

Meditation on the Advantages of Proper Reliance and the Disadvantages of Not Properly Relying on a Spiritual Guide

Preparation: Start by taking just a minute or two to focus on your physical body, finding the most beneficial position with your spine straight and erect, a position in which you can be aware and awake, but not stiff or rigid. Become present in the moment and place where you are.

Continue with a 5-minute breathing meditation. Focus the attention on the sensation of the breath flowing in and out at the opening of the nostrils. Let all thoughts go, like clouds in the sky. If distractions arise, be aware of them without getting involved and without judgment, then gently bring the attention back to the breath until your mind is peaceful and clear.

Motivation: Create an altruistic motivation for the meditation session. Without a spiritual guide, there is no way at all to escape from the ocean of cyclic existence and thus to reach full enlightenment. A spiritual guide is the foundation of all the paths to liberation from samsara and enlightenment; it is essential to achieving these states. So think that you are meditating not just for your own well-being or peace of mind or good reputation, but you are taking the time now to meditate and accumulate vast stores of merit to be able to find and skillfully maintain a strong and healthy spiritual relationship with a qualified spiritual guide in order to reach the state of enlightenment where you can most skillfully benefit all beings.

The main body of the meditation:

Contemplate the 8 advantages of practicing proper reliance on a spiritual guide (from the lam-rim):

- A. you will come closer to buddhahood
 - a. by practicing his/her instructions
 - b. by making offerings to and serving him/her
- B. it pleases the buddhas
 - a. the buddhas of the 10 directions are willing to teach you the Dharma, but you don't have the karma to even see the nirmanakaya, which appear only to ordinary beings with pure karma
 - b. if you do not rely properly on your spiritual teacher, the buddhas will not be pleased no matter how many offerings you make to them
- C. you will not be disturbed by non-humans or bad company
- D. you will automatically put a stop to all delusions and misdeeds
- E. your insights and realizations of the levels of the path will increase
- F. you will not be deprived of virtuous spiritual teachers in all future rebirths
- G. you will not fall into the lower realms
- H. you will effortlessly achieve all short- and long-term aims

Contemplate the 8 disadvantages of not practicing proper reliance on a spiritual guide or of transgressing your practice of proper respect (from the lam-rim):

- A. if you inadvertently disparage your spiritual teacher, you insult all the buddhas
- B. when you develop angry thoughts toward your spiritual teacher, you destroy your roots of virtue (merits) and will be reborn in hell (for as many eons as the number of moments of your anger)
- C. you will not achieve enlightenment, despite your practice of tantra
- D. although you seek the benefits of tantra, your practice will achieve only the lower realms

- E. you will not develop fresh qualities not already developed and those you have will degenerate
- F. you will be plagued with illnesses and the like in this life
- G. you will wander endlessly in the lower realms in your future lives
- H. you will be deprived of spiritual teachers in all your future lives

Make a strong determination in your mind that in order to reach enlightenment, in order to achieve the two purposes of self and others, in order to never be separated from the Dharma, the path to freedom, that you will maintain with strong effort and diligence a proper and healthy relationship of respect and reliance on your spiritual teachers, at any cost. Fix this determination strongly in your mind.

Dedication: Because of our merits, may I and all sentient beings find a perfectly qualified spiritual guide, and in all our future lives, may we never be separated from our spiritual guide nor from the pure Dharma teachings. May all our precious teachers have long and healthy lives and may all their compassionate projects for sentient beings succeed perfectly without any obstacles.

Meditation on Relating to a Spiritual Teacher in Thought

Preparation: Start by taking just a minute or two to focus on your physical body, finding the most beneficial position with your spine straight and erect, a position in which you can be aware and awake, but not stiff or rigid. Become present in the moment and place where you are.

Continue with a 5-minute breathing meditation. Focus the attention on the sensation of the breath flowing in and out at the opening of the nostrils. Let all thoughts go, like clouds in the sky. If distractions arise, be aware of them without getting involved and without judgment, then gently bring the attention back to the breath until your mind is peaceful and clear.

Motivation: Create an altruistic motivation for the meditation session. Without a spiritual guide, there is no way at all to escape from the ocean of cyclic existence and thus to reach full enlightenment. A spiritual guide is the foundation of all the paths to liberation from samsara and enlightenment; it is essential to achieving these states. So think that you are meditating not just for your own well-being or peace of mind or good reputation, but you are taking the time now to meditate and accumulate vast stores of merit to be able to find a qualified spiritual guide in order to reach the state of enlightenment where you can most skillfully benefit all beings.

Body of the meditation:

Step one: If you like, visualize your spiritual teacher in the space in front of you. Think about the essential good qualities of your spiritual mentor (either of the spiritual mentor *in general*, if you do not yet have a spiritual guide, or of the person whom you regard as your spiritual mentor). Focus on these qualities clearly and with some concentration. Generate a strong conviction or belief that your teacher has these qualities. This purifies the mind of disturbing emotions and attitudes towards the teacher, such as arrogance or doubt.

Step two: Next, think about what it means to “have good qualities.” First, good qualities are aspects of buddha-nature, that is, they are intrinsic potentials of the clear light mind (our purest level of mind). Also, in this case, a “quality” is something that corrects a deficiency. Therefore, even though all of us have the same potentials within us, fully realizing them comes from strengthening our natural abilities in order to overcome our shortcomings. Therefore, these qualities have arisen in our teacher through following cause and effect, training the mind, body, and speech in positive ways to overcome negative faults.

Also, focus on the wonderful ways that your teacher is able to help you and others because of these qualities. In this way, generate faith based on reasoning.

Step three: Go on now to think that (a) we all have these same positive potentials of our buddha-nature, (b) we too can apply the appropriate effort, (c) we can clearly see how developing these same qualities brings extensive benefit to ourselves and others.

In this way, generate a strong determination to practice the Dharma and an aspiration to attain bodhichitta. As you meditate more deeply, positive enthusiasm arises in you to gain these same good qualities.

Step four: Reflect now on the great kindness of your spiritual teacher, especially in teaching you the methods and path to eliminate your suffering and reach the incredible goal of enlightenment. Contemplate the immense value and rarity of that gift made to you out of extraordinary kindness.

Step five: With your mind suitably prepared and open to the inspiration of your spiritual teacher, from your heart, first offer the seven-limb prayer (either abbreviated or extensive), then from your heart make strong requests for blessings and inspiration in your Dharma practice, to overcome any specific obstacles or problems you may be having, and to gain the realizations of the path to enlightenment as quickly as possible.

Visualize that from your spiritual teacher come beams of light and nectar that flow through your crown and into you, bringing you all the blessings and inspiration of the path, eliminating all obstacles and wrong views and granting all realizations. Concentrate strongly on this with the conviction that this is truly taking place.

Then your spiritual teacher melts into light, which absorbs into your heart, remaining with you, present, always.

Dedication: Dedicate the merits gained from this meditation to deepening your faith in being able to relate perfectly with your spiritual mentor as well as to being able to find (if you have not already) a perfectly qualified spiritual mentor in this life to lead you quickly to enlightenment.

May all sentient beings have this same good fortune and be able to progress quickly along the path to enlightenment. May I and all sentient beings never be separated in all our lives from the perfect Dharma teachings and from a kind spiritual mentor who teaches it to us and kindly guides us on the path.

Meditation on Devotion to One's Spiritual Teacher in Thought

By Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Introduction:

Here I am going to mention a brief meditation to use the mistakes you see in the Guru to develop devotion, and to use the mistakes you see to achieve realizations on the path to enlightenment.

Preparation: Check your posture to make sure that your spine is straight. Take a few deep breaths allowing your body and mind to arrive to this place. Spend some time breathing naturally, watching the inhalation and exhalation of the breath. If it helps to focus your mind, count the inhalations from one to ten.

Motivation: Even though I want happiness and to be free from suffering, I still find myself creating so many problems. Although I want to be a source of happiness for others, I find that most of the time I am only thinking of myself. Even though I want to attain enlightenment, I am so easily fooled by my ignorance and self-cherishing. I am confused about what practices to take up and what to give up in order to attain realizations on the path. If I were to devote myself to a qualified teacher wholeheartedly, I could overcome these obstacles. And yet, even with my teachers, I have doubts and neglect to follow their advice. What am I going to do? I need to develop faith in my teacher so that I can make effort to follow their advice and receive blessings to achieve realizations. This is the quickest way to enlightenment. Therefore, I am going to do this meditation on devotion to the spiritual guide in thought, the essence of which is seeing the guru as Buddha.

Body of the meditation:

First think that all is a hallucination. One has so many wrong concepts such as one sees the impermanent as permanent, etc. Also, one has no knowledge to see even tomorrow, even what is going to happen next minute – one cannot see. So we are totally deeply ignorant. Recognize the many hallucinations that we believe in, so many mistaken thoughts and wrong concepts. *(Reflect)*

The first thing to establish is that the Guru is a Bodhisattva. Make sure that you understand and believe that Bodhisattvas have no thought of seeking happiness for themselves. Not for one second do they arise the thought of seeking happiness for themselves, they only think of others and only work for others with Bodhichitta, benefiting all sentient beings. *(Pause and reflect whether or not your guru could be a Bodhisattva)*

After you establish this, then think that Bodhisattvas collect two types of merit in order to achieve enlightenment for sentient beings, which includes oneself. There are numberless Bodhisattvas working for sentient beings and working for me.

Then, there are numberless Buddhas who have completed the two types of merit and ceased all gross and subtle defilements by actualizing the path: method and wisdom. Who have omniscient mind. They see all sentient beings including myself, all my sufferings, my needs, my karmas, my characteristics, level of intelligence, everything. They can see all the methods that fit to me, that lead me from happiness to happiness towards enlightenment, without the slightest mistake – as well knowing the methods for numberless sentient beings, every single sentient being. Not only this they have perfect knowledge of my own mind, everything they can see directly, they can see all the past, present and future, everything. Also they have perfect power to reveal these methods according to my karma and the karma of all sentient beings. Not only that, their mind is trained in great compassion that embraces and hooks me and every single sentient being. Also they have more compassion towards those who have more negative karma and who are suffering more, they have more unbearable compassion towards them.
(Pause to reflect)

So, Buddha never gives up sentient beings, even for one second, and Buddha has perfected all the qualities to guide me and all sentient beings. All the Buddhas are guiding me even now, guiding me even in the present time, right now. So, who they are they? *(pause)*

There is no one to find except these Gurus, especially this one, the one Guru that one has anger towards or heresy, the one that you see as having mistakes. The Guru that one sees as having delusion, having suffering aggregates, having mistakes in the actions.

If the Guru manifested lower than this, as animals and so forth then it would be difficult to recognize and difficult to receive guidance. If the Guru manifested more pure than this, I would not have the karma to see (him or her), enough pure karma to see (not talking about negative karma). I don't have enough pure karma to see, I don't have enough pure mind to see. I only have the impure karma to see only in this aspect, in this way, as having delusions, suffering aggregates, mistakes in actions, immorality, and so forth.

Therefore, the Guru Buddha manifests in this ordinary mistaken aspect exactly according to my karma and to guide me. How unbelievable, how kind it is. *(Repeat this over and over again. 21 times or half a mala or one mala.)*

The Guru Buddha manifests in this ordinary aspect, which means having mistakes, exactly according to my karma to guide me. This ordinary aspect having mistakes

is the only one that can guide me, the only one that can guide me. (*Repeat this over and over again.*)

Then do fixed meditation. Think, "How precious it is" - repeat over and over and think, "How precious this is". This is the most precious, most important one in my life, this ordinary aspect liberates me from lower realms, samaras, even lower nirvana, and brings me to enlightenment by revealing the holy Dharma by various methods. How most unbelievable kind the Guru is. (*Do fixed meditation and repeat over and over again.*)

Shakyamuni Buddha, Manjrushri, Chenrezig, Vajrayogini, Tara, Guhyasamaja, Heruka, Yamantaka and Machig Labdron, etc. – as well as numberless Buddhas – guide me through this ordinary aspect, or in this manifestation. Think, "How precious it is, how precious it is, this ordinary aspect." (*Repeat over and over again.*) "Most precious, most important one in my life." (*Repeat this part over and over again and do fixed meditation.*) This is the most precious, most important one in my life.

After that, think that each of the Gurus whatever action they do towards me is definitely leading me to enlightenment. Doing the action of even giving an oral transmission – a few syllables or verses of sutra and tantra – that leaves the positive imprint on my mental continuum and that causes me to be nearer to again receive this precious human body in my next life; and to meet Buddhism and the Dharma; and to understand the meaning and words of the teachings; and accumulate merit and purify; that which ceases all the delusions, gross and subtle, and, like this, leads me to enlightenment. There is no question that by giving me refuge, giving vows, initiations, oral transmissions, instructions, and even other actions such as: praising me, talking nice sweet words or wrathful words, scolding me, giving me gifts, food, drink and so forth – even this is helping me, supporting me, and inspiring me to practice Dharma and is bringing me to enlightenment. (*Pause to reflect on all the ways your guru is bringing you to enlightenment.*)

My ordinary mind believes that these Gurus are ordinary, but they actually do the work of guiding me and bringing me to full enlightenment by teaching me these methods. According to my ordinary view, that means that the numberless Buddhas are doing nothing for me. That is absolutely impossible. They have skies of qualities, so therefore these Gurus whom I see guiding me, taking care of me right now are the Buddha.

My normal concepts are totally wrong – projecting wrong views. This is my normal concept (mind) seeing mistakes in the Guru, seeing the Guru as not purified, as not having discipline, etc. My mind sees this and believes it although it is invalid and the most harmful wrong view in my life.

Bikshuni Legpa Karma, who served and was together with the Buddha for twenty-one years, only saw the Buddha as a liar – did not see any qualities in the Buddha – while numberless others saw the Buddha as fully enlightened, one who was enlightened an incredible amount of eons ago. This is similar to how we see the Guru.

Even if you see the Guru as ordinary, others can see them as the real Buddha and have devotion, a pure, happy, healthy mind towards them. Therefore, there is not a single question if they are really Buddha. (*Do fixed meditation on this.*)

Another example of how we see things as pure or impure depends on how we look at it, whether we look at it with a pure mind or not. Good, bad, happiness, and so forth, what view comes out is from what label I put, what kind of mind pure or impure that I create. Using this example, think, therefore, the Guru is definitely the Buddha. (*Again do fixed meditation on this.*)

For example: in Tibet there was one teacher (Geshe Potawa) who lived very high on a mountain. One day, two disciples went to visit him, they arrived very tired and the teacher offered them cold tea. One of the disciples thought, “We came so far and are so tired and still the teacher didn’t even offer us hot tea.” The other disciple thought, “How unbelievably kind the teacher is, he made us tea purposely cold to quench our thirst.”

For one disciple, it became very positive. He became very happy and received so much benefit and blessings. But for the other disciple, he looked at the situation in a negative way and he was very unhappy and even possibly got angry so he only received shortcomings.

According to what kind of mind with which one looks, you can see things as pure or impure. It all depends on how you look at it – with a pure mind or with a negative mind (impure).

So, whether one receives great blessings or small blessings, it doesn’t depend on the actual object itself. It depends on how you look at it.

Even the Guru showing mistakes – which means manifesting ordinary aspect – even this is the most skilful way to guide me to enlightenment. The Guru does this to bring me to enlightenment. So, if they are not Buddha, then who else is? They are definitely Buddha. (*Again do fixed meditation.*)

Really meditate on this: how the Guru is manifesting in ordinary aspect – which means having delusion and suffering body, mistakes in the actions, immorality, and so forth. Here this aspect becomes the most needed one, the most important

thing in your life, more important than anything else, the most urgent and most needed one.

Without this manifestation showing mistakes I am guideless, I am totally guideless, totally lost in samsara – like a baby left in the desert where there is nothing, nobody there to help, to take care of me. Besides there being nobody to guide me, in the vast desert there are also many vicious animals around and great danger, so many poisonous rattle snakes, and my life is in great danger.

As Pabonka Rinpoche mentions: being in the nighttime, lost in a forest with no moon, no stars, and you cannot see. It's totally dark in the gloomy forest, which is filled with vicious animals like tigers and so forth, and you are surrounded – not only guideless but in incredible danger. Being in samsara is like that.

Except for these Buddhas showing ordinary aspect to guide me – except for that – there is nobody – only these Gurus.

Resolve: Make strong determination that this Guru one gets angry at, arises heresy, sees mistakes – especially this one – make strong determination that all the Gurus, especially this one, are definitely Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. *(After one has made the determination that this is the Buddha then do fixed meditation on that, holding that and recognizing as Buddha.)*

Dedication: Due to the three times merits accumulated by myself, all the buddhas and bodhisattvas, and all sentient beings, my myself, all my family members, all students and benefactors of this organization, and all sentient beings be able to meet with perfectly qualified Mahayana gurus in all our future lives. From our side, may we always see them as enlightened. May our actions of body, speech, and mind always please the virtuous friend, and may we be able to fulfill their holy wishes immediately.

May I not rise heresy for even one second in the actions of the glorious guru. May see whatever actions are done as pure. In this way, may I receive the blessings of my guru in my heart.

Conclusion

This is a brief meditation that you can do and practice everyday. If you can, while doing the meditation also recite the Guru's name mantra, especially that particular Guru's name mantra or requesting prayer (which is usually one stanza in length). While you meditate you can do that if you are able to.

Anytime you see mistakes, you should immediately think that this is Buddha manifesting in ordinary aspect, showing immorality, or giving wrong explanations, teachings, or saying "I do not know". Immediately think this, not letting the thought of mistakes arise, thinking that this is what it means to manifest in ordinary aspect. By doing this, the thought of mistakes will be stopped.

- Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Meditation on Relating to the Spiritual Mentor in Thought

Preparation: Start by taking just a minute or two to focus on your physical body, finding the most beneficial position with your spine straight and erect, a position in which you can be aware and awake, but not stiff or rigid. Become present in the moment and place where you are.

Continue with a 5-minute breathing meditation. Focus the attention on the sensation of the breath flowing in and out at the opening of the nostrils. Let all thoughts go, like clouds in the sky. If distractions arise, be aware of them without getting involved and without judgment, then gently bring the attention back to the breath until your mind is peaceful and clear.

Motivation: Create an altruistic motivation for the meditation session. Without a spiritual guide, there is no way at all to escape from the ocean of cyclic existence and thus to reach full enlightenment. A spiritual guide is the foundation of all the paths to liberation from samsara and enlightenment; it is essential to achieving these states. So think that you are meditating not just for your own well-being or peace of mind or good reputation, but you are taking the time now to meditate and accumulate vast stores of merit to be able to find a qualified spiritual guide in order to reach the state of enlightenment where you can most skillfully benefit all beings.

The main body of the meditation:

Step one: If you like, visualize your spiritual teacher in the space in front of you. Think about the essential good qualities of your spiritual mentor (either of the spiritual mentor *in general*, if you do not yet have a spiritual guide, or of the person whom you regard as your spiritual mentor). Focus on these qualities clearly and with some concentration. Generate a strong conviction or belief that your teacher has these qualities. This purifies the mind of disturbing emotions and attitudes towards the teacher, such as arrogance or doubt.

Step two: Next, think about what it means to “have good qualities.” First, good qualities are aspects of buddha-nature, that is, they are intrinsic potentials of the clear light mind (our purest level of mind). Also, in this case, a “quality” is something that corrects a deficiency. Therefore, even though all of us have the same potentials within us, fully realizing them comes from strengthening our natural abilities in order to overcome our shortcomings. Therefore, these qualities have arisen in our teacher through following cause and effect, training the mind, body, and speech in positive ways to overcome negative faults.

Also, focus on the wonderful ways that your teacher is able to help you and others because of these qualities. In this way, generate faith based on reasoning.

Step three: Go on now to think that (a) we all have these same positive potentials of our buddha-nature, (b) we too can apply the appropriate effort, (c) we can clearly see how developing these same qualities brings extensive benefit to ourselves and others. In this way, generate a strong determination to practice the Dharma and an aspiration to attain bodhichitta. As you meditate more deeply, positive enthusiasm arises in you to gain these same good qualities.

Step four: Reflect now on the great kindness of your spiritual teacher, especially in teaching you the methods and path to eliminate your suffering and reach the incredible goal of enlightenment. Contemplate the immense value and rarity of that gift made to you out of extraordinary kindness.

Step five: With your mind suitably prepared and open to the inspiration of your spiritual teacher, from your heart, first offer the seven-limb prayer (either abbreviated or extensive), then from

your heart make strong requests for blessings and inspiration in your Dharma practice, to overcome any specific obstacles or problems you may be having, and to gain the realizations of the path to enlightenment as quickly as possible.

Visualize that from your spiritual teacher come beams of light and nectar that flow through your crown and into you, bringing you all the blessings and inspiration of the path, eliminating all obstacles and wrong views and granting all realizations. Concentrate strongly on this with the conviction that this is truly taking place.

Then your spiritual teacher melts into light, which absorbs into your heart, remaining with you, present, always.

Dedication: Dedicate the merits gained from this meditation to deepening your faith in being able to relate perfectly with your spiritual mentor as well as to being able to find (if you have not already) a perfectly qualified spiritual mentor in this life to lead you quickly to enlightenment.

May all sentient beings have this same good fortune and be able to progress quickly along the path to enlightenment. May I and all sentient beings never be separated in all our lives from the perfect Dharma teachings and from a kind spiritual mentor who teaches it to us and kindly guides us on the path.

Meditation on Why We Need a Spiritual Guide

Preparation: Start by taking just a minute or two to focus on your physical body, finding the most beneficial position with your spine straight and erect, a position in which you can be aware and awake, but not stiff or rigid. Become present in the moment and place where you are.

Continue with a 5-minute breathing meditation. Focus the attention on the sensation of the breath flowing in and out at the opening of the nostrils. Let all thoughts go, like clouds in the sky. If distractions arise, be aware of them without getting involved and without judgment, then gently bring the attention back to the breath until your mind is peaceful and clear.

Motivation: Create an altruistic motivation for the meditation session. Without a spiritual guide, there is no way at all to escape from the ocean of cyclic existence and thus to reach full enlightenment. A spiritual guide is the foundation of all the paths to liberation from samsara and enlightenment; it is essential to achieving these states. So think that you are meditating not just for your own well-being or peace of mind or good reputation, but you are taking the time now to meditate and accumulate vast stores of merit to be able to find a qualified spiritual guide in order to reach the state of enlightenment where you can most skillfully benefit all beings.

The main body of the meditation:

Contemplate the reasons why we need a spiritual guide.

Step one: First, think of examples of how we need a teacher to learn almost everything in life, from the time we are born until we die.

Step two: Now, think about the significant teachers that you have had in your life. Think of the kindness they showed you and the benefits you gained from their efforts and good qualities.

Step three: Now, think about the great importance of having a spiritual teacher to teach us what to practice and what to avoid, to lead us on the Dharma path, to lead us out of samsara, and to bring us to full enlightenment. We are entering territory where we have never been before, and we definitely need a guide along the way. We need to rely on a guide who has experience, who has already gone before us along the Dharma path, who knows more than we do.

Step four: Contemplate the kind of spiritual teacher that you desire to find. Think specifically about the 10 general qualities of a Mahayana spiritual guide (see *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, Wisdom Publs., p. 272).

Step five: Generate in your heart and mind an enthusiastic aspiration to find a qualified spiritual guide through opening your heart and through thorough scrutiny and checking. Feel the confidence and joy of finding such a precious spiritual friend to accompany and guide you on your spiritual path.

Dedication: Because of our merits, may I and all sentient beings find a perfectly qualified spiritual guide, and in all our future lives, may we never be separated from our spiritual guide nor from the pure Dharma teachings. May all our precious teachers have long and healthy lives and may all their compassionate projects for sentient beings succeed perfectly without any obstacles.