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## *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*

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We will practise some meditation as usual. Sit in an appropriate and comfortable physical posture.

After having assumed a good physical posture, one has to effect change within one's mind. It is important to effect change within the disturbed, worried and anxious mind for various reasons. First, if one can reduce the conceptualising mind, then the mind will more readily abide internally. With the mind abiding calmly within, one can generate both physical and mental happiness.

Also, the conceptualising mind leads to needless worry. There are many people who tend to worry and often it is quite needless. Because everything they do is tainted by anxiety, they cannot enjoy anything. Even if they are having a nice meal, they cannot enjoy it because of too much worry. I think that these days there are many people who may worry a lot about what is happening on the planet. There is a type of personality that will always find something to worry about, and these days one can find many occasions for worry – about what will happen on the planet, and so forth. This conceptualising mind can increase one's mental unease, just by one thought leading to another thought, leading to the next thought – and one then worries all the time. But it is a pointless type of anxiety.

If one can change the way one thinks and change the conceptualising mind, it will greatly benefit one's peace of mind and inner happiness. Lama Tsong Khapa said that: "The greatest enemy of single-pointed concentration is the conceptualising mind". There is no greater enemy to single-pointed concentration than the wandering mind distracted towards external objects.

So from these points of view, it becomes very important to effect change in the way we think and to decrease the mind's tendency to worry.

We can now meditate for a few minutes, focusing the mind single-pointedly on the object of meditation, which is the coming and going of the breath. With great mental effort, try to focus and concentrate your mind on the object of meditation. When you have managed to place the mind on the object, try to keep it there for the short duration of the meditation. Doing this will help one overcome the conceptualising mind, and induce both mental and physical well-being. So, for a few minutes, meditate in this single-pointed manner. *(Pause for meditation.)*

Regarding the position of the eyes during meditation, one has to decide according to one's experience. Some people they say they can't visualise very well if their

eyes are closed. Generally, it is recommended to have the eyes open, neither looking straight ahead or upward, but [partly open] and looking slightly downward, although not too far downward. If the eyes look straight ahead or upward, this increases the mental factor of excitement. Because one sees objects of attachment, the mind will wander off towards those objects, generating mental excitement. If the eyes look too far down or are closed, this has the effect of creating mental 'darkness'. If one continually meditates on this mental darkness, this can lead to mental sinking, the other main obstacle for the attainment of concentration.

Proper concentration is free from the two faults of mental excitement and mental sinking. This is why it is recommended to have the eyes open, neither looking straight ahead or up but to look down a bit. But it is also according to one's own experience. The main thing is to achieve concentration that is free from mental excitement or mental sinking

[Verse 29 of the text *The Thirty-seven Practices of Bodhisattvas* (Snow Lion Publications, New York 1997) reads:

*Understanding that disturbing emotions are destroyed*

*By special insight with calm abiding,*

*Cultivate concentration which surpasses*

*The four formless absorptions –*

*This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.*

Previously, we reached this verse in the root text about the Fifth Perfection – mental stabilisation.]

Mental stabilisation has a three-fold division:

1. Mental stabilisation abiding in bliss – this refers to the mental and physical bliss that occurs when one enters that mental stabilisation.
2. Mental stabilisation that induces qualities – this refers to the type of mental stabilisation through which one then generates various qualities, such as the different types of psychic and clairvoyant powers, the absorptions on cessation, and so forth.
3. Mental stabilisation that accomplishes the welfare of others – this refers to the mental stabilisation in dependence upon which one accomplishes the welfare of others without doing any non-virtuous or harmful actions. This mental stabilisation acts as a basis on which one can help sentient beings – one can perform actions for the welfare of sentient beings experiencing different types of suffering, or sentient beings that are sick, and so forth, on the basis of this mental stabilisation.

It is said that the Buddha effortlessly accomplishes the welfare of others. Although no-one can do this to the same extent and in the same manner as the Buddha – spontaneously and effortlessly – still, by basing one's activities for the welfare of others on mental stabilisation, one is training to be a future Buddha. One

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needs to have a calm and peaceful mind in order to help another person whose mind is agitated and disturbed, and to help them overcome their agitated, disturbed mind and become kind and peaceful. The refuge for a person who is agitated and disturbed should be a person who is calm and peaceful – whether or not this person has a fully qualified mental stabilisation, their mind should [at least] be calm.

Although we don't have too much time [to study it in these sessions], Lama Tsong Khapa wrote extensively on the practice of calm abiding, after investigating it thoroughly. [This is just a very brief overview of] calm abiding.

Next, we will go on to [the Sixth Perfection], the perfection of wisdom. In general, for the generation of wisdom, calm abiding is not a prerequisite. However, for the generation of what is called 'superior insight', calm abiding is a prerequisite. The measure of whether one has attained superior insight or not is whether, through one's own analysis, one has been able to induce the bliss of mental and physical pliancy. This bliss can only be induced on the basis of having obtained calm abiding.

Therefore, calm abiding is a prerequisite for superior insight, but is not a prerequisite for the generation of wisdom. Whether it is the wisdom realising emptiness or the wisdom realising impermanence, one doesn't need the prerequisite of calm abiding to generate these types of insight. Calm abiding, however, is needed as prerequisite for superior insight.

Superior insight comes about through analytical, investigative meditation while one is in [the state of] calm abiding. If one is able to induce the bliss of mental and physical pliancy through analysis while in [the state of] calm abiding, this marks the generation of superior insight. That's why it is called 'superior insight'.

Superior insight doesn't mean that this type of mind sees something that calm abiding hasn't seen before. Sometimes, people say it is called superior insight because it is superior to calm abiding – because it sees something that one hasn't seen with calm abiding. This is not correct. It is called superior insight because it generates a superior type of bliss arising from mental and physical pliancy – it is superior to the bliss of mental and physical pliancy that arises through mere calm abiding.

Whether it is a Hinayana practitioner or Mahayana practitioner, in order to attain their individual aims, they need to practise the union of calm abiding and wisdom. Neither practitioner will achieve their aim by relying on just one of these two.

To explain why both practitioners need the union of calm abiding and wisdom, we can use the metaphor mentioned in the Lam Rim of looking at a picture at the wall with a candle flame. One will only be able to view the picture clearly if, firstly, there is a candle flame. And then, the flame should be still and undisturbed by draughts.

So, if the light of the candle is not there, one won't see anything. Then, the candle flame needs to be undisturbed by draughts. Likewise, one firstly needs to have the clarity of wisdom or insight, combined with the mind of calm abiding so that the mind is very focused, clear and calm. With this unification of calm abiding and insight, one will clearly see suchness.

If one's mind had only the mere realisation of calm abiding without the realisation of insight, it would lack clarity, which is the candle flame [in the above metaphor]. Likewise, if one's mind had only an *understanding* of suchness, of wisdom devoid of calm abiding, it would not have the stability required to *see* suchness directly and clearly. Therefore, if one had only the wisdom realising suchness alone, there would be a fault. Both calm abiding and insight by themselves are not enough – one needs to have the union of calm abiding and insight in order to be able to see suchness clearly.

So, if one has only wisdom but not calm abiding, the mind will be eventually be disturbed by subtle psychic energies that cause conceptual thoughts to arise, preventing one from being able to see suchness clearly.

Therefore, both calm abiding and special insight are needed. One needs to meditate on the union of calm abiding and special insight. Kamalashila mentioned in his 'Stages of Meditation' that if there were such a state as superior insight without calm abiding, it would eventually be disturbed by the conceptualising mind, and one wouldn't maintain a clear meditation.

It is similar to trying to view a picture on a wall with a candle flame disturbed by wind. Without calm abiding, the wisdom one generates won't be stable and clear. Like the candle flame disturbed by wind, the clarity of one's wisdom will be disturbed by the wind of the conceptualising mind.

One shouldn't think that this only applies only to great meditators who have high realisations. One should also relate it into one's own situation. As a human being, one is endowed with discriminating awareness, but one is not able to make use of that discriminating awareness on a day to day level if one does not combine it with a calm and stable mind. If one wants to make proper use of one's wisdom and understanding, it needs to be combined with a calm and stable mind. If you can take this to heart and apply it to yourself, then that is very good. [Good mental] qualities don't arise automatically. Rather, one has to train one's mind, and through training the mind, one develops the qualities.

When one meditates, one also needs to apply the combination of calm abiding and wisdom. First, one practises investigative meditation; then, one remains focused on that what one has understood for a little while; eventually, one goes back to analysing. In such a way, one can develop qualities.

For example, first one can reflect on the disadvantages of having a distracted and disturbed mind and the benefits of having a calm and peaceful mind, trying to see the

disadvantages of the disturbing conceptual mind. In such a way, one generates the motivation of definitely not wanting to fall under the control of the disturbing, conceptual mind. Through this process, one can gradually develop qualities, up to the state of enlightenment.

It is said that the potential of the mind is limitless. If one trains one's mind, the qualities can extend to a limitless capacity. The physical body, however, is quite different – it has quite definite limits. For example, when one practises a sport such as high-jump, there is only a limited height to which one can actually jump: there are certain number of feet beyond which another foot cannot be added. So, the limits of the human body are quite finite, but the potential of the mind is limitless, infinite. One arrives at realising the mind's limitless potential by training it slowly.

I have made it look very easy! Maybe you have some questions for tonight?

*Student:* Geshe-la, is it possible for people living a western life to meditate at a higher level and develop special insight in this lifetime? And another question – are there many people on the planet who have developed special insight?

*Answer:* There are two types of practitioners. First, there are those who already have strong imprints from past lives regarding the meditation on calm abiding and superior insight. In this life, they will immediately recognise the benefit, and they won't see much benefit in rushing around doing things! Because they have these strong imprints, meditation will come naturally to them. Then, there is the other type of person who has to newly establish meditation practice in this life.

The attainment of calm abiding would be difficult if one lived a busy western lifestyle. In fact, we talk about the [correct] preparation for calm abiding – there are various prerequisites that one needs in order to properly qualify for the meditation on calm abiding. Such prerequisites include having little desire and practising pure morality. Then there is also the place where one practises and obtains calm abiding. It should be a conducive place having the five characteristics [i.e. excellent provisions available, a consecrated place, free from evil, a healthy and clean location, and the company of like-minded friends].

So, the attainment of calm abiding doesn't come about easily. On the other hand, one can see that one can change one's mind. For example, people who once had a lot of desire may decrease their desire. People who are rich and famous may have a change of mind and renounce their wealth, saying: 'Now the only thing I want to do is spend my life in meditation'. These things do happen. On the contrary, as has happened in Tibet, the minds of people who used to meditate can become discontented; desire arises and disturbs their meditation, so they give up meditating.

These days, there are many people who have taken ordination, [taking the vow] to spend their life without a

male or female partner. People have found this ability in the mind to choose to remain without a male or female partner for the rest of one's life. At first, they were not able to make such a choice, but then some change happened in their life and they were able to do it.

In the same way, everyone has the ability to attain calm abiding – it just might take longer for some than for others. It also depends on how one's ability is facilitated by conducive conditions. Just as the seed by itself is not enough, the seed also needs to have certain conducive conditions for its ripening. But, definitely, everyone has their own Buddha potential, so everyone definitely has the potential for calm abiding.

As to your second question – there are probably many people who have superior insight. There are many beings on the planet that have superior insight, but it would be difficult for one to know who has and who hasn't, because the other person's realisations of the mind are internal. One cannot comprehend the depth of another person's mind and the depth of their realisations. The shape of their physical body is obvious, but the internal state of their mind is something one can't comprehend.

I had a friend whose boyfriend claimed to be a reincarnated lama or tulkul. Sometimes I thought that maybe it was possible – he seemed to have quite a nice mind and a pure way of living. But at other times I thought, 'No way!'.

So, one has to be careful about people claiming to have realisations, even though they haven't got any realisations. When they first claim to have realisations, everyone starts to flock around them, but later when it becomes obvious that they haven't, it creates lots of disturbance and problems.

His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, has never said that he has a realisation. His Holiness always makes a point of saying that he doesn't have any type of realisation – he just says that he has strong faith in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha... "I have strong faith in love and compassion and bodhicitta and I practise as hard and as well as I can and that is it, but I definitely don't have any realisations. I'm just an ordinary hard-practising person". So, one can say that if His Holiness doesn't have any realisations, there is really no one who can claim they have realisations!

As was said before, focus your mind internally single-pointedly, then place it on the sound of the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha – not letting it wander off to external objects.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

*Transcribed from tape by Gaye Lewis-Radcliffe*

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*Edited Version*

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