
The Quick Path to Enlightenment

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We will continue our teaching on how to rely upon the guru.

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

This is explained under two subheadings which show how we can integrate it in our spiritual practice.

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

1. What we do in the actual session

We have finished this section which was presented in three parts:

1. The six preparatory practices
2. The actual practice
3. The conclusion.

Now we turn to the second heading, How to Rely on the Guru as the Root of the Path.

2. What we do in the break between sessions

This explains what to do in the break between meditation sessions, in other words, not one of the three parts of the actual session. This includes getting up in the morning, going to work and while at work, eating, interacting with others, going to bed and so on.

Getting up in the morning

It is important to remember to get up in the morning with a positive mental attitude and motivation. The highest motivation is an altruistic mind of bodhicitta rooted in compassion for all other sentient beings – a sincere thought of benefitting other sentient beings. The wisdom of emptiness, that nothing exists truly in the way it appears to our mind, should also arise. If we are not able to produce bodhicitta or the wisdom of emptiness we should at least try to cultivate some thought of making the day beneficial and meaningful – if not for all other sentient beings, at least for ourselves. This is a run-of-the-mill motivation that we should cultivate. At the very least we should try to cultivate the motivation, ‘I won’t cause any harm to any other being’.

Let go of worrying thoughts

Sometimes we might notice that our state of mind when we get up is not good or positive or happy and that something is bothering us. For example, we might notice that we are under the influence of anger or hatred. So, in order to overcome this worrying and unhappy state of mind it is good to apply the advice of the great master Shantideva:

Why be unhappy about something
If it can be remedied?
And what is the use of being unhappy about something
If it cannot be remedied?

It is good to say this out loud if you know it by heart and reflect on its meaning.

Going to work

To overcome a negative mental attitude, it is very useful to think about the causes and conditions that have brought about this negative state of mind, as well as its results. For example, not enjoying the taste of our favourite breakfast, and unnecessarily making our family members and friends feel tense and stressed. Thinking about the undesirable results of this negative state of mind helps us to counteract it.

When we are in a bad mood and our mind is unsettled, we easily forget things and make mistakes. On our way to work we may become impatient with traffic lights and other drivers and vehicles. Sometimes we rush off to work and when we realise that we have left something important at home we get frustrated and more restless, even showing this to work colleagues and objects. That’s how our problems start to multiply.

When our colleagues notice that we are in a bad mood they may try to say or do something pleasant to help us, but instead of thanking them we sometimes become angry with them. It goes without saying that we cannot pay proper attention to our work and can easily make mistakes. Some people hate going to work every day and become even more unhappy or even get depressed on Monday mornings. But when we think about it, we need to go to work – we really have no choice. So Shantideva’s advice, ‘why worry about something if it can be remedied, and what is the use of worrying about something if there is no remedy’, is very beneficial to think about in worrying situations. We must work, so we should accept that going to work is a part of living our life. Once we accept and come to terms with the situation we will stop worrying about that and can even turn it into a positive state of mind.

Practising the breathing meditation

Contemplating and recognising the undesirable results of negative states of mind such as anger and so on will help us to prevent or diminish them. If we find whatever methods we have chosen to overcome mental afflictions such as anger are not working, then we should do a few minutes of breathing meditation. It is a simple meditation technique of simply turning off all the outgoing thoughts and placing our mind just on the incoming and outgoing breath. If we do this on a regular and consistent basis and make a habit of it, we can then use it whenever we want to and will find it a very effective tool for immediately calming down our mind and eliminating the mental turmoil and agitation we are experiencing at that moment.

Restraining the sense doors

As mentioned in the lamrim text, throughout the break between sessions we should restrain our sensory doors by applying mindfulness and alertness. The five sensory faculties are called sensory doors because they are the main doorways, particularly for beginner practitioners, through which mental delusions or afflictive emotions such as anger, desire, jealousy, pride and so on arise. We can notice that these afflictive emotions are conditioned by various objects that we come into contact with through our sense faculties. Therefore, as it says in the lamrim text, through applying some restraint, or in other words, controlling and disciplining our sense faculties, we can prevent mental afflictions from arising in the first place, or at least minimise them. This does not mean that whatever object meets a sense faculty necessarily serves as a condition for mental afflictions to arise.

For example, those who are realised beings or who are not habituated to mental afflictions are not susceptible to mental afflictions arising from their sensory experiences.

To help us discipline our faculties, the great master Atisha advised:

Examine your speech when you are with others.

Examine your mind when living alone.

When we are socialising with others, one corner of our mind should always be checking our speech, what we are saying, including the words and tone that we use. Are they unpleasant or harsh or are we lying to others? Be mindful and aware of your speech. Is what we are saying worthwhile or not? This is how we will be able to control our verbal actions.

When we are alone, we should particularly pay attention to or watch our mind, checking what kinds of thoughts are emerging and the objects our mind is seeking. In a sense, we examine or observe various thoughts that arise in our mind. As we do this, we may notice that our thoughts and states of mind are totally meaningless. In fact, they really are garbage. With mindfulness and awareness, we can see how we can rid ourselves of the unwanted thoughts and objects in our mind, which are of no benefit but actually cause us harm. As part of training his mind, the Khadampa Geshe Karawa wrote all around the space in his room: Don't allow the mind to be distracted; don't allow the mind to be distracted; don't allow the mind to be distracted, ...

Eating yoga

One activity we do in between sessions is eating food and drinking. The lamrim says we should eat moderately, meaning not overeating or undereating. If we eat too little, we will become hungry very quickly and not get enough nutrients, which isn't good for our health. We should eat just enough to last until the time of our next meal. Overeating is bad because it can result in us gaining weight, thus making us feel physically very heavy. It can also cause increased sleepiness and has a detrimental effect on our breathing and thus on our health. Overeating can also be a cause of increasing mental afflictions.

Non-sleeping and sleeping yoga

In the break between sessions, we must be diligent and enthusiastic about engaging in virtuous activities rather than wasting our time in sleep and indolence. At the same time, we must also get enough sleep to enjoy good health. So, we need to know how we go to sleep and how sleep can be part of our spiritual practice. Before we go to sleep, we should reflect on and review how the day has gone. What happened when you went to work? Did it go well or not? Were you helpful or not helpful to others? If this review shows that you have spent the day in a beneficial and positive way, you should rejoice in that and be motivated to do the same the next day and into the future.

However, if you find you have been involved in negative actions and have caused harm to others, such as losing your temper, for example, you should feel remorse and try to motivate yourself to not repeat the same actions. It is recommended that when we sleep, we rest our head in our right hand lying on the right side, with the left hand resting on the left thigh. This position is called the 'sleeping lion', and it is the same as the posture in which the Buddha passed away. It also has the benefit of maintaining clear memory, as

well as preventing a very thick and deep sleep, and even preventing bad dreams.

Then, while going to sleep, we try to cultivate a positive state of mind such as compassion, or the wisdom of emptiness or pure faith in our gurus. At least try to go to sleep with mindfulness and alertness. It is said that if we go to sleep with a virtuous state of mind then our act of sleeping will be virtuous too.

Sleep is one of the four changeable or variable mental factors. The other three are regret, coarse conceptual observation, and subtle conceptual observation. By itself sleep is neutral: it can be virtuous or non-virtuous or neutral depending on the condition. With this, we complete the heading of Relying on the Guru as the Root of the Path.

As you know, this session is the last teaching for this year. From my own side, whenever we begin a teaching on the Dharma I try my best to have a good motivation. And in the middle when I am giving the actual presentation, I try my best to share whatever knowledge I have, by making it as easily understandable as possible so it is accessible to all of you. At the end, I also try to remember to dedicate the merit.

Dedication

It is very important that we dedicate whatever virtue or merit we have accumulated from when we first began these teachings. Many of you have been coming to listen to the teachings and from my part, I have been here to give the teachings, so we will certainly have accumulated some sort of merit and virtue. We must dedicate this virtue and merit so that the Lord Buddha's teaching flourish for a long time and also to the long life of all the great holders of the Dharma, such as His Holiness the Dalai Lama and all the gurus and so on.

In particular, we should dedicate this virtue and merit to the long life of our Venerable Geshe Doga. May he live long, and may we continually receive teachings and blessings from him, as we always have in the past and for many more years to come.

Last but not least, I also take this opportunity to wish you and all of the members of Tara Institute and all the people who listen to the teachings a Merry Christmas (which is not too far away) and a Happy New Year.

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Edited Version*

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