

Advice for Prostrations from Lama Zopa Rinpoche

During a retreat in Bendigo, Australia, 2014, Lama Zopa Rinpoche made extensive changes to many practices including Prostrations to the Thirty-Five Confession Buddhas. Rinpoche advised that preliminary prayers be done before doing the practice of prostrations and that at the end of the practice the “Mantra of Pure Morality” and “Prayer to Keep Pure Morality” be recited. These changes can be found in the FPMT Retreat Prayer Book, 2016 edition. Then, at Root Institute in Bodhgaya, India, January 2017, Lama Zopa Rinpoche gave some new instructions regarding prostrations, including some changes to the preliminary holy name mantras, and also dictated a new meditation. Rinpoche asked that these instructions be integrated into the FPMT booklets on the practice of prostrations. They will be included in forthcoming updated versions of the booklets The Practice of Prostrations to the Thirty-Five Confession Buddhas and The Preliminary Practice of Prostrations to the Thirty-Five Confession Buddhas.

When Doing Three Prostrations

When you are doing three prostrations, for example, to the holy objects on your altar or in a temple, Rinpoche suggests reciting the following holy names. Rinpoche clarified, “You can do both, if you can. It depends on what you can do. If you can’t do both, you can just do one of them.”

Reciting the holy name of Buddha Ratnaketu (Tib. Rinchen Gyaltzen, Eng. Precious Victory Banner) multiplies each prostration by ten million. With the first prostration, quickly recite the holy name as many times as possible.

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

**To Bhagavan, Tathagata, Arhat, Perfectly Complete Buddha, Precious Victory Banner,
I prostrate.**

According to the Kangyur, reciting the holy name of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha purifies eight hundred billion eons of negative karma. With the second and third prostrations, quickly recite the holy name as many times as possible.

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

**To Guru, Teacher, Bhagavan, Tathagata, Arhat, Perfectly Complete Buddha, Glorious
Conqueror Shakyamuni, I prostrate.**

When Doing “Prostrations to the Thirty-Five Buddhas”

Preliminary Holy Name Mantras

Recite the following holy name mantras while doing prostrations. All these can be recited quickly, i.e., one recitation does not need to correspond with one prostration. The first mantra multiplies each prostration by a thousand.

OM NAMO MAÑJUŚHRIYE / NAMAḤ SUŚHRIYE / NAMA UTTAMAŚHRIYE SVĀHĀ¹ (3x)

Reciting the holy name mantra of Buddha Ratnaketu (Tib. Rinchen Gyaltzen, Eng. Precious Victory Banner) multiplies each prostration by ten million.²

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 (3x)

**To Bhagavan, Tathagata, Arhat, Perfectly Complete Buddha, Precious Victory Banner,
I prostrate. (3x)**

OM NAMO BHAGAVATE RATNAKETU RĀJĀYA / TATHĀGATĀYA ARHATE SAMYAK
SAMBUDDHĀYA / TADYATHĀ / OM RATNE RATNE MAHĀRATNE RATNA VIJAYE
SVĀHĀ (3x)

Recite the holy name of Glorious Conqueror Shakyamuni and the mantra for prostrating to holy objects as a pair. According to the Kangyur, each recitation of the holy name purifies eight hundred billion eons of negative karma. By reciting the mantra, each prostration is done to all the Three Rare Sublime Ones and all the holy objects of the ten directions and the three times. The holy name is usually recited in Tibetan.

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

**To Guru, Teacher, Bhagavan, Tathagata, Arhat, Perfectly Complete Buddha, Glorious
Conqueror Shakyamuni, I prostrate.**

OM NAMO DAŚHADIK TRIKĀLA SARVA RATNATRAYĀYA / NAMAḤ³ PRADAKṢHĀ
SUPRADAKṢHĀ SARVA PĀPAḤ VIŚHODHANI SVĀHĀ (4 or 5x)

Rinpoche said, “It is not just about adding extra mantras. If you think of the purpose, you will understand why to do them.”

Meditation for “Prostrations to the Thirty-Five Buddhas”

Motivation

Generate the motivation of bodhichitta. As much as possible generate a strong thought of impermanence-death, which allows your mind to become Dharma. Then generate compassion and strong bodhichitta toward sentient beings.

Visualizing the Objects of Prostration

A simple visualization is to visualize Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, who in essence is the Guru, Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, as well as all the statues, stupas, and scriptures. Then prostrate to him thinking that you are prostrating to the Thirty-Five Buddhas. However, the main thing is to prostrate to the Guru-Buddha—Buddha in the aspect of the guru and the guru in the aspect of Buddha. By thinking the guru is in the aspect of Buddha, you quickly receive blessings.

The elaborate visualization is to visualize the *Lama Chopa* merit field, or, as His Holiness says, to think that all the numberless buddhas and bodhisattvas are there, without following the usual tradition of visualization.

When visualizing the *Lama Chopa* merit field, the founder of the Buddhadharma, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, is there in the heart of Lama Lozang Thubwang Dorje Chang, who is in the center of the merit field. In front of him are the direct gurus; to either side of him are all the indirect lineage lamas of the extensive and profound lineages, and behind him are the lineage lamas of the blessing lineage. Below them are the deities of the four tantric classes—kriya tantra, charya tantra, yoga tantra, and maha anuttarayoga tantra. Then, below them are the Thousand Buddhas of the Fortunate Eon and the Thirty-Five Buddhas; below them, the bodhisattvas; below them, the hearers and solitary realizers, including the Sixteen Arhats; below them, the dakas and dakinis; and below them, the Dharma protectors. However, they are all one—your root guru. All of them are your root guru. The whole merit field is your root guru. This is the elaborate way of visualizing the objects of prostration. If you have thangkas or statues, you should also think that they are manifestations of your root guru.

The Meaning of Touching the Four Places

When you prostrate, keep your feet together, not separated, but also not like an army exercise. Fold your hands at your heart with the thumbs tucked inside the palms.

The meaning of putting your folded hands on your crown is that it causes you to create the merit to achieve a crown pinnacle, one of a buddha’s thirty-two holy signs and eighty holy exemplifications. According to Kyabje Phabongkha Rinpoche, touching folded hands to the forehead purifies the negative karmas collected with the body from beginningless rebirths. It creates the cause to achieve the holy sign of the clockwise curled hair at the center of a buddha’s eyebrows, for which unbelievable merit is needed. It also creates the cause to achieve the vajra holy body. Touching folded hands to the throat purifies the negative karmas collected with the speech from beginningless rebirths and creates the cause to achieve the vajra holy speech. Touching folded hands to the heart purifies the negative karmas collected with the mind from beginningless rebirths and creates the cause to achieve the vajra holy mind.

What to Visualize When Doing Prostrations Slowly

When doing prostrations to the *Lama Chopal* merit field or the Thirty-Five Buddhas or just Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, what you should visualize is:

- When you put your folded hands on your crown: “I’m prostrating to the numberless buddhas, Dharma, and sangha, which are manifestations of my root guru.”
- When you touch your folded hands to your forehead: “I’m prostrating to the numberless statues, stupas, and scriptures, which are manifestations of my root guru.”
- When you touch your folded hands to your throat: “I’m prostrating to the numberless buddhas, Dharma and sangha, which are manifestations of my root guru.”
- When you touch your folded hands to your heart: “I’m prostrating to the numberless statues, stupas, and scriptures, which are manifestations of my root guru.”
- Then, when you lie down on the ground, think, “I’m prostrating to the ten-direction buddhas, Dharma, sangha, statues, stupas, and scriptures, which are manifestations of my root guru.”

The last thing, as you put your hands over your head, is to think that you are prostrating to all of them. This means that, from your place, wherever you are, you are prostrating to every single holy object that exists in all ten directions. So each time you prostrate it creates unbelievable merit.

What to Visualize When Doing Prostrations Quickly

The above is what to do when you do prostrations slowly at the beginning of a practice. But when you need to do them quickly in order to finish a certain number, you can’t do that. As you begin to bend down the main thing to think is: “I’m prostrating to the numberless buddhas, Dharma, sangha and the numberless statues, stupas, and scriptures, which are manifestations of my root guru.” This is unbelievable—with each prostration you prostrate to every single holy object in the ten directions. Not one is left out, not even the statues in shops or the tsatsas in people’s houses. By thinking that all these holy objects are the guru, you collect the highest merit and do the greatest purification. Don’t stay on the ground for long; you might fall asleep! Then, as you start to bend down again, do the same as before.

At the end, do the dedications that come at the end of the Thirty-Five Buddhas’ practice.

Colophon:

Lama Zopa Rinpoche gave these instructions to Vens. Joan Nicell and Tenzin Tsomo at Root Institute, Bodhgaya, India, January 2017. “Meditation for ‘Prostrations to the Thirty-Five Buddhas’” was transcribed by Ven. Tenzin Tsomo, March 2017, and checked against the audio and edited by Ven. Joan Nicell, May 2017. A few words were added by Ven. Joan Nicell from teachings on the same topic given at Light of the Path 2016 in North Carolina, USA, and at Rinchen Jangsem Ling, Triang, Malaysia, in 2016. Edited by Ven. Joan Nicell, FPMT Education Services, January 2018.

Notes

1. During a commentary on the *Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga* at Tushita Retreat Center, Dharamsala, India, March 1986, Lama Zopa Rinpoche taught: It is said in a teaching that if one does full-length prostrations while reciting the following mantra three times, you receive the same merit of having listened to, reflected on, and meditated on the entire Tripitaka, the three baskets, or collections, of Buddha's teachings. Also, if you do three full-length prostrations with this mantra every day, you will receive the benefit of being able to achieve the right-seeing path—the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness—in this very life. In addition, you will not be afflicted by diseases, nor will you be harmed by spirits and human beings. However, one of the main advantages of doing prostrations with this mantra is that it multiplies each prostration a thousand times.
2. The holy name can be recited with or without his mantra OM NAMO BHAGAVATE RATNA KETU.... When both are recited, the holy name can be recited three times followed by the mantra three times, or they can be recited as a pair three times. The holy name is usually recited in Tibetan.
3. Although both the Derge and Pedurma editions of the Kangyur give MAMA instead of NAMAḤ, Lama Zopa Rinpoche said that NAMAḤ is correct. It is called 'phags pa dkon mchog gi rten la bskor ba bya ba'i gzungs in Tibetan, ārya pradakṣā ratnatrayā nāma dhāraṇī in Sanskrit, and Dharani of Circumambulation of the Arya Holy Objects of the Rare Sublime Ones in English.