

A TREASURE MAP TO YOUR ENLIGHTENMENT THROUGH FPMT

Context

Over 2500 years ago, Shakyamuni Buddha gained direct insight into the nature of reality and perfected the qualities of wisdom, compassion and power to help others. During the course of a 45-year-long teaching career, during which he gave 84,000 different teachings, Lord Buddha revealed his discoveries about our conditioned existence, how to attain liberation from it, and how to achieve full enlightenment.

In the 11th Century, Lama Atisha brought these teachings from India to Tibet and organized them into a practical guide for a single individual to navigate their spiritual journey in a text known as the *Lam gyi drön ma* or “*Light of the Path*.” Atisha’s groundbreaking work was most completely elucidated by the great Tibetan saint Lama Tsongkhapa in the 14th Century. His detailed commentary on Atisha’s text became known as the “*Lam-rim*” the “*Stages on the Path to Enlightenment*,” which includes teaching and practices related to both sutra and tantra. The lam-rim tradition of teachings has continued to pass from teacher to disciple up to this present day in the Gelug tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, founded by Lama Tsongkhapa.

The lam-rim is the core of FPMT’s educational structure and the treasure map for your personal enlightenment. Your first goal is to familiarize yourself well with the lam-rim. Once you have done this, whatever teachings or empowerments you receive, whatever Buddhist texts you study, you will understand how they apply to your personal path and practice. All of our programs can be studied at FPMT centers or via homestudy courses through www.fpmt.org/education.

Introductory

Depending on your level of interest and commitment, there are a number of ways you can learn about the lam-rim. For newcomers, we recommend “Buddhism in a Nutshell,” which introduces you to the lam-rim and basic Buddhist concepts. “Meditation 101” is also a beginner’s course wherein you will learn the fundamentals of how to meditate. These are short courses of five sessions each and a good way to determine if Buddhism is your preferred spiritual path or if you just want to use some of these tools and understandings to enhance your life in a more general way.

Foundation

“Discovering Buddhism” is a two-year course with a more in-depth and experiential approach to understanding the entire lam-rim. It provides you with teachings, readings, and discussion; you will also learn how to meditate on the lam-rim and how to do retreats. If you are a committed practitioner, it is most highly recommended that you make a pilgrimage to Nepal and attend the annual One Month Lam-Rim Course at Kopan Monastery, offered every November. This is an intensive overview of the lam-rim in a retreat setting with plenty of opportunities for meditation, discussion, and debate. It is also a recommendation for those who wish to have a complete “Discovering Buddhism” experience.

“Heart Advice for Death and Dying,” is a unique intensive short course about preparing for death and how to benefit yourself and others at the time of death.

“Foundation of Buddhist Thought,” another two-year course, assumes that you already have some grounding in the lam-rim. In this program, you will study topics that help you to understand more deeply the core principles of Buddhism that inform the lam-rim and will give you greater confidence and appreciation for what Lord Buddha taught about our mind, the nature of reality, and the path to liberation and enlightenment.

In September of 2009, FPMT is launching a new program based on commentary by Lama Zopa Rinpoche on Lama Atisha’s *Light of the Path*. It is anticipated that this five-year series of teachings will become the quintessential lam-rim immersion for FPMT students. All who are interested in participating in this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity are encouraged to attend and may also participate online.

In-Depth

Our “Basic Program” is a five-year course of study and practice which includes a presentation of one of Lama Tsongkhapa’s more extensive works on the lam-rim, providing detailed information about each stage along the path to enlightenment. Commentaries on several other texts further illuminate the path of the compassionate warrior, the perfection of wisdom sutras, how the mind works, our buddha-potential, and the stages through which one progresses by relying on the path of tantra.

The residential “Masters Program” offers an intensive six years of study and practice, exploring in detail five key texts by Indian and Tibetan masters that are studied in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries. As a gateway into the very extensive and profound teachings given by Lord Buddha, the Masters Program makes students appreciate the import of Lama Tsongkhapa’s *Lam-rim* as it offers the framework to relate all this knowledge to practice, allowing study to become a transformative experience.

Finally, there is “Maitripa College,” a three-year masters level program with a fourth year option for tantric studies, which combines the academic and practice intensity of the Masters Program with a firm grounding in the lam-rim, meditation, Tibetan language, and social service. Maitripa is an accredited college offering a Masters Degree in Buddhist Studies.

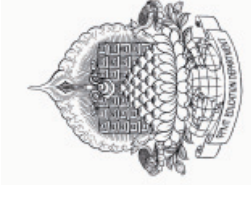
Language Programs

For those who feel especially drawn to the Tibetan language and want to develop skills to become an interpreter or translator of Tibetan Buddhist teachings, we encourage you to consider entering the four-year residential “Lotsawa Rinchen Zangpo Translator Program” based out of Dharamsala, India, the current residence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Our Masters Program and Maitripa College also have Tibetan language options.

The FPMT Integrated Approach to Education

FPMT education programs offer an integrated and well-balanced curriculum that incorporates academic study, meditation practice, service, and the cultivation of ethical behavior. Each of our programs integrates these components in a different way and to a different extent. For example, while our foundation level courses require weekly meditation sessions or a few days of retreat and allow for service as a voluntary option, our Masters Program requires a one-year lam-rim retreat; and Maitripa College curriculum mandates community service as a graduation requirement.

FPMT’s educational approach is not a linear one. While it is recommended that one attend introductory or foundation level programs before embarking on more advanced programs, we allow for the fact that different individuals have different karmic propensities and a range of qualities which may impact how they wish to approach their study and practice. It is common within FPMT to engage in tantric practices simultaneous to study and meditation on the sutra aspects of lam-rim, as they complement one another to bring about quick realizations of the path. In addition, our tradition emphasizes the importance of finding one’s own spiritual teacher on whom one can rely for guidance and advice for one’s study and practice.



www.fpmt.org/education/

According to Lama Tsongkhapa, you will receive four great benefits from studying the Lam-rim as taught in Atisha’s *Light of the Path*:

You understand all Buddha’s teachings with no contradictions.

The scriptural pronouncements, without an exception, dawn (on your mind) as personal guidelines.

You easily discover the Triumphant One’s intended meanings.

They protect you from the abyss of the great misdeed (of forsaking the Dharma).

Because of these (benefits), what scrutinizing persons among the erudite masters of India and Tibet will not have their minds enraptured by the stages of the path of three spiritual scopes, the supreme instructions to which many fortunate ones have entrusted themselves?¹

Conclusion

Whether you are a beginner or an advanced practitioner, if you are wondering about the next steps to take on your spiritual journey and do not have a teacher upon whom you can rely, look to the lam-rim. There is an abundance of ways to study it at FPMT centers or through homestudy programs available via the FPMT website: www.fpmt.org/education. Make strong prayers to the holy ones and always do practices to help you accumulate merit and purify negativities. This will ensure that the right doors will open for you and obstacles to your successful practice will be easily overcome.

“FPMT is unbelievably fortunate that we have many qualified teachers who are not only scholars but are living in practice. If you look, then you can understand how fortunate we are having the opportunity to study. With our Dharma knowledge and practice we can give the light of Dharma to others, in their heart. I think that’s the best service to sentient beings, the best service to the world.”

Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Endnote:

¹ From *Abbreviated Points of the Graded Paths (Lam-rim dti-dön)* by Tsongkhapa. Translated by Alexander Berzin and reprinted with permission from www.berzinarchives.com.