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# The Quick Path to Enlightenment

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Before we begin a short meditation, according to the *Great Exposition of the stages of the Path* by Lama Tsongkhapa, 'meditation' is a well-known term which refers to the practice of placing the focus of our mind repeatedly onto a virtuous object and then maintaining the observation and image of that object.

## Why do we meditate?

The purpose of meditation is to train and bring our mind under control. Since beginningless time the mind has overpowered us because it is led by the force of the mental obscurations such as afflictive emotions, resulting in us creating faulty actions and negativities. So because our mind is under the dominance of these mental obscurations and is the source of our faulty actions and negativities, meditation practice serves as a means to bring our mind fully under our control, so that we can utilise it to engage in whatever virtues we wish to create.

## What is meditation?

As previously mentioned, meditation is a practice of directing our mind repeatedly to a virtuous object, followed by maintaining the observation and image of that object. Since beginningless time, our uncontrolled mind has essentially overseen and dominated our actions and experiences, we commit negativities and evil actions. But once brought under control through meditation, the mind is no longer led by mental afflictions, hence we will be able to fully utilise our mind to engage in whatever virtue we choose.

To effectively practise meditation, we need to know the object or subject matter on which we will be focussing, and the tools we should be using in our practice. So our aim is to maintain the focus of our mind on an object and to concentrate and utilise our mind to develop an understanding of that particular object.

Before we start, we should always be clear and definitive about our chosen object of meditation, and generate a motivation to keep our focus on that object without losing it to any other object. Furthermore, we need to use the tools of mindfulness and mental alertness which are explained in greater detail in Lama Tsongkhapa's *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path*.

So keeping this in mind, let us now begin a short meditation practice.

[Pause for meditation]

## Happiness and its causes

The great Indian master Shantideva said in his text *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life* that 'due to ignorance and the delusions, even though we want to avoid suffering we

only pursue it, despite solely wishing for happiness which we destroy as if it were our enemy'. This quote reminds us of the contradiction between what we wish for and the actions we take in our life. Although we wish to avoid suffering, the actions we normally take mostly fall into the category of the ten non-virtuous actions which are the main causes of the suffering we don't want and try to avoid.

We always wish for and seek happiness, but we lack the true knowledge of finding it. So because of ignorance and delusion, we engage in unwholesome and non-virtuous actions that contradict our true wishes, thereby destroying the chances of happiness that we are seeking.

The question is: What is happiness? We can refer to two levels of happiness: worldly or temporary happiness is not lasting, such as the happiness we find as being born as a human in this earthly realm or as a celestial being in a godly realm; and the ultimate or everlasting happiness of the state of liberation from worldly or cyclic existence.

I don't need to explain temporary happiness because it is what we find in our current life. In the future we may be reborn into worldly existence, but we have never experienced ultimate happiness, which is the state of liberation or nirvana from worldly existence, and it is everlasting.

However when we talk about longer term or future happiness, we are referring to happiness in our next rebirth where we will again seek happiness. Needless to say we all wish for happiness, be it temporary or ultimate happiness or whatever we call it, such as the happiness of human world or the god realm or even liberation.

Even people who don't believe in a future life or liberation wish for happiness, preferably the state of ultimate and lasting happiness. Nobody will say 'no' to happiness and 'no' to lasting happiness. If we ask people if they want happiness, they will unanimously say 'yes'. If we ask for how long they want it, they will want it to be everlasting and permanent. But if we ask: 'Is it enough to just have it for a day? Or a month?' They may laugh and consider us sarcastic because they presume that everyone is seeking an everlasting state of happiness and why would we bother asking such questions.

## Five forces of strengthening virtues and merits

To achieve lasting and ultimate happiness, we must gather all the suitable conditions. One of the most important conditions is a suitable life basis. The topic we are currently studying is the human life of leisure and endowments, which consists of eighteen qualities or attributes. Such a life is also known as a precious human rebirth' because it is the most favourable form of life offering us the optimum opportunity to achieve the ultimate spiritual goal.

In last week's teaching we learned about the five forces or factors and how, by employing those, whatever virtuous actions and merits we create will become more powerful and increase. The text shows how, as a human being, if we possess all eighteen qualities or the eight leises and ten endowments, we have found a precious human rebirth

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with a tremendous potential to accumulate great and powerful virtuous actions. For example, we can apply the five forces, such as the first force of the field which refers to the type of object to which our action is directed, making our actions stronger. It is said here that directing virtues towards the guru as the field of merit, for example making an offering or prostrating to the guru, rather than directing it to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas, makes the virtue stronger by the virtue of the field. With this human life of leisure and endowments, we can create virtuous actions as part of our guru devotion practice.

To fully comprehend the meaning of the guru as being the most potent field to accumulate merit, we need some background knowledge of the Buddhist tantric path. In the tantric path, receiving initiations and blessings from the guru is vitally important for the development of our spiritual realisations and attainments. Lamrim teachings such as Lama Tsongkhapa's *Expositions of the Stages of the Path* present the sutric path in combination with the tantric path.

In his commentary on Lama Tsongkhapa's *Middling Exposition of the Stages of the Path*, His Holiness the Dalai Lama explained how the tantric path is also included in the lamrim teachings. Hence, as we go through this lamrim text we will find some notions of the tantric path.

Referring to the five forces: *field, intention, object, life basis and time*. Each force indicates its own virtue of enhancing and enforcing the practice in terms of the level of virtues and merits that it gathers.

The **force of field** refers to the object to whom our actions, such as making an offering, which predetermines the force of the merit that we accumulate. If that object is a fully enlightened or noble being, then that will be the determining factor regardless of all other factors involved in completing the virtuous action or making it stronger.

For example, with the practice of offering, the intentions or motivation for the practice, what is offered or how it is offered, it is the entity to whom the practice is offered that determines the merit that is accumulated, thereby making the practice more effective.

Along the same lines we can also understand why people prefer to perform virtuous actions whilst visiting a holy place of pilgrimage such as Bodhgaya where the Buddha achieved enlightenment, and Varanasi where he turned the wheel of Dharma. This is related to the virtue of these holy places. So, by the blessing or virtue of these places, engaging in any virtuous actions whilst there, brings an extra power and benefit to our practices.

The next force is called the **force of intention** which relates to the kind of motivation we have when undertaking our practice and actions. This motivation is another very important factor in determining the size and strength of the merit and virtue that we create.

It is said that with the motivation of benefitting all sentient beings, we will accrue very strong or great merit. This is because the motivation or intention behind our actions is to benefit all beings out of love and compassion. So, even if we give only a handful of food to an animal, the

motivation makes our practice more effective in accumulating enormous merit. By applying the right motivation to our practice we make our practice great and strong.

We do not need a lot of wealth and resources to engage in the practice of giving and accumulating great merit. Just by applying the force of the right motivation or mental intention, we can accrue great merit from our practice of giving.

The third force is the **force of the object** or the things to be given. This is to say that whatever we give as part of our practice of giving, is a very important factor for determining how much merit or virtue that we accumulate.

Of all types of giving, the giving of Dharma teachings is considered the highest and most supreme. As I mentioned earlier with the 'force of intention', in order to engage in the practice of giving through which we can accumulate enormous and powerful merit, we do not need to possess a great deal of material wealth. But we must understand that all of the Dharma and knowledge we share with others, such as our discussion sessions about Dharma, are also practices of giving, and on the strength of what is given, which is Dharma, we have to acknowledge as an important source of accumulating merit.

The fourth force is called the **life working basis** which relates to the kind of life we have. If we hold any vows, for example having taken a lay person's vows, whatever virtues we gather will accrue greater merit than if we don't hold the vows. Moreover, if we hold a celibacy vow, bodhisattva vow or tantric vow, we even accrue more merit as a direct consequence of those vows.

The fifth force is the **time factor** which means that whatever virtue or merit we accumulate, great or not, is also influenced by the time in which we create and accumulate it.

It is said that whatever practice we do such as the practice of morality by refraining from ten non-virtuous actions, at a time when the Dharma is degenerating and not flourishing, we accrue greater and more powerful merit than would be the case during a time when the Dharma is flourishing such as during the time of the Buddha. Therefore, even with minimal Dharma practice we can accrue great merit because the time of doing it is a time of degeneration.

For example, due to the unfortunate events unfolding in the Ukraine where the Russians are invading and causing a lot of damage and suffering, the Ukrainian people are going through one of the lowest periods of their history.

During such a tumultuous time, anyone who exerts an effort will become much admired, like the Ukrainian president who is working very diligently for his people. Because of his actions in the context of what is happening in his country, everything he says and does is a very important factor in the eyes of the world. Likewise at a time when the Dharma is degenerating and when there are major obstacles hindering the practice of Dharma, even a

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minimal practice, by the virtue of this time factor, a great amount of merit can be accrued.

It is said that with this human life of leisure and endowments, we have the potential to achieve complete enlightenment in a single lifetime. That is because we have found a life which fits in with the description of an excellent human life in the scriptures: 'a life which is suitable to achieve complete enlightenment within one brief lifetime and body at the time of degeneration'. So, we are extremely fortunate to have found such a precious human rebirth.

We should meditate on this subject and recognise how we possess all of the eighteen qualities which make our life very precious. We should also think about the ways in which this precious human life becomes so meaningful. It is not only how precious and rare is to find such a life, but also a life of great meaning and value.

As you meditate, try to generate and reinforce to yourself the thought that 'I will not waste this special life with its value and potentiality'. If you have visualised the gurus, buddhas and bodhisattvas, try to offer them prayers to bestow blessings and the inspiration to make this life meaningful. Pray that through these blessings, may you be able to eliminate all the obstacles to fulfilling the meaning of this precious human rebirth.

### Questions

1. *I just want to clarify ... we have a large buddha visualised upon the crown of our head and a smaller sized replica of that buddha in front of us, is he sitting on a lotus cushion and throne?*

How clear and how much detail you get in your visualisation depends on the individual. As a beginner it is very hard to specify the fine details of the visualised object. So it is best not to worry about the details and clarity but just focus on whatever image comes to your mind of the overall object. It is most important is to think of the image as a real Buddha rather than a sculpture or a painting. At the end of your meditation, you dissolve the front replicated Buddha into the Buddha on your crown which in turn dissolves into yourself. In that way, you will receive the complete blessings of the Buddha.

2. *If I forget to do the dedication for my morning practice, is it okay to do that dedication a day or a week later? If I delay the dedication, will this diminish my merit?*

Ideally you dedicate the merit at the time of accumulating it because if you don't, then you may lose the merit due to the possibility of anger arising. When we dedicate merit, we can think of not only the merit from our current practice but also of what we have accumulated since beginningless time. In that way we dedicate all our accumulated merit.

3. *Can attachment and other afflictions be a force to destroy root virtues?*

The scriptures specify only anger as a cause of destroying our merit, but I think other afflictions can also diminish our merit.

The good work that the Ukrainian President is doing, whether it is Dharma or not, is really up to his motivation.

If his motivation is purely for his country and he has genuine compassion and concern for the Ukrainian people, then it is very virtuous from a spiritual standpoint, but if it is based on political motivation, or for his own position or standing to become a renowned world figure to gain popularity, it won't be virtuous in a spiritual sense.

4. *What is the difference between merit and creating karma?*

They are very similar and inter-related. When we talk about accumulating merit and then engaging in actions such as giving and generosity and practising moral ethics, these actions accumulate merit as well as creating good karma. When look into detailed explanations about karma in the scriptures, there is a lot to understand. Karma refers to a mental factor in the form of impulse or intention.

Thank you.

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