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# The Quick Path to Enlightenment

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Let's begin by cultivating the proper motivation and engaging in a few minutes of breathing meditation together. Then we will continue the teaching from where we left it last time. (*Pause for meditation*)

## THE SIX PREPARATORY PRACTICES

### 4. Visualising the merit field (cont.)

Of the six preparatory practices, we have finished the fourth, which is visualising the merit field or sublime assembly. Last week, we started on the fifth: the seven branches (or limbs) of offering, including offering a mandala, which is the essence of purification and accumulating merit.

The assembly of sublime beings we have visualised in front of us is like a field of merit, so when we engage in the seven branches in the presence of this field, we can accumulate merit and purify negativities.

Remember that this visualised assembly of sublime beings really represents all the buddhas, Je Tsongkhapa, and so on, who are inseparable from our own lama or gurus. It is an extraordinary assembly of noble beings. So, the power of whatever virtuous practices we do in their presence, such as accumulating merit, will be vast; likewise, any purification practices we do will be very effective in purifying vast amounts of negativities.

As instructed in the lamrim text, *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, when we engage in this practice of the seven branches we must remember that cultivating the proper motivation is very important.

If our goal is to achieve a good rebirth, then our motivation should, accordingly, be directed beyond the affairs of this life towards finding a better rebirth. In this way, when we do the practice it will become a cause to find a good rebirth.

If our goal is to achieve liberation from cyclic existence, then we must cultivate renunciation, the aspiration to achieve liberation, based on a sense of dissatisfaction with samsara or cyclic existence. In this way, the practice we do will serve as a cause for us to achieve liberation.

Of course, the highest motivation we can have is cultivating bodhicitta, the aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings. If any practice we do is infused with this bodhicitta motivation, it will serve as a cause to achieve the supreme state of enlightenment.

However, as it is also mentioned in this lamrim text, while it is important to generate a proper motivation, the virtue from any practice we do in the presence of this extraordinarily powerful field of sublime beings – even if

it is done without a proper motivation – will become a cause for achieving enlightenment, due to the power of the merit field. In terms of the fruit or results of our practice, it is said that this exalted field of merit is like soil in a field that has been properly fertilised and enriched with manure, etc. Because of the soil's fertility, even if we sow or plant in the wrong weather, or at the wrong time, it is still possible to produce a good crop. This is because of the quality of the ground.

### 5. Offering the seven-branch prayer and world mandala

#### First branch: Prostration

Now we will go over the seven branches, beginning with the branch of prostration. In the lamrim text, the explanation of the seven branches is based on quotations from the *King of Prayers*, also known as the Samantabhadra prayer. So, we will continue from there.

Regarding prostrations, there are three types – physical prostration with the body, verbal prostration, and mental prostration. We can do all three types of prostrations together or apply each type of prostration – body, speech and mind – separately.

The lines from the *King of Prayers*, which show how we can do **prostrations of body, speech and mind together**, read:

With pure body, speech and mind,  
I bow down to every lion-among-humans,  
Throughout the three times  
And in all worlds of the ten directions.

This verse is referring to the buddhas to whom we offer prostrations of body, speech and mind: to the buddhas residing in all the three times – past, present and future – and in the ten directions.

#### Body prostration

There are a few different English translations of the Samantabhadra prayer. The English version of this lamrim text reads:

Through the power of the aspirational prayer of  
doing good,  
I visualize all the Conquerors.  
And manifesting my body as many times as the  
atoms of the universe,  
I bow down to all the Conquerors.

As these verses instruct, we should imagine doing **physical prostrations** to all the buddhas of the past, present and future, and residing in all the ten directions. We should also imagine manifesting as many duplicates of our body *as the atoms in the universe* – in other words, as the number of atoms in all the buddha fields. This analogy is used to indicate the countless number of prostrations we can imagine offering to all these buddhas.

When prostrating, you join both hands together at your heart with both thumbs touching at the tips and bent inward, and make a cupped shape with your hands, which symbolises holding a jewel or gem. Then, with your hands in this prayer gesture, first, place them on the crown of your head – this is to create the cause for attaining the crown *ushnisha* of a buddha. Then you place them in the middle of the forehead – this is to attain the curl mark in

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the centre of the Buddha's forehead. Next, you place your hands below the mouth to purify verbal negativities and achieve the qualities of the holy speech, and then at the heart to purify mental negativities and achieve the qualities of the holy mind. So, you touch your hands joined in the prayer gesture to these four parts of the body.

After you have touched the four parts of the body, you do a full-length prostration by prostrating full-length on the ground, stretching the arms and legs completely, or you can do the shorter or contracted body prostration, where you just kneel and touch the five parts of the body (hands, forehead and knees) to the ground. The text advises that, after bowing your body to the ground, you should try to get up as soon as you can – don't stay and let yourself rest on the ground.

No matter how many prostrations you are doing, it is important to think of not just counting the number of prostrations but to make sure that each prostration you do symbolises good manners, shows respect, and is done in a proper manner.

#### *Mental prostration*

After this comes the **prostration of the mind**. The *King of Prayers* says:

Upon one atom there are Buddhas as numerous  
as the atoms of the universe.  
All are seated in the midst of their children.  
In this way all are spheres of reality.  
I imagine Conquerors filling all of those atoms.

Here, we imagine that upon each atom there are countless numbers of buddhas, just as there are countless numbers of atoms in the universe. All these buddhas are surrounded by bodhisattvas and so forth. One then generates faith by thinking of the excellent qualities possessed by all these buddhas. So, we give rise to faith in the buddhas and their qualities.

Regarding the analogy of an infinite number of buddhas upon each atom, in the lamrim text, *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, it says this is logically possible.

For example, if one hundred people look at a seed, that one seed will serve as a cause or object for one hundred eye sense consciousnesses to arise. So, technically we can say there are one hundred eye sense consciousnesses in that seed. Likewise, since the omniscient mind of all the buddhas perceives every atom, it is like the sublime mind of all the buddhas exists in or pervades each atom. And in the state of buddhahood, wherever the Buddha's mind is, the Buddha's body and speech will be there also. Likewise, wherever the Buddha's body is, the Buddha's mind and speech will be, and so on. We can also say that just like the Buddha's mind, the Buddha's body also realises or perceives all things. So, from this perspective, it is conceivable to have an infinite number of buddhas upon a single atom.

#### *Verbal prostration*

Next, is **verbal prostration**. The text quotes the *King of Prayers*, which says:

In praise of all the Sugatas  
I express the excellence of all the Conquerors  
With the sound of oceans of voices in song,  
And oceans of inexhaustible praise.

As we mentioned in previous teachings, here we imagine manifesting countless bodies, manifesting countless heads from each body and from each head manifesting countless mouths and countless tongues from each mouth.

With the prostration of speech, we honour and praise all the sublime beings by reciting or singing prayers, hymns or songs in the most melodious and pleasing way, praising and admiring the inconceivable qualities of the holy body, speech and mind of all the sublime beings.

If you find it awkward or inconvenient to imagine manifesting countless bodies, heads, mouths and tongues, then there is another simpler visualisation. This is to think of the infinite lives you have taken since beginningless time and imagining all these forms of lives in the aspect of human beings. Then, when you recite the prayers, imagine they are all in human aspect saying the prayers.

#### *Second branch: Making offerings*

The next branch of the seven-branch practice is called the branch of offering. There are two types of offering – surpassable and unsurpassable offerings.

#### *Surpassable offerings*

Concerning the **surpassable** type of offering, there are two verses in the *King of Prayers* that read:

With the finest flowers, garlands,  
Musical instruments, perfumes and excellent  
parasols,  
The finest lamps and incense  
I make offerings to those Buddhas.  
With the finest clothes, superior fragrances,  
Baskets of aromatic powders piled as high as  
Mount Sumeru,  
All in the most excellent arrangements  
I make offerings to those Buddhas.

If you refer to the lamrim text, it explains the meaning line by line.<sup>1</sup> For example, it says: 'The finest flowers can be marvellous, loose flowers from earthly or divine realms. Garlands can be threaded and interwoven mixed flowers.' So, both can be either real or mentally created flowers.

Likewise, the text says *musical instruments* are those having strings, such as lutes, and those that are blown, such as conches and flutes. It goes on to say that *perfume* means aromatic liquids, ointments and pastes, which you can smear on your body. And *excellent parasols* are the best parasols, and the *finest lamps* can be luminous, sweet-scented lamps, such as those made of fragrant butters and precious jewels that illuminate day and night. We can think that the lamps we offer are so bright and so illuminating that one is unable to differentiate between

<sup>1</sup> See teaching text: *The Quick Path to Omniscience: A Practical Guide for the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, Panchen Lama Lobsang Yeshe, p. 36. Most of the elaboration on the offering substances that follows in this teaching is quoted directly from that text.

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day and night. *Incense* would be pure incense sticks of aloe wood, fragrant resin, and so forth.

The *finest clothes* are superb fabrics, and *superior fragrances* are fragrant waters that diffuse very sweet scents into the three thousand world systems. Here, 'fragrant waters' refers to something we can sprinkle around an area, in contrast to perfume, which is meant to be put on the body.

Then there are aromatic powders, deliciously scented powder equal in height and width to Mount Sumeru. These are powders that can be wrapped in a bag and hung, so the fragrance can pervade an area, filling it with a beautiful, sweet smell. These aromatic powders can be scattered, wrapped in parcels suitable for incense-burning, or made into graded colours of sand for drawing mandalas.

#### *Unsurpassable offerings*

Next, the *King of Prayers* or Samantabhadra prayer mentions the **unsurpassable** type of offering:

Whatever unexcelled and vast offerings there are  
I dedicate to all the Conquerors.  
By the power of my devotion to the practice of  
virtuous deeds  
I bow in worship and make offerings to all the  
Buddhas.

Unsurpassable offerings are objects that do not exist and which we do not find in this world. However, these objects are emanated by bodhisattvas and other highly attained spiritual beings through their miraculous powers. Unsurpassable objects also include an offering of all the virtues and merits we have accumulated through a bodhicitta motivation, which we mentally transform into material objects that we offer to the buddhas.

#### **Third branch: Confession**

The next branch discussed in the text is confession:

Whether from desire, anger, or delusion,  
Whether by body, speech, or mind  
Whatever bad deeds I may have done  
I fully confess each and every one.

To do this practice of confession, you must really feel a strong sense of regret for any negativities and bad deeds you have committed in the past. You should feel such a strong sense of regret that it is as if you have swallowed a deadly poison – you would really regret having ingested it and would very much want to get it out of your system. With this deep sense of regret for having created negativities, you also feel determined not to repeat such actions, saying to yourself, 'I will never repeat such actions'. This is how you need to do this practice of confession.

These two actions – feeling strong regret for the negative actions one has committed in the past and resolving not to repeat those actions – are a very important part of the practice of confession. Without these two, it is said it will be very difficult to cultivate new positive qualities, and there is also the risk that whatever positive qualities one possesses will diminish. On the other hand, if we include these two elements of this practice – regret for past

negative actions and resolve to not repeat such actions – this would ensure that we would develop more positive qualities, and whatever qualities we had already gained would also increase.

We find in this lamrim text an account of how thorough Atisha was in his practice of purification. It is said that wherever he went, if he happened to create even the slightest negativity, he would stop immediately and apply the method to purify that negativity – performing prostrations or making a mandala offering. Atisha said that if he didn't do this, then when he left this life he would go to a bad rebirth. This is how thorough he was in his practice of purification.

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