

a light-filled birthday for Lama Tsongkhapa



Je Tsongkhapa (1357-1419) is one of the most significant Tibetan Buddhist masters, whose studies and meditations in all the major schools of Tibetan Buddhism resulted in the founding of the Gelug lineage. Buddhists all over the world honor his birthday, which this year falls on November 29. Lama Zopa Rinpoche advises the following practices to be performed on that day.

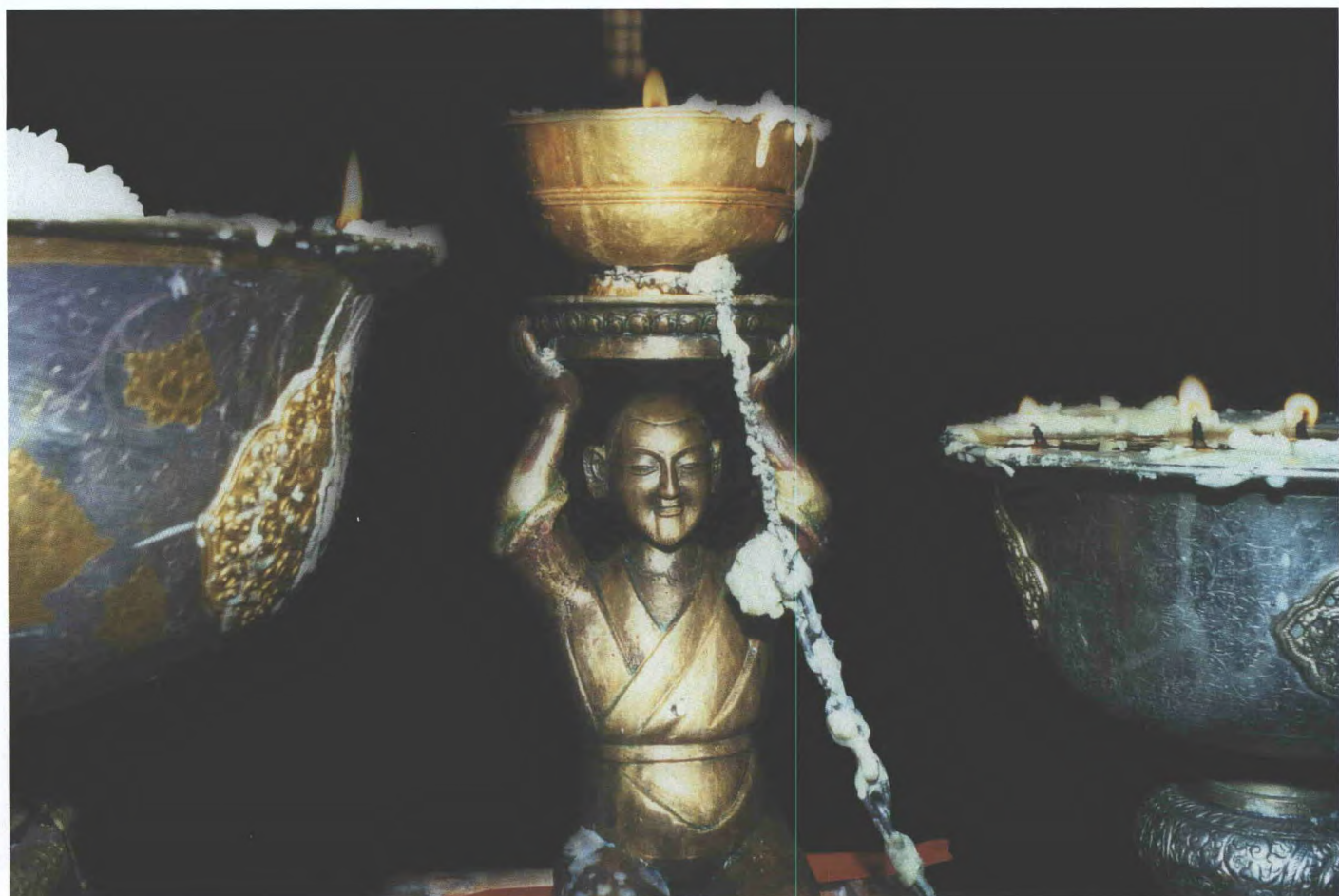


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As preparation, set up 1,000 offerings to Lama Tsongkhapa (1,000 sets of seven [or eight when music is included] offerings, including water, lights, flowers, incense, and food). If one is not able to do all these offerings, then set up as many hundreds of offering bowls as possible.

Perform the puja of *1,000 Offerings to Lama Tsongkhapa*. This practice is based on the version of the puja at Root Institute of *1,000 Offerings to Maitreya Buddha*, first used in Bodhgaya in 1993. You should recite the actual offering verse 1,000 times.

If you cannot do the practice of 1,000 offerings to Lama Tsongkhapa, then do *Lama Chöpa*. Once again, set up as many offerings as possible. Perform an extensive offering practice, offering as much as possible at the offerings section of *Lama Chöpa*. You can use the *Extensive light offering practice*, which I wrote. As you do this practice, you should substitute 'water,' or 'offering,' for the word 'light.'

After either of these extensive pujas, then recite the following:

- *The Praise to Lama Tsongkhapa*.
- *Palden Su Suma*. This is a very special prayer of the glorified one of the three realms; it was highly regarded by Song Rinpoche.
- *The Songs of the Mystic Experiences of Je Rinpoche*.
- The praise containing the line "My life has been meaningful." This praise is by Lama Tsongkhapa himself, in which he says, "I studied this and my life has been made meaningful..." (Name of prayer in Tibetan: *Dog chu du lä ma*)

After each stanza that describes Lama Tsongkhapa's attainments, we should rejoice. Rejoice at the qualities of holy deeds of Lama Tsongkhapa, by thinking how wonderful it is. Think, "May I also be like you."

Also, we should pray that we too can achieve the same realizations and become like Lama Tsongkhapa, that we can become as vastly beneficial as the sky, just as Lama Tsongkhapa was.

In addition to the other offerings, it is best to offer as many light offerings as you can. It is very common to offer lights on Lama Tsongkhapa Day, even in Solu Khumbu, which is mostly Nyingma. Although the villagers and townspeople don't really know about Lama Tsongkhapa, somehow on that day and night they still do lots of light offerings.

Just as many people often use lots of lights during Christmas and at marriages, we too should use lots of lights on Lama Tsongkhapa day and on special days of Buddha and other auspicious days, especially if we are not able to offer them every day.

Students at a center can hang up as many Christmas lights as possible. By offering lights, we create the cause of enlightenment, of liberation from samsara, and of the happiness of future lives. Also, success will happen in this life. Even if you hate [the idea of] happiness in this life, it will still come by the way. This is what you get from offering every single candle or Christmas light to the Guru–Triple Gem. You can hang white or colored lights on the inside and out of the center buildings, like a net of light offerings that cover a whole wall. Or you can hang lights over the trees and bushes in the garden around the center.

We generally use lots of Christmas lights just for parties or festivals. Instead, we should create the causes of enlightenment by offering lights to Lama Tsongkhapa, the merit fields, and so forth. Therefore, use as many Christmas lights and candles as possible, as long as you don't burn down the gumpa or yourself! But you can burn the ego away.

When we offer lights for marriages, New Year parties, and so forth, the entire expense incurred for the party is all wasted. It actually becomes negative karma because it is done with the attachment that clings to this life alone – unless the lights are offered with the sincere wish for other sentient beings to be happy, and without attachment to this life.

After completing the Lama Tsongkhapa Day practices, dedicate all the merit collected – beginning with the practice of refuge and bodhichitta, the seven-limb prayer, the various offering practices (outer, inner, and secret), any merit collected, skies and skies of merit collected – to achieve each of the special qualities of Lama Tsongkhapa's teachings.

To remember those special qualities, you can recite the text of *Losang Gyäl tän ma* or the prayer composed by Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo that is at the end of the Yamantaka self-initiation text. Another text you can recite is a special prayer that expresses the special qualities of Lama Tsongkhapa's teachings, which is contained in the life story of Pharpa Khun.

Of course, one can specially recite one of the great teachings of Lama Tsongkhapa, while reflecting on that teaching, such as *Dang nge legshe nyingpo*, *The Interpretive Definitive Meaning of Good Explanation*, or *Uma Gonpa Rabsal*, *The Extremely Clear Explanation of the View*, a commentary on Madhyamaka. That would be especially great. Or one could at least recite Lama Tsongkhapa's short praise of Buddha, *In Praise of Dependent Arising*. To recite the *Lam-Rim Chenmo* or *Middle Lam-Rim* or *Condensed Lam-Rim* would be a very good way to repay the great kindness of Lama Tsongkhapa's extensive beneficial works for the teachings of Buddha and for sentient beings. ❁

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