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# The Quick Path to Enlightenment

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As usual, we will begin with a short meditation together.

*(Pause for meditation)*

## Preliminary practices

### Seven branches of offerings

We are up to the fifth of the six preparatory practices which is to offer the seven branches practice together with a mandala offering. Of the seven branches of practice, we finished the first two which are the branches of prostration and offering. The third branch is confession.

### 3. The branch of confession

The primary purpose of the branch of confession is to purify negativities or sinful actions. The purification serves as a cause to cultivate the spiritual qualities which we have not yet cultivated and prevents those which we have already cultivated from declining or being lost. Purifying negativities is also a means to reduce and overcome unwanted suffering because suffering is the result of our past sinful actions or karmas. Suffering does not arise without a cause. So, what is the cause of suffering? The main cause of the suffering that we experience is the accumulation of negativities or bad karma in the past. This branch of confession purifies those negativities.

The early masters state that any negativity accumulated by a wise one is light, whereas the negativity accumulated by a fool is heavy. This difference is because the wise one knows and applies the means of purification, and the fool doesn't. This shows us the benefits of understanding and applying the means of purification.

No matter how severe the negativity is, it can be easily purified and diminished by applying the means of purification. On the other hand, if we lack an understanding of this and do not apply the purification method, then, even if the negativity that we accumulate is minor or light, it can easily become severe and heavy. We purify negativities by engaging in the confession practice, such as applying the four purifying forces – the forces of base, regret, antidote and resolution. The force of base is covered under Taking Refuge.

### The purifying force of regret and resolution

To be honest, there is no doubt that we have all accumulated a great pile of negativities or sinful actions from the past. We must recognise this, as well as the suffering that will result unless it is purified. So, we need to think of applying the practice of confession. One of the most important factors of purifying negativities is to feel remorse or regret about having created negativities in the past. This will charge your mind as you will develop a

strong motivation and willingness to apply the purifying forces to both purify the negativities that have been accumulated in the past and prevent the same negativities from being accumulated in the future.

How effective and to what extent we purify these negativities through our purification practice depends on the strength of the force of regret for the past accumulation of negativities that we developed, and the force of resolution of not repeating the action in the future. If the force of regret and resolution are strong, then the amount of negativities we purify will be great. But if the amount is of a mediocre or small level, then the purification will also be mediocre or small.

In the lamrim, we find an example of regret. Three people have eaten poison. The first one dies, the second undergoes excruciating pain and other symptoms, whereas the third person is not yet experiencing any discomfort or symptoms from the poison. The third person however is aware of what is happening with the other two people. Although they are not suffering, they will have a deep sense of regret about having eaten the poison and would strongly wish to expel the poison. It is said that, just in this example of consuming poison, we need to have a similar sense of regret about our past negativities. Relating to this branch of confession the *King of Prayers* reads:

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

It is saying that we must feel a sense of regret for any bad deeds or negativities that we may have committed ourselves or have made others commit for us, or for the times we have rejoiced in the accumulation of negativities. A sense of regret will arise if we truly come to understand the shortcomings of the negativities. At the same time, even though the negativities which we have committed have already been accumulated, it is important that we sincerely say to ourselves, 'I won't do it again', with a sense of regret about past bad deeds. This is a powerful means of purifying past negativities which prevents us from committing the same negativities in the future.

We must also remember that we are engaging in this practice of confession in the presence of the front Assembly of Merit Field of Sublime Beings, whereby we cultivate a sense of regret for past misdeeds and make a promise to not repeat them in the future. So, it is crucial that we are sincere in feeling regret and that our resolution is from the depths of our hearts. In the lamrim, it is said that if our resolution to refrain from this conduct is not coming from the depths of our heart and is not sincere, then that can constitute an act of lying to all the sublime beings in the merit field.

As to the question of how long to commit ourselves to the resolution of not committing the negativities again, it can be for a whole lifetime, a year, a month, a week, a day or so on. In the text, it is advised that we should shorten the length of commitment for any misdeeds that are difficult to overcome but prolong it for any misdeeds that are easy to avoid.

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## The purifying force of remedy

We should also apply the force of remedy as an antidote for purifying negativities. The practice related to the application of the force of remedy includes recitation of the *Thirty-Five Confession Buddha* prayers, doing prostrations and Vajrasattva meditations and circumambulation around temples and stupas.

If you can, it is best to apply all four purifying forces as part of your purifying practice. However, if you find it hard to integrate this into your daily practice, then there is another practice that is specifically beneficial in purifying negativities. Each day recite the 100-syllable Vajrasattva mantra at least twenty-one times with an intention to purify negativities, along with a sense of regret for the accumulated negativities, and a determination that whatever negativities we have accumulated will not multiply or increase. Otherwise, it is said that the negativities will automatically increase day by day.

### Branch of Rejoicing

Relating to this, the *King of Prayers* says:

I rejoice in the merits of all those of the ten directions  
Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Pratyekabuddhas,  
Disciples (both the learners and those with no more to learn)  
And all living beings.

The practice of rejoicing means rejoicing or taking joy in the virtues and merits possessed by all the buddhas, bodhisattvas, arhats and the hearers and solitary realisers, as well as the common beings. Without the practice of rejoicing, we will feel jealousy, and we will criticise and belittle others when they do or possess positive things. Especially if they are our enemies, we will feel very unhappy about their success and accomplishments. For example, we will quickly make negative comments by remarking, 'they are not sincere' or 'they are just showing off'. On the other hand, when we engage in some virtuous action or accomplish something, we will feel pride and think that we are better than other beings. So, our lack of rejoicing and admiration will cause our minds to fill with pride, jealousy and ill-thoughts towards others.

Not only can we rejoice in the virtues of other beings, but we can also rejoice in our own virtues, such as the virtues we have accumulated in our past lives or in this lifetime, or in an early part of this life. It is good to try to remember a positive thing that we have done at a certain time and then simply rejoice and admire ourselves for that good action. For example, think about the cause of how, in this life, you have found a perfect human life, a spiritual teacher, the profound Dharma and conducive conditions. All of these are the result of the virtues and merit you have accumulated in past lives, such as engaging in the practice of giving, moral ethics, patience and so forth. This makes us think of the excellent deeds we did in our past life. In this way, we can generate a sense of rejoicing in our own past deeds, and this can motivate us to accumulate further virtues and merit in this life.

We can also cultivate and rejoice in all the virtues that we have accumulated in this life by remembering the virtues we have accumulated, whether it is through the daily practice of recitations or doing prostrations, reading Dharma books such as lamrim texts, or offering goods and services to our gurus. For any virtues we remember that we have accumulated in this current life, we can rejoice and feel positive about them, but without any inflated sense of pride.

We must rejoice in the virtues of all beings: enemies, friends and strangers. The lamrim text puts all beings into five groups – buddhas, bodhisattvas, solitary realisers, hearers and ordinary or individual beings. It is important to rejoice in the virtues and merit accumulated by all these beings. When rejoicing, the key is to ensure that there is no element of jealousy and that we are wholeheartedly taking delight in the virtues of others. Reading the life stories of noble beings can be beneficial in inspiring us to develop rejoicing in virtue.

As I have said before, rejoicing is an effective means to purify negativities, and it will also increase our merits and virtues. The lamrim text says:

For example, as it is explained in the *Vinaya Scriptures*, King Prasenajit serves the Buddha, and his retinue; poor Bhadra rejoices in it and he achieves more virtue than the king. In the same sense, Je Rinpoche said that [by rejoicing in virtue,] you can gather a huge amount of virtue with small effort ...

As Lama Tsongkhapa has stated, rejoicing requires minimum effort, but it easily accumulates a great amount of merit. Therefore, we can understand from this quotation how beneficial it is to apply this practice of rejoicing, which doesn't require much effort, but which accumulates great merit. Je Guntang Rinpoche also stated that if you want to know a practice that you can do by lying down and accumulating great merit, that is the practice of rejoicing.

However, in applying this practice of rejoicing, we must make sure not to allow jealousy and pride to arise. If these arise, it will spoil the practice, and instead of increasing merit, it will have the effect of losing the virtues and merit that we have already possessed.

In the lamrim it says:

If you have pride and conceit regarding your virtuous actions, not only will your virtue not increase but it will be wasted.

We have finished this branch of confession and rejoicing. Next is the branch requesting to turn the wheel of Dharma. We will continue next week.

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