
The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas

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5 March 2003

We will practise a bit of meditation as usual. It is important to sit in a good, comfortable meditation posture. Even if you are only meditating for a short time, it is important to sit in a correct, comfortable physical posture. If you are not physically relaxed or experience physical pain, it will be difficult for you to be mentally relaxed and comfortable. Therefore, even if you are only meditating for a short time, it is important to assume the correct physical meditation posture.

The purpose of meditation is to make the mind more serviceable and to gain control over it. The obstacles that prevent us from gaining control of the mind and from making the mind serviceable are the mental delusions that disturb the mind and make it go after external objects. So, to prevent the mind from falling under the control of the delusions, we must instead focus it completely within.

Having concentrated the mind fully within, we then need to place it on a meditation object. As we've already said repeatedly, this can be any type of object with which one feels comfortable. Here, we have chosen the coming and going of the breath as the meditation object, because it is an easy object that is not difficult to comprehend – one can easily place one's mind on the coming and going of the breath.

By placing the mind single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath, one can attain pliancy of the psychic energies or subtle winds within the body. The subtle energies or winds within the body become serviceable through meditation. In conjunction with this, the mind also becomes serviceable. This has relevance later in your practice, if you want to practise the completion stage of Tantra, which you will not be able to do if you have not attained pliancy of the winds and channels and so forth.

So, we place the mind on the meditation object in a relaxed and clear manner. Then, we keep the mind there – in a relaxed, focused and clear manner – for some time. It doesn't have to be a long time. Even if it is just for a few minutes, one should try to do this meditation well. We will meditate like this for a few minutes. (*Pause for meditation.*)

Last time we talked about the union of calm-abiding and special insight, why one needs to combine the practice of calm abiding with the practice of wisdom.

If one is able to induce the bliss of pliancy through the force of analysis of the object of meditation while abiding in the state of calm abiding, this marks the attainment of special insight. So, special insight is

attained on the basis of calm abiding. Wisdom is the mind that can analyse the object, and can recognise the characteristics of the object. Discriminating awareness is wisdom. Calm abiding is the mind that has calmed down the confusions of the disturbed mind.

If one can base one's practice of wisdom on the practice of calm abiding to attain special insight, one can use that special insight to faultlessly understand selflessness. Then one can use that faultless understanding of selflessness to cut the root of cyclic existence, self-grasping.

But that is not the only benefit. One can use the union of calm abiding and special insight for any type of Lam Rim meditation. Any type of Lam Rim meditation that one does on the basis of calm abiding will become much more effective. The different Lam Rim meditations – such as death and impermanence, the law of cause and effect, the Three Jewels, the general and particular sufferings of cyclic existence, the law of compassion, bodhicitta and so forth – are all analytical meditations. All these Lam Rim meditations are analytical meditations, meaning that they are done with discriminating awareness or wisdom. So, if one can combine an analytical meditation with calm abiding, it becomes much more effective. If one attains the union of calm abiding and special insight, then uses that to meditate on these different Lam Rim topics, one's practice will become much more effective.

If we are able to remain fully focused during our meditation on a virtuous object, the beneficial effect of the meditation will be much stronger than if we had a weak and distracted mind.

Now we are onto the sixth perfection – how to train in wisdom (verse 30 of the text, *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*, Snow Lion Publications, New York 1997);

*Since the five perfections without wisdom
Cannot bring perfect enlightenment,
Along with skilful means cultivate the wisdom
Which does not conceive the three spheres [as real] –
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.*

We can use the metaphor of a blind person for the first five perfections – they are like blind people who cannot go anywhere without guidance. The sixth perfection of wisdom is like a person with vision who can lead those five blind people, the other five perfections, towards the goal of enlightenment.

Without wisdom, one cannot attain perfect enlightenment. Therefore, along with skilful means, one should cultivate the wisdom that does not grasp at the three spheres. What are the three spheres? In the context of meditation, the three spheres are the object of meditation, the person who is meditating, and the act of meditating. One shouldn't conceive of these three spheres as being inherently existing. Rather, [using wisdom] one should focus on the lack of the inherent existence of the object of meditation, the meditator, and the way in which one meditates.

Likewise, these three spheres can be applied to the first five perfections. For example, in the context of generosity, this would be the object being offered, the person making the offering, and the way the object is offered. All three lack inherent existence, so when one practises generosity, one should from one's own side focus with wisdom on the lack of inherent existence of these three spheres.

The meaning of this verse is that one will not be able to attain enlightenment if one doesn't have the skilful means of the wisdom realising emptiness. Without realising that the three realms lack inherent existence, one won't be able to attain enlightenment. Therefore, it is the practice of Bodhisattvas to train in the wisdom that realises the emptiness of the three spheres.

The application of wisdom is very important. If one doesn't combine one's practice with wisdom, one won't be successful in one's practice. Often practitioners will put a lot of effort into their practice, but they don't apply wisdom, so despite their efforts, they don't achieve any result. If one puts lots of effort into one's practice but one doesn't achieve a result, this is a sign that one hasn't combined one's practice with wisdom. So, one should combine effort in one's practice with wisdom.

Wisdom can be applied to any action. If you are continuously writing or reading without giving any thought to what you are reading, even if you read a lot you won't learn anything from that reading, and your wisdom won't develop. But if you read attentively, comparing the earlier parts of the book or document with the later parts, looking at the grammar, the way of expression, the subject and so forth, you will learn a lot from your reading. Also, when you are writing or composing something, if you really think about what you are writing, comparing the earlier parts with the later parts, using correct grammar, looking for faults in grammar, spelling and so forth, you can improve your discriminating awareness and wisdom.

In the context of one's meditation, the two main tools are mindfulness and introspection. Mindfulness is the mental factor that places the mind single-pointedly on the object. When one sits in the correct meditation posture, the mind abides calmly on the object. Immediately, however, one has to check up on what the three doors of body, speech and mind are doing. One has to repeatedly check up using introspection, which by nature is wisdom or discriminating awareness. One has check up during one's meditation: What is happening at this moment? Are the three doors of body, speech and mind still virtuous or have they become non-virtuous? If they have become non-virtuous, we have to bring them back to a virtuous state. This is the function of wisdom – being able to recognise whether the body, speech and mind have become non-virtuous or not, and if they have, to change them back to a virtuous state.

I forgot to mention that another aspect of the practice of wisdom is that, before we embark on any course of action, we should analyse it well. What are the benefits? What are the disadvantages? What kind of difficulties

will I encounter? What kind of problems could come up? If we engage in this type of analysis before setting out on a course of action then, whenever a problem comes up while we are working towards our goal, we won't be easily discouraged, because we are mentally prepared and not surprised that these problems have arisen. Also, because we have recognised by applying wisdom that achieving our goal will bring more benefits than disadvantages, we will not give up easily. If we just go ahead and do something without that initial understanding, when problems come up, we will be more easily discouraged and will 'throw in the towel'!

Another activity of wisdom or introspection is analysing which mental states bring happiness and which mental states bring suffering.

We can recognise, for example, that when we meet with certain types of outer objects, they create suffering, unease and unhappiness. Just by being separated from those objects, the mind is relaxed and well. We can therefore analyse these objects. How does it come about that these objects cause internal suffering? What mental states induce suffering? If the mind can be calm and peaceful during meditation, how does this come about? After we have meditated and encounter different types of situations and mental states that our mental peace, we can investigate what types of mental states destroy our mental happiness and peace.

In such a way, we can develop insight and discriminating awareness of what is beneficial for us and what is not – which mental states should be cultivated in order for us to be happy, and which mental states we need to reduce in order to have less suffering. This type of insight is also the result of wisdom, of using introspection.

Another benefit of wisdom is that it will prevent the practitioner from being attached to the different sense objects, to material objects. For a Bodhisattva who takes rebirth as king or ruler of the world, that Bodhisattva's mind won't be distracted by his or her immense wealth, power, fame and so forth. Why? Because he or she employs the 'Minister of Wisdom' – the Bodhisattva relies in his or her own mind as their Minister of Wisdom.

In our situation, the mind becomes easily attracted by sensual or material objects, such as fame. Our mind is easily attracted to those objects. But for a Bodhisattva, that doesn't happen. Why? Because the Bodhisattva relies on wisdom. Even if the Bodhisattva is a king who possesses great wealth and possessions, his mind will still abide internally. It won't be distracted and attracted towards external objects, because he relies upon the Minister of Wisdom. Therefore, we should ask ourselves why our mind is always attracted towards external objects. Then we must find ways to prevent the mind from wandering off to external objects.

Similarly, through their wisdom, Bodhisattvas only generate true love when they see a person who is pleasing to them. When ordinary people see someone who is pleasing to them, they generate strong

attachment. This is due to their lack of wisdom. With the help of wisdom, however, Bodhisattvas don't generate attachment. Even if the object has a very pleasing appearance to the mind, they only generate very strong love and compassion. In an ordinary person's mind, there is always confusion between love and attachment, which comes about through a lack of wisdom. So, with the help of wisdom, the practice of immeasurable love becomes very effective.

We must combine our practice of compassion with the practice of wisdom. The mind of compassion occurs when we realise the sufferings of sentient beings, and generate the mind that is not able to bear it when other people experience suffering. Quite often, what happens for ordinary people is that they also start to suffer themselves. By experiencing the suffering of another person, they themselves start to suffer. Then they have this idea that, "The more I meditate on compassion, the more I will start to suffer myself", and they won't be inspired to practise compassion.

However, for Bodhisattvas this doesn't happen. While Bodhisattvas have immeasurable compassion and cannot bear it if other people experience suffering, they don't let that affect them to the point that they themselves start to suffer. Through the practice of wisdom, one can prevent that from happening. If we start to feel suffering upon seeing the suffering of other people, we should be more inspired to practise compassion, because we will see the benefits of compassion and will start to experience those benefits. By experiencing the beneficial effect of compassion, one will be more inspired and enthusiastic about practising compassion; enthusiasm automatically generates a happy mind, so then one will also have inner happiness. This comes about by employing wisdom when practising compassion.

Likewise, when one practises immeasurable joy, one can prevent the mind from becoming disturbed through the experience of joy by using wisdom. If one doesn't employ wisdom, the experience of joy may agitate the mind, causing it to become disturbed. To prevent this, one has to employ wisdom. One also has to combine one's practice of immeasurable equanimity with wisdom. Even though one may abide within a state of immeasurable equanimity, one's mind should not become distracted from the welfare of others. This also comes about through wisdom.

Also, wisdom ensures that one's meditation on the four immeasurables is equal – meaning that the four immeasurables become equally powerful and effective, rather than the situation where one can only meditate, for example, on immeasurable love, but is not able to meditate on immeasurable compassion. Being able to meditate on all four equally and effectively comes about through wisdom.

Maybe you have some questions?

Question from student: Is wisdom discriminating awareness?

Answer: Wisdom is a discriminating awareness – an analysing, investigating, discriminating type of mind.

Question (inaudible – about attachment to negative emotions).

Answer: There are some negative emotions that one becomes attached to, and some that one doesn't become attached to. For example, there are people who are attached to attachment, and people who are attached to pride, but normally you are not attached to anger. Normally, people don't like anger!

In the context of attachment, when one has the feeling that attachment is a good thing, one has this idea "Attachment brings me happiness" or "Attachment is beneficial for me". Then comes this attachment to attachment. On the other hand, if you don't have any attachment in your mind, suffering will not arise.

For example, if one loses one's watch and is not attached to it, then the loss will not create any suffering within the mind. But if one is very attached to the watch one has lost, this will create lots of mental suffering.

As said at the beginning, bring the mind back home, focus it inwards, and then place the mind single-pointedly on the sound of the mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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