
The Quick Path to Enlightenment

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Usually, before beginning my talk, we meditate together for a few minutes.

The most important reason for engaging in meditation before we begin teaching is to ensure that we have a calm and stable mind for listening to the teaching. This meditation at the beginning helps us to empty our minds of any disturbing and distracting thoughts we may have accrued during the day. Carrying such thoughts makes it very hard to listen to, and concentrate on the teaching, or for that matter whatever we are supposed to be doing. Meditation makes our mind peaceful, stable and fresh.

Benefits of breathing meditation

It's an easy technique

First, we need to choose a suitable object for the meditation, and here we choose our breathing. This means that we focus our mind on the incoming and outgoing breath by just knowing, 'I am breathing in and breathing out' and so on. There are a lot of advantages when using the breath as an object of meditation to enhance inner peace and tranquillity.

The breath is considered a neutral object, in the sense of being neither a virtue nor a non-virtue. So, because it is neutral or an indifferent state of mind, we find it easier to fix our minds on it. Once our mind becomes still and stable, then it is easier for us to focus - for example - on listening to the teaching.

Whereas, if our mind is dominated by any disturbed or distracted thoughts, then rather than being in a neutral state, we will find it difficult to shift our focus to a given activity straightaway. Breathing meditation is simple and easy in terms of its technique. All we do is just sit quietly thinking of our breathing, only focussing on the incoming and outgoing breath rather than on any other object.

No preconditions are necessary

Anyone can do a breathing meditation. You don't have to be a religious person or have a particular belief system such as faith in gods or in life after death. Anybody can immediately find it very beneficial in terms of calming the mind and enhancing their inner peace and happiness. We will also find the breathing meditation technique a very effective and useful tool in everyday life to get rid of mental stress and anxiety. As soon as we focus or shift our mental attention to our breathing, any other disturbing and worrisome thoughts will dissipate, which will, in turn, enhance our inner peace and stability.

Benefits of using the Buddha as an object of meditative concentration

We can also choose any other object to develop concentration. As Buddhist practitioners, we can use an image of the Lord Buddha as an object to train our minds to remain focussed on any chosen object or to develop mental concentration. Using the Buddha as an object of meditation also has the added benefit of accumulating merit and so forth. However, when

we are pursuing a meditative state of shamatha, or a state of single-pointed concentration called 'calm abiding', it is strongly recommended that we don't keep changing the observed object but use whatever object that was chosen from the beginning, until we attain that state of calm abiding.

When devotees use the Buddha as an object of meditation practice, they will be reminded of the Buddha's excellent qualities and their faith will increase, resulting in the benefit of remembering the Buddha all the time. Whatever actions they do, such as eating and drinking, they will remember the Buddha and make an offering to him before they eat or drink.

Likewise, when they face hardships in life they will remember the Buddha as an object of refuge, and in the face of such hardships, they don't lose courage. Instead, they handle the situation positively. Furthermore, it is said that if at the time of death you remember to place your faith in the Buddha, it is guaranteed that you won't fall into the lower realms in the immediate future life.

We can use an image of the Buddha in the form of a sculpture or painting as an aid to our meditation. But whatever image of the Buddha we have in our mind, it is very important to think of that as the actual living Buddha. So, we first imagine the Buddha upon the crown of our head, thinking of that image as representing the actual Buddha. Then from that, another small Buddha, a replica of that first image, manifests itself seated in the space in front of us, level with the centre of our forehead. To this Buddha visualised in front of us we offer supplication prayers of requesting him to turn the wheel of Dharma, bestow blessings on us and so on.

Meditation tips for beginners

At the beginner stages of meditation, we should not expect or try to form a clearly defined image of the Buddha in our mind, rather we should be satisfied with whatever image we envisage, even if very vague, and just focus on that. The image may be in the form of light but at the same time it is recommended that it carries some weight, as if it is a solid object. This helps us to retain our mental focus on the meditation object instead of wandering off to a different object.

As beginners, we should keep our meditation sessions short but have as many sessions as we like. As we make progress in our meditation technique, we can then prolong our sessions. Trying too hard or forcing ourselves to meditate for a prolonged period may result in becoming tired and losing interest in meditating again.

So, let's now meditate for a few minutes. You can either use the breathing technique or the Buddha as an object of your meditation.

[Pause for meditation]

Now I will continue the teaching on the text we began last year called *The Quick Path to Omniscience: A Practical Guide for the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*.

The major outline or heading, which we already have finished, is called:

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

This covers how to serve our spiritual guide or spiritual teacher.

Under this heading, we learned about the need to rely on a spiritual teacher and the benefits of doing so. We must rely on

the guru to reach our spiritual goal. Even to achieve worldly goals and to live a successful worldly life we must have a good education for which we need to go to school, and rely on teachers. Spirituality is all about finding lasting happiness in this life, the next and forever. We all undoubtedly seek this.

However, to find that lasting state of happiness we must know the true path and rely on a spiritual teacher to show and guide us. Moreover, we must ensure that the spiritual teacher we have found is fully qualified and possesses all the necessary qualities and qualifications. So, under this heading, we learned about the benefits, the qualities and the meaning of serving or relying on the spiritual guru. After proper reliance on a spiritual teacher, the next major heading in the outline of this text is:

How one trains one's mind in the stages of the path

Under this heading, we learn about the practices involved in training or transforming ourselves. After having found a spiritual teacher, a question arises: What do we do? What should we expect from a spiritual teacher? Is the happiness we are seeking something our spiritual guide or master can hand over to us in the form of bestowing some spiritual power or blessing? Of course not. The reason we rely on a spiritual teacher is to avoid suffering and pain and our teacher cannot just extract it from us like pulling out a thorn, for example. The negativities or sins we have created that serve as a cause for our suffering cannot be washed away by the guru, like washing off stains or dirt from our clothes.

So, having found a spiritual teacher, they will guide and teach us about what to do and what not to do. In fact, the main role of a spiritual teacher is to guide and show us the path to happiness and liberation that the teacher has followed, and thus we can derive benefit from the teacher through learning and receiving their teachings. It is by implementing or putting into practice the teachings and guidance we receive that we can find the right direction in our lives, find happiness and eliminate suffering.

The preciousness and rarity of this human life

To find lasting happiness in this life and future lives, or achieve liberation and complete enlightenment, there is no better form of life than a human life of leisure and endowments, as it is the most suited and blessed with all the favourable conditions to fulfil all our temporary and ultimate wishes. By recognising the preciousness and rarity of the human life that we have found now, we will be motivated to render our life meaningful and not waste it. For example, if we possess a very valuable object and we are aware of its value, we will cherish and think of making the most of it. But if we lack the knowledge of that object's value or we overlook or lose sight of its value, we may become careless and damage or lose it.

I will tell you a little story that took place in Tibet. When the Chinese first came to Tibet, a large number of them gathered in an area of Eastern Tibet that was quite desolate and uninhabitable. Sometime later, they were leaving, but the reason was unknown and local Tibetans noted that some children looked sad and had tears in their eyes. The Tibetans didn't know why the Chinese were so upset for having to leave a place that was just full of rocks. However, the Tibetans later discovered that the area was full of valuable resources. But unfortunately, by then it was too late for the Tibetans to gain any benefit because the Chinese had dug out all the valuable resources.

The more reasons we have for valuing an object the more we will cherish the object. In the lamrim text, we find the explanation through many reasons or many ways to help us recognise the meaning and value of human life. By appreciating its value from many different angles or perspectives, we will be more forceful and conclusive about recognising and acknowledging how precious human life is. For example, if we have a lump of gold, because we know its value in terms of selling it or giving it to others as a gift or making jewellery, we will possess it with great care and ensure it is not wasted. Therefore, for us to wholeheartedly cherish and value the preciousness of human life we need to reflect upon the various reasons and different angles as to why this human life is so meaningful.

The characteristics of a human life

The text explains eighteen reasons why the human life of leisure and endowment is precious. These reasons are called the *eight leisures* and the *ten endowments*.

We are nearly running out of time, so we won't be able to go into these eighteen characteristics of human life tonight. So, before next week's teaching, I have a little homework for you. First, learn to list these eighteen reasons. Many of you have been studying the lamrim teachings and may already be familiar with them, so maybe just refresh yourself as to what these eight leisures and ten endowments are. Then I would like to know whether the eight leisures include having the ten endowments. In other words, if you have a human life that possesses or is characterised by these eight leisures, does that mean you also have all the ten endowments or not? If you don't have all ten, then find out which are missing. Furthermore, also think about the human life which is qualified by the ten endowments. Does possessing the ten endowments mean that you will automatically possess the eight leisures as well? I would like you to think about this.

It is important to remember all these essential points in the lamrim. We are engaging in the study and practice of the lamrim which means the *stages of the path to enlightenment*. So, when studying the lamrim we need to pay attention to all these different listings, like the eight leisures and ten endowments. These are the topics that we are supposed to be meditating on. That is what the lamrim meditation is about. If you don't know what the eight leisures and ten endowments are, then what lamrim are you going to meditate on in this particular section of the preciousness of human life? Therefore, it is a good exercise, as part of this learning, to embark on trying to study and to memorise the eight leisures and ten endowments and when you can remember all of these, then you can meditate on them.

Thank you.

*Transcribed by Kim Foon Looi
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