
The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas

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We can practise a little meditation as usual. Sit in a correct and comfortable posture. When sitting in a correct and relaxed meditation posture bring the mind back home, not letting it wander off to external objects, but rather focusing it inwards. After having focused the mind totally internally and not letting it wander off to external objects, keep the mind in that space for some time. Then, when the mind is just about to escape to an external object, place it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath and we can meditate in that manner for a few minutes. *Pause for meditation.*

Last time we talked about giving up attachment to the households of friends, relatives and benefactors. The next verse deals with abandoning harsh speech. It reads (verse 34 of the text *The 37 Practices of Bodhisattvas*, Snow Lion Publications, New York 1997);

*Harsh words disturb the minds of others
And cause deterioration in a Bodhisattva's conduct.
Therefore give up harsh words
Which are unpleasant to others -
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.*

If one doesn't analyse one's own speech and one doesn't practise awareness of one's own speech then harsh words can slip out and very easily disturb the minds of others and cause them mental unhappiness. Not only do harsh words disturb the minds of others they also cause the Bodhisattva's conduct to deteriorate because the Bodhisattva's conduct of speech is that one talks pleasantly and lovingly. One (a Bodhisattva) talks in a way that makes other people happy and content and obviously if one speaks harsh words, if one practises harsh speech, that will cause that Bodhisattva practice to deteriorate. Because of these two reasons; harsh words cause harm to others and disturb their minds and they cause one's own practice to deteriorate, one gives up the practise of harsh words. It is important that one relates this to one's own day to day practice and that one changes the habit of retaliating with sharp and harmful words. The common way is replying with sharp and harmful words instead of talking lovingly, compassionately and pleasantly in a way that makes other people's minds happy. One should relate this verse (to that behaviour) to change the behaviour and stop using harsh words. Quite often there are situations where, instead of actually talking about the actual problem, one rather uses harsh words and sharp words without actually solving the problem. That has to be stopped.

The karma of harsh words is completed when the other person hears those words and it is negative regardless of

whether one speaks the truth or not. Regardless of whether it is true, regardless of whether the other person has that fault or not, one doesn't point those faults out with the mind that wants to hurt the other person. This includes criticising the practice of morality of another person, any of their actions of body, speech and mind, either directly through one's own words or by inducing others to do so. When either through one's own words, or through inducing others to use harsh speech, the harsh words are heard by the other person the karma is complete.

There is, of course, the situation where one might have to point out the faults of others in order to help them to correct these faults. Parents, for example, have to correct their children. In the west this might not happen as much but in Tibet, when a teacher criticises a student it has to be done strictly on the basis of a compassionate attitude with the welfare of the other person in mind. If it is done on the basis of harmful intent then it is definitely a non-virtuous karma that has to be abandoned.

There are a number of results of harsh speech. One result is that one will be the object of harsh speech oneself. If, in this life, one is very often on the receiving end of harsh speech one can take that as arising from having used harsh speech oneself in a previous life. Another result is that one gets reborn in a rough place where there are lots of thorns and so forth. If, in this life, one experiences pleasant and nice speech one can relate that to one having abandoned harsh speech in the past. If however, in this life, one is on the receiving end of harsh speech then one can relate it to one not having abandoned harsh speech in the past but having used it on others.

Understanding karma and understanding the cause-effect relationship between one's actions and their results will definitely have a transforming effect on one's life. The power of that understanding will definitely have a transforming effect on one's life. One can very often observe that the immediate effect of using harsh speech is that the other person will immediately use harsh speech in return. One can observe this immediate cause and effect. It is very good to be very aware of one's speech because one uses speech a lot during one's lifetime. One's life is acted out through the three doors of body, speech and mind. As a human being one has actions of the body, actions of speech and actions of the mind. If one uses one's three doors in a positive manner; engaging in positive and wholesome physical actions, positive and wholesome verbal actions and positive and wholesome mental actions, it will have a positive effect on one's life. One will reap the benefit. But if one engages in unwholesome actions of the body, speech and mind, then one will receive the loss. Not only will one harm the other person but one receives loss oneself. Even if one doesn't harm the other person one definitely receives loss if one engages in unwholesome actions of body, speech and mind. It can very easily happen that

the object of the harsh speech will be able to have a good night's sleep but the person who was actually doing the abusing cannot sleep very well. Because of the significance of one's verbal actions and their results it is very important that one is very careful with regard to those actions and that one tries to improve not only the actions of one's speech but the actions of all three doors; body, speech and mind. One has to make that one's own responsibility. One has to be one's observer, one's own witness, for one's actions and take responsibility for making them positive and wholesome. If one does that one will be practising the Dharma. Turning the actions of body, speech and mind away from an unwholesome direction to a positive and wholesome direction is Dharma practice.

Wherever one goes one has to make use of one's speech so it is very significant that one takes care regarding one's verbal actions. In order to change one's actions of speech one needs to train the mind. Without training the mind it will be very difficult to change the actions of body and speech. The actual qualities of a person lie within the mind. The mind determines the actions of body and speech. If one doesn't train one's mind then, even though one doesn't want to, when another person uses harsh speech the motivation will automatically arise to use harsh speech in return. Further, if someone's physical behaviour toward us is bad or abusive then the thought naturally arises within the mind to reply in kind. Without taking care of the mind it will be very difficult to change the actions of body and speech. So one needs to train the mind in virtue and in positive and wholesome ways and then, if one does that, one practises the Dharma. Everyone wants to be a good person. One only becomes a good person through changing one's mind. One won't become a good person by changing the outer conditions. Good people are not created through outer conditions but through a change in the mind. That is also important to consider.

The Buddha said in the sutras that there are three types of speech; very pleasant and agreeable speech, true speech and wrong speech. The first type, pleasant and agreeable words, is like honey. Whoever tastes honey will find it sweet. True words, words that express the truth, are likened by the Buddha to a very beautiful flower. A beautiful flower brings pleasure to the mind of whoever sees it. The third type of speech, wrong speech, is that which offends others and makes them upset. That is speech that has to be abandoned. Of these three (types of speech), the first two are to be practised, and the last one has to be abandoned. So do you have any questions?

Question, inaudible.

No, not really. The other person might be afraid to reply with harsh words because they might think "Oh, something worse might happen" [*laughter*]. If there's a situation where the other person didn't quite hear the harsh words that one was saying then, because they didn't hear it, their mind didn't become disturbed and one's own karma is less negative.

Questioner continues, inaudible.

If one thinks, "That wasn't really a good thing to do and, from now on, I'm not going to use such harsh speech again", - by generating regret and making the determination not to engage in further harsh speech - will purify a great deal of the non-virtuous karma. In general we have the four opponent powers for the purification of karma but just by generating regret and thinking, "That was not a good thing to do", and making the determination not to engage in that action again purifies a great deal of non-virtuous karma. Generating regret for non-virtuous actions is a virtue. Virtue is the antidote to non-virtue. On the other hand if one generates regret for a virtuous action that is non-virtuous. If, for example, after having practised generosity one thinks "Oh, no ... I wish I hadn't given that money" and feels sorry that one gave away the money, then that becomes a non-virtuous action and negates the virtue that was created.

Question: "Geshe-la, sometimes harsh words just come out and you are expressing your emotions, and because ...

There is the idea that the negative mind will become less by expressing it. If you think about it that is really difficult to accomplish. The mind is not like the body. You can just take out a part your body and put it somewhere else. If you have a stone in your body that stone can be removed from the body. The mind is not like that. If it were possible, by expressing one's harmful feelings to reduce them, we should already all have got rid of our negative emotions. There is the perception that when one is feeling very upset and uptight and one doesn't express one's feelings they will become harmful and one will become sick. There's is the idea that one get rid of their bad feelings, their harmful emotions. This idea is actually deceptive.

Question: "What if your intentions are virtuous, but your words are perceived as being harsh and the person gets upset? Is that then (a situation where one should use) sweet words that sugar-coat the true words? Is it better to do that than to always speak true and perhaps generate a negative response?"

You want to know whether one should always state the truth even if it's harmful? (*Reply: Yes*) No, it's not necessary to say things that are true if they insult or harm the other person. If, for example, someone is blind; they know that they are blind, we know that they are blind and pointing out that they are blind is not really going to change anything or have any benefit. The other person is going to feel hurt by that even though it is true. So it's much better not to remark upon their blindness. Then there is the situation where a person is running away from someone else and you've seen where they have run to. If their pursuer asks if you have seen them you won't tell them. Even though it is the truth, you won't say; "The person has run up there". But you also can't tell a lie so you don't say "I haven't seen them". You have to somehow turn the subject to something else.

Question: (Question relates to responding to rude behaviour on the part of another.)

You can try to be intimidating to the other person. Sometimes, if someone is verbally aggressive to you and you say nothing, you just stay quiet and don't reply, they might take it as an encouragement to follow that up with some aggressive physical action. On the basis of having a mind that is not agitated and for the purpose of protecting oneself you can show the other person a very deep frown and you can tell them; "Is there anything you want?" or, "Did you say something?". You can show this for the purpose of protecting yourself.

There's a story that I have told before. When I was staying in Varanasi there was a young Rinpoche who held me in very great regard and liked me very much. One day we were walking in the market and a boy, the son of one of the shop owners or stall owners, said something derogatory about me as we were going by. I actually hadn't heard anything but the Rinpoche, understood both English and Hindi, the Indian language, very well so he understood the boy and whacked him. Immediately there were 20 Indians around the Rinpoche and they made a grab for his watch. I put my hand into my robe, pretending that I had a knife under here, and slowly, slowly, they all faded away. The Rinpoche said that this was a good trick because otherwise he would have lost his watch on top of being beaten up.

Question, inaudible [followed by laughter].

You can say; "Of course, I love you because I love all sentient beings" [laughter]. We said before that one can use harsh speech with the motivation of wanting to benefit the other person. Having the welfare of the other person in mind one can use harsh speech. Likewise, if one is confronted by someone else it is alright to respond in kind in order to protect oneself. It is alright to use harsh speech if one has the welfare of the other person in mind or to protect oneself. In these situations one can oppose the other person with an honest and upright mind. In Tibet, young boys when they are 17, 18 years of age engage in quite a bit of fighting amongst themselves. Different boys from different villages will challenge each other and will go up to each other and say: "Do you have any courage? Let's see how brave you are". If the other person says "Oh no, I don't have any courage and I don't want to fight" they will put their finger on the other person's nose and tap them and tease them. But if the other person says "What do you want? I'm ready. I'm brave", they won't say anything. They will look for someone else. Being a Buddhist doesn't mean that one has to take everything that is given to one by others; that one has to take any abuse that is given to one by others. That's not what it means to be a Buddhist but one has to take care that one's mind is not afflicted. Prime Minister Howard said that he sent Australia to war for the benefit of Australia. Whether that's true or not is difficult to say. I'm also an Australian and for me there was not the slightest benefit in the war in Iraq. It only made me sad but it didn't give me the slightest benefit.

Question, inaudible.

You have to remember that the person who is talking very harshly and insultingly is actually very unhappy. That's the reason (for their behaviour). Their unhappiness is the reason for engaging in that type of behaviour and if you remember that it that will help you not to become angry at that person. Even if someone harms us we understand that they are suffering and we don't get angry at that person. There can also be the situation where the harsh words of the other person are actually a reaction to one's own behaviour. Where, through one's own behaviour, one caused the other person to react in such a way one has to be honest to oneself and correct one's own actions. Family situations are very difficult because many of the issues that are present in families go back a long time and whenever the family members meet these old issues come up again and again and the focus always tends to be on negative things. The positive things get forgotten very easily but one holds on very strongly to negative things; the insults and harms and so forth. Family situations are very difficult to solve. In Tibet we say that one harsh word obscures lots of pleasant words and complimentary speech and that's really true. A person might have always treated us very well and talked to us in a polite and friendly manner but, if on just one occasion, they somehow insult us or use harsh words one latches onto that and just remembers that one instant of harsh speech. One completely forgets all the other good things that the person said and did.

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