



# FPMT BASIC PROGRAM

## Subject Descriptions

### Core Curriculum

#### Stages of the Path

*With study comes understanding; but this must be put to use. It is therefore vital to put as much as one can of what one has studied into practice...*

Lama Tsongkhapa



The celebrated system of teachings known as the *Stages of the Path* (lamrim) represents a synthesis of the entire path to enlightenment. Presented in a clear and concise form, these teachings are easy to understand and apply in meditation. Instruction begins with the preliminary practices, and then progresses through the essential practices of the 'beings of the three scopes', including correct guru devotion, renunciation, the altruistic wish for enlightenment and the view of the middle way. As a foundation and context for Buddhist practice, this subject is a key element of the Basic Program.

#### Heart Sutra

*Form is empty, emptiness is form; form is not other than emptiness, emptiness is not other than form...*

Shakyamuni Buddha



Among the most famous of all the Buddhist scriptures, the *Heart Sutra* reveals the truth of emptiness through a short exchange between two of the Buddha's most illustrious disciples, Avalokiteshvara and Shariputra. Traditional commentary expands on the cryptic style of the sutra to clarify the exact nature of the wisdom realizing emptiness and the 'method' practices that are its essential complement, relating these two aspects of practice to the five levels on the path to enlightenment. The brevity and profound nature of the *Heart Sutra* have made its recitation popular as an effective means for dispelling obstacles to spiritual endeavor.

#### Mahayana Mind Training

*And thus bodhisattvas are likened to peacocks: they live on delusions – those poisonous plants. Transforming them into the essence of practice, they thrive in the jungle of everyday life. Whatever is presented they always accept, while destroying the poison of clinging desire...*

Dharmarakshita



The Mahayana path is characterized by the bodhisattva's aspiration to become a buddha for the sake of all beings. The means to develop and enhance this extraordinary attitude are revealed in a genre of teachings, at once practical and radical, known as 'mind training', or 'thought transformation' (lojong).

Dharmarakshita's *Wheel of Sharp Weapons* is one of the most esteemed mind training teachings, and a powerful weapon to cut through our true enemies - the self-grasping and self-cherishing which oppose altruistic intent and prevent lasting happiness and peace.

### Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds

*For as long as space endures, and for as long as living beings remain, until then may I too abide, to dispel the misery of the world.* Shantideva



The teaching on the bodhisattva's deeds is based on Shantideva's inspirational verses on Mahayana aspiration and practice, composed more than a thousand years ago and still widely regarded as the most authentic and complete guide for the practitioner dedicated to the enlightenment of all beings. This highest of motivations lies at the heart of his *Guide to the Bodhisattva Deeds*, which ranges in scope from simple, practical techniques for developing generosity and dealing with destructive emotions, up to the most refined discussion of ultimate truth. Due to its authenticity and relevance for everyday life, this classic is probably cited more often in teachings by Tibetan Buddhist masters than any other Buddhist scripture.

### Mind and Cognition

*All human accomplishment is preceded by valid cognition.*

Dharmakirti



*Mind and Cognition* begins with the study of mind, both in its valid and distorted forms. In addition a number of important themes are introduced, including the relationship between subject and object, supramundane (yogic) knowing and the connection between thought and reality.

An introduction to Buddhist psychology forms the latter part of the teaching, where the various positive and negative emotions as well as the cognitive states relevant to practice of a liberative path are identified and defined.

### Tenets

*My doctrine has two modes: advice and tenets. To children I speak advice, and to yogis, tenets.*

Lankavatarasutra



Based on the idea that the Buddha taught different things to different people in line with their capacities, Tibetan scholars systemized the numerous trends in Indian Buddhist thought and taught the four schools of tenets as a means to approach the most profound philosophical teachings via more accessible levels. The text that is the basis for study of this subject gives a brief overview of the assertions on minds, objects, selflessness and the nature of attainment within each of the schools, culminating in the tenets of the most highly esteemed school, the Madhyamaka.

### Ornament for Clear Realization - Chapter 4

*That which through the knower of all leads hearers seeking pacification to peace, which through the knower of paths causes those helping migrators to achieve the aims of the world, and through the perfect possession of which the Munis set forth these varieties having all aspects, to the Mother of the Buddhas as well as the host of hearers and bodhisattvas, I pay homage.* Maitreya



Maitreya's *Ornament for Clear Realization* is the root text for the study of the levels of realization related to enlightenment according to the Madhyamaka school. This important scripture, traditionally the basis for extensive study in the monastic curriculum, made explicit these levels which were otherwise presented in only a hidden manner in the Buddha's *Perfection of Wisdom* teachings. From among the seventy topics covered by the *Ornament*, the eleven topics of chapter four have been selected for commentary in the Basic Program curriculum.

## The Tathagata Essence

*I bow to the one who, with no beginning, middle or end, has a serene stillness and is clear-minded and fully evolved, who became clear from his own aspects and once clear, shows fearless, constant paths of the mind to bring realization to those with no realization...*

Maitreya



One of the major texts studied in all traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, Maitreya's *Sublime Continuum of the Mahayana* clarifies the meaning of our buddha potential, the tathagata essence, in particular the emptiness of the mind that allows evolution to a state of complete enlightenment.

The first chapter of this work which explains four related 'vajra' subjects - Buddha, Dharma, Sangha and tathagata essence - is the focus of this teaching.

## Grounds and Paths of Secret Mantra

*In brief, the buddhahood achieved over countless aeons you will attain in this birth through the most excellent bliss, or the state of Vajradhara.*

Samputa Tantra



*Grounds and Paths of Secret Mantra* offers a concise overview of the structure of the Tantric path, widely acclaimed in Tibet as the swiftest and most sublime means to realize buddhahood. Tantra distinguishes itself in particular through a unique combination of method and wisdom, achieved through meditation on the perfect form of a buddha as completely devoid of true existence. Presenting the paths of all four classes of tantra, while not being a guide to Highest Yoga Tantra practice itself, this subject provides a clear overview of its complex path structure.

## Supplementary Subjects

### Seventy Topics

*Seventy Topics* is an important study of the entire sutra path to enlightenment as presented in the *Ornament for Clear Realization*, including all the fundamental features of the basis, path and goal in the Mahayana. The topics are listed and each is defined and explained in turn.

### The Three Basic Bodies: Death, Intermediate State and Rebirth

Death, intermediate state and rebirth underpin samsara, the condition of repeated rebirth impelled by previous action and delusion. But they are also the three 'basic bodies' of Highest Yoga Tantra practice, forming the bases for altruistic transformation into the truth, enjoyment and emanation bodies of a buddha. This transformation is brought about by means of simulating in meditation the stages of the death process that result in manifestation of the clear light mind. Therefore, this teaching explains in detail both the death process and the way it is brought into the path to enlightenment.

### Highest Yoga Tantra

Commentary on an actual Highest Yoga Tantra deity-practice, in particular the two stages of generation and completion. Generation stage practice utilizes the imagination as a means to cultivate the pure form and environment of a buddha. Completion stage follows, during which the practitioner gains increased mastery of the subtle vital energies, culminating in the ability to manifest the powerful clear light mind - the optimum mind for realization of emptiness – and ultimately the union of the clear light mind and the illusory body. The precise details of the associated visualizations and meditation rituals are also clarified, and the complex symbolism explained.