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# The Quick Path to Enlightenment

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Translated by Sandup Tsering

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As usual, we will begin this evening with a few minutes of breathing meditation.

## 1. HOW TO RELY ON THE GURU

### 1.1. What to do in the meditation session

#### 1.1.1. Preparation

##### 1.1.1.5. The seven branches

1. Prostration
2. Making offerings
3. Confession
4. Rejoicing
5. Requesting to turn the wheel of Dharma
6. Beseeching not to enter nirvana
7. Dedicating

#### Mandala offering (cont.)

So as far as the main outline of the text goes, what we are discussing falls under two main outlines, which are reliance on the guru and training our mind. Of these two, how to rely on the guru is explained under two subheadings: what you do during the session and what you do in between sessions. The first subheading – what you do during the session – has three further subheadings: the preparation, the actual practice and the conclusion.

Under the heading of preparation, we learn about the six preparatory practices. We are now studying the fifth of the seven branches together with the mandala offering.

Early masters emphasised that remembering the headings outlining the lamrim topics is the key to effectively engaging in a comprehensive lamrim meditation. If we don't remember every detail of the lamrim outline, we should at least remember the main headings outlining the key points of the teaching. In this way, by reflecting on those headings we will be able to cover the essential points in our lamrim meditation. This is how we can gain familiarity with the teachings on the lamrim.

Regarding the fifth preparatory practice, we have finished the seven branches. So, now we will continue with the teaching on the mandala offering. According to the early masters:

- Taking refuge in The Three Jewels is the doorway to the Lord Buddha's teachings.
- Generating a bodhicitta mind is the doorway to the Great Vehicle or Mahayana.
- The Vajrasattva meditation and repetition of the hundred syllables mantra is the doorway to purifying negativities.
- The mandala offering is the doorway to amassing the accumulation of merit
- Guru yoga practice such as repeating Tsongkhapa's prayer of inconceivable compassion, the *Migtsema prayer*, is the doorway to receiving blessings.

Therefore, the mandala offering is part of amassing the accumulation of merit. 'Mandala' is a Sanskrit word that literally means 'taking the essence'. In the last teaching, we talked about the material and size of the mandala. With respect to the type of mandala, there are five types of heaps: seven heaps, twenty-three heaps, twenty-five heaps, thirty-three heaps and thirty-seven heaps.

The extensive mandala offering has thirty-seven heaps, whereas the short mandala offering that we usually offer has only seven heaps – Mount Meru, the four continents and the sun and the moon. The prayer is:

By the virtue of offering to you assembly of Buddhas  
Visualised before me, this mandala built on a base  
Resplendent with flowers, saffron water and incense,  
Adorned with Mount Meru and the four continents,  
As well as the sun and the moon.

Lama Tsongkhapa offered the mandala with twenty-three heaps during his intensive retreat. The twenty-three heaps are the seven heaps listed above, plus the eight subcontinents, seven royal objects and the great treasure vase.

Next, is the mandala with twenty-five heaps where we add the outer chain of mountains and the golden base.

According to the tradition of the Sakya Lama Drogon Choegyal Phagpa, the mandala has thirty-seven heaps: the eight offering goddesses are added to the twenty-three piles, plus the precious wheel and the precious gem.

We can use grains of rice for the mandala offering. It is inauspicious to offer with empty hands so when we make the offering, we hold the mandala base with our left hand and a bit of rice. Likewise, we should have a bit of rice in our right hand, place some rice on the base and with our wrist rub the base of the mandala clockwise three times. The wrist is associated with the bodhicitta channel. Therefore, rubbing the mandala base signifies cultivating compassion and bodhicitta.

When we rub our hand on the base of the mandala, it symbolises the purification of the environment. So, when we rub the base clockwise, we imagine we are purifying and transforming the ground into a pure land, eliminating all faults such as dirt, thorns, unevenness, roughness and so on, so that it becomes crystal clear, like a mirror. This also purifies all negativities, sicknesses, causes of harm and obscurations. After this, we place more grains of rice on the base and wipe it off counter clockwise, imagining we are receiving all the blessings, excellent qualities and attainments from the gurus and the merit field.

Essentially, we follow the long version mandala prayer for making the thirty-seven heap mandala offering. When it says 'Mount Meru' in the prayer, we place a bit of rice at the centre of the mandala base to represent Mount Meru. Then the prayer says: 'In the east Purvavideha or Shar Lughag-pakpo, so we put a bit of rice to the east. If we are making offerings to the visualised merit field of Lama Tsongkhapa in front of us, we think of the east when we view the front of Lama Tsongkhapa and put some rice there. Here, we are making the mandala offering to the root and lineage gurus as part of our guru yoga or relying on the guru practice to request the accomplishment of the

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three great purposes. Therefore, east is facing us, so we place the rice accordingly.

To do the detailed visualisation of the mandala offering we need to have an understanding of the world system as explained in *Abhidharmakosha* or *The Treasury of Knowledge* by Vasubandhu. Without it, we can simply imagine that we are offering everything with the mandala offering. This is a brief explanation of the mandala offering.

Next is the branch of supplication that is part of the mandala offering. Here, we request the guru to fulfil the three great purposes we seek. The three great purposes found in the lamrim text are, according to the glorious Atisha:

- May we be free from wrong views and attitudes – ranging from showing disrespect to gurus to the dualistic appearance of a self.
- May we be able to generate correct views and attitudes, such as reverence towards our guru and so forth.
- May we be able to pacify all the outer and inner obstacles to our practice.

We can recite the following supplicating prayer to bestow blessings upon us to achieve these purposes:

All glorious previous root lamas,  
Please stay on the lotus and moon seat on the crown of  
my head,  
Through your great kindness,  
Please hold fast and bestow on me the accomplishment  
of body, speech and mind.

After making this supplication, the next stage is dissolving the merit field. In the space in front of us, we have the merit field of all the lineage lamas, buddhas, deities and so forth. Thinking of all their excellent qualities, we start dissolving the circle of sublime beings furthest from the centre, including the assembly of peaceful or wrathful protectors, into the circle of sublime beings above that and so forth. In this way, we eventually dissolve all the lineage of the vast deeds into Maitreya, the lineage of the profound view into Manjughosha, the lineage of gurus with whom we have a direct Dharma connection into the root guru and the lineage of the practice blessings into Vajradhara.

Following this progressive dissolution of the merit field, we now have the five central figures. Guru Shakyamuni Buddha is in the centre. In the front is our root guru and at the back is Vajradhara. On the left and right respectively are Maitreya and Manjughosha. We should spend a bit of time focusing our attention on these five central sublime beings.

Then we dissolve Maitreya and Manjushri into Shakyamuni Buddha, and their seats and thrones into the lotus, moon seats and thrones of Shakyamuni. Vajradhara sits at the heart of Shakyamuni Buddha, so we call Shakyamuni Buddha the Buddha Vajradhara. We should then spend a bit of time trying to develop a vivid and clear visualisation of the Buddha Vajradhara. After that, we dissolve the Buddha Vajradhara into our root guru who then sits upon the crown of our head.

Next, we make a short offering of the seven branches together with the mandala offering by reciting this prayer from the lamrim text.

I bow my head to the chief of the Sakyas, whose body was formed by the 10 million perfect virtues, whose speech fulfils the hopes of limitless beings, whose mind sees precisely all objects of knowledge.

And then offer seven branches:

I present every kind of offering, actual offerings and also those emanating from my mind. I confess all my sins since beginningless time and I rejoice in the virtue of all others. I dedicate all my virtues and the virtues of others to great enlightenment. Supreme lamas, Lord, the unity of all refuge, Munindra, and Vajradhara, I pray to you. I and all sentient beings born in samsara, have to experience suffering for a long time, due to not properly serving our virtuous teachers in words and deeds. So now, I and all other sentient beings pray 'please bless to properly serve our virtuous teachers in thoughts and deeds'.

In this prayer we are in essence acknowledging and confessing all the negativities and obscurations we have accumulated due to the lack of the proper practice of relying on the guru. We now fervently pray that we may be able to engage in the guru yoga practice properly. We also pray that we and all sentient beings be purified of all the negativities we have committed because of the lack of guru devotion or reliance on the guru practice. We pray that the gurus send us their blessing and inspire us to properly rely on the guru. Having made such a prayer, we imagine that we and all sentient beings receive blessings from the guru in the form of five coloured lights. This light purifies all negativities, particularly the negativities relating to the lack of guru devotion practice.

In summary, the preparatory practice begins with cleaning our room and properly setting up an altar. After that, we sit in the meditation posture, set the right motivation and then cultivate the field of merit. Then we engage in the seven-branch practice, through which we accumulate merit and purify negativities. Finally, we dissolve the merit field. What follows next is the actual practice.

We will stop here tonight.

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Edited Version*

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