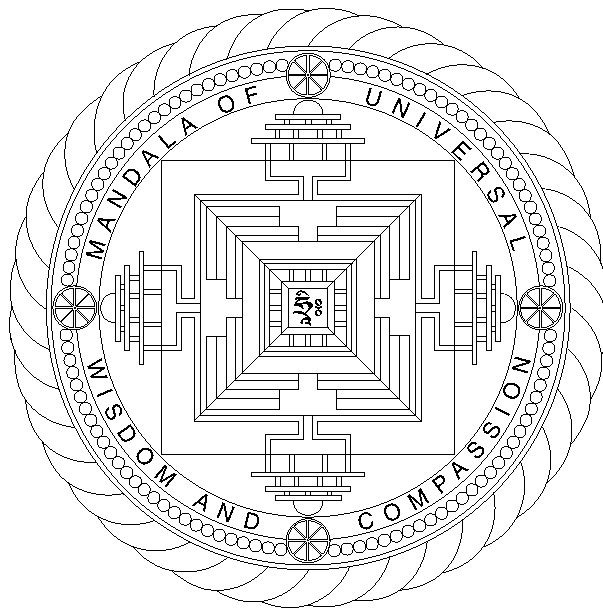


# DISCOVERING BUDDHISM



*Awakening the limitless potential of your mind  
achieving all peace and happiness*

**AN FPMT INTRODUCTORY PROGRAM**  
**Introduction for Students**

# DISCOVERING BUDDHISM

*Awakening the limitless potential of your mind,  
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Welcome to the *Discovering Buddhism* program!

This program is designed as an experiential course in Tibetan Buddhist philosophy and practice. The teachings contained herein are drawn from the Geluk tradition of Lama Tsong Khapa, a great saint and scholar of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. They come in an unbroken lineage from Shakyamuni Buddha who imparted this wisdom over 2500 years ago and were passed directly from teacher to disciple up to this present day.

The realizations of Shakyamuni Buddha cannot be measured, but it is said that the Buddha gained direct insight into the nature of reality, perfected the qualities of wisdom, compassion, and power, and then revealed the path to accomplish those same realizations to his disciples. The Buddha's teachings have been presented in various ways by different holy beings over the centuries to make them more accessible to those of us who did not have the opportunity to meet the Buddha ourselves. Lama Tsong Khapa was one such holy being and his teachings of the "lam-rim" or "graduated path to enlightenment" form the core of the *Discovering Buddhism* program.

In addition, two contemporary masters, Lama Thubten Yeshe (1955-1984), and Lama Zopa Rinpoche (1945-present), have imparted these teachings to *their* students in a deep and experiential way, leading thousands of seekers to discover for themselves the truth of what the Buddha taught. The methods and teachings found in this program also reflect the unique styles of these two great teachers and are meant to help students "taste the chocolate" of the Buddha's words.

*Discovering Buddhism* is intended to be more than an academic undertaking. As such, participants of the program are asked to not only attend lectures and do required reading, but they are also asked to do meditations and retreats as part of their program curriculum. Students may choose to simply audit the program and not fulfill all requirements. However, those who wish to gain some experience of what the Buddha taught are encouraged to make it a personal goal to fulfill all requirements and thus receive a final completion certificate issued by the Education Department of FPMT and FPMT's Spiritual Director, Lama Zopa Rinpoche. Your completion certificate is symbolic of your commitment to spiritual awakening and you should rejoice deeply when you receive it, let alone be moved by how your mind has changed in the process!

Regardless of what level of participation you choose to make in this program, we pray that you will enjoy the time you spend *Discovering Buddhism* and that it brings you every happiness, both temporal and ultimate.

With prayers for your success,

FPMT Education Department Staff

## **BINDER CONTENTS**

The following items have been assembled in this packet of materials for your convenience:

- ✧ **Program brochure**
- ✧ **Overview of the program** with advice for students
- ✧ **Required and Suggested Reading Booklist** for the program. This lists all of the required texts for the program as well as the publishers from whom you can obtain these texts. Additional suggested texts and relevant videos are also listed.
- ✧ **Subject Area Summary Sheets** provide an outline of topics to be covered in each subject area, required reading and practice assignments, suggested additional reading, other practices to do, and an estimated number of sessions<sup>1</sup> required for each subject area, not including meditation and retreat time.
- ✧ **Completion Cards** have been provided as an easy way for students to keep track of requirements fulfilled for each subject area.
- ✧ **Discovering Buddhism Required Reading** for each subject area. These reading materials may be distributed to you one subject area at a time or all at once, depending on the preference of the hosting center.

**An OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM follows.**

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<sup>1</sup> A “session” is one 1 ½- to 2- hour class.

# DISCOVERING BUDDHISM

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## INTRODUCTION

*Discovering Buddhism: An FPMT Introductory Program* is the result of the combined efforts of a number of FPMT teachers and spiritual program coordinators, under the guidance and advice of Lama Zopa Rinpoche. It is an estimated 2-year course for which students may receive a certificate of completion upon fulfillment of all requirements.

The aim of the *Discovering Buddhism* program is to give participants a solid footing in the practice of Mahayana Buddhism. By engaging in this program, participants will gain an experiential taste of the Buddha's teachings, some retreat experience, and the skills they need to make their lives most meaningful.

Within Buddhism, the defining feature determining whether a teaching lineage is still intact or not is the existence of a direct oral transmission from teacher to disciple from today's living teachers all the way back to the historical Buddha. It is FPMT's mission to continue this unbroken lineage and assure that the blessings of the Buddha's words survive for future generations.

## BACKGROUND – FPMT WISDOM CULTURE

The *Discovering Buddhism* program is presented within a context that reflects our FPMT wisdom culture. These are the qualities that have inspired students to become part of the FPMT network. The key elements of our wisdom culture are listed below:

- ***Openness and breadth in presenting the Dharma*** as exemplified in Lama Thubten Yeshe's teaching style. Using non-traditional, yet pure, methods. Making the Dharma accessible according to the culture and needs of students.
- ***Detail and depth of instruction*** as exemplified by Lama Zopa Rinpoche's teaching style. Placing emphasis on *how* to practice and the *meaning* of practice. Stressing the importance of motivation and dedication.
- ***Constant practice of accumulation of merit and purification*** as essential to bring temporal happiness and prepare the mind for realizations.
- ***Experiential lam-rim teaching methods & Kopan-style courses<sup>2</sup>***
- ***Respect and support for ordained Sangha***
- ***Regular retreat and meditation practice***
- ***Use of standard FPMT practices recommended by Lama Zopa Rinpoche***

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<sup>2</sup> Kopan Monastery, Nepal is the first center of FPMT where annual one-month courses are offered teaching the entire graduated path to enlightenment (lam-rim) together with guided meditations and discussion. Courses are usually team-taught by a Tibetan lama or geshe and a Western teacher.

- **Reliance on tantric methods.** Encouraging students to have spiritual confidence.
- **Cultivation of a close family feeling** FPMT is a family of practitioners.
- **Service.** Cultivating the attitude and wish to be of service to others. Think big.
- **Cherishing others.** Imparting a universal love for all beings. Big love.

## THE PROGRAM

There are a total of 14 subject areas within the *Discovering Buddhism* program. Within each subject area students are expected to attend lectures covering required topics of understanding, engage in meditation practices relevant to those topics, read texts and teaching transcripts, and do short retreats. The final subject area “Special Integration Experiences” includes a list of longer retreats and other experiences required in order to “graduate” from the program. **Students who have no interest in receiving a final completion certificate do not have to complete all the requirements for each subject area.**

This program is not designed as an academic study of Buddhism but is intended to change a person’s life.

## DISCOVERING BUDDHISM subject areas:

### 1. **Mind and Its Potential**

*Examine what is “mind,” its nature and function, and how it affects our experience of happiness and suffering. Come explore the differentiation between mind and brain, mind as the creator of our experiences, and the implications of possessing a mind that has no beginning and no end. In addition, learn methods to transform destructive thoughts and attitudes and create a positive and joyous mind.*

### 2. **How to Meditate**

*Basic meditation techniques. Learn the definition and purpose of meditation, how to sit properly, how to set up a meditation session, the different types of meditation techniques one may employ, and how to recognize and deal with obstacles to meditation.*

### 3. **Presenting the Path**

*Get an overview of the entire Tibetan Buddhist path to awakening. Hear about the life story of the Buddha and study the basic teachings of Buddhism. Discover the unique system for putting Buddhist philosophy into practice contained in the lam-rim, or “graduated path to enlightenment.”*

### 4. **The Spiritual Teacher**

*Take the time to investigate the role of the teacher on the spiritual path: the need for a teacher, the qualities of a teacher, the qualities of a student, and how to relate to a teacher for greatest benefit in one’s spiritual life. Consider the challenges we face when thinking of entering into a “guru-disciple” relationship and learn how to overcome these skillfully.*

## **5. Death and Rebirth**

*Explore the process of death and rebirth and its impact on how we live our lives. Be guided in skillful reflection on the meaning of death and what to expect at the death-time. In this way, fulfill your purpose in life, resolve conflicts, and develop the skills to help both yourself and others at the time of death. Eventually, through Buddhist practice, one can overcome death altogether.*

## **6. All About Karma**

*Learn the essential facts about the law of cause and effect and generate a clear understanding about how karma works. Discover effective tools to accumulate merit - the cause of happiness and success - and purify mistaken actions done in the past. In addition, explore ways to become adept at dealing with life most effectively and thereby take control of your future.*

## **7. Refuge in the Three Jewels**

*Get informed about what it means to take refuge in the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma and Sangha), and the essential practices of refuge. Find out more about the advantage of taking lay vows and their role in enhancing our spiritual growth.*

## **8. Establishing a Daily Practice**

*Assemble the tools you need to develop a successful daily practice. Using Lama Zopa Rinpoche's A DAILY MEDITATION PRACTICE as a guide, become familiar with the elements necessary to generate realizations in the mind. Also, receive some tips for making every action of the day meaningful.*

## **9. Samsara and Nirvana**

*Investigate what "samsara" is and how we are stuck in it. Find out what "nirvana" is and how to achieve it. Develop the determination to be free from suffering and empower yourself with practical tools to deal with and eliminate disturbing emotions forever.*

## **10. How to Develop Bodhichitta**

*Come discover the clear meditation instruction available in Tibetan Buddhism that enables us to develop our innate qualities of loving kindness and compassion. Become skilled at applying these techniques to generate the mind of bodhichitta, the wish to attain enlightenment for the benefit of others, known to be the heart of Buddha's teachings.*

## **11. Transforming Problems**

*Consider well the disadvantages of self-cherishing and the advantages of cherishing others more than ourselves. Get inspired to "exchange yourself with others," and then be guided in how to employ the special techniques of mind training or "lo-jong" as a means to transform problems into happiness and learn to like problems as much as ice cream!*

## **12. Wisdom of Emptiness**

*The realization of emptiness is crucial for the attainment of liberation and enlightenment. Take this opportunity to enhance your ability to bring about this realization. Learn how to develop calm abiding and different methods to use in meditation on emptiness. Practice accumulation of merit and purification of obstacles - indispensable for generating realizations within the mind.*

## **13. Introduction to Tantra**

*Learn the definition of tantra, how tantra works and why it is a powerful form of practice. Get a broad overview of the four classes of tantra and learn how to practice simple Kriya tantric methods. In addition, find out how to integrate the practices of tantra with lam-rim meditation for optimal results.*

#### **14. Special Integration Experiences**

*By undertaking intensive practices of purification and a minimum two-week lam-rim residential retreat, prepare your mind in the best possible way to gain realizations on the path to enlightenment. Purification practices include: 100,000 prostrations, 3-month Vajrasattva retreat, and Nyung Ne. This is a great way to seal the blessings of this program.*

#### **STUDENTS**

Students may begin this program at the start of any one of the subject areas being offered at their center. It is optimal for students to start at the beginning of the program with “Mind and Its Potential” and work their way through in order, but it is not a requirement. Students can simply make up subject areas missed when they are offered again at the center. By the end of 2003, courses will be made available on tape or CD for each subject area and students can also make up missed courses in this way, preferably under the guidance of a teacher or designated mentor.

It is possible for students to complete their 14 subject areas by attending courses at different centers. For example, one can study “Mind and Its Potential” at one center, and “How to Meditate” at another. It is the student’s responsibility to keep track of their own completion cards and to make sure that once all requirements are fulfilled they are “signed off” by the course teacher or other person designated to fulfill this role. Once a student has all 14 of their completion cards filled out and signed off, they may send *copies* of them all together to the FPMT Education Department to receive an official FPMT completion certificate for the program.

As mentioned above, students may attend the courses without fulfilling all requirements. The requirements are optional, but recommended. Students interested to get the full “FPMT experience” are encouraged to complete all requirements for each subject area: attend all lectures (sessions missed can be made up by listening to a tape or as the teacher advises), do all required readings, do at least one meditation session for each of the required meditations, and complete the assigned retreats or other items listed as “required” for each subject area. There is a substantial amount of reading required. Students can do this at their own pace, even after the course has finished. However, all readings must be completed in order to receive a formal completion certificate. Of course, it is best if readings are done while the actual course is in progress.

Retreat requirements can be fulfilled either individually or in group retreats organized by the center for the students.

Public exams or teacher interviews. One of the requirements for each subject area is that students participate in *either* a “public exam” *or* a teacher interview at the end of each course. Of course, if teachers want to do *both*, that is fine too! “Public exams” were created by Lama Thubten Yeshe in the early ’70s and were found to be very effective for helping students to incorporate the material they learned as well as assist them in learning how to present Dharma skillfully to others.

In this context, the teacher assigns, or lets students choose, a short topic or aspect of the course; the students then give a short presentation of this to the rest of the class (approx. 10 minutes). Fellow students may ask questions, etc. While this can be a little scary at first, over time it becomes incredibly fun and inspiring and creates great camaraderie among classmates! Teachers *may* give the option to of a short personal interview with each student, asking them key questions to make sure they have understood the essential points and giving students a chance to clear up any confusion.

Required reading. Teachers may substitute alternative reading for the current texts listed as “required,” with prior approval from the FPMT Education Department.

Discussion groups. In discussion groups, students are encouraged to bring forward problems from their daily life experience and explore how Dharma methods and principals can be applied to find solutions. Please keep personal stories of others confidential.

Subject area “14. Special Integration Experiences”. Students are encouraged to become familiar with the retreats and practices required to complete the *Discovering Buddhism* program for a certificate. It is recommended that students consult with their teachers to begin these practices within the first year of their curriculum so that they are able to complete them in a timely manner and receive their final graduation certificate.

Teacher protocol. Students should relate to their teachers in a respectful way as they are the main personal vehicle by which students are able to receive the teachings. Students are encouraged to ask questions about the materials and their personal practice and if they need more guidance to either request a personal interview with the teacher or ask the teacher to recommend a more senior student who can help them.

Basic dharma and teaching hall etiquette. All written materials containing dharma teachings should be handled with respect as they contain the tools that lead to your attainment of freedom and enlightenment. They should never be walked over or placed directly on the floor or seat - a nice cloth or text table should be placed underneath them. It is best to keep all dharma texts in a high clean place. They should be placed on the uppermost shelf of your bookcase or altar. Other objects, food, and even one’s mala should not be placed on top of the texts.

In the teaching hall, students should wear respectful clothing, nothing too tight, revealing, or dirty. One’s feet should never be outstretched towards the teacher or the altar, nor should one lounge around casually when listening to teachings. Out of respect, one should try to sit up straight in a chair or on the floor, and put all of one’s attention on the subject at hand.

Offering service. Most centers struggle along financially and do not have enough staff to keep the center running smoothly. At all times students are encouraged to offer their service to the center, help out with setting up for teachings, cleaning the meditation hall, or other tasks needing assistance. Let your program coordinator know your willingness to help and if you have special skills that you are happy to offer, be sure to let them know that as well! Offering service to the center helps to offer dharma to the world, which is the best medicine to bring about world peace and the end of all suffering. Any assistance given whether financially or in kind is greatly appreciated.



## **TEACHERS**

Who can teach this course? It is optimum that this program is taught by senior FPMT non-Tibetan teachers who have studied and practiced directly with Lama Thubten Yeshe and/or Lama Zopa Rinpoche. Some centers may also choose to have an FPMT geshe or Tibetan lama teach the material.

If an FPMT teacher or geshe is not available, centers can arrange to have a senior student member or their spiritual program coordinator act as the course leader. In this way, the material can still be presented, although perhaps in a slightly modified way.

By the end of 2003, each subject area will have courses on tape and/or CD available so that centers or individuals without access to teachers will be able to go through the program fully as a study group or by correspondence. We are also producing a *Discovering Buddhism* video series to accompany each subject area that should be ready for distribution by that time.

Teacher responsibilities. The main responsibility of the teacher is to make sure that the topics required for each subject area are covered during the course of their teaching that particular subject area. These topics are clearly listed in the “Subject Area Summary Sheets.” Teachers may choose how in depth they wish to present the various topics. This will vary depending on the audience as well as teachers’ preferences. Teachers are also responsible for assigning the required reading for students and guiding them in knowing how to do the meditations and retreats required for each subject area.

## **CENTERS**

Each center should have one person designated as the “program coordinator” for this program. This person is responsible for being the main contact person for students participating in the program as well as for working together with the teacher to assure that all aspects of the program run smoothly. Make sure you can identify your program coordinator and present your concerns, questions, and praise to that person.

Centers are responsible for providing a venue for the teaching program, arranging for teachers, and putting together the various aspects of *Discovering Buddhism* which will assist students in completing their experience successfully.

Teachings for *Discovering Buddhism* may be offered as weekly classes or weekend or longer intensives. Centers do *not* have to offer the subject areas in the order given. Centers may offer any of the subject areas in whatever order they desire, or according to teacher availability or preference. The order given is simply recommended for ease of student understanding and integration of the material. The main thing is that students wishing to take the program for a certificate of completion are provided the opportunity to study all 14 of the subject areas and be guided in completing their reading, meditation, and retreat requirements in a timely manner.

## HELPFUL CONTACTS

*For general information:*

### **FPMT EDUCATION DEPARTMENT**

125B La Posta Road  
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Phone: 01 (505) 758-7766  
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Email: [materials@fpmt.org](mailto:materials@fpmt.org)  
[www.fpmt.org/education/](http://www.fpmt.org/education/)

### **INTRODUCTORY PROGRAM CONSULTANT**

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*For ordering books for the program:*

### **WISDOM PUBLICATIONS**

199 Elm Street  
Somerville, MA 02144-3129  
USA  
Phone: 001 (617) 776-7416  
USA: (800) 272-4050  
Fax: 001 (617) 776-7841  
Email: [info@wisdompubs.org](mailto:info@wisdompubs.org)  
[www.wisdompubs.org](http://www.wisdompubs.org)

### **LAMA YESHE WISDOM ARCHIVE**

P.O. Box 356  
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### **SNOW LION PUBLICATIONS**

PO Box 6483  
Ithaca, NY 14851 USA  
Phone: 800-950-0313 (USA)  
Phone: 001 (607) 273-8519  
[www.snowlionpub.com](http://www.snowlionpub.com)

## **FINAL COMMENTS**

Your participation in the *Discovering Buddhism* program is bound to be both rewarding and challenging. Make sure to allow yourself the time to get the most out of your experience: do your meditations well, ask questions to clear up any doubts, set your retreats up mindfully, and most of all, rejoice that you are taking advantage of such a precious opportunity. In this world of increasing chaos, your interest and commitment to spiritual development is extremely rare.

Thank you for embarking on this program.

If you have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to be in touch. May all beings awaken to their limitless potential and achieve all peace and happiness.

Sincerely,

Kendall L. Magnussen  
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Discovering Buddhism Project Coordinator  
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