
The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas

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We can meditate for a little while as usual. Sit in a good and upright physical position.

On the basis of sitting in a good physical posture, you also have to place your mind in the right state, and generate the motivation that: "I'm not going to let my mind fall under the control of unsuitable thoughts, even for one instant". We know from experience what happens to the mind once we let it fall under the control of the delusions. Recognising these disadvantages, make the motivation that you will definitely not let the mind fall under the control of any disturbing thoughts that try to distract it towards outside objects.

You can confirm through your own experience that if the conceptualising mind isn't pacified, you will have no chance of experiencing inner peace and happiness. By reversing the mind away from the deluded thoughts and focusing it inwards, it will experience inner peace. One slowly brings the mind back home, focusing it inwards and reversing it away from the disturbing thoughts that distract it towards the outside.

Within that inner state, you can place the mind single-pointedly on today's meditation object, which is the coming and going of the breath. The mind actually enters into the breathing, so that it becomes one with it. We can meditate like that for a few minutes. (*Pause for meditation.*)

It is good for you to meditate from time to time. In this way, you are able to give yourself some inner mental happiness.

Last time, we talked about what patience is, and also the threefold division of patience.

Patience is the antidote to anger. Each of the various delusions has an antidote. The Buddha, in his great kindness, taught an antidote against each of the individual delusions – and patience is the antidote to anger.

What is the nature of anger? Anger is generated in relation to three types of objects. First, we generate anger in relation to other sentient beings – that one's obvious. We also generate anger towards the suffering that we experience, and also towards what we perceive as the source of our suffering, which often is actually our own mental exaggeration.

Basically, one generates anger towards an experience or an object that one dislikes. So, anger is generated in conjunction with dislike of a particular object or experience, and the nature of anger is a mind that wants to harm, eliminate or completely destroy the disliked object.

Here, the suffering that I mentioned as the object of one's anger is one's own suffering. Usually, when we see the suffering of others, there's more an effect of pacifying our anger. For example, if we are angry with someone else, and we see his or her suffering, that will generate joy in the mind!

Of the various delusions, anger is the worst. Shantideva said there is no delusion like anger, and there is no austerity like patience. We should practise the three types of patience, the first of which is the patience of not minding outer harm inflicted on us by others. Here, one practises patience with regard to other people.

However, we generate anger towards others when we regard them as an enemy. Who do we regard as 'the enemy'? Any person we think is harming our happiness. Normally, we categorise people who give us pleasure and happiness as friends, and those who harm our pleasure and happiness as enemies, and generate anger towards this latter category of people.

So, one must practise the patience of disregarding harm in relation to one's enemies. This is a very special type of practice – preserving one's peace of mind and not letting one's mind be affected by harm inflicted by others. This type of patience makes it possible to meditate on compassion for one's enemies.

While it might at first appear very difficult, if we apply ourselves to this practice of patience as much as we can according to our present ability, we will be able to further increase it, despite it being contradictory to the conventional, worldly point of view. Unlike the conventional worldly view, we try not to allow the mind to become agitated when we receive harm, and do not retaliate in kind.

This practice would seem unconventional and very difficult at first, but by remembering that the mind can be trained in anything if one applies oneself, one should start practising this type of patience as much as possible. The mind has this quality of being able to easily accomplish through acquaintance and familiarity something that was initially difficult.

Shantideva made the following remarks about the changeable nature of our perceptions. We don't even need to see someone we perceive as an enemy today in order for anger to be generated in our mind. We only need to remember the name of the person for anger to arise. However, the person we perceive now with such dislike, at a later time might transform into our best friend from whom we cannot bear to be separated, even for an instant.

And vice versa. A person we are now completely attached to, from whom we cannot bear to be separated, even for one moment, may later become someone we cannot bear even to see; just by remembering them, we will generate aversion and dislike. By seeing how our changeable mind perceives the people around us, we can open up to the possibility of practising this type of patience.

As Shantideva said, there are as many unsubdued sentient beings as the sky is vast. The number of sentient beings whose minds are unsubdued – whose behaviour is bad, or whose minds are vicious – is unlimited. Therefore, if we try to solve our problems by overcoming the outer enemy, we will not be successful. Rather, one should try to solve one's problems by subduing the inner enemy of anger.

Here, the example is given of the earth being covered by thorns – it would be much more practical for one to cover one's own feet with leather, instead of trying to cover the whole earth with leather. In the same way, by overcoming the inner enemy, one will have eliminated any type of harm – the outer enemy will not be able to harm us if we have subdued the inner enemy.

There's a difference in how we should treat the inner enemy of the delusions and the outer enemy. The outer enemy, the other person, can be subdued by kindness. By trying to harmonise with them, being kind to them, etc., one can turn the mind of the other person around to showing more kindness towards one.

But that system doesn't work with the inner enemy. The more one tries to agree with the inner enemy of the delusions, the stronger the inner enemy will become. For example, the more we feed our craving, rather than the craving going away, it becomes more insatiable. Therefore, the inner enemy of the delusions has to be counteracted.

When we start out to meditate on patience, we first have to ask ourselves: is anger something we want and need, or not? We can immediately confirm through our own experience that anger is not useful, and that it causes mental suffering whenever it arises within one's mental continuum. While there are various techniques for transforming problems and adverse conditions and meditating on patience, if one reflects on all the disadvantages of anger and all the benefits of patience at the outset, that will lay a good foundation for one's practice of patience. Then, one's practice of patience will come along very nicely.

Asanga explained the benefits of patience, which I will go through now. As Arya Asanga explained in his *Bodhisattva Grounds*, the first thing that Bodhisattvas look at is the benefits of patience. First, by meditating on patience, one will reduce the number of one's enemies, and one will not get more, but fewer, enemies. Also, one will experience fewer breakups and separations from friends. Such experiences come about through karma previously created through having been angry before.

Further, by meditating on patience, one will increase one's physical and mental happiness, and one also will be able to die without any regrets. One will be able to die in a happy state of mind, and in the next life, go on to a higher human or godly rebirth.

So, by reflecting on the benefits of patience, Bodhisattvas become motivated to generate patience towards others. Bodhisattvas also express praise for patience and rejoice when they see others practising patience. By practising patience oneself, one is able to appreciate the value of

patience, which is why Bodhisattvas rejoice when they see others practising patience. Patience has those various benefits.

The great Bodhisattva, Shantideva, said that if one is able to pacify anger through controlling one's mind, one will experience happiness in this life and in one's future life. Lama Tsongkhapa said that those with patience in their mental continuum will always experience mental happiness, and by always experiencing mental happiness, their whole life will be happy. In this way, patience acts as the cause for happiness in this life, and creates the cause for happiness one's future life – the happiness of a higher status, higher rebirth, or even definite goodness such as liberation and enlightenment.

For the mind to generate anger, it is not necessary to have a wrathful outer enemy scowling or showing a black face to us. All that is needed is something that appears unlikeable or disagreeable to us. We know through our experience that the mind becomes happy because something pleasant and agreeable appears to us. However, as soon as something else disagreeable and unlikeable appears to us, it destroys the happiness we had been experiencing, because aversion and anger arise within the mind.

So, when one looks for the cause of anger to arise on one's mind, one doesn't need to look to the outside, but one should look inside, towards the appearances within one's mind.

Do you have some questions? The next time, I will go on to the disadvantages and faults of anger.

(Question from student.)

Answer: When we generate anger in the mind, even though the mind may not manifest anger, this state of generating anger is closely related, because anger is a mental factor that accompanies the mind and, as such, will taint the mind and give the mind a certain 'colour'. That's what we mean when we say that the mind is under the control of anger. If the mind is accompanied by the mental factor of anger, that mental factor somehow determines the nature of the rest of the mind. So, even though one wouldn't say that the mind absorbs into the anger, the mind is already very closely related to anger.

(Question.)

Answer: There is this practice of watching the anger, and reflecting on the disadvantages of the anger and the benefits of patience. Through this, the anger will subside.

By analysing the nature of the anger and by reflecting on the disadvantages of anger and benefits of not having that anger, anger will subside within the mind. Sometimes when we are angry with another person, rather than analysing the problem in relation to the other person, we should instead go to the anger itself, and analyse its invalidity, disadvantages, etc. Through that, the anger will subside.

It may appear as if anger is completely one with one's being at the time of being angry, but that is a deceptive

appearance, because anger is not of one nature with the mind.

If we take the example of hot water, although the heat in the water appears as if it is completely one with the water, actually it is not of one nature with the water, because after a while, the heat will dissipate and the water will again be cool and refreshing. Another example is that of molten metal – even though the heat seems to be completely one with the metal, actually it is not of one nature with the metal, because after some time the metal cools down, the heat dissipates, and goes.

In the same way, while anger may appear to us as if it is of one nature with one's being when we are angry, actually the anger is not of one nature with one's mind. After some time, it dissipates and goes away.

(Further question, then brief question and answer exchange.)

Answer: That is the practice of investigating the nature of anger. You look at the nature of the anger, and at its various aspects, such as its harmfulness, invalidity etc. Through this practice, the anger then becomes pacified.

For example, if one generates such strong anger within one's mind that the mind returns to the object of one's anger again and again – thinking about how much that other person has harmed one, and listing the different things that the other person did wrong – through such a process, the anger is further inflamed and harms the mind even further. Rather, if we investigate the harmful nature of anger and the problems it brings, that will cause the anger to subside.

The advice given by the Fifth Dalai Lama from the words of Manjushri is that one will only inflame anger by contemplating the object of anger – thinking about how one has been harmed, etc. So then, one does the meditation on patience, reflecting on the various disadvantages, faults and deceptiveness of anger. But one cannot meditate on just like that. Rather, one needs to have a strong object with which can actually practise patience.

Question: I'm sorry, it's going back to the same point. I think what the other student was talking about was when somebody is experiencing extreme anger or extreme jealousy or extreme fear. Then sometimes the use of analysis doesn't help because you're so stuck in that situation. So sometimes to sit and allow yourself to be patient... (inaudible).

Answer: One or two weeks back, I mentioned this point – that when we hold some anger inside, at that time, the meditation on patience won't be successful. I talked about that point last week or maybe the week before, saying that when we harbour strong anger or strong jealousy within the mind and keep it bottled up, at that time, the meditation on patience will not be successful.

The worldly convention of practising patience does not just mean keeping one's anger bottled up inside and not acting upon one's anger. That is not the practice of patience, I have already said. Actually, keeping anger inside us like this can actually cause further inner problems or even sickness. In this case, it might be more skilful to actually express the anger in some way, even

though that expression of anger is not the meditation on patience.

As I said before, the meditation on patience refers to the mind not being affected, so not having anger in the mind in the first place. Keeping anger within the mind and not acting upon it is not the practice of patience. That might be patience according to worldly convention, but it is not patience according to Buddhism.

The meditation of patience refers to an unaffected mind, a mind that is not affected by adverse conditions, by adversity. Once the mind has become disturbed, this cannot be called patience – the patience has gone away.

(Further question)

Answer: As I have already said, anger is that which destroys the peaceful mind. The peaceful mind becomes less through the arising of anger, and those who have less anger have a more peaceful mind.

(Another question)

Answer: There's a benefit in trying to work with one's anger, even if anger has already arisen within one's mind. One should still try to meditate on patience.

However, when the mind is overcome by strong anger, it is said that it is very difficult to apply the various techniques for the meditation on patience. At such a time, it might be more practical to do a meditation where one doesn't have to think about it – such as the meditation on the coming and going of the breath.

When the mind is overcome by anger, at such a time it won't listen to reason very well, and there's no space within the mind to apply the various techniques for the meditation on patience. At such a time, it is more practical to do the meditation on the coming and going on the breath, through which the mind calms down. Then one can apply the various techniques for the meditation on patience.

As was explained at the beginning, bring the mind back home, reversing it away from the disturbing thoughts that distract it towards the outside. Then place the mind single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath, and recite the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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