

GATSAL

TEACHING

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on

37 Practices of a Bodhisattva

Part X

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*27. 'For a bodhisattva who desires the joys of virtue,
All who harm him are like a precious treasure.
Therefore, to cultivate patience towards all
Without resentment, is the practice of a bodhisattva.'*

This is really what our whole text has been about. So no need to go into great detail because the previous verses have gone on and on about how someone who is genuinely wishing to transform their heart welcomes people and circumstances which challenge us and create problems for us which normally would arouse resentment, anger, humiliation and negative states of mind. So normally we would try to avoid those and become upset. We see it as an obstacle when we meet with situations and people that create these negative feelings in us. But on this path, when that happens, we welcome it because this is a chance to practice.

It is not like we go out looking for obnoxious people or problems and difficulties. Actually, stay here and they will come. But when they do come, we are wearing the armor of a bodhisattva, so we are not wounded before. Now we welcome them insofar as now this is our opportunity to see how far we have got on our bodhisattva journey.

Personally my main area of practice is going to be FRO [Foreign Registration Office]. So, I'm ready. I'm armored. Before I go in, I think, 'Right, this is going to be my lojong practice for the day!' Then usually the police officers are quite polite and helpful. These poor guys. What a life they lead, day by day faced by frantic foreigners anxious about visa extensions! But the thing is, whatever happens to us, how we respond is an indication of how much we have really understood. If we do get upset and angry, then the point is not becoming angry and upset with ourselves

because we're angry and upset! We just remind ourselves, 'OK, now, I can see this is where I've got some work to do. So, I'm really grateful because now I understand. Yes, that situation lit up the area which needs to be worked on.'

It is not just being pious. How are we going to cultivate patience and tolerance and forbearance if we do not have objects on which to practice. Tolerance is a quality essential for Buddhahood.

One time I was at the FRO, and there was a Western monk in front of me. The officer was saying, 'Your form is filled out wrong! You didn't put this here.'

The monk replied, 'OK, well, I'll just alter it.'

'No, no!' And the official tore up the pages and he threw them back at the monk, and he said, 'You do it again.' I mean, it was several pages to this form.

So the monk said, 'OK, thank you very much. Please give me another set of forms.' The officer gave him another set of forms. As the monk turned around he saw me, grinned and winked!

Well done! Well done! So, it's possible.

28. Merely for their own sake, even shravakas and pratyekabuddhas

Make efforts, like someone whose hair is on fire, trying to put it out.

Seeing this, for the sake of all beings

To practice diligence, the source of excellent qualities, is the practice of a Bodhisattvas.

Shravakas are those who are striving for liberation, who are striving for nirvana.

Pratyekabuddhas are those who attain Buddhahood by their own means and without sharing what they have understood with others. So, both of these are

examples of people who are striving basically for their own benefit without particularly thinking in terms of benefitting all beings. Therefore they are those who are striving for spiritual liberation without arousing bodhichitta. So even to attain that liberation just for themselves they make tremendous effort to extinguish desire, like someone whose 'hair is on fire.'

So, the Buddha used this analogy to signify urgency. We should practice like someone with 'hair on fire.' How we would rush to the source of water immediately to put out our hair which is in flames. We wouldn't care what delicious fruit there is on the way, what beautiful people there are about, what fascinating programs are on television—our only aim is to put out the fire on our head. We could care less about anything else. Nothing else has greater importance than extinguishing the fire. So with that one-pointed focus, nothing else counts.

So, if shravakas have that kind of motivation, even just for one person, how much more would those of us who have taken the bodhisattva vow, who have aroused bodhichitta, the aspiration for enlightenment in order to be of benefit and rescue all other beings! This is such an incredibly vast vision. Then, how much more do we need to make effort. There's no question. Intimidating.

In our tradition, the Drukpa Kagyu, they are kind of proud of all their mad yogis, and one of them was called Drukpa Kunleg. We are proud of him. At one time Drukpa Kunleg went to Lhasa, and he went to visit the Jokhang, which is the central temple in Lhasa. He came to the image of the Jowo Rinpoche, which is the most venerated image of Shakyamuni Buddha in Tibet brought to the King Songtsen Gampo by one of his queens. Drukpa Kunleg made offerings and bowed down to the Jowo Rinpoche. Then he said, 'OK, you and I started at the same time. You became a Buddha. I'm still stuck here in samsara. What went wrong? What's the difference between us?' Then he answered himself, 'The difference is you made efforts and I was lazy.' When people ask, 'What is the main obstacle on the path?' I usually say, laziness.

Laziness comes in many forms. There is gross laziness when we don't want to get up in the morning to meditate. Or we'd rather watch a movie than go to a dharma talk. That's obvious.

Then there is the laziness of undermining ourselves, telling ourselves that other people can practice, but I can't. 'I tried to meditate, but my mind was so wild—obviously, I'm not meant to be a meditator.' 'I try to study, but it's so difficult. All those concepts, and I get so bored. Obviously, I'm not meant to study.' 'Other people are kind and selfless, but me, I've always had a hard time thinking of anybody outside of myself, so

clearly I can't do this bodhisattva sort of thing.'

Constantly, we undermine ourselves, we demean ourselves. We cut away at our own confidence in our own potential. But it is also an excuse not to make efforts. If we tell ourselves we can't do it, then we feel alright about not trying. So, although it looks like humility, or just a lack of confidence, it is actually a subtle form of laziness.

Shantideva said that there is a difference between pride or arrogance, which of course is a mental defilement, and self-confidence. Without self-confidence, we will never be able to follow the path. So, it is very important to listen to what we are telling ourselves.

We are constantly talking to ourselves. Those who have tried to meditate will know that. Soon as we try to quieten the mind down, we become conscious of how much we are carrying on an endless inner dialogue.

So listen to that dialogue. What is it telling us? What are we telling ourselves over and over? Are we encouraging ourselves, inspiring ourselves, saying, 'Well, yes I have this problem and I have these faults, but never mind. This is what the dharma is for. The dharma is for helping us to overcome and transform our faults. So we've got problems? Everybody's got problems. If we were so perfect, we wouldn't need the dharma.'

Or is our mind telling us how we have always been stupid; how we have always failed at everything we've tried; how basically we're not capable of anything.

How, if we try it, we are not going to succeed, so why bother to even try?

Many people's minds are their own worst enemies. To endlessly tell ourself how hopeless we are is not humility.

The word for a bodhisattva, which means like an enlightened being or a spiritual being, in Sanskrit was translated into Tibetan as *Changchub Sempah*. The word for *Bodhi* in Tibetan is *Changchub*. But the translation of *sempah* is interesting. *Sems* means the heart/mind. But *sattva* or 'a being' was translated as *dPah.wo* which is a hero or a warrior. So bodhisattva was translated in Tibetan as an enlightened warrior or a spiritual hero. There is something very heroic about that word in Tibetan.

We have to be heroic. We have to be brave. We have to be courageous. We are vowing to attain enlightenment in order to benefit all beings. We can't sit there and say, 'Oh, I don't know. I can't meditate. It's very difficult.' We have to believe in ourself. Of course Buddhism is about getting rid of the self, but in the meantime, while we still imagine we have one, we must cultivate a heroic sense of our potential. As I suggested, we have to use

the ego in the service of finally transcending the ego. A weak, sad little ego which is always telling itself how hard life is, and how it can never accomplish anything, is just another form of inverted pride.

Nobody is hopeless because we all have Buddha potential. The nature of the mind is completely fine—no problem at all. It may be a little obscured, but when we have good impulses, that is our true nature coming out. All the negative impulses are not our true inborn nature. We just have to uncover who we really are. So, no excuse to tell ourselves we can't do it. Anybody can do it if they try hard enough and keep trying.

It is like with any skill. Maybe we not going to become Rubenstein, but we can learn to play the piano. If we keep practicing, however many times we need to play the scales over and over, hitting the wrong notes, eventually the music will begin to come. But if we give up after the second lesson, then what?—tell ourselves we are not musical.

Admittedly the analogy of having the hair on fire may seem somewhat extreme. But nonetheless, as this text has been saying, we should take our life and everything which happens to us and we make it our practice. It means that we don't just think when we are sitting on our cushion, or when we go to a dharma course, or when we read a dharma book, that is practice. The rest of the time is just so much worldly activity and our minds can go in all directions. In fact everything we do, if we do it with mindfulness and awareness, we have transformed it into a practice.

The third kind of laziness is being involved in too much activities, even virtuous ones, as a way to avoid getting down to more focused practice. So, also those who run dharma centers or social projects should be conscious that we can get so busy in doing what looks like virtuous activities that we forget what we are really trying to do, which is to cultivate and transform the heart/mind. So, even if we are working in a dharma center very devotedly, still that has to be our practice. Otherwise, however hard we are working, it is just another form of avoidance. It's avoidance of what is really important, which is the cultivation, the taming, the training and the transcending of our conceptual mind.

Without effort, we accomplish nothing. We all know that. So this is an important quality. If we don't make any effort, we are never going to get anywhere. We know that. If we want to go from here to the dining hall, we have to get up and walk. If we just sit here thinking, 'Oh food, come, come! Oh, food, wonderful food, please come to me!' and we make no effort to go to the food, then what?—we'll starve.

So this whole text has been about how to skillfully transform our lives into an ongoing dharma practice so that nothing is wasted, everything is taken on the path. Whatever we are doing, it can still be an expression of our inner practice.

This is why these kinds of texts are so important because we can take them with us and really see that everything we do, wherever we are, this is how to deal with our life in a way to transform everyday events and encounters into our dharma practice, our path on the way to Buddhahood. So this is why these have been considered very precious instructions. On the outside they look very simple, but their meaning is profound.

29. Knowing that through profound insight thoroughly grounded in sustained calm,

*The disturbing emotions are completely conquered,
To practice the concentration which utterly transcends
The four formless states is the practice of a bodhisattva.*

It is well known that the basic formula of Buddhist meditation is in two parts of shamatha and vipashyana. The first is Shamatha or calm abiding which is the practice for getting our minds calm and relaxed but fully attentive. All the turbulence inside begins to abate and slow down. At the same time, we hone and sharpen our concentration to become single-pointed. We aim here to have our attention is so focused that wherever we want to place it, there it rests.

If we think of an ocean, then normally we are on the surface caught up in the waves. Because of the waves and the turbulence, we cannot see down to the depths. We remain on the surface.

Likewise with the mind. We cannot really understand the mind and go down below the surface chatter until the waves have quietened down. Normally, when we start to meditate there are many problems, but an obvious one is that the mind is very busy and doesn't want to concentrate on where it is placed. We want to pay attention to the breath—and so we think of everything but the breath! We bring back the attention and a few seconds later we have to bring it back again. So this is the usual situation when initially we try to practice. We just need patience and perseverance. As the mind calms down and becomes centered, it becomes more supple and workable.

Therefore, the Buddha always recommended that we start with Shamatha practice first, before doing anything else. In advanced Shamatha practice there are levels called the dhyanas or mental absorptions. As mentioned previously, there are the four form absorptions and the four formless absorptions. All of

them Siddhartha practiced before he became a Buddha and then explained that these rarified mind states - the infinity of space, the infinity of consciousness, - are not in themselves Liberation, because these states are impermanent and still within the cycle of birth and death.

Therefore in the Tibetan tradition these rarified states are not emphasised, although to attain to the first dhyana is useful because then the mind is unified and able to remain steady. Our concentration now is tamed, flexible, workable and malleable, so that whatever we want to do, the mind can cooperate.

Another example given is that when we try to concentrate using our ordinary mind, it is like pouring water on wax paper. It just runs off. But once the mind has entered into the absorptions, it is like pouring water onto blotting paper. It soaks right in. So then, whatever practice we do we become one with that practice immediately and results come quickly.

So after having tamed the mind through Shamatha practice, now the mind is calm, still and clear. We are completely focused and at one with what we are doing. Now we use that clear and focused attention to investigate and gain insight. We look at the mind itself.

Some people don't like to do that because with shamatha after a while there are few or even no thoughts. It is very calm and the mind feels spacious and clear. We feel we could just sit there blissfully absorbed forever. So then to be told, now we have to start thinking and investigating, people fear that this is a step backward. But actually it is not. This is called vipashyana or clear insight.

It is like an instrument. We have cleaned and sharpened the scalpel so now it is razor sharp. Now we have to start dissecting by directly looking at the mind. What is a thought? Where do thoughts come from? Where do they go to? Who is thinking? All these many different questions we start asking, not verbally, but just with a great big question mark. We look. If there are no thoughts, we bring some thoughts up to look at them. Then we question them to death. Interrogation—where do you come from? What do you really look like? Where are you going? Where do you normally live? Okay, what's your name? Don't tell me that! C'mon, try again...

So, we look and we look. Then we look at who is looking. In this way, we begin to understand that how we live: what stimuli we seem to receive from the outside, and what we are thinking about on the inside, is all thought. Everything is based on thoughts: our beliefs, our memories, our identity, our judgments, everything.

This is important because people even go to war and kill others and themselves for what they think and believe. It is all based on thoughts. What is thought? We never look. We are so busy looking outside, we forget to look within at who is thinking. Through this method we can finally transcend all of this duality to come back to the nature of the mind itself.

The nature of the mind itself transcends thought and at the same time it includes and permeates all our mental activities. So it is compared to space which is out there and also in here and everywhere—where is space not? The nature of the mind -our pure awareness is vibrant, it's not something static, because it is the knowing aspect of our mind. Whatever happens, there is that knowing quality, that essential awareness there. If there were not, we would be corpses. But normally, because our primordial awareness is so covered over with all the clouds of our thinking and emotions, we don't actually experience the awareness in itself. In other words, we are not conscious of being conscious, because we are too busy thinking. Once we recognize our true nature, then everything becomes obvious.

To sustain this realization is difficult. It is like waking up for one moment from a dream—'Aha that was just a dream!' Then we fall asleep again. But next time we have kind of an inkling that this is just a dream now. We still have that memory, even though it is not very clear, that there was another level of consciousness called 'awake'. This is why in Tibetan Buddhism there is an emphasis on dream yoga and lucid dreaming to help us to recognize dreams while we're asleep.

Basically, all our life is just a dream and we are trying to wake up. So to be satisfied with just tranquility and going into the dhyanas, or even to be satisfied with just investigating the conceptual mind, is not enough to liberate us. We need to recognize our primordial awareness and then learn how to dwell within that state of non-dual presence continually, day and night, waking or sleeping. That is the path.

The nature of primordial awareness is emptiness and lucid cognizance. We *know* because we are aware. But what is that awareness? What *is* it? That is what we have to discover.

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