
The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas

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We can practise some meditation as usual. Please sit in a good physical posture, so that you sit very comfortably, and mentally hold a settled mental attitude.

It's good to be aware of the benefits of sitting in a proper meditation posture with an upright body. This is to avoid the faults of sleep and mental agitation. If the body is upright, then the energy channels within the body are also straightened out, and the energies can flow more freely. Then the various types of consciousnesses that are associated with those energies can flow more freely through the channels, which assists in having a stable and clear meditation.

On the basis of sitting in a correct physical posture, then what is meditation? We always talk about meditation, and as I usually say, practising meditation means acquainting the mind with wholesome mental states, or establishing wholesome mental patterns. We can confirm from our own experience that if wholesome mental states manifest within our mind, then our mind is relaxed and happy. However once the disturbed mental patterns become active again then the internal happiness is destroyed. Therefore meditation means to meditate on wholesome mental patterns, and to establish wholesome mental patterns in the mind.

If one transforms one's mind by acquainting the mind with those wholesome mental patterns, then one will experience more mental happiness and peace. From our own experience we all know the power of mental habit and mental patterns. We all know how, against our wish, inner happiness and inner peace can be destroyed because of certain mental habits. If we reflect on the benefits of meditation, and the benefits of creating more wholesome and beneficial mental patterns within the mind, then we will become more inspired to practise meditation.

We should generate the motivation that, 'I definitely have to practise some meditation in this life'. If we practise meditation and establish more wholesome mental patterns within the mind, then the mind will become more peaceful. Then we will experience greater peace and inner happiness, which is what one needs in life, which benefits oneself both mentally as well as also physically. If one is internally happy, then it has also a beneficial effect on one's physical health. So by being aware of the benefits of meditation, then one will be inspired and generate the strong wish of wanting to meditate.

One should make use of the mental potential for inner happiness. By doing so one can transform one's mind, and so experience greater inner peace. It is important that one does so while one has the opportunity. It is too late if one remembers later on that meditating would be a good thing to do, but one doesn't have the opportunity any more. One has to practise meditation while one still has the opportunity.

By making use of the potential for inner happiness within one's mind, and in such a way establishing wholesome patterns, then one can create one's own inner happiness. These wholesome patterns become the supporting conditions for one's own inner happiness. Then one can straighten out one's mind, and also make oneself a more an upright honest person who will be trusted by others regardless of where one goes. In such a way, one's quality of life will greatly improve.

In order to meditate, we need to bring the mind back home, focusing it inwards. What normally prevents our mind from abiding calmly and focused inwards are disturbing thoughts, so we need to free our mind from the control of those disturbing thoughts.

One needs to free the mind from the disturbing thoughts that distract the mind towards the outside. Bring the mind back home, focusing it inwards. From within that state, then one concentrates the mind on the coming and going of the breath – one takes the coming and going of the breathing as one's meditational object. We can meditate in that way for a few minutes.

Pause for meditation.

It is good to practise meditation from time to time because both one's physical as well as one's mental wellbeing is one's own responsibility. One needs to create one's own mental and physical happiness, and also to take care that once they have been established one's mental and physical wellbeing does not degenerate.

Last time we started talking about self-grasping, the grasping at an 'I', and how the various delusions such as attachment and anger are generated from this belief in the 'I'. Because of those mental delusions, one then engages in various unwholesome physical, verbal and mental actions, and through that, one then creates further causes for problems and suffering.

The source of all one's problems is self-grasping, and one needs to engage in some method to overcome this self-grasping. One should also recognise that one has the potential to overcome self-grasping with various methods. You should understand that it is possible to generate the view realising emptiness within your mental continuum, and that it is impossible to overcome self-grasping without that view that understands emptiness. One needs to reflect on the disadvantages of self-grasping seeing how it is the source of all one's problems, and actually view self-grasping as one's own internal enemy. Only if one does that, will one generate the wish of wanting to overcome and abandon self-grasping, and only if one generates that wish will it be possible to generate the view that realises emptiness. Without viewing self-grasping as the enemy, one won't generate the wish to abandon self-grasping, and then the wisdom realising emptiness won't be generated.

Once one has decided to abandon self-grasping, one looks for a method. What type of method does one need in order to abandon self-grasping? Cutting out the self-grasping requires a different method to taking a knife and cutting out some part of the body during an operation. What one has to do is to actually investigate the object of self-grasping. By investigating the apprehended object of self-grasping, then one will be able to generate the view that realises emptiness.

We have to ask ourselves, is self-grasping a mistaken awareness, or is it a valid awareness?

If self-grasping is a mind concordant with reality then it is a valid mind. If we investigate the object of a valid mind, then what will happen is that it will just reinforce that mind by making the object more vivid. For example if there is a person over there, the more we look at the person the more it will just reinforce our understanding that there's another person standing over there. The more we investigate it the clearer the other person, will appear to the mind. Why? Because it actually exists, and the mind that perceives it is a valid mind. Therefore it is impossible to abandon a valid mind. However a mistaken mind can be abandoned. From far away it may appear that another person is standing somewhere in the distance, but in actuality, there is no person there. Rather it is another outer condition, a particular formation of stones that has been

mistaken for another human being. As one looks towards that pile of stones, one thinks, 'Oh, there's another person standing there', however that eye-consciousness perceiving those stones as another person is a mistaken mind. If one investigates whether there is in fact another person standing there all one finds is the pile of stones and one understands that one was mistaken. So the misunderstanding can be corrected and one can abandon the mistaken mind through investigating the object.

This is the difference between mistaken minds and unmistakable minds - unmistakable minds cannot be abandoned, whereas mistaken minds can be abandoned. Self-grasping is also a mistaken mind, and the 'I' that is perceived by that self-grasping is non-existent. So here it is very important to make a clear distinction between the 'I' that is apprehended by self-grasping, and the 'I' that exists.

First of all, the 'I' that is the apprehended object of self-grasping is referred to as the **object of negation** - it is what one has to negate. In order to negate it, one first needs to identify it. This is somewhat difficult, because the existent 'I', and the 'I' that is the object of negation, that inherently existent 'I' always seem to go hand in hand together. So it is very difficult to distinguish between them. However one shouldn't give up, thinking that it is too difficult. One just has to try again and again to identify the object of negation within one's mind.

If one has identified the object of negation within one's mind, and analyses whether it really exists or not, then one can negate it. One can understand its non-existence and then when emptiness starts to appear to one's mind, one won't fall into the fault of nihilism. One won't fall into the extreme of nihilism if one is very clear about what is to be negated, making a distinction between the existing 'I' and the 'I' that is the object of negation.

What is the mode of appearance of the false 'I', the 'I' that is the object of negation to self-grasping? The mode of appearance is one of not being imputed by the mind. So there's an appearance of the 'I' as not being imputed by the mind. You might remember that last time we mentioned how all phenomena are imputed by the mind, but instead of appearing as such, they appear as if they exist from their own side. Here, the 'I' appears to the innate self-grasping as if it is not imputed by the mind, but as if it exists from its own side. It appears as if it is established from its own side, and then also abides, so it has a somewhat 'true' appearance, as if existing from its own side. That is the way the 'I' appears to the self-grasping mind, and then the self-grasping mind also grasps at that 'I'. So there is both the appearance and grasping at that appearance.

The important first step is to identify this mode of appearance, and to identify the self-grasping. This cannot be done merely by sitting down and investigating one's mind. One needs to do it at the right time because even though this sense of an inherently existent 'I' is always with us, there are certain times when it appears more strongly than others. For example at a time when we are accused of something, or someone says something to us that we don't agree with. Then, independently of body and mind, one generates a very strong sense of self. When one thinks, 'I don't agree at all with what the other person says', there is a very strong sense of self at that time. Or when one feels 'I've been accused of such and such', again there is a very strong sense of self. At those times, one needs to investigate this appearance of self repeatedly in order to clearly identify the object of negation. At those times the 'I' appears very strongly as some entity that is independent of body and mind. There is an idea of a very solid third entity. The very first step is to identify this appearance of the 'I' that appears as if it is independent of body and mind in those situations.

One needs to very clearly identify this false 'I', the object of negation that appears during those times, because this appearance of the 'I' is the object of one's refutation. It is one's object of investigation. In order to perform this analytical meditation, one needs to first identify this object very clearly.

On the basis of having identified this appearance of the 'I' that exists from its own side, then one needs to perform an analysis into the existence of that 'I'. If this inherently existent 'I', not being labelled by the mind, exists the way it appears to be, as existing truly and from its own side, then it has to exist somewhere. There are three possibilities. It can exist either within one's body, or it can exist within one's mind, or it can exist as an entity separate from both.

So first of all one can investigate whether one's body is this 'I'. Here there are three reasons through which one can establish that the body is not the 'I'.

The **first** one is that if one burnt the body, then the 'I' would also be burnt. This means that the 'I' wouldn't go on to future lives, and so the continuity of the 'I' would be severed. That is one mistake that would occur if the body were the 'I'.

The **second** is that since the body has many parts, limbs etc, there would be as many 'I's as there are parts. So, as the body has many parts, then there would also be many 'I's, or many selves.

The **third** analysis is that the body is viewed by the self, by the 'I', as its possession. The self views itself as the 'controller' of the body, which has power over and controls the body.

If the 'I' were the body one couldn't say, 'I own the body' or 'my body'. This is like the king and his ministers. The king rules the ministers, which makes it clear that he is different from the ministers.

The king is the one who controls the various ministers, which very clearly shows that the king has to be different from the ministers. In the same way, the 'I' cannot be the body, because it is that which owns the body.

In order to refute this sense that the 'I' is an independent entity from the body and the mind, one can also reflect on how if one experiences physical pain, one thinks, 'I have such and such a pain. I am physically sick'. Also if one experiences mental distress or mental unhappiness, again one thinks, 'I am unhappy'. This very clearly shows the interdependency of the relationship between our body and mind and the self. Whatever the mind and body do, then one also gets the sense 'That's what I'm doing' or 'That is what I'm experiencing', thereby making use of the reasoning of dependent arising. By understanding the relationship, or the dependent arising between the 'I' and body and mind, one can refute the idea of an 'I' that is independent of body and mind.

It would be incorrect to say that one's mind is the self because the self appears as existing independently. If the self did exist in the way it appears to the self-grasping mind, then it would have to exist independently. The 'I' appears as being independent. Therefore it would be incorrect to say that the mind is this 'I', because one would arrive at the fault that the mind is independent, but the mind is obviously not independent.

One can understand that the mind cannot be the self that exists from its own side, because the mind doesn't exist from its own side. The mind doesn't exist independently; rather the mind exists in dependence upon causes and conditions. For example different types of mind are generated in dependence upon the different objects of the mind.

If one understands the relationship between the mind and its objects one can understand that the mind doesn't exist

independently. Through the mind meeting with pleasurable objects example happiness is generated within the mind, and through the mind meeting with undesired objects, then unhappiness is generated within the mind. By understanding this, one can see that the mind doesn't exist independently, but has a dependent relationship with its various objects. So the mind is generated in dependence upon causes and conditions. By seeing this, then we can refute the idea of the mind existing without depending upon causes and conditions.

If the mind was the 'I', then one couldn't have this notion of the 'I' being that which controls the mind, or that which owns the mind. Similarly to our body, this notion of owning our mind, and viewing the mind as something we possess and control wouldn't be possible if the mind were the 'I'.

By going through this analysis, and contemplating these various points, one can refute both the physical body as well as the mind as being this independent 'I'. Since one has both eliminated body and mind as being this independent 'I' and this independent 'I' is also not to be found anywhere else, one arrives at the absence of this independent 'I'. One then understands that this notion of an 'I' that is independent of causes and conditions, is mistaken. One understands there is no 'I' that exists independently of causes and conditions, but that the 'I' is actually generated independence upon causes and conditions.

Then through that contemplation one arrives slowly, slowly at an understanding of emptiness. First one has this idea of an independent 'I', an 'I' that exists independently of body and mind. If the 'I' existed independently of body and mind, then it would exist inherently. By understanding through the reasoning of dependent arising that this idea of an 'I' independent of body and mind is a misconception, and by understanding the interdependency of body and mind and the 'I', then one can arrive at an understanding of selflessness, and so one can purify the appearance into emptiness.

Maybe we can leave it here.

As we did at the beginning, free the mind from the control of the disturbing thoughts, bringing the mind back home, focusing it inwards, and then concentrate it on the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha. If you practise the meditation that I just explained for example, then you will also get some experience of the mind abiding inwards. The mind will become more focused inwards and one will get some experience of the mind abiding inwards if one practises that meditation. By practising meditation one becomes more introspective, and also one can understand how self-grasping harms oneself. Then by understanding 'Oh, self-grasping is not actually my friend', one generates the wish to do something about it.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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