
The Quick Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by Venerable Geshe Lobsang Dorje

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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We will begin with a few minutes of breathing meditation, keeping our mental focus on the incoming and outgoing breath. *[Pause for meditation]*

Regarding the headings of this lamrim topic, we are currently studying one of the main headings which is:

How to rely on the guru as the root of the path

There are two sub-headings:

1. What we do in the actual meditation session
2. What we do in the break between sessions

1. What we do in the actual meditation session

This is further divided into three:

1. Preparation
2. Actual practice
3. Conclusion

We have finished 'Preparation' which covers the six preparatory practices, and now we are up to the second heading.

2. Actual practice

This is further sub-divided into four:

1. Benefits of guru yoga or relying on the guru
2. Disadvantages of not relying on the guru
3. Relying on guru by thought
4. Relying on guru by deeds

Here these elements are subsumed into the topic of the qualities of a guru.

The qualities of a guru

We should realise the importance of understanding and practising guru yoga and relying on a qualified guru. We need to know what sort of qualifications and qualities a qualified guru should have.

Because we rely on a guru for our spiritual practice, they must have mastered the teachings relating to our spiritual path and thus have an excellent knowledge of the scriptural teachings. Excellent knowledge alone, however, is not sufficient; a guru should also apply their knowledge to their practice. In other words, they should be someone who is not only excellent at teaching others but who also lives their life in accordance with that teaching

The *Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras* by Maitreya lists the ten qualities of a guru:

- Relying on a guru who is subdued, pacified and completely pacified,
- Who has more knowledge than you;
- Who has perseverance and the wealth of scriptural knowledge,
- The realisation of suchness and is skilled in teaching,

Has compassion and abandoned being discouraged from teaching.

The main essence of the Buddhist teachings is how to subdue or control the mind. So, it is crucial that the guru we rely on has mastery over all the teachings relating to controlling the mind and the ability to impart such knowledge to others.

The guru must also apply that very practice to themselves and ensure that their own mind is also being subdued and controlled, otherwise, they cannot help others to do the same. Lama Tsongkhapa said in his *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path*:

It is said there is no way one can subdue others unless one is subdued. So, the lama whose role is to subdue others must first have their continuum subdued. If so, what does being subdued mean? It is not sufficient you put into practice whatever practices you want to practise and then calling whatever experience you gain from it as an inner realisation. Rather, your practice of subduing the continuum must be in accord with the general framework of the Buddha's teaching included within the precious three-fold trainings. Hence, it is said subdued and so forth.

The quote from Maitreya saying that the guru must be subdued, pacified, and completely pacified refers to the result of engaging in the threefold trainings. This is the meaning of being subdued. However, having the ability to display some sort of extraordinary talents including the power of clairvoyance and being able to read the minds of others is not an indication of having a subdued continuum.

The *Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras* cited above refers to the ten qualities of a guru:

1. The quality of being subdued

This refers to one's own inner continuum or mindstream being subdued through the training of moral ethics. For example, we have ordained monks and nuns who become famous because of their strict ethical practices. People admire them for their calm, serene nature and trustworthiness. Likewise, lay people with pure lay vows can also display this quality of being subdued. The minimum requirement for being regarded as subdued is to be externally sincere, good and courteous.

2. The quality of being pacified

One possesses this quality when the mind is at peace and free from external distractions. In other words, having accomplished a single-pointed state of mind and being free from the distraction of external objects. This refers to the training of concentration.

3. The quality of being completely pacified

This quality relates to abandoning mental afflictions or delusions. In other words, it means having the wisdom realising the selflessness of a person that counteracts mental afflictions. So, this refers to the training of wisdom.

4. The quality of having more knowledge

The guru should have more knowledge than the student; having the same degree of knowledge is not enough.

5. *The quality of perseverance*

This particularly refers to perseverance or joyful effort in benefitting other beings.

6. *The quality of having a wealth of scriptural knowledge*

The guru must be enriched with the oral knowledge of the three baskets of Dharma and have an ability to understand the content of the scriptural Dharma.

7. *The quality of having the realisation of suchness*

This refers to the wisdom realising the selflessness of other phenomena, whereas the wisdom of selflessness, as implied in the third quality of being completely pacified, refers to the wisdom of selflessness of a *person*.

Maitreya's *Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras* is based on the view of the Cittamatra School according to which the two selflessnesses are differentiated by their subtlety and coarseness - the selflessness of a person is coarse, and the selflessness of other phenomena is subtle.

8. *The quality of skill in teaching Dharma*

Not only should the guru have a wealth of knowledge of the Dharma, but they must also have great skill in teaching the Dharma to others, in a way that is appealing, rather than boring or uninteresting.

9. *The quality of having compassion*

The motivation of a guru for teaching others should be based on true compassion for other beings.

10. *The quality of having abandoned being discouraged from teaching*

This means the gurus have the quality of being patient and not easily tired or wearied in benefiting and teaching the Dharma to others. They will not be discouraged by having to repeat the teaching for slow learners.

Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras describes ten essential qualities needed to be a qualified guru, but it may be difficult to find such a guru in practice. In fact, Lama Tsongkhapa said in his *Middling Treatise on the Stages of the Path* that it would be difficult to find a guru who is qualified with all ten qualities. So, we should ensure that the guru we rely on has more positive qualities than negativities; having equal levels of positivity and negativity is not sufficient. Bearing this in mind, it is recommended that we take our time to find the right guru.

The *Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras* also describes three qualities of a student:

1. *Being honest or having an impartial mind*

An honest mind refers to being straightforward and having an unbiased mental attitude. Combined with the next two qualities of having an aspiration for the Dharma and a discriminating wisdom, a student can gain the wisdom of suchness to counteract three poisonous states of mind.

2. *Having a discriminating wisdom*

This means having a sense of discrimination or the intelligence to discern between right and wrong. The purpose of Dharma practice is to counteract the mental delusions - the three poisonous states of mind that are the

source of problems and suffering. For this, we need powerful wisdom knowledge.

3. *Having an interest and aspiration for the Dharma*

With an interest and aspiration for the Dharma we will utilise our wisdom knowledge to counteract mental delusions.

Because disciples want whatever realisations and knowledge their guru possesses in their own continuum, they should also show respect and have faith in their guru in order to cultivate the same inner realisations and qualities. Without establishing such respect and faith, especially if they are relying on a guru, a disciple will not be able to develop the same qualities within themselves.

In his commentary on Lama Tsongkhapa's *Middling Treatise on the Stages of the Path*, His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said that the practice of guru yoga is emphasised in the lamrim teachings, because the ultimate goal is to achieve the omniscient mind of a buddha. The methods shown in these lamrim teachings we are following include the highest yoga tantra stages of generation and completion, so considerable emphasis is placed on the importance of guru yoga practice in the lamrim. Here the person who follows the lamrim is not satisfied with just following the small or medium scopes; they follow the great stages of the path, which is also integrated with the highest yoga tantra. Hence, the guru yoga practice is crucial for the success of one's Dharma practice.

As part of the teaching on the guru yoga practice, we also need to reflect on the kindness of the guru. By developing a sense of kindness and gratitude for our guru we will feel a greater sense of respect and veneration. We can think along the lines of how our own guru is the kindest to us. We can think of other buddhas, for example, the Lord Shakyamuni Buddha to whom we are very grateful for coming to this earth in the form of a supreme emanation body and turning the wheel of Dharma. We have access to the perfect Dharma because the Lord Buddha turned the wheel of Dharma. So, from this point of view, the Lord Shakyamuni Buddha is an extremely kind guru.

However, our root guru from whom we directly receive the Dharma teachings and blessings is kinder to us than Shakyamuni Buddha. Many other great gurus and buddhas have taught the Dharma, guided and liberated many other sentient beings, but we are not one of those sentient beings. From this point of view, we can understand that for us, our own root guru is the kindest of all the gurus and buddhas.

We won't go into any further detail about guru devotion or the guru yoga practice here, but if you are really interested, you should refer to this lamrim commentary and other lamrim texts which provide very extensive explanations of the guru devotion practice.

3. *Conclusion*

We need to dissolve the Shakyamuni Buddha which we have visualised in front of us into ourselves. After this, you imagine yourself arising in the state of the guru Buddha. You meditate on being in the form of the Buddha for a little while. You then visualise rays of light emanating from the

self-generated Buddha towards all other sentient beings, thereby establishing all of them in the state of the Buddha as well.

At the heart of the self-generated Buddha and all other sentient beings, you visualise a moon disc upon which is the white syllable AH marked with a yellow syllable HUM, and around the disc is Shakyamuni Buddha's mantra, OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA. Then focus your mind and imagine all other sentient beings are also focusing on this mantra. You repeat the Buddha's mantra as many times as you like, after which you then recite the dedication prayer.

We have now finished the section on What We Do in the Actual Meditation Session including the preparation, the actual practice and the conclusion (including the Dedication Prayer). In our next session, we will commence with the next sub-heading which is: What We Do in the Break Between Sessions

*Transcribed by Kim Foon Looi
Edit 1 by Bernii Wright
Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering
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