

# Graduation Time!

Lama Yeshe's and Lama Zopa Rinpoche's vision for education in action has taken another step forward with Basic Program (BP) graduation ceremonies in Italy, Australia and the Netherlands. Designed by Lama Zopa Rinpoche as an integrated program of Buddhist studies suitable for a contemporary setting, the Basic Program is a practice-oriented transmission of the Buddhadharma that takes students beyond introductory-level study and practice.

Based on the lam-rim, the course takes up to five years. In 2007, twenty-two students received the Basic Program Completion Certificate, a reward for completing all the subjects of the core curriculum and the lam-rim retreat. They also had to satisfy the Basic Program criteria for behavior and conduct – practicing to refrain from killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct (adultery) and intoxicants, while developing their concern for others and awareness of positive and negative states of mind, and developing the practice of patience and the bodhichitta motivation over the course of their studies.

A number of FPMT centers worldwide currently offer the Basic Program on either a residential or non-residential basis. The Basic Program is also available as a Home Study Program.

This means that the program is very flexible. It was Rinpoche's wish that many centers would be able to offer a structured study program that went beyond introductory courses, as for most centers the Masters Program (MP) is too advanced and intensive.

“**Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa (ILTK)** in Italy has just offered a two-and-a-half year residential Basic Program

between their two Masters Programs, but generally the BP is designed as a five-year program,” Olga Planken, Basic Program and Masters Program consultant for Education Department explained. “Some centers offer the BP fairly intensively: For instance, **Chenrezig Institute (CI)** in Queensland Australia offers up to eight-week residential modules over five years, and **Maitreya Instituut** in the Netherlands offers residential weekends. Other centers have weekly classes with or without practice days on occasional weekends. Thus, different levels of the program are in play. A five-year residential BP at **Nalanda Monastery** in France started in February this year. This is offered in three languages (English, French and Spanish) while **Institut Vajra Yogini (IVY)**, also in France, offers a very successful BP in monthly weekends with their resident geshe, Geshe Tenzin Dorje and ‘summer universities’ with guest teacher Yangsi Rinpoche, Director of Maitripa Institute. **Kalachakra Centre** in Paris can then use their materials, offering the program at their city center on a more modest level with their visiting geshe, Geshe Jamphel. MP graduate Sixte Vinçotte helps with IVY's BP by leading the yearly month-long lam-rim retreats and as tutor.



“Spain is now offering several BPs. Ven. Nerea, an MP graduate who has been setting up both FPMT education program coordination and translation coordination for Spain, is now starting to teach the BP in **O.Sel.Ling Centro de Retiro. Nagarjuna C.E.T. Valencia** has taken it up, and **Nagarjuna C.E.T. Madrid** is starting as well. **Nagarjuna C.E.T. Barcelona** has almost completed its first BP and will participate in the next BP final exam.

“On request, another round of Italian BP Home Study will be offered on-line to up to seventy students, some of whom come to the monthly reviews at **ILTK**. That center’s two-and-a-half year BP, which finished last year, had up to eighty home-study students as well. There will also be a Czech on-line BP offered by our Czech Republic study group **Dompipa** (whose coordinator, Giovanni Conchin, a student of ILTK’s BP Home Study, insisted on offering the program to his country) under the auspices of ILTK and alongside the other on-line programs that they offer: MP in English and Italian, BP in Italian and in Czech! They use an inter-active on-line learning facility called ‘Moodle’ and will have video reviews on-line, audio to download, and on-line forums with tutors, etc. These tutors are all BP and MP



Above: ILTK BP students who did the three-month retreat as part of the Basic Program.

Below: Janny deBoer receives her Certificate at Maitreya Instituut.

graduates. It's a BP graduate (Ester Bilkova) who is tutor for the Czech on-line forum and is also translating all BP texts and transcripts into Czech. Their second tutor, Ven. Kevin Middleton, also an ILTK BP graduate, will travel to the Czech Republic every two months for reviews and to meditate with the Dompipa BP on-line students! Vania Tesser is the tutor for the Italian on-line BP. Aurora Maggio and Dino Cirulli, both MP graduates, are and have been translating and revising the Italian course materials, texts and transcripts, both for MP and for BP, and work on an Italian glossary of standard Buddhist terminology.

"In USA we also have MP graduates teaching BP – Don Handrick at **Thubten Norbu Ling** in Santa Fe, and **Ksitigarba Study Group** in Taos, New Mexico, and Emily Hsu at **Tse Chen Ling** in San Francisco and **Gyalwa Gyatso Buddhist Center** in Campbell, California – providing course materials that are innovative and very much appreciated by other BPs as well. Emily teaches a second round of BP alongside Geshe Ngawang Dragpa at TCL, who is currently offering the tantra subjects of the first BP round there.

"Also in USA, Geshe Tsulga is teaching BP at **Kurukulla Center** in Massachusetts and Geshe Gelek Chodak at **Kadampa Center** in North Carolina where they recently received Ven. Tendron, BP graduate from CI, as Western teacher and spiritual program coordinator, while **Guhyasamaja Center's** Khensur Rinpoche Losang Jampa also started offering the BP and **Land of Medicine Buddha** uses visiting teachers to complete their first BP. Other centers in Australia that offer the BP are **Buddha House**, with Geshe Pema Tsering and Jampa Gedun, our previous MP tutor, and where Ven. Jamyang, another BP graduate from CI, also teaches, and **Vajrayana Institute**, where Geshe Ngawang Samten's BP teachings are complemented with reviews by Western resident teacher Wai Cheong Kok, the MP graduate who, together with Emily Hsu, wrote the *BP Manual for Chapter Four of the Ornament* during the 1998 MP.

"Singapore's Geshe Chonyi is completing a very well attended and successful BP; **Amitabha Buddhist Centre** will be among the centers participating in the next BP final exam. **Shakyamuni Center** in Taiwan has a BP with audio CDs and transcripts, taught by Geshe Gyurme. In Germany

Ven. Fedor Stracke is now resident teacher at **Aryatara Institute** in Munich, where he is completing the BP that was started there by Geshe Sopa. Ven. Fedor also teaches the BP at **Kopan Monastery**, offering three-monthly summer modules over six years, which includes the three-month retreat! In the Netherlands and Australia the program had already been offered for a second or third time before the concept had crystallized, and the first BP final exam was offered last year. That's why their students needed only to fulfill the initial one-month retreat requirement to qualify for the Certificate. The retreat requirement has since been extended by Rinpoche to three months, and it was delightful to see ILTK fulfill this wish to offer BP students a taste of lam-rim experience so lavishly by organizing such a three-month lam-rim retreat at the conclusion of their BP last year, in which almost all their BP students and some home-study students participated (more than forty did the entire three months).

"In Brazil we have another MP graduate, Ven. Lobsang Chogni teaching BP in Rio de Janeiro's **Centro Shiwa Lha**. And **Liberation Prison Project** is preparing to offer BP homestudy for their more advanced students in prisons! Several translations have come from the 1998 MP, with more to come from the current MP, in both English and other languages that support and make possible the implementation of the BP in other than English-speaking countries.

### Final exam!

"In 2007 Education Department presented the first Basic Program final exam. Three centers participated – **Chenrezig Institute**, **Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa** and **Maitreya Instituut** – and we now have some twenty-two BP graduates. Another six BP home-study graduates received their BP Home Study Certificates. CI now has seven Sangha members with BP certification, and their BP coordinator and tutor also graduated; all are involved in teaching or as BP tutors.

"In this way, apart from those who continued their studies with the current Masters Program, all BP graduates are already involved in teaching and serving in centers; several teach *Discovering Buddhism*, some are tutors for Basic Programs and some are spiritual program coordinators."

## Masters Program update

Because of the unexpected passing away of Geshe Jampa Gyatso late November, the new Masters Program is taught by Geshe Tenzin Tenphel, who has been the second resident teacher at ILTK for more than ten years. At the time of writing, the program made its successful start mid-January with some seventy full-time and ten part-time residential students, and another one hundred and fifty engaging in the interactive on-line program that is offered in English and Italian. The residential MP is offered in Italian and English as well; all four tutors and the interpreters are MP graduates. Sze Gee Toh, English interpreter and tutor, is also translating Gyaltsab Je's commentary for the first subject, *Ornament for Clear Realizations*. Sze Gee has already translated several BP texts as well. Italian interpreter Ven. Christiana considers offering the BP in Sicily, starting this autumn. Tutor for the Italians, Ven. Olivier Rossi, has been the tutor for the ILTK BP as well, and Italian MP on-line tutor Ven. Laura Coccitto also was the much appreciated home-study tutor during the BP. Patrick Lambelet has been teaching at ILTK and the Italian centers since he completed the 1998 MP and is now the tutor for the English on-line MP.

**Maitreya Institute** is the first center to offer the Abridged Masters Program: a 'light' version of the MP for students who have completed the Basic Program but cannot set aside six years for the residential MP. It is part-time (at MTI a weekend per month), has attendance requirements only, but uses the study materials from ILTK's 1998 MP: transcripts, charts, quizzes, discussion materials and tests. A completion certificate will be provided by Education Department.

The residential full-time Masters Program will include three one-month retreats and will be completed with a review period and final exam and another nine months of retreat.

The next BP final exam is expected to take place in 2009.

For more information about the Basic Program and a full list of centers offering the Program, go to [www.fpmt.org/education/bpdescription.asp](http://www.fpmt.org/education/bpdescription.asp); for the Masters Program go to [www.fpmt.org/education/mpdescription.asp](http://www.fpmt.org/education/mpdescription.asp) ([www.iltk.it/mp/](http://www.iltk.it/mp/))



The well-earned Basic Program Completion Certificate has been awarded to 22 students.

## FPMT Basic Program Curriculum

The nine subjects are:

1. Stages of the Path (Lam-rim)
2. Heart Sutra
3. Mahayana Mind Training (Lojong)
4. Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds
5. Mind and Cognition (Lorig)
6. Tenets (Drubtha)
7. Ornament for Clear Realizations - Fourth Chapter
8. Sublime Continuum of the Mahayana (Gyulama) - First Chapter: The Tathagata Essence
9. Ground and Paths of Secret Mantra

### Supplements

(i.e. recommended, optional subjects):

10. Seventy Topics
11. Death, Intermediate State and Rebirth
12. A highest yoga tantra commentary