
The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas

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16 October 2002

We can practise a little meditation as usual. Sit in a good and relaxed physical posture. Once you are sitting in a good physical posture it is important not to let the mind fall under the control of useless conceptual thoughts. It is very important to free the mind from the control of useless conceptual thoughts. There are certain kinds of conception that can be termed “useless conceptual thoughts”. Why? Because they don’t give us what we desire. Everybody works in their life to achieve happiness but instead of achieving happiness they don’t find satisfaction. Instead their mind gets placed in a limbo, focused outwards, by the force of useless conceptual thoughts. It wouldn’t be so bad that the mind was under the control of useless conceptual thoughts if those thoughts give satisfaction to the person. But that doesn’t happen. So one has to free the mind from useless conceptual thoughts – stop thinking in those ways – and train the mind in thoughts and ways of thinking that have a purpose and give satisfaction to the mind.

When we talk about the useless conceptual thought we are not talking about one single thought. There are a whole multitude of conceptual thoughts. It is a process of one useless thought leading to another useless thought leading to another. Through the control of those useless thoughts one starts to turn the mind towards outside objects and then one’s actions follows those thoughts. One runs around under the control of those thoughts looking for happiness somewhere on the outside. Running around and exerting lots of effort following those thoughts and ideas causes one to waste lots of time. One acts in such a manner day after day for weeks, months and years. Once again, if one would at least achieve some type of purpose within one’s life, some type of happiness, it wouldn’t be so bad. Everyone leads their life in such a way, being directed by these pointless ideas and thoughts, running around and looking for happiness on the outside. It is important that one at least tries to refrain a little bit from that and tries to generate some useful thoughts that give one happiness and satisfaction.

As a meditator one has other methods for achieving happiness. This affliction of being under the control of useless thoughts and ideas brings problems to everyone regardless of their status or how much wealth they have. Even those who have many millions of dollars say that they feel their life is empty. They lack the satisfaction they are looking for and they feel that their mind is overcome by disturbance and worry. Many people have told me this again and again. Regardless of their material status, regardless of having a good job, regardless of having a family, a nice house, a nice car, they experience

problems within their life because their mind is under the control of useless ideas and thoughts. Those people who can experience the very great contrast of having very good material situation can see very clearly how pointless thought processes disturb their life. We are somewhere in between, neither here nor there, and it is a little bit difficult for us to see this. But those people who have an extremely good material situation can very clearly pinpoint the problem of disturbing thoughts.

Therefore it becomes important to subdue one’s mind and to practise meditation again and again. To practise meditation you need to take it easily and slowly and by starting early and taking it easily and being relaxed one’s practice will turn out very well. If one doesn’t take care of one’s mind now then later, when things get difficult, one doesn’t have an inner refuge. Even though one’s life might be quite alright and one might be materially comfortable now, in the future, especially when the aging process becomes more obvious, many problems start to occur within one’s life and if one doesn’t have some type of inner refuge then one experiences great difficulties. This doesn’t mean that one should neglect one’s material progress. It is important to have enough money and to be materially well off and one has to also make some plans with regards to the material side so that one doesn’t experience any material difficulty. But one shouldn’t just rely on that. One shouldn’t think that is the only cause for a happy life. One should also take care of one’s mind by practising meditation again and again. Then, when one gets old, one won’t have any material problems and won’t have any worries from that side and will be able to experience that happiness but one will also have some inner refuge – one’s mind will also be developed and one will experience the happiness coming from meditation. If one has achieved such a state then one can live one’s life very well. It is important that one makes a plan right now towards such an aim and starts to practise meditation but doesn’t rush but takes it easily and slowly and then it will turn out very well in the future.

We can now meditate for a few minutes freeing the mind from the control of the useless thoughts that try to distract the mind towards the outside – instead bring the mind back home focusing it inwards. By focusing the mind completely inwards in such a way one will generate a certain feeling within and then, when in that state, one places the mind on the coming and going of the breath and takes the coming and going of the breath as one’s meditational object. We can meditate in such a manner for a few minutes.

(Pause for meditation.) Sorry that the meditation was so short.

Previously we have talked about the nature of patience and we have talked about the nature of anger, which is counteracted by patience. We were saying that one starts out meditating on patience by first reflecting on the benefits of patience and the faults of anger. We

completed talking about the benefits of patience last time.

The faults of anger can be divided into the observable faults and the faults that one cannot observe directly. Firstly the observable are the faults that we can see directly in this life. The faults that are not observable are faults that one cannot see directly in this life, meaning the effects of anger that are not directly observable within this life. This refers to the fact that anger harms one's virtuous karma. In general the meaning of virtue is that which generates a pleasant result. That which generates an unpleasant result is the meaning of non-virtue. Regardless of going into too much detail as to whether there is actually a pervasion or not, one can generally give those two definitions: that which generates a pleasurable result is the definition of virtue and that which generates an unpleasant result is the definition of non-virtue. What anger does is to harm the power of virtuous karma to produce a pleasurable result. It doesn't necessarily mean that it completely destroys the virtuous karma but it harms the ability of the virtuous karma to produce a pleasurable result.

When we get angry we are not aware at that moment that anger actually harms the virtuous karma within our mental continuum. The other faults of anger are directly observable. As the Bodhisattva Shantideva said: "The arousal of anger generates pain in the mind." We can observe through our own experience that anger in the mind causes pain within the mind. A person who has anger within their mind doesn't experience peace. We also know through our own experience that an angry mind does not experience peace. Shantideva goes on to say: "With anger one does not experience physical or mental happiness and the physical and mental happiness that one might have had before gets destroyed by anger".

Anger robs one of one's sleep – even though one wants to sleep one can't. Anger destroys one's mental equilibrium – even if one has reached a state where the mind remains focused internally very well and one has a state of mental equilibrium that mental state is destroyed by anger. Anger causes one to create negative karma. For example if one is attacked with a knife by another person then, out of anger, it is very possible that one will actually kill the other person. This is also a situation we can all understand. Anger will estrange one from even dear friends. Friends may become more remote because of one's own anger. Even if you try to win those friends back by giving them presents it won't be enough.

One master went on to say that that anger transforms even a beautiful face into something ugly. If someone ordinarily has a beautiful appearance that beautiful appearance will be transformed by anger into something unpleasant and ugly. It doesn't help if one wears nice earrings and ornaments and necklaces... that won't make the face more beautiful if the face appears transformed into a mask of anger. Therefore if one dresses up very nicely and makes oneself very pretty it is important that one doesn't get angry at those times.

(Laughter). Therefore it is said that patience is the best ornament to wear because if one's face has been transformed into a mask of anger and is frowning and so forth, it will not matter how many ornaments and earrings and necklaces one puts on.

No matter how good one's outer conditions are, no matter how nice one's house is, how soft the cushions are that one sits on, etc. if the mind is under the control of anger one will not experience happiness. We said before that anger robs one of one's sleep. If the mind is under the control of anger, which is a coarse state of mind, the mind can't go to the more subtle state of sleep. No matter how much one tries one cannot go to sleep. But if one wears the ornament of patience then one can go to sleep and wake up happily the next day and also generally be happy.

Anger acts contrary to what one desires. If the mind is under the control of anger then the mind becomes very negative. It has fallen under the control of a negative state. In short if anger acts contrary to that what one desires it gives oneself all the things that one doesn't desire. First of all, anger harms one's reputation and one's fame. Further one cannot lead a purposeful life with anger. If one wants to achieve something, or if one wants to have a purposeful life, one needs to live one's life without anger. Anger will also decrease one's strength and courage in the same way as the waning moon, the decreasing moon, becomes less and less and less. A person whose mind is overcome by anger gradually loses their courage and strength. One's friends will also reduce, one will become estranged from one's friends and dear ones because of one's anger. Anger also harms one's discriminating awareness – being able to discriminate between what is beneficial and what is harmful. And anger leads the mind to ignorance – it makes the mind very foggy, dull and ignorant.

If one becomes very acquainted with the friend of anger one will have to spend lots of time, many years, among the hell realms. By reflecting on the various harms of anger one will come to understand that one's outer enemy cannot give one as much harm as the inner enemy of anger. The inner enemy of anger is much more harmful to oneself than the outer enemy could ever be. Therefore, by realising the faults and disadvantages of anger one will automatically be induced and motivated to practise patience. Even though there are many more faults to talk about maybe we can leave it here.

It is important to contemplate and reflect upon those disadvantages and faults of anger again and again on a daily basis until one has definitely ascertained them within one's mind. Therefore it is said that there is no negativity like anger and no austerity like patience. Understanding in this way the benefits and disadvantages of patience and anger then one should practise patience. By contemplating in such a way the benefits of patience and the faults of anger then naturally within one's mind one will be motivated to practise patience.

One will be able to meditate on the patience that disregards harm very effectively when one has first contemplated the benefits of patience and the disadvantages of anger, the faults of anger, very well. But then maybe we can leave it here for tonight and if you have some questions?

Question: "... made a mistake ... go to gaol and you are a very patient ... have been put in a goal cell with a very angry man and you spend 24 hours a day in that gaol cell with an angry man who will not let you meditate and will not let you rest ... what can you do? He won't let you stay in peace, he won't let you be quiet, you must answer whenever he asks you questions. What can you do when ... so angry ...?"

Answer: If you have meditated on patience very well you will regard that other person as your best friend. (*Laughter.*) But for ordinary people that might be difficult to do. One famous Buddhist practitioner called Atisha purposely kept one attendant who was very angry so the other attendants would actually say to him: "Why do you always keep him around, he is so angry and is giving you a hard time all the time. He has such a bad temper, why do you keep him around and not take someone else?" Atisha said: "Oh, I keep him around because he will help me to complete the perfection of patience."

If your practice of patience is very well established having such a person around won't be a problem because they give you the opportunity for you to practise patience. But that might be difficult to do. In general, if we can view the other person with compassion, that can help. Normally if we understand the situation of the other person and why they are angry and where they are coming from this understanding by itself generates compassion and lessons anger. That is one thing that one can do. It can be very beneficial to offer an angry person food, to cook for them and to give them presents such as clothes, etc. It is said that giving people who are very angry presents and good food helps to pacify their anger.

There is also another way of dealing with the another person's anger but you have to apply it in a selective manner - it might work but it is recommended that you do it with good friends. This involves you actually provoking their anger. I used to do that with a good class mate of mine. He was slightly older than me and had a bad temper. When I saw that he had a bad temper I would actually provoke him to flare up with anger and then I wouldn't reply in kind, I would only laugh and make jokes. He would get so angry that he would hit me. (*laughter*) But I would just laugh about it and in such a way over a period of time his anger actually would become less and less. So you might also be able to do that with certain selected few (*laughter*)maybe it is not good to do that with strangers.

So sometimes when he was asleep I would put dirt into his mouth (*laughter*) and then he would wake up and he would get very angry (*laughter*). Generally he liked me very much. (*laughter.*) We were generally good friends

and liked each other very much. It was just that he had a bad temper. Over time, by provoking him and then not reacting and just laughing about it his temper was cured.

As was explained before, bring the mind back home focusing it inwards and then when the mind remains stable and focused inwards, place 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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