
The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas

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We can practise a little bit of meditation as usual. Sit in a good physical posture. What is the purpose of meditation? The purpose of meditation is to establish positive mental patterns within the mind. One also meditates to prevent the mind from falling under the control or influence of delusions and if it has fallen under the control of the delusions the purpose is to lessen those delusions. When one initially hears that one should lessen the distractions that one is experiencing in one's life and in one's mind one might feel; 'If my mind is not distracted to diverse activities then I won't experience any happiness' because we see the various distractions that we engage in our life as a means to attain happiness. But the happiness that we experience through those actions is only a very fickle and transient type of happiness that is very unstable. That is something that we all have plenty of experience of.

Our activities are always directed at attaining happiness and avoiding suffering. Whatever activities we engage in in our life they will always be motivated by wanting to attain happiness and wanting to avoid suffering. The activities that we engage in on the basis of that motivation are influenced by the delusions. We engage in different types of diversions and distractions in order to attain happiness. The mind produces a great variety of thoughts that go in all directions grasping at different types of happiness. This army of thoughts grasping at many, many different types of happiness makes it very difficult to actually attain happiness. One always comes to the situation that one will be only able to attain partial happiness. One grasps at many, many different types of what one considers happiness and one is never able to bring about all those aspects of happiness that one is imagining. One might be able to achieve one aspect or two aspects but there will always be something lacking. Further, this multitude of thoughts grasping at different types of happiness, establishing the mental idea of what happiness is, makes it impossible to enjoy the happiness that one already has. If one has already achieved certain success in one's life; one has a job, one has a car, one has a house and so forth, but grasping at different aspects of happiness continues it makes it impossible to enjoy what one already has. Those thoughts arise and make it impossible to be happy with what one already has and grasp at more.

Contact with the different types of happiness increases disturbing thoughts and one's conceptualising mind. The more the conceptualising mind is activated the more difficult one's life becomes. If one can lessen the conceptualising mind one's life will be easier. Even if one is not able to completely pacify the conceptualising

mind if one is able to lessen it or if one is at least aware of the problem one can be happier. The more disturbing thoughts one has in one's mind the more difficult it is for one to experience happiness. It is as if they take away the opportunity for satisfaction and fulfillment. Then, because one is unable to find satisfaction and fulfillment, it takes away something within one's enthusiasm. It's as if one becomes a little bit deflated and depressed because one cannot find the satisfaction one is looking for. One can't find the happiness that one is looking for because of the multitude of disturbing thoughts that occupy and distract the mind.

Therefore one should free the mind from external objects and withdraw the mind inwardly, bringing it back home and focusing it totally towards the inside. Doing that, withdrawing the mind and bringing it back to an inner object that discourages the generation of disturbing thoughts and then acquainting the mind with that inner object gives the mind a break. It gives the mind a break in which it can experience inner peace. That is one of the benefits and purposes of meditation. Bring the mind back home, freeing it from external objects. Let the disturbing thoughts that occupy themselves with external objects subside and then, automatically, the mind will withdraw inwardly. It will become focused internally and within that state we then place the mind single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath and take the coming and going of the breath as the object of meditation. We can meditate in that manner for a couple of minutes. (*Pause for meditation*)

It is good to strive to attain inner happiness through meditation because even though there is a certain happiness associated with external objects that happiness is very fickle and unsatisfactory. By comparison mental happiness far outshines physical happiness. Mental happiness can, for example, outweigh physical suffering. Even though one might be physically suffering if one is mentally happy the physical suffering won't bother one. But the reverse does not apply. Physical happiness won't help one to overcome mental suffering. If one is mentally unhappy even though one experiences physical happiness one will still be unhappy. One can be physically suffering but if one is mentally happy one is happy. Comparing physical and mental happiness mental happiness far outshines and outweighs physical happiness. It is very important to make one's mind clear, to make one's mind happy and to protect one's mind.

We come to the next outline (of the text), the third outline, which explains the way the delusions are abandoned. Verse 35 of the text *The 37 Practices of Bodhisattvas* (Snow Lion Publications, New York 1997) reads:

*"Habitual disturbing emotions are hard to stop
through counteractions.
Armed with antidotes, the guards of mindfulness
and mental alertness
Destroy disturbing emotions like attachment*

*At once, as soon as they arise –
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.”*

What is termed “disturbing emotions” or “delusion” is a mental state that disturbs the mind, a state that makes the mind unsubdued. One can be habituated to disturbing emotions, or delusions, that arise naturally within the mind. We have three major categories of delusions; ignorance, attachment and anger. Those mental states that are termed “delusions” are mistaken consciousnesses. They are mistaken consciousnesses that don’t have the support of valid cognition. Delusions are mistaken states of the mind. They are confused states of the mind. An example is the way attachment is generated. On one side one has the object and the pleasant aspect of the object gets exaggerated by what is called mistaken conception. The mistaken conceptions exaggerate the pleasant aspects of the object and then, because the object appears in such a pleasant way to the mind, one generates attachment towards that object. One generates attachment to the object because of this pleasant appearance of the object. The attachment is a confused mind because it doesn’t perceive the actual nature of the object but only perceives the exaggerated aspect of the object and, because of that, grasps at the object. Anger is similar but it’s the reverse. One generates anger with regards to an unpleasant object. Here again the more the mistaken conception exaggerates the unpleasant aspect of the object the more aversion and anger one generates. If one looks at the mind of an ordinary person on an ordinary level one can probably say that one always generates aversion towards something that is unpleasant. If something seems unpleasant one immediately generates aversion and anger towards that object and the more the mistaken conception exaggerates and builds up this unpleasant aspect of the object the more anger and aversion one generates towards the object. In this way anger is also a mind that is based on confusion. Ignorance is not knowing the nature of reality. It is a particular mental factor: an aspect of our mind that is deluded with regard to the nature of reality.

Disturbing emotions, because they are mistaken minds, create lots of confusion in the mind because they distort reality. Anger distorts reality in a negative way and attachment distorts reality in a positive way because it exaggerates the pleasant aspect of the object. In both instances once the emotion has subsided one wonders what it was all about and one can’t see any more why one got angry or why one was attached. If, for example, one gets very attached to the body as long as there is strong attachment to the body the body appears as very pleasant and desirable. Every part of the body appears as pleasant and desirable when one has strong attachment. But, when the attachment subsides, one doesn’t have that taste any more for the body and wonders what it was all about. The body can then actually look the opposite. The body can actually look quite repulsive if one looks at it without attachment. It is similar with anger. When one looks at a person with anger then they look very disagreeable and undesirable

but when the anger has subsided one quite often realises that one made a big mistake.

Because the object of one’s attachment appears as very desirable at the time of attachment through the exaggeration of its pleasantness one feels inclined to act out one’s delusions regarding the object and wants to be close to it. It is similar with anger. Because of the strong appearance of the object as undesirable and unpleasant one wants to put a lot of distance between oneself and the object. One wants to distance oneself from the object. In this way the delusions bring confusion and headache to one’s life because they play havoc with one’s life. If one generates these different delusions and disturbing emotions with regards to one object it changes our view of the object. One can sit together with a friend in a relaxed manner but something can happen that generates anger towards the other person. Equanimity is destroyed as one generates anger towards the person and the person appears as unpleasant, undesirable and one wants to distance oneself from the person. But, as one is trying to distance oneself from the person then, all at once, the person starts to appear as pleasant and desirable again and one again generates attachment for the person. Then one again tries to get close to the person but, as one tries to do that, again something happens and one again generates aversion. One is, as it were, peddling back and forth between anger and attachment - between trying to be close to the object and trying to get away and in such a way disturbing emotions bring a lot of headaches to one’s life.

By peddling back and forth in such a way one doesn’t have any space to experience happiness. One is constantly switching between what one perceives as happiness and what one perceives as suffering and all the while one doesn’t have the opportunity to experience happiness. You can see that all of this confusion basically comes about because of ignorance, because of not knowing the actual nature of phenomena or because of not knowing the nature of one’s mind. If one wants to relate it to selflessness, not knowing the ultimate nature of one’s mind, there is always this sort of fork between the mind and reality. It is ignorance, or the delusive aspect of ignorance, which hides or covers up reality. The root cause of the whole problem is ignorance.

It says here in the first line; ‘Habitual disturbing emotions are hard to stop through counteractions.’ Once disturbing emotions have become habitual they are very hard to stop. Therefore one shouldn’t indulge one’s disturbing emotions and make them a habit because once they have become a habit they are very difficult to stop. We can observe that with such habits as smoking or drinking. Once one has become accustomed to those activities they are very difficult to stop. Someone who hasn’t been in the habit of drinking find it is quite easy to stop drinking. But if someone has acquired the habit of drinking and they want to stop drinking it is incredibly difficult. It becomes an incredible struggle and suffering to try to stop drinking once one has generated the habit. The reason why is it difficult for one person to stop drinking and for the another one it isn’t is because the

first person hasn't acquired the habit while the second person has generated the habit and this makes it difficult. There are other actions such as eating sweets, good foods and so forth which one can find very difficult to give up if one has acquired the habit. The habit makes the delusion very difficult to abandon. If one has generated the habit of drinking alcohol then, because of having that very strong habit, because of the mind having become so habituated to it, when one tries to stop and tries not to drink it is very difficult. It becomes exceedingly difficult to stop drinking and not being able to drink actually creates great suffering. If one has a very strong habit of drinking alcohol and one can't drink alcohol it generates great suffering. It is like that with other types of attachment. If the mind is very attached to an object as long as the object is present it is alright but, once one is separated from the object, it creates incredible suffering. Why? Because of the intensity of the habit. If someone doesn't have that very strong habit, or if someone's habit is not as intense, when they are separated from the object their suffering is also not so strong. But if one has strong attachment suffering is very difficult to stop.

Once disturbing emotions have become habitual they are very hard to stop through counteractions. If, for example, one has acquired the habit of drinking alcohol then it creates lots of problems when one tries to stop. In order to counteract disturbing emotions one needs different tools. It says here one needs to be; 'Armed with antidotes'. One needs to have the help of the 'guards of mindfulness and mental alertness', mental introspection. Mindfulness is that part of the mind that can remain mindful of the virtuous object, of the virtuous state, of the meditational object. Mindfulness is that part of the mind which can keep the object in the mind - that doesn't forget about the object. Mental introspection is another aspect of the mind. It is introspection that checks up on the actions of body, speech and mind. It checks what the three doors of body, speech and mind are up to. Are they engaged in positive actions? Are they engaged into harmful actions? Then if introspection finds that any or all of the three doors are engaged in harmful actions one has to turn them back from harmful actions into a virtuous direction, into a positive direction. Because of the difficulty that acquaintance or familiarity with delusions causes it says one should 'Destroy disturbing emotions like attachment at once, as soon as they arise.' When one recognises, through introspection and mindfulness, that a disturbing emotion is about to be generated in the mind the best thing is to immediately counteract it and to immediately destroy or get rid of it. One shouldn't give a disturbing emotion a chance to create a place for itself within the mind because of the problems that the habit of disturbing emotion brings with it. One should view disturbing emotions and habits as the enemy. One should actually be afraid of them thinking of them as that which causes all the confusion and suffering within one's life and be very, very apprehensive and afraid of acquiring such a habit. Therefore, as soon as one finds that a disturbing emotion has been generated in the mind, or is about to be

generated in the mind, one shouldn't give it a chance but should immediately oppose it, counteract it, pacify it and destroy it. So do you have questions?

Question: I have a problem with attachment. I've become a kind of object to someone else's attachment. I don't want them to be attached to me. Is there anything that I can do from my side to try and be less attractive to them? Is there anything that I can do to reduce their attachment to me?

Answer: Yes, there is (*laughter*). You can generate a very untidy appearance (*laughter*) or dirty clothes, or a dirty and untidy face (*laughter*). Some people, when they find themselves to be the object of someone else's attachment feel encouraged to make themselves more pretty and to dress up even more. By doing that they just encourage the other person to become more confused. That is something that one shouldn't do - one should rather dress down. (*Laughter*) It's also alright if you just don't go where the other person is. One can make oneself less beautiful and dress for the purpose of lessening the mindfulness of the other person. In relation to this there is a story where one man was defending himself from the attack of another man. He was defending himself with a sword against an attack with a bow and arrow by the other man. Whenever the other man shot an arrow the defender could somehow block the arrow with his sword. Finally the attacker had only one arrow left. Then the girlfriend of the attacker said to him, 'Don't shoot your last arrow. Let me first distract his attention and then, when he is distracted, you can shoot the arrow'. So she revealed her body to the defender and his mind was distracted and the attacker could kill him with the last arrow. The defender said, before he died; 'I wasn't killed by my enemy's arrow. I was killed by my loss of mindfulness and introspection.' The moral of that story, not losing one's mindfulness and introspection, applies to many life situations. The loss of mindfulness and introspection is a major cause of the destruction of relationships. If one party of the relationship loses their mindfulness and introspection and become attracted to someone else they break up the relationship because they are attracted to someone else. There are many ways in which one can see the impacts of losing mindfulness and introspection. This is something that one has to watch out for.

As was said at the beginning, bring the mind back home, bring it back from external objects and focus it inwards and then place the mind 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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