
The Quick Path to Enlightenment

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Let us begin with the usual breathing meditation for a few minutes.

(Pause for meditation)

How to train the mind on the stages of the path

Tonight we will continue with the presentation of how to train the mind on the stages of the path. This is the second main heading, the first being an explanation of how to develop certainty about the sequence of the path by elucidating the authentic origin of the lineage lamas, covering the general background of the lamrim text.

This heading is explained under two sub-headings: how to rely on the spiritual teachers as the root of the path, and then having relied on spiritual teachers, how to train the mind on the stages of the path. This heading and its sub-headings accord with the outline of Lama Tsongkhapa's *Great Treatise*. They serve as a framework for the whole text as you think about its meaning.

Relying on the spiritual teachers

In the same way as trees, branches and leaves grow from and rely on the root of a tree, the cultivation and development of spiritual experiences and realisations through practices such as thinking about the precious human rebirth, death and impermanence and so on, complete enlightenment is rooted in guru devotion or the practice of relying on the spiritual teacher.

In commenting on the section related to relying on the spiritual teacher as the root of the path, His Holiness the Dalai Lama says in his commentary to the *Middling Lamrim Treatise* that Tsongkhapa's *Great Lamrim Treatise* is taught primarily to those who aspire to achieve complete enlightenment by depending on the highest yoga tantra. His Holiness clarified this by saying that the trainees of the lamrim include the person of small and middle mental scope, but the main trainees are the person of great mental scope, particularly the person who follows the highest yoga tantra.

Relying on the spiritual teacher as the root of the path is explained under two sub-headings: what to do in the session and what to do in the session break.

We are always engaged in these two because we are either in a session or in a session break. Therefore, if all the time we spend during these two is meaningful, we can say that our whole life will be meaningful.

What to do in the session

What to do in the session is explained under three headings: the preparation, the actual session, and the conclusion.

Preparation

There are six preparatory practices:

1. Clean the house and set out the receptacles of body, speech and mind
2. Arrange these offerings properly in a beautiful array;
3. Sit properly on a comfortable seat in eight-fold body

posture or in whatever manner is comfortable; cultivate taking refuge and developing the enlightenment mind; cultivate the four immeasurables;

4. Visualise the sublime assembly,
5. Make seven branches of offerings including a mandala as the essence of purification and accumulating merits,
6. Make supplicatory prayers.

These six topics explain what we need to prepare before engaging in our actual practice. Preparation is important for anything we do. Even with something as small as making a good cup of tea, we need to have the right ingredients and need to know how to make it. The success and progress in our actual practice will depend much on how well we prepare ourselves for the practice.

Cleaning the house and arranging the altar

The first preparatory practice is cleaning the house and arranging the altar with representations of the holy body, speech and mind. This is important because the place where we choose to do our practice is where we will be engaging in the stages of the path to achieving complete enlightenment. Since the kind of practice we are undertaking is a very important one, we want to ensure the place is clean and pleasant as a show of respect to the practice. It's the same when we invite a guest or someone important to our house. We ensure that our house is clean and that it also looks welcoming, and we do this as a gesture of our respect to the guest.

When cleaning the house or place where we will do our practice, it is important that we get our motivation right. Our motivation is wrong if we do this merely to feel better or for our own satisfaction. It is also a wrong motivation to clean the place just to receive admiration or praise from others. Rather, we should integrate our motivation for cleaning the place with our aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment for the sake of all beings. We should think, 'I am cleaning the place because I am engaging in this practice to achieve complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings'. If we have this motivation, then we will accumulate great merit from cleaning the place.

There is a story from the time of Lord Buddha of an arya named Lam-chung who achieved arhatship or liberation by engaging in the activity of cleaning. Once in the town of Saraswati there was a Brahmin family who had experienced the tragedy of losing their children at birth. One day an old woman came to the house and said, 'Let me know when a child is born next time because I may be able to help save the child's life'.

Later, another child was born, and the family called this old woman. She advised the family to wash the child, wrap it in a white cloth and put some butter in its mouth and then hire a woman to take the child to an intersection of major roads. The woman should respectfully request prayers for the child from any sangha who passed by that junction.

The family followed the old woman's instructions and handed the newly born child to a woman. As she sat at an intersection of major roads, the first group of sangha who came by were non-Buddhists. She paid them respect and requested prayers for the child. The group prayed for the child to live long and for the fulfilment of the wishes of the parents.

After some time, a large group of Buddhist bhikshus came along. Again, the lady respectfully explained the story of the child and requested their prayers. The bhikshus made the same prayers. Then, the lady decided to request prayers from

the Lord Buddha, so she moved to a place where the Buddha normally passed through for his daily alms round. The Buddha arrived and she requested his prayers as she had done before. Lord Buddha too made the same prayers for the child. So, the child survived the first day and the lady returned the child to the family. The family named the child Lamchen meaning Big Road. The child was very intelligent and became a great scholar and practitioner and even achieved the state of arhatship.

The family had a second child, and for fear of losing this child, they followed the old woman's instructions again. This time they had a different woman go to the intersection who, unlike the previous one, was a bit lazy. She did not bother to find a major intersection but stopped at a small road that did not attract visitors. In fact, no sangha came by. Luckily, the Lord Buddha became aware of this situation and visited this lady and made the same prayers for the child. The second child survived. The second child was named Lamchung meaning Small Road.

As the child grew up, they started to educate him, but the child was extremely slow and had difficulty even memorising two words. Every time he focussed on the next word he forgot the previous word, and when he focussed on the first word, he forgot the next one. He never was able to memorise and improve his memory. The family found many different teachers, but still there was no improvement in his memory.

As time went by, both his parents passed away and there was nobody in his home. So, he left and moved to his brother's place. As an arhat, Lamchen saw some hope if Lamchung became a monk. So, he made Lamchung become a monk and started to teach him. Lamchen instructed him to memorise a verse, but he had the same blockage and could not memorise it. He tried so hard to memorise it by repeating it loudly every day over and over again, but he was not able to remember the words. Yet all the other children in the vicinity heard it so many times that they all knew it by heart.

Lamchen became really frustrated and could not understand what was blocking his younger brother. The older brother questioned his method by thinking, 'Instead of being gentle and loving, maybe I should adopt an aggressive and violent approach.' Through his clairvoyant power, he realised that aggressive and violent methods would work better for Lamchung. So, he banished him from the house. Lamchung had nowhere to go and ended up in the streets. The Buddha became aware of Lamchung's predicament and took the child and taught him two phrases - abandon dirt, and abandon stains. But still, he had trouble remembering these two phrases that the Buddha taught.

The Buddha then thought about what else he could do. He asked Lamchung if he could clean sandals and shoes, and Lamchung said he could. The Buddha then advised the bhikshus to let him clean their sandals and shoes as a means of purifying negative karma and mentioned his background story to the bhikshus. For a long time Lamchung did this cleaning job and recited the two phrases while cleaning.

Eventually, he managed to memorise the two phrases, so the Buddha promoted him to a different chore, which was to sweep the temple ground. He had to work very hard with the sweeping job. Whenever he swept in one area, the wind took all the leaves and dirt to the other areas. Then, when he swept that area, the wind blew the dirt to the other side. He persisted however and kept sweeping and maintained a pure motivation. As he was cleaning he kept repeating the phrases, 'abandon dirt, abandon stains'. Suddenly a thought occurred

which illuminated for him the actual meaning of these two phrases. The Buddha taught that dirt and stains are not external but internal negativities. At that moment true knowledge and realisation arose and he attained the state of arhatship or liberation. There are more stories, but we must stop here to move forward with the teaching.

As part of the practice of cleaning, wherever the place we choose to meditate - whether it is a house or a hermitage - we need to clean it well and make it look pleasant. If you can, make a cairn in each corner of the four directions to represent the four great kings and make offerings to them, and pray for a successful practice and the pacification of all obstacles.

We clean the place not only because we are invoking the gurus, buddhas and so forth but also to make it comfortable and hygienic for ourselves. An additional instruction is to sprinkle water to prevent dust. We need to arrange the altar; holy objects or whatever you normally have on your altar will suffice. Otherwise, we should place an image of Lord Buddha on the altar.

It is important to think that the holy objects placed on the altar are the representation of actual holy beings, regardless of what material they are made of or how well the artists have made them. You must not value them on the basis of their material, costs or the artist's work. Whether the object is made of gold or plaster, whether the artistic merit is good or not good makes no difference from your side in terms of their value and worthiness. It is important to remember that. In short, you should not have any thoughts of considering these holy objects as your material possessions. Most importantly, you value each one of them equally as you would honour the holy beings that they represent.

If you do not have any holy objects to place on your altar, you can, for instance, place a slightly higher platform such as a flat wooden board, place rice in the centre, and a handful of rice in each of the four directions. The pile of rice in the centre is symbolic of the Lord Buddha. What is important is the visualisation of whatever representational objects you place on the altar, i.e., the actual buddhas.

Traditionally, before arranging cushions to sit on, a clockwise svastika (a symbol of steadiness) is drawn on the ground and on that is placed kusha straw. Each tip of each straw is in the centre, and the stems face outwards, and each one is placed so they do not cross each other. Arranging your cushion in this way is very auspicious.

That is because the drawing of a svastika and blessing it with kusha straw on top in a proper manner accords with Shakyamuni Buddha's deeds. That is how the Buddha placed kusha grass. He placed the grass in that manner before he sat down and achieved complete enlightenment on the full moon. So, in doing this practice we are following and copying the way Buddha sat, which is auspicious and a cause for us to follow his example.

If you don't have your own cushion, you can make a cushion seat out of kusha grass. But of course, if you have your own cushion, use that. The back of the cushion where you rest your buttocks is higher and the front is lower.

Tonight we have to leave it at the first of the six preparatory practices.

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