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# The Quick Path to Enlightenment

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We have finished the second of the six preparatory practices and now we will continue with the third, which is to sit comfortably in the eight-fold body posture or in whatever position is most comfortable, then take refuge and cultivate bodhicitta.

## Quick reflection on the outlines of the topics covered so far

The six preparatory practices fall under the heading *Preparation* which is the first of the three sub-headings under the heading *what we do in the actual meditation session*. The three sub-headings are: *Preparation, Actual Practice and Conclusion*. The heading *what we do in the actual meditation session* falls under the heading *The spiritual teacher as the root of the path* which has two sub-headings: *what we do in the actual meditation session* and *what we do in the break between sessions*. Then, the heading *The spiritual teacher as the root of the path* is one of the two sub-headings; the other, *how to purify the mind in the stages of the training*, comes from the second of the two main headings:

**I. The explanation of how to develop certainty about the number and sequence of the paths by elucidating the authentic origin of the lineage lamas**

**II. After developing certainty about the paths, the explanation of how to purify the mind on the stages of the path**

If you are wondering why I go over these outlines in every session, it is because we are studying the lamrim teachings. When we engage in the lamrim meditation we must have the lamrim outline or framework to proceed with the practice. So, going over the lamrim outline often helps us to familiarise ourselves with it. The Tibetan word lamrim is called *The Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* in English. In lamrim, the teachings are presented in a structured and orderly manner to accord with our stage of development. So, lamrim makes the entire teaching easily accessible and user friendly.

When we meditate on the lamrim, we should strictly follow this sequence of the practice of the stages of the path, making sure that what we practise is the complete path in the right order and so forth. If we can't remember all the lamrim topics, we should at least remember the main topics covered under each outline. So, if we want to engage in lamrim meditation, the only way to do that is by remembering and following the outlines.

In *The Quick Path*, the outline is not as detailed or as complex as that of Tsongkhapa's *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path*. Therefore, it is not that hard to remember and you will find it very handy when you do lamrim meditation.

## Eight features of meditation posture

Of the six preparatory practices, we have finished the first two – cleaning the room and setting the altar. The third preparatory practice is sitting on a comfortable seat with the eight-fold body posture or the most suited posture, and meditating on taking refuge, bodhicitta and the four immeasurables. It is recommended that the back of the seat we use, such as a cushion, be raised a bit. This helps to reduce the aching in our legs and to keep our back upright. The eight features of the sitting posture are as follows:

- The first feature is adopting a cross-legged vajra posture or full lotus posture. Alternatively, it can be adopting a half-legged posture or a half-lotus posture in which the left foot is folded inward, and the right foot is stretched out. However, the left foot should not be completely placed under the right thigh, rather the heel of the left foot should be folded inward near the secret organ.
- The second feature involves our hands being placed in meditative equipoise, with the right hand on top of the left about four fingers width below the navel. The points of the two thumbs should be slightly touching. This feature has a significant effect in terms of aligning the vital position of the psychic channel in our body.
- The third feature is to keep the back of the body straight with the neck slightly bent forward. This also makes the psychic channel straight thereby allowing the wind energy to flow smoothly.
- The fourth is that the teeth and lips should be kept in a natural position while the tip of the tongue lightly touches the upper palate. If we are meditating for a long period, this can prevent a dry throat and dribbling.
- The fifth is to keep the head straight without tilting to the left or right.
- The sixth is to direct the focus of the eyes to the tip of the nose. This help prevents mental sinking and excitement.
- The seventh is to ensure the shoulders are level and not touching against the sides of the body so that there is a gap between the shoulders and the sides of the body. This helps to overcome drowsiness during meditation.
- The eighth feature is that breathing is natural. To achieve that, we do the breathing meditation of keeping mental attention on the incoming and outgoing breath. We need to make sure that our breathing is as natural as possible so that it is not noisy, nor too forceful or short and rough.

## Cultivating a special virtuous state of mind

Regarding the significance of adopting the correct meditation sitting posture, some early Tibetan masters said that the correct sitting posture is important at the beginning of our meditation, just like the title of the Tibetan scriptures translated from the Indian language are left in the Indian language. However, some scholars have said that what is important at the beginning of our meditation is faith in the guru. Here, what is important at the beginning of our meditation is the right motivation as said in the *Song of Lozang's View, Responding to the Question of High Resolve* by the omniscient great Panchen:

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The incomparable, excellent lama asserts that  
Examining one's own motivation thoroughly  
At the beginning of all meditation  
Is like the Indian language at the beginning of  
scriptures.

Therefore, we must ensure that we begin our meditation practice with the right frame of mind. If there is any influence of mental delusions, such as attachment or anger, we will not be able to meditate properly. So, as a remedy for overcoming negative influences in our mind, we apply the breathing technique in which we direct all our mental attention to the incoming and outgoing breath. As we breathe out, we imagine all the influence of the negative mental delusions, such as desire or anger, exit with the breath in the form of smoke or dark light. When breathing in, we imagine in the form of a bright light that we are receiving blessings and inspiration from all the buddhas and bodhisattvas and so forth. It is said that applying this breathing technique of purifying negativities and receiving positive energy is very effective in terms of getting rid of the influence of mental delusions. We can then cultivate the right frame of mind.

When we colour white clothes with a coloured dye, we should make sure that our clothes have no dirt or stains, otherwise the dye will not work well. If we wash the dirt and stains away, we will get a good result. In the same way, it is important to get rid of the influence of mental delusions in our mind first as this will make our mind suitable for meditation practice.

Before we engage in a meditation session, we must check our intention or motivation for doing the practice. We need to ensure our motivation is not related to protecting our reputation or making a profit for ourselves and that it is not stained by any of the eight worldly concerns. If our motivation for practising the Dharma is to fulfil our needs in this life, then that's what we get, no more. Moreover, we should also check that our motivation is not just limited to creating a cause for a good future rebirth, such as a human or a godly rebirth.

Atisha said that if the root of the tree is poisonous, then all the branches and leaves of that tree will be poisonous too. Likewise, if our motivation is stained by mental delusions, then any actions or activities we undertake will also be stained with negativities. When Atisha was asked, 'What will happen with all the actions I create to acquire wealth, respect or something in this current life?' he replied, 'All you will get is something in this life; you will get what the action is intended for'. Then Atisha was asked, 'What do I get in a future life from these actions?' He replied, 'In the future, you will get the hell, hungry ghost or animal realms.'

So, if our actions are motivated by accomplishing some purpose in this life, they will only serve the purpose of this life. And if our activities are motivated by achieving a future good rebirth, we will only get that. Despite all this, we are still bound to samsara. In a nutshell, engaging in any activities to serve the purpose in this life or in a future life end up serving as a cause that binds us to cyclic existence. So, when we think about this, we realise that all these activities have no meaning. If we direct our practice or our actions to achieving self-liberation just to free

ourselves from cyclic existence, if this is all we want, then this is all we will get. But this is not the fulfilment of all our wishes, let alone the fulfilment of all the wishes of other beings.

We can do different types of virtuous actions. For instance, generating faith in the Triple Gem, belief in the law of cause and effect, cultivating a thought of giving, or a thought of practising moral ethics and so forth. All of these are virtuous states of mind. However, in this context, when it says we should cultivate a very special frame of mind, it is referring to the mind of enlightenment or bodhicitta. With this special kind of virtuous frame of mind, we need to cultivate bodhicitta. We need to think about how, just like us, all sentient beings are tormented by the suffering of cyclic existence. We also need to think about how all sentient beings were once our mother, not once but countless times. Then we need to think about the extent of the kindness and love we have received from other sentient beings.

After cultivating a sense of gratitude towards all sentient beings who are tortured by the suffering of cyclic existence, we should think about who is responsible for freeing them from suffering. If we see that we have that responsibility, then we need to consider, 'Do I have the capacity to release all sentient beings from suffering?' When we think about this, we realise that we do not have the capacity to release even one sentient being, let alone all sentient beings.

So, who does have the capacity to free all sentient beings from suffering? Arhats, hearers and solitary realisers who have achieved self-liberation have the capacity to rescue only a few but not all sentient beings. Only buddhas or fully enlightened beings have the capacity to free all sentient beings from suffering. Therefore, to free all sentient beings from the suffering of cyclic existence we should cultivate an aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. This aspiration is bodhicitta. So, we need to cultivate this aspiration strongly and make a firm commitment to achieve complete enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings. We should make an effort and habituate ourselves with this aspiration until it arises naturally, and we experience it spontaneously within us.

Hence, after sitting in the correct posture, we must first ensure that we have the right frame of mind – bodhicitta – for engaging in the meditation practice. As we have just discussed, we need to make sure that our motivation for engaging in the practice is not related to our interests in this life, nor future lives or to fulfilling our own self-purpose. Rather, our motivation should be to achieve complete enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings. Therefore, we are engaging in the practice to achieve complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

We will now do a short breathing meditation together for a few minutes. First, we check our motivation and make sure that we cultivate bodhicitta, which is an aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. With this motivation, let's try to adopt the meditation posture with the eight features. If that is not possible, adopt the most comfortable posture you can. So, we will just do a few minutes of breathing meditation now.

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*[Pause for meditation]*

[Student] *Normally, you progress from one item to the next item. By realising one item, then moving like this, the order is important. We can check that it is completely true. So, you realise one and then move to the next one.*

Yes.

[Student] *Is that similarly important in other texts like 'The Bodhisattva's Way of Life'? You know in the lamrim you realise one point and then you go to the next point, all through the lamrim structure. So, is going from one point to the next point like that also true for other texts?*

Yes, that's right. When we do the lamrim practice there's a structure and sequence of order that we must follow to proceed with the practice. In lamrim meditation, we reflect on and progress along, stage by stage, in a systematic order as instructed in the guidelines. However, we can also do a particular topic in the middle, rather than beginning from the start of the lamrim topics. For example, we may just want to do the meditation on bodhicitta or emptiness. That's fine. But when we engage in that topic, we still have some sort of order related to doing that practice, whether it is bodhicitta or emptiness. We still need to have some sort of structured outline or framework to follow.

[Student] *In the lamrim they say the first step is realising the guru or guru devotion. In other texts, like 'The Bodhisattva's Way of Life', is it possible to go from here to there and back to here like this?*

There is no reason why we can't do the meditation on whatever topic we feel like doing at that moment. It is important that whatever meditation we do is effective and beneficial for us. Then, after we have done one topic, we can jump to a different topic. There is no reason why we can't do that. But in doing the lamrim meditation, there is a set order we must follow, depending on the topic. The lamrim, especially for a beginner, makes the meditation very accessible and effective because it provides a clear guideline of what to do in a structured, orderly and logically sensible manner. But rather than following the lamrim teaching, if you decide to probe into the topic in your own way, that is fine too as long as you are familiar with that topic and find it beneficial.

For example, to cultivate and experience bodhicitta, if we follow the lamrim guideline we will know exactly what we need to meditate on to give rise to bodhicitta. It all makes sense, and we just need to follow step by step. But someone who is already very familiar with bodhicitta does not need to follow all the steps because they can generate bodhicitta easily. Those who follow the lamrim guideline to cultivate bodhicitta need to cultivate compassion. To cultivate compassion, they need to understand the nature of suffering, so they need to meditate on suffering. If we say we have compassion for others but do not have any familiarity with and empathy towards the suffering of other beings, we are just lying to ourselves. Likewise, someone may guide us by saying, 'let the thought "may all sentient beings be free from suffering" arise.' If we are not familiar with what it says in the lamrim teaching relating to the suffering of sentient beings, and our responsibility for freeing them from that suffering, then we can only pretend to meditate. If somebody asks us why we need to

free other sentient beings from suffering, and what kind of suffering sentient beings are caught up in, then we wouldn't be able to go into any detail. The lamrim gives us a lot of knowledge about generating bodhicitta for other sentient beings and why we need to generate bodhicitta. There are so many reasons why we need to feel and show empathy and compassion towards other beings. The more we believe in those reasons, the stronger the bodhicitta will grow within us.

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