

Advice From Tsongkhapa

How should we begin our practice?

The root of everything right or wrong, is but the mind.

The channels for right and wrong are 3, and of these, the body and speech are controlled by the mind.

Therefore, before any Dharma practice, it is important for our motivating thought to be one in which we have properly worked ourself up, and not one that is mere words.

The stages of working ourselves up to a proper motivation have been explained in many ways, but the common helpful scheme is the 3 capacities.

If we only have a weak form of these motivations, a merely intellectual form of these, and were then to engage in hearing, reflection, and meditation; despite our noble claims of why we are doing it, our real motivation will actually be just for this life, or for some pleasant fruits of cyclic existence for which we have given the name 'Liberation.'

Therefore, to develop these motivating thoughts non-artificially it is not enough to just have a merely intellectual understanding of them.

We must meditate to build them up as a natural instinctive habit.

As for how we meditate, we need to acquaint ourselves over and over again, in many aspects, the causes pertinent for developing each of these kinds of motivation.

Even though meditating on these topics is the main cause, just to do that is not enough.

In between sessions we should make our understanding firm and certain by looking at the stainless exposition of Buddha and the Indian masters.

We must also, reach the heart of what is preventing us from developing them by doing a great deal collecting of merit and cleansing obstacles in order to eliminate contrary factors(such as selfishness, which is an obstacle to compassion, etc.) and bring about conducive conditions such as a kind heart(which is conducive to compassion for ex.)

To eliminate our black karmic debts, we should openly admit our faults. Invoking the 3 jewels and Bodhichitta as our basis and amassing as much counteracting virtue as we can.

This includes prostrating, mandala offerings, Vajrasattva, guru yoga, etc.

We need to making the causal factors for developing these motivations be never partial, but complete and thus fully effective.

We need to meditate and differentiate what is detrimental and what is beneficial.

We we have done both of these, we will understand deeply how to assure that if we meditate over and over again by having such and such a focal object, such and such an aspect, and such and such a manner in which we work ourselves up, to have the feeling, we will develop on our midstream such and such an uncommon imprint as a result. In doing this we will thereby come to gain confidence in our ability to actualize even the subtlest points of this practice.

We should also be aware of the special functions of each of these motivations to bring about what is beneficial and end what is detrimental. By knowing this and by thinking that developing just some of these motivating thoughts is not enough, in fact we have to generate the whole entire progression, then for certain it will come about that we will never abandon any of the sacred dharma(stages for building up motivation).

Although we must indeed generate these motivating thoughts before any actual session of meditation or puja, just to develop them is not sufficient. We must maintain them steadily and continuously throughout. Not only that, we must try to increase them as much as possible.

It is a mistake to think that since these are preliminary practices, it is unnecessary to have continual familiarity with them throughout the practice.

If we cherish enhancing in this way, motivating thoughts like these, we would then, on top of this as our foundation, practice the 2 stages of Tantra.

Before entering any Buddhist vehicle, we must set as the basis for our practice our own specific moral discipline -- whatever vows we hold.

For Tantra, it is important to have as our basis, Bodhichitta.