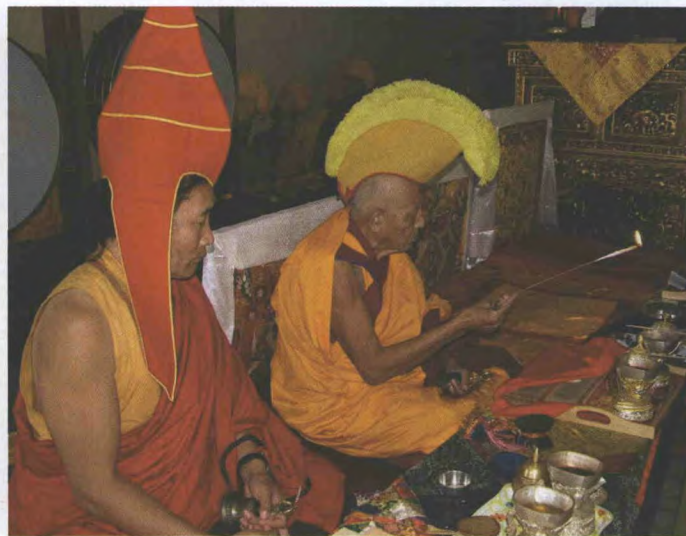


POWERFUL Ceremonies



Monks performing a Long Life Puja for Lama Zopa Rinpoche at Kopan Monastery. High lamas at the 100,000 Tsog Offerings to Guru Rinpoche Puja

The power of Tibetan Buddhist ritual never ceases to amaze and console.

A ceremonial expression of honor, worship and devotional attention is taking place somewhere in the world, any hour of the day or night, in monasteries, in gompas, in temporarily decorated town halls, in homes. The decorating of altars, the sweet perfume of flowers and incense filling the air, the creak of knees as devotees fall forward in prostrations, the whisper of hands raised in supplication and heads lowered in gestures of homage and humility – these are the manifestations of a human desire to connect with our enlightened potential.

As Khenrinpoche Lama Lhundrup Rigsel describes in his article, “*Why We Need Ritual*,” the performance of ritual is essential for creating the positive energy (merit) needed to achieve realization. He writes:

“Some people think these practices aren’t important. They think meditation alone should be enough. However, just meditating is not enough. The idea that there is no need to create merit through the body and speech is mistaken thinking. When we are embarking on the path which results in buddhahood, we need to accumulate a large amount of merit. This accumulation of merit can be achieved through the body, speech, and mind. Therefore, we need to practice with the body, speech, and mind.”

He is suggesting that we do not waste any of our tools when we engage in virtuous activity. He stresses that as ordinary beings, the amount of merit that is needed to

engage successfully in advanced meditative practice is immense, and best achieved through ritual practice.

Pujas in particular are such a powerful way to clear obstacles and bring success in our lives and spiritual practice, that Lama Zopa Rinpoche sponsors them regularly at all the major Gelug monasteries in India and Nepal. In the three main Gelug monasteries alone – Sera, Ganden and Drepung – there are more than 15,000 monks, and Rinpoche’s sponsorship of pujas performed by them helps them financially.

Lama Zopa believes that pujas are vital for harmony, and attributes much of FPMT’s collective success to the pujas he sponsors. Indeed, he has been personally funding pujas for the last thirteen years, and the annual cost has increased to more than \$64,000. Donations to this fund each year amount to less than \$5,000.

Rinpoche determines which pujas should be done, as well as the most beneficial monastery or nunnery to perform

¹ FPMT’s Foundation Training in Rituals, p. 10.

them, which makes these pujas performed exceptionally powerful. These pujas always include Lama Zopa Rinpoche's own dedication prayers for world peace, the long and stable life of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the fulfillment of all his wishes, and towards removing all obstacles to benefactors and students and all the FPMT Dharma activities, including its many projects.

While the monasteries and nunneries which perform the pujas benefit financially, we benefit too – because ordained people are living in higher vows, their prayers have a lot of power.

Rinpoche himself responds to incredible sufferings, such

as the recent events in China and Burma, by immediately doing Medicine Buddha Puja and reciting King of Prayers.

So many times students have contacted Rinpoche when they are about to have an operation or are suffering from a major sickness, and Rinpoche will recommend a certain puja for them.

These pujas have the potential to change the person's karma and there have been many recorded cases of recovery to full health (see the picture on page 30 of a healthy, grateful student with Rinpoche).

Remember, FPMT is united by the prayers and practices that we share. ☸

FPMT Puja Fund

Why do obstacles arise? Lama Zopa Rinpoche often explains how important it is to create merit and purify past negative karma: this is the only way conditions can be changed. Supporting the continual practice of pujas in the way Rinpoche explains below is an incredible and easy way to create merit, and to purify and change your karma.

For the last thirteen years Lama Zopa Rinpoche has sponsored many different pujas and virtuous actions on auspicious days. On these days, virtuous karma is increased many times – as much as 100 million times! With this in mind, Rinpoche has put in place permanent arrangements to have pujas and other activities performed by various Gelug monasteries in Nepal and India.

In Sera, Ganden and Drepung alone (three of the main Gelug monasteries) there are more than 15,000 monks. In addition to pujas, other virtuous activities are carried out at the famous Boudhanath Stupa in Nepal, where the stupa is whitewashed, offered saffron color, cleaned, and decorated with new umbrellas and lights each month.

Lunch is offered to each of Rinpoche's gurus, including His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and offerings are made to the various Sangha communities within FPMT.

Whenever these pujas are performed, the Sangha read a two-page dedication prepared by Rinpoche, so that the merit is dedicated to the long life of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, as well as to the removal of obstacles to all the FPMT Dharma activities, its 150 centers, and all its projects. Merit is also dedicated to all FPMT students; to those working, serving, and participating in the centers and projects; to all the benefactors of the centers and projects and all their

families; and to all those who make requests to Rinpoche for prayers for health, as well as to all who have passed away.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche said:

"The merit that is created from all these pujas that I have organized is also your merit. So you can dedicate all these merits to having realizations and to achieve enlightenment.

"All the offerings that I make to all the Sangha in the monasteries are in monasteries of my gurus; this is because it creates so much more merit. If by thinking of the guru you offer a cup of tea, a glass of water or even a candy to one of the pores of your guru, you collect more merit than if you had made offerings to all the numberless past, present and future buddhas, and to all the statues, stupas and scriptures in the ten directions. This applies to making offerings to your guru's family (wife, husband or children), friend, neighbors or even animals (cat, dog or horse). The merit of making offerings to all the numberless past, present and future buddhas is small when compared to the merit of offering even a glass of water to one of the guru's pores with thought of the guru. The monks in these monasteries all have the same gurus, even Kopan has 300 monks and 300 nuns, and there are many thousands of monks in the other monasteries, all of whom have His Holiness the Dalai Lama as their guru.