
The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas

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19 March 2003

We will first meditate for a little while, as usual. Please try to generate a [good] motivation, thinking: "My real problem is the unsubsided mind. I don't want to be under the control of the disturbed mind and disturbing thoughts, even for just one second. This is really what I have to change. In such a way, I have to make my mind serviceable, clear and stable". So, try to generate such a motivation.

One has to meditate to overcome mental states that prevent the mind from being satisfied, happy, clear and stable. One's consciousness is under the control of the disturbing thoughts and, as long as one doesn't free one's consciousness from these disturbing mental attitudes, one will also be under their control.

In order to meditate, we bring the mind back home, not letting it wander off towards external objects, but rather focusing it internally.

Since one can't meditate without an object, after having focused the mind internally, one places the mind single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. We take the coming and going of the breath as the object of meditation. By doing this meditation and becoming more familiar with it, slowly one will also experience inner clarity, stability and peace. So, we will do this meditation for few minutes. *[Pause for meditation.]*

It is good to keep in mind that meditation is a path to happiness, an alternative to trying to attain happiness through external means. There are various types of mental states, many of which don't allow us to experience inner happiness. If we don't deal with these inner mental states then, regardless of whether we are successful or not in our outer search for happiness, we won't experience happiness.

To attain inner happiness, we have to follow the path of meditation. If we are successful in our search for inner happiness, it won't matter so much whether we succeed in our search for outer happiness. Even if we lose the external opportunities for happiness, if we have not lost our inner happiness, it doesn't matter so much. But if we are not successful in our search for inner happiness, and are also not successful in our search for outer happiness, then it becomes a big problem.

As the great Bodhisattva Shantideva said, the only purpose in life is to attain happiness and to abandon suffering. The only reason we have not been able to do that until now is because we don't understand how the mind works.

The other day, we talked about how wisdom illuminates the mental darkness of ignorance. In the last teaching, we talked about the various conditions that cause ignorance. Today, we will talk about the threefold division of wisdom – the wisdom realising the ultimate; the wisdom realising the conventional; and the wisdom accomplishing the welfare of sentient beings.

The first wisdom, the wisdom realising the ultimate, has a twofold division – the wisdom conceptually realising emptiness; and the wisdom directly realising emptiness.

The wisdom realising the conventional has a fivefold division into the wisdom realising the five types of sciences. The five types of sciences are the science of language, the science of logic, the science of creativity, the science of medicine, and inner science.

It is taught in the *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* that one won't be able to attain enlightenment if one doesn't accomplish the five types of science that relate to the wisdom knowing the conventional, because one must know these five types of science in order to benefit others.

To start with, one has the science of language and the science of logic. These are needed in order to turn people's minds towards the Dharma. There are different stories of how one can do that by relying on the science of language. Then there is the science of logic – if one has to convince someone that his or her point of view is mistaken, or if one has to establish the Buddhist point of view, or if one has to show others where their mistakes lie (in relation to explaining the Dharma), one needs to know the science of logic so that one can explain the Dharma logically.

Then there is the science of creativity. This means, for example, the making of [sand] mandalas – they are something that is peculiar to Buddhism, something that stands out, something that attracts people to Buddhism. (Some people say that Aboriginal people also make mandalas, but it may not be quite the same.) When [Tibetan Buddhist] monks go round [the world] making mandalas, thousands of people go to look at them.

Next is the science of medicine. Tibetan medicine comprises a very sophisticated system for healing

people. Then there is the inner science, which is about attaining inner peace. If one wants to help others, one needs to attain inner peace. I'd relate this to the conquering of self-grasping – by conquering self-grasping, one can attain inner peace, so I relate inner science to the conquering of self-grasping.

This is not to say that people don't have wisdom if they are not accomplished in those five types of science. However, if one wants to attain omniscient or enlightened consciousness, it is best if one trains in those different types of science. One trains in the first two sciences to help others generate faith in the Buddhadharmā; the second two so that they generate liking for the Buddhadharmā; and the fifth one to generate wisdom oneself, so that one can attain enlightenment.

The third type of wisdom – the wisdom accomplishing the welfare of others – is the wisdom that, without any negativity, accomplishes the benefit of others within this life and in future lives. It is the wisdom that accomplishes both present and future benefit without any negativity.

Here, the word I translated as 'negativity', literally means "that which is not possible to be expressed...the inexpressible". This is in the context of Arya beings or higher beings, who refer to negative actions as "that which they don't even want to talk about". That's how this word came about.

So, wisdom without negativity accomplishes both the benefit of others of this life, and future benefit. Here, one has to know how to establish future benefit, and also the benefit of this life. One has to be familiar with how this life works, as well as how to accomplish the benefit of future lives in order to accomplish both benefits for sentient beings. Even if someone doesn't have particular faith in the Dharma, if one helps them to accomplish the benefit of this life, then they will generate faith in the Dharma, thus also accomplishing the benefit of future lives.

Without wisdom, one won't be able to progress towards liberation, so practice without wisdom won't become a path to liberation. Therefore, one should try to become proficient in the wisdom that understands the profound aspects of conventional and ultimate truth.

For the first five perfections [generosity, patience, morality, joyous effort and concentration] to become actual 'perfections gone beyond', they have to be combined with wisdom. If one wishes to follow the Buddha's path in order to attain the truth

body of a Buddha, one needs to practise the perfection of wisdom.

Everyone has wisdom, everyone has intelligence, so it is important that one uses and develops one's intelligence in the correct way. If one wants to attain enlightenment, one needs to oppose self-grasping and the view of the transitory collections. Self-grasping can only be opposed by the wisdom realising selflessness. Everyone has self-grasping within his or her mental continuum. To become enlightened, one needs to oppose this self-grasping, and the only way to oppose the self-grasping within one's own mental continuum is by generating the wisdom realising selflessness. There is no other way.

The Buddha said, "I am not able to wash away your negativities as one washes away dirt with water. Likewise, I am not able to pull out your obscurations and negative karmas as one pulls thorns out of flesh. And I am not able to transfer my realisations into your mind. The only thing that I can do is to teach you the Dharma, but you have to practise the Dharma and generate the Dharma within your own mind. Then, through this, one becomes enlightened".

This is the only way to attain enlightenment. By contemplating this, one will realise that there is great significance to one's intelligence and wisdom – one's intelligence and wisdom become very precious and important.

Intelligence can be used in both positive and harmful ways. For example, the knowledge of how to build a house or make a car are types of knowledge that are useful for sentient beings. But there is also a different type of knowledge – for example, knowing how to make different types of weapons that can harm and kill many sentient beings. Here, even though one has the knowledge of the science of creativity, it is pointed in a harmful direction.

We have a few minutes for a question and answer. Next week, we will go onto the next verse.

Question from student about what one's mental attitude or thoughts should be if one is faced with death as a result of a terrorist attack in Melbourne.

Answer: I think there are only two possibilities – it depends on whether you are a Dharma practitioner or not. If you are a real Dharma practitioner, your last thoughts will be requests to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. If you are a non-Dharma practitioner, your last thoughts will be "Now I'm being separated from my friends and relatives".

If we think about it, even when we lose a friend, we experience great suffering. Even outside the context

of death, just the loss of one close friend creates great suffering in our mind because of our attachment towards that friend.

We are not saying that one must abandon one's friends and give away all one's possessions. Rather, what one has to do is reduce one's attachment to these things. By reducing one's attachment to friends and possessions, one will experience less suffering at the time of separation.

At death, one has to separate from all of these things completely. During one's lifetime, if one experiences separation from a friend, there is still the consolation that there are many others. When someone is suffering separation from another and you say to that person, "You still have many other friends", they won't feel so bad about it. But at death, it's different.

One has to really look at death with courage, because death is something that everyone will experience. No one is free from death – everyone will experience it sooner or later. So, it makes sense to look at death with courage and make preparations for it, since it is something that will definitely happen. By making preparations for death, one can die as a Dharma practitioner.

Question about imminent bombing and invasion of Iraq tomorrow (Thursday)... "Is there a particularly strong practice that we can all do throughout the day?"

Answer: There are pujas, but maybe it's a little bit too late for those! There are many stories of practitioners being able to prevent wars with certain prayers. However, these days, the harmful energies are very strong and very difficult to stop.

In 1991, when America was invading Iraq the first time, I was in Kathmandu and one of the shopkeepers asked me to do prayers that it wouldn't happen. The shopkeeper said, "Tomorrow morning they are planning to go to war. Could you do some prayers that it won't happen?" Of course, from my side, I prayed as much as possible that there would be no war, and that people would not be harmed and so forth. I think it's good if you do likewise – praying as much as possible that war won't happen and that people won't be harmed.

Also, pray not to get angry at the people who are waging the war, but practise compassion for them by reflecting on how they are creating so much negative karma, yet still feel very proud of themselves, creating [further] negative karma. In this way, they become objects of compassion. And pray that one's mind will not be overcome by worry and discomfort. By doing these types of prayers, you might not help to actually stop the war, but

they will help you to keep your mind free from worry, comfortable and free from negativity.

We can't say how much a prayer actually helps or doesn't help. The extent to which someone's prayers will be accomplished or not depends on that person's merit. If one has lots of merit, one can accomplish one's activities and aims. If there are two businesspeople, one with a lot of merit and one without merit, the businessperson with a lot of merit will be successful in his or her business, while the business of the person without merit won't be successful.

We can observe this at the racing track! Those who bet on horses but don't have any merit only continually lose money [laughter]. Even if they continue to bet, they just keep losing money, while other people win all the time because of their merit.

It is called 'luck', but what it actually comes down to is a person's merit. Tibetans would refer to such a person as a person with lots of merits. In the western world, such a person is called a lucky person. If one has lots of merit, one can accomplish one's activities easier. Therefore, since no one here is without any merit, if you do your prayers, there will definitely be some benefit.

Sometimes, it happens that one accomplishes one's prayers. Sometimes, it also happens that one experiences things contrary to one's prayers! When I was around 16 or 17, I was in a situation where I had to fight another monk who was taller and physically much stronger than I. We made this arrangement that we would go to an isolated place and sort out our differences there [laughter]. Before I set out, I made strong prayers that it would be really good not to get into a fight. When we reached the appointed place, the other monk, whose mind was also more subdued, said, "It would be much better if we didn't fight today". That was a much better outcome for me, because he was much stronger and taller. So at that time my prayer was beneficial! [more laughter]

There are many instances where people say they received benefits from reciting the Heart Sutra or reciting the Tara Praises with a calm mind when they were experiencing obstacles or difficulties. We don't necessarily have to talk about a positive effect worldwide, but just at a personal level, there are many instances where people have benefitted by just sitting down very calmly and reciting the Heart Sutra or the Tara Praises.

While we were in Delhi during our visit to India in January, there was a danger that the plane in which part of our group were travelling would be late. There were some mechanical problems that had to

be repaired and the plane was in danger of running late. Someone asked me what they should do, so I told them to recite the Tara Praises. After about 10 or 15 minutes, the announcement came that the plane would be on time. We said to each other, "We have accomplished the purpose of our prayer".

Question about which prayers to do for people who are suffering... (?)

Answer: There are many prayers one can do. There's one prayer by Shantideva that is very good [dedication prayer, Chapter 10, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*]. The important thing is to engage in some virtuous activity and then dedicate the virtuous activity for those people.

Question about illness and taking ordination as a Tibetan Buddhist monk or nun.

Answer: There are different types of sicknesses. Firstly, it's not a question of which type of Buddhism, because the teachings regarding ordinations of monks and nuns and the rules of monks and nuns are not specific to the Tibetan tradition, but are the same in all the traditions. It's a common teaching. Also, it depends on the type of sickness the person has. The Buddha said that people with certain types of sickness, particularly those sicknesses where they can no longer take care of themselves, can't become ordained.

It's not very useful to have too many discussions about ordination, because people start getting worried and thinking, "Can I really do it?" and so forth, and start to lose their self-confidence.

There are different types of obstacles regarding ordination. With certain types of obstacles, even if one did the ordination ceremony, the vows wouldn't be generated. With other types of obstacles, even though the vows are generated, the [obstacles] make it difficult for that person to keep the vows.

That's why the Buddha set out different rules about who could become ordained and who could not. One has to fulfill certain rules or conditions in order to be suitable for ordination, from being able to ascertain, "Would I be able to keep the ordination after I have taken the vows?" to not being able to ascertain whether one is suitable to generate vows at all.

For example, one of conditions that was relevant in India in the past was that one shouldn't become ordained if the king had selected you for a particular position. Even if you went ahead and became a monk or nun, because the king had selected you to fulfill a certain job in the government, it might have been very difficult for you to keep your ordination vows.

Likewise, it is said that you shouldn't become ordained if you do not have the permission of your parents. Even if you generated the vows, later on, because of disagreement with your parents, it would become difficult to keep the ordination. One could even experience this with one's friends. They would say, "Before, we were very good friends, but now you've changed so much and you look different, you wear different clothes". There is this outer pressure that makes it difficult to keep the ordination. They might even say, "Don't come near me. I don't want to be seen with you when you wear those kinds of clothes".

As explained in the beginning, bring the mind back home, focusing it inwards, and not letting it wander off to external objects. Then, place it 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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