
The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas

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We can meditate for a little while as usual. First we have to sit in a good, comfortable, upright physical posture.

The most beneficial activity that one can engage in is subduing the mind. When the mind is subdued, the 'I' or the self will become subdued. Some Buddhist Tenets assert that the mind is actually the person or the self. Their reasoning is that the mind is the person, because when the mind becomes subdued, the person also becomes subdued.

The mind generates our unhappiness, and also generates the happiness we experience. The only way to subdue this mind is through meditation. There is no other way to subdue the mind. We can subdue some animals by beating them and physically subjugating them. However, that does not work with the mind. The only way to subdue the mind is through meditation.

For example, if an extremely angry person is arrested and put into prison, that alone will not eliminate that person's anger. Even though they are in prison and have been physically restrained, their mind is still angry.

When we subdue the mind, we should do it in a gentle, easygoing manner. For example, people who have had a strong mental disturbance may encounter a lot of stress if they are given a lot of work to do, even if the mental disturbance has calmed down; the [work] can lead to the mental disturbance arising again. I usually advise this type of person to take it easy and relax. It is important for such people to bring about some peace to the mind in an easygoing and gentle manner. It is important for those who have already attained a peaceful mind to increase that inner peace.

One of the main methods of subduing the mind is mindfulness. Through mindfulness, one can train the mind to abide on the meditation object, thereby stopping the mind from being scattered and wandering off towards external objects. When the mind is distracted towards external objects, it usually gets agitated. It is important to reverse that trend and to train the mind to abide on an internal object.

Otherwise, if the mind is distracted towards external objects, they may cause different types of disturbing emotions, such as fear, anxiety, excitement, and so forth, to arise. If one can prevent the mind from wandering towards those external objects that generate disturbing states of mind, then one's mind will be protected from those disturbed states, and one will be protected from those mental sufferings.

We will now meditate for a little while. Bring the mind back home, focus it completely towards the inside and

don't let it wander off towards external objects. From within that state, place the mind single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. *[Pause for meditation.]*

Last time [in our discussion of the text, *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*], we finished discussing the benefits of enthusiasm and the faults of laziness. Enthusiasm in this context has a three-fold division. Enthusiasm is prevented by laziness, which also has a three-fold division.

The first type of laziness is the laziness of procrastination. Procrastination is where one says: "I will practise the Dharma soon. I have a plan to practise the Dharma. I have a plan to engage in some virtue". One goes on and on, always having a plan to do something in the future and never accomplishing anything. When a person falls under the control of this type of laziness, he or she is continuously procrastinating and not following up on their aim.

The first type of laziness, procrastination, has to do with not doing the things one has to do at the appointed time, but putting them off until later. By always saying, "I will have enough time later to do it", etc., the tasks never get done.

There are two antidotes to this type of laziness. The first is meditating on death and impermanence, and the second is meditating on the nature of this precious human rebirth – its endowments and freedoms, great potential, preciousness and rarity.

By meditating on death and impermanence and realising that one is definitely going to die and that the time of death is uncertain, one will feel less inclined to procrastinate in one's Dharma practice. We may keep saying: "I am still young, I still have time", but before we know it, we will have already reached old age. Meditating on our precious human rebirth, and on this life's freedoms and endowments, its great potential, its rarity and how quickly it is lost will also help us overcome that laziness.

The laziness we are discussing here has to do with not doing the things at the appropriate time. The activities one must do in the morning should be done in the morning. The activities that must be done in the afternoon and in the evening should be done at those times. If one doesn't do the things one should in the morning and leaves them until the evening, then in the evening, one will feel tired and they won't done.

For example, some friends of mine always ended up to having to do their daily prayer commitments in the evening. It wasn't that they wasted the day – their days were quite full doing different types of things, except their daily prayer commitments! They had quite a few of these commitments, which one is not allowed to break and must do every day, so they ended up to having to do them in the evening. But in the evening they were tired. So, they would sit and do their prayers, but they would nod off, and wake up and continue their prayers

for a bit, until they nodded off again, and in such a way finish their prayers.

It would be much more skilful if one finished one's prayers in the morning, and completed one's commitments. Then, one would not need to worry about them for the rest of the day.

By falling under the control of 'procrastinating laziness', one loses many opportunities for Dharma practice and for accumulating virtue, because one thinks: "There is still an opportunity, there is still plenty of time ahead when I can do things." By thinking in such a way, one loses much precious time for practising virtue.

In contrast, we have no problems doing non-virtuous activities without hesitation. With non-virtuous activities, we don't lose any time and do them immediately! *[Laughter]* It would be very good if we could do virtuous activities in the same way.

It is important to understand that the time we let pass is irretrievably lost. The preceding moment and the subsequent moment are mutually exclusive – when a moment has passed, it is completely mutually exclusive from the present, and it will also be completely gone.

The second type of laziness is the laziness of grasping and being attracted to non-virtuous activities or objects such as gain and praise, social gatherings, or pointless and meaningless activities, or just lazing around and passing time. It is easy for the mind to become involved in these activities. It's as if it happens naturally. Again, being attached to such activities prevents one from practising the Dharma, from practising virtue. Many opportunities for the practice of Dharma and virtue are lost when one is attracted to and engages in such activities.

It talks here [i.e. in the text] about how the laziness of being attracted to non-virtuous activities prevents one from Dharma practice. But even if you want to attain a worldly aim, you have to be single-pointed in your approach, and you have to work for that aim. If you are distracted by various activities and things, you will not be able to accomplish even a worldly aim. In the context of worldly activities, one does not use the word enthusiasm; rather, one talks about zeal or effort. In the context of Dharma, enthusiasm applies only to one's Dharma practice.

Of course, we like to receive gain and praise. We also enjoy the company of others, social activities, and various meaningless and pointless activities that waste our time. There are limitless opportunities for enjoyment, but if one looks at them from a longer-term perspective, while these activities intermittently give some joy and pleasure to the mind, ultimately don't provide any benefit. The only activity that is really worth enjoying is the practice of Dharma, because it brings ultimate happiness. Even though the practice of the Dharma can sometimes be difficult in the short-term, it ultimately provides great joy and happiness. Other types of excitement, such as pleasure and gain, are momentary and just pass away.

If one has the attitude: "As long as I have some happiness now, I don't care what happens to me in the future", it usually leads to great harm. Activities and enjoyments that provide short-term pleasure usually lead to harm and problems in the long term. The attitude of wanting pleasure now, at any cost, is harmful and destructive, even from worldly point of view. However, the Dharma can provide both temporary and ultimate happiness. In a way, it takes one from happiness to happiness.

To overcome the laziness of being attracted to non-virtuous activities, one can reflect on the way worldly activities lack essence. Worldly activities involving material wealth, friends and relatives, even one's physical body are completely without essence. If worldly activities had some essence, we would see signs that they had mentally benefited us and given us some satisfaction; however, one is unable to find such signs.

Worldly activities don't provide happiness, they don't provide satisfaction and they don't benefit the mind. Therefore, they are without essence. The practice of Dharma, however, brings about a satisfied mind, it improves the mind, it benefits the mind. So the activity of the Dharma has essence, it has purpose.

The third division of laziness is the laziness of low self-esteem and depression. If one thinks about the aim we are trying to attain, that aim is complete enlightenment. An enlightened being is someone who has perfected all qualities and has purified all faults. To attain such a perfected state, one needs to practise the vast and expansive Bodhisattva path. This may lead one to think: "How is it possible for someone like me to engage in those practices? How is it possible for someone like me to achieve those aims?". One may feel incapable of achieving those aims – that would be the laziness of low self-esteem.

If one has low self-esteem and feels depressed, thinking: "I'm not able to achieve those aims" and tries practising with that type of attitude, one won't be able to achieve one's aims. What we need is aspiration and strength of mind. We need to have self-confidence.

To achieve a particular aim, there will always be conducive conditions and obstructive conditions, so being depressed and having low self-esteem is not a useful attitude to have. It has no benefit and it does not help one to achieve one's aim and get where one wants. We need to have self-confidence, strength of mind and aspiration. On the basis of this, one can engage successfully in the methods for achieving one's aims, and thus will be able to effectively achieve one's aim. If one doesn't have the qualities of aspiration, strength of mind and self-confidence, one won't be able to practise effectively.

If one doesn't have strength of mind and self-confidence, as soon as one encounters some obstacles within one's Dharma practice, one will start to become depressed and start thinking: "How is it I am not able to do this?". One will then lose one's aspiration to practise and fall under

the control of laziness. When one is under the control of laziness, nothing will happen.

It should be the other way around. One's strength of mind and courage should increase proportionally with the difficulties one encounters. If one encounters great difficulties, one should have great strength of mind and courage. If there are only small difficulties, only a small amount of strength of mind and courage are needed. Even though the text explains more, that is enough for us now.

By thinking about the vastness of the aim of enlightenment and by thinking about the extensive Bodhisattva practices one has to engage in order to attain enlightenment, one might feel incapable of doing that. One might feel: "That is something I'm not up to, something I can't do".

However, there is not the slightest benefit from holding on to such low self-esteem and depressed thinking. It is also not accurate. The Buddha said that, from the very smallest insects – such as ants – upwards, every being has the potential to attain enlightenment. Even an ant, if it were to engage in the practices for becoming enlightened, in the methods for becoming enlightened, would be able to attain enlightenment.

That was said by the Buddha and the Buddha is a valid being – meaning that the Buddha cannot mislead you. What the Buddha says is accurate and correct, and one can take faith in that and believe it. If the Buddha said this about ants, and if one then looks at one's present situation – where one has a human rebirth and not just a human rebirth but one has actually a precious human rebirth and all the conditions for Dharma practice – one should think that, on the basis of this precious human rebirth, there is nothing that one cannot accomplish. If one applies the correct means, one will be able to achieve any aim that one chooses.

This is the way we should be thinking. We should each think: "If I engage in the correct methods and practices, I will definitely be able to achieve enlightenment, because I have a precious human rebirth, which has great potential and all the conducive conditions. The Buddha said that even an ant has the potential to become enlightened, and that all sentient beings, from very small insects onwards, have the potential to become enlightened. As I have a precious human rebirth and have all the opportunities and conditions, there is nothing I cannot achieve if I apply myself."

It is also good to remember that the Buddhas of the past, present and future weren't always Buddhas, but they started out as ordinary beings. They started from below, and worked their way up. Nobody is a Buddha from the beginning.

There are various causes of laziness. One cause is being attracted to the happiness of leisure, viewing leisure as something as pleasurable. For example, if one thinks that doing nothing – not engaging in any worldly activity or Dharma practice, but instead doing nothing – seems

pleasurable and a cause for happiness, this is a cause for laziness.

The second cause of laziness is being to non-virtuous activities – being attached to the happiness of sleep, for example, and not having renunciation or disgust for cyclic existence. There are four causes of sleepiness. The first cause of sleepiness is having a full stomach. The second cause of sleepiness is the body becoming too soft. If the body becomes soft, one wants to fall asleep very easily. The third cause is tiredness and exhaustion, and the fourth cause is focusing on darkness. If one focuses one's mind on brightness, one will not fall asleep, but if one focuses one's mind on darkness, it will cause you to fall asleep. Even if a person did not want to sleep and instead sat down to meditate, if they were focusing on darkness, meditating on darkness, they would fall asleep while meditating.

Through any of these four causes the mind automatically, without freedom, withdraws internally from the five sense objects and goes to the state of sleep. We can finish here discussing the three types of laziness. Next time, we can go on to the three types of enthusiasm.

As explained at the beginning, bring the mind back home and focus it inwards. Then, by keeping the mind focused internally and not letting it be distracted towards external objects, place it single-pointedly on the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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