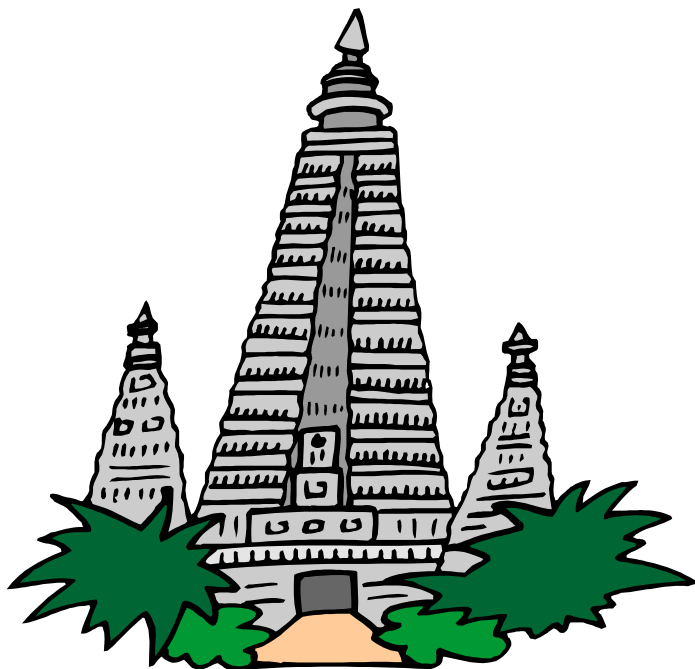


Advice on Pilgrimage



From

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Why Bodhgaya Is So Important

Bodhgaya is not only the place where the Buddha showed the holy deed of achieving enlightenment under the bodhi tree but also where all the great pandits such as Nagarjuna and Asanga practiced and made so many prayers. Also many great enlightened beings and yogis from Tibet, China, Nepal and other countries came here and made many prayers to benefit us sentient beings so there would be unbelievable, unbelievable benefit for us to purify negative karma and accumulate merit as quickly as possible.

That is why it is so important to come to Bodhgaya to practice; to circumambulate and make prayers under the tree. Even if you don't know much Dharma, try to circumambulate as much as possible. It makes your life very special, there is unbelievable purification and it collects so much merit to quickly be free from the oceans of samsaric suffering and achieve enlightenment.

This stupa is so precious that if you don't get to circumambulate it for even one day it's worse than losing skies filled with wish-granting jewels or billions of dollars.

Advice given by Lama Zopa Rinpoche in February 2014 while staying at Root Institute, Bodhgaya, India.

Practicing in Bodhgaya

I think you are very fortunate to be able to make time to come to Bodhgaya, where one thousand buddhas will descend, place their holy feet, display holy deeds and achieve enlightenment. Guru Shakyamuni Buddha is the fourth of the thousand buddhas. The rest of the buddhas will also descend here and show the twelve deeds, including the holy deed of achieving enlightenment.

This place is called the Vajra Seat and the ground here is blessed. Before becoming enlightened, the Buddha blessed the ground so it would not be destroyed or cracked, but would remain firm. It is said that there will be no earthquakes in Bodhgaya, where Buddha showed the holy deed of enlightenment, and also, this will be the last place to exist when the world ends.

On top of that, you are receiving blessings from this holy place where the four buddhas have already descended and where so many other enlightened beings, yogis and great bodhisattvas came for pilgrimage, to make many prayers and to bless this place. They came here throughout all those past years, for hundreds and thousands of years.

Therefore, it is very good while you're here to do as many circumambulations and prayers as you can inside the temple in front of the Buddha and especially under the bodhi tree. Even though it is said that the bodhi tree was cut down three times it has the same roots as at the time of the Buddha, when he showed the holy deed and achieved enlightenment.

The great bodhisattva and pandit, Khunu Lama Tenzin Gyaltzen from Kinnaur, India—who gave extensive commentary on the *Bodhicaryavatara* to His Holiness Dalai Lama, but already passed away and reincarnated quite a few years ago—said that when he was circumambulating the stupa one day, something was seeping out of the tree. It was not the rainy season, it was dry, but something was leaking from the tree. He took one drop and put it on his tongue and it was sweet. Of course, he was a great pandit, a yogi, and in reality, it was nectar dripping from the tree while he was circumambulating. It was actually nectar and when he tasted one drop, it was very sweet.

Generally, people know there's a Tara statue outside the stupa that spoke to Lama Atisha, but actually Khunu Lama Tenzin Gyaltzen said all the statues outside the stupa are the same; they all spoke to Lama Atisha when he was here circumambulating the stupa.

In the story you know that inside the stupa the paintings spoke to Lama Atisha. One of them asked the question, "What's the quickest and best way to achieve

enlightenment?” One female aspect answered, “The best and quickest way to achieve enlightenment is bodhicitta.” Khunu Lama Tenzin Gyaltzen said all the outside statues spoke to Lama Atisha, not only the Tara statue.

Of course, holy objects such as statues can speak to those who have pure karma and a pure mind, like Lama Atisha. As mentioned in the lamrim teachings by Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo and also in other teachings, the bodhisattva who has achieved the preparatory path, the path of merit, which has three levels—small, middle and great—those bodhisattvas who have achieved the great path of merit see buddhas in the nirmanakaya aspect. They see the statues in nirmanakaya aspect, so the statues speak to them.

The higher bodhisattvas who have actualized wisdom directly perceiving emptiness, who have achieved the right-seeing path, those arya bodhisattvas see the statues in sambhogakaya aspect. Of course, when they become enlightened, they see other buddhas as being oneness. When they become enlightened, they become oneness with all the buddhas, like water coming from the rivers, from many different sources, from different snow mountains, which goes into the ocean and becomes one. Even a drop that goes in the ocean becomes one. All the rivers, the different waters coming from different parts of the world, go into the ocean and become one, like that.

It is very good to use holy places as much as possible to purify your mind of the negative karmas and defilements, and to collect extensive merit, to plant the seeds of the whole path to enlightenment as much as possible.

Khunu Lama Tenzin Gyaltzen Rinpoche, the great bodhisattva, usually advised people to recite the extensive dedication prayer, the bodhisattva prayer called the *King of Prayers*, under the bodhi tree. He gave more emphasis to practicing under the bodhi tree than inside.

It’s also very good to recite any of the lamrim prayers, either based on *Guru Puja* or *Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga*. As you recite the lamrim prayer, do meditation and make very strong prayers and requests to the Buddha to receive realizations of each stage of the path.

You should especially meditate on bodhicitta under the bodhi tree, either the seven techniques of Mahayana cause and effect or equalizing and exchanging oneself and others. Meditate on bodhicitta in either way or combine these techniques. To meditate on bodhicitta under the bodhi tree would be your best offering to the Buddha.

Also reciting the *Heart Sutra* and then doing a little bit of meditation on emptiness is very powerful.

To practice in the following way is also good. After you sit down, remember the kindness and qualities of Buddha, whatever you know and can remember. Buddha sacrificed his life, he made charity of his life for three countless great eons. He practiced morality, patience, perseverance, concentration, wisdom and so forth for three countless great eons, then he completed two types of merit—the merit of wisdom and virtue—and then he achieved full enlightenment and revealed Dharma to us sentient beings. All of this was done for sentient beings, for our benefit.

Think, “Buddha sacrificed his life and made charity of his limbs to other sentient beings for my benefit. That is unbelievably kind. He did this for one year, for one eon, for three countless great eons. He practiced morality, patience, perseverance and so forth for three countless great eons for me. He sacrificed his life and completed the two types of merit for me. He achieved enlightenment for me and revealed all these teachings for me. How kind Buddha is, like limitless skies. Buddha is that much kinder than all the rest of the buddhas. How kind he is to me, like limitless space, like the sky, kinder than all the buddhas.” Think like that a few times—ten, fifteen, twenty-one times—how Buddha is kind to you; think over and over like this, meditating on the kindness of Buddha.

Then recite: “LA MA TÖN PA CHOM DÄN DÄ DE ZHIN SHEG PA DRA CHOM PA YANG DAG PAR DZOG PÄI SANG GYÄ PÄL GYÄL WA SHA KYA THUB PA LA CHHAG TSHÄL LO / CHHÖ DO KYAB SU CHHI O / JIN GYI LAB TU SÖL”

“To the founder, the endowed transcendent destroyer, the one gone beyond, the foe destroyer, the completely perfected, fully awakened being, perfect in knowledge and in good conduct, sugata, knower of the world, supreme guide of human beings to be tamed, teacher of gods and human beings; to you, the completely and fully awakened one, the endowed transcendent destroyer, the glorious conqueror, the subduer from the Shakya clan, I prostrate, make offerings and go for refuge.”

Recite the Buddha’s name, which expresses all the Buddha’s qualities, maybe twenty-one times. Then visualize nectar emitting from Buddha and entering into your body and mind, purifying you and all sentient beings.

After reciting the Buddha’s name, if you have any prayers praising Buddha—like the praise to Buddha written by Lama Tsongkhapa called *Dependent Arising: A Praise of the Buddha*, having found the realization that all phenomena are unified with emptiness and dependent arising—it’s good to recite that praise to the Buddha if you have it.

After that, Buddha melts into light and absorbs into you, and you become empty, as it is, empty. Then your wisdom seeing emptiness arises in the aspect of Buddha. Visualize the mantra at your heart, emitting beams. As soon as the beams touch the hell beings, instantly their negative karma and defilements are purified and they all become Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. Similarly, beams are emitted to numberless hungry ghosts and, as soon as the beams touch them, all their defilements and negative karma are completely purified and they all become Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. Similarly, think that the numberless animals, human beings, suras, asuras and intermediate state beings all become Shakyamuni Buddha when touched by the beams. Then rejoice, “How wonderful that I have enlightened all the sentient beings into the essence of Buddha.”

After that you can do the dedication to actualize bodhicitta and by sealing it with emptiness, dedicate to achieving enlightenment for sentient beings.

You may not have this prayer, but there is a prayer that contains the stories of Buddha’s past lives, when he was a bodhisattva. Buddha became a king, and gave charity to others; he gave charity to a tiger family by sacrificing his life for them. If somebody harmed him, Buddha cherished that one most and in return gave only benefit. There are different prayers about Buddha in his bodhisattva times, and how he gave incredible benefit to other sentient beings. In the Tibetan text about *chöd* practice—*chöd* is slaying the ego, cutting the ego—at the end of that there’s a prayer which contains the bodhisattvas’ life stories, *Jataka Tales*. So that’s very, very good, very inspiring to pray to become like this, praying, “May I be able to practice like you, who did this.” It is very good to pray like this to the Buddha from the heart. Then you do the dedication.

Finally, dedicate the merits. “Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me and the three time merits collected by others, may the bodhicitta which is the cause and source of all happiness for myself and for all sentient beings be generated within my mind, in the minds of my family members and in the minds of all sentient beings, without delay of even a second, and may that which is generated be increased.”

Make very, very strong prayers. Especially these days, the world is suffering even more than usual with so much killing and so many wars between countries. There is so much torture and unbelievable suffering happening in the world due to the turmoil of the negative emotional minds of anger, desire and the self-cherishing thought. So it’s very important to make strong prayers to actualize bodhicitta within oneself and in the mind of all sentient beings; to make strong prayers and dedicate the merits for that.

If we dedicate the merits to achieving enlightenment for sentient beings, it's like putting a drop of water in the ocean. We can enjoy the drop all the time and it never finishes because it's mixed with the ocean. Until the ocean finishes we can always enjoy it. If we dedicate the merits to achieve enlightenment for sentient beings it becomes inexhaustible, just as a drop of water put in the ocean becomes inexhaustible.

When we dedicate the merits, dedicate not only what we collect now, but also all our past, present and future merits, and the three times merits collected by numberless sentient beings. Put it all together. Particularly, there are numberless bodhisattvas who collect limitless skies of merit in every second because their motivation is bodhicitta, in order to benefit all sentient beings without discrimination. Whatever action they do, every second they collect limitless skies of merit; even each in- and out-breath is for the benefit of all sentient beings, so they collect limitless skies of merit each time.

Dedicate like this, "All my three times merits and all the three times merits collected by sentient beings, particularly all the bodhisattvas' and buddhas' merit, the appearance of which is a hallucination..." The merit appearing to us is empty, all these merits appearing as truly existing from their own side are totally non-existent, empty in reality. Then, "Due to that, may I..." When we think "I," how does the I appear to us? It doesn't appear as merely labeled by mind, it appears as not merely labeled by mind, which is the very subtle refuting object of the Prasangika Madhyamika school. This is totally a hallucination; it is totally empty. "May I achieve Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's enlightenment..." Think of enlightenment. How does enlightenment appear to us? Similarly, we think it's not merely labeled by mind, we think enlightenment exists from its own side, but it is a hallucination, it's empty. Then, "all sentient beings," when we think of all sentient beings, how do they appear? Again, even though they are merely labeled by mind, they appear to us as not merely labeled by mind, so again that is a hallucination, empty. "Lead them to that enlightenment, which is empty," Guru Shakyamuni's enlightenment is empty, and "...by myself alone," again it seems like a real one coming from there, but it is a hallucination, it's empty. So while we are dedicating we meditate on the emptiness of each one, each phenomenon, and in this way it becomes perfect, pure, stainless dedication.

There are two things to explain about the dedication. When dedicating merit we collect, whether small or great, to achieve enlightenment for sentient beings, by putting together our and others' merits, it becomes inexhaustible both ways. If a virtuous action is not done with bodhicitta nor dedicated to achieving enlightenment, it can be destroyed completely when anger arises. But merit

dedicated to achieving enlightenment can't be completely destroyed when anger arises; the merit is only made weaker, it becomes less. It's like a huge mountain—if we take many trucks of stones from the mountain, it becomes less, but still the big mountain is there. Similarly, merit dedicated to achieving enlightenment for sentient beings becomes less [if anger arises] but cannot be completely destroyed. This is mentioned in a sutra and also by Pabongka quoting the sutra. So there's a great advantage and even if anger arises, it can make the merit less but cannot destroy it completely. This is the method to protect the merit from becoming less, from being destroyed (here “destroyed” means less, making weaker.) At other times it can be completely destroyed if it is not dedicated to achieving enlightenment and is not done with bodhicitta motivation.

Now here, the protection, the best method for protecting the merits is to dedicate the merits by sealing with emptiness. The way to do that is either by looking at everything as empty or by meditating on dependent arising as we go through each phenomenon as merely labeled. Think, “Due to the three times merits which are merely labeled by mind, may I, who is merely labeled by mind, achieve Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's enlightenment, which is merely labeled by mind, to lead all sentient beings, who are merely labeled by mind, to that enlightenment, which is merely labeled by mind, by myself alone, who is also merely labeled by mind.”

If you dedicate the merits by meditating on subtle dependent arising you reach the same conclusion. Either use that method or meditate on emptiness by looking at everything as a hallucination, as your hallucinated view, as I mentioned before. What appears to you as existing from its own side is a hallucination; you look at the hallucination as a hallucination and that brings the conclusion that it's empty.

As I mentioned before, you can dedicate the merit either way, by meditating on their nature as subtle dependent arising or by looking at the hallucination as a hallucination. When you look at it like that, the effect in your heart is “empty,” in your heart that is empty. So, if you dedicate the merit by meditating on emptiness, the merit is protected, and then if anger or heresy arises it cannot destroy that merit.

If you dedicate the merit to the spread of Buddhadharma, for Buddhadharma to exist for a long time and spread, that includes everything; however, dedicate for the Buddha of Compassion, His Holiness Dalai Lama, the one object of refuge for all us sentient beings, and for the other virtuous friends to have a stable life and for all their holy wishes to succeed immediately. You can dedicate like this, “May

His Holiness Dalai Lama, the Buddha of Compassion, and other holy beings have long lives and may the Buddhadharma and especially Lama Tsongkhapa's teachings exist for a long time and be spread." It is very important to pray for their long lives.

Then dedicate the merit according to the condensed verse of the extensive bodhisattva's prayer, the *King of Prayers*: "I dedicate all the merit to be able to follow the holy extensive deeds of the bodhisattvas Samantabhadra and Manjugosha." And then, "I dedicate all the merit in the same way as the three times buddhas and bodhisattvas dedicated the merit; as they admired that the most."

After that, dedicate for Lama Tsongkhapa's teaching to be completed within your own mind and in the world. You can also dedicate that your family members meet and completely actualize the teachings. Dedicate particularly for Lama Tsongkhapa's teachings to spread in the world, to exist for a long time and to spread. Dedicate the merit like that.

Extracted from teachings by Lama Zopa Rinpoche during a meeting with a Russian group, Root Institute, Bodhgaya, India, 26 January 2002. Edited by Trisha Donnelly. Second edit by Sandra Smith.

Advice on Practice at the Stupa

This advice was given by Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche while he was circumambulating and reciting texts at the same time.

I have been reciting *Dependent Arising: A Praise of the Buddha* (Tib: *ten drel tö pa*), a praise to the Buddha having found realizations. The Buddha realized that the essence of all phenomena is empty—not non-existent, nihilism, but emptiness only. While there is emptiness only, *tong pa nyi*, there is also existence; things exist in mere name, merely labeled by mind, therefore those two are unified. In Madhyamaka, those two are unified. Phenomena are devoid of eternalism, true existence, and of nihilism, non-existence. Buddha realized this and revealed the path to sentient beings so we could realize this. Buddha liberates sentient beings by teaching that the cause of suffering is ignorance. He shows us how to realize this, how to counter this false mind and how to eliminate ignorance by realizing emptiness. By showing dependent arising the Buddha liberates us from the ocean of samsaric sufferings and leads us to enlightenment. We are liberated from the gross disturbing-thought obscurations, *nyon drib*, and our mind becomes separated from the subtle obscurations, *she drib*, by directly perceiving emptiness. Of course, to be free from ignorance we also have to realize bodhicitta, the path of method.

This prayer that I have just read, *Dependent Arising: A Praise of the Buddha* by Lama Tsongkhapa, is regarded as the best praise to Buddha.

Today I hope you have brought the paper from Root Institute or you know by heart Buddha Shakyamuni's name and mantra, which has six benefits.

**CHOM DÄN DÄ / DE ZHIN SHEG PA / DRA CHOM PA / YANG DAG
PAR / DZOG PÄI SANG GYÄ / PÄL GYÄL WA SHA KYA THUB PA LA
/ CHHAG TSHÄL LO**

**OM NAMO DA SHA / DHIKA / TRI KALA SARWA / RATNA
TRAYAYA/ NAMA PRA DAK SHA / SU PRA / DAK SHA / SARWA /
PA PAM / BI SHO DHA NI / SVAHA**

Benefits of reciting this name and mantra just one time:

- (1 and 2) You get the benefit of having prostrated and circumambulated to all the buddhas, Dharma and Sangha of the ten directions and the three times.
- (3) All the negative karma collected from beginningless rebirth is purified.
- (4) You will quickly achieve full enlightenment.
- (5) You won't be harmed by enemies and interferers.
- (6) You will be liberated from disease and spirit harms.

Then recite the mantra which multiplies the merit:

**CHOM DÄN DÄ / DE ZHIN SHEG PA / DRA CHOM PA / YANG DAG
PAR / DZOG PÄI SANG GYÄ / RIN CHHEN GYÄL TSHÄN LA CHHAG
TSHÄL LO
NAMO BHAGAWATE / RATNA KETU RAZAYA / TATHAGATAYA /
ARHATE / SAMYAK SAMBUDDHAYA / TADYATHA / OM RATNE
RATNE / MAHA RATNE / RATNA BIZAYE SVAHA**

This mantra multiplies or increases the merit of each prostration or circumbulation one million or maybe ten million times. It is good if everybody recites this together. That is very good.

When you go around the stupa where the bodhi tree is, you can recite the prayer found at the end of *chöd* practice, “DAG GI TÖN PA SAN GYÄ CHOM DÄN DÄ,” *The Thought Transformation Prayer of the Buddha’s Previous Lives*. At the end of the *chöd* practice, *Slaying the Ego*, there is a prayer about the Buddha’s life stories. The *chöd* practice, dedicating the illusory body to collect merit, has this prayer at the end. This prayer is about the Buddha’s previous lives, how the Buddha lived and practiced. So I am also going to recite that now; it is a very good one to recite. If you have the English prayer you can recite it in English and those who read Tibetan can do it in Tibetan.

Also read the *Three Principal Aspects of the Path* and make prayers to the Buddha to actualize the three principal aspects of the path, which are the heart of Buddhism.

If you can do more than that, there is also the Guhyasamaja direct prayer, the direct path to enlightenment—Guhyasamaja, Yamantaka or Chakrasamvara. You can also recite the Hayagriva direct prayer and in this way you leave imprints of the whole path to enlightenment. In order to achieve enlightenment quickly you have to make [imprints] on your mind, it has to come from your mind. In order to reach enlightenment quickly, to make preparation, it is very good to recite the prayer which comes at the end of the sadhana, to leave imprints on your mind as much as possible.

Other texts you can recite are the *Vajra Cutter Sutra* or the *Golden Light Sutra*. You can also recite those important teachings, *Bodhicaryavatara*, or other teachings and commentaries of the Buddha, or Nagarjuna’s teachings.

Advice given by Lama Zopa Rinpoche on January 25, 2012, at the Mahabodhi Stupa, Bodhgaya. Six benefits of the mantra taken from a teaching on January 20, 2012 by Lama Zopa Rinpoche at the entrance of Mahabodhi Stupa, Bodhgaya. Second edit by Sandra Smith, January 2020.

Practices for Pilgrimage

It is good to do different practices on pilgrimage, to make our lives very meaningful and productive. Normally when people go on pilgrimage, they are just like tourists; maybe they take some pictures and that's it. They don't use the places to collect merit or to meditate and get some benefit for their minds. If it's just like sightseeing, then it won't be that much benefit.

[When we went on pilgrimage to Tibet in 1987] whenever we entered a temple we would immediately do prostrations to the Thirty-five Buddhas. Then we made money offerings and bought butter lamps to make light offerings. The whole point was to use the pilgrimage to purify our minds and collect as much extensive merit as possible. I felt quite satisfied with that pilgrimage because we didn't just go and look at one temple after another like tourists, but really took as much time as possible to collect merit from every single holy object and make our time as meaningful as possible.

How do we make pilgrimage as meaningful, useful and beneficial as possible? The main point of pilgrimage is to subdue our minds. By eliminating mistaken thoughts and not allowing our minds to be under the control of delusions, our minds are better able to actualize the lamrim realizations from guru devotion up to enlightenment.

Why do we need to subdue our minds? The creator of samsara and nirvana, of enlightenment and of hell, is our own mind; everything depends on our own mind. When in a state of peace, the mind is protected from delusion. Usually we subdue the mind by studying Dharma, doing meditation practice, and working for others, in order to collect merit and to purify defilements.

One lama made the comment that when the great, holy beings—buddhas, bodhisattvas and yogis—go on pilgrimage, they bless the place. And when ordinary people go there, they receive blessings from that place. So pilgrimage means to receive blessings from the holy places to inspire our minds to transform into the path.

Actually, on pilgrimage it's very good to have difficulties because they purify the mind. We have to understand that difficulties purify the negativities; it's like when we do Vajrasattva retreat and become sick.

Think, "I am going to this place to purify my mind—to purify all the negative karmas and defilements—and to collect extensive merit, in order to have the realization of lamrim." With such a motivation, when we experience problems or difficulties, these become worthwhile. Yet if hardships are experienced with the

thought of the eight worldly dharmas—with attachment clinging to this life—then there is no special benefit; they only become torture.

We can never practice Dharma if we cannot bear hardships. The great lamas of the past bore so much hardship to practice Dharma; they renounced their lives completely, lived in caves and so forth, like Milarepa. All the lineage lamas achieved enlightenment; they achieved realization by bearing hardship to practice Dharma. So therefore, from the beginning, our motivation for pilgrimage has to be Dharma. This makes all the hardships and troubles we bear so meaningful, so worthwhile, and such unbelievable purification. Especially if we think that we are doing pilgrimage to purify our mind, to collect merit, to actualize the path in order to benefit sentient beings—that we are making ourselves perfect to be able to benefit sentient beings.

By doing pilgrimage, we receive blessing from the holy places where enlightened beings, great yogis and bodhisattvas, have practiced. With the blessing entering our hearts, our mental continuum is able to soften, to become subdued, and we are able to decrease the delusions. We are then able to develop bodhicitta, strong compassion, towards other sentient beings, and our guru devotion, renunciation, right view, our meditation on emptiness, all become stronger. That means that our mental continuum becomes Dharma. This is the result of pilgrimage.

How much we receive blessing from the place depends on our devotion, which depends on how deeply we understand the qualities of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Great devotion comes from hearing the stories of great yogis and bodhisattvas, which inspire us to pray to become like them. Devotion is very important in pilgrimage, otherwise we are no different from a tourist—taking pictures of that place, that rock, that cave, with no change to the mind, the heart.

It's important we use our body, speech and mind to make the pilgrimage with devotion to Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, and to the place. Having devotion is a good way of collecting merit with the mind. The more Dharma we understand, the easier it is to generate devotion. Life is so rich and so worthwhile for those with a lot of devotion. Having devotion naturally enables us to collect so much merit and to purify so much. With strong devotion, bad thoughts become pacified, just as when cold water is poured on boiling water it becomes peaceful. With devotion, there is no space for delusion to arise, which makes the blessing received from Buddha, Dharma and Sangha stronger, and for realization to come easily. To generate virtue with your mind, I suggest you let your mind focus each day on a different practice: one day guru devotion, one day renunciation, one day bodhicitta, like that. You can also do the tantric practice of pure appearance;

seeing oneself as the deity, visualizing the mandala, etc. Whatever you can do to train the mind, do that. Wherever your realization is, start from there.

With a correct motivation in the morning, when our body travels all day long, this activity becomes virtue. If done with bodhicitta, we collect limitless skies of merit with every step we take, every minute of travel. So it's very important to set up a correct motivation for pilgrimage in the morning, so that the action of the body becomes virtue.

Prostrations are also a way to collect merit with the body. Alak Rinpoche [Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche's attendant] did prostrations from his home in Amdo up to Lhasa. It took him three years. My driver told me that many people prostrate from Kham to Mt. Kailash, and that drivers on the way will stop and give those people money and warm clothes.

To generate virtue with speech, if possible, chant mantras during the pilgrimage, no matter the duration. Don't spend so much time gossiping, but chant mantras. The Mitukpa or Vajrasattva mantras are very powerful for purification. So, count Vajrasattva while you are traveling. During a pilgrimage you can finish 100,000 mantras or at least a few thousand. By reciting mantras, you continuously collect merit with your speech.

The main point about doing pilgrimage is not to waste time. Put as much effort as possible into collecting merit with your body, speech and mind.

The Benefits of Circumambulating Stupas

There are extensive teachings on the benefits of circumambulations, taught by Buddha to his disciple Sharipu. Before circumambulating, read it out to everyone, then other groups can hear it too.

Stupas are the main holy objects in relation to which sentient beings accumulate merit. The sutra teaching *Circumambulating the Stupa* says, "By circumambulating stupas, one avoids being born in the naraks, as a preta, an animal, a barbarian, a long-life god, a heretic, a fool, or in a place where Buddha has not descended. One receives a deva or human body, and one has a long life. One is not harmed by pretas, cannibals or other creatures. For hundreds of eons, one is not born blind or crippled with arthritis. By circumambulating stupas, one receives perfect power and perseverance; because there is no laziness, one is able to develop the mind quickly. One receives the six clairvoyances. One also becomes an arhat, having abandoned all delusion and possessing great psychic power. Finally, one achieves the golden holy body of Buddha, adorned with the holy signs."

Many other benefits are mentioned in *The Sutra of the Compassionate-eyed One* and *Advice to King Sengyal*, which says, “If a person circumambulates a stupa or statue of Buddha with devotion, in his future lives his enemies will respect and surrender to him. He will become a person of quality, respected by and pleasing to other people. The temporal and ultimate benefits are infinite. Circumambulating is the supreme method to purify obscurations and close the door to the lower realms.” This text also adds, “Any being who does one circumambulation of or one prostration to a stupa is liberated completely from the karma to be born in any of the levels of hell. One becomes a non-returner and achieves highest enlightenment.”

I’m sure you have often heard the story of Jinpa Pelgye, who became a monk because of circumambulating as a fly. Jinpa Pelgye was more than eighty years old when he decided he wanted to become a monk. His family had annoyed him by making fun of him, so he decided to join a monastery. He went to a monastery but was not accepted by the abbot, the arhat Shariputra, who said to him, “There are many things to memorize, and you are too old to do this. Besides, you don't have the karma to become a monk.”

Jinpa Pelgye was very upset. Returning from the monastery, he went into a park and cried and cried. Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, whose holy mind is constantly observing sentient beings, immediately used his psychic power to appear there in the park. Buddha asked the old man, “What's wrong with you? What's happened to you?” Jinpa Pelgye explained everything, and Buddha then said, “Unlike Shariputra, I have completed the merits of both method and wisdom. I can see that you do have the karma to become a monk.”

Jinpa Pelgye was given into the care of Maudgalyayana, one of Shakyamuni Buddha’s disciples, who had highly developed psychic powers. But again, the young monks in the monastery made fun of the old man. Jinpa Pelgye got completely fed up. One day, without telling his teacher, he left the monastery to go to jump into the river. After praying, “Since I can't live in a monastery in this life, may I be able to live in a monastery from a very young age in my next life,” the old man jumped into the river.

With his psychic powers, Maudgalyayana checked where the old man had gone. Seeing that Jinpa Pelgye had jumped into the river, Maudgalyayana immediately appeared on the river bank and grabbed him out of the water. The old man was so shocked and embarrassed that for a while he couldn’t even speak. Then he explained everything to his teacher, who said his behavior was due to not having generated renunciation of samsara.

Maudgalyayana then asked Jinpa Pelgye to hold onto a corner of his robe. Together they flew up into space and over an ocean in which there was a huge mountain of bones. They landed on the mountain and the old man asked, "What is this?" Maudgalyayana replied, "These are the bones of one of the largest animals living in this ocean; this is one of your previous incarnations." Suddenly Jinpa Pelgye's hair stood on end, and he generated renunciation of samsara. Even though he only began his Dharma practice after he was eighty years of age, in that life he became an arhat.

Buddha explained that Jinpa Pelgye had the karma to actualize the path through becoming a monk and an arhat because long ago in one of his previous lives he had been a fly that followed the smell of dung around a stupa. By following the odor of the dung, the fly circumambulated a holy object. In other words, even when there is no virtuous motivation, any circumambulation of a holy object becomes a virtuous action because of the power of the holy object. It is useful to remember that a stupa has this power.

Wind that has touched a stupa purifies sentient beings

A stupa filled with the four powerful mantras called the relics of dharmakaya is very powerful. The wind that touches such a stupa and then touches animals or human beings purifies their negative karma to be born in the lower realms. If the dust from a stupa touches sentient beings, it purifies them. Circumambulating holy objects purifies broken pratimoksha vows, the five uninterrupted negative karmas, and all the karmas to be born in the naraks.

Circumambulating with devotion

Circumambulating is a very powerful practice. The very root of the practice is to circumambulate with strong devotion and with an undistracted mind. Since we need to accumulate extensive merit in order to generate realizations and achieve enlightenment quickly, we should attempt to circumambulate as perfectly as possible.

In India there were great siddhas who achieved realizations by circumambulating temples. Lama Atisha and the Kadampa geshe did many circumambulations of stupas.

Once when Lama Atisha was circumambulating, Dromtönpa asked him, "Why don't you relax? Why not practice virtue while sitting? Why are you doing this ordinary practice of circumambulating?" Lama Atisha replied, "You don't understand. A circumambulation contains all three actions of body, speech and mind. If you just sit and meditate, you have only the one action of the mind

meditating, with no virtuous actions of body or speech. In terms of creating virtue, there is no greater merit than that from circumambulating.”

Circumambulating with body, speech and mind

Circumambulations should be done with body, speech and mind. If your mind is distracted and you are gossiping while you are circumambulating, there is no great benefit.

Mental circumambulation involves generating devotion by thinking again and again of the qualities of the object you are circumambulating, of the qualities of the Guru-Buddha. Speech circumambulation involves reciting mantras and praises over and over again. Of the three types of circumambulation, the most important is the mental circumambulation, having devotion in the mind. It is the same with prostrations.

The Benefits of Making Prostrations

By doing prostrations, you receive the qualities of the holy body, holy speech and holy mind of Buddha, and you purify obscurations. You should have a Western business approach to any Dharma practice; trying to get the most profit in the shortest time.

Simply putting your hands together at the heart is a prostration. As explained in the sutras, making this simple prostration to a holy object has eight benefits:

1. In future lives you will receive a good body with perfect shape, organs and senses.
2. You will receive perfect conditions so that your practice and wishes are fulfilled, and you can work for the teachings and sentient beings.
3. You will be able to live in morality. (Without morality there is no happiness in future lives, liberation or enlightenment.)
4. You will have devotion. (Without devotion there are no realizations.)
5. You will have a brave mind. (Without a brave mind you cannot continue to practice Dharma or do extensive bodhisattva works for the teachings and sentient beings.)
6. You will be born as a deva or human being.
7. You will achieve the aryan path.
8. You will achieve enlightenment.

When we go inside temples, it is important to remember that a simple prostration to even one Buddha statue has these eight benefits. In one temple there may be hundreds of statues and paintings of Buddha, so prostrating like this to all of them as we look at them is unbelievably beneficial. In addition to the merit we create from circumambulating as we walk around temples or

stupas, it is good to use our hands to accumulate merit. Since there is so much merit from prostrating to one holy object, this is such an easy way to accumulate extensive merit.

All holy objects are the Buddha

It is said that holy objects are transformations of Buddha. Even though we don't have the karma to see the actual living Buddha, by manifesting statues, stupas, scriptures and all the other holy objects, Buddha allows us to accumulate merit. Some sentient beings can see these transformations of the Buddha, some cannot. In Tibet there have been people who have not been able to see the Guru Shakyamuni Buddha statue in the Jokhang temple. To them, the temple was completely dark; they couldn't see anything. One person with this problem, after doing much purification, could see the light of the butter lamps, but still could not see the statue. Another person saw big piles of dried meat on the thrones instead of the statues. It does not necessarily follow that everybody can see the statues just because the statues are there. It has to do with the level of the mind.

The teachings say that animals cannot see holy objects. At Kopan, I lift the dogs up to try to get them to look at the thangkas, but I feel they don't see the same thing we see. It may be very rare for an animal to be able to see a statue; the texts say they don't see them at all. That we have the karma to see holy objects is unbelievable and gives us an incredible opportunity to accumulate merit. Use all the holy objects you can see—all the pictures of deities in your room—to accumulate merit. They exist for that reason.

The power of offering to holy objects

Having the karma to see holy objects such as statues and stupas is extremely fortunate because those who have the karma to see these transformations can accumulate much merit. Think of all the stupas, temples and statues in Bodhgaya. Hundreds and hundreds of Indians come to Bodhgaya from all over the country to offer a few coins to Buddha. Even though their offering is small, because of the power of the holy object of Buddha, all these actions of offering become the cause of enlightenment. This is one of Buddha's many skillful ways of guiding suffering sentient beings according to their karma.

Another ten benefits of prostrations are mentioned:

1. You will achieve a perfect golden body like Guru Shakyamuni Buddha.
2. You will be extremely beautiful.
3. You will have an enchanting voice.
4. Without fear or shyness, you will be at ease amongst holy beings and other people.

5. You will make devas and humans happy.
6. You will become magnificent.
7. You will be able to be with Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and his disciples, the bodhisattvas and arhats.
8. You will have great wealth.
9. You will be born in higher realms.
10. You will quickly achieve enlightenment.

When doing a full-length prostration, which is according the tradition of the great pandit-yogi, Naropa, you should not lie on the floor for very long. In some traditions, the palms of the hands are held upwards in the prostration. The main point of the prostration is not so much the form but that it should be done in a respectful manner. Then it becomes good karma. Doing prostrations disrespectfully is negative karma. There will be no confusion about different styles of prostration if you understand that the main point is to do the prostration respectfully. The way the prostration is done is more important than the number of prostrations. It is the same with mandala offerings; it is better to offer mandalas well than to offer them quickly. If you do just one prostration properly, unbelievable merit is accumulated.

How to accumulate the most merit

To accumulate the most merit with prostrations, there are two important points to remember.

1. Visualize as many bodies prostrating as possible, either in human form or in the form of a deity. As you lie down, think that the whole earth in all directions is covered with your body doing prostrations to the stupa or altar. The lamrim teachings say that even if you cannot prostrate physically because there is something wrong with your limbs or you don't even have limbs, if you visualize your body doing prostrations, you receive the same merit. By visualizing as many bodies as you can, you gain unbelievable merit, creating the cause to be born many times as a wheel-turning king.

The *Lankara Sutra* and other sutras mention that the number of atoms our body covers from the surface down through the earth to the other side, is equal to the number of rebirths we will take as a wheel-turning king. In his lamrim teachings, Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo says that we have to accumulate inconceivable merit to be born even once as a wheel-turning king. It's not that the only result of doing prostrations is to be born again and again as a wheel-turning king; Buddha mentions the wheel-turning king to give some idea of the inconceivable merit accumulated by doing one prostration.

There is an uncountable number of atoms from here down to the other side of the earth, and one prostration creates the cause for this number of rebirths as a wheel-turning king. With the power and wealth of a wheel-turning king, one can benefit others immensely by engaging in many Dharma activities.

The merit we accumulate by doing one prostration is beyond our conception. The result, all the temporal happiness up to enlightenment, is beyond the grasp of our mind. Remember that karma is expandable. From a small virtuous action, we can experience many results of happiness for many hundreds of lifetimes. In the same way, because karma is expandable, from even a small non-virtuous action, we can experience many different suffering results in one life and for many lifetimes. If we cannot comprehend the cause, there is no way that we can comprehend the result.

Since there is a difference in merit between doing prostrations on a bed and on the floor, it seems there would be much more merit in doing prostrations on the highest possible mountain. Perhaps we should strap a prostration board to the roof of our car and head for Mount Everest!

2. The second important point is to remember to see the holy object, whether it is a stupa or a statue, as the guru. Do not miss this point. If there is an altar in your house, think that all the pictures of buddha on your altar are the guru. Because the guru is the highest, most powerful object, the most merit comes from prostrating to the guru. Every time we make offerings, every time we prostrate, this is the essential thing to remember. With this awareness your action is the most profitable, accumulating the most extensive merit. The guru, all the buddhas and bodhisattvas, all the holy objects, are there on your altar. Thinking that your altar holds the essence of all the holy objects of the ten directions, prostrate. Then prostrate to all the holy beings, all the buddhas and bodhisattvas, of all ten directions. Prostrate to all the holy objects—statues, stupas, scriptures—in Tibet, India, Nepal. This creates more merit, so you are doing prostrations wisely.

When doing prostrations, as with circumambulations, after each prostration dedicate the merit for all sentient beings, especially the narak beings, then the preta beings, animals and so forth.

Making Prayers and Offerings at Holy Places

At every holy place you should make offerings. Offer butter lamps or candles, incense and flowers. Offer one hundred thousand, or whatever you can. There should always be offerings. First light the candles [and make the other offerings]. Everybody should recite OM AH HUM to bless them.

Recite *Prostrations to the Thirty-five Buddhas* three times, depending on time, and the prayer at the end just once.

You can sit down for the rest of the prayers, starting with the seven limbs. At the offering part, if you have time, do the *Extensive Offering Practice*. Before making offerings, first make charity of the offerings to every hell being, every hungry ghost, every animal, every human being, every asura and sura, and every intermediate state being. Then do the offering practice to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, making offerings on behalf of all sentient beings, so they all get the merit. Doing it on their behalf is very important. It is like making puja for all sentient beings.

In the *Extensive Offering* prayer, repeat the last prayer over and over again while you do meditation.

When you continue the seven-limb prayer, stop for two or three minutes at the rejoicing section, and rejoice in your own and others' three-times' merits, including the bodhisattvas and buddhas.

After the seven-limb practice, do a mandala offering, short or long, and at the end of that make some requests, such as the Three Great Purposes or for the long life of the gurus.

Recite one of the lamrim prayers slowly, doing a direct meditation on Lama Tsongkhapa's *Foundation of All Good Qualities*, the *Three Principal Aspects of the Path*, or the *Hymns of Experience*.

Then chant Guru Shakyamuni's mantra:

TADYATHA OM MUNÉ MUNÉ MAHAMUNAYÉ SVAHA

Finish with the dedication prayers. There are various dedication prayers; it's important to do at least five of those prayers each time. It's your choice to do others.

As a result of the three-times' merits of myself and others,
May bodhicitta, from which the happiness of all sentient beings comes,
Be generated in the minds of myself and other sentient beings without delay,
even for one second. And that which has been generated, may it increase.

As a result of the three-times' merits of myself and others,
May [the view of] emptiness be generated in the minds of oneself and other
sentient beings without delay, even for one second.
And that which has been generated, may it increase.

As a result of the three-times' merits of myself and others, which are empty from
their own side, may I, who am empty from my own side,

Achieve Guru Shakyamuni Buddha’s enlightenment [or Tara’s or Chenrezig’s or whichever buddha one is praying to], which is empty from its own side,
And lead all sentient beings, who are empty from their own side,
To that enlightenment, which is empty from its own side, as quickly as possible,
by myself, alone.

Meditate very intensely and precisely. Dedicate in emptiness, then when your mind is in that state, labeling the three-times’ merits of myself and others, think, “May I achieve Guru Shakyamuni Buddha’s enlightenment and may I lead all sentient beings to that enlightenment by myself, alone.” In this way you can see that it is just mere imputation; that the three-times’ merits, enlightenment, I, are empty of existing from their own side. Everything appears to you as mere imputation; your dedication is mere imputation. It’s not completely non-existent, but like non-existent. If that kind of idea comes, it is extremely good, correct.

Whatever dedication the Victorious Ones Gone to Bliss
Of the three times have admired as best,
I shall also perfectly dedicate in the same way all these roots of virtue
So that I may perform good works.

This contains the extensive dedication prayer of the bodhisattvas, *The King of Prayers*, the prayer of the bodhisattva’s holy deeds; it’s a condensed version. That prayer contains numberless hundred thousand bodhisattvas’ prayers. Then after that, recite the prayer for meeting Lama Tsongkhapa’s teachings.

Because of the past, present, and future merit created by me and by the buddhas, bodhisattvas and sentient beings,
May I, my family, students, and all sentient beings be able to actualize completely in this very lifetime Lama Tsongkhapa’s path of unified sutra and tantra, which is pure like refined gold.
May this pure teaching of Lama Tsongkhapa spread in all directions and flourish forever.

If there is time, do the Final Lamrim Prayers.

Recite the prayers for the long lives of the gurus and of His Holiness, for all his holy wishes to be successful.

Give all the merits of your practice—past, present and future, up to enlightenment—give all your merit to sentient beings. Then after that, think precisely about every hell being, every hungry ghost, every sura, asura, etc.

You can also give your body as a wish-fulfilling jewel to all sentient beings—to pretas, hell beings, etc. You can make charity of all your possessions to every hell

being, every hungry ghost, every animal, every asura, sura, and the rest of sentient beings.

Then think that all their places, such as the hot hells, become pure lands of the Buddha, Vajrayogini, Amitabha, Shambhala, etc, mainly depending on which pure land you are praying to be born into. This is a pure land where there is no sickness, no poverty, no suffering, no old age, suffering or rebirth.

Then think that they all receive enlightenment, or whatever they want, whatever they need—a guru or teachings, even if they're not aware that they need them—they receive everything. This causes them to actualize the path of method and wisdom in their minds. Their minds become the dharmakaya, and their bodies become the rupakaya of Shakyamuni Buddha or Chenrezig or whichever buddha's pure land you visualize.

This practice of giving your merit and its result, happiness, is according to His Holiness Serkong Tsenshab Rinpoche's advice. It is very good at the end of a practice to do this.

Finally, recite the mantras to increase the merit 100,000 times, and recite Buddha's name, which makes all the prayers to succeed.

Basically, this is the way to practice in any holy place you go to, except where there is no place to do prostrations.

Additional Practices at Other Holy Places

At **Lumbini**, you could recite the Guru Shakyamuni Buddha puja or the daily meditation practice, then *Praise of the Buddha*. You could also recite one mala of Guru Shakyamuni's name mantra.

At **Kushinagar**, where Buddha passed away, there is a place where Buddha's body was offered to the fire, a very beautiful place. Here you can recite Lama Tsongkhapa's *Dependent Arising: A Praise of the Buddha*. You can also meditate on impermanence, which was Buddha's last teaching, to break the concept of permanence.

Then, after everything else, read Pabongka Rinpoche's *Heart Spoon*. Read it very slowly and meditate on impermanence.

At **Nalanda**, you can also recite *Hymns of Experience*, and make strong prayers to become like Lama Atisha and the great pandits, to be able to benefit all sentient beings.

At **Rajgir**, again, do the same practices, but here, first chant Shakyamuni Buddha's mantra. Then recite the *Heart Sutra* very slowly, so that you can meditate on the meaning.

At **Deer Park**, do all the same practices, but here emphasize the four noble truths. Meditate on the twelve links, then the suffering of each realm and the general sufferings of samsara, then the conclusion, the cessation of suffering; that suffering can cease because the path exists. Meditate on the three higher trainings, morality, concentration and great insight, and the benefits of morality. Then meditate on emptiness as the solution or the means to be free of the oceans of suffering and its causes. Come to the conclusion that this is what needs to be practiced to get out of samsara. There is a stupa there. If you are staying one or two days, go to the grounds to meditate on the lamrim.

At **Bodhgaya** do the same practices. Inside the temple, recite the daily meditation practice and you could also recite *Praise of the Buddha* in the temple, in front of the Buddha. It's very good to recite the *King of Prayers* under the Bodhi tree.

At the end of the *chöd* practice there is a special prayer, "May I be able to follow the path like this bodhisattva; may I do like that also." That is very good. It's also very good to recite Buddha's life story from that text in some of the places, especially under the bodhi tree. It inspires us to be like Buddha and follow the path to enlightenment.

You could also do *Lama Chöpa* and *tsog* there, in the temple or under the tree.

It is also very good to do Chenrezig practice and to recite Khunu Lama's *The Jewel Lamp: A Praise of Bodhicitta* or read all the benefits of bodhicitta from the *Bodhicaryavatara*, if you have more time; you could do that in another session or you could begin this at another holy place.

There is a beautiful place, **Sravasti**, where Buddha lived for 24 or 25 years. This is a very important place. There is a very large monastery there where many of the Buddha's teachings were given. It's an extremely beautiful place. Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche said that it is so calming for the mind. Many people have told me that. This is the place where he wanted to do retreat, and where he first met His Holiness the Dalai Lama in India. One lama from the Tibetan monastery in Sarnath had *lung* but after he spent one week there, he was so relaxed. I sent one student Stefano there; at every other place it was much effort for him to meditate, but at this place, meditation just came. I thought to build seven retreat rooms there, but it's difficult to find people for that.

In this way, everyone makes their life most productive and comes much closer to enlightenment.

Extracted from advice given by Lama Zopa Rinpoche to students going on a pilgrimage to Tibet in June and July 2002. Source: www.lamayeshe.com

What to do on Pilgrimage

When you are in **Bodhgaya**, I have some suggestions for practices:

If you can, offer the best orange or yellow silk robe to the buddha statue inside the temple. You can get a monk's yellow robe (Tib: *chögö*) sewn if there is time, or it can just be one piece of cloth. You can also fill up many begging bowls with food offerings and offer these in front of the statue.

When you make the offering of the robe, you can start by doing the *Jorcho* practice inside the temple. If there is somebody who can chant the prayers, that is very nice, otherwise you can read in English.

Then do the extensive offering practice, all the meditations I do when I offer scarf to Buddha statue and so forth. So do that short practice in front of the Buddha. This practice includes the blessing, offering and prostration.

Then sit down and go for refuge to the Buddha and the Triple Gem. Then recite the Four Immeasurables, generate bodhicitta, and recite the Seven-limb Practice. Then do either a long mandala or short mandala offering (depending on your time), and the *Prayer of the Three Great Purposes*.

Recite *Dependent Arising: A Praise of the Buddha*. This is a special prayer in praise of the Buddha having realized dependent arising, attaining enlightenment and guiding us sentient beings. This is referring to the Prasangika school view of dependent arising or emptiness, which is extremely subtle. Or there is another prayer that is recited in the Sangha confession called *Praise by Way of the Twelve Deeds*.

When you read either of these prayers it is important to meditate on the words and the meaning. Western people often think reciting prayers is boring, with no meaning. Here in Buddhism every single word has a very deep meaning, it is unbelievable, very deep meditation, if you are paying attention to every word.

Then if you can chant the mantra of Buddha.

TADYATHA OM MUNÉ MUNÉ MAHAMUNAYÉ SVAHA

Visualize that light and nectar beams, white in color, flow from the heart of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. These enter your body, speech and mind, purifying disease, spirit harms, negative karma and obscurations. They are washed out of you just as dirt leaves clothes when they are washed. Then think that you receive all the qualities. Do one mala mainly focusing on purifying, then 21 times of the last

mala mainly focusing on receiving all the realizations. Or you could do half purifying and half receiving the qualities.

Then do the lamrim prayer *The Foundation of all Good Qualities*. When you recite this, stop for a little while for meditation, but if you don't have much time then you can just recite it straight through. If you have time there are other lamrim prayers that you could do, such as *Meditation on the Stages of the Path*, *The Three Principal Aspects of the Path*, this is a short lamrim that is common, a little bit longer version is the *Hymns of Experience of the Path to Enlightenment* by Lama Tsongkhapa. There are many other lamrim prayers by other lamas that you can also do, such as *Calling the Guru from Afar*. These prayers purify obstacles and actualize all the realizations.

At the end do the dedication prayers.

May the precious supreme bodhicitta not yet born arise.
May that arisen not decline, but increase more and more.

TONG NYI NYING JE ZUNG DU JUG PÄI LAM

Savior of the Land of Snow teachings and transmigratory beings,

CHHE CHHER SÄL DZÄ GANG CHÄN TÄN DRÖI GÖN

Who extensively clarifies the path that unifies emptiness and compassion,

CHHAG NA PÄ MO TÄN DZIN GYA TSO LA

To the Lotus Holder, Tenzin Gyatso, I beseech –

SÖL WA DEB SO ZHE DÖN LHÜN DRUB SHOG

May all your holy wishes be spontaneously fulfilled.

Also recite the prayer *Words of Truth*. This is composed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and is very important for Tibet and the world.

Then pray, “Whatever sufferings others have, let me have it, and whatever happiness or merit I have, let them to have it.” Actually this is the best puja, except when it actually happens then we forget the prayer! HA HA HA HA!

The prayers can be dedicated for the success of projects especially the Maitreya Buddha statues.

Then probably you know this prayer, because I say it many times:

Due to the merits accumulated during the three times by myself and others, which are empty from their own side, may the I, who is empty from its own side, achieve the state of enlightenment, which is empty from its own side, and lead all sentient beings, who are empty from their own side, to that state as quickly as possible by myself alone. Also recite the *Prayer for the Flourishing of Lama*

Tsongkhapa's Teachings, for oneself and one's family members, all the people who are connected in every project, all the FPMT students and supporters, all the many people who bear so much hardship and also everybody in this world. Pray for Lama Tsongkhapa's teachings to flourish and spread out in this world. Then recite the names of the Buddha and bodhisattvas and recite the mantras to increase the merit.

The other way that you can do the prayers is, after you sit down you can do *Praise of the Buddha*, then begin the *Jorchö* preliminary prayers and then whatever prayers you have time for.

If you can do this inside the temple that is very good, otherwise you can do it under the tree where Buddha has shown the activity of enlightenment.

Make very strong prayers such as the bodhisattva Samantabhadra prayers, or the dedication prayer from the *Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life*.

I fully dedicate all these virtues
To be able to train just like
The hero Manjushri, who knows reality,
And just like Samantabhadra as well.

I fully dedicate all my roots of virtue,
With the dedication praised as the best
By all the gone-beyond victors of the three times,
In order to have good conduct.

These are very beautiful because you are dedicating for all the good things to happen to others, such as harmony, no fighting, no harm, you become those methods and give it to them. This is the short version; the long version is the *King of Prayers*. It is fantastic, it makes you so happy, even a depressed person will be so happy, because you have done something so worthwhile.

There are also prayers on Maitreya Buddha. There is one prayer from one of the panchen lamas who built a four-story Maitreya Buddha statue, so this is very good to recite.

Then there is the prayer showing how Buddha sacrificed himself for all of us sentient beings for so many eons. If this is chanted well, it is inspiring.

It is very important when you are in Bodhgaya to pray every day under the bodhi tree and to recite teachings on emptiness, also to recite lamrim prayers. When you reach the subject of emptiness, then do meditation on the four-point analysis.

Also it's good to recite some teachings on bodhicitta, for example, the chapter on bodhicitta from the *Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life*, and also from the lamrim outline—equalizing and exchanging oneself and others, the benefits of cherishing others and the shortcomings of cherishing oneself and *tonglen*. *Tonglen* is a great and very important practice to do.

Then do dedication prayers, especially the prayer for yourself and others to never be separated from Lama Tsongkhapa's teachings.

You may wonder why the stupa is low down and not level with the ground, this is because it was completely covered by dirt and had to be dug out.

When you go to **Rajgir**:

It is very good if you offer lights and incense, also bread, fruit and whatever you have, arranged very nicely. If you have brought a picnic lunch with you, then you can put it all together and offer all together.

You can do the same prayers that I explained before. Sit down and do the preliminary prayers as before. Then after reciting *Dependent Arising: A Praise of the Buddha*, you can recite the *Heart Sutra*. Read it slowly and meditate on the meaning, unless you come very late or have no time to meditate, then you can just read it straight through.

Make strong prayers to realize emptiness because oneself and all sentient beings have been suffering in samsara from beginningless samsaric lifetimes.

What we see now in Rajgir is old mountains, a worn-out place, a small place, but in the text it says that many hundreds of thousands of disciples were there and the Buddha gave teachings on the *Perfection of Wisdom*:

- Perfection of Wisdom of the object—that phenomena are devoid of true existence
- Perfection of Wisdom of the subject—which teaches emptiness, dependent arising
- Perfection of Wisdom of the path—the wisdom directly seeing emptiness
- Perfection of Wisdom of the result—the wisdom of the dharmakaya

Kyabje Khunu Lama Tenzin Gyaltzen, who is a guru of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, said that what we see now in Rajgir is something small, old and kind of ruined, as I explained before. But even nowadays Buddha is still giving teachings for inconceivable arya bodhisattvas on the exact same spot. Therefore their view of the land is totally different, something else from what we see. The Fifth Dalai Lama once saw the whole mountain as Dharma texts, completely filled from the bottom to the top. He had this view.

What to do on Pilgrimage (part two)

One thing I missed out was how to circumambulate holy objects. In the beginning, of course, it is important to do a strong motivation and generate bodhicitta; then there are unbelievable skies of benefits from circumambulating. The benefits (of circumambulation) can be read before going to the stupa, or it can also be read there if that is more convenient.

It is very important to remember to recite the mantra for increasing each circumambulation ten million times. Then circumambulate, doing meditation to purify not only yourself but also to purify the sentient beings of the six realms—all together or one by one, purifying each realm separately. If you are going around more times—for example, if you are going around six times—then you can focus on purifying a different realm during each circumambulation. Dedicate at the end, then it collects skies of merits.

Even if you circumambulate one or two times, you are enriched by so many skies of merits and receive very deep purification. This is an extremely important practice for quick enlightenment, because of the method—the extensive meditation, the special mantras and so forth.

Also when you make extensive offerings—not only food offering—you can follow the same extensive offering practice I put together for light offerings and what I often do before eating. So you can follow this same practice when you make offerings to the statues. This is a very important practice, a very quick way to get out of samsara and achieve enlightenment and enlighten sentient beings. It is deep like the ocean. Doing this practice purifies our negative karma, so that the mind can be transformed into the path to enlightenment.

There is still more I would like to explain about the first practice, the *Praise to Shakyamuni Buddha* (LA MA TÖN PA) There are so many benefits.

If it is possible to go to the stupa in the morning, then you can recite other prayers that you normally do, inside and outside the stupa, and also recite some while circumambulating.

When you do circumambulation you don't need to go slowly, you can just go normally or in a quick way. The main thing is to do the meditation, to be able to do that while going quicker, then there are more merits created in a shorter time. You can also recite mantras when you circumambulate, such as Chenrezig, Vajrasattva, Guru Shakyamuni name and mantra, Mitukpa or *migtsema* mantras. You can also recite the names of the Thirty-five Buddhas, the five powerful

mantras for purification and any others that you know. This is excellent. Also if you have memorized any texts, you can recite them.

When you are at Bodhgaya, all around the main stupa there are many other statues, small and big ones. I think some have been taken away and replaced with black ones that I think are Hindu deities. Anyway if you think it is still Buddha and worship it, you are taking refuge to Buddha and not a Hindi deity.

All these statues around the stupa, small and big, all spoke to Lama Atisha when he was circumambulating. It wasn't just one Tara statue, which is what most people think.

Also it was said by Kyabje Khunu Lama Tenzin Gyaltzen, the great scholar and great bodhisattva, that the carved pillars from King Ashoka's time and Nagarjuna's time that are outside the temple; that they were like that naturally, not carved.

Of course when you are in Bodhgaya, you can do Guru Shakyamuni Buddha meditation under the Bodhi tree. This is very good. In the evening time dedicate all the merits by reciting the *King of Prayers*; this could be under the Bodhi tree. Also you can recite the prayer spreading of Lama Tsongkhapa's teachings, to spread in your heart and to every being in this world, and to all sentient beings. Also you can recite the lamrim dedication prayer.

When you go to **Rajgir**, of course if you have many hours or even the whole day then you can read the Eight Thousand Stanzas of the *Prajnaparamita Sutra*; even just one volume. This has been done in a few hours at Rajgir by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and by many monks.

Or you could read the Madhyamaka text, *Entering the Middle Way*, or Lama Tsongkhapa's important texts that have a good explanation of the interpretive and definitive meaning of emptiness and so forth.

When you go to **Nalanda**, you can chant the prayer written by His Holiness the Dalai Lama about the Seventeen Pandits. That is a beautiful prayer to the Seventeen Pandits. You can also recite praises and homage to Shakyamuni Buddha and chant mantras—the Guru Shakyamuni name and mantra—and do Guru Shakyamuni meditation.

Also remember the kindness of all these great pandits, scholars, highly attained and enlightened beings—even some who were not enlightened at that time, but were highly attained beings. I don't mean to go through all the stories of the Seventeen Pandits, but you can talk, remember or read about the main ones, such as the Six Ornaments and the two sublime disciples—Nagarjuna, Asanga,

Chandrakirti and especially Lama Atisha. You can have a far-out time going through some of their enlightening stories.

You can also read some teachings of Nagarjuna, Shantideva or Lama Atisha, such as *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* or other teachings by Lama Atisha. You could read one chapter of the *Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life (Bodhicaryavatara)*, for example, the chapter on patience, the benefits of bodhicitta or the chapter on exchanging oneself for others. However much you can read depends on the situation, the people, etc. Even a little bit is very good, of course if you do more, then it is more beneficial.

You could also read lamrim prayers, do lamrim meditation and request to have each of those realizations that are mentioned in the lamrim. This is very good. It makes them very happy and is a very good offering. Or you can read any teaching and then think to try to practice that way, exactly as it says.

Another possibility is to do *tsog* offering, *Lama Chöpa (Guru Puja)* or *Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga*. Do the *tsog* offering according to your time. It doesn't mean you have to do everything, or that everything has to be chanted. It depends on how much time you have.

Very important, the essence is, rejoicing in these qualities and the three time merits of all these holy beings, especially the extensive benefit that has been done, is still happening and that will happen in the future, through the texts that have been written and that are continuously being studied in the monasteries, and especially those that are integrated in our life through lamrim practice. Numberless beings have already become enlightened in the past and the present and will also be enlightened in the future. So make strong prayers to become like them.

When you are at Nalanda, according to the time you have, first think about the meaning of Buddha, and how kind the Buddha is to you, like the limitless sky. Also think, "How kind the Buddha is to all my mother sentient beings, without leaving even one out."

From advice given by Lama Zopa Rinpoche in September 2008 to a student going on pilgrimage. Slightly rearranged by Tenzin Dekyong, September 2017. Edited by Sandra Smith, January 2020.

Advice for Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage needs faith. More faith, more happiness. Otherwise, we are just like tourists looking at ruins. Pilgrimage is not just going to holy places and taking pictures. We go to holy places for blessings. So it's good to do practices at the different holy places.

Of course, it is good to recite Buddha's mantra and meditate on the *Heart Sutra*, even something short like this. Then to recite a lamrim prayer and different praises to Buddha. There are three different praises to Buddha; the best one is Lama Tsongkhapa's *Dependent Arising: A Praise of the Buddha*. Then there is the *Praise of the Buddha—Unrivalled Lion of the Shakyas* by Lama Tsongkhapa and *Praise of the Exalted One*. It is good to do different praises to Buddha. Use Lama Tsongkhapa's *Dependent Arising: A Praise of the Buddha* most of the time because it talks about emptiness.

Pilgrimage is good if we know how to do it. Otherwise we are just travelling like tourists. Also, when we go to these holy places it reminds us of impermanence. Once these places were great cities but now there are just stones. A thousand years ago these places were quite different. But even though there are just stones now, they are so precious. Amazing. Can you imagine how blessed these places are? They are places where the Buddha was. Many Tibetan people take away earth from holy places. One time I went to the place where a monkey made offering to Buddha and the guide took some of the earth to give to me. Then an Indian doctor who was with me got angry at the guide for giving me the earth! That earth is now at Kopan with many other holy things from different places. [Note: Many people give Rinpoche holy objects, like blessed stones or fish from Mount Kailash and Lake Manasarovar.]

So do different lamrim prayers at these holy places and make prayers to have realizations. At the beginning do prostrations. You can recite the preliminary prayers that we do traditionally at Kopan, which include prostrations by reciting Buddha's name (LA MA TÖN PA CHOM DÄN DÄ) Then do the Seven-Limb Practice". Then recite the different praises to Buddha and lamrim prayers.

If you have time, you can carry the story of the holy places with you and read that story in the different places to the people who are doing pilgrimage. If you are going on pilgrimage, read a book describing the holy places and read about what the Buddha did in those places. You can also read the stories of the great pandits.

This advice was given to a student attending a course at Tushita and doing pilgrimage after that. Dictated to Ven Sarah Thresher, Tushita Meditation Centre, Dharamsala, India, 30 March 2012.

Benefits of the Prostration Mudra

Remember I told you yesterday that it's very important when you see holy objects to keep your hands like this. [Rinpoche demonstrates the prostration mudra.] I emphasized this yesterday. It has eight very important benefits. The minute you see a stupa or a statue, a picture or a painting of a buddha, when you do this, you get the eight very important benefits immediately.

In your next life you receive a perfect body, a deva or a human body, with perfect senses, perfect limbs, which allows you to practice Dharma to benefit others.

The next result is to have perfect people surrounding you so that your Dharma wishes get fulfilled. Whatever wishes you have for practicing Dharma, for benefiting other sentient beings, for serving the teachings of the Buddha, you're able to get done when you have perfect people surrounding you.

Then next one is to be able to live in pure morality. It becomes cause to live in pure morality. Without pure morality, you can't achieve perfect meditation, samadhi or shamatha. Samadhi is the concentration, shamatha is calm abiding. You can't achieve perfect meditation and without that you can't achieve great insight, deriving the rapturous ecstasy of the body and mind, by analyzing, doing meditation on emptiness, unified with the calm abiding, shamatha. You can't have that realization, great insight, the higher training of wisdom; you can't have the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness. Without that, you can't cease the defilements, you can't cease the disturbing thought obscurations directly.

Without the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness, you cannot cease the subtle defilements, so that means you can't achieve either liberation or enlightenment. So that means, of course, you can't liberate numberless sentient beings from the oceans of samsaric suffering and bring them to enlightenment. Therefore, when you prostrate like this to a statue or painting of a buddha you create the cause to live in pure morality. That's unbelievably important.

Then, the next one is devotion, to create cause to achieve devotion. Again it's the same thing. Without devotion, you can't receive the blessings of the Guru, Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Without that, you can't achieve realizations of the path to liberation and enlightenment.

So, devotion is an extremely important foundation. Even if a person doesn't have much understanding, doesn't have the intellect, but has strong devotion, he or she is a very lucky person. Conversely, a person who has intellect but no devotion, is not a lucky person, is not a fortunate person. The person with so much devotion to the Guru, Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, even without much

intellect, is a lucky person, he or she can achieve realizations, even if there's not much intellect.

It is said in the lamrim teachings that somebody who has devotion, who correctly devotes to the Virtuous Friend, even if he is as foolish as a dog or a pig, there's no hardships, no difficulties, to become like Manjushri, the Buddha of Wisdom, and Chenrezig, the embodiment of all the buddhas' compassion. Kadampa Geshe Chengawa mentioned that. One who correctly devotes to the Virtuous Friend, even if he is a fool—F.O.O.L.—like a dog and pig, has no difficulties to become like Manjushri.

Normally I think anybody who has great devotion is a very lucky person, a very lucky person. Somebody it's very hard to generate this, to develop this is because there are many blockages in the mind. You can be very intellectual but have many blockages, many superstitious thoughts, and that blocks it. But some people of very high intelligence also have a lot of merit, a lot of good karma, and they are able to achieve realizations quickly. So this is devotion.

Then, the next result is to have courage, a brave heart. This is the courage to be a leader of the people, to lead them in having a kind, generous life, to lead in Dharma, to lead in the path to liberation and enlightenment, to lead people for good. So courage has two aspects: the courage to offer service, and to bring other sentient beings to courage.

The next one is you get reborn in deva or human realm. You create the cause to be born in deva or human realm.

The last two are very important ones. The next is to create the cause to achieve the arya path, the exalted path. You no longer create negative karma, the cause of samsara, by achieving this arya path, and then of course if it's the bodhisattva's arya path then you don't get reborn into the suffering of rebirth, old age, sickness, and death. You don't experience all that if you achieve the arya path of bodhisattva.

Number eight is enlightenment.

So you get these eight benefits the minute you put your palms together to a statue of a buddha, or picture or painting of a buddha, or a scripture, besides actually prostrating to the Triple Gem.

I thought to mention that. It's very important to write this down and to actually know yourself.

Normally I say, when you go on pilgrimage or when you're in a temple, as I mentioned, there are many paintings and statues of the Buddha, and paintings of the Buddha's life stories, so in your mind you should think, "I'm prostrating."

Even though you don't have time to look at every single buddha in the paintings, but in the heart you can think, "I'm going to prostrate to all these holy objects," to all the statues, stupas, scriptures, paintings of buddhas, in your heart think, this is for the benefit of all sentient beings. You think that, then you put your palms together, and you think in mind, "I'm prostrating." You turn around like this.

If you don't have time to prostrate to each single one, think in the mind, "I'm prostrating to all," and then just turn around. It doesn't even take a minute, but if there are a billion holy objects there, then you have created a billion causes for enlightenment, and by the way, a billion causes for liberation from samsara and a billion causes for happiness in future lives. You create that if there are a billion holy objects there—statues, paintings of buddhas, Dharma scriptures, stupas. It doesn't even take a minute to go like this, it doesn't even take a minute.

It's the same at your own house. If there are many Buddhist statues, many buddha pictures in your shrine room or in the house, but because you have so many it's not possible every time you enter, to put your palms like this, each time you enter the room. If possible, let yourself become habituated like that, create the habit of good karma, create the habit of the cause of enlightenment, of liberation from samsara. Let yourself be habituated in that. Then every time that happens, it's unbelievable. Every time you enter the room, you make your life unbelievably, unbelievably, most meaningful. However many holy objects are there, statues, stupas, scriptures, pictures of buddhas—even in one photo there can be so many—think, "I'm prostrating to all these holy objects," so that gets done if you think that when you enter the room.

At least, even one time a day, you do this for all the house. It doesn't even take a minute, just a few seconds, and it's unbelievable, unbelievable, what you can do with your life. However many thousands or millions of holy objects there are, you create that many causes to achieve all those happinesses. It's unbelievable.

Before you went to the holy place yesterday I explained the purpose of going for pilgrimage. Now you understand the importance, what a pilgrimage means, you understand from that, by knowing the benefits, even just the putting palms together, the benefits of that, very important eight benefits, by the way, unimaginable merits you collect, purified.

Extracted from teachings given by Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche at the 41st Kopan Meditation Course, held at Kopan Monastery, Nepal, in December 2008. Edited by Gordon McDougall. Source: www.lamayeshe.com

Benefits of Circumambulation

I am going to read the translation that I did of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's explanation to Sharipu. From among the disciples and the two heart disciples of Buddha, the arhats Sharipu and Maudgalyayana, Sharipu is the most excellent in wisdom, so Buddha explained the extensive benefits of circumambulation to his disciple Sharipu.

Sometimes you might think after hearing the benefits, "Oh, this is so mundane." You might think these benefits are so mundane, so ordinary, but you have to understand, the Buddha is so skillful. The Buddha explained not only the benefits of realizations, of enlightenment, but also many common ordinary benefits, things that ordinary people need or desire. The Buddha explained the benefits according to the desires of ordinary people, what they would like to succeed in. Circumambulation and such practices definitely bring those results, that happiness. The Buddha related to ordinary people and their desires, to inspire them to collect virtue with holy objects, to do prostrations, to do circumambulations and also to make offerings.

This is from sutra verses [in the Kangyur] regarding circumambulating stupas.

"Sharipu, the one having great wisdom, requested the founder, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, 'Whatever the ripening aspects are from circumambulating the stupas, you, the pure guide, the sublime one in the world of the great eon, please teach me.'" Sharipu made this request.

"The founder, the fully enlightened being who is supreme among two-legged beings advised,

"I will reveal just a part of the qualities of circumambulating stupas. As a result of circumambulating stupas, devas, nagas, yakshas, smell-eaters, asuras, garudas, and other types of non-human beings, the different types of spirits, will all make offerings to you. After having achieved the freedom that is difficult to find, by having circumambulated stupas even for just one second, you will abandon the eight states that don't have freedom to practice Dharma."

These are: being born as a hell being, a preta (hungry ghost), an animal, a barbarian or a long-life god; being born at a time when no buddha has descended; holding heretical views or having defective faculties. These are the eight states where there's no freedom to practice Dharma. Even when you circumambulate for just one second, even one second of circumambulation frees you from the eight states that have no freedom, that don't give any freedom to practice Dharma. That means every second that you circumambulate, the effect you achieve is unbelievable.

“Having circumambulated holy stupas, you will always have a good memory.” So those who think, “I have a bad memory or I am losing my memory,” need to do a lot of circumambulations, day and night.

“You will always have a good memory, you will have wisdom and you will have a beautiful color.” This means you don’t need to paint [your face] all the time; you will have a naturally beautiful color, so there will be no need to carry all the boxes [of make-up], or go to the shop [to buy more.]

“You will have a beautiful color. You will be wise, and you will receive offerings all the time.” You will receive chocolates, milkshakes, ice cream, coffee, biscuits or chai, anyway, you will receive offerings. “You will be wise and you will receive offerings all the time.” This also means you can make offerings to others.

You have to look at it this way: these practices—prostrations, making offerings to holy objects, circumambulation—fulfill your wishes for happiness, all your needs to practice Dharma and all your needs to help others, all your needs to serve the teaching of the Buddha. Everything comes naturally, without effort, the more you do these practices. The sutra talks in detail about how you’ll get these benefits, but the general thing is that all these practices fulfill all your wishes up to enlightenment. Not only all the things that are mentioned here—you’ll get this, you’ll get that—but most important, realizations from guru devotion, realizations of the graduated path of the lower capable being, the graduated path of the middle capable being, renunciation, bodhicitta, emptiness and then the two stages of tantra.

Offering one grain of rice, one tiny flower or a stick of incense to a visualized Buddha, a statue or even a picture of the Buddha, if the motivation is bodhicitta then no question it’s Dharma—or if it’s done with renunciation of samsara or right view. Even if the motivation is nonvirtuous, only having attachment clinging to the happiness of this life, for a long life, to be healthy, to have power, success in business, wealth, all these things for yourself, because of the power of the holy object—not because of your motivation but because of the power of the holy object—this one grain of rice offered to a statue or picture of Buddha, or to a visualized Buddha, immediately becomes a cause of enlightenment.

You have to understand this becomes the cause to achieve the infinite, inconceivable skies of qualities of the Buddha’s holy body, holy speech and holy mind. Not only that, it becomes the cause for us to achieve enlightenment. That means it becomes the cause to achieve the realizations, from guru devotion, renunciation of samsara, the graduated path of the lower capable being, the middle capable being, the higher capable being, bodhicitta, right view, and then all the bodhisattva paths, the six paramitas and the ten paramitas. It becomes

the cause of achieving the five paths and ten bhumis and then, on the basis of the three principal aspects of the path, the two stages of Highest Yoga Tantra.

So this offering of one tiny flower or one grain of rice to a statue or image of the Buddha or a visualized Buddha becomes the cause for us to achieve enlightenment. Without actualizing the path we cannot achieve enlightenment, no way. You have to understand this one tiny offering becomes the cause to achieve the whole path from guru devotion up to enlightenment, even if the offering is made with a totally negative mind. Due to the power of the holy object, not because of our motivation but the power of the holy object, it becomes virtue, the cause of enlightenment. It becomes the cause to achieve liberation from samsara and not only that, the cause to achieve good rebirths, deva or human rebirths, for many hundreds or thousands of lifetimes, because karma is expandable. Therefore, from one cause, from one good karma of offering to the Buddha, we experience the result for many hundreds of lifetimes, thousands of lifetimes.

The result of the karma of making offerings is not only experienced in the next lives, we don't have to wait until the next life. Because the karma is very powerful we start to experience the result even in this life. As I normally say, all the success of this life, health, long life, prosperity, all the needs of this life for our own practice or to help others, all this has to come from good karma. We collect so much merit from these practices, so by the way, it takes care of all the things that we need in this life. All our difficulties and health problems—sicknesses and life danger—come from negative karma. These practices purify negative karma by the way, even if we are not thinking of the benefits for this life, even if we don't motivate like that, these practices take care of this life, so we don't have to experience the obstacles or at least they become smaller.

I think a common world view is that by doing business we develop. That's the common idea, the common method, but there are many problems in that method, it's not very reliable. First of all, for the action of business to become virtue, the motivation has to become virtue, we have to put a lot of effort so our motivation becomes virtuous. For a business to become Dharma, the motivation has to become Dharma. There are many obstacles in business and the benefit, the profit that we achieve is not fixed, not definite—sometimes it's more and sometimes it's less, and even if we are able to make sales it is not profitable.

The benefit of doing these preliminary practices—circumambulations, prostrations, offerings, the various practices that the Buddha taught as a means to purify the mind of negative karma and defilements and to collect merit—the benefit is always the same. The skies of benefit, the inconceivable merit or benefit, is always the same. There is no deflation and inflation. It's not like the

value of gold or the dollar and so forth, which goes up and down; it's not like the value of material things, which goes up and down. The benefit of every single one of these practices is inconceivable; the resultant happiness is inconceivable, and it's always the same. Due to the power of the object, of the Buddha, it's always the same. Due to things being empty of existing from their own side, dependent arising, it's always the same. The Buddha's power never decreases, the Buddha's compassion toward sentient beings never decreases, the Buddha's qualities never decrease, they are always the same, having infinite qualities and never decreasing. Therefore, all these practices that we do—circumambulation, prostrations, offering—even to a statue or a painting of Buddha, the benefit is always infinite. Always.

The reason there's so much success in the projects so far, according to my experience—being able to serve many monasteries, many, many thousands of monks, being able to serve food, to build monasteries and so forth, all these various projects that enable us to benefit more and more—is mainly from the practice of offerings. It came from those good karmas, from these practices. That's according to my experience, my own experiential proof of how these practices work in life, how they are so effective, how these practices are a reliable method, that's proven according to my experience. From the little practice I did, the result that came is being able to offer some service to the teaching of the Buddha, to the sentient beings, to the Sangha.

All this is due to the kindness of the Buddha; even in our case, even in my case it is due to the kindness of Buddha, due to Buddha's compassion. All this happened due to Buddha's compassion. Buddha has achieved inconceivable qualities and each time we make offerings, do circumambulation or prostrations to Buddha, the reason why each of these practices has infinite merit, why we achieve inconceivable benefit, including the highest, enlightenment and temporary benefit; ultimate happiness and temporary happiness; is because Buddha has inconceivable qualities, because the Buddha has developed compassion for all of us sentient beings. Compassion inspired the Buddha to achieve all these inconceivable qualities. So all this, even what the organization can do or whatever service we are able to offer, is due to Buddha's compassion.

I used the example of offering, but it's the same for every circumambulation, every prostration to a holy object, a statue or picture of Buddha. There are all these benefits, as in the example I gave of offering one flower or stick of incense or one grain of rice to a statue or picture of Buddha. All those things that I explained, for example, one circumambulation of one holy object, it's the same.

As I mentioned before, it's good to remember, when we make offerings or do circumambulation or prostrations, don't simply think that it becomes the cause

of enlightenment, but within that, remember that it means from guru devotion up to enlightenment; it becomes the cause to achieve all these realizations, besides all other temporary happiness. There is an inconceivable amount of temporary happiness and all this ultimate benefit, as it becomes the cause to achieve all these realizations of the whole path to enlightenment. Therefore we can see how every single offering is so important; we can feel every single practice of offering, prostration or circumambulation is so important.

“Having circumambulated holy stupas, devas as well as human beings will achieve long life, and you will achieve great fame. Having circumambulated holy stupas, you will be born in a pure generation of race, line, faultless breed, in this world, the land of Dzambuling, and you will have wisdom. Having circumambulated holy stupas, you will be good-hearted, of beautiful color, learned, with your mind abiding in the state of happiness. Having circumambulated holy stupas, you will become wealthy, having much wealth; you will not be miserly but you will be brave in giving, making charity. Having circumambulated holy stupas, you will be attractive and enchanting, and whoever sees you will be happy.”

So if you want anybody who sees you to feel happy with you, then circumambulate all day and night. There are some people who everybody likes, the whole world gets attracted to that person, but I don't think it's so much to do with their body; I don't think the body is the main reason for that. The person created the cause in the past for that to happen, so everybody is attracted to that person and naturally likes them. It's not so much their body, it's the cause that they created in the past; that's what makes other people attracted to them. You have to understand that. It comes from these practices, it's due to the power of the holy objects. It's nothing particularly to do with the shape of the person's body, maybe it can be ugly shape, but somehow people get drawn to that person. It's the cause, the karma that the person created in the past, circumambulations and so forth, due to the holy objects. If you analyze, that is how it happens.

“Having circumambulated holy stupas, you will be attractive and enchanting and whoever sees you will be happy. You will always be able to enjoy extensive enjoyments.” That means you can have a lot of coffee, chocolate drink, milkshakes, a lot of chai.

“Having circumambulated holy stupas you will see all causative phenomena as empty.” This is a very important point. “Having circumambulated holy stupas, you will see all causative phenomena as empty. You won't become ignorant in Dharma, and you will quickly achieve the state of joy.” The first bhumi [the path

of seeing], Extremely Joyful, happy, the first bhumi. There are ten bhumis to achieve enlightenment.

“Having circumambulated holy stupas you will be born of a supreme being’s caste, generation, of faultless breed. You will always be surrounded by women; your wishes will always be fulfilled.”

Remember, I already announced at the beginning, it’s not the Buddha telling lies, circumambulation does have all these benefits, but because ordinary people usually mostly desire temporary happiness, not ultimate happiness and as circumambulation does have those benefits, Buddha emphasized what ordinary people like. Then as they circumambulate it brings them to enlightenment, even though their motivation is for these [worldly] things. Gradually, doing that circumambulation brings the realizations of the path, it brings enlightenment, so that is the Buddha’s skillful means.

“Having circumambulated holy stupas, you will be born a great Brahmin, of high caste.” I think Buddha explained this because in India there are a lot of castes, and also circumambulation does have those benefits, so the reason might be that; it does have those benefits.

“You will have morality and will always hear the teachings. You will have scriptural understanding and realizations of tantra, secret mantra. Having circumambulated holy stupas you will be born in a great family, of a high class. You will be wealthy and have many possessions, animals, crops.” Crops, not corpse.

“Having circumambulated holy stupas, you will be born lord of the world in the land of Dzambuling; a Dharma king in control of all the empty land of the whole earth. Having circumambulated holy stupas, you will become a wheel-turning king, having the seven precious jewels, and you will turn the wheel according to Dharma.” Wheel-turning king means the most powerful king of this world; no other king can compete with a wheel-turning king, they are the most powerful and most wealthy. There are kings who have control over one continent, two continents, three continents or four continents, then there is the king who controls the deva realm. It seems there is a wheel-turning king when human beings have an inconceivable length of life. When humans live for 80,000 years a wheel-turning king appears.

“Having circumambulated holy stupas, you can transfer your consciousness from this world and go to an upper realm.” That means the pure land of a buddha, like the pure land of Amitabha, Vajrayogini or Kalachakra. Circumambulating holy objects also helps with the practice of *powa*, so when you die you can transfer your consciousness easily to the pure land.

“Your mind will be happy to meet Buddhadharmā. You will have yoga realizations such as guru yoga in particular, and clear light and illusory body. You will have great psychic powers.

“Having circumambulated holy stupas, after transferring your consciousness from the deva realm and reincarnating in the human realm, you will enter the womb without ignorance. Having circumambulated holy stupas, you won’t be defiled by the stains of the womb. You will become like a pure wish-granting jewel that will be cleaned with three means. You will be able to be born from the mother’s womb with a very clear memory, remembering so much of your past lives.

“Having circumambulated holy stupas you will abide blissfully in the mother’s womb. You will be born blissfully and will drink milk blissfully. Having circumambulated holy stupas you will be cared for not only by your father but also by many surrounding servants who will look after you, and your mother will serve you all the time. Having circumambulated holy stupas you will be loved by your relatives and especially loved by your parents.”

So if you want to be loved by your parents then you need to circumambulate stupas. Especially those who blame their parents, who are angry with their parents, not feeling loved, they need to purify, they need to circumambulate stupas.

“After birth, your wealth is increased. Having circumambulated holy stupas, you will not be harmed by the flesh-eaters. You will enjoy the enjoyments without problems.

“Having circumambulated holy stupas, you won’t become blind or experience arthritis.” So if you have arthritis problems, it’s very good to circumambulate as much as possible. “You won’t become blind or experience arthritis for a hundred eons.” For a hundred eons you won’t become blind and you won’t experience arthritis. “And your body will be pure. Having circumambulated holy stupas, your eyes will be completely pure, clairvoyant, fine and horizontal, dark.” It says “beautiful” according to [Eastern] interpretation. “Enchanting and you will achieve the deva’s eye clairvoyance.” Deva’s eye clairvoyance, I think, is being able to see where you will be born; after the death seeing where you will be reincarnated, those things. That kind of clairvoyance.

“Having circumambulated holy stupas, you will have a healthy body, a stable mind and stable perseverance. You will show or have round shoulders.” I mean, the head will have a nice shape and the body will have a nice shape, not ugly. I think it’s describing a nicely shaped body, what we see in the world.

“Having circumambulated holy stupas, you will have perfect power, a perfect face, body, form. You will have all the limbs well-adorned with good signs.

“Having circumambulated holy stupas, you will become the lord enriched with power in the realm of the Thirty-Three,” those deva realms. “You will become a great and powerful deva having great psychic powers, in the realm of Indra.

“Having circumambulated a holy stupa, you will be born the king of devas, who are devoid of fighting. You will have control over those deva realms. Having circumambulated holy stupas, you will become the controller of the deva realm of Brahma. Ten million devas will make offerings to you.

“Having circumambulated holy stupas, you will have wisdom for a thousand times ten million eons, as well as for a hundred times ten billion eons. And you will always receive offerings. If you circumambulate a holy stupa, for a thousand times ten million eons you will have a clean body, clean garments and white Dharma, virtue.

“Having circumambulated a holy stupa, you will achieve perfect power, perfect perseverance, no laziness, and will achieve realizations of the path to enlightenment very easily. Having circumambulated a holy stupa, you will have stable perseverance and power, stable flexibility, you will receive no harm and will quickly achieve success.

“Having circumambulated a holy stupa, you will have an enchanting sweet tone of voice and clear, high and beautiful sound, and you will experience no harm and no sicknesses.”

People are attracted to the sound, the voice of singers and so forth, so there’s a cause for that, such as offering a bell. The person will become very famous, and many millions of people will be attracted to the singer’s voice. So like this, circumambulating holy objects or offering a bell to the holy object, stupa or statue of Buddha and so forth, will become a cause of that.

“You will experience no harm and no sicknesses. Having circumambulated a holy stupa, you will go quickly to a place where there are teachings of the Buddha, where most will achieve higher rebirth. You will achieve the four mindfulnesses and the four limitless thoughts, and you will also achieve the power of psychic limbs,” so these are realizations, the four psychic limbs, part of the realization of the thirty-seven aids to enlightenment. If you are able to have those limbs of psychic power, with that you are able to subdue the mind of other sentient beings in that way. By showing the miracle powers to those who cannot be subdued just by teachings, you can subdue their mind and bring them into Dharma. Buddha did this during the fifteen days of the Tibetan New Year; he

showed miracle powers for the benefit of sentient beings, in order to liberate different sentient beings.

“Having circumambulated a holy stupa, you will actualize the four noble truths of the arya being and you will achieve the limbs of enlightenment. You will achieve the six clairvoyances and no falls (delusion).”

The sixth of the clairvoyant powers, the clairvoyance of having ceased delusion, the disturbing thoughts, both the gross and subtle defilements, that type of clairvoyance is the omniscient mind which only Buddha has. It is said the five other clairvoyance powers are more general, and Hindus also have these: clairvoyance of miracle power; clairvoyance of the deva’s ear, by which you can hear teachings being given in different pure lands by buddhas, you can hear and then you can reveal them to other sentient beings; clairvoyance remembering one’s own and others’ past karma.

By knowing others’ past karma and describing it to them you can explain Dharma in a way that fits their mind. Also explaining their past karmas can give them faith in karma; with your clairvoyance you can give them faith in karma. So you can benefit others in this way. Also, clairvoyance of being able to read other people’s minds means you can benefit others in this way so they make less mistakes. You can benefit others or teach Dharma according to their mental state, like that. By being able to read other sentient beings’ minds you know what fits with their mind and what doesn’t fit with their mind. Then, the clairvoyance of the deva’s eye means being able to see when death will occur, when death will happen, and where birth will be taken, what kind of birth will be taken, and in this way you can also help other sentient beings. It is said in the text that even Hindus can achieve these other five, except for the last [sixth] one, which involves ceasing delusions. If you are able to achieve these clairvoyant powers faster, then you can benefit other sentient beings in a much better way.

“You will achieve the six clairvoyances and no falls.” “Falls” means delusions. “You will abandon all delusions. You will become an arhat, having great psychic power. Having circumambulated a holy stupa, you will abandon attachment and hatred, you will abandon all surrounding beings and you will achieve the state of a self-conqueror, a solitary realizer, and you will achieve enlightenment. By having circumambulated a holy stupa, you will become a tathagata, adorned with the holy signs, having a golden holy body.”

Extracted from teachings by Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Root Institute, Bodhgaya, India, 19 December 1999. Edited by Sandra Smith

Meditation on Emptiness at Vulture's Peak

On 12 March 2014, Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche ascended Vulture's Peak, Rajgir, India, to give a transmission of the Vajra Cutter Sutra to a group of students. Rinpoche began by reading out a Dedication Prayer by Mipham Dawa Rinpoche, then, after the sutra transmission, Rinpoche led students in a meditation on emptiness.

So we heard the teaching on emptiness, then particularly here the *Vajra Cutter Sutra*. It might be good just one minute to meditate on emptiness. It might be good.

There are many quotations to meditate on emptiness, but unless I read I don't remember. So one thing, one quotation I remember is Seventh Dalai Lama:

འཁོར་འདས་གྱི་ཚེས་ཅན་མ་ལུས་པ།	<i>Khor dä kyi chhō chän ma lü pa</i>
རང་རྟོག་པས་བཅོས་པའི་སྐྱུ་མ་ལ།	<i>Rang tog pä chö pai gyu ma la</i>
དོན་བདེན་པར་བབྱང་ནས་བསྐྱེད་པའི་ཕྱིར།	<i>Dön den par zung nä lu wai chhir</i>
འཁྲུལ་སྣང་ལ་མ་ཞེན་སྟོང་པར་སྟོན།	<i>Khrul nang la ma zhen tong par tö</i>

Every single base of samsara and nirvana,
Although illusion made by one's own conception,
Is held as ultimate so therefore deceives,
Do not cling to it as ultimate, look at it as empty.

Khor dä kyi chhō chän ma lü pa. “All the bases of samsara and nirvana,”—every single base of samsara and nirvana.

Rang tog pä chö pai gyu ma la. “It is made up by one's own concept.” All the bases of samsara and nirvana are created by one's own concept, made up by one's own concept. Then everything appears... Everything is created by one's own concept, *rang tog pä* [by concept] “conceptual thought,” then so everything is illusion. Self, I, action. Self—doer of the action—I, then action, object, everything is illusion.

Then believing the illusion *dön den par* “ultimately exists.” *Dön den par zung nä lu wai chir.* “Looking at it as real,” existing from their side. The I, action, object, *all* the phenomena real, *real*, as *real*. Existing from their own side, *dön den par zung* [holding as ultimate]. Then that cheats you. That concept cheats you completely whole your life; not only that, from beginningless samsara. Not only from this morning to night cheats you completely. Completely cheats you. And cheats you from birth until death. Completely cheated you. Then cheats you from beginningless rebirth... if you do not realize emptiness.

So that's why we have been suffering from beginningless rebirth up to now. Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and numberless buddhas they became free from samsara, but us not. We were same before. We were same before, having same suffering but they realized emptiness, direct perception of emptiness, became free from samsara but we not. So we have been suffering from beginningless rebirth up to now. Why? Because the concept cheated us completely from beginningless rebirth up to now.

So therefore the instruction is: *Khrul nang la ma zhen*, "Don't cling to it." Don't believe things are real, truly existent, things are real. As they *appear* real to our hallucinated mind due to ignorance, don't *believe* real. "Look at it empty." Look at the I *empty*, action *empty*, object *empty*, so the whole samsara, nirvana, the whole thing as empty, as it is empty.

So before the meditation...

So like this:

Khor dä kyī chhō chän ma lü pa: "All the bases of samsara and nirvana."
Rang tog pä chö pai gyū ma la: "Your own concept created."
Rang-tog pä chö-pai gyū-ma la: "Created by your own concept so all are illusion."

So the aggregates, these aggregates... Why there is I, because there are aggregates, the base aggregates. If there are no aggregates there won't be I. There's aggregates. So reasoning the base, *dag zhi*, base to be labeled, the aggregates, because of that then the mind merely imputes "I."

Because of the aggregates, the mind merely imputes I. The reason is there are the base aggregates. That's all, nothing else. Your mind merely imputed I.

So we meditate in this a little while.

So merely imputed. The mind merely imputed. Your valid mind merely imputed the I.

It's just like, for example, your mind, valid mind, merely imputed I on the table. Merely imputed I on the table, on your shoes, or on your kaka! [Rinpoche laughs] Merely imputed I on the kaka—how that is? [Rinpoche laughs] On your table or in your mug. So of course, that I doesn't exist. That I merely imputed on the table or the *kaka* doesn't exist because there is no valid base. There is no valid base. You can't label I on everything. As you label on the aggregates, you can't label on everything I. It doesn't exist. You can label but it doesn't exist. It doesn't function. Labeled, merely labeled on the aggregates that functions.

So now, good to meditate for hours, however, for a long time, to see more clearly.

Then after the mere imputation, the I—how does it appear to you? Does it appear merely labeled by mind or not merely labeled by mind? Not merely labeled by mind? “Not merely labeled by mind” means it exists from its own side. So which way appeared to you, the I?

So except in equipoise meditation, the arya beings, higher bodhisattvas, arya beings, arhats who have direct perception of emptiness, in equipoise meditation, otherwise after the achievement *je tob* [post equipoise] then all the phenomena—I, action, object —everything appears [as a] hallucination. Truly existent, an illusion. It appears like illusion, except for sentient beings in equipoise meditation.

Even the compassion, bodhicitta, things appear as truly existent, as long as sentient beings [are] suffering, until we become enlightened. The minute when we purify subtle obscuration, achieve enlightenment, then we don't have the dualistic view, things appearing—I, action, object—things existing from its own side, doesn't have that. So then appears, things existing [in] mere name, appears like that. So not for us sentient beings. [Things appear as] truly existent, except in equipoise meditation.

So appearing real, truly existent, existing from its own side, appearing real. I, action, object, that hallucination happens due to past ignorance having left negative imprint on the mind. So it is right now our mind has, our valid mind has merely imputed I. So should appear the I merely imputed by the mind, but not, but not in the reality. It appears totally wrong, false, hallucination. So total hallucination existing from its own side, truly existent, real I.

Then, first second merely labeled, merely imputed; second second appeared real existence, real I; third second then superstition *tag pa*, conceptual, holds it true. The real I appeared, conceptual thought holds it real, entrusts that real. That concept, such sort of thing, that concept is the root of samsara.

That self-concept that is root of samsara. That is root of cancer, all the sicknesses, root of old age, root of death, why we have to die, that is the root, that self-concept, wrong concept, ignorance, is the root of our death. Why we have to be reborn, that's the root—what causes death, what causes rebirth, what causes old age, sickness. Not only that, also suffering of change, all the comfort/pleasure of samsara, where it comes from is that. Suffering, suffering of change. Then from where the third suffering, pervasive compounding suffering

khyab pa du je kyi dug ngäl comes from that. The whole entire ocean of samsaric suffering comes from that concept, the self-concept.

So the eight major hot hells, eight cold hells, neighboring sufferings, ordinary narak suffering. Then the hungry ghosts, for thousands of years the preta's life [has] so much suffering of hunger and thirst, major suffering. Unbelievable, unbelievable, unbelievable, unbelievable. For us, even one day don't get food and so can't stand, basically, can't practice, can't meditate. So the pretas [for] thousands of years, tens of thousands of years, can't find even a drop, can't find a spoon of food. Unbelievable suffering, unbelievable. All those heavy sufferings, the three—outer obscurations, *chi yi drib pa*; *nang gi drib pa*, inner obscurations; *zä yi drib pa*, food obscurations—all those three types of suffering of pretas come from that concept, that wrong concept, ignorance.

Then the animals suffering, totally being ignorant, too foolish and ignorant, and then being eaten by another one, *chig la chig za wai dug ngäl*, hunger, thirst, torture even by the human beings. All that suffering, unbelievable, most unbelievable, unbelievable suffering came from the ignorance.

Then human beings, eight types of human beings' suffering—suffering of rebirth, old age, death, sickness, suffering not finding desirable object, suffering of meeting the undesirable object, then even one found desirable object but not finding satisfaction, then five sufferings of the aggregates—so all those eight types of sufferings of the human beings came from the ignorance, this wrong concept.

Then same thing the suras and asuras, their sufferings—the five shortcomings of death time, signs of death, five shortcomings, five nearing signs of death, five signs of death, all those. Mind is completely distracted in the samsaric pleasures of samsara, unbelievable. Life is completely distracted, so difficult to practice Dharma, so all that. Then war between sura and asura, fighting and killing. However all that suffering came from ignorance, root of samsara, that self-concept.

Therefore the problems of the global world—country problems, society problems, individual problems—the whole thing came from this concept, the ignorance, that concept I explained before, the wrong concept, the self-concept. So therefore the solution is to not...

The concept is ignorance, entrusting I, action, object as real, existing from their side, or truly existent. Real. As they appear real, entrusting, believing real. So now the antidote, method, antidote to free yourself from oceans of samsaric suffering and to free numberless others from oceans of samsaric suffering and

bring to enlightenment, then meditate on emptiness. Opposite concept. Don't think it's real, I, action, object, existing from its own side, real. Instead of that think it's empty. Empty from its own side. I is empty from its own side, action is empty from its own side, object is all empty from its own side.

So that's a little one-minute meditation.

[Pause]

The conclusion: Because it exists; because it exists.... You can say, because it is empty from its own side, therefore it exists in mere name. You can say that. It exists in mere name, merely imputed by mind. So meditating on emptiness it helps to support the subtle dependent arising, not only the gross dependence but subtle dependent arising, the Prasangika view. It supports for that. So emptiness meditation, if it supports for that, if it supports for the subtle dependent arising, it's supporting for the existent, then your meditation on emptiness is correct. But if it cannot help, if it cannot bring to conclusion, cannot help, cannot support the subtle dependent arising, exists in mere name, merely labeled, you can't support it, then the meditation on emptiness is wrong. It's not correct. That's probably nihilism. Your meditation on emptiness becomes nihilism, perhaps nihilism. Not correct. If it cannot support to that.

So empty, do not exist from its own side, so to be correct, it has to support for the existence, the conventional truth—*kun dzob den pa*. *Kun dzob den pa*, realizing, concentrating on emptiness helps *kun dzob den pa*, the conventional truth. It should help for that. So it exists, I, action, object, phenomena exist in mere name, being merely labeled by mind. So while it's empty it exists; while it's existing, it is empty. So unified emptiness and dependent arising on I, on every single subject of samsara, every single nirvana. So that's the middle way. Correct.

OK, so then through that able to eliminate the root of samsara, the ignorance. Then through that, by having trained the mind in that, then you achieve the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness, *phak pa*, arya being, you achieve that, then able to cease the seed of delusion. Then you remove delusion and karma; then you achieve nirvana. With bodhicitta, then also you achieve the bodhisattva arya path and then cease the subtle obscuration, then you achieve full enlightenment, then you are able to do perfect works for sentient beings.

Thank you very much!

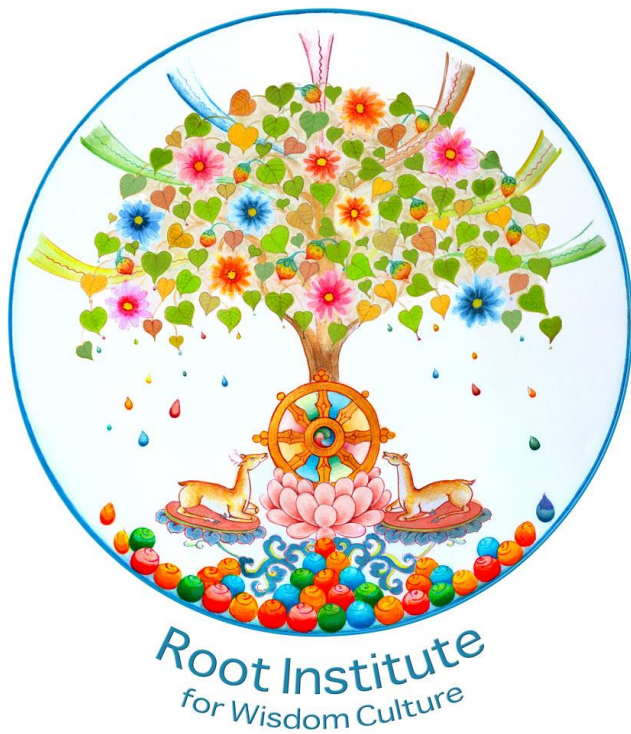
Transcribed, checked and lightly edited by Ven. Sarah Thresher. Root Institute, 31 March 2014. Source: www.lamayeshe.com

“I am sure all of you have come from a long distance with a good motivation. We should recognize that we are fortunate to have come here, just to be in Bodhgaya eating lentils and rice is good enough. Just to feel the vibration of the stupa is good enough. Normally it takes a lot of energy to ‘space out’, but here you can space out even without meditation, without having to do anything special. This is the power of Buddha’s omnipresent wisdom. So I think this is good enough, but still a good motivation is very important.

You can see nowadays in the world’s vibration that there is tremendous aggression, the ego conflicts. So we should be able to energize compassion easily. Especially since the world is becoming so impure. Therefore, the actions that we do here should at least be dedicated for the benefit of others and to somehow remove aggression and the impure energy of the world and its beings.”

Lama Thubten Yeshe

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