

How To Choose Your Root Spiritual Teacher (The First Wish-Fulfilling Jewel):

In *The Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* Maitreya postulated the methods of how to choose a virtuous root teacher. A qualified spiritual guru should embody the following ten virtues:

1. Ethical: The mind of the spiritual teacher should be subdued by renunciation, precepts, and tantric vows.
2. Peaceful: The mind of the spiritual teacher should be peaceful and subdued by training in concentration.
3. Worry-free: The mind of the spiritual teacher be subdued by wisdom and be free of worry.
4. Virtuous: A spiritual teacher should continually possess renunciation, concentration and wisdom.
5. Brave: The spiritual teacher should persevere in the acts that benefit disciples
6. Knowledgeable: The spiritual teacher should be multitalented, extremely knowledgeable in sutras and tantras, and well-versed in various subject matters.
7. Realized being: A qualified spiritual teacher should possess the direct realization of ultimate Truth and emptiness.
8. Effective Expression: The spiritual teacher should be effective in articulating Dharma teachings and should not mislead the disciples.
9. Compassionate: The spiritual teacher's loving-kindness and compassion towards his or her disciples is unconditional.
10. Respectful: Whenever a qualified spiritual guru is giving Dharma teachings, he or she is always respectful towards his or her disciples and Dharma.

In the midst of this degenerate time, the end of the Dharma era, it is difficult to seek and rely on a root teacher who embodies all these ten characteristics. However, even if one cannot find a qualified spiritual teacher who possesses all these qualities, one may choose his or her spiritual teacher based on a minimum number of these virtues. At the very least a spiritual teacher must possess the first virtue, that is to be ethical--well trained in discipline, renunciation, concentration, and wisdom, and the 9th virtue-- be compassionate. This is because one can learn from the spiritual teacher's ethical conducts and precepts and immerse oneself in the spiritual teacher's loving-kindness.

How to Listen to the Right Dharma (The Second Wish-Fulfilling Jewel)

There are two ways to listen to Dharma:

I. Cultivate your mind:

A. Mahayana: cultivate your bodhichitta

B. Vajrayana: cultivate your ultimate calm and clear mind

1. Perceive the place where you listen to the Dharma as an exalted heaven
2. Perceive the guru from whom you listen to the Dharma as the embodiment of Buddha
3. Perceive your cohorts who participate in the Dharma practice as virtuous ones.
4. Perceive the perfection of Dharma as the ultimate truth of the Mahayana
5. Perceive the time listening to the Dharma as the ultimate calm and abiding time

II. Ngöndro (Preliminary Practices)

A. Elimination

1. Three Faults of a Vessel/Container: A vessel that is upside-down, a vessel with a leaky bottom, a vessel that is filthy
2. Six Flaws of a Vessel:
 - a. Has the thought that the guru is not as good as oneself
 - b. Does not have the faith in the spiritual teacher and Dharma
 - c. Does not appreciate the opportunity to seek Dharma
 - d. Has a wandering mind
 - e. Has five senses that are too restrained
 - f. Has a mind that grew tiresome and fatigue
3. Five Things a Vessel Should not Keep:
 - a. Fixated on the diction but not the meaning
 - b. Fixated on the meaning but not the diction
 - c. Fixated on something so that one does not comprehend the meaning
 - d. Fixated on the wrong gradual path
 - e. Fixated on the wrong sequence of the path

B. Take Possession

1. Relying on four attitudes:
 - a. Think of oneself as a sick person
 - b. Think of Dharma as the medicine
 - c. Think of the guru as a skillful physician
 - d. Think of earnest and diligent practice as a cure for the disease
2. Possessing six paramitas:

- a. Charity, Generosity
 - b. Sila (Moral and virtuous conduct)
 - c. Shanti (Forbearance)
 - d. Perseverance
 - e. Samandi (Concentration)
 - f. Prajna (Wisdom)
3. Relying on other virtuous manners pertaining to Dharma

How to Contemplate Dharma (The Third Wish-Fulfilling Jewel)

I. Contemplate the Dharma

A. Enjoy Dharma: As aforementioned, one should externally eliminate a vessel's three faults, five non-possession, six flaws, rely on four attitudes and possess six paramitas. Internally, one should cultivate bodhichitta and a tranquil and clear mind when one is listening to the Dharma. This then helps one reach the stage where every nuance and thought is in accordance with one's true nature. This is the ultimate way to listen to the Dharma.

B. Right Thought: Relying on right knowledge and right view to contemplate, but not wrong view.

C. Comparison: One's realization of Truth is dependant upon comparison of three levels: major premise, analysis, and analogy.

D. Observation: Adhere Dharma to observe the law of cause and effect, and use the same rule to observe others. Try hard not to violate the Three Dharma Seals.

E. Steadfastness: Upon observing the aforementioned four characteristics, one should strive to summarize the Dharma one heard and turn them into poetic prayer, correctly and steadfastly practice the Dharma, recite the Dharma and mantra, and by doing so one arises one's own wisdom. This is what we called contemplative wisdom and this is the impetus of achieving practice wisdom.

II. Fourteen non-responses, not obsessed with phenomena that are beyond words, not to contemplate the wrong things:

A. Fourteen non-responses, not to think about all these absurd things. The so-called non-response implies not answering to the questions. The

Buddha did not respond to the obscure questions raised by those people who are not genuine Buddhists. This is due to these absurd questions are meaningless and not based on facts. For example, somebody asked how much milk can one get if one buys a bull's horn. This is not a legitimate question therefore the Buddha chose not to respond to such a ridiculous question. Fourteen non-responses are nonsensical and meaningless questions; therefore one should not contemplate on these questions. If one dwells on these questions, then one falls into the trap of wrong view. One must be cautious about this.

B. Not to have wrong view on the state that are beyond words. One should not seek the external phenomenon of this state. Words cannot quite capture these complex phenomena. This is a state that is indescribable. So, if one dwells on this phenomenon and contemplates on the wrong thing, then one may have higher propensity to be dangerously misled. However, if one is fixated with emptiness, or one starts practicing Dharma based on the phenomenon described in *koan*, one is not following the right path. Thus, one shall not dwell on the contemplation of the unspeakable; otherwise this will be another cause that hinders one's true realization of Dharma.

III. Seek knowledge for the unknown, and do not forget the knowledge we already acquired. This is because each day we increase our growth, if we seek knowledge that we do not know. As for the knowledge we already acquired, then we should try to retain it. If we received the knowledge but we forgot about it, then it is as though we never knew about it. There are many ways to help our retention. For example, if we compose our own prayer based on what we have learned, then it will be concise and easier to remember. This will be one of the methods to help retention.

IV. The scope of Dharma is vast and in great depth. Look up to and have unwavering faith in Tathagata. Do not have doubt on the profound Dharma of Tathagata. The state of Tathagata differs from that of ordinary people. There is a vast difference between the two. Thus, from the limited state of ordinary people, if one cannot fully comprehend the immense scope of Tathagata, one cannot peek into the state of being a Tathagata. Do not attempt to slander or libel. One should wait until one perseveres, makes steady improvement, and attains the state of Bodhisattva, then in due time one will fully understand. Tathagata is the one who speaks the Truth and who does not make idle talks. Tathagata's profound wisdom is like the infinite amount of waves in the ocean. If one follows these steps, then one shall not have the fault of having doubt. A steadfast faith is the paramount key.

How to Practice Dharma (The Fourth Wish-Fulfilling Jewel)

This portion can be divided into three parts pertinent to cultivating our profound wisdom. They are delineated as follows:

I. Adhere to gradual path to learn and uphold Dharma. Follow the correct path of one's own body, speech and mind.

To uphold one's body, speech and mind means that-- from our body's perspective, we need to practice prostration and various mudra gestures; from the speech's perspective, we need to read, chant, and recite mantras; and from the mind's perspective, we need to visualize Buddha's image and view. If we are practicing all these three elements in accordance with Dharma, then we are on the correct path.

In fact, to practice the Dharma means to simultaneously practice concentration and contemplation/mindful observation of one's thoughts and actions. According to Zen Master Chih-che (or Chih-i), one of the patriarchs of the Tien-tai (Heavenly Terrace) Sect: There are many paths that will lead us to the true Dharma of Nivana, however the two paramount methods are concentration and contemplation (vipasyana). Concentration is the beginning stage of calmness, while contemplation is the most essential method which will help remove one's confusion and delusion; concentration is virtuously cumulating and cultivating one's mind, while contemplation is the skillful means that will miraculously bring forward resolution; concentration is the victorious cause of samadhi, whereas vipasyana is the root cause of our wisdom. If a person could accomplish both samadhi and vipasyana methods, and accordingly, be able to benefit oneself and others, then the person has acquired all the right Dharma. If we practice Dharma according to the gradual path, then we know how to be flexible, adaptive and harmonious. We skillfully practice what we learned by adhering to our guru's teachings.

These two methods are like a car's two wheels or a bird's two wings. If we lose one of them or lean too much on one side, then we will for sure be falling. Therefore, one of the Buddhist sutras indicated: If we focus too much on concentration but not on the cultivation of wisdom, then we will become dim-witted; conversely, if we focus too much on the learning of wisdom, but do not practice the virtue of samandhi and concentration, then we will become too arrogant. And thus, "Though there is a difference between the fault of being unintelligent or arrogant, there is essentially no difference in terms of how these two wrong views will perpetuate vicious cycles. If we do not keep the balance, then our behaviors will become increasingly absurd, and this is not the way to reach enlightenment in a timely fashion. Therefore, another sutra states: "Those Sravakas, hearers or Hinayana disciples who understand the four dogmas and rid themselves of the unreality of the phenomena may have too much of concentration and yet cannot see the Buddha's true nature; Those Bodhisattvas who had reached the ten stages of Bodhisattva-wisdom may have acquired

abundance of wisdom; however even though they saw Buddha's nature, they still cannot fully comprehend it. Tathagatas, however, have reached the amazing balance of samandhi and profound wisdom, and thus they can see and fully comprehend Buddha's nature." "From this, we can understand that concentration and contemplation are the victorious paths for the practitioners; they are the major premises and indicators of all virtues and perfection, and they are the gate to reach nirvana, and they are the bodies of the ultimate fruition.

II. Do not commit any fraud regarding any behaviors sanctioned by Buddha. If one should violate any one of the commandments, then one should immediately repent and eliminate any wrong-doing.

Buddha's sanctions are precepts or commandments. One should not violate these commandments light-heartedly. However, since we are ordinary people, it is easy for us to violate these precepts. What should we do then? Buddha said that we should prevent ourselves from committing any violations; however, if we should violate these commandments, then we should promptly repent, and should try to return to our state of being pure and clean. Thus, Buddha said there two kinds of healthy individuals and they are:

- (1) those who never violate these commandments;
- (2) those who violate these commandments and yet are able to repent and eradicate the mistakes immediately.

If one wants to repent, then one must know the following ten methods. They are listed as follows:

1. To know and trust the law of cause and effect (karma)
2. Be fearful of violating these disciplines/precepts
3. Be regretful and shameful of one's wrong-doing
4. To seek ways to eliminate these sins
5. To confess these sins and do not attempt to conceal these wrong doings
6. To eliminate the thought of continuously committing previous wrong views and behaviors
7. To have the heart of protecting the Dharma
8. To make great (Bodhisattva) vows and wishes
9. To recite Buddhas from all directions
10. To contemplate not to raise the sinful nature again

These are the gradual paths of repentance, ranging from repentance with specific forms to repentance without specific forms (absolute truth as having no differentiated ideas).

III. With regard to our body, mind and speech, practice Buddha's teachings, be steadfast and persevere, and do it step by step. If you can't do it, you should feel remorseful about it and try to amend it; if you forget about it or lose it, you should try to make up for it.

Those who want to practice Dharma according to Buddha's teachings and do it gradually, should start with the practice of the deep understanding and

appreciation of the rarity of having free time and a perfect life. If one practices it for a long duration of time then one can stop the evilness and cultivate more virtues; after this, one can adhere to the virtues presented by one's spiritual root teacher (guru), and one ought to practice discipline, meditation and wisdom, and to hear, contemplate and practice, etc. All these are the skillful means of practicing and learning Dharma. From the surface, it seems like an ordinary talk, but if we follow the aforementioned teachings and practice them step by step, it will come to an amazing fruition after a long period of time; eventually we will be able to maintain the disciplines/precepts, acquire our concentration/samandhi, and cultivate our profound wisdom.

The aforementioned three major points are pertaining to cultivation of wisdom; thereafter we may summarize the main points in the following poem:

Follow the Dharma and adhere to what we acquire
Do not turn our body, mind and speech in reverse
Obey Buddha's sanctions and follow the discipline
Practice Buddha's teachings and persevere