
The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas

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We will practise a bit of meditation as usual. Please sit in a good physical posture, upright and comfortable. When sitting physically upright, you also have to make your mind upright! If the mind isn't straightened out and goes off in all directions, it can cause problems for us. So it is important to subdue one's mind – to make it peaceful, serviceable and pliant.

We should understand the problems that can occur if we leave the mind unsubdued, and employ methods for subduing it. Since it is your mind and causes you disturbance, it is your responsibility to subdue your own mind. Once the excitement within the mind subsides, it is the nature of the mind to be peaceful and happy.

The methods or tools for subduing the 'wild elephant' mind are mindfulness and introspection. One shouldn't have any doubt that it is possible to subdue one's mind with those two tools.

Sometimes one may generate doubt and lose courage because one thinks one will not be able to subdue the mind when one enters into meditation. This thought takes away our strength and self-confidence. We feel able to do less and less, and feel less enthusiastic about doing things. Increasingly, laziness becomes one's friend. That is one way of thinking.

A more positive and encouraging attitude would be to think about what one *can* do to subdue one's mind, and to think that one will not give up. One shouldn't have any doubt that, with the help of mindfulness and introspection, one can subdue the wild elephant mind.

If one sets out to meditate and subdue one's mind using mindfulness and mental introspection then, in two or three years time, one will see a difference. If we don't compare ourselves to how we were before we started to meditate, it might appear to us as if there has been no great progress. But if we compare ourselves to how we were before we started meditating, we will see that our mind has become more subdued and peaceful, that we have generated new insights and understanding, and that there definitely has been some benefit.

Keeping in mind the benefits of meditation, bring the mind back home, free it from the disturbing thoughts that distract it towards the outside, and instead focus it 100% inwards. If you can focus the mind in such a way – not distracted outside by the disturbing thoughts – it will remain peacefully and calmly focused inwards. Then you can place it on the coming and going of the breath, and concentrate on the breathing. We will meditate like that for a few minutes. (*Pause for meditation.*) You can arise from your deep meditation!

Last time, [when we were discussing the course text, *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*, Snow Lion, New York, 1997], we talked about the perfection of morality.

First, had the threefold division of morality into:

- the morality of restraint, or the morality of restraining from non-virtue,
- the morality of accumulating virtue, and
- the morality of accomplishing the purpose of others.

We said that the basic definition of morality is that of abandoning harming others – restraining from ill-will and from the intention to harm others.

The main morality of restraint refers to restraining from the ten non-virtuous actions. This is the basic and most important morality, which Bodhisattvas practise very strictly. While there may be some difference between the strength of mind between Bodhisattvas and us, we still have to practise abandoning the ten non-virtuous actions as best we can.

The next division is the morality of accumulating virtue. A Bodhisattva works to subdue his or her own mental continuum and the mental continuums of other sentient beings. To do this, one needs first to subdue one's own mental continuum. This is initially done on the basis of the first type of morality, the morality of restraining from non-virtue. On the basis of this, one automatically engages in the practice of accumulating virtue.

To develop one's mind, one needs to purify it from faults and to generate good qualities. The purification of faults happens through the first type of morality, the morality of restraint. The development of good qualities happens through the second type of morality, the morality of accumulating virtue. Once one has subdued one's own mental continuum in this way, one can subdue the continuums of others through the third type of morality, the morality of accomplishing the purpose of others.

The practice of morality nurtures the generation of good qualities. On the basis of sound morality, one generates further qualities – the qualities already generated will increase, and the faults within the mind that would harm one's practice are subdued.

Thus, morality nurtures further good qualities. For example, one's practise of listening, contemplating and meditating on the basis of having good morality becomes the morality of accumulating virtue. If one explains the Dharma to others on the basis of having good morality, it becomes the morality of accomplishing the purpose of others.

The first morality, the morality of restraint, purifies the actions of body, speech and mind from any type of fault. The morality of accumulating virtue is established on basis of keeping the first morality. If one engages in practices such as making mandala offerings, prostrations, or the seven-limb practice, this would constitute the second type of morality, the morality of accumulating virtue. So, after the first type of morality

has purified the three doors of body, speech and mind of any type of fault, the second type of morality makes the actions of body, speech and mind virtuous.

Understanding the sequence of practice will greatly benefit our own practice. Once one has subdued one's mind well, if one teaches the Dharma to others or engages in actions for the purpose of others, those actions will be fruitful. If one's own mind is not subdued, those actions won't be very beneficial.

One can engage in the third type of morality after having first subdued one's own mind through the first two types of morality – by first stopping non-virtuous actions, then developing good qualities through the second type of morality, one is brought to a state where then one is ready to practise the third type of morality, the morality of accomplishing the purpose of others.

Practising the third type of morality, accomplishing the purpose of others, can be done through the four means of subduing disciples – subduing the mind of the disciple through material generosity; speaking pleasantly and kindly to them; teaching the more profound meaning of the Dharma; and ensuring the actions of oneself and others are concordant.

So, first of all, one practises generosity towards other sentient beings, making oneself agreeable to them. Then, when one first teaches them the Dharma, one doesn't teach in a tough or strict way, but rather speaks in a pleasant and nice way. Once they have become further attracted through that second step, one can teach the more profound or actual meaning of the Dharma. The fourth step is concordant practice, which means that one has to practise in accordance with what one teaches, and that one also has to encourage or induce disciples into practising in accordance with what one has taught or what they have heard. These are called the four means of subduing disciples.

This is a very skilful approach. For example, if we want something from another person, we will firstly offer them lunch, so that they are already softened up a little bit! *[Laughter]* Then, when we explain ourselves in a kindly and friendly way, they will even be more agreeable. This approach will be of great help to one in accomplishing one's purpose, and in getting whatever one wants.

Another way of practising the morality of accomplishing the purpose of others is to help sentient beings in their activities, and in accomplishing their aims. Here, of course, one has to be discerning. We shouldn't help them accomplish non-virtuous activities, but we should help them accomplish their virtuous activities, and this becomes the third type of morality.

Another way of practising the third type of morality is to offer service to sick people. If someone is sick and they need help, then giving them the help they need, helping them in daily activities they can't do, or giving them medicine or food or whatever becomes the third type of morality. This is also something one really should do.

Helping those who are destitute and sick creates very powerful virtue. There are three categories of beings who, if we help them, help us create very powerful virtue. These are the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas; one's father and mother; and the destitute and sick. Of course, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are very powerful objects for virtuous karma, as are one's father and mother because they have raised one, but the Buddha himself also regarded highly the action of giving help to destitute and sick people.

Lama Tsongkhapa described ways in which one can help destitute and sick people. First, there will be sick people among one's friends or family, so it is very important that one helps those. We can also offer service to those who are blind or whose faculties are impaired in other ways, who can't walk or can't speak – for example, getting things for those who are blind, or translating in sign language for those who are deaf.

Without going into great detail, there are many ways in which people can be poor and destitute. There is the destitution of friends and acquaintances, and material destitution. There are also people around us experiencing mental distress, depression and mental suffering. So, there's a variety of help one can offer those in need. Lama Tsongkhapa explained there were more than forty different ways of helping!

I shall stop here for tonight with the morality of accomplishing the purpose of others. Next time, we will complete this point by talking a bit about the benefits. If you have some questions, we can have some question and answer.

(Question inaudible.)

Answer: It would be beneficial to make some prayers that your grandfather may be more relaxed in his mind and have more happiness. Then, you have to look the cause of your grandfather's unhappiness.

There are many possible causes. Some old people are unhappy because they have the very strong feeling that they are by themselves, and that nobody is taking care of them. They feel, "I always have to do everything by myself, nobody is taking care of me or looking after me". This view of themselves as being isolated and ignored makes them unhappy. In such a case, it can be very good to go and visit them for example. When you visit him, you can just talk calmly and nicely to put him in a nice state of mind. If he's a religious person, perhaps you can talk with him about his religion to help him put his mind in a virtuous mental state, perhaps remind him about different aspects of his religion.

Also, from your side, you can make prayers that this action have done will generate some virtuous states within his mind. Some people find it useful in such situations to recite the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha, but it depends on the person. If it doesn't suit the mind of the person, it might just confuse them or disturb them. Maybe reciting the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha might just confuse them and they

might order you out of the house and say: "Recite those things somewhere else and don't come back here!".

If the person is Christian, it would be good to talk with them about their religion and remind them that they are being looked after by God, and that God is taking care of them. This will make them feel more mentally relaxed, and within their mind they will be able to generate an internal refuge at the difficult time of death. This internal refuge is the only thing that can benefit a person at the time of death. Once a person's reality becomes more internalised, such as at the time of death, the only thing that matters are the various mental states. When the only reality is the inner mental reality, then the only refuge, the only things that will help are those virtuous states of the mind – the inner refuge that the person generates at that time.

Question: What are the most important meditation practices?

Answer: The most important daily meditation is love and compassion. Generally, the most important meditation I think is love and compassion. That is a very good daily practice.

When practising the morality of benefiting others, there are various types of advice one gives in order to help others to subdue their minds. To those whose minds are overcome by attachment, one teaches the meditation on impurity to help them subdue their minds. To those whose minds are overcome by anger, one teaches the practice of patience, love and compassion to help them to pacify their minds. To those whose main problem is over-conceptualisation, one teaches the meditation on the coming and going of the breath. To those whose main problems are mental dullness and ignorance, one teaches dependent-arising to help them overcome their problems. And one helps those whose main problem is pride by teaching them the meditation on the various spheres and sources, the various aspects of the objects of knowledge.

So, one teaches various meditations to the different types of disciples who have these main problems. But, in general, the meditation of love and compassion is a very good one. If one can train one's mind in love and compassion, that is the best practice.

(Question inaudible)

Answer: If you harm someone by accident, the non-virtue is less, but there is still some non-virtuous karma. However, it is reduced, because the various factors needed for the karma to be complete – such as the recognition of the object, the delusions, and the motivation – are not present. For example, if you aim to kill one person, but by mistake you kill another person, then the karma is slightly less, because your recognition was mistaken [laughter]. So, there are various factors needed in order to make the karma complete. If some of these factors are missing, if you do an action by mistake, then the karma is less.

(Question inaudible – to do with spheres, objects of knowledge as above)

Answer: One talks about meditating on the various divisions of objects of knowledge. Essentially, this means you reflect on all the things you don't know. The more you realise how much you don't know, the less your pride will be. So, you can think about the manifold categories of objects of knowledge. There are many things to think about that one doesn't know. If you take someone who is very proud about their skills in driving a car to an airplane and ask them to fly the plane, their pride will become much less!

Question: What's the best meditation to get over anxiety and social phobias?

Answer: This problem often comes about through over-conceptualisation, so maybe one can do the meditation that acts as the antidote to conceptualisation. The meditation on the coming and going of the breath can be beneficial in these cases, because sometimes when we think and conceptualise too much, it causes fear. When we meditate on the coming and going of the breath, it has a calming or soothing effect on the conceptualising mind.

There is also a certain type of over-active personality, who is always mentally busy. While they are doing one thing, they are already thinking about the next thing they will be doing, and while they are still doing the first thing, they will start to do the next thing! These people are always hyperactive and internally busy. For such a personality, it is good to learn how to be more relaxed. They should try completing an action, before going on to the next, and not begin planning ahead to the next few things they want to do. It's like having a mental 'traffic jam' of plans – you get stuck, and you get to the point, as Geshe-la just described, where you say: "How can I do anything?". You feel stuck and are not able to do anything.

There are various types of personalities associated with anxiety, but to someone with the personality just described, I usually say to keep their mind on what they are doing at the moment, and not let the mind get disturbed about how much they will be able to finish in how much time, etc.

Some people are in a work situation where, while they are trying to complete one thing, many more things are placed on their desk. So they are still trying to complete one job, while many, many more jobs are put on their desk and they have to complete them all within a certain amount of time. Then they get very anxious and end up not being able to do anything. Some people have a very demanding boss or employer. I advise people in such a situation not to worry about what is put on their desk, but to just keep their mind on what they are doing at the moment. Then, they will be able to do what they are doing at that moment very well.

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Edited Version

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