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## *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*

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We will practise some meditation as usual. Sit in a good, relaxed posture. It is important not to let one's mind be uselessly distracted by disturbing thoughts, pointlessly circling around the same objects, again and again.

On the basis of sitting in a correct, comfortable and relaxed physical posture, it is important that one doesn't let the mind continue to think about useless things – things that have happened or are about to happen. If one lets the mind stay fixated on these situations, there is a danger that it will become more excited, upset and uptight, to the point where the tension will manifest physically, and the whole upper body will become rigid.

When some people become mentally agitated and fixated on certain problems, ideas or situations, not being able to stop the mind from going over these situations again and again, their whole body, particularly the shoulders and upper body, become tense and rigid. On the other hand, people who are able to think about things in a relaxed way and keep their mind relaxed usually have a softer body and softer skin.

If one lets one's mind become agitated from non-stop internal dialogue, one becomes so tense that it is very easy for anger to arise; anger arises very readily for such people. Once the mind is habituated to such a (tense/angry) state, it is difficult for it to return to a calmer state. To prevent this from happening, it is important for one to place the mind in the correct mental state after sitting in a good, relaxed physical posture.

Practising meditation should be done on the basis of the benefits it will bring to one's future life. But if that is not possible, at least we should practise meditation with a view to bringing some benefit in this life, some degree of mental happiness. Otherwise, if one one's mind continues to remain agitated and uptight, it will cause both mental ill-health and physical illness.

Therefore, subduing the mind becomes very important. If one subdues the mind, it can remain happy in this life. One needs to have both physical and mental happiness in this life, remembering that physical happiness is supported by mental happiness.

One should remember these benefits when practising meditation.

So, on the basis of sitting in a good, relaxed physical posture, free the mind from the control of the disturbing thoughts, bring it back home and focus it inwards. After having focused the mind completely inwards, concentrate single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. We will meditate in this manner for a few minutes. (*Pause for meditation.*)

It is important that we take responsibility for our own happiness and our own mind and that we analyse which mental path leads to happiness and which mental path leads to suffering. We need to regard our own wisdom as a 'minister', and follow its advice.

Otherwise, we can be misled by certain types of mind that arise within our mental continuum that try to 'sell' us different ideas about what will make us happy. If one follows such mistaken ideas, one will lose both happiness of this life and the happiness of future lives. By the time we realise that we have lost everything by following the mistaken advice of those types of mind, it will be too late.

Therefore, we should thoroughly investigate which path leads to happiness and which mental states bring suffering, and then act according to that wisdom. We should regard our sense of discriminating awareness as a friend or a minister, and follow its advice. Of course, that wisdom also needs to be combined with the supporting condition of calm abiding. We need to have a kind mind, free from the destructive influence of the disturbing thoughts. In this way, we can attain true inner happiness. You can see that it is quite easy!

If the mind is separated from both wisdom and calm abiding, we will go down the wrong mental path and our inner potential for happiness will degenerate. Therefore, it is very important that we look after ourselves and don't rely on others, but rather take our own life into our own hands.

Last time, we dealt with the [heading or] outline [in the text] of 'abandoning true grasping with regard to the objects of one's attachment'. Now, we come to the next outline: 'abandoning true grasping with regard to the objects of one's aversion'. Verse 24 [of the text, *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*, Snow Lion Publications, New York, 1997, states]:

*All forms of suffering are like a child's death  
in a dream.*

*Holding illusory appearances to be true  
makes you weary.*

*Therefore when you meet with disagreeable  
circumstances,*

*See them as illusory –*

*This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.*

Usually, the term 'objects of our attachment' refers to attractive sense objects – pleasant sounds, smells, sights, etc. The term 'objects of our aversion' refers to the opposite – unpleasant sounds, sights, smells, tactile sensations, etc.

Regardless of whether they are objects of attachment or aversion, we always grasp at objects as existing from their own side, as having true existence. Those objects appear to exist truly and we grasp onto a belief in that appearance. To counteract this, one has to generate some disbelief about the way objects appear. One needs to understand that there is a discrepancy between appearance and existence. We need to view all

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phenomena as illusory. Although they appear truly existent, we must try not to believe in that appearance.

When we generate aversion to objects that appear unpleasant, that unpleasant appearance appears to come from its own side. This appearance of unpleasantness seems to exist truly from the object's side, and one believes in that appearance. However, one must come to realise that there is a discrepancy between appearance and existence. The object that appears to the mind is dependent-arising – it depends upon its parts, and it also depends upon the mind that labels it.

Appearances are merely illusory. It is said that if one believes in the true nature of those illusory appearances, it will make you weary. Since there is this discrepancy between appearance and existence, it is said that: "All forms of suffering are like a child's death in a dream". There is no true existence to them. Therefore, when one meets with disagreeable circumstances, one should view them as illusory, which is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

Here, the example of the child's death in a dream is based on the example of a young woman who would like to very much to have a child. When she dreams about having a child, in the dream she is very happy. But when the child then dies during the dream, she will be very sad in the dream. Therefore, the emotions of happiness and suffering are generated in response to a mere illusion, to something that happens in a dream. This is why this example is used.

As to the nature of this illusion, anger and attachment are supported by what we call the mistaken conception that exaggerates reality, either in a positive or negative way. In the case of attachment, the pleasant aspects of the object are greatly exaggerated by the mind. Because the mind believes in this beautiful appearance of the object, it generates attachment for it. Conversely, because the disagreeable aspects of an object are greatly exaggerated by the misleading conception, one will generate strong aversion to it.

We can clearly see how one's view of an object changes. The object will appear different to the mind depending on whether one has attachment for it or not; and whether one is angry with it or not. When one views the object with attachment, it appears to be incredibly desirable. At other times, when one views the same object with no attachment, it doesn't appear to be desirable at all.

There has been no change from the side of the object. What has changed is one's view of the object. The same applies to aversion – when we have strong aversion, the object appears to be undesirable and disagreeable. However, when we view the object after one's aversion has died down, we no longer view the object as disagreeable or undesirable. Again, the object hasn't really changed; what has changed is our view of the object. Therefore, it is very good to understand the power of mistaken conception.

By remembering the power of mistaken conception – that there is discrepancy between what appears to our mind and the actual situation of the object – we can

greatly benefit our mind. Whenever we feel strong attachment arising, we can recall that the beautiful appearance of the object is merely created by one's own mistaken conception. Then, one will get the benefit of less craving. Whenever we feel strong anger arising, we can recall that the disagreeable or unpleasant negative aspect of the object that appears to the mind is also a mere creation of one's own mistaken conception. Then, one will get the benefit of less aversion.

These benefits do not even take into account the view that understands emptiness. Once we understand emptiness and the lack of the true nature of appearances to the mind, and the lack of the true nature of the object, one will not believe the true appearance anyway. This is the meaning of the advice to abandon true grasping with regard to the objects of one's anger and attachment during the post-meditation period.

Ordinarily, our mind bounces back and forth between attachment and aversion. Something appears desirable, and we generate attachment for it. Something appears undesirable, and we generate aversion. Quite often, this fluctuating view is in relation to the same object. When an object appears pleasant and attractive to us, we generate great attachment for it, declaring our love for that object. But just a small degree of disagreeable appearance from the side of the object automatically changes our attitude. Instead of having great attachment for the object, we generate aversion. In this way, our mind continually bounces back and forth between attachment and aversion.

Therefore, one can see the benefit that reducing attachment and aversion will bring to the mind. By reducing attachment and aversion, one's mind can enjoy great peace and has an opportunity to calm down.

By recalling the disadvantages of aversion/anger and attachment, one will be able to pacify at least partially these disturbing states of mind. To be completely without attachment is very difficult, but at least one should try not to let it rule one's mind.

People are always complaining about their lives being unstable and that they cannot have a stable relationship and experience stability in their lives. How does that come about? What causes one to be in such a situation? Some older couples have been living together for 65 or 70 years, and they are still able to keep their worldly happiness. They have been able to take care of each other for 65 or 70 years, so they have at least experienced the worldly happiness of being able to have a stable relationship and experience the happiness of harmoniously living together.

Even without taking into consideration life's greater Dharma purpose, from the point of view of how one's life affects the people related to us, it is important that we try to have stable relationships and a stable life. When people don't do this, you often hear their children saying: "How should I know about having a stable relationship if my parents cannot have one?" Definitely, the way we live our life affects those associated with us. By considering the effect of one's own lifestyle on the

lifestyle of one's children, one should try to have a more stable lifestyle.

Of the two delusions of anger and attachment, it is easy to view anger as an enemy. The disadvantages of anger are obvious. It's more difficult to realise the disadvantages of attachment. However, by thinking about the disturbing influence that attachment has on our life, perhaps we will be able to understand its disadvantages a bit more. I will finish here for tonight. Do you have any questions?

*Question [not clear in transcription]*

*Answer:* The understanding of one's own situation and meditating on compassion for others are closely related. The better we understand our own situation, the easier it is for us to generate compassion for others.

For example, if we have experienced separation from a close friend, we will find it difficult to engage in any divisive action that would drive two other friends apart, because we have experienced the suffering induced by being separated from a close friend, we will very careful not to cause separation between two other people, because we have experienced the suffering ourselves, so we definitely will not want to cause others to experience the same suffering.

Therefore, experiencing suffering oneself is conducive to generating compassion for others. Also, if one has been the object of another person's anger and has experienced the difficulty it causes, one will be very careful about not reacting in anger to others, so that they do not have the same experience.

For example, in the army, an officer or general who has come up through the ranks, starting with being a normal soldier or a private, is usually very compassionate towards his troops and well-liked by them because he knows exactly how they feel and treats them appropriately and fairly. On the other hand, an officer who has been promoted straight from nothing to being an officer and who has never had the experience of being an ordinary soldier will find it much more difficult to relate to his troops.

Here again, the benefit of one's own personal experience comes out in the way one treats others. Also, it shows that you should always try to work your way up slowly – if you want to become a minister or whatever, you start low, then work your way up!

If you have experienced the suffering of hunger and thirst, it will be difficult to bear the hunger and thirst of others; one will automatically be motivated to alleviate the suffering of the hunger and thirst of others.

Anything else?

*Question about attachment and contentment.*

*Answer:* The nature of contentment is having less craving.

Contentment doesn't mean that one has to give away all one's possessions, that one can't have possessions. Rather, contentment means that one has no craving and grasping at one's possessions.

One of the Dalai Lamas said of himself that he did not have any kind of craving or grasping at any of his possessions, even though he had many possessions because he was a Dalai Lama. The only things he regarded as his own were his three monks' robes and his begging bowl. Usually, one takes that Dalai Lama as an example of someone who has contentment, but still has many possessions. The nature of contentment is non-attachment, non-craving for one's possessions.

If someone who is financially well off generates some contentment and reduces their craving, they usually can lead a relaxed and happy life.

Reducing craving and attachment is important – there is a great benefit to one's life. If one doesn't reduce one's craving, one will never be satisfied. Those who have one friend will then want two friends. Then, if they have two friends, they will want a third friend. No matter how many friends they have, they will never be satisfied because of their craving for one more friend.

If one reduces one's craving, one can be happy. Also, at the time of death, one will die more easily, because one will have given up craving the things from which one will be separated at the time of death. Therefore, one can die with a peaceful mind. If one hasn't given up craving and attachment for the things one has to be parted from at the time of death, then one will experience great suffering. In order to die peacefully, it can be very conducive during one's lifetime to practise contentment and to give up craving and attachment.

It will also make it easier for you to make your will! *(Laughter)* If you make a will in which you dedicate all your things to others, it will also make it easier for you at the time of death.

As explained at the beginning, bring the mind back home, free it from the control of the disturbing thoughts, then concentrate single-pointedly on the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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*Edited Version*

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