

■ Practicing Dharma in DAILY LIFE

This section provides advice, resources and inspiration for practicing Dharma in daily life.

FEATURED PRACTICE



Photo by Linda Lane

As Buddhists, we try to be keenly aware of our own suffering and the suffering of others. But how do we cultivate a mind of benefiting others and ourselves? Lama Zopa Rinpoche's answer is this issue's **Featured Practice**: an explanation of how to meditate on *Sang gyä chhö dang*, the well-known and foundational prayer written by Lama Atisha, recited millions of times every day by Tibetan Buddhist practitioners around the world.

SANG GYÄ CHHÖ DANG SOG KYI CHHOG NAM LA

I go for refuge until I am enlightened

JANG CHHUB BAR DU DAG NI KYAB SU CHHI

To the Buddha, the Dharma and the Supreme Assembly.

DAG GI JIN SOG GYI PE SÖ NAM GYI

By the merits I create, through practicing giving and the rest,

DRO LA PHÄN CHHIR SANG GYÄ DRUB PAR SHOG

May I become a buddha in order to benefit all sentient beings.

Refuge and Bodhichitta

By Lama Zopa Rinpoche

I am going to explain the meditation prayer of taking refuge and generating bodhichitta, composed by Lama Atisha. It is extremely important as we recite it so many times in one day.

Sang gyä means “eliminated and developed.” *Sang* means having eliminated all gross and subtle mistakes of mind; and *gyä* is having completed all the qualities and realizations. This is what we need to achieve. We need *sang* and *gyä*. Then *chhö* is the whole path, and *sog* is the Sangha – their qualities.

The first cause of refuge is one's own mind qualified by having useful fear of samsara. Then the second cause is having faith towards the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha; understanding that they have the power and qualities to save oneself, liberate oneself, from the oceans of samsaric sufferings and their cause: karma and delusions. Then, with those two causes, completely relying on, totally trusting in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha; that mental factor is Hinayana refuge. In Mahayana, there are these two causes and the third one, compassion for sentient beings. With

these three causes, totally relying on Buddha, Dharma and Sangha; that mental factor is Mahayana refuge.

The Secret Mantra Vajrayana way is by practicing generation stage to be free from ordinary appearance and ordinary concept, and then to be free from the unfunctionability of the chakras, winds and drops; to be free from impure wind and mind, to cease those.

Meditate on Two Shocking Things

The first unbelievably deeply shocking thing is that I have been experiencing the suffering of samsara numberless times from *beginningless* rebirths. The second shocking thing is that it is, again, *endless*, if one doesn't change one's own mind and become totally detached from samsara.

Then, you look at the numberless sentient beings – numberless hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, human beings, asuras, suras and intermediate state beings – *oooh*, they have been exactly the same: experiencing the general sufferings of samsara and the particular sufferings of the

lower realms numberless times from *beginningless* rebirths. You can't imagine. It's most unbearable. *Feel that.*

Now, if they don't get help from you, they will experience the sufferings of samsara, again and again, *endlessly*. It's most, most, most unbearable. You can't stand it for a minute, for a second.

However, you don't have *sang gyä*, so you can't complete the work for sentient beings. Therefore, with your whole heart, totally rely on Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, not just for oneself, but because you want all sentient beings to be liberated from oceans of samsaric sufferings and their causes.

"I go for refuge to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha," is the cause refuge – taking refuge in those whose mental continuum is separate from yourself. "Until enlightenment is achieved" shows the result time refuge. Result Dharma is when your mind becomes the cessation of suffering and cessation of defilements, the true path. At that time, you become the result Sangha. By developing Dharma, you become the result Buddha. Only then can you do perfect work for sentient beings without any effort, spontaneously.

"By the collection of merits," refers to the merits of transcendental wisdom and the merits of virtue.

Dro la is "migrating beings." It has two meanings. One meaning is that after sentient beings are born, even in one second, they constantly *go*, non-stop, towards death. One meaning of *dro la* is that – "one who is going." The other meaning is "transmigrating." There are seven realms of sentient beings. Transmigratory beings are under the control of karma and delusions and so, continuously, in one of the realms they suffer. This is what has been happening from *beginningless* rebirths and, if you don't help them, they will have to suffer *endlessly* in samsara.

Call them "mother" sentient beings. Bring in that subject, mother. Thinking "mother" means close to you, close to your heart. At the same time, it means being a mother and kind in four ways.¹ Not only that, but we should remember this: our parents created so much negative karma, twenty-four hours a day, for our well-being. It is important to think that there will be so much suffering as a result of their negative karma, bearing hardships for you. Remember that, include that. That is the real story. Then you can see the mother's kindness. It becomes most unbearable. You come to the conclusion that you have no

¹ (1) Your mother gave you a body, especially the human body which allows you to practice Dharma; (2) bore hardships for you; (3) protected your life from hundreds of dangers each day; and (4) gave you an education, led you in the path of the world, taught you how to walk, how to speak human language, etc.

choice. You've got to give help to the mother sentient beings. It's not only nice words; it is the reality.

"To benefit" means to liberate them from the bondage of karma and delusions. That way you are able to liberate them from oceans of samsaric sufferings. Not only that, but you also want to bring them to full enlightenment. Therefore, the solution is for oneself to achieve enlightenment. Each time you generate this bodhichitta, "May I achieve enlightenment for the benefit of transmigratory beings," by putting your palms together, how much merit you collect is *amazing*.

Sealing with Emptiness

After this, think, "The real I seeking enlightenment does not exist; it is totally empty right there. The real action seeking enlightenment is totally empty right there. The real enlightenment, not the merely labeled enlightenment, is totally empty right there. Those for whom you are achieving enlightenment, the real sentient beings, are totally empty right there." Meditate a little bit on emptiness.

When we do *sang gyä chho dang*, we must meditate, not just blah, blah, blah. It is a very, very important practice. This way, at the very beginning, you practice the heart of Buddhism – the heart of the 84,000 teachings of Buddha, the three baskets, the Hinayana, the Mahayana Paramitayana, and the Mahayana Secret Mantra Vajrayana, the essence of the lam-rim, the graduated path of the three capable beings, and the three principal aspects of the path – all these already get done at the beginning, before the actual practice. It becomes very powerful. ♦

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Buddha Days

March 5 – 19, Days of Miracles

Full and New Moons

(Tibetan 15th and 30th days)

January 4, 19

February 2, 28

March 4, 19

The FPMT Foundation Store offers for sale the LIBERATION calendar, a traditional Tibetan lunar calendar including auspicious days and more, produced by Liberation Prison Project: www.fpmt.org/shop