
The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga
Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

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We will meditate for a little while as usual. Sit in a proper meditation posture. On the basis of sitting in a relaxed and comfortable manner, you then need to put the mind in a good state.

It is good to reflect on the purpose and fruits of meditation. The purpose of meditation is to change the mind, to change disturbing thoughts that make the mind unclear, unstable, unserviceable and difficult to handle. One has to change the mind so that it becomes more pliant, serviceable, stable and clear.

The thoughts that need to be changed are those that make the mind unclear. One has to transform the mind from an unclear state to a clear state – this is why one has to meditate. Through meditation, one can make the unclear mind clearer; by meditating on the [meditation] object, it will appear more clearly to the mind. As the object appears more clearly to the mind, the mind itself also becomes clearer and more stable.

So, by seeing that it is the disturbing thoughts that cause the mind to be unclear and unstable, one has to generate the motivation not to let the mind fall under the control of the disturbing thoughts even for a moment. On the basis of this motivation, you free the mind from [its focus on] external objects and focus it internally, bringing the mind back home. Then, you focus it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. When you do that, the focus shouldn't be too tight, but neither should it be too loose. If the mind's focus is too loose, it causes mental dullness, and if the focus is too tight, it causes mental excitement. So the focus should be just right. We can meditate in that way for a few minutes. *[Pause for meditation.]* That's maybe enough!

It's good to always practise a bit of meditation, especially these days, when it is a very sad time, and when it is very easy for one to be sad. One should see the benefit of meditation for the mind [at such times], because when you meditate, you don't hear or see anything.

Last time, we talked about the importance of analysing one's own mind for mistakes. This is very important, because if one doesn't recognise the mistakes of one's three doors of body, speech and mind, then those negativities of body, speech and mind will harm one's morality. Also, as long doesn't analyse one's mind for mistakes, one will not be aware of one's mistakes.

The next verse (verse 32 of the text *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*, Snow Lion Publications, New York 1997) deals with abandoning criticism of others. Verse 32 reads:

*If through the influence of disturbing emotions
You point out the faults of another Bodhisattva,*

*You yourself are diminished, so don't mention the
faults*

*Of those who have entered the Great Vehicle –
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.*

Here, the text says that if, through the influence of disturbing emotions such as anger, attachment and pride, one points out the faults of another Bodhisattva, through this one's own qualities will diminish. Therefore, one shouldn't mention the faults of those who practise the Mahayana.

Because one's own qualities will decrease if one criticises and talks about the faults of others, one should not point out even the very small faults of other sentient beings in general – and of those who practise the Mahayana path in particular. This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

Even if we can directly see the faults of others, we shouldn't point them out. We tend to focus only on the external appearance of another person; we are not able to realise that person's inner qualities. So, when we criticise another person, we will ourselves perpetrate a great fault, because it is possible that the external appearance of someone with great inner qualities is slightly imperfect. If we just concentrate on what we see without knowing that person's inner qualities and then criticise such a person, it is a big fault.

The internal qualities of other beings are not visible to us. It is impossible to know the qualities of another person yet, without knowing that person's inner qualities, one still criticises them because they appear displeasing to one. This is a very great mistake.

Another situation that causes one to criticise another person is jealousy. If one is jealous of the qualities of the other person, and is not able to bear their qualities and abilities, this can also cause one to criticise that person. Here again, one will receive a very great fault. There's not the slightest benefit to be gained from criticising someone else out of jealousy. However, there is great benefit to be gained from rejoicing in the qualities of another person. By rejoicing in the inner qualities of another person, one will gain great benefit. But if one criticises them, one receives only loss.

This is an important point to understand. If we see the qualities of another person and it generates unease and unhappiness in our mind, this is a sign of jealousy. On the other hand, if the recognition of another person's qualities generates joy in our mind, this is rejoicing. When we recognise the qualities of another person and think: "That's really very nice, very good", this is rejoicing. However, if this recognition generates unhappiness, unease and discontent in our mind, this is jealousy. There's not the slightest benefit in being jealous – it will only give one loss and generate unhappiness in the mind. But if one rejoices in the qualities of others, it makes one's mind happy and one receives gain.

This is important mental training for us to do. If we know someone who does not criticise or discriminate against us because of our faults and who rejoices in our qualities, we will be comfortable with that person. If we

know a person who is never jealous of our qualities, we are comfortable with them. We know that they won't discriminate against us and criticise us because of our faults. Instead, they have the attitude that nobody is perfect, so they can also accept our faults. They think: "That person may have certain faults, but that is quite common. Everyone has faults, but they also have qualities". One can remain comfortably with such a person, and have trust and an easy relationship.

If we train our mind, it is definitely possible that we will gain more experience in having such an attitude, which will make it easier for other people to relate to us. Otherwise, we will have to go through life always being jealous of those who are higher than us; competitive with those who are equal; and proud with respect to those who are lower. This is a very unhappy attitude, but if one tries, one will definitely be able to experience a change of mind, and it will definitely be beneficial.

People may be Bodhisattvas internally even though their outer appearance is displeasing or poor. One cannot judge only by outer appearance. For example, one famous lama was actually a Bodhisattva but was very poor. Once, when he was on his way to Lhasa, he was resting by the roadside – a thin, haggard monk in poor robes carrying a big bag. As he sat there resting by the side of the road, a pretty young girl from Lhasa passed by and looked at him in disgust thinking: "May I never be reborn to be like this poor beggar". But the lama said to her: "You don't need to do any prayer in that regard, because there's no chance that you will be reborn like me!" So this is an important point to keep in mind, because if one only relies on someone's outer appearance, one will receive many faults.

Generally, we cannot judge the qualities of another. Lower Bodhisattvas cannot comprehend the qualities of higher Bodhisattvas. Only higher Bodhisattvas have the measure of lower Bodhisattvas, but not the other way around. So, ordinary individuals cannot comprehend the qualities of another person. It is similar to looking at live embers covered by ash and thinking there is nothing burning there, but actually below the ash the embers are glowing. Likewise, one shouldn't just judge people by their outer appearance, because Bodhisattvas don't really care about outer appearance, and outer appearance is not relevant.

Outer appearance is not the measure of whether someone is a Bodhisattva or not. Bodhisattvas can be lay people, they can have wives, they can have long or short hair – there are many different Bodhisattvas, and they don't worry about their outward appearance. They only remain in cyclic existence for the benefit of sentient beings, so they take any rebirth that benefits sentient beings through their prayers.

Maybe we can leave it here for tonight. Do you have any questions?

Question from student (not audible).

Answer: Normally, we generate compassion for those who are suffering, but one can also feel compassion for those who inflicted the suffering, because through their

negative actions, they have created the cause for future suffering.

Geshe-la says in Tibetan there's a slightly different word from compassion that is used for a person who is inflicting the harm, but it's still in the nature of compassion, being compassionate for that person. When you see a person who is doing a negative action, and think of how they are creating negative karma, you start to feel compassion for that person.

Question from student (inaudible).

Answer: If one has behaved mistakenly with regards to someone else, to a Bodhisattva, if one says 'sorry' to the Bodhisattva, they have to be patient with you. There are also quotes from scriptures, so then when you say 'sorry' to a Bodhisattva, if you have behaved mistakenly with regards to that Bodhisattva, then also the fault is purified. .

Question from student (inaudible).

Answer: The accumulation of merit simultaneously purifies non-virtue. It is explained in the scriptures that any practise of virtue fulfils the function of purification. Of course, there are specific virtues for purification explained, but also in general, any virtue has the power of purification.

Question: Geshe-la, in my meditation, I'm not sure whether what I'm experiencing is mental excitement or mental dullness. What is the experience in the mind of those two things and what's a simple remedy?

Answer: What we term 'mental excitement' generally falls into the family [of delusions] known as attachment. Mental excitement is caused by thoughts that belong to the family of desire and attachment. If your mind is distracted by remembering a pleasant object, this is mental excitement. If your mind wanders off, that would be subtle mental excitement, and if your mind wanders off to the object, it is coarse mental excitement. Mental sinking is a lack of clarity in the mind – even though your mind might remain comparatively stable, there's a lack of clarity, a certain dullness.

Question: Geshe-la, we're invited to look for a guru, and the process of choosing a guru by yourself involves observing the qualities of that guru up to the point where one is satisfied that the guru practises what he preaches. If, after a period of observation, one decides that person is not suitable, surely that would imply criticism and judgement. Although it may be unspoken, nevertheless it amounts to criticism?

[Some exchange here between student and translator/Geshe Doga about the process of evaluating someone as a guru – if they appear inadequate, is that criticism on the student's part?]

Answer: After you check up and don't see their qualities, where is the criticism coming in? If you think: "That person is not up to it, they don't fulfil those criteria", that's not criticism.

If, after having checked up on the other person, you don't see the qualities you were looking for – regardless of whether they have those qualities or not – on the basis

of not seeing any qualities if you say to that person, "I don't believe in you" in a straightforward way, that is not criticism because you don't have any harmful intention of criticising them.

Further question from student – inaudible.

Answer: It's like being discriminating. Also, you're not telling that person that they don't have those qualities, even though they may have them. Even if you put them down and say: "You don't have those qualities", you are just saying in a straightforward way what you think in dependence upon your assessment. However, if you do that after you have taken that person as your teacher, then it's an entirely different matter.

Really, the purpose of analysing the teacher is for the purpose of assessing: "Can I generate faith in regard to that person?"

One can also point out certain things to that person or bring forth one's own argument, but it has to be done with a peaceful mind and non-aggression. For example, quite often we're in situations where we have to confront another person. Buddhism does not say that one is not allowed to say anything. That's not the case. However, if one is in such a situation, one has to handle it in a peaceful and non-aggressive manner.

The worldly point of view says that if you don't express your feelings, like anger and so forth, they will remain in your mind and fester there. However, in reality, there is no need to express the anger or discontent in your mind in order for you to get rid of your anger or pacify it.

If you generate anger and then hold onto it, it turns into a festering hatred. So, first one generates anger, and keeping that anger in mind generates this resentment. With this resentment or hatred in your mind, you wait for a window of opportunity where you can express dislike and resentment towards the other person. Until then, you carry it around with you in your mind.

In such a case, it helps to meditate on compassion for the other person, thinking that the object of one's anger is actually unhappy because of their own mental afflictions and anger. Meditating on compassion helps one to overcome the resentment. In this situation, meditating on compassion and patience is a good method.

Another question from a student.

Answer: That has happened in Tibetan history. Quite often, at first certain practitioners would think: "That lama is not for me". But later, their view of the lama changed, and they took that lama as their guru. At the beginning, perhaps they felt they were already quite highly attained and that the lama was not good enough for them or something, but later they changed their point of view.

As we did at the beginning, bring the mind back home, focus it inwards and place it single-pointedly on the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha.