

## LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE'S ADVICE FOR DAILY PRACTICE

The purpose of life is to benefit other sentient beings and the greatest benefit you can offer them is to liberate them from their suffering and its causes. In order to do that you need to attain enlightenment and to do that you need to achieve the *lam-rim*, the gradual path to enlightenment.

To make that possible, you have to purify all the negative karma and defilements you have collected over your beginningless rebirths and accumulate extensive merit. These are the conditions necessary for you to actualize the path.

Life is like last night's dream. Don't hold on to it as too solid or inherently existent. The following advice on practice is given with the intention of making your life—this most precious human life that you have received just this once—as meaningful as possible. In the past, you have sacrificed your life and died numberless times creating the cause of suffering in samsara but have almost never sacrificed your life for the sake of Dharma, especially trying to bring other sentient beings to enlightenment. So, do as much of what follows as you can, and don't worry—be happy.

### PRELIMINARY PRACTICES

The purpose doing preliminary practices is for you to purify obstacles to achieving realizations of the path to enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings—defilements, negative karmas and downfalls—and collect extensive merit. Furthermore, to cause such realizations to ripen within your mind, you need to receive your guru's blessings through the practice of guru yoga.

Therefore, you should base each preliminary practice on the particular guru yoga that you do, such as the *Six-Session Guru Yoga*, the *Guru Puja* [Tib: *Lama Chöpa*], the *Lama Tsong Khapa Guru Yoga* [Tib: *Ganden Lha Gyäma*] and the guru yogas of various deities, such as the *Tara Guru Yoga*.

When practicing guru yoga, focus on the guru yoga meditation at different points of the practice—for example, after visualizing the merit field or during direct meditation on the lam-rim at the stanza on guru devotion—in order to develop guru devotion and realize that the guru is buddha. Meditate on the guru as buddha with the help of scriptural citations and logic as well as your own personal experience that supports the mind that sees your guru as all the buddhas and all the buddhas as your guru.

When doing preliminary practices in retreat, always spend the first session concentrating on guru yoga emphasizing guru devotion meditation. Then do about a half hour of lam-rim meditation. For the rest of the session—an hour, an hour-and-a-half or two hours: you can decide the length—do your preliminaries. If you retreat like this, your preliminaries retreat also becomes a lam-rim retreat: your lam-rim meditations make your preliminary practices much more powerful for purification and the accumulation of merit, and your preliminary practices make your lam-rim meditation extremely effective in quickly transforming your mind into the path to enlightenment.

In addition to the specific practices given here you should also meditate on and recite the short<sup>1</sup> or long<sup>2</sup> Avalokiteshvara mantra, or both, and the Medicine Buddha mantra<sup>3</sup> as many times as possible every day.

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<sup>1</sup> OM MANI PADME HUM

<sup>2</sup> NAMO RATNA TRAYAYA/ NAMAH ARYA JNANA SAGARA/ VAIROCHANA/ VYUHA RAJAYA/ TATHAGATAYA/ ARHATE/ SAMYAKSAM BUDDHAYA/ NAMAH SARVA TATHAGATEBHYYAH/ ARHADBHYAH/ SAMYAKSAM BUDDHEBHYYAH/ NAMAH ARYA AVALOKITESHVARAYA/ BODHISATTVAYA MAHASATTVAYA/ MAHAKARUNIKAYA/ TADYATHA/ OM/ DHARA DHARA/ DHIRI DHIRI/ DHURU DHURU/ ITTI VATTE/

## *Lam-rim meditation*

Base all your lam-rim meditations on guru devotion and meditate every day for whatever length of time you can—15, 20, 30 minutes or an hour—until you receive stable realizations.

To gain a background understanding of and detailed information on the lam-rim and how to meditate on it, read *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, by Pabongka Rinpoche.

For everyday use, I recommend *Essential Nectar*, by Geshe Rabten, which provides instruction on guided daily lam-rim meditation. The other way is to follow the outline of the *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment [Lam-rim Chen-mo]* or *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*. You should memorize the lam-rim outline that you do, which is what most serious Tibetan lam-rim meditators do. The outline is the basis of your meditations.

You can meditate daily for fifteen minutes, half an hour or an hour or two according to your situation in one, two, three or four sessions a day—decide the duration of each session yourself. The most important thing is continuity; this really helps. If you meditate a lot one day then take a few days off, your mind won't develop continuously. No matter how much time you spend meditating on the lam-rim every day, it's all good. Just don't stop—meditate every day.

You can rotate the focus of your meditation (as indicated above) as follows. Spend three months on guru devotion, three months on the lower scope, three months on the intermediate scope and three months on the highest scope up to emptiness. Then start over again with guru devotion. Continue cycling through the lam-rim in this way until you achieve the realization of each stage.

With guru devotion, continue doing the meditations daily until you have gained the stable realization of seeing all the buddhas spontaneously. Then meditate on the lower graduated path, from the precious human rebirth up to karma, focusing mainly on impermanence and death, which is the most important meditation because it helps you gain realization of all the others.

After you have realized renunciation, where you don't have even the slightest interest in happiness of this life, no clinging at all, and seek only the happiness of future lives, liberation or the happiness of others—which could take weeks, months or years—meditate on the intermediate path.

Once you have gained spontaneous renunciation of all of samsara, dedicate your life to realizing bodhicitta, where you don't have even the slightest thought seeking your own happiness but want only the happiness of others. In order to attain enlightenment you should feel like this day and night.

You should also do a little meditation on emptiness every day, using any unmistakable text, such as the *Heart Sutra* or any authentic mahamudra teaching. In the meantime, continue training your mind in the other steps of the path to enlightenment. After some time you can try to achieve tranquil abiding by focusing on the meditation object suggested above.

Reciting a lam-rim prayer every day is the fundamental daily practice that renders each day of your life most meaningful. When you recite a lam-rim prayer mindfully from beginning to end your recitation becomes a direct meditation on the entire path to enlightenment. This practice leaves imprints, or seeds, of the realizations of the whole path on your mental continuum. This means that with each recitation you become closer to enlightenment and, therefore, closer to enlightening all sentient beings, which is the main goal of your life, the purpose of being alive. This is unbelievable benefit of doing direct meditation on the lam-rim every day of your life.

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CHALE CHALE/ PRACHALE PRACHALE/ KUSUME/ KUSUME VARE/ ILI MILI/ CITI JVALAM/ APANAYE  
SVAHA/

<sup>3</sup> TADYATHA OM BEKANDZE BEKANDZE MAHABEKANDZE BEKANDZE RANDZA SAMUDGATE SOHA

There are various different lam-rim prayers that you can recite in this way; for example, Lama Tsong Khapa's *Three Principal Aspects of the Path, Foundation of All Good Qualities and Lines of Experience*, and Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo's long version of *Calling the Guru from Afar*. You can also meditate on any other prayer that contains the essence of the entire path. If it mentions the practice of tantra at the end, that is particularly good.

The more direct meditations on the whole lam-rim you do each day the more advantages you receive. If you have received highest yoga tantra initiation, it's also good to recite a prayer of the graduated path of tantra, such as that found at the end of the long Yamantaka and Vajrayana sadhanas. Again, if you recite it mindfully, it plants the seed of the entire path on your mind.

Thus there are two different direct, or glance, meditations: the one on the lam-rim, which is the foundation of the common path, and the one on the tantric path, which is the extraordinary path. Practicing these helps prepare your mind for all the realizations of the path, perhaps in this life but definitely in a future one.

When you meditate on the lam-rim, bring into your meditation whatever teachings and other information you have learned from reading other authentic Buddhist texts. This makes your meditation much more effective. When meditating on guru devotion, for example, you can augment the outline with whatever you have learned from studying various teachings on guru devotion. Similarly, you can enrich your meditation on the nature of samsara, bodhicitta, emptiness and so forth by studying different teachings on these topics. This makes your meditation more effective.

However, following your guru's instructions is what makes your meditation practice most productive in bringing quick realizations.

During the break times—which means your life between sessions of sitting meditation, not breaks from Dharma practice—whether you're standing, walking, sleeping or doing anything else, try to live with the experience generated by your morning lam-rim meditation. Live with a mind transformed by your daily meditation on guru devotion, impermanence and death, the meaningfulness of this life's body, the suffering nature of samsara, bodhicitta or emptiness—whatever was the main focus of that session.

By doing so, not only do you make your life highly meaningful during your sessions but also during the rest of the time. This is mainly because your lam-rim experience gives you a positive attitude and, as a result, you avoid creating negative actions; you are always careful to practice Dharma and avoid creating negative karma. Thus all your actions become causes of liberation and enlightenment and, therefore, the remedy to samsara.

This instruction also to practice in between formal meditation sessions is extremely important—if you follow it, your sessions will help make your life during the breaks highly meaningful and fruitful. This is specifically what Lama Tsong Khapa meant when, in the *Foundation of All Good Qualities*, he talked about taking the essence of the precious human body day and night. His Holiness the Dalai Lama also explained that this verse means that we should live in the experience generated by our morning meditation and strongly recommended that we do so.

If you can do this, even your working life will become meditation. It will be unified with the Dharma and, especially, your lam-rim meditation. Your mind will always be peaceful and stable, not up and down; you will have peace, satisfaction and fulfillment in your life and will be able to benefit others better and more with your positive Dharma mind.

When your mind is ready, take the initiation(s) when available and train your mind in the practice of the generation stage. You can do a little completion stage practice just to plant the seed of it, but initially your main emphasis should be on the generation stage. You might like to meditate on the completion stage just for fun but you cannot accomplish it without accomplishing the generation stage. Do that first and then practice the completion stage.

You should understand that you and I don't often have the chance to meet to discuss your practice. So, whether we meet again in this lifetime or not, you must make your life meaningful with many years of practice.

Thus your request for practice is done. I have put off other things—prayers and so forth—to spend time checking all this for you. Therefore you must consider doing these practices in your life. Take this advice seriously; otherwise it would have been better that you hadn't asked me.

#### ADDITIONAL DAILY PRACTICES

##### *Prostration to the Thirty-five Buddhas in the morning*

If possible, recite and prostrate to the Thirty-five Buddhas of Confession three times every morning or whenever you can. That's 105 prostrations all together.

If you think about it you'll see how urgently we need to practice the Thirty-five Buddhas of Confession. Reciting these buddhas' names while bringing to mind our past negative karma purifies that karma. If we don't purify our negative karma we will not achieve a perfect human rebirth with eight freedoms and ten richnesses like the one we have now and will experience the opposite instead: rebirth in the suffering lower realms. Furthermore, if left unpurified, the negative karma we have created will increase exponentially within our mind (see below). Therefore it is extremely important that we purify it.

The express purpose for these Thirty-five Buddhas' existence is for sentient beings to purify the various different negative karmas they have created. Even reciting these buddhas' names just once purifies many eons of negative karma; it's like an atomic bomb in how extremely quickly and powerfully it destroys negative karma.

Lama Tsong Khapa did many hundreds of thousands of prostrations with this confession practice to the Thirty-five Buddhas in his cave at Olka, Tibet. Lama Atisha also did many prostrations every day, even when he was very old. So did many of the other lam-rim lineage lamas, as a result of which they achieved many realizations.

Therefore the Thirty-five Buddhas practice should be an essential ingredient of our daily routine. It's the best thing we can do in order to be healthy and not have regrets in future.

Geshe Jampa Gyatso's *Everlasting Rain of Nectar* is a commentary on this practice.

##### *Vajrasattva recitation at night*

Before you go to bed each night, recite the Vajrasattva mantra to prevent whatever negative karma you have created that day from multiplying. If you don't purify it in this way your negative karma will keep doubling and re-doubling day by day, week by week, month by month, and year by year up to the end of your life and even one day's negative karma will become as huge and heavy as a mountain—in time, even one atom of unpurified negative karma can swell to the size of the Earth.

Even though you may not necessarily create particularly heavy negative karmas, since unpurified negative karma increases exponentially in this way, even one small negative action can cause you to be reborn in the lower realms and experience great suffering for many eons. And because in the lower realms you continually create more and more negative karma, it is extremely difficult to be reborn back into the upper realms, which makes it almost impossible for you to practice Dharma. Therefore you *must* purify your negative karma every day.

Since practicing the Vajrasattva recitation-meditation at the end of the day prevents negative karma from multiplying it is an unbelievably powerful method. It makes your life very light and easy and keeps you happy and peaceful inside—in your heart and in your inner life. Furthermore, it

purifies not only that day's negative karma but also that created in this life from the time you were born and in all your previous lives as well.

Purifying negative karma makes it much easier to attain liberation and actualize the path to enlightenment. It also decreases your suffering and any obstacles that might arise. Purifying negative karma means that you won't have to experience the many eons of suffering in the lower realms that result from not purifying even one negative karma, and you won't have to experience again and again without end the four suffering results that arise from each unpurified negative karma.

The conclusion is that even if you have completed the preliminary of reciting 100,000 Vajrasattva mantras you can't just stop, relax and say, "I've finished my Vajrasattva preliminary practice. Now I don't have to recite that mantra any more." You need to keep doing the long Vajrasattva mantra at least twenty-one times or the short one at least twenty-eight times a day in order to keep purifying your negative karma and prevent it from multiplying.

### *Medicine Buddha mantra*

The Medicine Buddha mantra is recited for success. Since we have many problems and want to succeed we need to recite the Medicine Buddha mantra every day. It can help us eliminate the problems, unhappiness and suffering we don't want and gain the success, happiness, inner growth and realizations of the path that we do.

Lord Buddha told his attendant Ananda that even animals who hear the Medicine Buddha mantra will never be reborn in the lower realms. The highly attained Kyabje Chöden Rinpoche, who has completed the entire path to enlightenment, said recently that if you recite the Medicine Buddha mantra at the time of death you will be reborn in the pure land. Therefore, it is to be recited not only for healing but also to benefit people and animals all the time, whether they're living or dying.

If you recite the Medicine Buddha mantra every day you will purify your negative karma and this will help you never to be reborn in the lower realms. If you don't purify your negative karma, then when you die you will be reborn in the lower realms as a hell being, hungry ghost or animal and will have to suffer again and again without end. Therefore you need to purify your negative karma right now. If you cannot bear even the present suffering of the human realm—which is blissful joy compared to that of the lower realms—how will you be able to bear the intense suffering of the lower realms, which is unimaginably unbearable, lasts for an incredible length of time and a billion times worse than all the human sufferings put together.

Since reciting the Medicine Buddha mantra saves you from all these sufferings it is much more precious than skies of gold, diamonds, wish-fulfilling jewels and zillions and zillions of dollars. Material wealth counts for nothing because it can't purify negative karma. Even if you possessed that much wealth, simply reciting or even hearing the Medicine Buddha mantra just once would be far more precious because it would leave an imprint of the entire path to enlightenment on your mind, help you gain realizations of the path, eradicate all your gross and subtle defilements and cause you to achieve enlightenment.

The Medicine Buddha mantra can help you liberate numberless sentient beings from the vast oceans of suffering and bring them to enlightenment, so you should recite it with absolute trust in the Medicine Buddha, knowing that he will completely take care of your life and heal you in every way and that he is always with you—in your heart, on your crown and right there in front of you. There is not one second that the Medicine Buddha does not see or have compassion for you.

### *Chenrezig, the Compassionate-Eye Looking One*

All students, old and new, should practice Chenrezig, the Compassionate-Eye Looking One. Doing his recitation-meditation brings all happiness, temporary—the happiness of this and all future lives—and ultimate—the happiness of liberation and enlightenment—to the numberless sentient beings, yourself included. Reciting the Chenrezig mantra brings skies of benefit, especially if you do it with bodhicitta.

The practice and realization of bodhicitta is the most important thing in life because it fulfils not only your own wishes for happiness but also those of all other sentient beings—each and every one.

With bodhicitta you can completely dry up the ocean of samsaric suffering and its cause and achieve liberation and enlightenment because it helps you gain the wisdom directly realizing emptiness, which eradicates both gross and subtle defilements.

Bodhicitta is what allows *arya* bodhisattva to abandon the sufferings of samsara, including rebirth, old age, sickness and death, just by achieving the right-seeing path. Even though arhats of the lesser vehicle path have the wisdom directly realizing emptiness and many other inconceivable qualities, they still have the remainder of the suffering aggregates.

Bodhicitta is the door to the Mahayana path to enlightenment and the root of the limitless qualities of the Buddha's holy body, speech and mind. The courageous bodhisattvas are able to bear all the hardships of working for sentient beings, no matter how great they are, even if it costs them their life. Since bodhisattvas see how beneficial it is to bear hardship in order to work for others in this way they are not only able to bear it but experience limitless joy as well. For bodhisattvas, even dying as a result of working for others is like drinking nectar; doing so, they experience the delight of a swan plunging into a cool pond on a hot day.

Bodhisattvas abandon the thought of achieving their own liberation from the ocean of samsaric suffering and its cause—delusion and karma—as one discards used toilet paper, having not an atom of interest in it. They have only aversion to gaining the ultimate happiness of nirvana for themselves alone.

Bodhicitta allows bodhisattvas to complete the accumulation of the two types of merit—transcendent wisdom and virtue—and is the cause of their achieving the two holy bodies: *rupakaya*—the holy body of form—and *dharmakaya*—the holy body of mind—which is the ultimate goal. The sole purpose of achieving these two holy bodies is to be able to do perfect work for all sentient beings. Even though there are numberless sentient beings and it can take three countless great eons to complete the accumulations to bring every single one to enlightenment, what gives bodhisattvas the determination to do so is bodhicitta.

No matter how many eons it takes to have one sentient being generate a single virtuous thought, the bodhisattva will try to make it happen without being discouraged. In the *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras*, Maitreya said, “In order to ripen even one virtuous thought, the bodhisattva, the child of the Victorious Ones whose mind is stabilized in supreme perseverance for highly ripening the sentient beings, does not get discouraged, even if it takes thousands of ten million eons.”

So you can see that the determination that drives bodhisattvas to bear hardship and work continuously for sentient beings comes from bodhicitta, which itself comes from the root of great compassion. This root, compassion, fuels the skies of benefit that derive from bodhicitta, like rocket fuel powers a spaceship or electricity generated by a power station lights up an entire city.

It is also great compassion that has already brought numberless sentient beings to enlightenment in the past, brings numberless sentient beings to enlightenment at present and will bring numberless sentient beings to enlightenment in future; great compassion that makes numberless buddhas do perfect, unmistakable work for numberless sentient beings until they achieve enlightenment; and great compassion that causes all buddhas to have the omniscient mind and perfect power they need to benefit all sentient beings.

Similarly, your own great compassion will become the source of peace and happiness of numberless sentient beings—the source of all their temporary and ultimate happiness—including the beings in this world and the country where you live, and your own family: parents, companion, children and, lastly, yourself.

Without compassion in your heart all you have is ego, which both directly and indirectly harms all sentient beings, including those in this world and your country, and your own family: parents, companion, children and yourself. The more you can practice compassion, the greater will be the peace and happiness in your heart and in your life.

Your compassion is the source of happiness of even the people and animals you encounter in everyday life. Without compassion there are personality ego-clashes and many other problems—anger, jealousy and the like. Without compassion your life is overwhelmed by problems, like a mouse trapped in a cage and killed, an elephant stuck in the mud and suffocated, a fly caught in a spider’s web and eaten, or a moth attracted by a flame and drowned in hot candle wax. Your life is enmeshed in problems and continues in that way until you die like a moth in a flame. That’s why you need to practice compassion; compassion is the most important Dharma practice you can do, the most important meditation for you to practice.

Living and working with compassion is the best thing you can do. Then, when you experience problems, you can experience them for others, use them to develop compassion for others. Thus you use your problems to achieve enlightenment—your problems become the path to enlightenment.

Similarly, when you are sick from cancer or AIDS, for example, you can experience your illness with compassion, for the sake of other sentient beings—to bring them all happiness up to and including enlightenment. Thus your sickness becomes the path to enlightenment.

Therefore, all problems—failed relationships, illness, business failure, unemployment—become very important and useful, a special, heroic practice. Before, such experiences were something that you disliked and were to be abandoned but now, with your practice of compassion, they become something highly desirable and of the utmost need for the development of your mind in the path—very powerful and special.

Also, when your life ends, the best way to die is with compassion. His Holiness the Dalai Lama often says that dying with bodhicitta is “self-supporting.” You don’t need anybody else around to help you because you can guide yourself. You’re the leader; you can lead yourself to the happiness of future lives.

In order to develop great compassion you need to understand the Buddha’s teachings on how to develop it. But even if you can recite the teachings on compassion by heart and know how to meditate on them, that alone is not enough for you to realize them. To do you need the support of the blessings of Avalokiteshvara, the Buddha of Compassion. In order to receive these blessings you need to practice his meditation-recitation.

For more on the benefits of this practice, please see *Teachings from the Mani Retreat*.

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*For further information on how to do the preliminary practices and to obtain commentaries on them please contact your local FPMT center or the FPMT International Office as listed in Mandala magazine or go to [www.fpmt.org](http://www.fpmt.org). See the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive for large collection of teachings by Lama Yeshe, Lama Zopa Rinpoche and many other great lamas: [www.LamaYeshe.com](http://www.LamaYeshe.com).*