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## *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*

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We can first practise a little bit of meditation. Sit in a good physical posture. As I always say, one has to take responsibility for one's own aims and for one's own purpose. Of course, we generally say that Bodhisattvas leave aside the purpose of self and work for the purpose of others – but we must take responsibility for our own aims. Our purpose consists of attaining happiness and alleviating suffering – trying to achieve what one wants and to reduce what one doesn't want. Apart from that, there is not really that much more.

The basis upon which one can achieve one's happiness and aims are one's body and mind. One needs to have a healthy and strong body; similarly, one needs to have healthy and strong mind. Therefore, it is important to take good care of one's health and to look after one's body.

From the time we are born, the two things that always go with us wherever we go are our body and mind. When our body is healthy and well we say, "I am healthy and well". If our body is unhealthy and unwell we say, "I am not feeling well, I am sick". When our mind is well and happy we say, "I am happy". If our mind is unwell we say, "I am unhappy". If one has a healthy body and mind, one will be also happy and well and can achieve the purpose of others on the basis of this.

It is important to quieten and pacify the mind. The more the mind is quietened and pacified, the more happiness the person experiences. Therefore, if one doesn't start trying to generate some peace within the mind now, one will have lost the opportunity. One can see the significance of pacifying the mind for one's everyday happiness.

The mind will become peaceful if it remains focused on one point. By focusing the mind on one point, one will be better able to utilise the mind's potential. If the mind is not focused on one point, its potential will be scattered and can't be utilised. By focusing the mind on one object, it will become more stable, clear and peaceful. One will then be able to protect one's inner happiness. If one is not able to focus the mind, and if it is under the control of the disturbing thoughts, then one's life won't turn out successfully and one won't achieve one's aims and inner happiness.

Sitting upright in the correct meditation posture, bring the mind back home, focusing it inwards and reversing it away from the disturbing thoughts that distract it towards the outside. Then, within that state, place the mind single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. It is important that the mind remains 100% focused towards the inside; while within that state, the mind should enter the object of the meditation, and become one with the object of meditation.

It is much better to have a good meditation with perfect focus for just one minute. When you start out on the path of meditation, it is much better to start out correctly, even if

you just meditate very briefly, instead of sitting with the mind going here and there. While trying to meditate properly in such a manner, we can meditate for a few minutes. (*Pause for meditation.*)

[Last week,] we started to talk about patience. The meaning of patience is a mind undisturbed by obstacles and harm. Then we talked of the three-fold division of patience. We have already talked about the patience that disregards the agent of one's suffering and problems.

The second type of patience is the patience bearing suffering. When one experiences problems, it is necessary to accept those problems and bear them. This is the patience of bearing suffering. This patience is very important because, out of [the two] suffering and happiness, one experiences more suffering than happiness. There are also more causes for suffering than there are causes for happiness. If we analyse our life, it is very difficult to pinpoint a day when one hasn't experienced any type of problem. Usually, during the day one will experience one problem or another.

It is important to be able to transform the problems we experience into the path, and to be able to meditate on the patience that bears suffering. There is a danger that when one experiences problems, one will either become upset and angry, or very depressed. If one becomes depressed, one won't achieve whatever one has set out to do.

Without considering the Dharma, even in terms of worldly goals, we must have the patience that bears sufferings and problems so that we can achieve our aims. We will not be able to achieve our worldly aims if we are not able to take on sufferings and problems. If this is the situation for worldly aims, then it is also like that with the Dharma.

The method for alleviating these problems is patience. Hence, the importance of practising patience with regard to the problems one will face while working towards a certain aim. This includes not just meditating on 'small' patience but also meditating on 'great' patience. It also means not being too sensitive when we experience problems; not having a small mind and getting depressed, because that way, we would not achieve any type of purpose.

If one practises the patience willingly bearing suffering, one won't worry, even when one is facing problems. But, if one doesn't have that type of patience, on top of the problems one is already experiencing, the mind will start to worry about the problems. So, on top of one's initial problems, one will also experience mental problems.

However, if one has the patience bearing suffering, although practising that patience will not stop the problems, it will prevent mental worry about those problems from arising. By practising this patience, one will stop the inner problems of worry and agitation. But, if one doesn't have the patience that is happy to bear problems and suffering, then on top of experiencing these problems and suffering, one generates worry and unhappiness and the mind becomes agitated. One will just be adding more problems and suffering to what one is already experiencing.

One definitely shouldn't worry. Worry needlessly agitates the mind. Mental unhappiness is primarily generated through our way of thinking, through the different conceptual thoughts we have. Worrying generates mental unhappiness. We generate our own mental unhappiness by

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worrying. Of course, there are other causes of mental unhappiness such as karma, but really, the primary cause depends on one's outlook and conceptual thoughts.

Quite often, we artificially create problems for ourselves through our way of thinking – worrying about what would happen if that happens, and then if that happens, what could happen after that. By thinking in that way, setting off a chain reaction of worry and thought, one makes oneself sick. Although in reality nothing has happened, one is already sick with worry about what might happen. That is completely unnecessary.

One very strong worry many people have is this: "I will separate from my partner, or, if my partner separates from me, what will happen to me as I don't have any work or income of my own?" This seems to be a primary source of worry for many people. But again nothing has happened, and this worry primarily comes about because of the particular way of thinking. This worry is artificially generated in the mind.

One story I always tell is what happened when we came out of Tibet, walking across the mountains. One Geshe went with some of his students. They had to go through the mountains and cross the border [into India]. They had very little food with them, only a bit of barley flour. The Geshe was very worried about what would happen to his students once the barley flour ran out, and then what would happen when they arrived in India and so forth. However, one of his students said, "Geshe-la don't worry. First of all, we will get to India and in India there are people. People have to eat. When we get there, we will get something from what they eat, so there is really nothing to worry about". Even though it was a student who said this to the Geshe it actually benefited the Geshe's mind quite a lot and he stopped worrying about what would happen.

When they came to India, it happened exactly like that! They were given rice and dahl. (*Laughter*). Once they arrived in India, they received both food and clothing. Of course, the clothing wasn't very good – a piece of that and a piece of this – but they did get both food and clothing. So, the worry of dying of starvation ceased. Then another worry came – the worry of dying from heat! (*Laughter*). There is no end to what you can worry about. There is the worry that one will die from heatstroke in India.

It is important not to worry. One shouldn't worry and should practise the meditation bearing suffering. If one practises that patience, although it will not lessen the problem one is experiencing, one will receive less harm from the problem. There will be less opportunity for the problem to harm one if one practices practices patience, because one will not have the inner problems of worry and mental disturbance.

After having established that there is a need for meditating on patience bearing suffering we come to the point: "How do we meditate on that patience?" What are the causes that generate that type of patience? Generating the wish to have that patience is not enough. One needs to also enquire about the causes for generating that patience: "How can I generate that patience?" It is not a matter of sitting there thinking, "I cannot generate that patience" but of actually finding out about the causes. How do we meditate on that patience?

When we meditate on patience, the first step is that one has to abandon the thought of definitely not wanting any

problems. One has to let go of the complete dislike of problems.

The method for meditating on patience is that, firstly, one must give up the single-pointed dislike of problems.

Then, we investigate the problem we are experiencing. Can we do something about the problem or can we not do anything about it? If there is something we can do about the problem, there is no need to generate a strong dislike for it; but if the problem cannot be alleviated or changed, there is no benefit or purpose in generating dislike for such a problem.

From the point of view of both situations – a problem that can be solved or a problem that cannot be solved – one has removed the need to generate dislike towards that problem.

If it is a problem one cannot do anything about, one should look at the benefit of the problem. What can the problem teach us? If the problem cannot be changed and one generates a dislike towards it, then it will agitate and disturb one's mind and create further worry. If there is something that can be done about the problem, there is no need to generate dislike towards it, and there is also no need to worry, since one can do something about it. One only needs to change the situation and do something about the problem.

If one can do nothing to resolve the problem, then one practises patience and does not generate strong dislike towards the problem. Although it will not disappear, at least one will not receive the further suffering of worry. If one doesn't generate worry about the problem, it will not add further suffering to the problem one is already experiencing.

For example, when one is experiencing physical sickness if, on top of this, one lets one's mind be affected and becomes mentally agitated because of one's strong dislike for the sickness, then one will have aggravated one's situation. It is as Shantideva said: "If there is something that can be done, then there is no need to dislike the problem. If there is nothing that can be done, then there is no benefit in disliking the problem".

Shantideva goes on to say: "One should practise patience with regards to the various problems such as problems of heat, cold, sickness, hunger, thirst, etc". If, for example, one is able to be patient when the weather is hot, one's mind will not be agitated. However, another person who doesn't have that patience will get agitated if the weather is not to their liking and it is too hot. If one practises patience with regard to these various difficulties, one's life will be much easier, because one will have alleviated the problem of worry and mental agitation.

It is good to generate strong and great patience. If one just generates a small amount of patience, one's practice of patience won't be successful. There are a few more points regarding patience, but maybe we can talk about them next time. If you have some questions, we have some time for questions and answers? Small problems are also OK! (*Laughter*)

(*Question about contentment and renunciation.*)

*Answer:* If you don't have contentment and reduced desire, then renunciation or aversion to samsara won't come easily.

The practice of contentment and of reducing attachment doesn't mean that one has to give up all of one's

possessions. What it means is that one reduces one's attachment towards these possessions and other objects. Through this, one comes to see the problems that exist within cyclic existence. If one has more contentment and less attachment, it is easier to see the faults of cyclic existence.

One won't receive satisfaction through experiencing the various sense pleasures. If one has strong desire, and if all one wants are those various types of sense pleasures, it will be very difficult to see the faults that exist within those sense pleasures. If one has more contentment and less desire, it will be easier to see the faults inherent in the sense pleasures. When we generate a sense of disgust with cyclic existence, it means we have seen the faults of cyclic existence. By seeing the faults of cyclic existence, we generate this disgust.

It is important to generate contentment and happiness with what one has. If we are able to be content and happy with what we have, then what we have will make us happy. If one is not content and just aims for more and more, what one has will not give satisfaction.

There are no ultimate qualities or ultimate happiness to be found within cyclic existence. For example, apart from someone who has been a monk from a very young age, there is normally no worldly happiness that one has not already experienced. If there were some essence to worldly happiness, then everybody should be perfectly happy, everybody should have experienced that essence and the ultimate happiness that samsaric happiness promises to provide. One could say there is no samsaric happiness that one has not experienced.

Actually, it seems to be the other way around – one seems to have reached a point where one gets tired of samsaric happiness and is dissatisfied and so looks for something more or something new. This shows very clearly that there is no essence to worldly happiness and that worldly happiness ultimately can't make us happy. Otherwise, everyone would have experienced that essence and would already have that final happiness. There is no satisfaction through experiencing samsaric and worldly happiness. One cannot improve on samsaric happiness, even though one tries frequently by trying to experience new things all the time. But this doesn't provide satisfaction and it doesn't get any better.

*Question:* (inaudible)

*Answer:* To experience contentment, one also needs to have patience. For example, if one wants to be content with little food or lesser quality food and a lesser quality place of living one needs to be patient with that situation.

If one has patience, one's mind won't be agitated by difficult conditions. I don't know if this could happen in Australia, but situations can occur where people have little food. However, if one has patience, one can accept the situation and be content. Sometimes, the lack of material things, lack of money and lack of conducive conditions can give one problems. If one has patience, one will be able to bear those problems and be content with what one has. We Tibetans have some experience in that type of patience, as we have experienced material difficulty, but we don't have too much mental difficulty.

*Question:* As well as developing patience in everyday life and meditation, how is it possible to develop greater levels

of concentration which you can apply, through being patient, to an everyday task or something that requires more concentration?

*Answer:* It is important to also have concentration. In fact, the third type of patience, the patience of definitely ascertaining the Dharma, helps you attain concentration. Without that type of patience, you will not achieve proper concentration. The third type of patience, the patience of definitely relying on the Dharma, is necessary to attain proper concentration so that one doesn't give up one's aims. In the context of concentration, one doesn't give up the focus of one's meditation.

During the beginning stages of meditation, one will experience physical problems, so it is important to have the second type of patience – the patience of bearing suffering. We need the second type of patience when we experience physical problems. To cope with such problems in the outset of our meditation, we need the second type of patience. To attain proper concentration, we need the third type of patience of definitely relying on the Dharma, of not giving up one's focus.

We need to experience situations in which we face difficulties so that we can practise Dharma. During the Nyung Nye fasting retreat, one experiences the sufferings of hunger and thirst; one has to experience those sufferings in order to practise the Dharma. If one didn't experience those sufferings, it wouldn't become Dharma practice. The sufferings experienced during the Nyung Nye fasting retreat will only be experienced by the person who is actually doing the retreat. Those who don't do the retreat won't experience those sufferings. In order to cope with those sufferings, one needs the second type of patience.

As was explained at the beginning, bring the mind back home, focusing it completely inwards then, within that space, place the mind single-pointedly on the sound of Shakyamuni Buddha's name mantra.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

*Transcribed from tape by Gaye Lewis-Radcliffe*

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*Edited Version*

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