

DEVICE FOR RETREAT PRACTICE

Taken from

The Melodious

Song of the Spring Queen

on the Experiences of the

Path, composed by the

author of *Liberation in the*

Palm of Your Hand, Kyabje

Pabongkha Rinpoche

(1874-1941) at the request

of Dorje Rabten, a lay

disciple. Dorje Rabten

was the administrator of

Rontang Teng, one of the

large areas in Kham. He

later took the five vows

from Pabongkha Rinpoche,

and left his post to go into a

long Vajrayogini retreat. He

asked Lama Dorje Chang

for detailed instructions on

how to meditate during the

sessions and in the breaks,

and Pabongkha Rinpoche

wrote this text in the form of

a letter. Ribur Rinpoche,

who knew him well,

described Dorje Rabten as

“a very devout person who

frequently attended

teachings with a very

subdued outlook.”

The precise instructions concerning the practice of the basic visualizations during and between sessions are clearly explained in the retreat manual. If you wish to elaborate on what is already explained in the scriptures concerning the visualizations at the time of mantra recitation during the approximation retreat, it is very good for beginners like us to train in the topics of the graduated path to enlightenment. In this respect, there are definitely instructions and layout. For instance, during a retreat program of one month, if you divide daily the meditation topics from guru devotion to bodhichitta, applying effort to each topic and [then] gradually moving to the next, by the time you have completed the retreat, you will have accomplished an extensive panoramic meditation on the whole path, and this will be excellent.

For people like us, this will be just enough to place imprints or to bring about only initial experiential glimpses [of the topics], but not enough to produce the contrived or uncontrived experiences.

You can also consider another program in which during the first session you begin with meditation on guru devotion and proceed [through the other topics in subsequent sessions] up to bodhichitta by the end of the last session. With this program you will be able to complete a panoramic meditation [of the entire path] on a daily basis. Just as I mentioned before, aside from placing stable imprints, this will produce neither contrived nor uncontrived experiences. Yet, in comparison to having a pure vision of the deity, reciting billions of mantras, or achieving clairvoyance and magical powers, to place stable imprints of the graduated path is far superior.

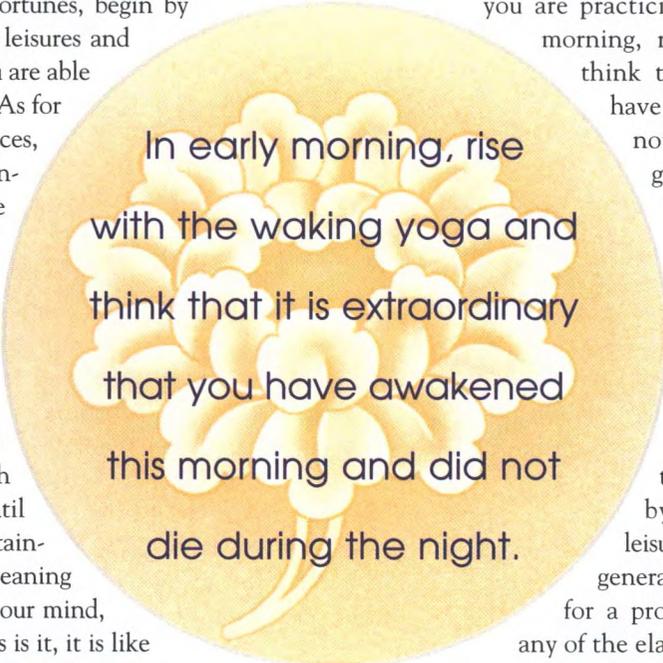
This is the only time that we have found the meaningful basis so difficult to find, the only time we have come into contact with the teachings of the whispered lineage of the

Gentle Protector [Je Tsongkhapa]; therefore, we must do whatever we can to generate the complete special experiences [of the path]. First, begin with a panoramic meditation from the topic of guru devotion up to bodhichitta, making extensive prayers [to succeed in] the trainings of the perfections, calm abiding, special insight, and so forth. Then, during the self-generation of the deity, apply your mind in the meditation topics of the gradual path of the generation stage, and at the conclusion of your session, do a panoramic meditation on the topics of the gradual path of the completion stage. In this way, you will be able on a daily basis to complete a short panoramic meditation on the entire path [to enlightenment].

If you wish to approach each topic comprehensively [in order to have a complete realization of each topic, rather than mere imprints], you should first strive to produce the experience of guru devotion. Among the topics of correct devotion to the spiritual teacher, [the actual experience of] the root training, faith, is very difficult to elicit. For some people, just to bring forth this experience might require an entire lifetime. Thus, if you wait for this to happen before you move to the next topic, leisure and fortune and so forth, it might take eons. Therefore, [you should] approach this skillfully. Begin by taking a single topic of guru devotion and one of leisure and fortune [in two separate daily sessions]. Focus on these with extensive analysis until you are able to produce an experience. During other occasions [sessions], do the short panoramic meditations as I have explained before. For example, in [a daily program of] four sessions, during the first two or three sessions meditate exclusively on these two topics. During the last one or two sessions do the panoramic meditation on the entire path up to bodhichitta. Also include taking the bodhisattva vows in connection

with the engaging bodhichitta, and use the meditation prayers of Lama Chöpa for the training in the six perfections and so forth. From time to time, engage in the visualizations as explained in the retreat manuals of the gradual path of the generation stage. However, if you rely too much on visualizations at your heart, there is danger of developing life-wind diseases. Therefore, you must be careful.

When you take the individual meditations of correct devotion to the spiritual friend and leisure and fortunes, you should first focus only on the eight benefits of correct devotion to the spiritual friend. For leisure and fortunes, begin by focusing only on recognizing the leisures and fortunes. Stay with these until you are able to elicit an experience [of them]. As for the manner of eliciting experiences, for instance, let's consider the benefits of correct devotion to the spiritual friend. First, you should establish the root [the core meaning] that you need to generate [in your mind as experiential realization]. Analyze each of the eight benefits using the specific quotations and reasonings, as if you are engaging in a debate with yourself. Apply this with effort until you are able to generate an ascertaining awareness. When the core meaning of the subject clearly appears to your mind, when you are able to see that "this is it, it is like this," then merely focus your mind on that conviction [single-pointedly, without analysis]. This is the way of applying analytical meditation combined with single-pointed meditation on the conviction [elicited by analysis]. You should do this over and over. With the exception of calm abiding, this is the manner of meditation for all the topics [of the graduated path to enlightenment] up to special insight. Until you have produced the experience of a specific topic, you should not move to the next. You should move to the next topic only once you have elicited the experience of the previous one. [In the case of] some of the topics, an experience can be easily elicited within the space of one or two weeks. For the difficult [topics], it may require months or years. You should not, however, be concerned with the length of time [required]; just apply the effort required to produce the experience. If you keep putting effort in this way, the experience of realizations will gradually develop until they are firmly rooted.



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The most important practice between sessions is to bring to mind repeatedly the topic you have contemplated during the session. One of the key points to increasing virtues is to mix this [topic with the mind] as much as possible throughout all the activities of the twenty-four hours. If you look at scriptures, you should read biographies of the lamas of your lineage, lam-rim, lo-jong, or texts on the two stages. If you read various texts at random [of topics unrelated to your meditation], your wisdom will degenerate. It is most important to read the scriptures containing the meditation topics you are practicing during the sessions. In early morning, rise with the waking yoga and think that it is extraordinary that you have awakened this morning and did not die during the night. Then, generate the intention that for whatever lifetime you have left, particularly for this year, moreover for this month, and especially during this day, "I will practice only the Mahayana path, thus extracting a meaningful essence." Then, recite the mantras to bless the speech, the rosary, and so forth. Then, by particularly stressing the leisures, fortunes, and impermanence, generate renunciation and bodhichitta for a proper motivation. Engage first in any of the elaborate or abbreviated versions of guru yoga, such as Lama Chöpa or the six-session, and then begin the self-generation for the actual session. By meditating with effort on impermanence, it will make a great deal of difference in the way you engage in the actual session. Also, you should definitely generate bodhichitta as the motivation for the session. For instance, [think], "I will definitely die, although I don't know when. Before this happens, I must achieve the supreme enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. Therefore, in this very session I will manifest the state of the three exalted bodies of [whatever deity yoga you are engaged in]." Motivate like this at the outset of the session and also bring to mind this motivation again and again during the actual session. ❁

Translated by Fabrizio Pallotti, attendant and translator for Ribur Rinpoche (MANDALA June 2001 p. 10 and September-November 2001 p. 12.) Lightly edited by Ven. Constance Miller, FPMT Education Department, June 2002. © Fabrizio Pallotti, 2002