

and the lotus seat on which Tara sits, but the fine detailed painting of Tara's facial features, especially her eyes, was done by Lama Zopa Rinpoche. Rinpoche was truly able to bring Tara alive when he "opened the eyes" of the statue. This was the last step before the actual consecration, during which Tara was invited to come and reside in the statue.

Connie remembers the consecration: "Two monks carrying Tara on their shoulders led everyone in a joyous

procession all around Kopan Hill. I remember that Lama was wearing a ceremonial crown of the five dhyani buddhas. We stopped at various points to chant and make prayers. Lama explained to everyone that we were showing Tara around her new home. Then she was placed in her house in front of the gumpa. I always thought of her as watching over and protecting Kopan from there." And she still does to this day.



Lama Zopa Rinpoche and Lama Yeshe are pictured here at Borobudur Stupa, Java, Indonesia, in 1979. Peter Kedge remembers the details of this visit to one of the world's greatest Buddhist pilgrimage sites, dating back to 800 CE. "It was blisteringly hot the day we were there, humid and absolutely the worst conditions for Lama [Lama Yeshe had a heart condition that was especially aggravated by the heat]. But he insisted on circumambulating the shrine several times, while prostrating. Rinpoche joined him, but I couldn't keep up at all and went off and found some shade."

## WHY HOLY OBJECTS ARE PRECIOUS AND WISH-FULFILLING

*By Lama Zopa Rinpoche*

Every time you look at holy objects – pictures of the Buddha, statues, scriptures, stupas – they plant the seed of liberation and enlightenment in your mental continuum. So every time you look at them they purify your mind. How? When you look at them they plant a seed or positive imprint on your mental continuum so that later when you meet Buddhadharma, either in this life or in future lives, you are able to understand the words and the meaning of the teachings. From that, you are able to practice the meaning of the Dharma you have understood, which causes you to cease the gross and subtle defilements by actualizing the path and then your mental continuum becomes omniscient mind. This is what is meant when we say that by seeing holy objects it plants the seed of enlightenment on the mind – it contains the whole path from guru devotion and the three principles up to the two stages of tantra and enlightenment.

Every time we see holy objects it purifies so much negative karma, so many defilements. This is because of the power of the holy object. It's like an atomic bomb – even though it is small it can bring so much harm and cause so much destruction. That example is negative but what I am saying is that the material has power, like electricity. The material of an atomic bomb has the power to harm and

destroy the world. The material of holy objects – statues, scriptures and stupas – has the power to affect our mind, to leave a positive imprint.

There are five paths to achieve enlightenment and the first is the Mahayana path of merit. Within that are three levels: small, middle and great. As soon as your mind achieves the great level of the path of merit then wherever you are, whether you are in a holy place or in the toilet, anywhere, you see numberless Buddhas around you. Numberless Buddhas are always there but we just don't see them because our minds are so obscured. When you reach that level you will actually see uncountable Buddhas in nirmanakaya aspect wherever you are. Then, when you reach the right seeing path, you become an arya being and you can see numberless Buddhas in sambhogakaya aspect. This explains the quotation that "even if you look at a drawing of Buddha done on a stone wall out of anger it causes to see ten million Buddhas."

So the benefit we get each time we see a statue of Buddha, a picture of Buddha or a stupa is like the limitless sky. It causes us to achieve all the realizations from guru devotion up to enlightenment and to achieve all the numberless qualities of the Buddha's holy body, speech and mind.



Holy objects only leave positive imprints, no negative imprint. When we watch TV or go sightseeing in the city many of the things we see can leave a negative imprint on our mind, depending on how we look at them. So it is very important to have as many holy objects as possible outside the house and inside the house – maybe not in the toilet because the bad smell might be disrespectful – but otherwise, everywhere. So that wherever you look, always you see a holy object and always you get these skies of benefit.

Just merely seeing a statue or form of Buddha, whether the person is Buddhist or non-Buddhist, a believer or not, creates far more merit than that – numberless great merit. So these holy objects are so precious. These pictures and statues are so precious. Even if somebody makes a very ugly drawing or like a child just draws some kind of design and says it is Buddha, still there is something so the positive effect is there.

Holy objects are really wish-fulfilling, unbelievable. Just by existing, these holy objects make it so easy for sentient beings to purify their negative karma – no matter how bad or how much they have accumulated – and so easy to collect extensive merit. Holy objects are more precious and wish-fulfilling than skies filled with gold, diamonds or even wish-granting jewels because those material things cannot have the same positive effect on your mind that a statue or painting of the Buddha has.



The lamas at the Golden Stupa, Bangkok, 1974

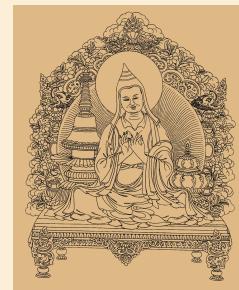
Usually I keep many photos of Buddha and this is also what I give to other people. For me these are the best, the most precious things. These statues and pictures of Buddha are very precious. Priceless. That’s also why I give them to other people.

*Excerpted from a talk given at the Mitukpa retreat, Milarepa, August 2002. Edited by Ven. Sarah Thresher and further edited here for space.*

*For extensive advice on the benefits of statues and stupas, together with advice on how to construct, fill and bless them, please see Benefits and Practices Related to Stupas and Statues, Part 1: Teachings and Instructions, published by FPMT Education Services and available through the FPMT Foundation Store.*

## LAMA ATISHA

Holy objects, because of their ability to help transform a practitioner’s mind, have been highly esteemed by many of Tibet’s greatest teachers. Lama Atisha (982 -1054 CE), who revitalized Buddhism in Tibet and author of *Lamp on the Path to Enlightenment*, for example, traveled with a small stupa or statue at all times. Whenever he noticed a breach in his ethics, even in public or riding his horse, he would stop what he was doing and immediately purify his mistake in front of the holy object.



Drawing by Robert Beer