



TYPES OF HOLY OBJECTS

Objects become “holy” when they contain the presence of a buddha’s holy body, holy speech or holy mind. There are several ways in which to engage with holy objects. You can make offerings, prostrations and circumambulate the holy objects that already exist, you can create holy objects that become future sources of blessings and pilgrimage to others, and you can also help sponsor a holy object initiative with volunteer time, money or prayers. Holy objects can even be used to benefit animals! Although animals may have a difficult time with making offerings, you can always help them to circumambulate; give them a nice gentle bonk on the head with your stupas, statues and tsa-tsas; or recite mantras for them.

All of these activities, when in relation to a holy object, become incredibly powerful acts of virtue.

“The moment holy objects such as statues of Buddha are completed on a rock, painted on paper with a brush and colors, taken with a camera, or printed on paper from the negative with chemicals, etc., the moment a holy object materializes, it becomes a field of merit, like a field of crops, for sentient beings.”

LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

STATUES



Statue of the future Buddha, Maitreya.
Photo courtesy of the Maitreya Project

A Buddhist statue represents the holy body of a buddha.

Buddhas are invited to abide in statues through a consecration ceremony. When this is complete, the statue is an actual embodiment of the Buddha, and should be respected as such.

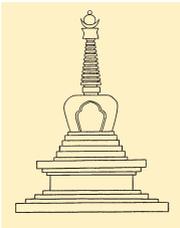
“In the future, sentient beings making offerings to statues make the same amount of merit as making offerings directly to me.”

BUDDHA SHAKYAMUNI TO MANJUSHRI

Lama Zopa Rinpoche recommends reciting this prayer when you see a statue of a buddha:

*In whatever way you appear, glorious Guru,
With whatever retinue, lifespan and pure land,
Whatever noble and holy name you take,
May I and others attain only these.*

STUPAS



Stupas, one of the most ancient icons in Buddhist art, are powerful symbols of the mind's limitless potential. In other words, they represent the mind of enlightenment. Stupas are filled with sacred images, mantras and the relics of holy beings. Originally fairly simple structures, stupas have undergone elaborate design changes as they have been embraced by new cultures.

There are eight different types of stupas, each of which commemorates different events in the life of the Buddha: **Lotus Stupa**: the birth of the Buddha; **Enlightenment Stupa**: the Buddha's attainment of enlightenment; **Auspicious Stupa with Many Doors**: the Buddha's turning the wheel of Dharma, and commonly referred to as a "Wheel-Turning" Stupa; **Miraculous Feats Stupa**: when the Buddha preformed miracles; **Descent Stupa**: the Buddha's descent from Tushita heaven; **Reconciliation Stupa**: when the Buddha healed the schism of the Sangha, also known as the "Healing the Community" Stupa; **Victory Stupa**: prolonging the life of the Buddha, more commonly known as a long life or Namgyälma Stupa; **Parinirvana Stupa**: the Buddha's passing into parinirvana.

"A stupa is a palace where all the buddhas are abiding."

LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

MANTRAS



Rinpoche paints mantra at his residence in California

Mantras, meaning "mind protection" are Sanskrit syllables, usually recited in conjunction with the practice of a particular meditational deity, and embody the qualities of the deity with which they are associated. They bring benefit to all who see, touch, hear or speak them. Further, when you recite mantras with the correct motivation (the wish to benefit others), your speech becomes holy speech capable of offering blessings to others. Some mantras are so powerful that they are said to be able to benefit others even when no virtuous motivation is present.

Because mantras are universally beneficial, Lama Zopa Rinpoche designed a baseball cap covered in powerful mantras in order to provide an opportunity for us to be of benefit to others by simply walking around.

The mantra cap is available through the FPMT Foundation Store.

THANGKAS



Thangkas are painted or appliquéd depictions of deities, venerated spiritual figures, or common religious symbols, usually framed by colorful brocade.

"You may think that a statue or thangka is just a statue or thangka, but it is the transcendental wisdom of dharmakaya, which understands and directly sees absolute truth, as well as conventional truth."

LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

Thangka image of White Tara, a long life deity.

Photo courtesy of Nick Dawson.



RELICS



Pearl relics. Courtesy of Maitreya Project Heart Shrine Relic Tour

Relics can include bone relics of a holy person or fragments of close physical possessions, such as robes, and can also include certain very blessed mantras found in sutras and tantras, known as dharmakaya relics (the actual presence of the enlightened mind in the world). The most visually unique relics in the Buddhist tradition, however, are the pearl-like crystals found among the cremation ashes of Buddhist masters. The relics are considered a result of the master's special compassion and wisdom, and are often enshrined in stupas.

“When you see holy beings’ relics, think in the following way: ‘At this time, these holy beings are benefiting us by emanating relics that enable us to accumulate merit and purify negativities, thereby leading us to liberation and enlightenment.’”

LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

TSA-TSAS



Tsa-tsas in Bhutan. Photo by John Berthold.

Tsa-tsas are a form of Buddhist art that has flourished for centuries in the Himalayas, most notably Tibet. Like many Tibetan sacred objects, they are iconographic forms of various buddhas.

Often, students are given a commitment to make 100,000 tsa-tsas of a particular buddha or meditational deity during their lifetime.

In Tibet, tsa-tsas are made with clay from the earth. These days, more modern and durable materials are used, such as plaster, hydro-stone, or a professional casting system consisting of architectural-grade gypsum.

“Making tsa-tsas pacifies obstacles, bad conditions, accidents, and sudden diseases like heart attacks and paralysis. By making tsa-tsas you pacify enemies, interferers and harms. You accumulate all merit, purify all obscurations and achieve the resultant three kayas in a future life.”

LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

PRAYER WHEELS



Prayer wheels are filled with mantras traditionally printed on strips of paper and tightly rolled around the core. These days mantras are reproduced onto microfilm; the more mantras, the more powerful. Prayer wheels can be small enough to be held in the hand, table-based or can be very large containing billions of mantras.

“One of the benefits of the prayer wheel is that it embodies all the actions of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the 10 directions. To benefit sentient beings, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas manifest in the prayer wheel to purify all our negative karmas and obscurations, and to cause us to actualize the realizations of the path to enlightenment.”

LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

THE FOUR DHARMAKAYA RELIC MANTRAS

Leaving a statue empty is like offering nothing to the buddhas and can create obstacles. Therefore, it is important to put something inside the statue, even as little as a few mantras and some incense.

According to Lama Zopa Rinpoche,

“The four dharmakaya relic mantras are the main mantras that give power to holy objects. They are what make holy objects most powerful and beneficial, and make it easy for sentient beings to purify negative karma and collect extensive merit. It is like having thousands of atomic bombs to purify negative karma.”

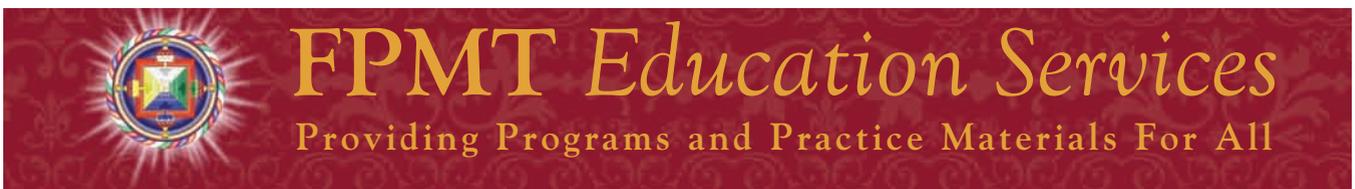
And further:

“The four dharmakaya mantras are a sacred relic. They are the highest relics of Buddha, relics of the dharmakaya. Other relics, the ones that we normally see, such as relics of the robes or parts of Buddha’s holy body, are secondary relics. These four mantras are the highest relics.”

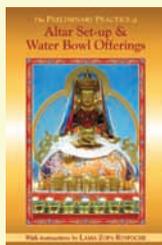
As such, FPMT Education Services has made available for free download the four dharmakaya relic mantras, formatted for rolling:

www.fpmt.org/Teachers/zopa/advice/pdf/essentialmantrasholyobjectsbkltjune07a4.pdf

A wonderful resource containing instructions for properly filling and consecrating statues and stupas of any size can be found in the *Statues and Stupas* series published by FPMT Education Services, Part 3: Essential Advice for Filling Statues and Stupas. Available through the FPMT Foundation Store.



Preliminary Practice Series:



Daily practice to make the mind ripe for realizations



Clears away obstacles to practice and opens the mind

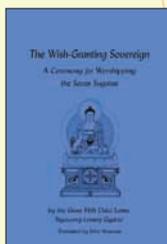


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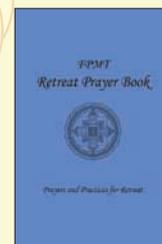
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PRAYER FLAGS



Photo by Marc Sakamoto

Unique to the Himalayas, prayer flags are pieces of cloth stamped with mantras and images, either in a pattern of five colors (blue, white, red, green and yellow) horizontally on a long string, or a single narrow vertical flag on a pole. Prayer flags are flown on auspicious days for different reasons including: the removal of obstacles or illness; protection against harm when traveling; and on important occasions such as the third day of the Tibetan New Year, marriages and other official functions.

Please refer to the Liberation Calendar for days appropriate for hanging prayer flags as obstacles can be experienced when hung on the wrong days of the Tibetan calendar.

www.fpmt.org/resources/dates

SCRIPTURES



Lama Zopa Rinpoche writing out the *Prajñāparamita*

Sutras and tantras are records of teachings given by the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni. The Buddha's discourses were memorized by his disciples and later written down in various languages, the most complete collections of teachings being in Pali and Sanskrit.

Because sutras contain the actual words spoken by the Buddha, by reproducing that speech ourselves during recitations our voice becomes a conduit for the spread of Buddha's teachings in the world. A special set of sutras called *dharmaparyayas* or "transformative teachings," including the *Sanghata Sutra*, function to transform those who hear, recite or write out them in particular ways, in the same way as meeting a buddha in the flesh.

MANDALAS



FPMT's Mandala of Universal Wisdom and Compassion

The word "mandala" is commonly used to refer to the entire universe according to Buddhist cosmology, as when someone offers a mandala to request a teaching. It is also used as the term for the celestial abode of a meditational deity, a celestial palace that manifests out of the deity's boundless compassion and wisdom. Images of these types of mandalas are often painted or drawn with colored sand as a crucial element in tantric ritual. The basic structure of a mandala is sometimes preserved in the structure of large Buddhist pilgrimage sites, such as the magnificent Gyantse Kumbum in Tibet.

"When you become enlightened, you see yourself as a buddha and everything appears to you in pure form: the place as a mandala and the beings in pure forms of the deity."

LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE