

An Essay on Relics

by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Generally speaking, it is not that easy to produce relics and to achieve progressive experiential realizations on the grounds and paths in a succession of many noble rebirths in happy migratory realms. One has to make very strong and extensive prayers and preserve pure morality for many lifetimes in order to create the causes that produce relics. Relics will only be produced by practicing.

The tantric teachings are expounded in four classes. Within these four classes of tantra, it is only the highest yoga tantra that enables one to achieve enlightenment in one brief lifetime of this degenerate time with this one body; the others do not. Highest yoga tantra has two divisions: generation stage and completion stage. The generation stage is classified into gross and subtle, while the completion stage is classified into five stages. It is said in the scriptural teachings that those who have achieved the realization of mind isolation [in the completion stage of highest tantra] will produce relics. One who has achieved the realization of mind isolation will definitely be able to attain enlightenment in that very lifetime.

Likewise, we can also see the relics of arya buddhas such as our own teacher Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and Buddha Kasyapa (Tib: *Osung*), who achieved the two unmistakable paths of method and wisdom within their mental continuum and thereby extinguished the two obscurations and attained buddhahood. In order to produce these relics, they first practiced the bodhisattva's conduct of the six perfections, five paths, ten grounds, and so forth for three countless great eons and accumulated the two collections of merit and wisdom that led to the actualization of the rupakaya and dharmakaya of a buddha. Relics emerged as a result of all this.

Generally, although a buddha's body is unlike our gross body that is composed of flesh and blood, the Buddha emanated many kinds of relics out of compassion for us, in order to help us sentient beings generate faith in our mindstreams as a cause to receive blessings, purify our negativities, and accumulate merits.

In the past, when Buddha was residing in India, many people saw his actual body. Nowadays, due to impure karma and lack of merit, we cannot see the actual body of Buddha nor hear his speech. We only have the fortune to see Buddha's relics. Therefore, the kind and compassionate Guru Shakyamuni Buddha emanated thousands of relics as an object of devotion for very many sentient beings. It is said in the sutras, such as *Dode Kalsang*, that King Ashoka regarded the relics as the most sacred of objects and placed them all in many stupas that he built for sentient beings. Many of the relics can also be found in Sri Lanka. The emanated relics were spread throughout many countries in the world inspiring numberless beings and leading to the attainment of liberation and enlightenment – this is the sole purpose of producing relics. Buddhas appear to arya bodhisattvas in the aspect of the sambhogakaya, to ordinary bodhisattvas in the aspect of emanation bodies, and to those with karmic impurities in the aspect of ordinary beings possessing a body of flesh and blood. Similarly, in the case of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, whom we are able to see directly and who is in fact actual Chenrezig, most ordinary beings can only see him in the aspect of a gelong (fully ordained

monk) who is still subject to sickness, who grows old, and so forth. In the same way, those who have reached very high levels of tantric realization – for example, like the late Geshe Lama Konchog who recently passed away – leave behind relics for the sake of sentient beings who are tortured by suffering. This happens because they have developed high realizations within their mental continuum originating from the root of great compassion. Geshe Lama Konchog inspired and introduced so many foreigners to the Dharma and planted the seeds of good imprints in their minds.

When you see holy beings' relics, think in the following way: At this time, these holy beings are benefiting us by emanating relics that enable us to accumulate merit and purify negativities, thereby leading us to liberation and enlightenment. We should rejoice at the deeds and realizations of great tantric practitioners such as Geshe Lama Konchog and others. We should pray, by thinking, "May we too achieve realizations of the grounds and paths as you holy beings have done. May we be able to benefit migratory beings as extensively as you holy beings have benefited them." We should also rejoice at the virtue of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas, at all the qualities of their holy body, speech, and mind, as well as at all their great activities for the teachings and for migratory beings. If one makes strong prayers in this way, then one will also be able to give great and extensive benefit to the teachings and to migratory beings. As it says in the sutras, "All phenomena are like conditions and well abide at the tip of the wish. Whoever makes even a single prayer, the result will arise in exactly the same way." As it says here, good and bad always depend upon the intention, so one should strive to generate good intentions. As Lama Tsong Khapa said, "If one's practice is not conjoined with any of the three principles of the path, apart from a few exceptional cases, whatever one does will only become the cause of samsara." It is said that due to the power of holy objects, even if one makes offerings, prostrations, and circumambulations to them with an impure motivation such as anger, it all becomes the cause for omniscience.

In order to generate realizations such as isolation of the mind in the completion stage of highest yoga tantra, one must first realize the view of the Madhyamaka Prasangika, which is unlike the views of the other philosophical schools. One must train in the stages of the common path by generating the pure mind of bodhichitta, by renouncing self and cherishing others. This is preceded by generating pure renunciation. The root of all of these is generating the faith that sees the guru as the actual Buddha. This depends on the manner of correctly devoting to the guru with thought and action. It is through such a practice of developing the mind in the path that these relics will come about.

This is the reason why relics are considered very holy and precious. Relics are manifested and remains are left behind due to the kindness of holy beings in order for us sentient beings to collect merit and purify obscurations.

Colophon:

This was written at the most holy place of Bodhgaya on 29 January 2002 during the visit to receive the Kalachakra initiation conferred by Arya Avalokiteshvara, the omniscient one, His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. It was translated by Ven. Pemba Sherpa and initially edited by Ven. Sarah Thresher. It was checked and further edited by Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche. Final minor polishing was done by Ven. Constance Miller, FPMT Education Department, May 2002.