

How to make the most of your visit to the Holy Relics Advice by Geshe Konchok Tsering

What are the relics?

When a great spiritual master's body is cremated after their death, beautiful pearly or crystal objects are often found in their ashes (called ringsel in Tibetan). These relics are reputed to hold the essence of inner purity of the holy person.

What is the benefit of visiting the holy relics?

The relics provide Buddhists with an opportunity to make a personal spiritual connection with an enlightened being. Visitors to the exhibition have reported connecting directly with the powerful loving energy emanating from the relics. Buddhists and non-Buddhists have reported feeling inspired, healed and at peace in their presence.

Why relics are revered

It is said that the merits are the same whether you directly made an offering to the Buddha or to the relics of the Buddha. So when you are prostrating or making offerings to the relics see them as the same as the holy beings.

In the Lion's Roar of Maitreya Sutra the Buddha says, "Whether you make offerings to me now or in the future you make offerings to my relics, the merit will be the same, the ripened result will be the same."

Even though we have not had the merit of meeting the Buddha we are extremely fortunate to have met the relics and the teachings of the Buddha. So even though the Buddha does not manifest to us now in his common appearance, we still have his relics and we can still attain enlightenment.

How to pay respect to the relics

The traditional approach is to circumambulate, prostrate and make offerings; but this is not mandatory. The relics are available to everyone regardless of spiritual or religious background. There are no strict formalities. Simply be respectful and mindful and experience the relics in whatever way is appropriate for you.

Also feel free to prostrate and circumambulate, if you wish. For the benefit of sentient beings the Buddhas have generated Bodhicitta; for the benefit of sentient beings the Buddhas have trained in the path; for the benefit of sentient beings the Buddhas have manifested complete enlightenment.

For these reasons the Buddhas and their relics are very sacred. They are endowed with the power of the object. With this in mind we will gain a very powerful blessing. Even when we are not mindful of the blessings of the Buddhas we will still benefit through the power of the object. By understanding this reasoning we can quickly attain the state of enlightenment. Even if your understanding is little, your visit to the relics will become a cause for enlightenment. And it's good exercise too!

How to view the relics if you are sick

It is very useful for someone who is suffering sickness or illness to stand in front of the relics. Visualise that surrounding you are all sentient beings especially those suffering sickness like yourself. Then see white light coming to the crown of your head (and all other beings) and see the illness or whatever it is that makes you unhealthy leave your body in the form of pus and blood from the soles of your feet.

How to view the relics to purify negativities

In the same way we can purify our negativities and those of all sentient beings by visualising white light entering our crowns. See any obscurations and negative actions of body, speech and mind leaving through the pores of our body in the form of dark smoke or water that has been polluted by coal.

How to view the relics when you are unhappy

At times when we are unhappy, for example when we are in conflict with family and friends, it is very good to circumambulate the relics. While you circumambulate you need to visualise your unhappiness in the form of pests like spiders, scorpions, frogs and snakes being expelled from your body. Also pray that all sentient beings who are unhappy are blessed and purified by your actions.

Rather than leaning on alcohol and drugs and saying “poor me”, this meditation takes the focus off you and your problems and allows you to see your suffering as a spur to spiritual practice.

How to view the relics if you have an addiction

At times when you feel you really need alcohol or drugs of addiction, instead of going to the pub we should go to the relics.

Admit you have a problem and rely on the Buddha by remembering his qualities and aspiring to generate his qualities. As you circumambulate the relics visualise receiving the white nectar light emanating from the relics and see snakes, scorpions, slugs, spiders (as the symbols of addiction) being eliminated from your body and the bodies of all sentient beings. Then feel convinced that you have purified yourself. Train the mind to develop a strong habit to overcome addiction so that eventually even the smell of alcohol will be repulsive to you.

Where are the relics going eventually?

The relics will be housed will be displayed behind glass walls in the “Bumpa” which is on level 6 of the Great Stupa.