
The Quick Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by Venerable Geshe Lobsang Dorje

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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I am personally so happy that we can finally begin teaching face to face this year, so I would like to send my greetings in Tibetan; *tashi delek* to all of you here and to those listening to the teachings online. According to the Tibetan lunar calendar, today is the last day of the year, which means tomorrow is our Tibetan new year. I take this opportunity to send my prayers and wishes to all of you for good health and prosperity and that all your wishes in the coming new year are fulfilled. Also, after two years of lockdown due to COVID-19, today we can have this face-to-face teaching. This makes me, and many of you, very happy; it is really wonderful.

Motivation

The reason we are here is to learn the Dharma, which means to educate ourselves about the causes of happiness we seek and the causes of suffering we are trying to avoid. Like other beings, if we look deep inside ourselves, happiness is something we are always seeking. Whatever activity we undertake, it is to find happiness. Therefore, to find happiness, we have to create the right causes and conditions, as happiness doesn't come to us simply by wishing or praying for it. This is something we must understand.

Having recognised this, the next question is, what are the causes and conditions for happiness? This is the reason we are here studying the Dharma together; to develop that understanding of cause and effect. Here we are learning about the truth, as realised and explained by the Lord Buddha and other great masters. We must recognise that the time we invest in learning the Dharma and practising the Dharma is truly special and meaningful for our lives, not only in terms of our future lives but even in this life. So, for our Dharma practice to be effective, it's important that we have the right motivation at the beginning. Our motivation should not be tainted by an intention to become famous or to acquire a good name and material possessions.

There is a saying that there are two important things we must remember, one in the beginning and the other one at the end. At the beginning when we engage in Dharma practice, we must ensure that we have the right motivation for engaging in the practice, and then at the end, we dedicate our virtue and merit.

It also makes a significant difference if, in whatever activity we do, we are happy and take delight in it, feeling positive and enthusiastic about it. If we take great joy and delight in our activities, such as running our business, then naturally we will feel enthusiastic. In that way we can be more effective and successful in achieving our goals. In the same way, when we engage in spiritual practice, if we

begin with a delighted mind and are courageous and have a great deal of enthusiasm for doing the practice, this will help us make progress in our practice.

One way to bring joy when we engage in the practice is to recognise the goal and to have a strong motivation for achieving it. It's the same as when a person pursues a business activity; if the person sees how much profit can be made, they will then be very happy, enthusiastic and take great joy in pursuing the business activity. In a similar way, it is important to feel very positive and delighted when engaging in spiritual practice. We should recognise our goal and be driven by a passion to accomplish it through our practice.

To help us recognise our goal and be motivated, we should reflect on the Buddha's life, how he pursued the Dharma and at the end attained complete enlightenment. By thinking of this, and by realistically recognising our goal and understanding the true benefits of our practice, we will naturally feel joy and enthusiasm about engaging in the practice.

When practising the Dharma, we should have a steady and clear state of mind while we strive with great effort in the practice. Using an example, if somebody has to chop wood, then in order to chop the wood properly they must hit the wood with force and the axe they use must be sharp. However, the hands which are holding the axe must be very steady, otherwise they wouldn't be able to hit the wood properly. Similarly, we have to think of all the factors that make our Dharma practice effective. We should have a stable mind, like holding an axe with steady arms and we must utilise our intelligence as much as possible to analyse the Dharma topic, just as the axe must be sharp to cut the wood. When we engage in Dharma practice, having a stable mind means not being agitated by outer distractions, including the influence of any negative thoughts or destructive emotions, such as anger; we have to be able to prevent this. So, in this way it makes our practice very fruitful.

Meditation

There are two types of meditation - stabilising meditation to develop mental focus and concentration and analytical meditation to develop discriminating wisdom-knowledge. These two meditations will enhance inner stability and alertness or intelligence. On the other hand, when we lack discipline, our mind can easily fall under the control of afflictive emotions, such as feeling hatred towards a particular person. Without mental discipline, our mind keeps thinking of every moment or instance when the other person harmed or insulted us. By going over such thoughts again and again, hatred will continuously increase, and our mind can be in a state of turmoil due to these afflictive emotions.

By cultivating and developing a positive mind, for instance by contemplating the qualities of our own spiritual gurus or guides, and by remembering their qualities and kindness towards us, this kind of meditation has the effect of arousing faith in the gurus, to the extent that it brings tingling or goosebump sensations in our body. Sometimes it will bring tears of joy to our eyes.

Stabilising meditation

At the beginning of every Wednesday night teaching we do a short breathing meditation together. This meditation is really to remove all the distracting thoughts and to bring our mind inward. Many of you have been studying meditation for many years, so you are already familiar with how to meditate. But there may be others who are new to meditation and therefore every now and then I explain the basics of meditation practice. With stabilising meditation practice, in terms of technique it is quite simple, so we won't have much trouble understanding it. Where we need to do more is by applying this technique in practice and finding the time to do the practice. You don't have to follow any religion or have faith in the concept of past and future lives. Anybody can do it and find it very beneficial in terms of enhancing inner peace and tranquillity. Of course, we can also utilise this meditation on the advanced spiritual stages whereby it becomes an important causal factor to achieve complete enlightenment.

Object, timing and posture of meditation

For the stabilising meditation practice, the first and very important thing is to find the right object on which to cultivate the single-pointed state of concentration or mental stability. Of course, there are many kinds of objects, but whatever object we choose, it must be something easy to remember and easy to hold in our mind. With this meditation we are trying to increase our mental focus and concentration. So, our main challenge is to get rid of distractions in our mind to any other objects. Whenever we engage in this meditation practice, if we keep losing our given object all the time then we won't be able to make any progress in our practice.

For beginners, your own breathing is recommended as an object to do stabilising meditation. There are many benefits for using your breathing - in and out - as an object to develop concentration as you are already very familiar with it. Because of your familiarity, breathing is easier to remember and thus retain your mental focus on it. The fact that breathing as an object has no shape or colour helps the mind settle inward rather than being distracted by external objects.

The actual breathing meditation practice involves simply being aware of breathing in and breathing out; just being aware of that and not being distracted by any other objects. We just simply remember that we are breathing in and breathing out. To develop meditative concentration, it is better in the beginning to make the session short. For example, only do five or six rounds of breathing, and then after we can keep the mind on the breathing for six or seven rounds well, we can then increase the rounds of breathing to ten and so on. So, you slowly extend the session length as you are able to maintain focus for longer periods. If we force ourselves at the beginning to do it for longer, then our body might ache, and we might get tired and even lose our motivation to engage in meditation. As a result, we will find the practice ineffective and not make any progress.

Morning is the best time to practise meditation. Having said that, for some people practising meditation at night might be more suitable. But generally, in the morning is best because, as our body has had a good rest from sleeping, it is fresher. As we are mentally fresher in the morning, we have fewer distracting thoughts. Whereas at the end of the day, quite often our mind is under the influence of various thoughts and events from the day.

Another factor we need to consider for meditation is choosing the right sitting posture, which does make a difference to our practice; it helps it to be more effective and enables us to gain realisations. As to the sitting posture, usually we say it should possess the seven features of Vairochana, such as two legs in the lotus posture, the hands in meditative equipoise with the right hand placed over the left, with the tip of the thumbs at the level of the navel. Keep the back of the body straight, the head slightly down and the shoulders even. The two eyes are just gazing or looking directly towards the nose. The lips and teeth are kept normal whilst the tip of the tongue touches towards the upper palate. Of all these physical features, the most important is keeping the back of the body straight. The reason is it will help keep good alignment of all our psychic channels in our bodily system. Because the channels are straight and in good alignment, the wind energy will flow well, which in turn helps the stability of our mind.

There is story from Lord Buddha's time which relates to the impact of keeping our channels in good order, in terms of a successful meditation practice and gaining realisations. Once there was a student who excelled in knowledge but couldn't meditate effectively and gain any realisations. All his other friends had no such obstacles in their meditation, and they were all progressing well in their practice. Upon consulting the Lord Buddha, the Buddha advised that the obstacle was the abnormal order or alignment of his psychic channels. Buddha said that the position of his channels was very similar to that of a cow. So, the Buddha advised him to meditate lying down like a cow.

By following that advice, the student was able to meditate well and make very fast progress and achieve the state of liberation. Hence, if you find it difficult to sit in the full lotus posture, it is alright, you can choose a position that is more suitable for you. Trying too hard to meditate in a full lotus posture may not only make it too hard to meditate but you can find it difficult even to tolerate the pain.

Today I ended up just giving the introduction to the meditation. Before we finish, we will do a short breathing meditation together. From next Wednesday onwards we will begin the teaching on lamrim, *The Quick Path to Omniscience; The Practical Guide on the Stages of the Path*.

Just for a few minutes, we will do the breathing meditation.

[Meditation]

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Edited Version

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