

In battle, if a warrior loses his weapon he will immediately pick it up, knowing that to do otherwise would place his life in danger. In the same way, it is important to understand that whenever any mental affliction arises, we must remember to apply the antidote immediately and attack it.

The Kadampa master Dromtonpa advises us that if whatever we do becomes a remedy to the mental afflictions, then it becomes a Dharma practice. Otherwise, the action is not a Dharma practice. On the other hand, if whatever spiritual practice we engage in is not really counteracting any mental afflictions, then we are not really practising the Dharma. Therefore, we must ensure that whatever our spiritual practice, it counteracts the mental afflictions.

The next verse emphasises that we must maintain mindfulness and introspection throughout all our practices of benefitting other beings.

36. In brief, whatever you are doing,
Ask yourself 'What's the state of my mind?'
With constant mindfulness and mental alertness
Accomplish others' good -
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

This summarises how we should put into practice all the things mentioned earlier. It is important that whatever practice we do and whatever types of actions we engage in (such as sitting, lying down, standing or walking), we must always examine and observe our inner continuum and our mindstream, knowing what state of mind we have within ourselves.

The line saying *with constant mindfulness and mental alertness accomplish others' good* refers to the bodhisattvas' deeds of benefitting others. For all of those deeds to be effective, the bodhisattvas always retain and maintain the forces of mindfulness and introspection, which makes their deeds very effective and fruitful.

We are talking about engaging in deeds that benefit others. The way we benefit others is to engage in the bodhisattvas' deeds of the six perfections, such as giving and so forth. We can engage in those deeds according to our own capacities. For example, if we do not have any material things to give, we can still practice it on the mental level by working on cultivating and increasing our thoughts of giving. We may lack material things to give to others, but a sincere and wholehearted thought of giving is really the equivalent of having generated bodhicitta. Cultivating a genuine thought and wish to benefit others is paramount in our spiritual development, so it is very beneficial to developing a positive mental attitude within us.

Achieving the perfection of giving does not mean that we must fulfil the needs of all sentient beings in the three realms. If that is the case, then even buddhas have not accomplished that. Rather, we reach the state of the perfection of giving by transcending our thought of giving to the perfection of giving. We can achieve this through training our minds with the thought of giving.

In a treatise called *The Commentary on Bodhicitta* Nagarjuna says, 'Although we may lack the ability to benefit others, we should still hold the thought of giving. And when we

have this thought, practically we are engaged in the deeds of benefitting others.'

Now we move to the next verse, which is about dedicating virtues to complete enlightenment.

37. To remove the suffering of limitless beings,
Understanding the purity of the three spheres,
Dedicate the virtue from making such effort
To enlightenment -
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

Here we understand how the bodhisattva Thogmay, who is the author of this text, dedicates all the virtues he accumulates from composing it, as well as engaging in the practices mentioned here. He dedicates it all to liberating limitless sentient beings from suffering existence with the knowledge of the lack of true existence. So, this verse mentions the importance of conjoining the wisdom of the lack of true existence of the three spheres with the practice of the six perfections. The three spheres, in the context of the practice of giving, are the giver, the receiver and the object of giving. However, as beginners, or if you lack the understanding of emptiness, or if you do not know how to properly dedicate, then a good way to dedicate is to say to yourself from the bottom of your heart, 'Just as all the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the past and in the present and future dedicate their virtue and merit, may I too dedicate it in the same way'. If you think of dedicating your merit in that way, it is very powerful, and your dedication then becomes complete.

The benefit of dedicating our merit to achieving complete enlightenment is that we will have the fortune to enjoy the fruit of our virtues and merit. In other words, the virtue we accumulate will not be extinguished until we achieve complete enlightenment. The Buddha said, 'Just as a drop of water that falls into the great ocean is not exhausted until the ocean itself is dry, the merit totally dedicated to complete enlightenment will never be exhausted until enlightenment is reached.'

Next, the author shows who he has written this text for:

For all who want to train on the Bodhisattva path,
I have written the *Thirty-seven Practices of
Bodhisattvas*,
Following what has been said by the excellent ones
On the meaning of the sutras, tantras and treatises.

This clearly shows that the text was written for the sake of those who are keen to engage in the bodhisattvas' path or the bodhisattvas' practices. They are the main target of this text. The verse then describes what this text contains, which is meaning based on the sutras and the treatises on them, as well as all the personal instructions the author has received from his own lineage gurus.

The next verse refers to the authenticity of this text being the reflection of an unmistakable instruction and practice:

Though not poetically pleasing to scholars,
Owing to my poor intelligence and lack of learning,
I've relied on the sutras and the words of the
excellent,
So I think these Bodhisattva practices are without
error.

On one hand, the author is showing his profound humbleness by saying that he lacks enough intelligence

and skill to write beautifully or eloquently. On the other hand, he is showing confidence in what is mentioned in the text as being exactly in accord with what is mentioned in the sutras and the treatises. Therefore, the author is saying that the content of this text unmistakably expresses the true practices of bodhisattvas, without error.

Then the next verse reads:

However, as the great deeds of Bodhisattvas
Are hard to fathom for one of my poor intelligence,
I beg the excellent to forgive all faults,
Such as contradictions and non sequiturs.

In short, this verse also expresses the author's humbleness and requests forgiveness for any mistakes, including those that are contradictory or out of context.

When the author says, *however, as the great deeds of Bodhisattvas are hard to fathom for one of my poor intelligence*, he is saying that when we talk about the bodhisattvas' deeds, we are talking about something that is as expansive as the sky, as deep as the ocean, and so profound. Because of such profundity, it is not possible for one of his intelligence to fathom all the bodhisattvas' extensive and profound deeds. Therefore, the author is confessing that there might be some contradiction in terms of the meaning and disconnection in terms of the wording of his writing. If that is the case, he asks for our forgiveness.

The next verse dedicates the virtue from this composition towards complete enlightenment:

Through the virtue from this may all living beings
Gain the ultimate and conventional altruistic
intention
And thereby become like the Protector Chenrezig
(Avalokiteshvara)
Who dwells in neither extreme - not in the world
nor in peace.

Freedom from these two extremes relates to the line that says to *gain the ultimate and conventional altruistic intention*, which is ultimate bodhicitta and conventional bodhicitta. Ultimate bodhicitta refers to the wisdom realising emptiness, which is the means to free oneself from the extreme of samsara or the world. Conventional bodhicitta is the means to free oneself from the extreme of the peace of nirvana. An example of someone who is free from these two extremes and possesses both ultimate and conventional bodhicitta, is the protector Chenrezig, who is also known as Avalokiteshvara. Therefore, the author dedicates all the virtues that he may have accumulated so that all sentient beings will achieve the state of Avalokiteshvara.

Then finally:

This was written for his own and others' benefit by the monk Thogmay, an exponent of scripture and reasoning, in a cave in Ngulchu Rinchen.

The colophon clearly shows who wrote this text, to whom it was written, for what purpose it was written and where it was written or composed.

With this, we complete the short commentary to the *Thirty-seven Practices of Bodhisattvas* by the bodhisattva Togmay.

Next Wednesday happens to be the auspicious day of the Buddha turning the wheel of Dharma, and I am going to begin the teaching on the lamrim text – the text on the graduated path to enlightenment called *The Swift Path*.

With that teaching, my intention is to go over the text section by section, review each section at the end and then give an opportunity for people to raise questions. Of course, the Covid restrictions right now make it a bit difficult to have direct interaction with questions and answers. However, when the restrictions are lifted, maybe we could get together at the end of each section and focus on that particular section and then engage in questions and answers.

I know that many people here have heard this lamrim teaching a number of times, and many of you are familiar with the lamrim topics, so discussion can be a useful tool to learn from each other. With your past knowledge and experience of the subject, I am sure there is something I can learn from you as well, which is something I look forward to.

Having completed this teaching on the *Thirty-seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*, and since it was just yesterday that we celebrated His Holiness the Dalai Lama's 86th birthday, let us dedicate all the virtues and merit we have accumulated towards the long life of His Holiness, as we all want him to live for many, many more years.

Transcribed by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Cynthia Karena
Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering
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