
The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas

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We can first meditate for a little while. Sit in a good physical posture. When sitting in a good physical posture one then needs to mentally prepare oneself to meditate. One needs to generate a very strong mindfulness that “Now I am going to do such and such a meditation”. In order to meditate one needs to have an object on which one meditates. Having placed oneself in a good physical posture if one doesn’t have mindfulness of what one is going to meditate on then one will sit there and not know what to do. If one is not aware of any objects upon which one can meditate then, apart from the mind remaining relaxed and focused internally, one won’t accomplish any more than that.

When one looks at one’s mind one has to check whether the mind is in a virtuous state or whether one has fallen into a non-virtuous state. If one has (fallen into a non-virtuous state) it is good to contemplate how the non-virtuous states of the mind are like one’s greatest enemies which have given one all the different types of sufferings and problems that one is experiencing. The different types of wrong view and misconceptions are really the enemy that give one all the suffering that one is experiencing. If sometimes one views the negative mind in such a way it can be beneficial. From time to time you can contemplate in such a way thinking that I have to lessen and eliminate the non-virtuous and harmful negative states of the mind because they’re really that factor which gives one the greatest harm and loss. At the time of one’s death there are no external things that one can take with one to the next life. Even though one has a good life and lives in good circumstances and one has a good physical form that doesn’t mean anything at the time of death. By remembering and reflecting on that one has to then generate the determination to eradicate and eliminate and lessen the power of the non-virtuous and negative mental states thinking they’re the ones which really give me the greatest loss and they are the ones which bring about my downfall.

Free the mind from the control of disturbing thoughts that distract the mind towards external objects and rather than letting the mind wander off to the external objects bring it back home focusing it totally towards the inside. Having done that place the mind single-pointedly on the breath, on the coming and going of the breath. It shouldn’t be a subject/object mind looking at the breath but as if the mind is actually entering the breath. Place the mind very clearly within the breathing and then try to keep that focus. We can meditate like that for a few minutes. *(Pause for meditation)*

We were talking about the practice of the perfection of wisdom last time and we went through the different benefits of generating wisdom. In order to induce oneself to practise wisdom, to engage in the practice of wisdom, one needs to be aware of the benefits of having wisdom and the disadvantages of not having any wisdom. In this way we automatically become induced, inspired, to generate wisdom, to practise wisdom. This applies to any type of activity. If one knows the benefits of that action and the disadvantages of not doing it then automatically one will be induced to engage in that action. We went through various benefits of wisdom and now we come to the disadvantages of not having wisdom.

In order to illustrate the disadvantages of not having wisdom the metaphor of a person working for the government is used. If someone who works for the government has lots of wisdom and they apply that wisdom to their work then, inevitably, they will progress. They will go further and further and be promoted and go higher. On the other hand, even if someone starts very high up if they don’t have any wisdom then the only way they will go is down. Their work, and whatever they do, won’t turn out well and will degenerate and they will drop down. Likewise, without wisdom one won’t be able to dispel the inner darkness of ignorance. In order to dispel the inner darkness of ignorance one needs to develop wisdom – otherwise one won’t be able to do so. Similarly, in the external world where light is shining it immediately dispels darkness. Likewise one has to dispel the inner darkness of ignorance with the light of wisdom. The sun completely dispels any type of outer darkness but if one doesn’t dispel the inner darkness with the light of wisdom then, even though the outer darkness might be dispelled and the weather might be very bright, one is obscured and the mind is dull because of one’s own ignorance. The inner ignorance has to be dispelled by wisdom, by the light of wisdom. As long as one doesn’t do that the inner darkness will remain.

One has to check for the cause of one’s inner dullness and ignorance. The more inner dullness and ignorance increases the more attachment and anger increase and the more the mind becomes disturbed. One has to go back to the root at the inner source of ignorance and dullness and ask; ‘Why is it there and why is it increasing?’ For dharma practitioners, if ignorance is not becoming less but staying the same or becoming more the reason is that person isn’t applying the antidotes. Even though they know the Dharma they don’t apply it to their mind. It is as if they know the antidote but have placed it somewhere over there. One has to apply it to one’s own mind and through that one can overcome the ignorance. If that doesn’t happen it’s the fault of not practising and is not because the Dharma doesn’t have any power.

So what are the conditions that increase one’s ignorance? One of the conditions is misleading friends. By relying

on misleading friends one increases one's ignorance and the other delusions such as attachment and so forth. Increasing delusions such as attachment in turn increases ignorance. It is as if they feed each other. Ignorance from its side increases attachment and attachment from its side increases ignorance. If one relies on misleading friends, then that relationship increases one's attachment and then it increases one's ignorance. Misleading friends can have many different types of harmful influence on one. It happens again and again. For example, someone might think that it is not a good thing to kill another person but then, because of misleading friends, they think, 'Oh, it doesn't matter all that much' and so forth. Then after some time they start to think, 'Oh, maybe it's alright to kill another person.' The influence of harmful and bad friends is one factor for increasing ignorance. As a master said, 'If one walks through dirt and mud, it will cling to oneself.' If one associates with harmful and misleading company then that will also cling to oneself, meaning it will influence one's actions. It also works the other way round. If one associates with good company then automatically one's actions become more positive and less harmful. It is a very subtle influence on one that comes from the company that one keeps.

The influence of the company that one keeps is very strong on one's own actions and behaviour. Therefore one should always keep very good company. There is no benefit to be gained by associating with bad company. For example, if someone who studies very well and is going to school or university falls in with a bad circle of friends then slowly, slowly they give up their studies and their life degenerates more and more. That type of influence one can see very clearly. There is nothing to be gained by associating with misleading friends and bad company. Similarly a Dharma practitioner should definitely not associate with bad company. The Buddha said that the Dharma is the antidote against attachment and against anger and ignorance. If one associates with company that increases one's attachment and anger then one's Dharma practice definitely cannot progress. It will actually degenerate and regress. That is definite and inevitable. One should definitely not associate with bad company if one wishes one's dharma practice to increase. Not associating with bad company doesn't mean that one doesn't have love and compassion for those people – only that one shouldn't associate with their behaviour; adjusting one's own behaviour to fit in with their bad behaviour. As long as one doesn't do that then one is fine. In Buddhism one should have love and compassion for all sentient beings. Not associating with bad friends doesn't contradict that statement – one still has love and compassion. One doesn't associate with their bad behaviour, meaning one doesn't conform with their bad behaviour and doesn't adopt it. If one doesn't do that then one is fine.

If one wants to practise the Dharma then one has to lessen one's anger and attachment. If one says one practises the Dharma but one doesn't lessen one's anger and attachment and keeps the objects of one's anger and

attachment within one's mind all the time then one's Dharma practice will be a mere illusion. It will be a mere reflection of Dharma practice but not actual Dharma practice. Another condition that increases ignorance and generates ignorance is laziness. This applies to both Dharma as well as normal worldly living. The greater the laziness the greater the ignorance of the person. This ignorance arises firstly because one will not generate any new types of knowledge or insight and secondly because past insights and knowledge that has been acquired will be forgotten through laziness. This is something that one can observe directly for oneself. It maybe in the Dharma or it maybe in other areas. If one is lazy then the qualities and knowledge that one generated in the past decreases and get forgotten and one doesn't generate any new types of insight. Therefore, if one wishes to decrease one's ignorance, one needs to decrease one's laziness. If one wants to increase one's ignorance then one can increase one's laziness! Sometimes making lazy people aware of that fact that laziness increases ignorance can have a beneficial effect on the mind.

Another condition that increases ignorance is actually wanting to tread the path of ignorance or not wanting to know. There is a certain type of person who doesn't want to know what Dharma practice is about. This is another condition that increases ignorance – not wanting to know. This applies to any type of area. If one doesn't want to know about a certain activity how will one not start engaging in it. From the Dharma point of view not wanting to know about Dharma practice is a cause for increasing ignorance. Another condition that increases ignorance is too much sleep. Of course one needs a certain amount of sleep every day but too much sleep is a condition that increases ignorance. If one sleeps too much then it a person becomes like they are jaundiced. People who always sleep a lot have a sort of yellowish tinge to their appearance. If one sleeps too much then it definitely induces a certain type of harm and then that induces a type of jaundice-like fault. Another fault that increases ignorance is eating too much food. If one has too much food then the body becomes heavy, the mind becomes tired and one doesn't generate the interest to study or practise and so forth. A further condition is not being inclined to investigation. If one doesn't like to investigate then that also becomes a condition that increases ignorance. There is a certain type of person that doesn't like to investigate or analyse and that is also a cause for ignorance. There is also having the fault of having being small-minded and always saying, 'Oh, I just need to understand a little bit and if I understand a little bit that is sufficient' That type of attitude closes the door to generating very vast and expansive understanding. It closes the door to greater things. If one is very small-minded then the activities that one engages in will be very small in scope. If one's aims are very vast and expansive then the activities that one engages in will have a very great scope and that will increase one's wisdom. If one always treads a very small path then one's wisdom will always remain very tiny.

Another factor that increases ignorance is delusional pride. This is the type of pride where, even though one doesn't know anything, one thinks one knows everything. That kind of pride also closes the door to wisdom. Another factor is having strong wrong views. Yet another factor that increases ignorance is insufficient self-esteem. If one is always thinking; 'I'm not able to do this, this will be too much for me' and so forth then, on the basis of that, one never engages in activities that further one's wisdom or that can further one's development.

All these conditions increase one's ignorance but the fault of not having wisdom is that one won't be able to eliminate one's ignorance. Actually there are various faults associated with not having wisdom. Being lazy in one's Dharma practice is a fault of not having wisdom. Having less compassion is a fault of not having wisdom and so forth. If one aspires to become free from ignorance then one needs to deal with the causes of ignorance. If one stops the causes of ignorance then ignorance will cease. One is always contemplating, 'Where does ignorance come from?' We have been through the various causes and by dealing with these causes ignorance will automatically reduce. Specifically, if one doesn't generate the internal wisdom realising emptiness then one will not be able to eradicate ignorance from one's mind. One can add that onto one's reflection on the faults of not having wisdom. The next time we will talk a little bit about how to increase one's wisdom. Now do you have some questions you would like answered?

Question: Geshe-la, if you have a bad friend, is it alright to associate with them if you think you can be a good influence on them?

As was said before, we have to practise love and compassion for all sentient beings. When it says one has to abandon harmful friends it seems like a contradiction but what it means is that one has to abandon the harmful behaviour of those people. It doesn't mean that one abandons them from one's heart. One wants to practise love and compassion towards them and benefit them but what one abandons is their harmful behaviour. There are certain people that only engage in completely confused, destructive and bad behaviour. When anyone looks at them they think, 'Oh, that's really a person one shouldn't associate with'. But if one can benefit such a person then of course one should do this but what one shouldn't do is conform to their behaviour – meaning one shouldn't adopt their behaviour. When one says one should abandon or not associate with a bad friend it means is one shouldn't associate with their behaviour.

Someone who is abstaining from alcohol is allowed to associate with people who drink alcohol because they may have a good influence on them. In the example of someone who doesn't drink alcohol, one is allowed to associate with people who drink alcohol even if one doesn't drink oneself but what one has to take care that one doesn't adopt the habit of drinking alcohol from that company. As long as one doesn't start to drink alcohol

oneself then one can associate with that company and if one can then one can be of benefit to them in that way. It also works like that in other areas.

Question: I was just wandering, What are the causes of laziness and what are the antidotes?

The result of laziness, which you know, is implicit. The function of laziness is that one stops one's activities. Laziness causes one to abandon one's virtuous activities. To counteract that one needs to generate enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is the liking of virtue, of positive actions and so forth. Laziness is the opposite. Laziness is dislike for virtuous and positive actions. Generating enthusiasm will counteract laziness.

For someone with laziness the true path of the Buddha doesn't exist. With laziness one abandons one's activities because one loses one's enthusiasm. One starts to feel that the activities, the actions, don't bring any benefit and they're taking up a lot of time and so one becomes a little bit depressed with what one is doing and then becomes discouraged and lazy. In this way and one gives up one's activities. To counteract that one needs to generate enthusiasm. If one is enthusiastic about what one is doing and one sees the benefits and one is happy with what one is doing and won't give up the activity and won't generate laziness. Laziness is basically a dislike for virtue while enthusiasm is a liking for virtue and positive actions. If one has a dislike for non-virtuous actions that is not laziness. Not being enthusiastic about engaging in non-virtuous actions is not laziness. Laziness is having a dislike of positive and virtuous actions. Having a liking for non-virtuous actions is also laziness.

Question: How does one deal with something from childhood, how do you overcome belief that you have held over and over.

With deeply-rooted habits one needs to deal with them over a long period of time so that they change very slowly. That's why I always tell parents that they have to be very careful regarding their actions regarding their children. Parents can plant seeds in the mind of their child that are like seeds for unhappiness and disturbance that ripen later when the children grow up. This is something that I really believe. If the parents fight or are unhappy and they show the child a dark face or they are angry at the child it will, even in the minds of very small children leave some type of imprint, some type of seed, within their mind that can ripen later when they grow up as some type of deep rooted unhappiness and disturbance. That's why I always tell parents to be very cautious about what they say to their children, how they affect their children, and always to be very positive.

It can happen that one picks up bad habits from one's parents as a child and then, when one grows up, one recognises that they are harmful or are bad habits and, by applying the antidotes, one can change those habits. Of course one shouldn't change the good habits that one has picked up from one's parents. It is possible that if the parents have some funny or strange habits that they get picked up by the child. When the child grows up and

recognises those habits to be harmful or not good they can change that by applying the correct antidotes. In Tibet we have a saying that parents give to their children. with the intention of making the children more strong and resilient. The father might say to the child, 'When someone says something to you, you say something back; if someone hits you then you hit the person back. You don't take anything from the other person. If someone frowns at you, you frown back. You don't take anything and you give everything back the same way the same as you got'. That type of advice is given with the idea of making the child more strong and resilient. But when that is translated into practice with the people that one is living with such as one's girlfriend or boyfriend or one's husband, wife, children and so forth, and they say something and one says something back, or they frown and one frowns back, or they hit one and one hits back, then that type of advice is not really very beneficial. It doesn't really bring any benefit to one's life. Therefore that type of advice shouldn't be followed.

There is also the situation where children put lots of blame on the parents. When the parents do something wrong the children immediately accuse their parents of having done something wrong. When parents tell me that I say to them, 'Well, how do you think that the child learned to be so accusatory? Did that come about because when you brought up the child you actually did the same thing? When the child did something wrong did you accuse the child saying something like 'you are so bad' and so forth instead of explaining to the child, 'Oh that is actually an action that is not appropriate to do for these reasons and therefore you shouldn't do that action'. If one explains it to the child in such a manner then it doesn't harm the child. The child won't feel attacked or harmed, but, if instead of doing that when the child does some inappropriate or wrong thing one then blames the child and puts the fault completely on the child saying 'you are wrong' it harms the child and in such a way it builds up the habit for the child to do the same thing to others, for example back to the parents. Quite often one can find that small children say, 'Oh, my mother is no good.' or 'My father is no good.'. How does that come about? Where did they learn that type of accusation? The child says, 'My mother is wrong.' or 'She is mistaken.' or 'My father is wrong, mistaken.'. You have to check where this behaviour comes from. Where did the child learn to say 'Oh, the father is bad.' or 'The mother is bad.' or 'They're mistaken and confused.' Where did they learn to make that type of accusation? It comes from the parents themselves because they accused the child in such a manner in the first place. That's where the children learn it, from their parents.

As was explained in the beginning, bring the mind back home focusing it totally towards the inside and then place the mind single-pointedly on the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha.