
The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas

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We can meditate for a little while as usual. Firstly sit in a good and relaxed physical posture. Then the mind has to be turned inwards. You all know that the reason why it becomes difficult to turn the mind inwards is disturbing thoughts. Disturbing thoughts prevent the mind from focusing inwards. If we cannot pacify the manifest disturbing thoughts then it will be difficult to experience inner peace. In order to give the mind an opportunity to experience happiness one needs to lessen disturbing thoughts. Now, on the basis of sitting in a comfortable and good physical posture turn the mind inwards and try to focus it totally towards the inside, not in a half-hearted way but trying to retain a very clear focus internally. After having focused the mind completely inwards so that it doesn't wander off to external objects you can leave the mind in that state for a short while. Then place it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath and take the coming and going of the breath as the meditational object. The mind needs to have an object on which to meditate. Now place the mind single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. By doing this meditation one can pacify the manifest disturbing thoughts and in such a way create space in the mind to experience inner peace.
(Pause for meditation)

There are various ways of meditating on the coming and going of the breath. The correct way is internally placing the mind on the coming and going of the breath. It is a mental awareness of the coming and going of the breath, a mental placement on the coming and going of the breath, and one counts the breaths. There are some other methods where one follows the air coming, going out and coming back in, but if you do that the mind gets distracted towards outside objects. But of course you know there are many different ways of doing that meditation. The next outline (in the text) is an instruction to practise the four Dharmas taught in the Sutras. The first one (Dharma) is abandoning one's own faults after having looked for and recognised them. Verse 31 of the text *The 37 Practices of Bodhisattvas* (Snow Lion Publications, New York 1997) reads:

*'If you don't examine your own errors,
You may look like a practitioner but not act as one.*

*Therefore, always examining your own errors,
Rid yourself of them –
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.'*

The great saint Atisha said 'The best practice is to examine one's own mind and then get rid of one's own faults'. It is essential that one examines one's own mind and the type of mental state that one is in. Is it a positive mental state? Is it a harmful mental state? Is one's mind very coarse and rough or is it refined and soft and so forth? By examining one's own mind one will come to recognise the psychology of one's mind; how one's mind works, the characteristics of the mind and the way it functions. This is very important. If one is a dharma practitioner, if one is a Mahayana practitioner, one needs to examine one's own mind and one needs to examine one's own faults and try to get rid of these faults. If one doesn't do this certain problems will arise. If one doesn't examine one's own faults one won't become a very knowledgeable and pure practitioner. Not being 'knowledgeable' means that one won't become very well versed in philosophy and 'pure practitioner' refers to one's morality not being pure. Even though one might have faults as big and high as Mount Meru if one doesn't examine one's own mind one won't be able to recognise them. If one doesn't examine one's own mind one won't obtain the qualities of proficiency, knowledge, purity and even though one has huge faults, one won't recognise them. Not seeing one's faults one will think of oneself as being a sage, being a very great pure dharma practitioner, and try to convey that through one's outer actions to others. If such people present themselves as very pure dharma practitioners others, who don't have the clairvoyance of being able to know the minds of others, will rely on what they see in front of them and start to believe that person is actually a great dharma practitioner. Such a person who is not aware of their own faults and thinks of themselves as being very pure and a very great dharma practitioner will also try to project that to others. That physical projection of a pure and great dharma practitioner is actually a deceptive appearance; it is a deceptive form. The appearance of having the body of a pure and great dharma practitioner is actually a deceptive appearance. That becomes clear when such a person, even though projecting themselves as a great dharma practitioner, engages in actions contrary to dharma practice and in completely ordinary actions. It becomes very clear that the impression of being a great dharma practitioner was deceptive impression. That is a fault of not examining one's own errors.

Therefore it is the practice of Bodhisattvas to always examine the continuity of their own three doors of body, speech and mind for faults and errors and if they find any to rid themselves of them. That is the practice of Bodhisattvas. It is very important and beneficial to examine one's own mind for errors. If one examines one's own mind for errors and one doesn't find any faults it generates a certain inner self-reliance. If one has the knowledge that one doesn't have those faults then one doesn't need to get depressed if others criticise one because one can rely on one's own inner wisdom that one doesn't have those faults. Because these faults, inner faults, prevent success in dharma practice it is important to identify those that one might have and try to get rid of them. By understanding one's own faults one also understands that other people may also have those same types of mental faults within their mind. By understanding one's own fallacies or one's own faults one can be more compassionate towards others. If one understands one's own faults it helps one not to get angry at the faults of others and one can be more compassionate and forgiving of them .

If one calls oneself a dharma practitioner then one has to act in accordance with what one is proclaiming or teaching. If one doesn't others will lose faith. This doesn't just apply on a very high level but also on a day to day level for dharma students. If other people know that that a person is a dharma student and that person doesn't act according to the dharma that they say they are practising it causes others to lose faith in that dharma. It is very important that one examines one's own mind for faults and tries to get rid of them. There is an example by Nagarjuna's "Letter to a Friend" where it says, "Certain people are like a mango, for example, or fruits. They can appear on the outside as being very ripe but when one tries to eat them one discovers that inside they are still raw and haven't ripened yet. They are still green.". This example applies to that type of person who appears to be a dharma practitioner but actually is still very green and unripe inside. A renowned Geshe said that one shouldn't examine the faults of others; one should examine the faults within one's own mind and try to overcome those. Similarly a Kadampa master, Geshe Chowneh said that one doesn't see one's own faults, even though if they were given form they would be as huge as a mountain, but the faults of others, even if they would be as tiny as an atom, one can see immediately. One shouldn't have that type of attitude because it is most harmful for oneself. Instead of focusing on the faults of others one should try to correct one's own ways. There is also a Tibetan saying that; 'Even if one's own faults

are as huge as a yak, one doesn't see them. Even if one is wearing a mask that looks like a yak, one doesn't see it. But the faults of others, even if they are tiny like a flea, those one can see immediately'.

By not examining one's own faults one receives great loss. Examining one's own faults and correcting them benefits one and facilitates inner happiness. Dharma practice is for the purpose of correcting one's own faults. That is the point of Dharma practice. The purpose of Dharma practice is not to give a very saintly impression to others. One can give a very saintly impression to others but still be completely unsubdued internally and if one mistakes that for Dharma practice then one will just deceive oneself and receive loss. There are many situations in the past where people were very convinced that they were great dharma practitioners and proclaimed themselves to be pure dharma practitioners and other people believed that initially but then, later, when people recognised that that person was, for example, still very attached to wealth and to other things their faith waned and was lost.

One has to develop one's own inner wisdom when one receives teachings. The purpose of the Dharma is develop one's own inner wisdom, to recognise mental afflictions, to recognise positive mental qualities and then to be able to lessen one and develop the other. In such a way it teaches us not to rely on outer appearance. When we recognise that in order to attain happiness we have to change our minds it teaches us that we can't rely on the external world. It teaches us not to rely on external appearance. Quite often there are people who, when we first see them, we think must be a very wealthy business person from the way they dress and behave but actually they could be very poor. They might actually be someone who is a con man who will just take our money and go. There are many instances of this. At one time when a Tibetan was traveling by train in India and was befriended by an Indian who was traveling in the same compartment where their beds were opposite. First of all the Indian was very friendly to the Tibetan and offered him tea. Being offered tea the Tibetan thought 'Oh, this Indian is actually a very nice person', and he generated some trust and liking and offered the Indian tea in return. By giving tea in return he had to open his bag and the Indian could see where his valuables were. The Tibetan, having some trust, went to the toilet and when he came back the Indian and his valuables were gone. Actually, when he came back to the compartment he didn't immediately know that his wallet had been taken. He still thought of the Indian as being a friend. Only later when he got off the train and

looked for his wallet did he find that it was missing. Appearances can be deceptive and it is important to use one's discriminative awareness. Do you have some questions?

Question: Geshe-la, I seem to be too critical of myself.....

That is very good if you can't see anything but faults (laughter). That means that you are really practising the advice of Atisha (laughter). It is said one has to downplay one's own qualities and highlight one's own fault and one has to downplay the faults of others and highlight their qualities.

Question: Inaudible

There is no point in lifting up your faults, as if you were praying to them, and just holding onto them. That is not the point. After having recognised one's own faults one needs to follow that road further thinking about ways and means to overcome those faults. One has to abandon the faults that one recognises. Without recognition of the faults, without the decision to change the faults, the correction of the faults won't happen. If you clean a room you first see the dirt and then you go about cleaning it up. It is like that. If we see dirt on the floor we go about cleaning it up with a broom. We don't just look at the dirt and then leave it there; we go about cleaning it up with a broom. Similarly the dirt of our faults needs to be cleaned up with the broom of the antidote and wisdom. One can meditate on sweeping things out where the dirt is actually one's own faults and obscurations and the broom is the broom of wisdom.

Question: Geshe Doga, if you have got limited time what is the better practice?

The 35 Buddhas would be better. If you have memorised the prayer of the 35 Buddhas your mind will be very well focused on the visualisation and the practice. If you have to read it your mind will also become very well focused by doing the practice. As beginners it is always more important to do purification practices and practices for the accumulation of merits. For example, if one is angry and one sits down to meditate the meditation won't proceed very well. But if you start by doing prostrations to the Buddhas and reciting the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha then, after a time, the anger will have been pacified.

Question: What is good to do if you have become attached to being praised? How can you become detached from that so you can become indifferent (to praise) ???

Regarding praise, there is probably more the danger of generating pride than generating attachment. If you think about it the attachment

that is generated to receiving praise is not so strong. The real danger is that one generates pride by being praised. If someone praises your qualities, your appearance and your capabilities the greater danger is that one generates pride; that one becomes internally puffed up. Of course there is also some subtle attachment but attachment focuses more on external objects. Here the primary danger is that one generates pride; that one internally becomes puffed up and the best antidote is studying something that one doesn't understand. I always give the example that if one has very great pride in their driving skills and they want to overcome that pride they should think about the difficulty of flying a plane and setting out trying to learn how to fly a plane. If you put someone who doesn't know how to fly a plane into the cockpit of a big plane they won't know what all the different buttons and so forth are for.

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

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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