

About Special Integration Experiences

Discovering Buddhism Subject Area 14

DESCRIPTION

By undertaking intensive practices of purification and a minimum two-week lam-rim residential retreat, prepare your mind in the best possible way to gain realizations on the path to enlightenment. Purification practices include: 100,000 prostrations, 3-month Vajrasattva retreat, and Nyung Nä. This is a great way to seal the blessings of this program.

REQUIRED

- Two-week Kopan-style Lam-rim course
- Three-month Vajrasattva purification retreat
- 100,000 Prostrations to the 35 Buddhas
- Nyung Nä Retreat – do, Know how to do, Able to lead others to do

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

- Kopan one-month course (at Kopan Monastery, Nepal - fulfills requirement)
- Making pilgrimage to Buddhist holy sites¹
- Meeting a qualified spiritual master
- Participation in an “Experiencing Monasticism” residential course (*To be developed in conjunction with the International Mahayana Institute*)

REQUIRED TEXTS

- *Discovering Buddhism Required Reading* packet on pilgrimage (FPMT)
- *Becoming Vajrasattva* (previously called *The Tantric Path of Purification*), by Lama Thubten Yeshe (WP)
- *The Preliminary Practice of Vajrasattva*, compiled by FPMT Educ Dept (FPMT)
- *The Bodhisattva's Confession of Moral Downfalls*, compiled by FPMT Educ Dept (FPMT)
- *Nyung Nä*, compiled by FPMT Educ Dept (FPMT)

SUGGESTED TEXTS

- *Confession of Downfalls*, by Brian Beresford (SLP)
- *Relating to a Spiritual Teacher*, by Alex Berzin (SLP)
- *Teachings from the Vajrasattva Retreat*, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche (LYWA, FPMT)
- *Everlasting Rain of Nectar*, by Geshe Jhampa Gyatso (on prostration practice)

¹ Pilgrimage can be done in a modified way by creating replicas of the Buddhist Holy Sites in one's home or center, reading about each place and doing the appropriate practices as if one were actually at these places.

WP = Wisdom Publications, www.wisdompubs.org
LYWA = Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive, www.LamaYeshe.com
SLP = Snow Lion Publications, www.snowlionpub.com
FPMT = FPMT Education Department, www.fpmt.org/shop
SP = Shambhala Publications, www.shambhala.com

ESTIMATED TIME TO COMPLETE

- 3 Nyung Nes (2 days each = 6-9 days)
- Prostrations (2-3 months full-time retreat or 200-300/day for 1-2 years)
- 2-week lam-rim course
- Vajrasattva retreat (2-3 months full-time retreat or 6-9 months doing two sessions/day)

HOW TO COMPLETE THESE REQUIREMENTS

For students interested in completing all requirements of the *Discovering Buddhism* program, we recommend that you begin your efforts to engage in the “Special Integration Experiences” as soon as possible as they will demand a sincere commitment of time and effort to complete. These requirements can be filled at any point during the program and you do not have to wait until completing other subject areas to start. If you have already done these practices for other reasons prior to your participation in the DB program, you do not have to complete them a second time to fulfill the requirements.

There are a number of ways you can plan to complete these requirements of the program:

Two-week Kopan-style Lam-rim Course

The best way to complete this requirement is by making pilgrimage to Kopan Monastery in Kathmandu, Nepal and attending the renowned “Kopan November Course.” This is a one-month course that is an invaluable opportunity to deepen your experience and understanding of the lam-rim. There is time for open discussion, meditation, and lectures from a Tibetan lama and a western sangha member daily. Kopan is where the FPMT first began and there is no better “rite of passage” into the heart of Tibetan Buddhism as practiced in FPMT than to go to Kopan. To find out more about the Kopan November Course, please see Kopan Monastery’s website at: www.kopan-monastery.com. If you are not able to participate in the November Course, attendance at any of the ten-day lam-rim courses offered at Kopan also fulfills this requirement. For a schedule of these courses please see the DB retreats page: www.fpmt.org/retreat/dbschedule.asp

For those unable to travel to Nepal, the next best option to fulfill this requirement is to attend one of Lama Zopa Rinpoche’s annual retreats, offered in different regions every year. While these are often deity-based retreats, the emphasis is always on lam-rim and the experience will give you an equally profound journey to the heart of FPMT. To view the schedule of these retreats again please refer to: www.fpmt.org/retreat/dbschedule.asp For a schedule of retreats with Lama Zopa Rinpoche please see <http://www.fpmt.org/teachers/zopa/schedule.asp>

One can also fulfill this requirement by attending a lam-rim retreat of at least two weeks offered at any FPMT center. A list of current retreats being offered is available on the “Discovering Buddhism Retreats” page mentioned above.

Lastly one can perform a two-week lam-rim retreat in ones own home. This will, of course, require more discipline and more familiarity with both the lam-rim and how to conduct a retreat than doing the retreat in a group setting. However, it is an option. To fulfill the

requirement in this way we recommend that you follow the 3-day lam-rim cycle found in Module 3; Presenting the Path, and repeat the cycle 5 times.

Three Month Vajrasattva Purification Retreat

The Vajrasattva practice is a powerful opportunity to clear away obstacles on the path to enlightenment and fertilize the mind for gaining realizations on the path quickly. It is a trademark of Lama Thubten Yeshe's (Founder of FPMT) style of guiding students that they engage in Vajrasattva retreat, preferably as part of a group. The "three month" commitment means either doing a full-time Vajrasattva retreat for three months or 100,000² recitations of the long mantra.

There are a number of ways to fulfill this requirement:

Participate in a group Vajrasattva retreat. Vajrasattva retreats are offered annually at:

Kopan Monastery in Nepal (Feb-May); www.kopan-monastery.org
Tushita Meditation Center in India (June-Sept); www.tushita.info, and
Root Institute in Bodhgaya, India (Feb-May); www.rootinstitute.com

Other FPMT centers offer Vajrasattva retreats from time to time. See the "Discovering Buddhism Retreats" web page mentioned above for current dates and locations. The support of a group is invaluable for retreat. It also gives you a chance to share your experience with others and test your patience!

Do a full-time Vajrasattva retreat alone. This requires anywhere from 2-3 months to complete the mantra count. In a "full-time" retreat, you usually do from 4-6 sessions each day for one to two hours each. Many FPMT centers offer retreat facilities for individuals wishing to undertake longer retreats and can offer some help and guidance in the practice. See the "Retreat Facilities" section of the FPMT web page to locate a retreat center in your region, www.fpmt.org. Retreats can also be done at home if the conditions are suitable and one has enough self-discipline, although if this is your first serious retreat, this is not recommended.

Do Vajrasattva practice daily until 100,000 mantras have been completed. While a full-time residential retreat is optimal, this is the best option for those who do not have the luxury of taking three months away to do retreat. Set up the altar and meditation seat as you would do for a full-time retreat and recite any number of mantras each day. It is recommended to do at least two sessions each day, one in the morning and one in the evening. Once you become familiar with the mantra, you can recite anywhere from 200-500 mantras each session. Thus you can complete this requirement in 18 months at a slow pace and in 3 ½ months at a brisk pace while still maintaining a regular work regimen. If one chooses this option, it is important not to "break" retreat, meaning that you must recite at *least* the short Vajrasattva sadhana and 21 long mantras every day until the retreat is finished.

² When doing retreats that have a recitation commitment of 100,000, it is traditional to add 10% to the total to make up for errors. In this case, one would recite 110,000 mantras.

Full instructions on how to properly engage in a Vajrasattva retreat together with the necessary practice texts are available in *The Preliminary Practice of Vajrasattva* available through the FPMT and in Lama Thubten Yeshe's, *Becoming Vajrasattva* (previously titled *Tantric Path of Purification*) available through Wisdom Publications www.wisdompubs.com *The Preliminary Practice of Vajrasattva* contains detailed guidelines for completing 100,000 mantras as well as a list of helpful resources to complete the practice.

100,000 Prostrations to the 35 Confession Buddhas

The practice of prostrations is based on the “Sutra of the Three Heaps”, commonly referred to as the “Confession of Downfalls to the Thirty Five Buddhas” or “The Bodhisattva’s Confession of Moral Downfalls.” Lama Zopa Rinpoche has given extensive commentary on how to do this practice that has been integrated into a step-by-step guide entitled “The Bodhisattva’s Confession of Moral Downfalls, extensive.” available from the FPMT Education Department. To complete your 100,000 prostrations, you can either engage in full-time retreat or do them as a daily practice at home.

To do a full-time prostration retreat, it is highly recommended to make pilgrimage to Bodhgaya, India and do your prostrations at the place of the Buddha’s enlightenment. This is recommended for a number of reasons: First, because of the power of the place, each prostration is said to have seven times the effect, and, secondly, because Bodhgaya is a central location for prostration practice. There are a number of prostration boards available, the Bodhgaya Stupa is both powerful and inspirational, and the number of fellow practitioners making prostrations keeps one going when things become difficult! Contact Root Institute at: riooffice@vsnl.net for more information.

Alternatively, one can do a prostration retreat at any FPMT retreat center or in the convenience of one’s own home. If done full-time, it should take you 2-3 months to complete the requirement.

Prostrations can also be done as a daily practice, as with Vajrasattva. You can do a session each morning and each evening and can eventually do 200-1000 prostrations each day. As it is important not to “break” retreat, once you have begun this practice, you should at the least recite the “The Bodhisattva’s Confession of Moral Downfalls” every day and do a minimum of three prostrations.

Students who are not able to fulfill this requirement due to physical limitations are encouraged to contact the FPMT Education Department for an alternate practice requirement.

Complete practice and support materials are available from the FPMT Education Department. Email: materials@fpmt.org

Nyung Nā Retreat

Nyung Ne is a profound practice to develop compassion based on offerings, prostrations, and praises to Avalokateshvara, the embodiment of Great Compassion. It is said that engaging in a Nyung Ne retreat is equivalent to doing up to three months of other kinds of retreats. It is a Kriya Tantra level of practice that anyone who has faith can do. A single

Nyung Ne takes two days and a morning to complete and requires taking precepts for two days. The second day is a day of fasting and silence, which ends with the final session on the third morning. One does four – 2 ½ hour sessions of well-structured practice each day. To fulfill this requirement, students must not only participate in a Nyung Ne retreat, but also understand how to do the practice on their own, and feel competent to be able to lead others in Nyung Ne retreats.

The best way to do fulfill this requirement is to attend Nyung Ne retreats at any number of FPMT centers. Current dates and locations can be found on the “Discovering Buddhism Retreats” web page mentioned above. It is most likely that a student will need to do this practice at least three times before feeling able to lead others in it. The first time, one can simply experience the retreat. The second time, one can pay closer attention to how the altars are set-up and the rituals observed during the retreat. The third time, one can volunteer to help set-up the altars and perhaps lead a session or two to test it out. Many centers offer a number of Nyung Näs in a row giving students the opportunity to experience the practice on deeper and deeper levels.

If it is not possible to go to an FPMT center to engage in Nyung Nä retreats, it is possible for students to get the support materials mentioned below and get personal advice on how to do the practice from FPMT Education Department or any experienced FPMT student. In this case, you would need to do at least three Nyung Näs on your own to assure sufficient familiarity with the practice.

Support materials for this practice include: *Nyung Nä – The Means of Achievement of the Eleven-Face Great Compassionate One*, a practice text including full instructions for how to do the retreat, altar set-ups, mudras, etc.. These are available from the FPMT Education Department. Email: materials@fpmt.org

IN CONCLUSION

The retreat requirements of *Discovering Buddhism* are the specific practices advised by Lama Zopa Rinpoche, our Spiritual Director, for those wishing to get the highest benefit from this program. While the practices may at first seem daunting, there is no way to measure the benefit of engaging in them. They are the foundational practices that open the mind to realizations on the path and clear away lifetimes of negative karmic buildup, preparing us for not only a happy death and future rebirth, but also for the ultimate happiness of liberation and enlightenment.

If you have further questions or concerns regarding this or any other aspect of the *Discovering Buddhism* program, please feel free to contact:

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