

relics

Relics Explained by Lamas

Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche:

The benefits of seeing relics are great. Relics have the nature of primordial awareness comprehending emptiness and the aspect of pills, bones, and so forth. They are established by enlightened beings with great compassion.

order to receive the blessing. You could say that the power of the relics is like the rays of the sun: they are always shining on everyone. But sometimes there are clouds in the sky, which prevents us from receiving such blessings. The lack of faith is like these clouds.

Does a photograph of the relics have the same power as the relics themselves?

There is no difference between a picture and the actual object of relics for those with strong faith and resolution. For those who are lacking that faith, the relics are merely some forms printed in a piece of paper. If you have faith, you understand that a picture is like the appearance of an image on your TV screen. Although what you see is only a reflected image, you know that this reflection appears because somewhere there is an actual object. A similar understanding dawns in your mind when you see a picture of a relic.

Why did the Buddha manifest relics?

Buddhas manifest different aspects according to the needs of various beings. To some, the buddhas manifest as ordained beings, to some as kings, to some they even manifest as inanimate objects such as mountains and so forth. For some, the buddhas manifest in the aspect of relics.

How do we know that the relics are genuine?

It is very difficult to tell a genuine relic from a fake one. But if you have faith in the object, you will receive the blessing anyhow. There is a story related to that. The son of a mother was going to Lhasa, Tibet, and his mother asked him to bring back to her a piece of stone from the statue of Jowo Je. The son went to Lhasa but forgot his mother's request. Just before arriving home he remembered, and being embarrassed to come home empty-handed, he collected an ordinary stone from the side of the road and presented that to his mother as a piece of the statue. The mother placed the stone on her altar, and made many offerings and prostrations to this piece of stone.

Some time later the mother and son quarreled. In the heat of the moment the son revealed that the stone was just an ordinary piece he had collected from the side of the road. The



Photo Nick Dowson

Geshe Lama Konchog, a yogi who has reached a very high level of tantric realization, passed away in Oct. 2001 and left many relics behind (see picture opposite) for the sake of sentient beings.

It is said that the body of the Buddha is vast like the ocean but that ordinary beings cannot perceive it. For their sake, the buddhas manifest relics. The enlightened beings with high realizations establish relics as a means for passing on blessings of their body, speech and mind.

Due to the power of realization and compassion of these beings, anyone who sees, hears of, touches or even thinks of relics receives their blessing. Relics might appear as ordinary bones to those with untrained, ordinary minds but in reality the relics are not ordinary at all.

Where does the blessing of the relics come from – is it from the object itself or the mind of the person?

The blessings come from both the side of the relic and the side of the person. The person needs to have strong faith in

mother was so annoyed that she picked up the stone and threw it to the ground where it split open and revealed the relics of the Buddha inside. So, being treated as a holy object, it became one!

Do the relics multiply spontaneously?

Relics will remain and multiply as long as there is faith from the side of sentient beings. If that faith disappears, the relics will also disappear. Relics represent the love and compassion of the buddhas. This love and compassion never stops. It can only increase. So the relics also increase and multiply. Relics are like seeds of love and compassion – they only produce a new crop of love and compassion. And as from one seed we get an abundance of crops, so from one piece of relic we get many more relics.

Why are relics heavily guarded in reliquaries or enshrined in statues and stupas?

Relics need to be safeguarded because they are so rare and precious. Many people want to steal precious things. Also others, with no faith, might wish to destroy them. It has happened in the past that someone who wanted to get hold of relics substituted the genuine ones, in this case hair of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, with his own! So to avoid such cases, they are enshrined.

What is Rinpoche's opinion about the Relic Tour?

The idea of a tour is very good. In the past in Tibet if there were an epidemic or some other serious natural disaster, they would take the Kangyur and Tengyur around the hills of the village. They believed that their blessing powers would pacify the disease or any other harm.

The tour will visit many countries with many different religious beliefs and traditions. Certainly some of the countries are Christian countries but of course, even in these countries there will be Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and so forth. It is important not to insult anyone's religious feelings. Every religion has its own principal, sometimes known as God, sometimes known as Allah and so forth. Try to use a general rather than a specific Buddhist name and terminology.

Translated by Voula Zarpani, South America, November 2001

Lama Zopa Rinpoche:

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 body of Buddha nor hear his speech. We only have the fortune to see Buddha's relics. Therefore, kind and compassionate Guru Shakyamuni Buddha emanated thousands of relics as an object of devotion for very many sentient beings.

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 passed away in October 2001 [pictured opposite] – 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.

From an essay written at Bodhgaya in January 2002. Translated by Ven. Pemba Sherpa and edited by Ven. Sarah Thresher and Ven. Constance Miller.

Venerable Ribur Rinpoche:

In Sarnath, India near Benares, there is a temple with the relics of the Buddha. We were in pilgrimage there a few years ago with Lama Zopa Rinpoche and a group of disciples. We had to request the abbot, and we had to make a huge offering to the temple just to be able to get in line. Not like today, so easily accessible, so many relics that you can see and receive blessings for as long as you want. And this is exclusively because of the kindness of Lama Zopa Rinpoche, because of his Maitreya Project and because Rinpoche is exceptional in his activities in that he was able to collect such a great number of different relics from all over the world.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche is going through a great deal of difficulties and hardships in order to be able to have, for the benefit of all sentient beings, this Maitreya statue. The amount of activities and projects that he undertakes in relation with this very Project and the amount of responsibility that he carries around is not to be underestimated.

There are some very, very exceptional relics on display: relics of buddhas and bodhisattvas. There are some relics of the great Lama Tsongkhapa and a bone relic of Lama Dorje Chang, Pabongka Rinpoche – those probably I offered to Lama Zopa Rinpoche myself.

Just seeing the relics of the Buddha purifies an incredible amount of negative karma and that goes also for the other relics. They are so unbelievably difficult to find, to come into possession of this is just something almost unthinkable. ❁

From a teaching at the Land of the Medicine Buddha, Soquel, California, September, 2001. Translated by Fabrizio Pallotti.

Photo Nick Dawson

