



We begin by generating a positive motivation, which can be based on bringing to mind the meaning of the words of the Refuge and Generating Bodhichitta prayer that we have just recited. While reciting the words of that prayer it is important that we try to generate those thoughts in our mind. Hearing the meaning of something is necessary if we are to be able to understand what we are to think about. Once we have heard something, then we can think about it and meditate on the meaning of it. That seems to be the appropriate procedure. It is good to keep in mind that this procedure is applicable at all times when studying the teachings. We must not underestimate the hearing part of the process, as it is so important. Then the thinking that we do about what we have heard becomes the basis upon which to meditate.

If doubts arise in the course of meditation practice, then one can refer to what one has previously heard. Because of the imprints left on the mind from the hearing and thinking process, the meanings of what one has heard can become really vivid in one's mind, and thus assist us in the practise of meditation. Just the mere fact of hearing a teaching is said to have great benefit, but in order to establish it firmly in our mind, and leave a strong imprint, it needs to be followed by the thinking process. The main point in relation to the motivation is that when we recite the Refuge and Generating Bodhichitta prayer it is good to reflect upon what it means and actually try to generate that state of mind within ourselves.

In the teachings there is a general mention of the benefits of acquiring the imprints of hearing. My interpretation of what 'imprints of hearing' means is that when you hear a teaching and spent some time thinking about it, then at a later stage when you actually engage in some practice. Even though you may not recall every word, you will still be able to remember the main points, which will assist you in your practice. This ability to recall the main points is, I think, due to the imprints of hearing. Anyway that is my interpretation and you may find other explanations.

The great Kadampa masters are said to have first engaged in extensive hearing of the teachings, then based on their extensive hearing they naturally had the ability to think extensively. The combination of extensive hearing and thinking then served as the basis for them to meditate on the profound topics. So understanding this process of hearing, thinking and then meditating can give us guidelines for doing our own practice.

If one does not refer to this process then there is the danger that after hearing quite a few teachings one may be left feeling, 'Oh I have heard a lot of teachings, but I don't have a clue as how to engage in the practice?'

Last week we covered the basic explanation of guru yoga in the auto-commentary. I mentioned then that I might go into a bit more detail on this point. The auto-commentary states:

Then meditate on the lama by seeing him as inseparable from the buddhas of three times, he who is the source of all goodness in this life and all future life times, who exemplifies the deeds of all buddhas and bodhisattvas and who is kind in the three ways. And/or meditate on the lama by seeing him as the essence of the three jewels. Thus meditating on the guru yoga, which is the profound practice of the path, make strong supplications to the guru from the depths of your heart.

These few lines are a profound way presentation of how to do the guru yoga practice. If you are vague about this then you will not derive much benefit from that practice. The main points, as elucidated in these few lines, are to see the lama as being inseparable from the buddhas of the three times, and as the essence of the Three Jewels. How do we see the lama as being inseparable from the buddhas of the three times and as being the essence of the Three Jewels? I felt it would be good to explain these points a bit further.

First of all, we need to know the literal meaning of the term 'guru yoga'. In English the Sanskrit term 'yoga' is used, but that doesn't convey the literal meaning of the Tibetan word *nal jor*, which consists of two syllables. *Nal* has the connotation of being true or genuine whereas *jor* has the connotation of bringing yourself close to that. So the literal meaning of *nal jor*, which is translated as 'yoga', means a practice that brings oneself closer to a genuine object, in this case the guru. So the actual meaning of the word *nal jor* refers to bringing one's mind towards the genuine guru, and that is what is called the guru yoga practice.

The term yoga refers to the practice itself, whereas the one who engages in the practice would be called a yogi. So *nal jor pa* is the Tibetan for yogi (or the person who engages in the practice), and *nal jor* is the actual practice itself. The texts further establish that there is the conventional genuine guru and ultimate genuine guru.

**The conventional genuine guru** is a being who has overcome all faults, and acquired all qualities, and who has the ability to engage in activities of propounding the teachings of the buddhas. **The ultimate genuine guru** is the emptiness of the mind of the conventional genuine guru. In brief, the one who has all positive qualities and the ability to engage in the virtuous activities of the enlightened beings is called the conventional genuine guru.

In relation to the activities of the buddhas, it might also be good to point out that there is a distinction between the virtuous activities and the knowledge of the Buddha. Even though in essence there is no big difference, based on the literal meaning there is a distinction between the knowledge and the activities of the Buddha. The qualities and knowledge of the enlightened body, speech and mind imparted to sentient beings by an enlightened being are the enlightened virtuous activities, while the ability of to propound or impart this to others, is referred to as the enlightened being's knowledge.

The Tibetan word for virtuous activity of enlightened beings, is *tin ley*. All enlightened activities arise spontaneously from the knowledge or potential the enlightened being has to be able to impart the qualities of the enlightened body, speech and mind to the disciples. Thus all activities that come from

---

---

the knowledge or potential of the buddhas, are the virtuous activities of the enlightened beings. So within this context we can also understand the reference in the texts where it is said that 'every virtue within the minds of sentient beings, are the virtuous activity of the buddhas'. Thus all virtues are said to be the virtuous activity of the enlightened beings. When one has a deeper understanding of what a virtuous activity is, then one will have a glimmer of understanding as to why all virtues within the minds of sentient beings are the actual virtuous activity of the enlightened beings.

It has been explained that virtuous states of mind arise within sentient beings as a direct result of the virtuous activities of enlightened beings. Thus when we offer the long life prayer to the guru, we are making a supplication for the lama to please live long and for his virtuous activities to increase, in order to benefit the disciples and all sentient beings. With the proper understanding, we can derive a deeper appreciation of what this means.

#### **INSEPARABLE FROM THE BUDDHAS OF THE THREE TIMES**

The teachings say that one should see the conventional genuine guru as being inseparable from the buddhas of the three times, as is mentioned in the auto-commentary. This can be explained by referring to the three points of view found in the teachings.

In the **Vinaya** system the guru is to be seen as being similar to the buddhas. According to the *Prajnaparamita* or the *Perfection of Wisdom* teachings the guru is to be regarded as being exactly like the actual Buddha, whereas in the **Tantrayana** teachings, the guru is to be regarded as the actual Buddha. Of these different explanations, we rely on the ultimate explanation of the Tantrayana, which is that the guru is the actual Buddha.

#### **1. The Vinaya point of view**

In the Vinaya sutra teachings, the guru is regarded as being similar to the buddhas, because activities engaged in to benefit the guru are similar to benefiting all the buddhas and whatever activities one engages in that harm the guru is similar to harming all buddhas. Furthermore, according to the Vinaya sutra teachings, the activities that harm or benefit any sentient being are said to be similar to engaging in the activity of harming or benefiting the buddhas. So that is how one understands the explanation of the need to see the guru as being similar to the Buddha.

The point about the similarity of benefiting and harming sentient beings, and to benefiting or harming the buddhas is actually a very profound instruction that we should take to heart. This explanation is derived from the Buddha's own words where he said: 'When you benefit any sentient being, it is the same as benefiting me and if you harm any sentient being, it is the same as harming me'. So in this manner the great and compassionate Buddha gave us instructions to treat all sentient beings with kindness and respect, just as you would treat him.

#### **2. The Prajnaparamita point of view**

The *Perfection of Wisdom* sutras say that we should regard the guru as being similar to the actual Buddha in respect of his deeds and activities. The Buddha, or Enlightened Being, manifested in whatever guise or form necessary to subdue beings. For those in need of a peaceful aspect, the Buddha manifested in a peaceful aspect, and for those in need of a wrathful aspect the Buddha manifests in a wrathful aspect. The guru also benefits sentient beings by adopting similar guises.

#### **3. The Tantrayana point of view**

From the Tantrayana or Tantra vehicle point of view the guru must be regarded as the actual Buddha. Those who do the practices such as the Six Session Guru Yoga practice, will be familiar with how the guru is actually regarded as Vajradhara.

When we go to the most profound level of explanation, what we understand from this presentation is that the guru is inseparable from the buddhas of the three times. The Tantrayana explanation of seeing the guru as the actual Buddha means seeing the guru as inseparable from the buddhas of the three times, because he is the source of all goodness, and has overcome all negativities and imperfections.

The auto-commentary refers to the lama as 'he who is the source of all goodness'. Here the term 'holder of the lineage' would be a more literal translation of the Tibetan word *rig-gyi dak-po*. The holder of the lineage is one who has perfected all qualities and overcome all negativities. If one can begin to understand that the essence of the guru is an entity which is free of all negativities, imperfections and defilements, and who encompasses every good possible qualities, then one can come to understand how the guru is actually inseparable from the buddhas of three times.

The words 'he who is the source of all goodness' also implies that the nature of the lama is that he has overcome all imperfections, which is also the nature of an enlightened being. The essence of an enlightened being is one who has overcome all negativities and perfected all qualities. So in that way we can understand how the buddhas and the guru are inseparable.

#### **Visualising the merit field**

When one actually engages in the guru yoga practice it is not enough to have the understanding that the lama or the guru is inseparable from the buddhas of the three times, but one actually needs to envision the lama in the centre of the merit field. Thus one envisions the lama as being the main figure in the merit field, with the other enlightened beings in the aspect of buddhas and so forth surrounding the lama, which are seen as manifestation of the guru. The text further explains, 'because all other enlightened beings surrounding the guru in the merit field are actually manifestations of the guru, one confirms that all enlightened beings are inseparable from the lama'.

Another commentary explains that the main point of envisioning the lama in the merit field is to practise generating faith. So the main essence of the guru yoga practice is to practise generating strong faith in the guru. In accordance with the earlier explanations, the guru is the actual Buddha, an enlightened being who possesses all the positive qualities, and by thinking about his kindness, faith in the guru is generated.

The main point being stressed here is that in every guru yoga practice, one needs to see the lama as the Buddha. When one understands why that is done, it will make more sense. The manner of seeing the lama as Buddha, is to practise seeing the lama as endowed with all good qualities and free from all imperfections and negativities. When one trains one's mind to see the lama in this way then one is able to regard the lama as actually being the Buddha. This doesn't necessarily mean seeing the lama as having all the major and minor signs of the Buddha, such as having an *ushnisha* and a halo and all the other features that the Buddha is portrayed as having. Rather one develops the

recognition that the lama is free of all negativities and endowed with all qualities. It is in fact definitely possible to see the lama in that light, if one trains one's mind consistently.

As another commentary on Mahamudra explains, having engaged in the practice with this understanding and generating faith in the guru, the next step is to make supplications to the guru from the depths of one's heart. As the auto-commentary also indicates, the practice of making strong supplications to the guru from the depths of one's heart is based upon the earlier practice of training the mind in seeing the guru as being inseparable from the buddhas of the three times. Once one has developed the state of mind that sees the guru as being inseparable from the buddhas of the three times, then making supplications from the depths of one's heart will follow naturally.

The commentary goes on to explain that the only purpose of becoming enlightened is to benefit sentient beings, there is no other purpose in becoming enlightened. As each practitioner becomes enlightened, they simultaneously manifest all the enlightened virtuous activities that benefit sentient beings. The very purpose of becoming enlightened is to display the enlightened activities of benefiting sentient beings, which is to lead beings out of suffering, and the one who displays those enlightened virtuous activities is our own guru. Buddha Shakyamuni is the buddha of our era, and we regard him as benefiting and helping us, however we do not receive teachings directly from Buddha Shakyamuni, thus he must be helping us indirectly. Who do we receive the teachings directly from then? It is our gurus who display the virtuous activity of the Buddha himself by giving us teachings and personal instructions. In this way we can see that we directly benefit from the guru's guidance and the teachings he gives. That is why we regard the guru as being even kinder than the buddhas of the three times, even kinder than all other enlightened beings.

### Developing faith in the guru

By remembering how the guru guides us and benefits us we recall the kindness of the guru again and again. Then one makes strong supplications to the guru from the depth of one's heart to be able to continuously fulfil the wishes of the guru, to never forsake the guru, and to always be guided by the guru. This is how we make supplications to the guru. The essence of the explanation given so far has been how to generate strong faith and respect towards the guru by recalling his kindness.

As mentioned in previous sessions, by recalling and familiarising oneself with the advantages of relying on the guru and the disadvantages of not relying on the guru, one engages in the practice of pleasing the guru, which means putting his advice into practice to the best of one's ability. The ability to put the guru's advice into practice follows from engaging in the practice of developing faith and respect for the guru by seeing his kindness. Then the wish to follow the guru's advice comes naturally to one's mind. When one practises in that way, and it becomes evident to the guru that the disciple is practising to the best of their ability, this is what pleases the guru's mind. So pleasing the guru is the actual genuine guru yoga practice.

The other commentary further explains that with such an understanding one tries as much as possible to engage in the guru yoga practice that is explained in the extensive Guru Puja. However the commentary goes on to explain that it is best to engage in the general mode of practice as has been

just described. The commentary goes on to present a brief guru yoga practice that is of a form that one can manage in one's daily life.

### Brief form of the guru yoga practice

#### Visualisation

##### *Manjushri*

The particular visualisation in the brief form of the guru yoga practice seems to be related to the specific practice of Mahamudra. On top of one's crown one visualises a throne supported by four snow lions, and top of the throne is a lotus seat upon which is a sun and moon disc. Seated on the sun and moon disc is the deity Manjushri. His right hand holds a sword of wisdom lifted above his head, and his left hand holds the *Perfection of wisdom sutra* at his heart. He is orange in colour and has a beautiful smiling face, and is uttering the beautiful sounds of the Dharma.

The significance of this particular visualisation, which also relates to other practices/visualisations, is that

- The snow lions holding up the throne represent the four fearlessnesses.
- The lotus, sun and moon disc represent the **common point of view** of the three principals of the path, which are renunciation, bodhichitta and the realisation of emptiness. From the **uncommon point of view** those three represent the clear light, the illusory body and unification. Thus the lotus, sun and moon disc actually represent the qualities of the guru's mind.

##### *Vajradara*

On the top of Manjushri's crown one visualises Vajradhara with consort. Vajradhara is the holder of the lineage and the essence of all enlightened beings and is represented in two colours:

- When in the aspect of Vajrasattva the colour is white,
- When in the aspect of Vajradhara the colour is blue.

The colour depends upon the nature of the practice: for those who engage in the six-session guru yoga practice the visualisation is normally a blue Vajradhara, but in a purification practice it is a white Vajradhara.

##### *Lama Tsong Khapa*

At the heart of Manjushri one visualises Lama Tsong Khapa who represents the wisdom being. Lama Tsong Khapa is seated in a lotus position, he has a smiling face and a pinkish complexion, and is wearing a yellow pandit's hat. His hands are in the mudra of turning the wheel or teaching the Dharma. On both shoulders there is a stem and a lotus flower, on top of which one visualises texts.

- The technical description of the colour of Lama Tsong Khapa's complexion is white with a reddish tint, which we normally translate as pink. The description of Lama Tsong Khapa's complexion as white with a reddish tinge represents the unification of method and wisdom.
- The mudra or the hand gesture represents the unification of sutra and tantra, Lama Tsong Khapa's mind being endowed with the practices of sutra and tantra, as well as emptiness and interdependent origination. The mudra itself is called the mudra of teaching and it represents Lama Tsong Khapa imparting the teachings.
- On top of the stem and the lotus on Lama Tsong Khapa's right shoulder there is a sutra and top of that a sword.
  - The lotus represents the bodhichitta mind with which Lama Tsong Khapa imparts his teaching. One

---

of the qualities with which Lama Tsong Khapa is endowed is bodhichitta mind.

- o The text represents Lama Tsong Khapa's mastery of composition. Today we have eighteen volumes of Lama Tsong Khapa's works that we can study and refer to, so the text represents the quality of composing
- o The sword represents dialect or debate with a sharp intellect.

It is good to understand the qualities of great beings such as Lama Tsong Khapa. These are teaching, composing and debate or dialect. It is said that beings such as Lama Tsong Khapa, who are endowed with these three qualities have enabled the teachings of the Buddha to remain and endure for a long time. The **teaching** of the Buddha's doctrine is a direct means of propounding and spreading the teachings. **Composing** commentaries and so forth on the Buddha's teachings is a means of preserving the Buddha's teachings, because if it is not written down and recorded then it may not endure over time. Thus a composition in textual form has the ability to be preserved for a long time. That is the purpose of composition. **Debate or dialectics** ensures the teaching that has been given or composed is free from any flaws and faults.

- Another quality is to be endowed with pure morality, which is represented by the three robes that Lama Tsong Khapa wears.
- The yellow pandit's hat represents the unmistakable teachings of the Buddha that are presented after analysis. Just as gold is analysed through cutting, rubbing and burning, the teachings are analysed thoroughly and presented in a flawless manner. The yellow colour comes from the Vinaya tradition. The pointed tip of the hat represents gaining the pinnacle of the most profound perfected aspect of the ultimate view of emptiness.
- Lama Tsong Khapa is seated in the Vairochana's meditative sitting posture. In different circumstances that would represent different aspects or qualities, but in Lama Tsong Khapa's case it represents the qualities of Lama Tsong Khapa's mind being free of all adversities and having gained all realisations. When White Tara, for example, is seated in that posture it specifically represents never being reluctant to help sentient beings. Another interpretation of sitting in the lotus meditative posture is that it represents the four sets of sixteen in relation to the tantric practices. These are the sixteen drops, the sixteen channels, the sixteen winds, which relate to being able bring the winds into the central channels and so forth, and the sixteen unities of bliss and emptiness. This will be presented in more detail later on when we come to explanations on the completion stage practices.

In summary the lama on top of one's crown is visualised as the deity Manjushri, and on the top of Manjushri is Vajradhara with consort, and at Manjushri's heart is Lama Tsong Khapa who represents one's own guru.

### Contemplation

The next point of the practice is to generate a very strong sense of, 'It is through the kindness of my root guru at the top of my crown that I am delivered from all suffering and saved from all misfortunes, as he has come at the right time

for me to be subdued'. By recalling from the depth of one's heart, the kindness of the lama again and again, and how one has been guided and taught and so forth by him, the lama's incredible kindness becomes very clear—he is kinder than all other forms of enlightened beings.

The kindness of one's root guru or lama is equivalent to being given a meal when we are extremely impoverished and hungry. If someone were to actually give us a meal when we have nothing to eat, we would always remember that extremely kind person. To take that analogy further, if someone gave us some food when we have plenty to eat it would not be considered such a big deal.

Like that analogy, at this time when one is spiritually impoverished, without any realisations, and lacking any true qualities, the one who guides and helps us is the lama. Later on, when one gains realisations with direct sights of the buddhas and deities and receiving instructions and so forth, that is great; but what actually enabled us to reach that point is the kindness of lama, who helped us at a time when we were most destitute of realisations and qualities.

The main point is that this guise of the lama is the most appropriate aspect for us. Thus one thinks, 'My root guru, who I visualise on top of my crown, is the most appropriate aspect to guide and subdue me right now; he is the manifestation of all enlightened beings who appear in this guise to guide and help me'.

As the commentary further explains, having visualised the lama in this way and generated strong faith and respect towards him, one engages in the practices of taking refuge, generating bodhichitta, the four immeasurables, the seven limb practice, and makes mandala offerings. After having made extensive offerings to the lama then we need to receive something back—the mandala offering particularly is an indication of 'I need something in return'.

The actual supplication practice is similar to how it is presented in the lam rim teachings. There are two supplication practices, the common supplication and the uncommon supplication, but we can leave these until our next session.

This abbreviated version of visualising the lama is actually very useful, or in lay terms a very 'handy package', for doing the guru yoga practice. It is good for us to understand that it is an abbreviated and easy way to practice guru yoga.

With this visualisation it is not helpful to visualise the throne as actually touching the top of one's head, because it might feel uncomfortable, or wobble when one moves one's head. It is best if it hovers a few centimetres above one's crown, not too high and not too low. Also the throne and the visualisation itself should not be too large or too small, but of an appropriate size.

Someone once misinterpreted the actual visualisation and rather than thinking that the lama was to be visualised at the top of the crown, he actually thought that he himself must be visualised on top of the lama's crown. As the lama happened to be bald, he kept imagining that he was sliding off.

If one feels that there is a danger of the throne wobbling and so forth then actually that is an indication that one is fully engaged in visualisation, because that danger arises only if one can visualise something. So those uncomfortable aspects might arise for those who are able to actually do the visualisation. Also, if one happens to be bald oneself then there might be the danger that the lama slips off one's head!

---

## *THE ESSENCE OF THE THREE JEWELS*

The next point is seeing the lama as being the essence of the Three Jewels. At the point where one makes supplication to the lama, one brings that particular aspect of the practice to mind, which is to see the lama within the merit field, so that what is normally regarded as the Buddha is actually the lama. What is represented as the Sangha is actually the lama as well, and what is represented as the Dharma is in essence the lama too, along with the protectors, and the titular deities. So in that way one generates a strong recognition that the lama is actually in essence the Three Jewels.

### *Visualising the merit field*

Seeing the guru as the essence of the Three Jewels is the practice of 'encompassing all jewels into one' visualisation of the lama, which is one of the three ways of doing a visualisation of the merit field.

The other forms of visualising the lama in the aspect of the merit field is where the surrounding deities are actually facing the lama in the centre, however in the images they are depicted as looking down upon us, drawn in such a way to make it easier for us to visualise how the deities look. However they should all be actually facing the main guru in the middle.

There is also the stacking visualisation where the lamas are envisioned as being stacked one on top of the other, which is in the Yamantaka practice.

As some techniques of the guru yoga meditation have been presented, it would be worthwhile to put it into practice when you go back to your rooms'.

*Transcribed from tape by Judy Mayne  
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnnett  
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe  
Edited Version  
© Tara Institute*