
The Quick Path to Enlightenment

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Today in the Buddhist calendar we remember an auspicious day called Descent from Heaven which relates to the Lord Buddha's life which is considered one of the four important deeds of the Buddha's life story. So, on this special day, I send my greetings and say tashi delek to you.

I consider it very auspicious and I'm very happy that tonight's teaching coincides with this special Buddhist event. Many great masters claim that if we create merit or do anything virtuous on an auspicious day, then the benefit will be multiplied by thousands of times. Therefore, we should think about how fortunate we are to attend this teaching session as, through it, we will greatly increase our merit.

So, we have been talking about the preparatory practice of visualising the sublime assembly, meditating on the merit field or object of the merit. In the previous teaching, we talked about the benefits of engaging in the practice of accumulation and purification so we won't go over it again. Today, we will look at the method for visualising the merit field of the sublime assembly. There are two methods. One is according to the Guru Puja, and the other is according to this practical guide of Lam Rim teachings.

Following my explanation, we will meditate on the merit field. Meditating on the visualisation of the merit field is beneficial in general and meditating on an auspicious day makes it more beneficial. Furthermore, we create even more benefit when we do the practice with other Dharma friends rather than doing it on our own.

With the visualisation of the merit field according to the Guru Puja, we start by imagining an ocean of milk from which the merit field arises. Then, we imagine a huge and beautiful wish-fulfilling tree that has many large leaves, flowers, fruits and jewels. On that wish-fulfilling tree, we think of a huge and precious jewelled throne supported by eight lions. Upon it are the inconceivable eleven layers of variegated lotus flowers and petals. The petals on the bottom layer are the widest becoming smaller as the height increases. The top layer is a lotus with four petals. In its centre, on the anthers of the lotus is a variegated lotus, moon and sun disk cushion where our own kind root guru is seated in the aspect of Lama Tsongkhapa or a bhikkhu, wearing a saffron-coloured robe. Their right hand is in the gesture of giving the Dharma, and the left is in the gesture of meditative equipoise, holding a begging bowl filled with nectar.

The guru is wearing a yellow pandit hat, and his body is adorned with the major and minor marks of a Buddha. His body is in the form of brilliant light which forms a halo around him. He sits in a crossed-legged, vajra posture in the centre of that circle of light. At the heart of the guru, we visualise Shakyamuni Buddha, and at the heart of Shakyamuni Buddha is Vajradhara.

The guru is seated in the centre of the four-petal lotus. Upon the right petal is the assembly of the deities of Vajrabhairava

or Yamantaka; on the left petal the assembly of the deities of Chakrasamvara; on the front petal is the assembly of deities of Guhyasamaja, and on the petal behind at the back is the assembly of the deities of Hevajra. Then, on the layer of petals below that, we imagine the assembly of the deities of the highest yoga tantra. On the layer of the petals below that is the sublime assembly of yoga tantra, such as the Sarvadi Vairochana. Below that, is the sublime assembly of the performance tantra, Vairochana Abhisambodhi, and below that is the assembly of the action tantra such as the Muni Trisamayavyuha So, we have all the assemblies of the deities of the four classes of tantra.

The lamrim teaching states:

Below that, he is surrounded by the One Thousand Buddhas of the Our Fortunate Age and the Thirty-Five Buddhas [of Confession]. Below that are the Eight Great Intimate Offspring Bodhisattvas. Below them, he is surrounded by the Twelve Great Self-Realized Victors and below them are the great disciples such as the sixteen elders and so forth. Below them, are the Dharma Protectors. Outside of these in the four directions are Dhritarāṣṭra surrounded by Gandharva [to the east] Virudhaka surrounded by Kumbhan Dakas [to the south] Virupaḥṣa surrounded with Nāgas, [to the west] Vaiśravaṇa surrounded by Yakṣas [to the north]. All four deities stand protecting you from obstacles.

Then rays of light equal to the numbers of lamas radiate from the heart of the lama Śākyamunī. Upon the tips of the rays of light spreading upwards, on a multicolored lotus seat with sun and moon cushions, the Conqueror Vajradhāra sits surrounded by the Lineage Lamas Who Bless Your Practice such as Tilopa, Nāropā and the glorious Dombhipa and so forth. Upon the tips of rays of light spreading to the right side, on a multicolored lotus seat with a moon cushion, the Sovereign Maitreya sits. He is surrounded by the lamas of the Lineage of Vast Practice such as noble Asanga, and so forth. Upon the rays of light spreading to the left side on a moon cushion sits Mañjuḥṣa, surrounded by the lamas of the Lineage of Profound View such as Noble Nāgārjuna, and so forth. In front sits your kind root lama surrounded by the lamas with whom you have a direct connection in the Dharma. In front of each of these lamas, on a perfect bookstand, are their own volumes of scripture appearing as light. Out of this an inconceivable array of emanation bodies spread in all directions, to wherever living beings can be tamed.

When meditating, it is best if we can visualise the full description of the merit field, the details of the principal sublime being and all the surrounding deities and so forth as explained above. If we find that too difficult, we can focus just on all the principal sublime beings of the merit field without visualising the surrounding deities. If we find that even that is difficult, then we can just direct our focus on the principle sublime being of the root guru in the aspect of Lama Tsongkhapa with Shakyamuni Buddha at his heart and Vajradhara at the heart of Shakyamuni Buddha.

With this meditation, the main thing is that we have an wavering faith in the merit field as being actual and living sublime beings. The only reason we do not directly see them as being actual and sublime beings is because of our karma

and mental obscuration. So, we must have faith in what we see in our visualisation, seeing real living figures such as our guru or Lama Tsongkhapa, right in front of us. Arya Asanga spent years of retreat meditating on Maitreya but saw him only later on when he had purified his mind of obscuration. Although Maitreya was with him right from the beginning, Asanga was not able to see him. In the same way, it is important that, even if we don't directly see them now, we at least have a solid faith in all the sublime beings of the merit field as being real and that we feel their presence right in front of us.

So, remembering the benefits of the purification and accumulation practice, and the significance of today's special Buddhist event, we should think that we are very fortunate to have such a wonderful opportunity to engage in this meditation of the merit field. With this kind of positive frame of mind, we will begin the meditation together on visualising the merit field.

[pause for meditation]

Next, we will look into the explanation of the field of merit. The practical guide to the lamrim teaching tells us to:

Start by visualising a vast precious jewelled throne supported by eight great lions in the space in front. On this throne, we imagine another smaller jewelled throne located towards the back of the main throne. It is supported by eight lions. Upon that throne is the variegated lotus, moon and the sun disc cushion. Seated upon the cushion is our own root lama in the aspect of Shakyamuni Buddha wearing a saffron-coloured. The Buddha is adorned with a crown protrusion or *unisha* and the major and minor marks of enlightenment. His right hand is in the gesture of giving the Dharma. The left hand is in the gesture of meditative equipoise, holding a begging bowl filled with nectar. The Buddha is in the nature of brilliant light. He sits in a cross-legged posture amid a circle of light formed by the emanated light from his body. Infinite light rays emanate from the heart of the guru Shakyamuni Buddha.

At the tips of the light rays which go upwards is the Buddha Vajradhara, together with all the lineage gurus of the blessing practice who are sitting on the lotus and moon cushions on the lion throne. At the tips of the light rays that go the right side is the Maitreya, together with all the lineage gurus of the vast deeds sitting on the lotus and moon cushions on the lion throne. At the tips of the light rays on the left side is Manjughosha, together with all the lineage gurus of the profound view sitting on the lotus and moon cushions on the lion throne. From the rays of the light spreading in front is our own kind root guru who is seated upon the lotus and moon discs on the lion throne, surrounded by all the other gurus from whom we have directly received Dharma connections. Surrounding these assemblies of the gurus are the great assemblies of deities – buddhas, bodhisattvas, *dakas*, *dakinis*, Dharma protectors and so forth.

In front of each of these sublime objects is a pile of their own oral teachings placed on a precious throne in the nature of illuminating light but in the aspect of a traditional Tibetan Dharma scripture. Outside these sublime assemblies, we then imagine an emanation of light that benefits each and every sentient being in the manifested form according to their precise needs. We also imagine that, at the three places of the body, are the principal sublime objects and the retinue of sublime objects. The three places are the crown where there is

a white OM, the throat where there is red AH, and the heart where there is a blue HUM.

The lamrim text says:

Rays of light equal to the numbers of lamas radiate from the heart of the Buddha Śākyamuni:

At the end of the rays of light spreading upwards sits the Lineage Lamas Who Bless Your Practice surrounding Conqueror Vajradhāra sitting on a lion throne upon lotus and moon Mandala cushions. At the end of the rays of light spreading out to the right sits the Lineage Lamas of Vast Practice surrounding Lord Maitreya sitting on lotus and moon Mandala cushions.

At the end of the rays of light spreading out to the left sits the Lineage Lamas of Profound View surrounding Lord Mañjughōsa sitting on lotus and moon Mandala cushions.

At the ends of the rays of light spreading out to the front, surrounding your very own kind root lama, upon a lion throne with lotus and moon Mandala cushions sit the lamas from whom you have directly received Dharma teachings.

In the surrounding area the assembly of Tutelary Deities, Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Heroes, Heroines, Dharma Protectors and Wisdom Beings are seated. In front of each of these holy beings, on a perfect bookstand, are volumes of their own teachings in the form of light. Beyond these is an infinite array of emanation bodies spreading in the ten directions to wherever they can tame [the minds] of living beings. On the crown of each of the principal beings and their retinues is a white OM, on the throat a red AH, and on the heart a blue HUM. The crown, throat and heart are visualized very clearly with these syllables. Rays of light spread from the HUM syllable in the heart of Buddha Śākyamuni and invite Wisdom Beings.

These correspond to the visualized deities from their respective natural abodes.

So, will do a few minutes of meditation together, visualising the merit field of the sublime assembly according to the lamrim tradition. We visualise the field of merit and imagine that the blessings sent forth from the field of merit purify all beings of their negativities and increases their merits. We should try to take delight in and feel positive about all the benefits we are extending to all beings.

[meditation]

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