

Daily Practice Advice for Dharma Practitioners

By Lama Zopa Rinpoche

The purpose of our lives is to benefit all sentient beings. In order to do that, we need to be qualified. We need to actualize all the stages of the lamrim teachings, which show the path to enlightenment. We need to develop our minds in the complete path to liberation and enlightenment.

A human body is qualified to achieve enlightenment by traveling the stages of the path. This is why we need to survive and why we eat food to take care of our bodies. The whole point of our lives is to liberate numberless sentient beings and to bring them to enlightenment.

It is very important to practice every day, since time is very short, and we need to practice correctly. There are three parts to every practice: the motivation, the actual practice, and the dedication. Even if your practice is done with virtue, without the proper motivation, the actual body of the practice done well, and dedication, the practice will be very weak. All three parts of the practice are very important.

There are two types of meditation – sitting meditation and active meditation. Active meditation is the other side of traditional meditation. Sitting meditation and active meditation work together and help each other. During the time we are not sitting in prayer, we need to pay careful attention. This should not be a break time from Dharma. We need to practice awareness of watching our mindstream and putting in the effort to transform our minds into Dharma. In this way, the normal work of washing clothes, doing housework, or doing one's job, all these actions, become a cause for enlightenment and a cause of happiness for all sentient beings. After some time, the mind becomes trained and our regular work becomes working with bodhichitta. Eventually and quite naturally, everything you do becomes bodhichitta. As much as possible, we should make all our actions Dharma. This will activate our motivation and then activate our bodhichitta.

Try to learn Dharma as much as possible. If you don't understand the lamrim, read the pages slowly two or three times and let the ideas sink in. When you read them slowly, this becomes meditation. Then when you learn the meditations that come later, they will make sense. By doing this, from the beginning you will have a broad view, a map of the entire path to enlightenment. You will have methods to work with to make the path familiar. Like a wrestler who has confidence that he can defeat his opponent, you will know that you can accomplish whatever you want. You will have the confidence that is needed to attain realizations. But you need to begin at the lowest stage by learning from the foundation up. Without going step by step, it is not possible to attain realizations. You need to go slowly. It takes many years and even lifetimes to achieve enlightenment.

It is important to practice guru yoga as the foundation of the path. Using the reasoning and quotations from Buddha himself, as well as the teachings of Manjushri, Chenrezig, and Lama Tsongkhapa, will help your practice. With guru devotion as the basis, you will generate realizations.

The *Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga* helps us develop wisdom. There are seven types of wisdom: great, clear, quick, profound, explaining, debating, and writing. Developing these wisdoms helps you take rebirth in Tushita Pure Land after death; it creates the cause to take rebirth in the higher realms, where there is opportunity to learn and practice Dharma. With right conduct, right view, a pure life, and the

realization of emptiness, there is not much doubt that enlightenment will be achieved. [*Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga* is available as a booklet from the Foundation Store, www.fpmt.org/shop.]

Manjushri advised to meditate on the perfect human rebirth and on death and impermanence. These meditations help us to gain realizations more quickly. Starting with the perfect human rebirth, build up step by step to the meditations on renunciation, and then develop bodhichitta. Meditate on emptiness for five minutes daily with a few stanzas of a text, just to put a positive imprint in the mind for the future. Also try to meditate on single-pointed concentration, with no distractions in a place that is quiet, to achieve the state of calm abiding.

Try to practice bodhichitta in daily life as much as possible with your family and friends and at your job. If we practice with bodhichitta, we collect limitless skies of merit. For example, if we offer one light to the Buddha with the motivation of bodhichitta, wishing to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, our merit increases by 100,000 times. We have to earn money in life, but when your job is done with bodhichitta, your hours at work increase your merit. While driving to work and with every step you take during the day, feel you are doing this for numberless sentient beings. This increases merit and brings unbelievable purification. Every step collects unbelievable skies of merit. Every action becomes the cause for enlightenment. If we do everything – walking, eating, and sleeping – with a motivation of bodhichitta, of offering service to others, we will benefit all sentient beings and free them from suffering.

After you have meditated and studied for some years, you can start taking tantric initiations. The Vajrayana path brings us to enlightenment very quickly. In this way, all the sentient beings who depend on you to become liberated do not have to wait such a long time to be freed from suffering. Instead, we have the opportunity to achieve enlightenment in a brief time, even in just one lifetime.

I advise doing purification in the morning, especially the practice of Prostrations to the Thirty-five Confession Buddhas. Our negative, emotional thoughts make it difficult to attain realizations, and this practice makes it easy to purify many billions of eons of negative karma. Each of the names should be recited three times. [For more information on this practice, see *Essential Buddhist Prayers, Volume One*, or *The Preliminary Practice of Prostrations to the Thirty-five Confession Buddhas*. Both are available from the Foundation Store, www.fpmt.org/shop]

In the evening, I advise doing the Vajrasattva purification practice with the four opponent powers [also available from the Foundation Store]. If you don't do this practice, the negative karma committed that day is doubled the next day, quadrupled the third day, and on the fourth day becomes eight times greater, and so on. If this increased negative karma is not purified, it will increase to the size of this earth! It will be very heavy at the time of death, and then it will continue with you to the next life. It can cause you to take rebirth in the lower realms, where you won't be able to help yourself and others. A wise person understands that negative karma can become great, but with the four opponent powers and purification of negative actions, our life becomes most profitable.

From time to time each month, you should take the eight Mahayana precepts [see *Essential Buddhist Prayers, Volume One*, available from the Foundation Store]. This should be done especially on the special Buddha days, such as Saka Dawa, Descent from Tushita, and so on. There are four major days and four minor days [these are marked on the Liberation Prison Project calendar]. Whatever merit you collect is increased one hundred million times on precept days, so on these days it is very profitable to increase virtue. On days of solar eclipse, the practice of virtue is increased seven hundred million times with the eight Mahayana precepts. But even on other days, taking the eight Mahayana precepts allows us to collect merit all the time, even while sleeping. On the days you take precepts, any virtue done increases. Because being born human in your next life depends on the practice of pure morality and it is extremely difficult to be born where you will meet the Buddha's teachings again, you should take every opportunity to take

the eight Mahayana precepts, even if there are many obstacles. Even if you don't do the practice well, your virtue will still increase.

Colophon:

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