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# The Quick Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by Venerable Geshe Lobsang Dorje

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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We will begin with a short meditation. If you are familiar with the teaching on taking refuge and generating bodhicitta, you can apply that in this meditation. Otherwise, just do the breathing meditation by simply keeping the mind on the incoming and outgoing breath. *(Pause for meditation)*

## THE ACTUAL MEDITATION SESSION

*Preparation [The six preparatory practices]*

### 4. Visualising the sublime assembly

We have been discussing the six preparatory practices. We have now come to the fourth preparatory practice, in which we visualise the merit field, called the sublime assembly.

When someone plants a crop, they must first prepare the ground well with manure, water the crop and so forth, in order to obtain a good harvest. Likewise, when we accumulate merit and purify negativities by doing the preparatory practices well, we can easily cultivate bodhicitta and the wisdom of emptiness, which will lead us to reach our ultimate goal of complete enlightenment.

#### The power of the merit field's sublime assembly

In last week's teaching, we mentioned the quote from Lama Tsongkhapa: *When you listen you cannot catch the word, when you think, you cannot understand the meaning, when you meditate you don't produce any realisation in your mental continuum. At that time, your power of mind is very weak, and you are instructed to rely on the power of your field of supplication [i.e., your Lama Lord].*

This quote shows the power of the blessing of the merit field's sublime assembly as an external, positive force whenever we are too weak, or otherwise unable to engage in any virtuous practice. It urges us to rely on the merit field's sublime assembly to remove the obstacles and make our situation conducive to spiritual development.

As Je Tsongkhapa says, the reason why *when you listen you cannot catch the word, when you think, you cannot understand the meaning* is due to our past accumulation of karma, our mental delusions and negativities, and insufficient accumulation of merit. So, to purify negativities and accumulate merit, we need to cultivate the merit field and the sublime assembly and engage in the supplicating practices of purification and accumulation.

#### Purifying negativities and accumulating merit

In reply to Tsongkhapa's question to Manjushri about what he must do to quickly produce realisations,

Manjushri advised: *You should rely on the guru yoga practice of seeing your guru as inseparable from the deity, and in conjunction with this, you should engage in the practice of accumulating merit and purifying negativities and obscurations. In this way, if you contemplate the meaning of the profound Dharma, you will realise it.*

This advice shows the importance of purifying negativities and obscurations and accumulating merit in order to cultivate bodhicitta and the wisdom of emptiness. If we lack merit, or if we have too many negativities, mental delusions and obscurations, we won't be able to cultivate bodhicitta and the wisdom of emptiness, even if we work hard in our spiritual practice.

We can refer to Tsongkhapa's life story when he followed Manjushri's advice and undertook a strenuous program of purification and accumulation – completing hundreds of thousands of prostrations, mandala offerings, mantra recitations, and so forth – in the Woeka valley.

As a result of this practice, Tsongkhapa had a direct and pure vision of the great Madhyamaka masters like Nagarjuna, Buddhapalita, Aryadeva and Chandrakirti. In these pure visions, Buddhapalita placed a scripture on Tsongkhapa's head, and Tsongkhapa had dialogues with those masters on the difficult points of the profound Dharma. Afterwards, when he read Buddhapalita's commentary on Nagarjuna's *Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, Tsongkhapa fully realised its content.

It is not the case that Tsongkhapa hadn't studied Buddhapalita's commentary called *Buddhapalita-Mulamadhyamaka-Vrtti* before; he had studied it but hadn't fully comprehended its meaning. However, after completing his purification and accumulation practices he easily understood it when he read it again.

This story illustrates the difference that purifying and accumulating practice can make to the outcome of our practice. There are many other inspiring stories of past masters demonstrating how their intensive practice of purifying negativities and accumulating merit enabled them to accomplish inner realisations. One master stated that a person who has not done accumulation and purification practice is like a seed that lacks the conducive conditions, such as moisture and manure, to ripen.

In our monastery, before the debate session, we recite prayers, such as the *Twenty-One Tara Praises*, which usually go for about an hour and a half, while the debate session goes for three hours. This prayer session is meant to be a part of our accumulation and purification practice.

#### How to visualise the merit field

To engage in the practice of purifying negativities and accumulating merit, first, we must visualise the merit field and the sublime assembly. There are two methods for visualising the merit field – one according to the Guru Puja, and one which accords with this practical lamrim guide.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See *The Quick Path to Omniscience: A Practical Guide for the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, Panchen Lama Lobsang Yeshe, p. 29.

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Prior to this, in our preparatory practices, we have taken refuge in the Three Jewels and generated bodhicitta. So, before we visualise the merit field, we need to know how to dissolve the refuge objects. There are three ways of doing this: **First**, we can dissolve the refuge objects into the centre of our forehead in the form of light. **Second**, we can dissolve the refuge objects into the state of emptiness by meditating on how all things are merely designated by conceptual thought and lack true existence from their own side. **Third**, rather than dissolving the refuge objects, we can just mentally move them a bit higher for the moment and dissolve them into the merit field later.

Regardless of which of these methods we follow, prior to visualising the merit field, we need to engage in 'the blessing or consecration of the ground', or mentally transform the place where we are practising into a pure land. We begin this during the first of the six preparatory practices – cleaning the house or room. Then, we imagine the place where we are sitting as being a perfect pure land – the ground is even and spacious, filled with gold, jewelled trees and mountains, the most beautiful lakes, birds, and so on.

We can mentally view any place where we may be as a pure land – just as when we set up water bowl offerings in the earlier preparatory practice and imagine them to be vast offerings of flowers, incense, fragrance, music, and so forth.

Then, in the space in front, you visualise a vast ocean of milk, in the middle of which is a huge wish-fulfilling tree. Its root is gold, the trunk is silver, and it bears various beautiful fruits and precious gems. In the centre of this wish-fulfilling tree is a wide and high precious throne, supported by eight great lions. Upon it are infinite layers of variegated lotus flowers and petals.

The petals of the bottom layer are wider, and the petals get smaller towards the top layer, which is a lotus with four petals. In its centre – upon the anthers of the lotus, and on a cushion of variegated lotus petals and moon and sun discs – is one's root guru with three kindnesses.

The lotus symbolises renunciation: just as the lotus is untainted by mud, so the holy beings are untainted by the faults of samsara, even when they abide in it. The sun symbolises ultimate bodhicitta or the wisdom of emptiness: just as the sun causes all fruit to ripen, so the wisdom of emptiness causes the state of complete enlightenment to ripen. The moon symbolises conventional bodhicitta: just as the moon soothes the minds of those suffering from heat, so conventional bodhicitta fulfils the wishes of all sentient beings.

Here, you can visualise the guru in the aspect of a saffron-robed *bhikshu* or in the aspect of Lama Tsongkhapa – in Tibetan, we use the title *Lama Lobsang Thupwang Dorje Chang*. *Lama* means guru; *Lobsang* refers to Je Tsongkhapa; *Thupwang* refers to Shakyamuni Buddha; and *Dorje Chang*, Holder of the Vajra, refers to the buddha Vajradhara. The point is to view one's root guru, who is the chief figure of the merit field, as being inseparable from Je Tsongkhapa, the Buddha, and the Vajradhara.

One Guru Puja commentary says that when you visualise your root guru, you visualise Buddha Shakyamuni at his heart; then, at the heart of Shakyamuni Buddha, you visualise Vajradhara. In this way, you can view your root guru as being inseparable from the Buddha and Vajradhara in nature.

Another Guru Puja commentary says you visualise your root guru in the aspect of Tsongkhapa; then at the heart of Tsongkhapa is Shakyamuni Buddha; and at the heart of Shakyamuni Buddha is Vajradhara.

The difference between these two is that, in the first one, your root guru is in the aspect of a saffron-robed *bhikshu*, but in the second one, he is in the aspect of Je Tsongkhapa.

### Seeing four entities as one

Here, we are training our mind to view Tsongkhapa, Shakyamuni Buddha, Vajradhara and our root guru as being of the same nature, because we usually don't regard them as one entity. We regard Tsongkhapa as a completely different person from our root guru. Likewise, we regard the historical Buddha Shakyamuni as a supreme nirmanakaya and hence different from our root guru; and Vajradhara as being in the aspect of the sambhogakaya, and different from our root guru. So, we normally regard these four entities as different.

However, there are many logical reasons that prove they are the same. For example, we can understand Shakyamuni Buddha and Vajradhara buddha to be manifestations of the same enlightened being – one manifestation is in the aspect of the Buddha as a supreme nirmanakaya to teach the Sutrayana path; and one is in the aspect of Vajradhara, who teaches the Tantrayana path.

Further, the deeds of Shakyamuni Buddha included taking birth in this world, turning the wheel of Dharma and, at the end, displaying the parinirvana of passing away from this world. Then, after leaving this world, the Buddha came back, manifesting in the nirmanakaya forms of great Indian pandit scholars and meditators to benefit sentient beings according to their needs, interests and predispositions. The Buddha also came to Tibet, manifesting as many great Tibetan masters, such as Je Tsongkhapa. From this perspective, we can say that all these diverse manifestations are the same enlightened being, therefore, one's root guru is inseparable from all the buddhas and deities.

In the past, the Lord Buddha took a vow that he would come as a spiritual guide to all beings of the degenerate time. This means that the gurus and spiritual guides with whom we have a Dharma connection are manifestations of the Buddha.

Later, when we reach the section on guru yoga practice, we will find out more about how all the buddhas and deities are in the same nature or entity as our own root guru. It is crucial that we understand this, and in our practice, view the gurus, deities and buddhas as being one in nature or entity. In the lamrim teaching, it says if we don't understand this, then engaging in guru yoga practice becomes fake or artificial, like the reflection of an object in the mirror.

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### Three kindnesses of the root guru

In the visualisation of the merit field, the text describes the kindness of one's root guru in three ways or the three kindnesses of the root guru.

According to the **sutra system**, these three kindnesses refer to (1) bestowing of vows to a renounced person, or the precepts of refraining from the ten non-virtues to a layperson; (2) giving oral transmissions of the scriptures; and (3) giving commentaries and explanations of the teachings. The three kindnesses according to the **tantric system** are (1) conferring initiations; (2) explaining the tantra; and (3) passing on pith instructions or precepts.

Any lama who is kind to one in these three ways is called the lama of three kindnesses.

If you have an image or photo of the Guru Puja merit field, have a good look at it so that you can get a clearer understanding of this description of the merit field.

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