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# The Quick Path to Enlightenment

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We are now up to the third of the six preparatory practices.

## Cultivating a special virtuous mind

As we have discussed previously, the lamrim itself lists eight features of how to sit. The third preparatory practice is to sit properly in this eight-fold body posture if you can, or to choose a suitable option that is most convenient or in whatever manner is most comfortable, and then cultivate bodhicitta and take refuge. The main focus here is to cultivate the right motivation. Having said that, if you can't adopt the eight-fold body posture you can choose a posture that is most convenient, but that doesn't mean you can choose any posture. Whatever posture you choose, it should be respectable, courteous and honour the holy objects of refuge you have envisaged in front of you as part of your second preparatory practice of setting up the altar. For example, if you have invited important guests, you will ensure you treat them with respect and dignity.

Cultivating the right motivation is crucial and critical for our practice. Consider the example of four people who recite the Tara practice together, with each person having a different motivation. Let's say the first person's motivation is to achieve complete enlightenment; the motivation of the second person is to achieve liberation from cyclic existence; the third person's motivation is to find a good rebirth in a future life and the fourth person's motivation is to find pleasure and gain in this current life. Even though all four people are engaging in the same practice, the result of the practice of each will vary significantly. Whether the result is great or small will depend on the scope of each person's motivation.

## Motivation sets our goal

We are advised that when we engage in Dharma practice, we should aim to achieve the state of buddhahood to benefit all beings. If this is not feasible, we should aim to achieve self-liberation or at least aim to find a good rebirth in the future.

However, we may feel that if we direct our attention to benefiting other beings or achieving some long-term goals, aren't we then neglecting our needs and interests of this current life? Not at all. Because if we direct our time and energy to achieve long-term goals, our immediate needs and short-term goals are fulfilled as a by-product.

To achieve liberation and a good future rebirth, we must practise reducing the mental afflictions such as attachment or hatred and refrain from the ten non-virtues and so forth. Applying such virtuous practices will not only enable us to achieve our long-term goals but will also automatically bring more happiness, reduce problems and fulfil our wishes in this life. By aiming towards a higher goal, the lower or immediate goals will automatically be reached. So, if we strive to achieve complete enlightenment, the

same action will automatically facilitate achieving liberation from cyclic existence or finding a good future rebirth with happiness and contentment in this life.

If we specifically aim at self-liberation, even though it will not serve as a cause for complete enlightenment to benefit all beings, it will serve as a cause to find a good rebirth and happiness in this life. Alternatively, if we limit the scope of our motivation to just finding pleasure and gain in this current life, that is all we will get out of our actions. Since such actions are associated strongly with the likes and dislikes of this life, they don't serve as a cause to achieve any of the other three higher goals - buddhahood, liberation and a good future rebirth, and hence they are not considered as a Dharma practice. Taking this into account, His Holiness the Dalai Lama comments that with the bodhicitta motivation, bodhisattvas are also the wisest and smartest, even in fulfilling their own personal goals.

## Taking Refuge

After choosing the correct sitting posture and ensuring that we have cultivated the right motivation or frame of mind, taking refuge is the next step.

## Invoking Refuge Objects

To engage in the practice of taking refuge, we first need to cultivate the objects of refuge. So, you imagine in front of you a vast and high precious throne supported by eight lions. Upon it is the cushion of a multi-coloured lotus and the sun and moon discs upon which is seated one's precious root guru in the aspect of Shakyamuni Buddha, who appears as you see the Buddha's image in paintings and sculptures. His body is a golden colour with an *ushnisha* or crown protrusion. He is sitting in a cross-legged lotus posture, his right hand in an earth touching gesture while his left hand is in meditative equipoise holding a begging bowl filled with nectar. He is wearing a saffron robe and his body is adorned with the major and minor marks of a buddha. A radiant and brilliant light is emanating from his body which forms a circle or a halo around it, representing his form body being in the nature of light. Then surrounding the Buddha are the assemblies of the direct and lineage gurus, deities, buddhas, bodhisattvas, *dakas* and Dharma protectors. Then in front of each of those refuge objects are their oral scriptures in the form of *pechas* (a Tibetan style Dharma book) in the nature of light. All the objects of refuge are looking at you with a delightfully pleasing gesture.

With a deep sense of faith, and remembering the kindness and the qualities of the refuge objects, we should think as Nagarjuna said in his *Letter to a Friend*:

Every being has already suckled  
More than the four oceans worth of milk.  
In the future every ordinary person in samsāra  
Will drink far more than this.

As said here, the number of times each sentient being has taken rebirth is more than would be from drinking all the milk of the four oceans, and if they continue to remain in cyclic existence, they will drink even more milk than that! So, we need to think of how long all sentient beings, including ourselves, have remained in the ocean of samsara or cyclic existence, and how much longer we will remain in it.

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Aryadeva says in his *Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way*:

The ocean of suffering  
Has no end at all.  
While drowning here in saṃsāra,  
Child, why do you have no fear?

This is saying that there is no measurement of the depth of the ocean of suffering. So, any being who is drowning in it and is not terrified is truly showing child-like naivety. We need to think about how ourselves and all other beings have been caught in this ocean of cyclic existence since immemorial time, inflicted with the suffering of samsara and in particular a bad rebirth. If we don't do anything to achieve freedom now, then the depth of suffering yet to be experienced is unthinkable. At this present time, we have the opportunity to free ourselves from cyclic existence because we have found a rare and optimum human rebirth, and finding the same rebirth again is very unlikely; likewise meeting with the perfect Dharma is very difficult to find again. We should think that this is our perfect opportunity to free ourselves from all types of suffering by achieving the supreme liberation of complete enlightenment. If we don't achieve liberation, then we will have to continuously suffer in samsara.

So, in this way, we should cultivate a thought of freeing ourselves and all other sentient beings from cyclic existence. We should also recognise that the assembly of refuge objects, as we have cultivated in front of us, is the perfect object of refuge and protection, thereby developing faith in them. No other objects can rescue us from suffering and lead us to complete enlightenment. Hence, to achieve complete enlightenment for the sake of all beings we should think that we are taking refuge in the Three Jewels in front of us and imagine that all other sentient beings are also cultivating bodhicitta motivation, and out of this motivation, are also taking refuge in the Three Jewels.

### **Taking refuge in the guru**

We, and all other sentient beings around us, take refuge in the guru by gently saying, 'I take refuge in the guru', seven times or more, but at least three times. As the lamrim instructs us, at that time imagine that a stream of five-coloured nectar and light comes forth from the bodies of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and the direct and lineage gurus. This enters into our mind and body and that of all other sentient beings, purifying the negativities and obscurations we have accumulated in samsara since beginningless time.

The negativities and obscurations specifically relate to not harming the guru's body, disobeying the guru's speech, disturbing the guru's mind, lacking respect for the guru and criticising the guru. As the nectar and light fill our body, we can imagine that all our accumulated negativities and obscurations are exiting from every pore and opening of our body in the form of dark smoke or charcoal liquid.

As a result, our body is transformed into a very pure and luminous form. The lamrim text provides two analogies to show how the negativities leave and how purification takes place. Suppose there is a pile of hot ashes on the ground. If you pour a bucket of water over it the pile will disperse into the dust of ashes and just dissipate. The next analogy is when entering a pitch-dark room with a bright

lamp, the darkness will vanish instantaneously. In a similar way, you imagine the effect of the nectar of light clearing away negativities and obscurations within us. Applying the latter analogy of purification in our practice is said in the lamrim to be more powerful and effective than the first analogy. Having purified all the negativities and obscurations, our mind and body are filled with the blessings of the guru's body, speech and mind. Thus, we increase our longevity, merit, knowledge and realisations and we receive the refuge protection of the glorious gurus.

### **Taking refuge in Buddha**

Next, you take refuge in the Buddha by repeating, 'I take refuge in the Buddha' at least three times while imagining a stream of multi-coloured nectar and light flowing from the bodies of the Buddha Vajradhara and the surrounding deities of Guhyasamaja, Chakrasamvara, Vajrabhairava, Hevajra, Kalachakra, the one thousand buddhas of the fortunate aeons, the Thirty-five Buddhas of Confession and so on.

As before, this enters into our mind and body and that of all other sentient beings, purifying the negativities and mental obscurations accumulated since beginningless time. We should also specifically focus on the purification of the negativities and obscurations we have created in relation to the buddhas for example, with ill-thought causing the buddhas' bodies to bleed, and destroying stupas which are the representations of the holy mind. In short, we eliminate and purify the negativities and obscurations of transgressing the precepts of taking refuge in the Buddha. By receiving the nectar light blessing of the Buddha refuge object, our bodies and the bodies of all other sentient beings become pure, clear and luminous. This increases our lifespan, merit, knowledge and realisations, and thus we receive the protection of the Buddha refuge object.

### **Taking refuge in the Dharma**

To take refuge in the Dharma, you repeat 'I take refuge in the Dharma' at least three times, or as many times as you like, while imagining a stream of multi-coloured nectar and light coming forth from the scriptures - or *pecha* in Tibetan - which are sitting in front of each one of the refuge objects. This enters into our mind and body and that of all other sentient beings, purifying the negativity and obscurations accumulated since beginningless time, particularly those relating to the Dharma refuge object, such as rejecting the Dharma, treating the Dharma as a material possession as a means of livelihood or placing Dharma texts on the ground, which is disrespectful.

The meaning of 'rejecting the Dharma' includes actions such as Hinayanists disparaging the Mahayanists and vice versa. Disparaging or criticising the Dharma is an act of rejecting the Dharma. We can also have Mahayanists who follow the Sutrayana disparaging the Tantrayana, and then within the Tantrayana, those who follow the lower tantras disparaging the higher tantra classes. Likewise, those who follow the higher tantras disparaging the lower tantras. An act of rejecting Dharma also includes criticising Dharma teachers by saying they lack confidence, or they are overconfident. Criticising their Dharma teachings is criticising or rejecting all the Dharma within their

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continuum. In short, the negativity of abandoning Dharma is heavy and very subtle.

The *Samādhirāja sūtra* says:

Compared to someone who destroys all the stūpas  
in the world,  
Someone who rejects the Sūtras is far worse.  
Compared to someone who kills as many Arhats as  
the sands in the Ganges,  
Someone who rejects the Sūtras is far worse.

As illustrated in this quote the negativity of rejecting the Dharma is greater than the negativity accrued by destroying all stupas. So here we should specifically focus on the purification of the negativity we have created in relation to the Dharma. As discussed earlier, after the nectar and light have purified the negativities and obscurations, our body becomes light in nature – clear and vivid. This increases our lifespan, merit, knowledge and realisations through which we receive the blessing and protection of the Dharma refuge object.

We will stop tonight's teaching here with the completion of taking refuge in the guru, the buddhas and the Dharma. Now we will do a short meditation together based on what we have discussed in this teaching session.

[Question:] *Early on you mentioned the Buddha appearing to be in the aspect of light. What does that mean?*

[Answer:] It means the Buddha's body is in the nature of light, in the middle of all of the radiant light being emanated, forming a halo.

[Question:] *You went through the blessings from the guru and then the blessings from the Buddha. Are the guru and the Buddha as one? In the sequence of the meditation, you did one with the guru and then one with the Buddha, but is there only one figure?*

[Answer:] The centre figure is your guru in the aspect of the Lord Shakyamuni Buddha, but in entity or in nature, it is your own guru. We say that the guru is the Buddha, the guru is the deity, the *daka* and the Dharma protector which implies that all these are the manifestation of the guru. So, when taking refuge in the gurus, you focus on the guru Shakyamuni Buddha and the surrounding direct and lineage gurus. When taking refuge in the Buddha, we focus on Buddha Vajradhara and all the surrounding buddhas.

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