side, he would exist independently and wouldn't need any father and mother. If you existed from your own side, you would be independent; you would be able to do whatever you liked. But it is not the case – for example, you wish to stay young, but it doesn't happen! *(Laughter)*

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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