
The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas

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We will meditate for a little while as usual. Sit in a comfortable, relaxed physical posture.

After assuming a good physical posture, you should think that the most important discipline is that of subduing one's mind. It is important to protect one's mind and establish beneficial and wholesome mental patterns; otherwise, there will always be an undercurrent of disturbance and unhappiness in one's life. Even when one experiences happiness, it will always seem to fade away and one will again feel that undercurrent of unhappiness. However, by establishing wholesome mental patterns, one will overcome that undercurrent of unhappiness.

If the mind is not subdued, then even if one experiences a happy external situation, one will always feel unhappy because the mind itself is unhappy. Happiness cannot be generated on the basis of an unsubdued mind, which makes one feel incomplete and empty, unable to trust others, and so forth. When one experiences such feelings, instead of remaining fixated on the external world and looking for a solution there, one should instead focus inwardly and overcome the actual causes [of unhappiness] within the mind and start subduing the mind. In such a way, one can establish happiness within the mind.

So, by focusing internally, training the mind and making it clearer, one can establish some internal happiness.

In difficult times, one must be able to rely on the power of the mind. We can see that the mind has the power to make one happy or unhappy. For example, when our external conditions are good, but inwardly we remain unhappy, that shows the power of the mind. In such situations, although we may momentarily feel happy through a change in external conditions, in the long term and at a deeper level, we can only really be happy through training the mind. Although there are various types of medicines one can take to help one feel happier, again, at a deeper level, this will only be possible if one starts to train the mind and subdue it.

This is where meditation becomes important – making use of the mind's potential to be happy through the tools of mental courage or strength and wisdom or discriminating awareness. By using these two tools [strength of mind and wisdom], one can make use of the power of the mind to be happy, independently of external conditions.

To make the mind happier, one has to generate the internal causes for such happiness. One cannot transform one's mind by having certain operations or by taking certain types of medicines. You cannot go to a hospital and have an operation to make you happier and cure you of your mental problems. If such an operation existed, we would know about it by now. Of course, we can go to hospital and have operations and treatments to make the physical body well again. However, mentally, nothing can really be changed through an operation.

Likewise, taking different medicines cannot really cure mental afflictions. After taking such medicines, it is difficult for the mind to be as clear and sharp as it was before. Actually, once a mental sickness has developed, it is very difficult to cure it. The solution is that, from the very start, one should try to take good care of one's mind, so that it doesn't develop any mental disturbance or unhappiness in the first place. That's the main thing.

Now, we will practise a few minutes of meditation, withdrawing the mind from external objects and turning it inwards – focusing it completely within, so that it does not experience the disturbances that come when it is distracted towards the outside. After remaining for some time in that focused state, we then place the mind single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. We meditate on the coming and going of the breath in this way for a few minutes. This type of meditation – completely focusing the mind inwards – has the power to bring us some peace and happiness. We can practise the meditation for a few minutes. *[Pause for meditation]*

Last time [in discussing the source text, *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*], we completed the three types of laziness that prevent enthusiasm. There are three types of enthusiasm that counteract those three types of laziness. The first is armour-like enthusiasm; the second is enthusiasm for accumulating Dharma and virtues; the third is enthusiasm for accomplishing the welfare of sentient beings.

The first type of enthusiasm is called armour-like enthusiasm. Historically, before soldiers and warriors went to war, they would put on armour to reduce the chance of being wounded by their enemy's weapons. They would put on a helmet, breastplate, protective armour for the arms, and so forth. After having done this, they would be eager to go into battle, thinking: "I'm going to fight, and I'm not going to worry about whether I'll be stabbed or cut or whatever". They built up a strong eagerness and strength of mind to go into battle. However, before going into battle, they took this preventive measure of putting on armour.

Likewise, one should put on the armour of enthusiasm in order not to be harmed by the three types of laziness. At the outset, one should be eager to practise the Dharma, being protected by the armour of enthusiasm and generating intense joy about practising Dharma. One should engage in Dharma practice with great courage and strength of mind, having the resilient attitude of thinking: "I will work for sentient beings, regardless of the difficulties I encounter along the way. Even if I have to remain in the hell realms for many aeons in order to benefit sentient beings, I am willing to take that upon myself". One must have this great strength of mind and courage to complete the path and practise the Dharma.

So, before the actual practice, one generates strong armour-like enthusiasm. Then, when one actually engages in the practice of Dharma, one practises the other two kinds of enthusiasm – enthusiasm for accumulating merits, and enthusiasm for accomplishing the welfare of sentient beings. All Dharma practices are contained within these two practices.

If, at the outset one generates strong enthusiasm, eagerness and joy for one's Dharma practice, and if one then does the

actual practice very effectively, one's practice will be very powerful.

There are many different practices associated with the second type of enthusiasm, the enthusiasm of accumulating Dharma and virtues. For example, all the practices of accumulating merit and purification belong to that category, so one should be eager to engage in these practices. Also, in practising the perfection of generosity – being generous to sentient beings – if one has strong enthusiasm [for this practice], one can strengthen that practice. [It's the same for] the practice of refraining from giving harm to others, the practice ethics and morality, and the practice of patience, which is the antidote to anger. Anger destroys the roots of one's virtues. [One should also have enthusiasm for] the practice of mental stabilisation – in fact, a practitioner with strong enthusiasm will not be blocked by the three types of laziness, so their meditation will develop very well. [The same goes for] joyfully engaging in the practice of wisdom.

So, engaging in all the above practices with enthusiasm would be the second type of enthusiasm, that of accumulating Dharma and virtues.

Engaging in the four ways of attracting and collecting disciples, and of subduing sentient beings with enthusiasm would be the third type of enthusiasm – the enthusiasm accomplishing the welfare of sentient beings. On the basis of enthusiasm, one engages in the four ways for subduing sentient beings: first, practising generosity; then speaking kindly and pleasantly to them; then teaching them the Dharma; and then inducing them to actually practise the Dharma, as well as practising the Dharma oneself. Enthusiasm in conjunction with these four activities would be enthusiasm accomplishing the welfare of sentient beings.

Through the practice of generosity, one can accomplish the welfare of sentient beings in various ways – for example, supporting and helping those who are destitute; giving medicines, treatment and care to those who are sick; giving company [to the lonely]; and cheering up those who are unhappy. There are a great variety of activities in which one can engage. We have already been through that in great detail.

These are practices everyone can do. We can recognise people who have problems such as sickness, or who need some type of generosity, or who are old and infirm. We can practise different types of generosity in these situations with joy, being enthusiastic and joyful about it. If we see someone who needs medicine, or who needs help, or who needs company, or some other type of help, we should joyfully be generous from our own side, providing whatever the other person needs. If a person is sad, we can take them out for coffee or tea, or offer them food or company to cheer them up. Recognising their need and joyfully attending to that need is the practice of enthusiasm. The point here is that, if the action is done joyfully, it becomes the practice of enthusiasm.

Accomplishing the welfare of other sentient beings is something everyone can do. We can all see the different needs of those around us, and we have the ability to help.

One has to co-exist harmoniously with others living around one. We have to help those who are close to us. Sometimes, we become focused on remote issues and talk about world peace and so forth, but world peace cannot occur if people cannot live together peacefully. It's very important that we

don't lose the peace within our own life – that, if we live with another person, we don't lose the peace of that relationship. If we did lose that peace, world peace could not occur.

It is important that one is helpful and considerate towards those who are close to one, that one does not lose the peace and happiness of living with another. If people are respectful to each other and help each other, they can live together harmoniously and won't lose their enthusiasm. Thus, they will have both peace and enthusiasm.

I always advise older people to be kind to the younger generation – to give compassionate advice and to be kind and considerate. Likewise, the younger generation should be respectful towards their elders and should listen to what they have to say and help them. It used to be like that in Tibet; relationships were very harmonious. Even if one cannot accomplish this to any great extent, but can do even a little bit, it will be very beneficial for one's life.

In a relationship between someone of an older generation and someone of a younger generation, the older person may treat the younger person a bit like a child, taking care of the younger person and looking after them. The younger person may look to the older partner as a parent, with respect and adoration. Quite often, these relationships seem to be quite harmonious, because this particular type of relationship between old and young can be very beneficial.

We find the same type of relationship within a family. Sometimes, the grandparents may find it difficult to relate to their children, but find it easy to relate to their grandchildren. Again, if there is an attitude of caring for the grandchildren from the side of the older generation, of looking after their needs, and if the grandchildren generate admiration and respect for the older person, they will both feel as if there's something to be gained. The young person will like having the older person around and will like getting advice and listening to what they have to say. In this type of situation, the older person will feel that he or she is useful. From their own side, they will take good care and try to look after the younger generation.

So, the younger generation will want to have that older person around, and that older person will feel needed, liked and useful. This will make them feel happy to be alive; they will want to live for a long time, because they feel useful, and feel that their life has a purpose. They feel happy to be there. In this way, they can impart their positive qualities to their children or grandchildren. It is very important that their good qualities are passed on through the family in this way. Otherwise, if there's not a good relationship between grandparents and their children or grandchildren, the older person will quite often feel alone and unwanted. Maybe they won't even want to live any longer, and so forth. However, if it is the other way around, it will be beneficial. Not only will one's own life benefit, but within the wider family, the life of many people will take a happy turn. Their lives will be happier, and that can be passed on down through the generations.

Lama Tsongkhapa said that if one wears the armour of enthusiasm, one will not be stopped by the obstacle of laziness, and one's qualities of realisation and scriptural understanding will increase many-fold.

Bodhisattvas practise enthusiasm because it increases their qualities of realisation and scriptural understanding like a

waxing moon. They don't waste any time, but take the essence of each moment of this precious life. In this way, one can accomplish one's aims exactly as one has planned. Understanding the benefits of enthusiasm, Bodhisattvas engage in the great path of enthusiastic effort that overcomes the different types of laziness.

Similarly, it is important to contemplate the point mentioned by Chandrakirti. He said that all qualities follow enthusiasm. One has to consider that, if one wants to have qualities, one needs to rely on enthusiasm.

If one wishes for qualities, but takes laziness as a friend, one won't be successful. If one desires to attain qualities, one has to take enthusiasm as one's friend, not laziness.

One should consider this well, whether or not one is a Dharma practitioner. One will not be able to accomplish one's aim without striving and effort, without mental courage and strength of mind. If one loses one's strength of mind, if one loses one's courage and just gives up, then one will not be successful. We stop here for tonight, and you can ask some questions.

[Question from student]

Answer: You have to remember the virtuous practices and activities of this life. You have to remember the virtuous practices and meditations you did during your lifetime, because the purpose of doing those practices during this lifetime is that they will help you at the time of death.

If one doesn't do any practices during one's lifetime, trying to focus the mind internally, to collect it, will be very difficult at the time of death. If one hasn't trained one's mind during in this life, at the time of death, it will be very scattered. It will grasp at all types of external objects, such as wealth, friends or one's own body. Therefore, one has to practise now, during one's lifetime, so that one can do those meditations at the time of death.

If one is able to do these meditations, one can have a comfortable death. We have to remember now that at the time of death, wealth, friends, acquaintances, family and even our body will have to be left behind and will be of no use. So, we recognise what is important, then train our mind accordingly.

It is said that our body is like a guesthouse, and that our consciousness is like a guest. The guest doesn't take anything away with him or her from the guesthouse. Once the guest has stayed the number of days he or she has paid for, the guest leaves. Similarly, once the timespan for the consciousness to remain within the body has finished, it leaves.

Question: You spoke about laziness and enthusiasm. I guess that brings in another concept, which is sleep. How much sleep would you suggest one needs?

Answer: Sleep is listed as one of the causes of laziness, even though there is such a thing as virtuous sleep.

As to the amount of sleep required, I would say maybe 5 or even 4 hours a day is enough. The sleep you get between 11pm and 2am at night is particularly healthy and useful. I think the sleep between 11 and 12 o'clock is very beneficial for the body. If one doesn't get enough sleep, it harms one's physical health; but if one sleeps too much, it makes the person look jaundiced – they turn yellow! People who sleep a lot at night and also during the day have a yellowish tone and look jaundiced.

A Dharma practitioner will adjust his or her sleep to be somewhere in the middle. From the point of view of health, I think it is said that young children need more sleep than older people. So, for young children, it can be very healthy to have more sleep. Actually for young children and old people – but I'm not sure whether it's actually healthier for older people, or whether it's because they have more time and nothing else to do! *[Laughter]*

[Another question]

Answer: If you start to become drowsy and sleepy, you have to refresh the mind. You can do this by splashing water on your face. Certain practitioners tie a small container to their forehead with water inside: it hangs there and refreshes the head area, preventing sleep from arising. Also sit up straight. If you don't hang something on your forehead, splash your face with water, or get up and walk around outside, or imagine bright light. If all of that doesn't help, you can stand up and meditate standing up. Some practitioners tie a rope around something and stand up holding onto it with one hand! *[Laughter]*

As explained at the beginning, bring the mind back home, focusing it totally towards the inside. Then, from within this state, 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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