
The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas

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18 September 2002

We can practise a little bit of meditation as usual. Sit in a comfortable and relaxed position and put mind into a good state. One trains one's mind and then trains one's body - that is the way to go about it. One needs to transform one's actions into wholesome actions of body, speech and mind and they then become actions of dharma. Wholesome actions of mind will lead to wholesome actions of body and speech and in this way everything turns out wholesome. When one dislikes something the thought of aversion arises very easily and that will lead to unwholesome actions of body and speech. We need to analyse our mind, which is the source of our actions very carefully. It is important that we first identify our mind and then purify it and by purifying one's mind it won't fall under the control of unwholesome states. Then the actions of body and speech won't become unwholesome.

It is important that one makes it one's life's aim, one's life work, to transform one's actions of body speech and mind into wholesome actions. If one can make that one's life's work then one will have given purpose to this life.

An objection might arise within one's mind, "If I try to live my life in a completely wholesome manner - make the actions of my body, speech and mind completely wholesome - then what will become of my financial situation? What will become of my material situation?" The answer is that you don't need to worry. If you make the actions of your body, speech and mind wholesome, then you won't lose anything - things will actually come to you, you will reap the benefit. On the other hand if your mind is disturbed and you get some material benefit the only effect it has is that it aggravates your mind even further.

After having dealt with that doubt very quickly in this way you can see it is important to meditate on mental happiness and to generate wholesome mental states. In order to do that we are now going to practise meditation for a few minutes.

On the basis of sitting in a good physical posture bring the mind back home, freeing it from the control of disturbing thoughts that try to distract it to the outside and focus it towards the inside. After having brought the mind home, focused it completely, 100%, towards the inside, concentrate it on the coming and going of the breath and meditate on the coming and going of the breath for a few minutes.

(Pause for meditation) Please arise from your deep meditative equipoise.

Last time we talked about the practice of generosity and how the practice of generosity constitutes the generous attitude, being generous with one's possessions, one's virtues and even one's physical body. One practises generosity to the level that one is able. Where there are things that one cannot actually give at the present time then one trains one's mind to be able to do so in the future. One mentally trains one's mind in that generosity until one is able to practise it.

You can clearly see the significance of generosity when you look at the benefit that you get from generosity. What actually benefits sentient beings is the practice of generosity and by benefiting other sentient beings with the various practices of generosity that will generate very strong affection and liking for oneself in return. For example, if you look at the first practice of generosity, the generosity of materials. If we give material benefits to others how much joy does it generate in their mind? It makes others happy when we give them material presents. In return they like us. Everybody likes people that give presents and one smiles at the person and laughs at the person who gives them presents. In that way one receives the benefit from the other person's happiness. Everybody also likes someone who gives useful advice, so here we have the generosity of the Dharma. By giving useful advice, by practising generosity of the Dharma, again one will be very well liked by others. Then the third type of generosity, practising the generosity of protection - protecting others, showing fearlessness for others - will again be the cause for being very well liked and respected by others. Everybody likes a person who is able to be completely selfless and with disregard for their own wellbeing and life can save others from dangerous situations. Such a person is always very well regarded and very well liked.

We can see that through the practice of generosity one can attract friends. One will generate liking for oneself in the mind of others and in such a way attract friends towards oneself. I was asked by some people whether there are certain mantras (*laughter*) through which they could make friends and attract others. In order to make friends and in order to attract others no mantra meditation is needed - the best practice is the practice of generosity.

My life was once saved by a nun when I was aged around six or seven. A few miles from our home there was a hot spring where people used to go to wash their clothes. One day, when my older sister had gone there without my father knowing, I wondered off and followed her along the path. In order to get to the hot spring one had to cross a small river. That river, particularly in winter time, would be frozen in the morning but during the day the ice would break up and it would become a very strong river and the current would become very strong. Because I was very small I was swept away together with the ice. A nun who passed by fished me out of the river. I was very lucky

because if I had been swept further down stream the small river would have joined a very big river and then it would have been very difficult or impossible to save me. The nun picked me out of the river and carried me on her back to the hot spring where she dressed me in warm clothes and made me some warm tea. Later when I went out to play I ran across my older sister. That nun saved my life and I received very great benefit from the nun. It was also good for her to have saved me. (*laughter*)

That is the correct way of looking at it. The nun also received very great benefit by rescuing me, by saving my life. Even though I don't really know her I, from time to time, praise her and include her in my prayers and so both sides receive benefit – I received a lesson in life through her rescuing me and she received the benefit of saving my life.

We can now move on to the second perfection: the perfection of morality.

Verse 26 from the text, *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattva*, (Snow Lion Publications, New York 1997) reads:

*“Without ethics you can't accomplish your own well-being,
So wanting to accomplish others' is laughable.
Therefore without worldly aspirations
Safeguard your ethical discipline –
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.”*

Without ethics you can't accomplish your own wellbeing. Without practising pure morality one can't accomplish one's own purpose because one will be reborn in the lower realms. Therefore wanting to accomplish the purpose of others without practicing proper morality is basically a joke. The text then says *“Therefore without worldly aspirations safeguard your ethical discipline, this is the practice of a Bodhisattva”*. Because a Bodhisattva wants to accomplish the purpose of others they keep pure morality and their motivation for keeping pure morality is free from worldly aspirations. They are not aiming for some happiness in this life. They are also not aiming for happiness in a future life. They also not aiming for personal liberation but they safeguard their ethical discipline in order to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings and this is the practice of morality of Bodhisattvas.

It is said in the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* by Shantideva that the mind of restraint constitutes the practice of morality. The meaning of morality or ethics is the mind of restraint and if one has perfected the mind of restraint then one has perfected the practice of morality. If one's practice of morality is, at the beginning, motivated by the thought of Bodhicitta, in the middle is held by the wisdom realising emptiness and is completed by the dedication for complete enlightenment, then the practice of morality has become the perfection of morality.

In the *Great Stages of the Path* by Lama Tsong Khapa it says that to restrain oneself from a mental state of wanting to inflict harm on others is the meaning of morality. Mentally restraining oneself from mental states that want to inflict harm on others is the practice of

morality. The practice of morality has a three-fold division into the morality of abandoning non-virtue, the morality of accumulating virtue and the morality of benefiting others.

In the *Great Stages of the Path* the definition of morality is given as the restraint of mental states that want to inflict harm on others. In this we can see that morality refers to the mental restraint, to the mental factor of restraint, restraining oneself from those harmful mental states. This definition applies primarily to the first type of morality, the morality of abandoning non-virtue. The other two types of morality, the morality of accumulating virtue and the morality of accomplishing the benefit of others are not really contained within that definition. It is good to know that this definition is given from the point of view of this first morality, the morality of abandoning non-virtue and the other two types of morality are not contained within that definition.

The first type of morality is the morality of restraint. In the case case of an ordained person, a person who has taken vows, then the vows are the morality of restraint. One has taken these various vows to not do certain actions and keeping those (Bodhisattva and Tantric) vows becomes the practice of that morality. In the case that one hasn't taken any vows then the mind of restraining from the ten non-virtuous actions constitutes the practice of the morality of restraint.

The practice of restraining from the ten non-virtuous actions is very important and essential. The ten non-virtuous actions are the three actions of the body, the four actions of speech and the three actions of the mind. The three physical actions are: killing, stealing and sexual misconduct. The four of the speech are: lying, slander, harsh words and gossip and the three of the mind are: covetousness, ill will and wrong view. These ten are referred to as the ten non-virtuous actions or, if the motivation of the action is included, as the ten non-virtuous karmic paths. The three non-virtuous actions of the mind act as the motivation for the seven non-virtuous actions of body and speech. That's why one talks about the ten karmic paths including the motivations. What protects us from these ten non-virtuous actions are the mental states of non-attachment, non-anger and the correct view. If you have the mental state of non-attachment what does that mental state protect us from? It protects us from killing out of attachment, it protects us from stealing out of attachment and it protects us from engaging into sexual misconduct out of attachment. If we have the mental state of non-anger it will protect us from killing out of anger or stealing out of anger and it is also possible that one commits sexual misconduct out of anger so it also protects one from that action. Those non-virtuous actions are always preceded by a non-virtuous motivation. So if one has the mental states of non-attachment, non-anger or correct view then one will be protected from those non-virtuous actions. Because we can engage in killing out of various motivations, for example out of attachment or out of anger, if we have the mental states of non-attachment non-anger we are protected. The same

applies to stealing and also of course to sexual misconduct that is motivated by attachment- there is no need to mention that. But there is also sexual misconduct that is motivated by anger so a state of non-anger will also protect one from that action.

So the non-virtuous actions of body and speech are motivated by the three non-virtuous actions of the mind. We have discussed the first two but ignorance also acts as the motivator for non-virtuous actions of body and speech. This occurs by thinking: "It doesn't matter if I do that... nothing further harmful will result from that... no suffering will result from this." Having this attitude of ignorance and thinking: "Oh it doesn't matter if I do that" would be an example of how ignorance acts as the cause of, for example, killing. When one kills another animal it can be done on the basis of attachment... one is attached to the meat of the chicken. Or one can kill out of anger or one can kill out of ignorance thinking: "Oh it doesn't matter if I kill that other sentient being" "What fault could possibly occur by my killing that other sentient being."

The same applies to the non-virtuous actions of stealing or sexual misconduct. So we can see how the non-virtuous actions of body and speech arise from the three mental motivations. We can then see how the three virtuous mental states, non-attachment, non-anger and correct view can turn us into exactly the opposite direction. They actually protect us from creating any of those non virtuous actions of body and speech. If we have non-attachment, non-anger and non-ignorance we will be protected from killing another sentient being out of either anger or attachment or wrong view. The same applies to stealing etc.

A person who, out of this wholesome attitude of non-attachment, non-anger and out of correct understanding, doesn't kill is usually very well regarded within society. One usually regards that type of person as a very good person. To attain higher rebirth in the next life abandoning the non-virtuous action of killing is essential. Killing is the heaviest of the three non-virtuous actions. This action is one that definitely has to be abandoned by making the very strong determination: "Today I am not going to kill any sentient beings. For the rest of the life I am not going to kill any sentient being." Practising this morality of abandoning killing, refraining from killing is essential for the attainment of a higher rebirth in a future life. And, as we were already saying, if someone refrains from killing they will be very well regarded within their society. Someone who doesn't steal will earn the reputation of being someone upright and honest. Someone who doesn't commit adultery with the partner of their friend will earn the trust of others and will be regarded as someone honest and trustworthy, etc. There are many benefits of keeping morality and there are many disadvantages from practising immorality.

With regards to lying, when one lies one aims to confuse another person about the truth of a certain situation... one aims to confuse the other person about reality. Again, a person who doesn't tell a lie will be very well

regarded within society as someone honest and upright and trustworthy – while if someone is known to lie they will not be trusted. If someone is lying frequently people will not place their trust in that person. Next there is slander. Slander refers to saying things that drive two people apart, saying bad things about another person to their friend with the aim of splitting them apart, driving a wedge between them. Harsh speech is just that, when one says words that hurt the other person. And then we have gossip, gossip is the least of the four. Even though gossip is karmically the least of the four non-virtuous actions of the speech when we consider the waste of time that it can cause it is quite significant.

There is a view of work that in order to earn some money it can easily prevent one from using one's time more beneficially. From the point of view of Dharma practice it takes away the time available for Dharma practice. One very easily spends one hour. One hour goes very quickly by gossiping about this and that and that hour that could have been spent on Dharma practice or it could have been used in order to earn some money. One could have earned \$20 during that one hour. So one has received a \$20 loss by gossiping for one hour.

Even if one is employed with a fixed salary one might not have to worry about the hourly loss of the \$20. If one spends an hour gossiping and one still gets the wage from their employer the employer then has the loss. If there are two people gossiping for one hour they don't engage in any work for that hour and the employer still pays them their wage then the employer has the combined loss of \$40, \$20 for each of the employees. From the side of the employees, one could actually say that this is stealing because they receive money they haven't actually earned. From the side of the employees it becomes like stealing and the employee receives a loss. So gossiping harms the success of the company and also harms the the development of society as a whole because if everybody is gossiping then society doesn't benefit. So in order to benefit society as a whole it is good if one abandons gossiping. (*Laughter*)

As was explained before, bring the mind back home focusing it inwards and place the mind 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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