

This section of Mandala highlights a featured practice in each issue. Through shared practice we aim to further connect the worldwide FPMT community.

Don't Just Sit There...Circumambulate!

The practice of circumambulating holy objects, which Rinpoche advises as an excellent method for accumulating merit and purifying negativities,

is this issue's **Featured Practice.**

By Ven. Sarah Thresher

At the entrance of Golden Lotus Restaurant in Boulder, Colorado, Vicki Chen, a devoted student of Lama Zopa Rinpoche, has arranged a special table full of *tsa-tsa*¹ images of buddhas, stupas and offering bowls, giving customers a chance to purify and accumulate merit on their way to enjoying a good meal.

Proof and inspiration to all of us that holy objects can be built anywhere, Vicki's idea is, of course, pure Rinpoche. Over the years, Rinpoche has initiated the construction of numerous stupas, prayer wheels and other holy objects, large and small, around the world. Rinpoche also oversees the translation of texts dealing with their construction and related practices.

Circumambulation is a very powerful practice to purify negative karma and accumulate the imprints for enlightenment. Rinpoche particularly recommends it for anyone who has difficulties in life, for those who need to purify negativities, for those who need to create the cause for success, for those who are sick, and as a way of benefiting animals. Nearly every room in Rinpoche's house has a small table packed with holy objects for circumambulating. And a visit to Rinpoche's room wherever he is in the world would be incomplete without circumambulating the holy objects he carries everywhere – an extraordinary collection



Sangha circumambulating stupa at Kachoe Dechen Ling, Lama Zopa Rinpoche's residence in Aptos, CA.

of precious relics and texts that Rinpoche can walk around any-time, day or night, especially while carrying animals or insects².

We should never think that we are far from a holy object. Rinpoche circumambulates his house and car, even his luggage packed with holy objects. During a recent Vajrasattva retreat at Land of Medicine Buddha, retreatants walked up and down stairs in the pouring rain circumambulating the shrine room while carrying

worms to be liberated. Rinpoche advised the meditators at Shiné Land from time to time to circumambulate their huts instead of going for a walk. And he told his attendant, Ven. Roger, to walk around stupas during his endless telephone conversations. The first time the relics ever came to Tahiti, Rinpoche's French cook spent the entire night walking around the bag in which the relics were stored.

Even in the absence of holy objects, Rinpoche cites the great yogi Milarepa who sang that whenever he walked he was circumambulating. In other words – visualize! Rinpoche suggests that even if you are just going for a walk, heading out to the shops, sitting on a bus or driving around in the car, think before you set out that you are going to circumambulate all of the holy objects in the world, then complete the circuit on your way back – that way your action becomes virtuous and you accumulate inconceivable merit. One

¹ *Tsa-tsas* are a form of traditional Buddhist art, traditionally votive tablets made of clay with images of buddhas, bodhisattvas and other venerated figures. For more information, consult the Tsa Tsa Studio/Center for Tibetan Sacred Art: www.tsatsastudio.org

² Lama Zopa Rinpoche has said, "Holy objects help other sentient beings easily to purify inconceivable negative karma and create the causes of happiness, merit and extensive happiness, which definitely brings them to enlightenment quickly." *How to Benefit Animals: A Collection of Advice from Lama Zopa Rinpoche*

FPMT center director even visualizes herself prostrating around Mt. Kailash every night before she goes to sleep.

In India, there were great *siddhas*³ who achieved realizations by circumambulating temples. Lama Atisha and the Kadampa geshe used to circumambulate stupas. Dromtonpa once asked Lama Atisha, “Why don’t you relax?

Why not practice virtue sitting? Why do this common practice of circumambulation?” Lama Atisha replied, “You don’t understand. When I circumambulate I accumulate all three virtuous actions of body, speech and mind. When I sit there’s only one. In terms of merit, there is no greater practice than circumambulation!”

Lama Zopa Rinpoche’s Advice for Circumambulation

Even if you only circumambulate one or two times using this method, you become enriched with so many skies of merit and receive very deep purification. This is an extremely important practice for quick enlightenment.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche

FIRST, generate a strong motivation of bodhichitta. Remember the sufferings of all the beings in the six realms and feel that you are responsible to free them from their suffering: “I must achieve enlightenment for the sake of all mother sentient beings. For that, I need to actualize the path, therefore I need to purify and accumulate merit, therefore I am going to circumambulate.”

SECOND, think that you have manifested numberless bodies, either all your past lives in human form or yourself in the form of numberless deities. Think that you are leading all sentient beings in the circumambulation.

THIRD, recite the four special mantras that multiply each circumambulation.

FOURTH, visualize that the holy object you are circumambulating becomes empty. Remember that the absolute nature of this holy object is the absolute nature of all holy objects everywhere. If there is no holy object, visualize a yellow syllable *BHRUM*, which transforms into an extensive wish-granting tree in which all the refuge objects abide. Even though you may not be in Lhasa, Dharamsala or Nepal, think that you are circumambulating all the holy objects of the ten directions. With this visualization, you receive the incredible benefit of circumambulating all these holy objects.

You can visualize the holy object as your root guru who embodies all Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, as well every single holy object that exists anywhere – statues, stupas, scriptures, relics, etc. Or you can visualize the holy object taking the form of the Guru Puja merit field or a deity such as Chenrezig or Vajrasattva. Most important is to always keep the mind in devotion, seeing the holy object you are circumambulating as a manifestation of your root

guru and all other objects of refuge. This is the most skillful meditation to collect the most extensive merit.

FIFTH, as you walk, recite mantras and prayers such as Chenrezig’s mantra, Vajrasattva’s mantra, Mitrugpa’s mantra, the names of the Thirty-five Buddhas, Praises to Buddha and Buddha’s mantra, Praises to Tara and Tara’s mantra, Lama Tsongkhapa’s Guru Yoga prayer (*Migtsema*), the refuge prayer, the five powerful mantras and so on. As you recite, visualize that nectar beams emitted from the holy object completely illuminate you and all other sentient beings around you.

You can also recite any texts you have memorized, practice rejoicing or meditate on any of the topics from the lam-rim teachings, such as death and impermanence, bodhichitta or emptiness. Ask yourself, “Who is circumambulating?”

UPCOMING AUSPICIOUS DAYS FOR PRACTICE

On Buddha Days and full and new moons, the merit of virtuous activities is multiplied. On these days Lama Zopa Rinpoche recommends taking the Eight Mahayana Precepts in addition to any prayers and practices we engage in.

BUDDHA DAYS

July 25, the day of Lord Buddha’s first teaching

August 5, the day of Lord Buddha’s conception (*alternative*)

FULL AND NEW MOONS

(Tibetan 15th and 30th days)

July 7, 22

August 5, 20

September 4, 18

The FPMT Foundation Store offers for sale the LIBERATION calendar, a traditional Tibetan lunar calendar including auspicious days and more, produced by Liberation Prison Project: www.fpmt.org/shop

³ Siddha means “a perfect one” or “perfect master” and is a term applied to tantric male and female adepts who have successfully mastered their spiritual goals and often have also attained secondary supernatural powers as a result.

SIXTH, as you do each circumambulation dedicate it and give away the merit. First motivate for the beings in the six realms. Think, "I am doing this circumambulation for all sentient beings and particularly the hell beings." At the end of the circumambulation think, "Now all defilements are purified and every single hell being has attained enlightenment by completing the entire path." Then dedicate all the merit from that circumambulation to all sentient beings especially those in the hells.

Do the same for the hungry ghosts, animals, humans, asuras and suras.

Then dedicate each circumambulation for the long life of all your gurus and for all their holy wishes to succeed immediately, for the flourishing of the Dharma, and finally, for the Sangha who preserve and spread the Dharma to complete their scriptural understanding and realization during this life. And dedicate also for the benefactors who support the Dharma to have long lives and their virtuous wishes to succeed.

SEVENTH, rejoice! Recite dedication prayers, long life prayers and mantras to increase the merit. Dedicate well and extensively! ☸

Four special mantras to be recited before circumambulating

The buddha's name that causes the circumambulation to multiply 1000 times:

CHOM DÄN DÄ DE ZHIN SHEG PA DRA CHOM PA
YANG DAG PAR DZOG PÄI SANG GYÄ RINCHHEN
GYÄLTSHÄN LA CHHAG TSHÄL LO (7x)

The buddhas' names that increase each circumambulation or prostration 10 million times:


NAMO RATNA TRAYAYA OM NAMO BHAGAVATE
RATNA KETU RAJAYA / TATHAGATAYA / ARHATE
SAMYAK SAMBUDDHAYA / TADYATHA / OM RATNE
RATNE MAHA RATNE RATNA BIJA YE SVAHA (7x)

CHOM DÄN DÄ DE ZHIN SHEG PA DRA CHOM PA
YANG DAG PAR DZOG PÄI SANG GYÄ PÄL GYÄL
WA SHAKYA THUB PA LA CHHAG TSHÄL LO

By reciting this mantra it becomes equivalent to circumambulating all holy objects of the ten directions:


OM NAMO DASHA DEKA TRI KALA SARVA RATNA
TRAYAYA MAMA PRADAKSHA SUPRA DAKSHA
SARVA PAPAM VISHODHANI SVAHA (7x)

See Benefits and Practices Related to Statues and Stupas Vols. 1, 2, 3, published by FPMT Education Services and sold at The Foundation Store: www.fpmt.org/shop



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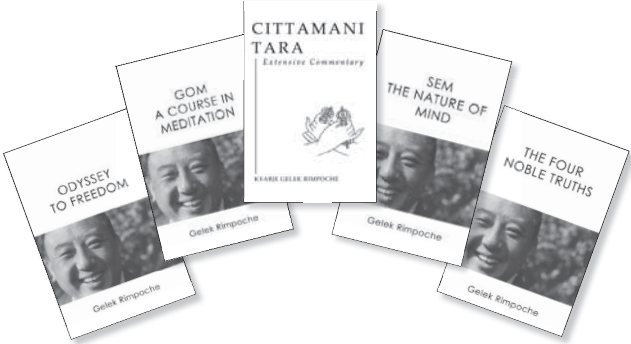
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