

# Buddhist Paths for Modern Seekers

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**ABSTRACT:** In our modern age, we are often too occupied with busy schedules of business appointments and customers, also family and friends. There are too many distractions that could fully occupy us and leave us without any time left to even to think about Buddhist path or practice. So many distractions form the biggest obstacle to practising Buddhism. From the Buddhist scriptures this article outlines examples of methods which can be easily practised in a busy lifestyle to resolve the modern distractions. Buddha had 84,000 teachings in order to satisfy the different needs of human beings. One can choose any methods that will lead closer to the wisdom of realizing the true nature of our existence. Finding a path through a genuine master is of paramount significance. In the end, there are multiple methods offered to the readers which are conducive to the twenty-first century path seekers.

**KEYWORDS:** Buddhism, Mahayana, Vajrayana, Buddhist Teachings, Buddhist Path, Buddha, Samsara, Nirvana, Sunyata, Four Truths, Guru Yoga, Mantra Recitation, Accumulating Merits, Distractions

## The Two Questions Underlying My Research

A seeker of the Buddhist path is often obstructed by the distractions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Modern people face different types of distractions than in ancient India or Tibet. What are these distractions that are keeping the seekers from following a Buddhist path?

One way to avoid distractions is to leave families, work and busy lives and go on a long meditation. However, we need more possible and practical methods which path seekers can follow while keeping their normal family lives and income. What are these methods that are easy to put into practice?

## Sutras

The literature review of this research is based on Buddhist Sutras, the scriptures of the words of the Buddha, that includes the Mahayana Sutras and Vajrayana Sutras—the sources of the latter are more prevalent than the former. There are references to the Mahayana classics such as The Prajna Paramita Sutra, the quintessence of the teachings of the great sunyata (emptiness). In the Vajrayana sources, there are references to many Tibetan classics and modern-day commentaries by renowned Tibetan Buddhist masters—most of them are from the Nyingmapa tradition—the most ancient Buddhist tradition in Tibet.

These Sutras lead us towards the range of potential methods. Considering so many distractions in the modern age, the different potential methods that are powerful, effective, and easy-to-apply are shared.

## Distractions

Many distractions accompany us from birth to death—common to most people in most societies.

The first distraction is education. Our parents are our first teachers as we learn the basics of life, followed by our educational teachers adding the curricular layers of knowledge and skills. Perhaps, there is little time for Buddhism with the pressure to get a “good” education. But a good education is not only for employment but for life. We learn Buddhism, ideally from national culture and a staunch family, but also from formal education in a Buddhist monastery.

The second distraction is career. Finding suitable jobs and income to live in an expensive modern world is a busy time, which continues as we work hard, train and develop, and compete to

advance by promotion. We can find more time for Buddhism and a better life if we do not exaggerate our salaries beyond what we need and a bit more and settle a level lower in the hierarchy.

The third distraction is family. Investing time and resources in our partnership and raising our family becomes the main focus for a couple of decades and beyond. Yet in so many cases a devout and loving family is a vital part of the Buddhist path and not an obstacle.

The fourth distraction is habit. We adopt and adapt habits all our lives and some stay with us to death. Good habits do not need to change while bad habits are difficult to convert. But we must make changes in the way we live to follow Buddhism actively, which then enables further positive changes. Tea drinking in Taiwan for example is a good habit, which is about more than drinking tea. This ritual enhances a whole positive approach to life. Three very good habits, easy to fit in, are explained more fully in the coming Method sections of this article.

In the end, we develop habits of liking different distractions in life that keep us away from practicing Buddhism. In essence, Buddhism is learning about yourself. But looking inside yourself is less interesting than watching movies or listening to popular music. Therefore, finding methods that are easy to practice and integrate into a busy lifestyle are important and useful for the longterm survival of Buddhism.

### **The Fundamentals of Buddhism**

The fundamental understanding of Buddhism is based on Samsara and Sunyata. Samsara means the current existence of us in our world, and Sunyata is the emptiness nature of this existence.

In Buddhism, Samsara represents our attachments to our parents, siblings, husbands, wives, children, grandchildren, careers, adventure, exploration, friendship, love. We may love this tangible and apparently real world that we live in.

Visualizing an illusory nature of our world is harder to imagine than holding a branch of a tree. The Sunyata nature of the forest is almost impossible to conceptualize when thousands of trees stand in front of our eyes. People continue to struggle to understand the emptiness nature of existence, although it was taught by Buddha Sakyamuni after realizing enlightenment as a wisdom teaching in the Mahayana Prajna Paramita Hrdaya Sutra (Kwang Um School of Zen, n.d.) in India about 2,500 years ago.

The Lord Buddha had spoken the four truths about impermanence, sufferings, causes and conditions, and liberation from sufferings (Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse, 2007, p. 5).

First, all compounded things are impermanent. Everything we experience through our senses and all external phenomenon is not going to remain permanent. It has a beginning and an end. For example, a flower will blossom and fall. A person is born and will die. A feeling of joy will arise and end. We are not able to enjoy it forever.

Second, all emotions are pain. All the emotions ultimately lead us to suffer. For example, the birth of a child is a bliss to a parent. When the same child grows up and gives painful experiences to their parents, bliss turns into anguish—blissful and rewarding development is more likely if we have done our parental nurturing well.

Third, all things have no inherent existence. All phenomena are empty without an inherent self-identity. For example a house. When a house is dismantled to its ingredients (cement, rubber, steel, iron, wood, stone, and so on), the concept of the house does not exist any longer. And further disintegration of these ingredients shatters the concept.

Fourth, nirvana is beyond concepts. It is the cessation of all the samsaric sufferings. It is a state where you are not bounded by the cause, effect, and result of karma. As a result, one ceases to be reborn and henceforth achieves the ultimate peace.

All practitioners must accept these four truths to be called Buddhists, and all methods must lead to the realization of the four truths through dedicated practice. Only with great compassion, the Lord Buddha showed 84,000 different paths to practice for different types of people in this world to realize these four truths. It is one of the world's best à la carte menu. Wonderful!

Out of many methods to realize the ultimate wisdom, here I am going to share three such methods that can bear swift results: Guru Yoga, Mantra Recitation, and Accumulation of Merits

### **Method of Guru Yoga Practice**

Nowadays the word “guru” is loosely used in management, health, fashion, sports, politics, and other fields with some slight resemblance to its Sanskrit meaning of a teacher or master who teaches and transmits knowledge.

In a Buddhist path, one must be guided by a guru. The words guru, lama, master, and teachers are synonyms in Buddhism. The Great Ridgzin Jigme Lingpa (1730-1798), one of the highly realized Tibetan masters of the oldest Nyingmapa tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, advised a great deal of research about a guru in order to trust him or her completely (Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse, 2012, pp. 85-86). In Vajrayana, the guru is the entire spiritual path: the guru is the Buddha, the guru is the Dharma, and the guru is the sangha (Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse, 2016). Because the guru introduces to a disciple to the inner guru which is the primordially pure nature of mind.

One such popular and effective method is the “Guru Yoga” practice. Remembering the sublime Buddha qualities of your guru all the time is the quintessence of this practice. No one has achieved liberation from samsara without relying on a guru (Drubwang Penor Rinpoche, 2017, p. 97; Padmakara Translation Group, 1998, p. 312).

In this practice, a practitioner follows a realized guru; develops pure perceptions of the guru as a living Buddha in human form; evokes a deep faith and devotion for the blessings; mixes ones mind with the mind of guru; and, finally realizes the absolute truth (Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse, 2012, pp. 177-190; Padmakara Translation Group, 1998, pp. 309-347). A practitioner must mix the minds with deep devotion all the time using body, speech, and mind. At times, it could be misleading using “mixing” because implicitly, it seems to suggest two different entities, however, in essence, the two minds have never been separated.

The calling to the guru is the most effective method of mindfulness practice. Mindfulness is becoming aware of all the thoughts in your mind. Besides keeping the awareness of the guru all the time, even thinking of one’s teacher for a single moment has unimaginable blessings as stated by the Great Patrul Rinpoche (Padmakara Translation Group, 1998, p. 310). Another preeminent practice is developing a pure perception of one’s guru. Remembering the guru constantly is like thinking of the Buddha, and bringing your guru to mind is same as remembering the true nature of your mind (Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse, 2012, p. 59).

There are many records of immediate realization through the Guru Yoga practice in Vajrayana Buddhism.

One such fascinating instant is the anecdotal Tilopa-Naropa case. The Great Naropa (1016-1100) was a highly learned master and scholar of one of the most famous Buddhist University of Vikramasila. The Great Yogic master Tilopa (988-1069) was a wandering tantric and mediation master. Master Tilopa was the teacher of Naropa. One day, Naropa realized the true nature of mind and his wisdom became identical with his teacher when his guruTilopa hit him on his head (Padmakara Translation Group, 1998, p. 312). This was the beginning of the precious Mahamudra, the Great Seal, meditation tradition of the Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism.

For a busy modern person, the Guru Yoga practice can be a handy, efficient, and effective method to realize the wisdom.

But we quickly become victims of our analytical habit of making judgments based on good or bad, right or wrong. Even after taking refuge in a guru, pledge to take your guru as your spiritual guide, we will continue to analyze the outward behavior, “How can my guru become angry? Why?” The pure perception of the guru falters and the core of the practice is challenged. One of the suggested antidotes is to think that it is our dualistic mind that is visualizing the guru in such a manner. One of the fundamental prerequisite mindsets in Guru Yoga is to stop any further analysis of one’s own guru. If you develop doubts about your guru, it will be difficult to receive the blessings

(Drubwang Penor Rinpoche, 2017, p. 98). Missing the possibility of realizing the ultimate blessing of the true nature of our mind.

A practitioner should conduct a thorough analysis before embarking on this path through reading, hearing, and contemplating the words of the Buddha. Therefore, the Ngondro practice, preliminary practice, is so important because it prepares students to be ready for the Guru Yoga path. In nutshell, devotion is all about trusting in the cause-condition-result phenomenon.

There are many different lineages of Guru Yoga practice. The Omniscient Longchen Rabjam (1308-1363), a highly realized master in Nyingmapa tradition, indicated that it is important to rely on a guru in order to direct the mind towards the practice of past masters and raise own level of realization. Another Great Nyingma master Jamgon Mipham Ripoche (1846-1912) even expounded a Guru Yoga practice based on the “The Seven-Line Prayer,” one of the most important invocation prayers to Guru Rinpoche (Padmakara Translation Group, 2016, pp. 93-96). Guru Rinpoche was a highly realized tantric master who brought Buddhism in Tibet in the 8<sup>th</sup> century and established the vibrant traditions of Vajrayana to the land of snow—the Second Buddhas of our time. Because of the blessings of Guru Rinpoche, Tibetan Buddhism has one of the most complete compilations and collections of the teachings of the Buddhas. Many practitioners with strong faith and devotion realized their true nature of mind by reciting this prayer as mentioned by Drubwang Penor Rinpoche (2017) mentioned in his book *An Ocean of Blessings*.

In the Guru Yoga practice, a practitioner will experience different levels of realization and signs of maturity—all to be guided by a realized master. One of the safest methods of measuring the result is when a practitioner will develop far purer perceptions of others than a beginner; become more humble; incite greater devotion to the guru; and, more quickly diminish pride and arrogance—the supreme sign is the loss of interest in material gain, fame, the respect of others, or being the center of attention (Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse, 2012, pp. 186-187).

From many perspectives, this method is quite straightforward and simple to apply. People need to develop complete faith and devotion to their gurus, arouse pure perceptions of their guru as a Buddha, and remembering their gurus all the time. No big investment required, no major effort required and can be practiced anywhere and anytime—all the incentives for busy people.

### **Method of Mantra Recitation**

The word mantra combines the notion of ease and swiftness (Dudjom Rinpoche, 2003, p. 9). It protects our minds from negative thoughts and helps not to accumulate negative karma of speech—slandering, lying, cheating, or toxic gossiping—already a good achievement.

When chanting a mantra, it energizes your breath that works directly on your mind and subtle body (Sogyal Rinpoche, 1994, p. 71). This is a form of vipassana meditation, a method to see the true nature of mind. Sitting straight in a cross-legged position in meditation is as much a ritual as reciting a mantra—both the methods aims to bring us closer to the truth—the truths about impermanence, sufferings, sunyata, and nirvana. The recitation of the mantra is a popular method used by many Tibetan laypeople and practitioners.

In the Nyingmapa tradition, The Seven-Line Prayer is one of the most powerful invocation prayers to Guru Rinpoche.

The innovation prayer to Guru Ripoche (Padmakara Translation Group, 2016, p. 29):

“Hung

In Orgyen’s land, upon its northwest rim,

On lotus, pistil-cup, and stem,

Wondrous, supreme mastery you found

And as the Lotus-Born you are renowned.

A ring of many dakinis encircles you,

And in your footsteps practicing we follow you.

To grant your blessings, come, we pray.

Guru Padma Siddhi Hung.”

This prayer is expounded on three levels, the literal meaning in the outer level, the inner meaning of Vajra words in the inner level, and practice in the path at the secret level (Padmakar Translation Group, 2016, p. 26). Expounding the three levels of meanings are beyond the scope of this article. Interested readers can read “*White Lotus: An Explanation of The Seven-Line Prayer to Guru Padmasambhava.*”

This method is again very practical and effective because of its simplicity: no elaborate ritualistic ceremonies required, no specific location needed, no specific time is necessary, no big investment is essential—simply requires a mala, some time to spare, a bit of diligence—a perfect method for busy professionals. The bonus is that it can be practiced watching Youtube, Facebook, Instagram.

### **Method of Accumulating Merits**

Through sufficient accumulation of merits to purify all the karmic obscurations, the Buddha-nature within us will manifest itself (Drubwang Penor Rinpoche, 2017, p. 87). The good news is that all of us have this Buddha-nature which is currently hidden by defilements and obscurations, not easily realizable.

There are many different ways to accumulate merit, even every ordinary event can be transformed into a source of merit, for example, when you see a beautiful flower at the market or in the hills, one can mentally offer them to the Three Jewels—the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha—so that the experience of ordinary flowers transforms into a meaningful source of accumulating merits (Drubwang Penor Rinpoche, 2017, p. 88).

Other examples, we can dedicate our compassion to distressed refugees by offering to all those similar fate to be able to find a safe place to live and raise their family in peace, love, and harmony. The ordinary act of spending time with the old and sick can be transformed into accumulating merit by offering it to all the similar people in this world, may they find loving and compassionate caretakers throughout their remaining years. At work, the managers delegating fairly and properly to improve staff development and their career prospect can dedicate the act to all the workers around the world to always find bosses who are fair, honest, caring, and compassionate.

At a deeper, subtle level of visualization, make an offering of your food the hundred deities in your body mandala (Drubwang Penor Rinpoche, 2017, p. 88). According to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, our body is a temple of hundred deities of peaceful and wrathful forms (Karma Lingpa, n.d.).

The offering of lamps is another way. It helps to purify the obscurations of ignorance, and according to Dzogchen or Great Perfection, the most ancient practice to realize the primordially pure nature of mind, it develops and increases inner wisdom (Drubwang Penor Rinpoche, 2017, p. 91).

Even adverse incidents such as sickness or failure can be utilized to collect merit. A person can pray to the Three Jewels that such sickness or failure may not occur to all the sentient beings—may they only have good health and success. The significance of using daily ordinary activities is to always remind about the Dharma (Drubwang Penor Rinpoche, 2017, p. 89). And make offerings with pure motivation—not out of miserliness or self-pride—and at the end dedicate the merit to all the sentient beings.

In the Guru Yoga practice, one of the biggest merits is offering to one’s own guru. With complete faith and devotion, offering a bouquet of flowers to the guru has the potential to accumulate merits great than the offering of food to a thousand Buddhas as said in many scriptures. Therefore, a practitioner should avail of any chance of making offerings to the master.

This method is easy to practice anywhere and anytime at marginal cost. Another positive aspect is that all ordinary events can be transformed into a source of merits.

Let me reiterate that besides these three methods, there are thousands of other methods—a few other examples such as the practice of pilgrimage, of deities visualization, of different forms of meditations, of aspiration prayers, of keeping vows—that a practitioner can choose from.

## Conclusions

There are many distractions that can create obstacles from practicing Buddhism in our daily lives—no ways to avoid them but you can overcome them: Distraction is one of the main challenges a person faces. In this modern technology era, there are wide varieties of Apps. A practitioner has to overcome these distractions and allocate time for Buddhist practice.

There are 84,000 different methods taught by the Buddha to choose from in order to realize the ultimate nature of our existence. In this article, there are three effective and easy methods: Guru Yoga, Mantra Recitation, and Accumulation of Merits. These methods are easy to implement in our busy schedules without requiring lots of investment and can be practised anywhere and anytime. The flexibility offered through these methods is exactly what people today require. Finally, may your obstacles and obscurations be removed through the blessings of the Lord Buddha, and may you realize the ultimate empty nature of the mind in this lifetime!

## Upcoming book

This article is part of the book that I am currently completing for publication in 2021. The book's topics include blessings. The book will tell you much more about the Buddhism and the four truths, Dzogchen and Guru Rinpoche, meditation and Guru Yoga, and treasure teachings and death in Vajrayana.

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