
The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas

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Today is the first teaching of this year and we meet for the first time in the new year. We haven't seen each other for 6 weeks. During the holidays I went to India and while in India I accomplished all the things that I wanted to do and I greatly enjoyed my time. The teachings there also went very well. I believe that you also enjoyed your holidays and so I rejoice for you and I'm very happy that we meet again today.

At the beginning of a new year it's important that one takes care of oneself and looks after oneself. This doesn't mean that one doesn't look after others but it is also important that one looks after oneself. When one looks after oneself one looks after the three doors; the actions of body, speech and mind. That is what one concentrates on. The significance of the actions of one's body, speech and mind is that these actions are particular to oneself. They're not shared with someone else but are one's own uncommon features and, if the actions of one's own body, speech and mind are peaceful and wholesome then it automatically makes one's own life peaceful and wholesome. If the actions of one's body, speech and mind, the uncommon characteristic of one's own life, are peaceful and wholesome then one becomes peaceful and wholesome and one's life is clearer. Of the three - body speech and mind - the most important is the mind.

The great Master Saraha said that: "The mind is the seat for all beings. It is the source of samsara as well as of nirvana. Therefore I prostrate to my own mind." One's own mind is the source of one's own happiness and of one's own suffering. If one experiences the sufferings of samsara, they arise from the seat of the mind and if one experiences happiness, or the happiness of liberation, that also arises from the seat of the mind. Therefore the mind is the source of everything, of all happiness and that is why the Master Saraha, said 'I prostrate to my mind'. As the mind is the source of one's happiness and suffering, one will find that if the mind is peaceful and subdued and wholesome then the person is happy. The mental happiness that a person experiences comes about through positive and wholesome characteristics or features of the mind. When unwholesome characteristics or features of the mind arise a person becomes unhappy. This is something that one can clearly observe. The mind is the creator of everything and if the mind is wholesome or positive then the person becomes positive and wholesome and peaceful, and vice versa. If the mind is very negative and unwholesome and unhappy the person becomes like that. The actions of the person's body and speech follow the mental state that the person is in. If the mental state of the person is positive and wholesome then the actions of body and speech will

follow suit and will be positive and wholesome. This will benefit both oneself as well as others. But if one's mind is in a negative state, an unwholesome state, then the actions of body and speech become harmful and are negative. Then one harms both oneself as well as others.

One can confirm through how one feels what one's experiences during different states of the mind. If the mind is very positive and wholesome and virtuous how does the mind feel? It experiences happiness at that time. And how does the mind feel if it is negative and unwholesome and disturbed? Does one experience any happiness then, or is it more mental suffering that one experiences? One can confirm through one's own experience which mental states are conducive and which mental states are harmful, both to oneself as well as to others. One can think at such a time 'There I was in a positive state of mind, and it benefited both myself as well as well as benefiting those around me', while at other times one can remember when one was one in a more negative and harmful state of mind and how it actually caused suffering both to oneself as well as to others. In this way one can confirm through one's own experience how the mind is the source of one's happiness and suffering.

Through this process one recognises the importance of subduing one's mind. What one has to do is view the unwholesome and harmful states of the mind, the negative states of the mind, as the enemy - something that one doesn't want to become familiar with. One should familiarise oneself more and more with the positive states of the mind, the wholesome and virtuous states of the mind, and make them a more and more natural and integral part of one's mind. In this way a person will automatically abide more and more in happiness and go from unhappiness to happiness.

It is important that one applies the different methods for subduing the mind. The first one is, through one's own experience, confirming the importance of the need to subdue one's mind. Then one needs to apply the methods. One needs to learn how to recognise that there is a power within the mind for change and then one needs to learn to utilise that power. The mind has the power to create happiness as well as to create unhappiness and when harmful states of mind arise they have the power to cause unhappiness. This is something that one can confirm through one's own experience. Similarly one has to look within one's own mind to see whether there is also the power within the mind for the reverse, for positive states of the mind that bring about mental happiness. In order to effect a change of the mind, in order to be able to utilise the power of the mind, one needs to apply inner methods. Because the mind is an internal phenomenon one can't change it through external means. One needs to apply internal means.

For example, from a physical point of view it is possible to subdue a wild elephant to a certain degree but, because one hasn't subdued the mind of the wild

elephant, then from time to time the elephant can do great harm. Why? Because one might have conquered the physical form of the elephant but if the mind is still unsubdued and wild then when the elephant has the chance it will again cause great harm. Likewise, the mind can only be changed from the inside. First of all one has to recognise that there is a power within the mind for change. In the same way as the mind has the power to give unhappiness it has the power to give happiness. This is important to recognise otherwise one might start to feel quite hopeless. It happens quite often that people feel they are so frequently overcome by disturbed states of the mind that they don't know where to start to change the mind and they don't see any type of method. Then the feeling arises 'Oh, I can't change my mind, I'm worthless, I don't have any qualities' and so forth. Based on that feeling of worthlessness one doesn't change the mind. It is important to see that similarly to way negative states of mind or disturbed states of mind can create unhappiness, there's also the potential within the mind for mental happiness through positive and wholesome mental states. If one has arrived at that understanding then one is already on the road to change.

It is important that one doesn't lose one's positive and/or wholesome mental states and that one doesn't lose one's positive feeling. Mentally if one feels positive it colours the whole mind and one will feel mentally very positive and well and that will express itself through the actions of body and speech towards the outside, to others. In this way one experiences happiness and a clear mind and others are also happy. Others people will think 'Oh, that's really a very worthwhile state to have. That is really worthwhile, to be like that'. If there's a person who is positive, and gives other people a good feeling and is happy and kind then when one sees such a person one thinks 'Oh, if I could be like that person, regardless of whether I'm rich or regardless of whether I have no money, that would really be very worthwhile'. It is possible to become such a person because all that obstructs us are confused, disturbing thoughts. The mind quite often has conceptual thoughts fighting with each other and these disturbing the mind and the person becomes disturbed. What one has to do is to slowly, slowly pacify the disturbing thoughts and the disturbed conceptual mind. By doing that slowly and gradually the mind slowly, slowly becomes more pure and more clear. As Aryadeva said, if one has very muddy water, one can slowly, slowly separate the mud from the water or if the mud sets, the water becomes clean and clear. Similarly one can slowly, slowly change the mind and purify the mind from the disturbed mental processes and concepts, and slowly and gradually make the mind more clean and clear.

Since we have to liberate our mind from disturbing thoughts and clear those disturbing thoughts we can now meditate for a little while. Sit in a good, relaxed physical position and don't let your mind wander off to external objects but bring it back home, focusing it inwards, turning it 100% towards the inside. After having focused the mind completely internally first let it

rest in that empty state for a short while and then you place it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath and meditate on the coming and going of the breath for a few minutes. *Pause for meditation.*

Now, do you have a question?

It is important not to let the mind fall under the power of negative thinking. Sometimes people let their mind fall under the power of the negative thinking and let the mind focus on this. The mind then goes only round and round in a negative way. This just intensifies the ignorance of the mind as it obscures the positive side more and more by letting the mind continue to circle around in the negative way of thinking. One shouldn't give the mind any chance to fall into this negative way of churning negative thoughts round and around and in one's head. If this happens maybe it's better to get up and do some exercise or whatever to distract the mind and not to let it fall into that negative state. That's very important. Some people, when they can't fall asleep at night, rather than letting the mind circle around negative subjects get up and do something. Some people engage in midnight gardening and things like that *[laughter]*. There's a purpose behind it because if one just lies down, can't sleep, and the mind starts thinking and becoming more and more heavy and so forth, and uptight. It's better one gets up and do something that distracts the mind and prevents that from happening. It's important that one learns to keep the mind in a more relaxed state. And then, after having worked for some time in the garden, one is also tired and can sleep very well afterwards *[laughter]*. If one can't sleep there are various methods that one can employ in order to become tired.

As was just explained stop the mind wandering off to external objects and instead focus it internally, concentrating it totally to the inside, and then place it single-pointedly on the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha. We can recite the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha a few times. Place your mind on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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