
The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas

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We will practise a little bit of meditation as usual. There are both internal and external signs that show whether one's practice of meditation has been successful. The internal sign is that the delusions are reduced and the external sign is that one's external behaviour and actions are more peaceful.

If you think about it, nobody wishes to increase his or her delusions. Everybody wishes to have fewer delusions. It is important to consider the effect of the delusions on the mind, on the person, on oneself. When delusions arise, they strongly disturb the mind, to the point where, whatever activities we engage in, we are unable to find happiness. If we want to rest, we can't rest properly. If we want to sleep, we can't sleep. Whatever food we eat, we don't enjoy it or appreciate the taste.

Therefore, seeing that such a disturbed mind has the ability to make our lives completely miserable, we should take great care. One should think about these naughty, harmful mental factors that have the potential to make one's life completely miserable, and remember that one has the potential within one's mind to overcome these delusions. We should make the strong, single-pointed determination that: "I definitely must make use of the potential within my mind to overcome the delusions. If I don't do this, my life won't be worthwhile".

Also whenever one is experiencing inner turmoil and disturbance, one must not follow one's usual attitude of looking for the source of one's turmoil and disturbance outside; rather, one must bring the responsibility back to one's own mind and to the delusions. Then, we can deal with the situation by making use of our inner potential and overcoming the delusions.

It is important to develop and make use of our own inner wisdom. We can use our wisdom to determine which mental attitudes are beneficial and which are harmful, and make the decision that we definitely must change the harmful attitudes and make use of the potential in our mind. One must rely on one's inner wisdom and make use of one's potential. One has to use the power and potential of one's mind as an antidote to the harmful delusions.

To counteract the delusions within the mind, we must identify the states of mind that oppose those delusions. If we just continue to dwell on the delusions, we won't be able to overcome them. Instead of dwelling on the delusions, we should focus the mind inwards. One takes the mind away from the problem and instead focuses it inwards. Through continuous practice, one will be able to experience the inner clarity, peace and bliss that arise

through meditation. This actually refreshes the mind. In the past, when the mind was overcome by the delusions, it was constantly tired, depressed and down. Here, however, one experiences the opposite.

When the mind is focused calmly and peacefully towards the inside, one can experience the peace and happiness that arises through meditation. So, rather than dwelling on the object of one's delusion, one meditates and brings the mind back home, focusing it inwards. In such a way, the delusion will subside. This is a very brief introduction on the antidote to the delusions.

Now we can meditate for a few minutes, bringing the mind back home, and freeing it from the control of the disturbing thoughts that try to distract it towards the outside. After having focused the mind inwards, we concentrate it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. We can remain in meditation for a few minutes in this way. [*Pause for meditation.*]

Maybe that's enough. Otherwise, if you meditate too much, you may get too high!

It is important that we do not too push ourselves too much in meditation, otherwise we will become uptight and perhaps a bit confused. So, just meditate for a short while, say 10 minutes. During those 10 minutes, your mind can experience some vividness and clarity. After 10 minutes' meditation, you can take a short break, relax, look around a bit, and then do another session. In this way, you can do several short sessions. It's important to take it easy and slowly. If you meditate in such a way, you will always have success.

It is important when meditating that we treat our mind in the right way, being neither too rough nor too relaxed with it. It is similar to bringing up a child. From when the child is very young, it is important that one is neither too rough nor too indulgent with the child. For example, if one lets a child do whatever he or she wants from a very young age, once the child is 11 or 12, he or she will feel that they have already attained a lot of freedom and independence, and it will be difficult for the parent to start disciplining the child. However, if one applies just the right amount of discipline and relaxation when the child is very young, and brings the child up in that way, when the child is older, he or she will be attentive. It is the same with one's mind: one has to treat the mind in the right manner. One must neither be too rough nor too indulgent and relaxed with one's mind.

Last time [when we discussed the text, *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*], we talked about generosity. We said that if the practice of generosity – wishing to give away one's wealth, body and merit – occurs in the continuum of a Bodhisattva, it becomes the perfection of generosity.

Generosity has a threefold division. The first is material generosity – ultimately wishing to give away one's body and life, but also one's materials, wealth, possessions, even down to giving a small spoonful of food to another

person. This would all fall into the first category of generosity.

It is important that we think about our motivation in practising generosity. Even if we are not able to practise like a Bodhisattva, we should try to have the motivation of wanting to benefit the other person, to be generous for the benefit of the other person. At the very least, one can make strong prayers that the other person will receive benefit. It is important that we practise generosity not for our own sake, but for the sake of another. If one practises generosity with this attitude, one will definitely receive some benefit. If this practice is also 'sealed' with prayers, then so much the better.

It is important to practise pure generosity. As I always say, of the various delusions, no-one will benefit from anger, but other people might benefit from attachment. If one acts out of anger, the only action one will engage in is the action of harming the other person. So, there is definitely no benefit to be gained for oneself or others if one acts out of anger. However, if one acts out of attachment, the other person may benefit.

If one is attached to a certain person, even though there are other people who are needier or actually destitute, one will neglect those people and benefit the person to whom one is attached. Even though this person might have already have, say \$100, one will give them another \$100. The result is that the other person will generate some liking for us – maybe smile at us or have a laugh with us. If one doesn't get that result, one will feel that the money was a lost investment! *[Laughter]* You can confirm that through your own experience. When the money is finished, the other person casts one aside and goes on to another person. This occurs quite regularly.

Therefore, one's practice of generosity shouldn't be partial, but should be equally beneficial for everyone. If we see a person who is destitute and in need of help, one should immediately help that person and give them what they need. People who immediately and freely help any person who is destitute and in need are regarded as good human beings. We can find many examples of such people. Such people are regarded as good members of society. So, within one's practice of generosity, one should not be partial. One should be guided by compassion.

It happens frequently that people have lots of friends as long as they have money. But once the money dries up, the friendships also dry up. We can see this happening to old people. If an older person has money, they will be surrounded by many friends and relatives. But if they have no money, they will be alone.

This situation comes about through the confusion between love and attachment. One tends to give to the person to whom one is attached, confusing that attachment with love and compassion, rather than giving to a person who is really destitute. For example, if the other person already has silver earrings, one may give them a pair gold earrings – so, one tries to give them something better. But they already have earrings. Instead of giving that money to someone who is really destitute,

one has given gold earrings to one's friend, to whom one is attached.

I'm not saying that one should not give presents – it is a custom within society. But there are several points to consider here. First, one's practice of generosity shouldn't be motivated by getting something in return. If one practises generosity with the hope of getting some affection, attention or a smile in return, this would be a wrong motivation. So, it is important that one's practice of generosity is pure, that it is not for one's own selfish aim.

Next, one should consider one's work situation. If one is employed, as I always advise, one should work honestly and well for one's employer. By working hard for one's employer, you will be able to save some money; it will benefit the company as a whole; and your employer will be happy with you. Therefore, there is benefit all around. It is important that both the employee and the employer can depend on each other. If one is employed somewhere, one should try to work as well as one can for the employer, and one will receive benefit.

As we just said, it is also very important to give to people who are really destitute. To practise generosity towards people who are destitute is the real practice of generosity. Also, it is important not to have regret when we practise generosity. Give as much as you feel you can give freely, without generating regret later. This is also important. You can start your practice of generosity with small amounts, small gifts, then slowly you can increase the amount you give away. However, it is very important that one doesn't generate regret later on over what one has already given.

If one offers a cup of tea to a friend, that already becomes the practice of generosity. Even when friends invite each other for coffee or tea, it becomes the practice of generosity. Generosity can be practised towards everyone. It can be practised towards those who are powerless and destitute, towards those who are rich and powerful, or towards the Three Jewels. When one practises generosity towards the Three Jewels, it is important to have this motivation of wishing to benefit others.

One can practise generosity in any area of one's daily life. For example, in India during the hot season, people commonly practise offering cold water to others. People will have these unfired clay water containers that can keep water quite cool for about an hour. Quite often, shopkeepers in India will have these clay pots of water and offer the water to people during the hot season.

That was the division of material generosity. Now comes the generosity of giving Dharma. This refers to showing the unmistakable Dharma. However, teaching others skills that are not necessarily virtuous [in the sense of pure Dharma] but are also not non-virtuous – for example, building a house, sewing or drawing etc. – becomes the generosity of the Dharma, because there's no non-virtue involved in such activities. If one explains to another person how to go about building a house, then this would constitute the generosity of the Dharma.

Next comes the generosity of protection and fearlessness. This refers to rescuing sentient beings from life-threatening or dangerous situations – for example, protecting a king from thieves, or rescuing sentient beings from dangerous animals, such as tigers or lions, or rescuing sentient beings from natural disasters.

In Australia, the danger of crocodiles is quite prevalent – although there is at least one person who is not afraid of crocodiles at all, and even regards them as his best friends! Last year, there was a situation where a child was carried off by a crocodile. A bystander immediately jumped on the crocodile and tried to free the child. Other people nearby became aware of the situation, and were able to help free the child from the crocodile. But this was only possible because of that first person who had jumped on the crocodile to try and save the child.

So, the third type of generosity involves rescuing sentient beings from dangerous situations, sometimes even at the risk of one's own life. This can also occur in the context of rescuing someone from the danger of the elements. I recall a situation where a female police officer was recognised for having quite selflessly rescued many people from the danger of fire. We can find these situations again and again, where people disregard their own safety to rescue other people from the danger of the elements.

You can recognise the significance of compassion in one's practice of generosity. If one has great compassion, then without any hesitation, one will immediately go after the other person and try to help them. If a father sees a child being carried off by the current in a river, without a second thought, he will jump after the child into the river. Other people, who don't have such compassion for the child, will just stand and watch. So, compassion is a very important factor for one's practice of generosity.

Do you have a question?

[Question inaudible.]

Answer: How effective prayers will be depends on the person who is praying. If the person who is praying is a person of great merit, the prayers will be more effective. People who have great merit will be able to accomplish their purpose just as they wish. There are some people who are always successful – whatever activity or venture they engage in, they are always successful. We can observe this in our own society. This is because these people have great merit; whatever they start out doing, they are able to accomplish it.

[Question inaudible.]

Answer: Whether other people are inspired by your action or not depends on their compassion. As we said, whether one is able to help another person at the risk of one's own life or not depends very much on how much compassion one has for the other person. So, the generosity of fearlessness means that you take away the fear or the danger to the other person. Other people will not necessarily be always able to do what you are able to do.

In Australia, there is someone called the Crocodile Hunter, who is quite adept in handling poisonous snakes. Generally, he never seems to harm the animals. He is one of those people who actually looks after animals, and seems to be very skilled in handling poisonous snakes. But when he puts a poisonous snake on the ground, other people will stand clear. While he is able to skilfully handle the snake, other people can't necessarily do it. If another person comes along who is as skilled in handling wild animals, crocodiles and snakes, as the Crocodile Hunter, they will be able to what he does. In the same way, if there's a person who at the risk of their own life, through the force of their compassion, is willing to risk their life to save the life of another person, then if we have the same amount of compassion, we will be able to engage in that same action. It depends on whether one has the same skills as the other person.

In the case of the Crocodile Hunter, we don't know about his compassion, but at least he doesn't harm the animals. As to saving the life of others, even if it is not done out of a pure motivation, it is still a worthwhile thing to do. Sometimes, people might put their own life in danger in order to save the other person's life because of pride or because they are competitive or some other type of questionable motivation. However, even if one engages in the action of saving another person's life without pure motivation, it is still worthwhile.

As was explained at the start, bring the mind back home, free it from the control of the disturbing thoughts, focus it inwards and concentrate on the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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