

Stupa

the mind of a buddha

When VEN. KIRTI TSENSHAB RINPOCHE visited the site of Tse-Chen Cho-Khor Ling in Bendigo, Australia, where a giant stupa, the exact size and design of the famous Gyantse Kumbum in Tibet, will be built, he talked about how to accumulate merit through the way we approach stupas. This is an edited excerpt.

In order to accumulate merit in relation to a holy object we need the appropriate representations of the Buddha's body, speech and mind. By prostrating and making offerings to a picture or statue of the Buddha, a representation of the Buddha's body, we accumulate the same merit as if we were making all these actions in front of the actual Buddha himself. Likewise, by behaving with respect toward a Buddhist text, a representation of the Buddha's speech. Stupas represent the Buddha's mind.

Before passing into *parinirvana* the Buddha said, "When I pass away you can use my relics, whatever remains of my body, and erect a stupa in a special place. Then you can treat that place, that stupa, in the same way as you would treat myself." So, in following the tradition, you can see how great stupas were established in places such as Bodhgaya, India.

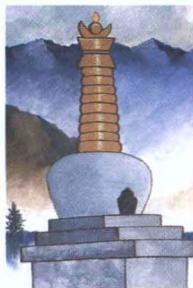
When one decides to build a stupa it's important to know that the vastness of merit accumulated is multiplied by the number of molecules that make up that monument. Also because the motivation to build one is at the level of the Great Scope, which includes every sentient being, it's as if you're multiplying the number of molecules to the number of sentient beings in existence.

One should erect a stupa with a proper motivation, always considering the wellbeing of sentient beings who all undergo numerous sufferings – both environmental and individual. A stupa is built because so much merit is accumulated with respect to it that eventually it has the power to clarify and purify all that suffering.

In the *King of Prayers*, it says, "In every atom are buddha-fields numberless as atoms, each field is filled with buddhas

beyond conception, and each buddha is surrounded by myriad bodhisattvas." So in every molecule, in every atom, you have millions of buddhas and bodhisattvas, who are physically present and whose minds are also there.

It is said that one can accumulate a vast amount of merit for any single activity performed in relation to a stupa. So if one were to go through the seven-limbed prayer and engage in each one of those activities around a stupa, the merit accumulated is multiplied by seven.



One also needs to bring in the wisdom aspect. Say one is prostrating – one thinks, "this activity I am undertaking, and the object of my activity, are all empty of inherent existence." In thus recalling emptiness with respect to the three circles we generate wisdom and combine all the merit, all the

method we have, with the wisdom realizing that all this method is empty.

How to relate to a Stupa

There are many ways a beginner can engage in relation to a stupa. Offering prostrations is the first accumulation of merit. Of the three kinds of prostrations, physical, verbal and mental, mentally generating respect for these objects is the most important. Here one can also circumambulate.

The second method of accumulation is that of making offerings. In addition to the traditional offerings of lights, flowers and water, etc., one can make sure the stupa has certain decorations. Parts of it could be fashioned from gold or other precious metals, for example.

It is also important to offer pleasant music to the stupa.



Photo Kitty Lecken

Painting by T. Lobsang/ Friendship Painting Organization

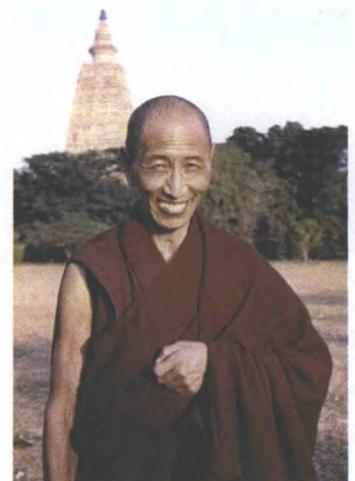
According to what you offer, a result will be established in the future. There was once a Buddhist practitioner who seemed to have the most beautiful body and the most melodious voice. Astonished by his beauty, people asked the Buddha how he came to have such beauty and such a voice. In the past, the Buddha explained, this person was involved with building a stupa, and had, at the time, made sure that everything was clean and tidy. This created for him the merit to have a beautiful body. He also offered very nice music to the stupa, which resulted in him having a voice so melodious that nobody could resist his speech.

It's very important to offer attractive things. If you're offering flowers they should be beautiful, and if it's food you're offering, it should be really delicious! There's a vast array of physical objects to offer but make sure they are beautiful.

In confession, the third limb, we are acknowledging and revealing all the mistakes we have made. So when you approach a stupa, go through this process of confession, saying, "Many times in the past I have made many mistakes with my physical, verbal and mental actions. These I acknowledge and confess."

Rejoicing is the next step. Rejoice in all the virtue and all the meaningful activities that have been accomplished by all beings, including beings far superior to ourselves (buddhas and bodhisattvas,) beings similar to us and also those we consider "lesser" than us.

Requesting the teachers to turn the wheel of Dharma is the next limb. Then we ask the teacher not to pass into *parinirvana*, thereby wishing them a long and steady life. The final limb is dedication, where all the positive energy we have generated for the benefit of all sentient beings is dedicated. If you think big like that, it is said that the virtue you create is safely guarded by your dedication. ☸



Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche in front of the great stupa at Bodhgaya.