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# The Quick Path to Enlightenment

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We will begin with a few minutes of breathing meditation. Please cultivate the right motivation which should be a bodhicitta mind wishing to achieve complete enlightenment. We are studying this profound lamrim teaching so that we can benefit all sentient beings.

## Preliminary practices (cont.)

### 4. Visualising the merit field of the assembly of sublime objects.

After a brief explanation of the merit field, we now understand that there are two main methods to meditate on visualising the sublime assembly: according to the practice of the guru puja, and according to the practical guide in this lamrim teaching.

As noted in the previous teaching, there are a few different options in terms of applying the meditation of visualising the merit field. The best option is to include all details of the entire merit field in the visualisation. If we are unable to achieve this, another option is to focus our visualisation only on the principal sublime objects of the merit field, rather than all of them. However, if we still find it very difficult, we can simply place the focus of our visualisation on our root guru in the aspect of Lama Tsongkhapa.

### Dissolving wisdom being into pledge being

Having mentally cultivated this assembly of the sublime beings, we may speculate that the visualisation is simply our own imagination and what has been visualised doesn't exist and is not actually present in the space in front of us. We may have faith in the visualisation, but we may find the visualisation of the merit field very unsteady or unstable. So, to overcome these obstacles of doubt and instability related to the visualisation, as the text says, *Rays of light spread from the HUM syllable in the heart of Buddha Śhākyamunī and invite Wisdom Beings*. We mentally invite the wisdom being which is the actual deity and absorb it into the pledge being which is the visualised or imagined deity. The text refers to this in a section called *absorb* which is to invite the wisdom being and absorb them into each visualised pledged being with these words:

You, who became Lord of All Beings,  
You, the deity who destroyed the terrible Mara and his  
armies,  
O Blessed Victor, with perfected knowledge of all  
things,  
Please come here together with your retinue.  
O Blessed Victor, for countless eons  
You practiced compassion, out of love for beings.  
Fulfilling the goal of your magnificent prayer of  
aspiration,  
Spontaneously appearing at the mention of Dharma  
realms  
Manifesting various blessings and miracles to deliver  
infinite hosts of beings,  
Now is the time for you to perform the benefit of living  
beings according to your vow.

O Lord, please come here with your retinue.

This verse is from a supplication prayer for invoking the wisdom beings from their natural abode and dissolving into the pledge beings which are the sublime beings we have visualised in front of us.

The 'Lord of All Beings' means the protector of all beings and not of just a few beings. 'Mara' - meaning the force of evil - is referring to the two types of obstructions: the afflictive obstructions and the obstruction to an omniscient mind. So, in this supplication we praise the invited wisdom being as the destroyer of the force of Mara. 'With the perfect knowledge of all things' is the knowledge which has the clear, full and perfect realisation of, for example, the two truths or the four noble truths and so on.

I will give you the background story related to this supplication prayer to highlight its profound meaning and benefits. During the Lord Buddha's time, there was a family in a town with a most beautiful looking girl. Over a period, the girl became renowned far and away for her beauty. One day a man from a distant place sought permission from the girl's family to marry her. The family said the decision was up to the girl.

So, the man asked her if she would marry him. She replied, 'I will, but on one condition' which was a promise to organise a grand offering of various objects for her, especially on all the auspicious religious days. The girl was very fond of the practice of making offerings to all the sublime beings. So, the man promised to organise the offerings as she wished. She married the man and moved to live with the man's family.

However, the new town was populated by non-Buddhists. Despite this, when the auspicious day came, she reminded her new family of their promise to arrange a very grand offering. They agreed to arrange the offering but said to her that it may be too far away for any of her Buddhist guests to come. Nevertheless, she insisted on organising the offering to be as grandiose as possible.

Accordingly, the family complied, and the news of the offering event spread around the town. A lot of local townspeople decided to participate in the event because many were curious about where the guests would come from. Also, there were many others - non-Buddhists - who wanted to embarrass her for making the family organise such a large-scale grandiose offering without any special guests.

The timing of the offering was lunchtime. On the day of the offering, the girl wore her best clothes, filled the house with aromatic incense and went to the top level of the house where she offered a lamp, made prostrations, and then chanted the invocation prayer mentioned above. At that time the Lord Buddha came to know about this special offering event. He said to his followers he would attend the offering and advised them to come with him. Because of the long distance, only those who had accomplished miraculous powers could join. So, as the story goes, the Buddha, along with the great assembly, including hearers and solitary realisers, flew to the girl's house. They had lunch there and then the Lord Buddha gave a Dharma discourse to all who had attended.

As we recite the invocation prayer while imagining the arrival of the assembly of sublime beings, we should have a strong and unwavering faith that they will arrive in front of us, even if we don't directly see them. There are stories of many great masters who had experienced this. For example, Asanga, who meditated on Maitreya for many years, only saw Maitreya at

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a much later time, but in fact Maitreya had been with Asanga while he was meditating from the very beginning. So even though it does not matter whether we can directly see the sublime beings or not, we should still cultivate and maintain an unwavering faith when we visualise them as actual and living sublime beings.

### Offering of a bath

Having invoked the assembly of the wisdom beings and dissolved them into the merit field visualised in front of us, the next step is to make what is called an 'offering of a bath'. The purpose of performing the ritual of a bath offering is primarily to cleanse our defilements; it is not because the sublime beings have some stains that we are trying to clean.

For the bath offering ritual, firstly we need to mentally create a bathing place. We imagine a very large bath hall which is square, with four large transparent glass windows in each wall. A beautiful aromatic scent pervades the area and the house is exquisitely adorned with various ornaments and precious jewels. We then invite the assembly of sublime beings into the hall and offer them the bath. However, I am not going to delve any further into the details of the description of a bath hall and the ritual of the bath offerings. You can learn these from the standard ritual manual relating to the bath offering practice.

We now move on to the fifth preparatory practice, which is:

## 5. Making seven branches of offerings including a mandala as the essence of purification and accumulating merit.

### The seven branches

Visualising the merit field is followed by the practice of the seven branches. I am sure many of you are already very familiar with these. The reason why we meditate on the field of merit is to accumulate merit and purify negativities, for which these seven branches are considered an essential practice.

What are the seven branches? They are the branches of:

1. Prostration
2. Offering
3. Confession
4. Rejoicing
5. Requesting to turn the wheel of Dharma
6. Beseeching to not enter paranirvana or not pass away
7. Dedication

The first branch is:

### 1. Prostration

There are three types of prostration: by body, by speech and by mind.

#### Prostration by body

To increase the merit through prostration by body, you imagine that from your body you manifest or duplicate as many bodies as there are numbers of atoms in all the buddhas' fields, with each one prostrating to all the buddhas of the past, present and future.

There are two ways of body prostration: a fully-stretched body prostration which in Tibetan is called *kyang-chag* and a half-stretched or contracted body prostration, called *kum-cha* in Tibetan, where you prostrate so that you touch five parts of the body on the ground - two knees, two hands (palms) and the forehead.

#### Prostration by speech

After mentally manifesting our body as many times as there are atoms, we can then imagine manifesting a countless number of heads on each body, and a countless number of mouths on each head and a countless number of tongues in each mouth. So, we can imagine the exponential effect of our recitations.

The prostration of speech is offering prayers of praise or hymns to the sublime beings eloquently and poetically. If you find the profound imagination of manifesting countless numbers of your body, head, mouth and tongue is not feasible or awkward to do, there is a simpler method of visualisation. This is to imagine all the forms of your past lives since beginningless time in the aspect of a human being and to imagine as you prostrate by speech, reciting or chanting prayers of praise, hymns or supplication to the sublime beings, that all of these forms of being are reciting.

#### Prostration by mind

This means that we mentally have a pure perception of the sublime beings in the merit field as being fully awakened ones, possessing all the excellent qualities and being free of all faults. So, prostration by mind means to venerate and honour the sublime beings from the bottom of your heart, having full faith in them as being completely perfect and supreme beings.

Relating to the branch of prostration in the lamrim text, there are supplication prayers starting from the Lord Buddha, through to all the lineage lamas or gurus. These are a way to pay homage and I will recite this supplication prayer from the text:

It begins with:

I bow my head to the Buddha, King of the Śākya,  
Whose body is made of ten million perfect virtues,  
Whose speech fulfils the wishes of infinite beings,  
And whose mind comprehends exactly all knowable objects.

Also included is the verse:

I bow down to my kind lamas,  
Themselves the Lama Vajradhāra, embodiment of the  
Three Refuges,  
Who having taken the form of spiritual teachers to train any  
disciple  
Bestow the common and excellent accomplishments.

And the last verse is:

To all those worthy of salutation  
With as many bodies as atoms in all lands  
I bow down to all Buddhas,  
With a mind directed to all Buddhas,  
By the power of the vow of the practice of good.

The text then further continues with the rest of the Seven Branches practice by quoting a prayer from the *King of Prayers* or the *Samantabhadra Prayer*.

So before next week's teaching, if you have time, refer to that section of the Seven Branch offerings of the Samantabhadra prayer and we will continue with that in the next teaching.

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Edited Version

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