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## Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas

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We will begin with a few minutes of breathing meditation.

Of the six perfections, we have finished discussing the perfections of giving and moral ethics. We covered the meaning of 'moral ethics' and the three types of moral ethics which are: refraining from negativities; gathering virtues and benefitting other sentient beings. Is there any order in cultivating these three moralities? Yes, there is a sequential order.

Firstly, we cultivate or engage in the morality of refraining from negativity or harm which primarily refers to refraining from the ten non-virtues. Based on this, we then engage in the morality of gathering virtues which means to gather any virtues that we have not yet gathered and to safeguard and increase those virtues we have already gathered. When we engage and commit ourselves to the ethical discipline of refraining from negativities and gathering virtues, we should engage in and commit ourselves to benefitting other beings.

Acharya Shantideva said in his text *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, 'if the path and the cause is obscured to one, then explaining it to others is very difficult.' So from this quotation we can understand that in terms of advising other people on the meaning or practice of moral ethics, firstly we must thoroughly learn about it and also put it into practice. Only when that is done, can we be more effective in terms of advising or encouraging others to apply ethical practice.

In a practical sense, we cannot apply the third morality of 'benefitting others' unless our continuum is calm and subdued. We calm our continuum by first applying the moral practice of refraining from negativities or harmful actions in order to overcome the coarse mental afflictions. That is how we make our continuum calm and gentle. So, we can understand why we must first apply the morality of 'refraining from negativities' and how it makes the other two types of morality viable.

As a result of our moral practice in our past life, we have presently found a perfect human life to practise Dharma, and as a result of our past practice of giving we have all the suitable conditions to live a healthy life and to engage in spiritual practice. However, it is important to be aware that anger can destroy the virtues which we have accumulated from our past actions, and it can also lead us to commit negative actions that can yield bad ripening results in the future. The remedy to anger is patience, so the 'perfection of patience' is explained after the 'perfection of moral ethics'.

Verse 27 of the root text reads:

To Bodhisattvas who want a wealth of virtue  
Those who harm are like a precious treasure.  
Therefore towards all cultivate patience

Without hostility–

This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

The first two lines of this verse indicate how the bodhisattvas view those who bring them harm and trouble as being like a *precious treasure* because they provide bodhisattvas with an opportunity to develop patience. They understand that as a benefit of practising patience, they achieve the state of buddhahood in future. The second two lines explain that because of their practice of patience, the bodhisattvas never get angry or have thoughts of retaliation towards those who cause harm.

Let's now look into the benefits of patience. These benefits include reducing the number of enemies and increasing the number of friends or people on our side; turning enemies into friends, making existing friendships and relationships closer and long-lasting. In everyday life it is obvious that the more we demonstrate good character and conduct, the more people will want to associate with and befriend us. Having such a good nature will result in harmonious relationships with others and a happier life with the added benefits of better mental and physical health.

We should not misunderstand the 'practice of patience' and think that it means we cannot respond or do anything to those who cause harm. It means that we should not respond to them out of anger or with any hostile intent. Rather, our response needs to come from good intentions. If we respond to others with an angry mind then we will cause harm, resulting in them becoming upset. Any kind of angry response will not solve the problem because it will be negative and unfair. If people find us annoying and irritating they will begin to lose faith in us, dislike and hate us. Not only can anger destroy our current friendship, but it can also prevent us from finding new friends. With anger in our mind, we won't be happy and peaceful while we are in the company of others or when we are by ourselves, and nor can we even get to sleep. Furthermore, anger can also spoil our external appearance and personality. When someone who is physically very beautiful becomes angry, they lose that beauty. Likewise, a normally fun-loving person when influenced by anger will alienate others to the point where they avoid interaction and contact with them – because anger is off-putting and can even frighten others away.

Taking into account some of the benefits of the practice of patience, we will now examine the meaning of 'patience' and the different types of patience. We will also look into how we need to think and reflect when we are meditating on patience.

**What is patience?** Patience is the state of mind which remains in its natural state without being agitated or disturbed by anger in the face of confronting harmful or undesirable situations. There are three types of patience: non-retaliation towards a perpetrator or harm giver; willingly accepting suffering and firmly thinking of the Dharma.

*The patience of non-retaliation:*

In order to cultivate the patience of non-retaliation, we need to change our mental attitude. For example, we need to stop blaming others, let go of our self-centred mind,

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generate compassion and take responsibility for our own actions etc. If we ask, 'what is the underlying cause of the harm we receive from others?' 'Is it the person?' 'If so does that person have a choice or not?' The answer to all these questions is no. The real cause is the afflicted state of the mind within the person, and not the person. The person was incited to cause harm by an afflicted mind. So recognising that it is not the person and the real cause of the harm we receive is the mental affliction within them will help to prevent anger from arising and circumvent any retaliation. So here we are shifting the blame from the person to the mental affliction and indeed upon examining the situation, it seems that the person was ordered to harm us by the mental affliction or delusion. Essentially the person is likened to a servant, and their master or boss is the mental affliction within their own continuum. Hence, in this situation, if we engage in retaliation, we end up helping their boss and we too end up becoming a servant and succumbing to the mental affliction of that person.

If we receive harm from somebody because of their mental illness, we usually don't get angry at the person because we recognise that they are behaving abnormally due to a mental disorder. We feel empathy for that person and will consider getting help for them. Similarly, we should try to view the situation where we are being harmed by others and try to feel compassion and not hatred towards the harm givers.

Another perspective to help us prevent a sense of retaliation is to understand and recognise that the reason or cause for being harmed by others relates to the negative karma we have created in the past. If we blame the cause of harm on our own past negative karma rather than the person harming us, we can prevent a sense of retaliation and resentment towards that person. So we should think that the pain and suffering we experience is derived from negative karma we have committed in the past. And if we become angry and retaliate when we are harmed, then we are creating the cause to suffer more in the future.

*The patience of willingly accepting suffering:*

In order to apply this practice of patience, we need to cultivate a more realistic and holistic way of thinking. We will find it very helpful to apply Shantideva's advice to examine if there is a way to remedy the problem or not. If there is a remedy then why should we worry, because it can be remedied? If there is no remedy why should we worry, because worrying is not going to overcome or change our situation? So, through changing our way of thinking we cultivate a spirit and thought of willingly accepting our situation as it is.

We have to look at our situation from as many angles as we can because having different perspectives will help us to apply patience. Another way of thinking is to recognise that whatever harmful situation we face or the suffering we encounter, is not necessarily negative or bad. So, try to understand the other side or positive aspects about facing hardship and experiencing suffering because they teach us humility and lessen our pride. When things are going well and are on our side, such as enjoying good health, beauty, wealth and power, we will have an elevated sense of pride which can be very destructive. However, when we are down in terms of our health, wealth, relationships and

work etc., we don't have such an arrogant mind or pride, due to the adversity that we face. Another thing to recognise is that, as briefly mentioned earlier, all the unwanted experiences arise from our negative actions or karma. Therefore experiencing suffering should remind and inspire us to abandon non-virtue and to adopt virtue, because we want happiness and do not want suffering.

Suffering provides the perfect opportunity to habituate ourselves in cultivating and developing compassion towards others. Through our own experiences of whatever difficult situations and suffering we endure, we can easily feel compassion towards other beings who are experiencing the same situation. This kind of compassion or sense of empathy we feel towards others arises from our own experience of suffering. Therefore our own suffering and hardship can foster within us compassion towards other beings who are inflicted with suffering.

*The patience of firmly thinking of Dharma:*

This type of patience relates to all of our commitments to keep up with the Dharma practices, from taking refuge in Three Jewels to all other practices, in order to achieve complete enlightenment, which is our ultimate spiritual goal. In terms of the scriptural collections, there are twelve branches of the Dharma and it is very important to recognise that all of them are equally essential and to never discriminate or evaluate some types of Dharma as being more precious than others.

We will leave tonight's teaching on the perfection of patience. Next time we will start to discuss the 'perfection of joyful effort'.

Thank you

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