

English Dharma talk
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Thirty seven practices of Bodhisattvas – Class ?

Text at <http://www.lotsawahouse.org/tibetan-masters/gyalse-thogme-zangpo/37-practices-all-bodhisattvas>

Let's think about meaning of stanza from Shantideva's Engaging in Bodhisattva Deeds, in which he says although sentient beings don't want suffering, they rush toward suffering. Although they want happiness, due to ignorance, they destroy causes of happiness. All of us are alike in wanting happiness and not suffering. We have an innate wish arising within us.

Shantideva says although we don't want suffering, it's as though we are voluntarily seeking out suffering as though we are like a starving person seeking food trying to consume as much food as possible. Although we don't desire suffering, we seem to be actively seeking out suffering. Although we want every happiness, due to ignorance, we distance ourselves from the causes of happiness, as though they are enemies. Suppose someone you don't like. Directly or indirectly you will try to distance yourself from this person. Our behaviour toward causes of happiness are similar, as if we regard causes of happiness as enemies and try to be as far away as possible from them.

Why is that although we want happiness we destroy its causes; although we don't want suffering, we run toward its causes? We fail to recognize the true causes of happiness. Happiness comes in many forms: that of this life, that of future lives, as well as the long term happiness of liberation and enlightenment. The true causes of happiness lie in the cultivation of love and compassion. Instead of cultivating our minds with these qualities, we engage in the opposite. We have this obsession with I and me. As a result of that, we find people annoying, irritating, and so on. Instead of treating them with love and compassion, we generate disturbing states of mind. We look down upon them, despise them, are very competitive, generate jealousy and other negative states of mind. Instead of creating causes of happiness, we create causes of suffering.

We have this mistaken perception as happiness coming from outside. If only I can be wealthy, I'll be happy; if only I have a good reputation, I'll be happy. Because of such perceptions as objects as for happiness, we will get them. We may steal / lie to get them. So we create more and more causes of happiness and causes of happiness become more and more distant from us. As if we have treated causes of happiness as enemies and we've become far away.

We want happiness. We don't want any unhappiness. What should we do? Buddha in his first teaching taught the four noble truths. When teaching the four noble truths, he

first stated what's suffering. Then he went on to explain origins of suffering. Having identified what sufferings are and what their causes are, then he went on to explain how we can overcome such suffering. He taught the path and practicing the path. One will be able to obtain cessations of suffering. It's a state of everlasting wellbeing and happiness. By obtaining liberation from cyclic existence, one will be able to explain everlasting peace and happiness.

We constantly are concerned with how to achieve happiness. The Buddha's approach is slightly different. He begins by thinking of suffering, identifying what that is and so on. For us, we usually think about how to achieve happiness, rather than how to dispel causes of suffering. On an ordinary level, people usually look outside to achieve happiness. We may think by eating certain kinds of foods, drinking certain drinks, I'll be happy. I need to obtain this, that I'll be happy. Attention is focused on the 5 senses: how to satisfy them. Going by this approach, it would be difficult to stop the causes of unhappiness.

When the Buddha taught the four noble truths, he started by explaining where our happiness comes from. He identified unhappiness and says it comes from certain causes and conditions. It is by stopping these causes and conditions that we are able to experience happiness. Automatically, happiness will arise if you remove the causes of unhappiness. The latter are of 2 types: karma and afflictions. By mental afflictions, we mean these disturbing emotions: attachment, anger, pride and so on. There is this presentation of the 6 root afflictions and 20 secondary afflictions (we've discussed these). There are these disturbing emotions that cause us suffering. We should identify these as the true culprits that cause suffering. Instead of focusing outwards on finding happiness from the external world, we need to look inwards and think under these disturbing emotions, we create karma. ... when this karma ripens, they give us difficulties. Between the 2 types of causes of suffering (karma and afflictions), the main culprits are the afflictions, b/c they cause karma. Among these afflictions, the main affliction (disturbing emotion) is called ignorance. b/c of ignorance, we create all the other mental afflictions and actions and so on. If we want to experience happiness, then what we need to do is reduce these negative emotions. Reduce ignorance by work on 6 root and 20 secondary afflictions. Then in that way, happiness will naturally be induced.

What do we need to do to rid these negative emotions? We need to cultivate the path. There are many kinds of path explained in Buddhism. Hinayana and Mahayana. By cultivating these paths, then we'll pass through various stages that will lead us to happiness. "Gate gate paragate parasamgate Bodhi svaha" – progression: path of accumulation, preparation, insight, meditation, finally – no more learning. By passing through these, we'll be able to rid suffering in a thorough manner. In that way, naturally, we'll be able to achieve happiness.

In this context, we study Mahayana (Universal Vehicle). There are many qualities we can train in. but among these, there's 1 quality that's particularly important. In Stages of Meditation, Geshe explains if you have this quality, then you have all qualities of Buddhas in the palm of your hand: it is great compassion.

What do we mean by great compassion? It refers to this quality that is moved by others' suffering. When one witnesses suffering of other living beings, one has this spontaneous wish if only they can become free from this problem. If only they may be free from unhappiness. One has this very genuine wish such that one may actually manifest a certain signs (goose pimples or tears in one's eyes) b/c one has such a wish for others to be free from their suffering/ difficulty. This kind of compassion conveys all living beings. Our compassion is likely weak now. And likely very biased: in the sense that we feel compassion for those who have benefited us, e.g. parents, siblings, relatives who have benefited us. If they encounter problems, we'll feel oh what a shame, want to help them out. But if the person experiences suffering hasn't benefited us before (stranger), then probably we won't be moved. We may be indifferent (not care). If someone has to be our enemy, someone who's annoyed us, then we'll actually feel "yay" – serves him right. So you can see the kind of compassion that we do have in this point and time isn't fully developed. There's lot of room for improvement. Kind of great compassion we aim to develop in our mind is that kind that's all encompassing. We're trying to achieve this great compassion.

By cultivating our minds it's possible for us to arrive at this state of great compassion, in which we are able to regard every living being with affection. We can see them in a positive light. At that point, we won't have enemies anymore. We'll be constantly surrounded by friends. That will really bring about a deep sense of happiness and wellbeing. The purpose of training in the Mahayana teachings is so that our minds will arrive at this state of great compassion, which we can view others in a positive way, and in that way, experience happiness constantly.

This is how the Bodhisattvas train (beings who aspire to be fully enlightened). We've arrived in the text where the 6 perfections are explained. These are practices of Bodhisattvas who've obtained grounds (advanced levels). We've completed the first two (generosity and ethics). Today, we look at third: perfection of patience.

Stanza 27

The practice of all the Bodhisattvas is to cultivate patience,
Free from any trace of animosity towards anyone at all,
Since any potential source of harm is like a precious treasure
To the Bodhisattva who is eager to enjoy a wealth of virtue.

In stanza 27, it's mentioned in the fourth line that Bodhisattvas are eager to enjoy a wealth of virtue. From the point of view of the Bodhisattvas, the highest wealth of virtue one can enjoy is the state of full enlightenment. They strive to attain such a virtuous state. They see any potential source of harm as a priceless treasure. When they meet people who can cause harm to them, annoy them, and cause difficulties, Bodhisattvas actually generate great joy as though they have discovered a priceless treasure. Imagine you found someone very valuable without having to pay for it, how happy you will be. Imagine on your land you find a big lump of gold or diamond, imagine having found this priceless treasure how delighted you will be. Bodhisattvas are like that. When they meet

people who are potential sources of harm, they are happy. Bodhisattvas can practice patience toward everyone. People who are pleasant, of course Bodhisattvas can respond with joy, happiness, but even for these unpleasant people. Bodhisattvas can also practice patience and have joy in their minds.

Let's suppose we do think that cultivating patience is wonderful. We want to be patient people. How do you become a patient person? How do you cultivate patience? Let's say you generate this intention today I will practice patience. But you need an object for you to practice patience. Someone who can cause you to be impatient. Even if you try to go to a busy place, you may not find anyone who annoys you. So if you are really serious about cultivating this mind, and becoming more patient, you want to do something about your anger and impatience, if you are able to encounter someone who can cause you harm / annoy you, you will be delighted. It's like you suddenly win some prize. It's like that who's sincerely trying to work on anger and trying to cultivate patience. If this person can cause them harm, they'll think this is priceless. It's great.

But not mean you find someone you want to practice patience, you make them angry 😊! b/c if you make them angry, they destroy their roots of virtue. This is now how you cultivate virtue.

What's so great about practicing patience and becoming patient? What advantages will you experience? If you're not patient, if you're angry and impatient, what kinds of drawbacks? In "Supplement to the Middle Way", Chandrakirti says one moment of hating a Conqueror's Child destroys virtue from 100 eons. There can be no worse sin than ... Patience protects us from destroying this positive energy. If we get angry at someone less spiritually advanced than us, we'll create very negative karma. If they're equal, we also create similar negative karma. If they're very developed, we'll create humongous destruction to roots of virtue. This is just from 1 instance of anger.

Chandrakirti's text says it creates an ugly form, leads to the unholy, and robs discrimination that knows right and wrong. Through impatience, one's quickly cast to a bad migration. It causes us to be very ugly. They become red faced, looks scary. People who see him understand this person is feeling angry. This is not a nice person. Also, anger causes us to lose our rational faculty. It robs us from discrimination that knows right and wrong when we are furious. In our future lives, we will be reborn in the lower realms. These are some of the disadvantages of anger.

His text continues: patience creates qualities opposite to those above: beauty, [closeness with holy beings], skill discriminating between right and wrong, rebirth as god or human, extinguish of nonvirtues. This can occur although one is not in human realm. E.g. certain animals have pleasant appearance. Humans take care of them as humans. E.g. West treats cats and dogs very well. They almost have same rights. They live in house, get good food, medical treatment and so on. These beings have attractive appearances. Humans feel close to them. Another is dearness to holy: close relationship with holy beings. One will also have skill discriminating between right and wrong (discernment). Afterwards, one will be reborn in an upper realm as human or god.

What is patience? We don't want to be angry / impatient. What's nature of patience? Patience is defined as the unperturbed mind. The mind is not disturbed. You meet difficult conditions. You meet trying circumstances. You can maintain your mental calm. Your mind can stay unperturbed. Without getting disturbed, you can maintain mental calmness. This is the definition of patience. 3 types. First, patience of nonretaliation. Second, patience of voluntarily accepting suffering. Third, patience of thinking about Dharma.

3 kinds of patience involve 3 kinds of responses when encountering difficulties. First, patience of nonretaliation. When we meet a difficult person, we don't hit back. Second is accepting suffering. When you find yourself in difficult situation, instead of denying it, you can acknowledge it and keep your mind calm. Third is patience of thinking about Dharma. When you encounter difficulty (a problem), instead of generating fear and becoming afraid, you are able to recall the Dharma, the spiritual teachings.

These 3 practices are taught by the Buddha for households mainly. In Chandrakirti's text the Sugatas mainly praised these practices (generosity, ethics, and patience) for householders. b/c easy for lay people to engage in these practices. It's not difficult for them to give, practice charity, and ethics, protect themselves from engaging in harming others. Lay people should practice patience as a way of protecting their own minds and keeping it calm.

First 3 practices are mainly for lay people. Last 3 are more important for ordained monks and nuns: joyous effort, concentration, and wisdom.

The Buddha mainly praised last 3 for ordained monks and nuns b/c they're monks and nuns completely devoted to spiritual development. They have more time. They have more opportunities to generate joyous effort with respect to engaging in spiritual practice. Also single pointed concentration better. But simply with concentration they will not be able to make progress to higher paths and attain enlightenment. So they need to practice in wisdom as well to go to higher and higher paths.

Let's look at the next perfection: enthusiastic diligence or joyous effort. Let me define it first. It is joyous effort in relation to virtue. It is important for us to know we are talking about this enthusiasm in relation to virtue, and not just anything. Some people are very enthusiastic regarding worldly activities. They can devote great effort to accomplish worldly things. From the perspective of a spiritual practitioner, that's actually a distraction. By doing mundane work, one's actually not doing virtue. So it's effort in relation to virtue. First, one has great interest in creating virtue. While one creates virtue, one doesn't experience any mental hardship. After one's done that virtue, one's joyful at having done so.

Let's read stanza 28:

The practice of all the Bodhisattvas is to strive with enthusiastic diligence

The source of all good qualities – when working for the sake of all who live;
Seeing that even sravakas and pratyekabuddhas, who labour for themselves alone,
Exert themselves as if urgently trying to extinguish fires upon their heads.

So in stanza 28, we first have this description of how the sravakas and pratyekabuddhas will practice. These sravakas and pratyekabuddhas are practitioners of individual liberation vehicle. They don't strive for universal liberation. These practitioners (hearers and solitary realizers) strive for their own liberation from cyclic existence. They cultivate their minds in the 16 aspects of the 4 Noble Truths. First is impermanence. So they have this sense of urgency b/c they realize how transitory things are. They practice with great urgency as if trying to extinguish fires on their heads. If you had fire on clothes and hair, you would urgently want to extinguish it. Not say wait. They practice very urgently, exerting themselves urgently. If that is the case for people who are trying to just achieve their own purpose, how much more would Bodhisattvas strive if they want to achieve for all sentient beings. With enthusiastic diligence for living beings.

Three divisions of enthusiastic effort. Let me present a common presentation.

Armour-like joyous effort

JE of application

JE of enacting welfare of others

First type of JE is armour-like JE. If someone is going to fight in a war, before actually entering the battle field, this person will make sure he's well protected. This is to ensure when he enters the battle field and encounters the enemy, his body will not be harmed by the enemy's swords, etc. so armour-like JE refers to kind of enthusiasm. We have mental resolve we will not be overcome by difficulties. No matter what hardship we experience in course of spiritual practice, we will persist. That is armour-like JE. JE of application refers to fact when we actually engage in activity, we are able to do so with JE. So before we started, we had a certain motivation, mental resolve, after we've actually started, we maintain that joyous state of mind, that is enthusiastic regarding our spiritual activity. Finally, JE of enacting welfare of others. While we are working to benefit others, we are able to maintain that enthusiasm.

Third kind of JE: we are able to maintain our JE re benefiting others. Else, we can become discouraged easily. E.g. we become tired. And decide this is it, I'm giving up. This is a sign we don't have the kind of JE for enacting benefit of others.

Perfection of concentration. What is it? A mind that is able to dwell single-pointedly on a virtuous object of observation. To remain in an unwavering manner on this object. Is able to remain on this object in an exact way. As a result of this focus, one is able to elicit what we call wisdom arisen from meditation.

29:

The practice of all the bodhisattvas is to cultivate concentration,
Which utterly transcends the four formless absorptions,

In the knowledge that mental afflictions are overcome entirely
Through penetrating insight suffused with stable calm.

Here we are trying to understand the practice of concentration. The practice that Bodhisattvas want to cultivate is a kind of concentration that is combined with penetrating insight. In other words, the Bodhisattva isn't just interested in concentration in which the mind is able to abide single pointedly on this object of observation. Bodhisattva wants this kind of concentration that will bring advancements on the path. That kind of concentration needs to be combined with penetrating insight. It's the kind of insight induced by force of analysis. There's analysis involved. If you have this kind of penetrating insight fused with stable calm, then you'll be able to eradicate the disturbing emotions, the thoughts. They can be eliminated. Usually when people talk about the cultivation of concentration, they talk about concentrations of form realm, etc. Indeed, they can be obtained by Shamata or calm abiding or stable calm. Union of calm abiding and special insight → obtain high states. Emptiness.

Many of us are interested in meditation. We think it's desirable. We think if we're able to meditate well, we'll be able to experience physical and mental bliss. In meditation, we do experience well being b/c when you stop discursive mind, you do experience this sense of physical and mental calm. That kind of state can be very peaceful and enjoyable. It's almost like you are sleeping. b/c when you get out, all forms, sounds, appear again and your reaction towards these attractive forms can be that of attachment. In other words, if you simply cultivate concentration without added element of wisdom (special insight), your meditation is like sleep. b/c when you wake up from sleep, things are just as they are before. Disturbing emotions are still there. From that point of view, calm abiding is no big deal. It can't eliminate your disturbing emotions. So what you need in addition to this Shamata is special insight, b/c if you have wisdom, your concentration will have ability to damage disturbing thoughts in your mind. As a result of that, during meditation, you'll be able to experience wellbeing. But AFTER meditation, you will experience wellbeing too, b/c calm abiding and special insight damaged disturbing emotions – attachment etc. they are reduced in strength. So it's not enough to just practice concentration or calm abiding. Need special insight observing emptiness. That's what Bodhisattvas cultivate.

This sounds complex. Union of calm abiding and special insight. Indeed, for high level Bodhisattvas of 5th ground: practice like that. For us, who are not at those advanced levels, Shamata is important. It's important for us to know how to focus our minds. To train in mental concentration.

To obtain this achievement, union of calm abiding and special insight, you need to have vipassana. You need special insight. In order to obtain that, you need calm abiding or Shamata. For us, who are at the beginning levels, we need to start by training in calm abiding or Shamata.

This concentration is a single pointed state of mind. There are a few divisions.

Concentration of this life.

Concentration for achieving excellent qualities.

Concentration for enacting the welfare of sentient beings.

First kind of concentration that's focused on this life involves training we mentioned above. You need to try your mind single pointedly on an object without wavering. 2nd is concentration that causes you to achieve more advanced spiritual attainments. Finally, when you're working for sentient beings, your mind needs to be focused. If mind is discursive / scattered, won't be able to achieve welfare of others. To enact welfare of others, need to focus your mind.

Let's go through wisdom: wisdom that which can discern phenomena.

30

The practice of all the bodhisattvas is to cultivate wisdom,
Beyond the three conceptual spheres, alongside skillful means,
Since it is not possible to attain the perfect level of awakening
Through the other five paramitas alone, in wisdom's absence.

Here, wisdom refers to that realizing emptiness. The practice of all Bodhisattvas is to cultivate this wisdom. It's said in Chandrakirti's Supplement to the Middle Way, just as a person having eyes easily leads all in a blind group to their desired destination, so here also the mind of wisdom taking hold of virtues that lack the eye of wisdom goes to the state of a Conqueror.

What's being said here is the first 5 paramitas (generosity through to concentration) are like blind people. In order for them to reach destination, someone needs to lead them. Leader needs eyes (sight). This wisdom realizing emptiness is precisely this person with sight, guide, can lead 5 other perfections to level of awakening. As we mentioned early on, without such wisdom, one is not able to advance on the path. There are these 5 paths (accumulation, preparation, seeing, meditation, no more learning). In wisdom's absence, generosity and so forth, ... can't go through and reach perfect full enlightenment. They need this guide.

Here, in the second line, it's mentioned the Bodhisattvas' practice "alongside skillful means". These refer to bodhicitta and compassion. If one practices wisdom without skillful means (mind of enlightenment and great compassion), one will not achieve full enlightenment. They'll fall to lower one (individual). For someone who wants full enlightenment, Buddhahood, need skillful means. The cultivation of wisdom should be one that's passed beyond the 3 conceptual spheres. The 3 conceptual spheres refer to the conceptual states of the meditator, the object of meditation, and the meditation itself. Without clinging to these 3 aspects of the practice as independent, one needs to cultivate wisdom. This is an advanced practice. It's the practice of Bodhisattva of the 6th ground among 10 grounds.

Wisdom in general: 3 types.
Wisdom knowing conventionalities.
Wisdom knowing the ultimate.
Wisdom of enacting the welfare of sentient beings.

Wisdom explained here, practice that all Bodhisattvas do in stanza 30 is the 2nd type. The 1st and 3rd types aren't explained in this stanza.

A lot more can be said about 6 perfections. E.g. generosity: what obstacles; what antidotes; let us save that for next week, and leave rest for questions.

Question 1: How overcome doubts in purification? We're taught to generate strong faith that all's purified after doing the practice, but I have 2 doubts. A) I don't deserve it b/c others need to live through their karma and if I think so, I'm getting off scot-free, and I did bad things, I need to suffer. I need to be punished. B) I thought we need to purify gazillions of times, and so I don't feel like I can feel it's completely purified at first instance. So how can I overcome these 2 doubts?

In reality it's very difficult for us to purify our negative karma completely through say recitation of certain mantras. b/c mentally we don't have the complete qualities that bring about complete purification. So of course we can visualize we've purified all it, it's not so easy. One reason is we've had infinite lives. If we create negative karma in those lives, then we can conclude our negativities know no bounds. That is one factor to consider. Other factor to consider is – for negative karma to be effectively purified, need all 4 opponent powers. But 2 are difficult to generate. One is the power of regret. Other is the power of resolution. So unless these are very strong, it's very unlikely that we can purify our negative karma completely. So let's say we generate regret for a negative action. Classic example is having consumed poison. People don't know food is poisoned. After a while, people in this group dies. One is dying, other is sick. You're the only one who's still well. You will feel so much remorse. Resolution: you need to generate this determination I'll never do this again even at the cost of my life. Usually we don't have this determination. So typically these aren't generated fully.

Other is power of support. You generate bodhicitta. In order to go for refuge to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, you need a very thorough understanding of their excellent qualities. If we really have one, then we will generate this very fervent wish to attain their good qualities. Our mind will be moved when recalling them such that we generate goose pimples, tears well up in our eyes. But usually we're not so impressed by Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, say blah blah blah, but not have this fervent wish to obtain their excellent qualities. So even in this way, the power of the support, does not become very complete within the four powers.

2nd element in the power of the support is generating bodhicitta. In order to do that, you need foundations of love and compassion. You need to ask yourselves do you have love and compassion for all living beings? Are you moved of the fact they are deprived of love and happiness. If you lack these, your mind of bodhicitta isn't completely qualified.

Then your power of support is not complete. So it's very hard to generate the 4 powers in its complete forms. Not mean we shouldn't try our best. We may try recitation. Again, it's hard for these 4 powers to be generated in their entirety. What this means is it's difficult for us to conclude that our purification is so effective that every single negativity has been eliminated without a trace left.

There are people who do have these excellent qualities we spoke about. E.g. holy beings, Khensur Rinpoche and so on. When they mention bodhicitta, compassion, etc., they feel very moved. They weep on the spot. For people who don't understand, they may be bewildered. So it is possible to attain the complete forms of these good qualities but before we have attained them, it may be unrealistic to think our purification is so effective that all our negativities are purified.

To give an analogy, if you want to burn different kinds of materials, you need fires of different strengths. E.g. want to melt stone, need fire of certain degree. If fire is very weak, e.g. burning grass, you may have difficulty burning even some wood. In various cases, this fire can be of various strengths. When this fire is a weak fire, we shouldn't assume it has a full power and it can burn everything.

With our body and speech and mind, we try to achieve what we can. Definitely it will be helpful. Verbally you can recite as many mantras as you can. Definitely it will be effective. The more you are able to do, the more you are able to purify. When you have achieved a certain number, it is an achievement. You have purified a certain amount of negative karma. My brother has lots of experience. He's done huge amounts. Every time there is a vacation, he will do it. He said he thinks this purification is very effective. b/c what happens after these practices is when he reads the textbooks, the points that were completely obscured before are clear. Meaning can dawn on his mind. Purification does have effectiveness – causes spaciousness in the mind. Makes you see more clearly.

Negativities are like grass in summer. No matter how you cut the grass, it will grow back through combination from warmth of sun, rain. Our negativities are like these grass that you see during summer. Although we may purify negativities, easily we create new ones. E.g. we meet people, engage in unskillful speech, and so on, there are so many ways we collect nonvirtue. Grass is cut but grows back.

If we think about it carefully, we probably create nonvirtues regularly. You step on bugs e.g. You meet someone, sometimes gossip, lies, slander etc. Very difficult to completely prevent creation of nonvirtues in our present state. If you think I've done purification and all my past negativities are wiped out, and from now on, I don't, this is actually unrealistic.

