

## Advice for Pilgrimage from Lama Zopa Rinpoche

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*[This advice was given to a student who was attending the introductory course at Tushita. Rinpoche heard she was doing pilgrimage after the course and gave this advice.]*

Pilgrimage needs faith. The more faith, the more happiness. Otherwise, you are just like a tourist looking at ruins.

Pilgrimage is not just going to holy places and taking pictures. You go to holy places for blessing. So it's good to do practices at the different holy places. Of course it is good to recite Buddha's mantra and meditate on the *Heart Sutra*, even something short like this. Then to recite a lam-rim prayer and different praises to Buddha. There are three different praises to Buddha; the best one is Lama Tsongkhapa's *In Praise of Dependent Origination*. Then there is the *Praise of the Buddha—Unrivalled Lion of the Shakyas* by Lama Tsongkhapa and *Praise of the Exalted One*. It is good to do different praises to Buddha. Use Lama Tsongkhapa's *In Praise of Dependent Origination* most of the time because it talks about emptiness.

Pilgrimage is good if you know how to do pilgrimage. Otherwise it's just travelling like a tourist. When you go to these holy places it reminds you of impermanence. Once these places were great cities but now there are just stones. A thousand years ago these places were quite different. But even though there are just stones now these stones are so precious. Amazing. Can you imagine how blessed these places are? They are places where the Buddha was. Many Tibetan people take away earth from holy places. One time I went to the place where a monkey made offering to Buddha and the guide took some of the earth to give to me. Then an Indian doctor who was with me got angry at the guide for giving the earth to me! That earth is now at Kopan with many other holy things from different places. Many people give me holy objects, like blessed stones or fish from Mount Kailash and Lake Manasarovar [in Tibet].

So do different lam-rim prayers at these holy places and make prayers to have realizations. At the beginning do prostrations. You can recite the preliminary prayers<sup>1</sup> that we do traditionally at Kopan Monastery, which include prostrations by reciting Buddha's name. Then do the seven limb practice. Then recite the different praises to Buddha and lam-rim prayers.

If you have time, you can carry the story of the holy places with you and read that story to the people who are doing pilgrimage in the different places. If you are going on pilgrimage, read a book describing the holy places. Read about what the Buddha did in those places. You can also read the stories of the great pandits.

*Colophon: Dictated to Ven Sarah Thresher, Tushita Dharamsala, India, 30<sup>th</sup> March 2012. Lightly edited by Claire Isitt.*

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<sup>1</sup> *FPMT Retreat Prayer Book*, pp.13-17.