

THE MAHAYANA PRACTICE OF THE KEEPING OF THE EIGHT PRECEPTS

(the Uposhatha Fast)

This method of giving the precepts is in accordance with the Sutras, and according to the tradition established by the Gelongma Palmo, known in Sanskrit as the Bhikshuni Srimati, who lived in India in the fourth century. A.D.

It is the method now followed by the Tibetan Buddhists of the Kagyudpa tradition.

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THE PRACTICE OF KEEPING THE EIGHT FASTING PRECEPTS

In the Tibetan Mahayana tradition, of all four sects, it is customary for lay devotees and others to keep the Eight Precepts for a period of two days.

This method is described here as practised by the Kagyudpa Line of which the Head Lama is His Holiness Gyalwa Karmapa.

NAMO LOKISHWARAYA INTERDUCTION

This Nyungnes (Uposhatha) Fast is kept for a period of two days. If the time is short it may be kept for one day, when it is called Nyesnes. If at all possible it is better to take it first from a Lama who has the Nyungnes Line of Ordination.

It can otherwise be taken from the Buddha, imagined in the sky in front of one, imagining also the Lama (Chief or Tsawi Lama) in the sky.

It is taken in the very early hours of the dawn, when the light is just enough to enable one to see the lines on one's hand.

CONCERNING THE TAKING OF MEALS

I. ON THE FIRST DAY

It is advisable to begin eating the heavy meal of the day at 11 a.m. and finish before twelve midday. An early breakfast is also taken after the vows and first *puja* is complete (or during the *puja*). No food should be taken after midday.

After twelve midday, only liquids are to be taken, like water, tea, fruit juices. In the strictest practice, no milk at all is used. No animal or non-vegetarian food is to be taken, including eggs.

II. ON THE SECOND DAY

Nothing whatsoever to eat or drink is taken the whole day. No water either. Mantras and prayers may be said aloud if you wish, either alone or with a group of fellow practisers (mantra chanting; puja etc.) Nothing is otherwise to be said, and this vow of silence is to be kept until dawn on the third day, after the fast is broken.

III. ON THE THIRD DAY

As soon as in the first light of the dawn the lines of the hand can be seen, the fast may be broken. In a hot country, this is about 4.45 a.m. (in the summer season). In the winter time or the cold season, the time can be decided locally. The fast is to be broken by drinking water from the Bumpa or Ceremonial Vase on the shrine, if there is one.

CONCERNING THE TAKING OF BATHS

According to the strictest practice, while it is still dark, before the dawn breaks, a bath is taken. This is suitable for hot climates. In Tibet or in the Himalayan areas it is usual to take a bath the afternoon before. On the second day of the fast, it is customary in the mountain areas not to take a bath. This custom need not be followed where a daily bath is a necessity (in hot climates). On the second day of the fast, the presence of the lama is not strictly necessary, and the vows may be taken from the Buddha and Lama imagined in the sky before one.

INTRODUCTION ACCORDING TO THE TIBETAN TEXT

If you are keeping these Uposita or fasting vows of the Eight Precepts for one or two days, on the shrine make a Mandala circle of the Eight-petalled Lotus on a white ground.

If you are in retreat and have not got a mandala, you may arrange eight tiny heaps of rice in a circle on a piece of white cloth. Place a heap in the centre.

On top of the Ceremonial Vase (Bumpa) place a red flower. If this is not available, a leafy twig from a good tree or plant, sweet-smelling and without thorns, will do.

Before the Buddha or Chenrezi, the Greatly Merciful one, and the Mandala, place a butter-lamp (or candle or any light) and one (or seven) small bowls of water (metal bowls or glass finger bowls would do).

Place a round Torma (Torma Dumpo) in the centre, behind the Mandala. Note: a torma is a symbolic offering, moulded in roasted flour mixed with butter. This particular one is round and tapering with four petals at the base.

If there is not torma available, or the practiser does not know how to make one, then make a small pile of flour with a piece of butter balanced on top.)

The Bumpa or Initiation Vase should be in the centre of the Mandala (preferably balanced on a tripod).

If a Bumpa is not available, then a glass of water or a slender vase, thin at the top and round at the bottom could be substituted. Place the red flower or twig of leaves on this (stem in the water). This is used to sprinkle the purificatory water on the shrine, and offerings and inside the room.

It is important to remember that while we should offer the purest and best we reasonably can, any shortcomings can be made up by imagining them as most beautiful and perfect..... "offerings as the Gods make them".

The actual thing we offer is of less importance than the intention. Wash your hands and feet and face ("the five things") See that the room is perfectly clean, wear clean clothes, burn incense and sandalwood. Rinse your mouth. Bow in reverence (prostrate) three times before the Buddha. Think in your mind: "Before the Greatly Merciful One I am taking these vows".

If you are taking these vows in solitude, or in a community where there is no lama, see the note on how to do it at the end of the translation..

Then follows:

THE REQUEST FOR THE EIGHT PRECEPTS.

THE EIGHT PRECEPTS

After bowing (prostrating) three times before the shrine, repeat after the Lama.

All the Buddhas of the Ten Directions and all the Bodhisattvas, The Buddha Bhagawan, matchless King of the Sakyas and the Holy Lord Chenrezi.

I pray you, listen to me.

As in days of old the Tathagatas, the Arahats, and the Fully Enlightened Buddha

Like the Heavenly Steed, the Great Elephant, did what had
to be done, accomplished all tasks,
Lifted the burden of suffering, fulfilled all our aspirations,
emptied all the desires of the world;
Uttering words most precious, immaculately pure, with a mind
liberating all from suffering

By this great wisdom liberating all most perfectly.
So, for the sake of all that lives, in order to liberate all,
In order to prevent famine, in order to prevent sickness,
So that the Thirty-Seven Special Dharmas leading to Enlightenment
may be perfectly completed and

So that the matchless, complete and perfect Buddhahood may
be attained, determined to keep the Fasting Precepts
Who am called by the name.....from this very
time until the sun rises tomorrow
will definitely keep the Fasting Vows (uposhatha) in a perfect way.

(repeat this three times)

Then again repeat after the Lama :

From this time I will not take the life of any being
Nor will I take the possessions and money of others
I will not break the rule of chastity
Nor will I speak a word of untruth
That which brings many faults, intoxicants (wine) I completely
give up
I will not use high or luxurious seats
Nor take food at the wrong time
All scents and ornaments, music and dancing I give up
As the Arahats (saints) gave up the taking of life and so on
So I renounce all killing and the like
May I here and now attain the supreme enlightenment
May all beings harried by suffering
Be carried across the ocean of the world.

(repeat this three times)

Repeat the following mantra of purification three, seven or twenty-one times :

OM AMOGHA SILA / SOMBHARA SOMBHARA / BHARA
BHARA / MAHA SHUDDHA SATTVA / PADMA VIBHU
SHITA BHUNTZA DHARA DHARA / SAMANTA AVALOKITE
HUNG PHAT SWAHA /

NOTE: The Heavenly Steed signifies higher energy; the Elephant,
discretion.

Then, if you want to recite the line of lamas through whom the ordination comes you can pray in the following words:

(this is a short English version)

She who has the power of Chenrezi, the Bhikshuni Palmo, Jnana Bhadra and Chandra Kumara, Manju Bhadra, Sangyes Nyenpa, the Karmapa VIII Mikhyod Dorje the Shamar Kunchog Yenlak, Khenchog Drubwang and Tenzin Gyurmed:

To you and all the holy venerated Lamas of our line we are praying:
shower your blessings on us.

Then comes the Refuge :

In the Buddha, his Teaching and the Order most excellent
I take my refuge until enlightenment is reached.
By the merit of generosity and other good deeds
May I attain Buddhahood for the sake of all that lives.

(see all in the voidness)

OM SWABHAVA SHUDDHA SARVA DHARMA
SWABHAVA SHUDDHO HUM

Then follows the special puja to Chenrezi, the Eleven-Headed One (or Chenrezi of the Thousand Arms). This is the Buddha in his aspect of the limitless Compassion of the Mahabodhisattva.

The prayer is in the tradition of the Bhikshuni Srimati, called in Tibetan the Gelongma Palmo, who lived in the Fourth Century in India.

All Dharmas appear empty.

Out of the voidness appears the Jewel Earth
And on it, with decorations perfect in every detail,
The Buddha Palace of Illumination, charming to the heart.

Imagining oneself in the divine form

Within it, I myself appear in the form of the Greatly Merciful One.

NOTE : This modern Tibetan version from which the translation is made was composed by the former famous Kagyudpa Lama Raga Asres, known as Chagmed Rinpoche.

From the ༄: AH letter in his heart emerges a moon disc,
and on it the HRI letter is standing.

After that, in the sky before me appears a jewel throne, and on it
The Water-Born Lotus, perfect, with a (hundred) thousand
petals,

Within it's heart the circle of the moon.

From the HRI within my heart the light streams out
Invoking our honoured Lama, inseparable from the Greatly
Merciful One,

And, surrounded by the Buddhas of the Four Races and the
Bodhisattvas

He comes and takes his seat upon it

THE SEVEN FOLD OFFERING, PRAYER

FIRST : PAYING RESPECTS TO HIM

*Sangyes thamsched dus pi ku / dorje tzin pihi ngowo nyid / konchog sum gyi
tsawa te / lama nams la chag tsal lo /*

You who have the form of the Buddhas of all time
Of the very nature of the Buddha Vajradhara,
You who are the root of the Three Jewels:
Before all the lama Gurus I bow in devotion.

*Dussum dewar shegs pa chos kyi ku / dro drug senschen nams la chenrezi ncm-
khah tabur khyab pihi chu chig zhal / zi jid hodpagmed la chag tsal lo /*

He who is the Dharma body of the Sugatas of the Three Times,
Looking with compassion on all beings to be saved,
Like the sky enfolding all, of the eleven heads,
Before the Buddha Amitabha, stressing rays of light,
I bow in devotion.

*Kyon gyis ma gos kundog kar / tzogs sangyes kyi us la gyen / thukje chen gyis
drola zige / chenrezi la chag tsal lo /*

Faultless one of pure white colour
With the Fully Enlightened Buddha as the decoration on your
head
Looking with greatly merciful eyes on all that lives
Before you Chenrezi I bow in devotion.

*Chosku namkhah zhindu yermee kyang / zhugs ku jahtson zhindu so sor sal /
thabs dang sherab chog la ngah nyes pihi / rig nga dewar shegs la chag tsal tod /*

You who are inseparable from the Dharma Kay^a, like the sky,
Out of which many divine forms shine like rainbows
Skilled in transcending means and wisdom
O you sugatas of the five races, to you I bow and praise you.

SECOND : THE OFFERINGS

Out of the HRI seed letter in my heart the rays of light are streaming and at the end of the rays I imagine the offering goddesses bearing flowers, incense, butter lamps, scented waters, all presenting them to the Buddhas :

OM the Vajra flowers AH HUM
OM the Vajra insence AH HUM
OM the Vajra lights AH HUM
OM the Vajra scents AH HUM
OM the Vajra food AH HUM
OM the Vajra music AH HUM

(ring the bell and use the damru drum : or play music)

THIRD : THE PENITENCE

All you lamas who hold the Vajra, listen to me.
I am in the grip of the Three poisons.
For all the failings on the Three Ordinations
And for all my many faults, I am penitent.

For all the sins that I have committed at all times
Conciously or unconciously
Fearing all bad results
I am penitent.
I will not do them again.

FOURTH : REJOICING IN THE GOOD OTHERS DO

In all the good others do I rejoice.

FIFTH : ENTREATING THEM TO TEACH THE DHARMA

Turn for us the Wheel of the Dharma
We entreat you.

SIXTH : BODHICITTA

I will always keep in my mind the Enlightenment
Thought of the Buddhas.

^a formless Body (cf. Holy Spirit)

SEVEN : SHARING MERIT

All my merit I share that all may reach the Enlightenment most perfect.

.....

Then meditate on the Four Limitless Meditations.

.....

May all beings remain happy
May all be away from sorrow
May they never be without the sacred happiness
And remain in the greater Calm of equanimity.

OM SWABHAVA SHUDDA SARVA DHARMA
SWABHAVA SHUDDA HUM

All is void and of the nature of the wisdom transcending
OM SUNYATA JNANA VAJRA SWABHAVA ATMAKO
HUNG.

Zung dang tzin pes dus pa yi / chos nams thamsched tong par gyur

When attraction and attachment end, all Dharmas become empty. Out of the voidness appears a lotus, and in it a moon disc full and perfect on which we imagine a white HRI letter standing :

From the letter streams out (as an offering to the BUDDHAS) and returns from them purifying the sins and ignorance of all that lives. The light is agains absorbed into the HRI letter, and the lotus is radiant in golden-yellow light, with the HRI letter standing on it. (or "signed with the HRI letter").

Again from this the light streams in the form of a hook or a lasso of light which invokes the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas of the ten directions, who in the form of light are absorbed into the HRI letter.