
The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas

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We can practise a little bit of meditation as usual. Sit in a good and comfortable physical posture. It is important to be relaxed physically as well as mentally. Being relaxed physically and mentally doesn't mean that one doesn't engage in any physical action and that one doesn't think about anything. It would be quite difficult, if not impossible, to stop thinking about something and it would also be difficult to not have any physical activity. But to be relaxed in both mind and body is important. One should try to avoid letting the mind fall under the control of delusions. Once the mind has fallen under the control of the delusions then, inevitably, the deluded mind will force the body to engage in certain actions.

What we call 'meditation on Dharma practice' means to reclaim the mind and to free it from the delusions. If one frees the mind from the delusions one will attain inner happiness and the mind will either be in a neutral state or it will be in a virtuous state. In either case, the mind won't be non-virtuous and one will have that benefit.

It is very important to practise meditation and to try to free one's mind from delusions. If from a young age onwards one trains one's mind to have less delusions and becomes mentally more habituated in meditation and in Dharma practice then the easier it will be to counteract disturbed states when they arise. When the mind falls under the control of the delusions then inevitably the deluded mind will induce certain physical actions. But what happens if one reaches an age where the physical actions are not possible any more? There can come a time where, even though the mind is under the control of the delusions, one cannot physically act upon those delusions as one could before. But just because the physical action is not there doesn't mean that the mind changed. This brings its own particular problem with it. The person has become old but the delusions haven't become old. They are still as strong and fresh as they ever were and the antidote towards the delusions has withered away and become old. This is something that one should try to avoid. Instead one should familiarise one's mind more and more with the antidotes and in such a way subdue the mind, freeing it from the delusions, and then there is no need to engage in the physical actions. Because the mind is free from the delusions then one will experience inner bliss and inner happiness.

You can see the significance of subduing the mind and attaining some inner happiness. If the mind can abide happily and peacefully then the person will be happy and peaceful and if physically they cannot engage in the various pursuits of happiness they will still be happy.

But if the mind is not subdued and there comes a time when physically one cannot engage any more in the pursuit of happiness one will experience very great inner problems because the mind is still as deluded as it was at the time when one was young and able and one cannot act upon the delusions as one used to be able. This is very important to consider... to look at what lies ahead in the future.

Even if one is able to physically act upon the deluded mind there are still various problems that one encounters. If the mind is under the influence of the delusions and one doesn't act one is dissatisfied and may feel some separation from the object one desires. But even if one goes out looking for the object of one's desire then various different situations can occur – either one doesn't meet with the object one is looking for, or one meets with an object that one doesn't wish to meet, etc. There are various types of problems that come if the mind is under the influence of the delusions. On the other hand if the mind is subdued then the mind will be happy. If one is able to go out and about the mind will be happy and if one physically does not have the ability to go out and about and one has to remain inside the mind will still be happy. So you can see the significance and importance of subduing the mind.

It is important to reflect on the benefits that arise if one subdues the mind and frees it from delusions. The mind will become more subtle and more workable, more pliant... both body and mind will become more serviceable, more pliant.

On the basis of sitting in a good and relaxed physical posture bring the mind back home, focus it 100% towards the inside, freeing it from the control of disturbing thoughts that try to distract the mind outside. After having focused the mind completely towards the inside concentrate single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath in a relaxed manner and we can meditate in that way for a few minutes. (*Pause for meditation*)

We have completed the sections of the text that deal with abandoning true grasping at the objects of one's aversion and attachment. You should give very careful consideration towards the dangers of attachment and aversion and try to abandon them as much as possible. Attachment and aversion will only give one misleading advice. The path that is shown by attachment and aversion will inevitably be a mistaken path. Therefore one should take very great care not to follow the path of attachment and aversion.

We come to the next outline of the text which deals with advice regarding the Bodhisattva trainings. This section has five parts. The first is training in the six perfections, and the second deals with training in the four dharmas taught in the Sutras. Third is training in the methods of abandoning the delusions. Fourth is training in the practice of benefiting others on the basis of mindfulness

and introspection and lastly dedicating the merits towards complete enlightenment.

The first section deals with the practice of the six perfections... training in the six perfections. The six perfections are the perfections of generosity, morality, patience, enthusiasm, mental stabilisation and wisdom.

A path leading to enlightenment has to be a path that unifies both method and wisdom and the practice of the six perfections is such a path. The first four perfections fall into the category of method and then the fifth and sixth perfection fall into the category of the practice of wisdom. So practising the six perfections means that one practises the unification of method and wisdom.

Once one has generated Bodhicitta and works for complete enlightenment one engages in the practice of the six perfections. A practitioner who engages in the Bodhisattva trainings has only two purposes; there is the purpose of self and the purpose of others. As it is explained in the great Lam Rim by Lama Tsong Khapa both the purpose of self and others can be achieved by practising the six perfections. The six perfections are enough to achieve the purpose of self and others.

Firstly to bring happiness to others one has to practise material generosity. In practising generosity one is already fulfilling the purpose of others. If one practises generosity with harmful intent it will not benefit others. Therefore in order for one's generosity to be beneficial for others one has to restrain oneself from harmful intent. This restraining from harmful intent constitutes the practice of morality, the second perfection.

If, on the basis of having restrained oneself from ill-will and one benefits others through the practice of generosity, one will need the third perfection of patience to complete one's practice. In order to be able to benefit others through one's practice of generosity without ill-will one definitely will need patience. If one doesn't have patience then one will retaliate in anger if one is attacked, or if one is the object of another person's anger, and one's practice won't be completed. If you reflect on this point then you will see the significance and importance of patience. If you retaliate to the harm given by others then it harms the practice of morality. Therefore in order to be able to practise pure morality, restraining oneself from harming others, one needs to have patience that is unaffected by the harm of others.

If one practises the patience of being unaffected by the harm of others then that will eliminate many non-virtuous karmas that would be accumulated if one replied in kind. So you can see that the practice of the first three perfections really fulfils the purpose of others. In fact the first three perfections are necessary to fulfill the purpose of others.

One's own purpose is fulfilled through the perfection of wisdom. In dependence upon the perfection of wisdom one will accomplish one's own purpose; the attainment of liberation and liberation will be attained through the practice of the perfection of wisdom. So liberation, one's own purpose, is attained in dependence upon the perfection of wisdom. But one will not be able to practise

the perfection of wisdom efficiently without the perfection of mental stabilisation. If the mind is distracted and disturbed, going here and there, then one's wisdom will not be very powerful. The mind needs to be stabilised. One needs to be able to attain the concentrative absorptions or one needs at least to attain a calm abiding where the mind is able to remain on the object of meditation effortlessly for however long the meditator wishes. Then, on the basis of that type of mental stabilisation, one can efficiently practise the perfection of wisdom, generating the union of calm abiding and special insight.

But calm abiding and mental stabilisation will not be attained by a lazy practitioner so the attainment of mental stabilisation depends upon the preceding perfection of enthusiasm. By practising enthusiasm, engaging in practice day and night, one will be able to attain mental stabilisation in dependence upon which one can then practise wisdom.

A person who is lazy will not have any type of Dharmic experience or Dharma practice. Of the various types of delusions laziness is the worst. That was just a very brief introduction into the six perfections so that you have an idea of what the six perfections are and the way in which they are practised.

If you go to the verses the first verse deals with the perfection of generosity. Verse 25 from the text, *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattva*, (Snow Lion Publications, New York 1997) reads:

"When those who want enlightenment must give even their body,

There's no need to mention external things.

Therefore without hope for return or any fruition

Give generously –

This is the practice of Bodhisattvas."

It says here, "When those who want enlightenment must give even their body". The Tibetan word for enlightenment is *jangchub*. There are two syllables; *jang* and *chub*. *Jang* refers to the purification of all obscurations and *chub* refers to the generation of omniscient awareness. So if one wants to attain enlightenment which is the purification of all obscurations and the generation of omniscient awareness then one must give one's body.

There is no need to mention that one has to give external things. When it says that there is no need to mention external things it is saying is that if one has to give even one's body in order to attain enlightenment then it is of course implicit that one also has to practice generosity of material things as well as the generosity of one's merits, etc. This is implicit. When Bodhisattvas practise generosity they give without hope for return or fruition. This means one doesn't have any of hope that one will get some karmic future result in return for one's practice of generosity but rather one's practice of generosity arises out of the motivation of Bodhicitta and the merits and then is dedicated for complete enlightenment. Giving in such a way, without the hope for some karmic

benefits or future karmic results, is the practice of a Bodhisattva.

When it says here, giving 'without the hope for future results or fruition', it means that one shouldn't practise generosity with the hope of some samsaric result, for some future body within cyclic existence or for samsaric wealth, etc. Of course certain fruits will arise in the future from one's practice of generosity but here the fruits it is talking about are fruits of samsara. So one should practise generosity not hoping for the fruits of samsara, because if one practises generosity with the aim of some samsaric benefit in the future, then one's generosity will not become a cause for liberation. Lama Tsong Khapa, in his commentary on the *400 Stanzas* by Aryadeva, mentions the example of a businessman who through the business of buying and selling for profit makes a certain profit. The businessman by pursuing his business has established a certain profit, he has gotten a certain amount of money. But has he received any merit out of it? No. He didn't get any merits out of it. Similarly, if one practises generosity with the eye on some future samsaric fruits, such as a nice physical body or material wealth, then one will be like this businessman. One's practice, even though it has some samsaric benefit, will not be the cause for liberation and enlightenment. Therefore when one practises generosity one's main aim shouldn't be samsaric fruits.

So what do we define as the practice of generosity? The practice of generosity is the generous intent, the willingness to give away one's merits, one's material wealth and one's happiness. The generous attitude, the internal giving to others of one's merits, material wealth, body, etc. constitutes the practice of generosity. Of course there is the physical giving but the actual attitude of giving is internal.

Generosity has a three-fold division: We have the generosity of materials, we have the generosity of Dharma and we have the generosity of fearlessness.

We will explain more next Wednesday about the various aspects of the practice of generosity. Maybe now we find that some people, who although they persevere in Dharma practice, experience destitution. That can occur, but it can also occur the other way around. People who pursue material wealth experience a destitution of the Dharma. One can also find people who are both materially well off and have a good Dharma practice but who encounter dangers to their life. We will discuss this next Wednesday. Now, do we have a few questions?

There are various types of problems that sentient beings encounter; their lack of material wealth or the lack of Dharma or danger to one's life. These can be met with the various aspects of generosity.

Question: (inaudible)

I will give an extensive explanation next Wednesday but if you want you can have a short one now. So which one do you want, the short one which you can have now and the extensive one later? *(Laughter)*

An example of the giving of fearlessness would arise if you see that insects are endangering their life by being attracted to light. If you see that they are endangering their life by being fatally attracted to the light source then you might catch them and place them somewhere they are out of danger. This would be an example of the generosity of fearlessness.

Question: ...place yourself in certain danger to help others?

Answer: It can happen that in the course of protecting someone else from danger, one places one's own life in danger. There are even instances, though it might be very rare in our circumstances, where a person gives up their own life in order to protect another person. That can occur.

While trying to accomplish the purpose of others, it is possible that one will encounter all types of sort of obscurations and difficulties and dangers. Since we are all beginners it is important to take it easy in one's practice and not to take on more than one can swallow. As it is explained in *Entering the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* by Shantideva, without pure compassion it will be impossible to practise generosity of one's body, etc. In order to be able to give one's life for others one's mind has to be very well trained in pure compassion.

A Tibetan once went to Japan for his studies. He was living in a high-rise building and in one of the lower apartments there was an explosion of a gas bottle. Without any protection on his hands he grabbed the burning gas bottle and threw it out of the window, because he said to himself that if he didn't do that then there would be great danger to many people's lives. He lost his hands in that action.

Are there any other questions?

Question: When I was younger I was ... threatened physically and I became quite intimidated ... Recently another man whom I'd met a couple of times was very aggressive towards me. How do I stop from feeling scared of him?

If you get very afraid in one situation you can carry that fear with you for a long time and you become afraid very easily after that. In the monastery the monks would memorise during the day and then during the night sit outside and recite what they had memorised during the day. Geshe Lektin would sit outside in the dark and recite what he had memorised, and a monk came up from behind and surprised him, and he got a very great fright. After that he was very, very sensitive and as soon as someone came near him he was immediately afraid. If we get a sudden fright it tends to stay with us.

In order to overcome that, one has to direct the mind to some other way and to build up your courage and think that it doesn't really matter. You have to build up your courage and become a little bit more relaxed and then slowly, slowly you can, in such a way, lessen this fear. There are some people who, if they have had one bad experience with the police, will get afraid immediately

just by seeing a police officer standing around somewhere. *(Laughter)*

Question: Geshe-la, you were talking about laziness before. I guess in some ways I am a very lazy person and we often get told to create joyous effort. But how do you actually go from... what sort of path do you take to get yourself out of laziness?

Answer: In order to pull yourself out of laziness you have to generate aspiration for some aim. Reflect on the benefits of the aim and the more you recognise these benefits and the more you aspire to those benefits then that will automatically pull you out of your laziness. This is something that doesn't happen overnight so again you have to take it very easily and slowly. In the case of a person whose laziness is not wishing to meditate then that laziness can be overcome by reflecting on the benefits that one receives from concentration and meditation. By reflecting on the benefits received from meditation and concentration then slowly, slowly one will become more and more inspired to meditate and in such a way overcome one's laziness.

Some people need to get a fright in order to overcome their laziness. *(Laughter)* For example, if the teacher is very fierce and strict students don't have an opportunity to be lazy because the teacher examines the students every day. There is no chance to be lazy.

Question: Giving merits, how long do you do that and why? I mean do you ...

Answer: The generosity of merits refers to mentally giving away your merits to sentient beings. That doesn't mean that you will lose your merits. You can't lose the merits, that's impossible. If you have the attitude that you give them mentally away that would be the generosity of merits. When we practise the generosity of the Dharma, for example explaining some Dharma to another person without the wish for any return, that would be the generosity of the Dharma. When you practise the generosity of the Dharma there is nothing that you lose – you can't exhaust your generosity of the Dharma.

When you practise the generosity of material possessions that can be finished at one point

There is an attitude that greed is the way to success, thinking even cherishing \$1 thinking: 'If I hold onto this dollar then sooner or later it will have multiplied and could become \$2, etc.' There is this idea that the way to success is to be very stingy – but in actuality it isn't like that. Greed is the way to accumulate wealth. *(Laughter)*

Greed is the method to accumulate material wealth. Somebody who doesn't have greed will not accumulate money. If somebody works and has a job but is not greedy they will not save the money they have. Greed is the way to accumulate money and wealth. *(Laughter)*

If you don't like money and don't give any importance to money even if you have a very good job, you will not save the money you earn and then the purpose of the work and what you achieve have become opposites and you never get anywhere. Here you could consider the

subject to be Damien – someone who has a very good job but doesn't have any money. *(Laughter)*

Question: Can I ask a question? The question earlier about fear and fear of others..., Geshe-la do you believe in spiritual protectors or symbolic figures that we see in some of the books and would you suggest that that could be beneficial, a beneficial concept overcoming someone else's anger and nastiness? Or would you see that those are just imagined concepts?

Answer: That is not an easy topic. The practice of Dharma protectors is based on control over that protector. Practitioners with high realisations can control that protector and can order them to do what they wish, in the same way as a king has a power over his subjects and can order them to do what he wishes them to. On the basis of being a very highly advanced practitioner and having control over the Dharma protector then it is possible that benefit comes from their practice – but on our level that is difficult. When you undertake a protector practice first you have to generate yourself in the aspect of the meditational deity. There is a purpose for that and a proper way of doing the practice.

We can leave it here and, as was explained before, bring the mind back home freeing it from the control of the disturbing thoughts and focus it completely inwards and concentrate it on the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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