

# Chenrezig Institute Advanced Study Programme



## General Information

The Advanced Study Programme at Chenrezig Institute currently follows Basic Programme designed by Ven Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, spiritual head of the FPMT, the international organisation of which Chenrezig Institute is part. It was created as an opportunity for students with some previous experience of Buddhist philosophy to deepen their understanding through in depth study of various subjects within both the sutra and tantra paths to enlightenment.

Begun in October 1997, the programme has been offered continually until the present time and three full rounds of the Basic Programme subjects have been taught with many students completing the programme successfully, achieving the Basic Programme certificate and going on to teach here and at various centres throughout the FPMT. After the completion of Round Three the centre also offered an intensive two-year study of Madyamika at the higher Masters Level.

A set of guidelines has been compiled and updated by FPMT Education Services based on experience at various centres. Lama Zopa Rinpoche, who remains closely involved in the development of the programme, has added specific recommendations regarding meditation, retreat and 'self-evaluation', and the role of certification as a means to encourage and recognise a standard of Dharma practice, rather than simply measure academic achievement.

Attendance records are kept and to all in house students we hand out a small booklet in which each student is able to keep a personal record of their involvement in the meditation component, the attitude and behaviour component and the service component. The completed booklets are then handed in to the course coordinator at the end of each module.

External students are also encouraged to fulfil these aspects of the programme as much as possible.

### **The Basic Programme consists of five main aspects:**

The academic component, attendance at daily teachings and tutorials, participation in in-class discussions, quizzes and exams.

The meditation component – attendance at regular meditations and retreats.

The attitude and behaviour component: daily self-evaluation, fulfilment of the patience requirement, maintaining a standard of ethical conduct.

The service component: contribution of a minimum of three hours per week in the form of various assigned tasks that benefit the programme, the centre and the community.

The training component: leading discussions and meditations, giving presentations, preparing course materials and discussions, participation in FPMT trainings, etc.

## **The Academic Component**

*There are nine core subjects in FPMT's Basic Programme:*

- Mind and Cognition
- Buddhist Tenets
- A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life
- The Graduated Path to Enlightenment
- The Heart Sutra
- Mahayana Mind Training (Wheel of Sharp Weapons)
- The Sublime Continuum
- The Fourth Chapter of the Ornament of Clear Realisation
- The Grounds and Paths of Secret Mantra – the Lower Tantras and Highest Yoga Tantra

*Plus three supplementary subjects*

- Seventy Topics
- Death Intermediate State and Rebirth (the Three Kayas)
- A Highest Yoga Tantra Commentary

*In addition Chenrezig Institute complements these subjects with:*

- Collected Topics
- Sutra Grounds and Paths
- Signs and Reasoning

The courses are comprised of teachings from our resident teacher, Geshe Phuntsok Tsultrim, personally chosen to be beneficial for our centre by Lama Zopa Rinpoche, tutorials with a qualified assistant teacher, discussion time with senior students who have successfully completed most of the previous subjects, debating amongst all students and analytical meditation on the Graduated Path and on the material being studied. Students are recommended to attend full-time, four days per week and are expected to commit to extra hours of study and to sit for regular examinations and complete assignments. Graded certificates are conferred at the end of each module.

Regular tests are set to help students keep up with the material, to know where there are gaps in their understanding and to allow the teacher and tutor to keep track of how students are assimilating the sometimes complex subject matter.

Extra materials, commentaries from other FPMT teachers, materials used in other centres and at previous courses at our own centre, are provided to students where appropriate.

## **The Meditation Component**

### **Daily meditations**

*'During the program, do students do lam-rim meditation? Meditation should mainly be on lam-rim. Encourage them to develop the experience of meditating on lam-rim during the program..... That would be good, to go gradually through the lam-rim, from guru devotion up to emptiness.... when the subject is calm abiding just go over the outlines without doing the real calm abiding....otherwise do analytical meditation from guru devotion up to emptiness...*

Lama Zopa Rinpoche Interview with Ven. Joan Nicell, October 2000

**Daily meditations** are an obligatory part of the programme and are important for keeping the students grounded, inspired, and integrated with the teachings. In house students are expected to

attend all meditation sessions and to meditate on the specific topic of a meditation session. Attendance will be monitored.

[External students should commit to a minimum of three sessions of 30minutes meditation on Lam Rim per week of study.]

**A meditation log** (laid out in the small booklet provided to students) should be kept by students. At the end of each session – or at least during each week of the course - students are encouraged to write a brief comment about their meditation, an evaluation of how the practice is going.

### **The Attitude and Behaviour Component**

*'It would be good to implement an assessment for moral conduct; moral behaviour is very important. If it is clear that they are using the teachings to subdue their mind and are being kind, this will touch the hearts of their students, and their teachings will be more effective. It's not just to study to produce knowledge, but to subdue the mind.'*

Lama Zopa Rinpoche Geshe Summit, April 2001

As practitioners and even prospective Dharma teachers, students will be expected to sincerely work on developing exemplary conduct, so they can become the embodiment of Dharma practice that renders a Dharma teacher most effective. Lama Zopa Rinpoche has emphasised again and again the need for students to practise abiding by the five lay-vows (so that eventually these vows can be taken on as a lifelong commitment and practice, and can be re-taken if breaches occur) and to conscientiously develop their practice of patience and the attitude intent on benefiting others throughout their studies.

To facilitate this essential training aspect of the programme, Lama Zopa Rinpoche has put in place a three-fold assessment: a daily self-evaluation, fulfilment of the patience requirement and an acceptable level of conduct.

During previous programmes, with Lama Zopa Rinpoche's detailed input and incorporating feedback from students and staff, a self-evaluation form was agreed upon as an effective method to monitor one's practice of ethical behaviour, patience and attitude.

By keeping such a record students have found that their mindfulness of these specific elements of practice in daily life increases; the self-evaluation functions as a tool to develop their practice and as an encouragement to become more aware of developments and lapses.

During our course at Chenrezig Institute, students are provided with a booklet which they can carry to all sessions and keep personal records as benefits them.

*....in one month, how many times one gets angry - and this means not just upset but hatred, ill will to somebody - to write that down. By writing it down, it becomes part of your job, it makes you to be aware. Always there is the thought "I must be careful." It gives you awareness and that makes you to get angry less often and it persuades you to think of the meditations, of what to apply. It makes sure you prepare.*

Lama Zopa Rinpoche to MP students in Padua, Italy, May 2001

### **Conduct**

Behaviour is also assessed in general, with regard to meeting an acceptable level of conduct - evaluated by programme staff.

**The Service Component:**

All students are asked to contribute of a minimum of three hours per week in the form of various assigned tasks that benefit the programme, the centre and the community. Many people will be involved in transcribing and possibly editing the teachings for the benefit of current and future students and almost all will help with the maintenance and beautification of our Gompa.

**The Training Component:**

Since many BP graduates will go on to teach in FPMT centres we encourage students to develop confidence by leading discussions and meditations, giving presentations, preparing course materials and discussions, and where possible through participation in FPMT trainings, etc.

**Preparation**

This programme is an advanced level of study and it is assumed that students are prepared to learn some of the terminology and concepts taught in previous semesters. We do not make firm pre-requisites for the courses (except in the case of tantric teachings) but stress that in order to gain benefit from the teachings and in order not to disturb the progress of the rest of the class, a certain level of understanding is very beneficial.

Extra tutorials are sometimes offered by senior students to assist newer ones, and many materials, cd's of teachings, homestudy packages, notes and charts from previous courses made available.

Please contact the Advanced Programme coordinator for assistance with how to prepare in the best way for the specific course you are planning to undertake.

**General preparation:**

In order to comprehend these teachings, students should have at least a reasonable understanding of the Buddhist path, including the Three Principles of the Path and the Lam Rim and those without this are requested to do some preparatory reading and possibly complete one or more of the homestudy packages.

There are many helpful books in both our library and bookshop. Highly recommended are:

- ◆ Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand by Pabongka Rinpoche (Wisdom);
- ◆ The World of Tibetan Buddhism by His Holiness Dalai Lama;
- ◆ Awakening the Mind by Geshe Namgyal Wangchen;
- ◆ Essential Nectar by Geshe Rabten,
- ◆ Tibetan Buddhism From the Ground Up by B. Alan Wallace.

For further advice about advance reading for specific modules, please contact the course coordinator.

## Attendance

These modules are full time, four days per week, from 9.00am to 4.00pm. Participants are required to attend all daily sessions for the duration of the course. (casual attendance as an observer is possible and this is outlined later in this information)

The four-day weekly schedule (currently Monday and Tuesday, Thursday and Friday) will include teachings daily with our Geshe, tutorials with an experienced tutor, discussions with the senior students and practice and meditation daily.

It is encouraged that Advanced Programme students also attend the teachings of the General Programme (usually two teachings per week) during the study programme module although these are not compulsory. These teachings often relate to some of the subjects that will be necessary for completion of the entire Buddhist Studies Programme and Geshela sometimes refers to the Study Programme texts.

Full time participation is definitely the most beneficial way of attending these courses. Both the individuals and the group benefit from this in that the members of the class move ahead at approximately the same rate and accordingly support each other in their assimilation of the sometimes quite difficult material. We are however aware that some students are unable to attend fully and have therefore made it possible for them to join the class on a casual basis, for a few days or even for a day or two each week.

## Casual Attendance

It is possible for those who are unable to attend the entire course to attend Geshela's teachings and the tutorials as casual students. The course is still however primarily a full time course and students should inform the coordinator of their wish to attend in this way.

Special conditions apply to all casual students, including the following:

- ◆ They may attend Geshela's teachings and the tutorials but as silent observers/auditors only.
- ◆ We ask them please to sit to the side or back of the group and not to ask questions or participate in discussions etc during these teachings. Any questions they have about the material presented in Geshela's teachings should be submitted to the interpreter or the tutor on paper so that they can be dealt with at an appropriate time.
- ◆ The timetable of the course will be available from the office and through the coordinator. All students, full time or casual, should arrive promptly with time to prepare their seat etc and be ready to quietly greet Geshela or whoever is leading the session.
- ◆ Examination papers will be made available where possible for the interest of casual students. They can elect to do all the examinations at the allotted time, by prior arrangement with the course coordinator. Casual students will not be eligible for certification.
- ◆ Extra notes and charts will be made available for all students. Those who will not be present at all sessions should make arrangements with other students to collect material handed out when they are absent. It will also be uploaded to our online storage site.
- ◆ Students will possibly but not necessarily be permitted to start any course as a full time student after the course has begun and should discuss this with the coordinator as early as possible. They will be asked to attend as an observer until they have caught up with the rest of the class.
- ◆ Note: the special conditions for casual students are made so that these students may also benefit from the teachings without disturbing the progress of the full-time group. It is

therefore stressed that these students, who are not attending all sessions, should not interrupt the progress of the core group in any way.

- ◆ **Homestudy available:** For those who can't get to the centre at all, we offer homestudy packages of many of the previous courses. The materials of current courses are all available online and students may enroll as external online students (the course fee for this kind of attendance is 50% of the in house course fee)
- ◆ All students (full-time and casual) should note and follow the rules of etiquette as laid out below...

## Etiquette

All participants (full-time and/or casual) are expected to follow the following simple requests:

- Shoes and hats should be removed before entering the teaching room. Modest dress is required for both men and women. This means: long trousers or skirts below the knee, covered shoulders and modest necklines (shorts, singlets and short skirts are not appropriate).
- During the teachings one should not point the soles of one's feet towards the teacher or altar; a respectful, upright posture should be maintained. Please feel free to sit in a chair if it is difficult for you to sit on the floor.
- Texts and other holy objects should not be placed on the floor or walked over.
- Prostrations, while not compulsory, are a sign of respect for the teachings and the qualities of the teacher and teaching assistant.
- If you must leave the room during the teachings, do so with respect for the teacher and fellow students, making as little disturbance as necessary.
- Hot drinks (tea etc) are only permitted in the gompa when the whole class is sharing Chai etc. Otherwise water is permitted at any time.
- Please follow the format of the teachings and tutorials, ask questions at appropriate times, without interrupting the teacher, and with respect both for the teacher and the teachings

## Payment

Course Fees are calculated at the rate of \$70 per week of each module ie \$560 for an eight week course, with 10% discount for centre members. On registration, a link will be sent so that students will be able to book and pay the appropriate fee through the Chenrezig online booking system.

Casual rates are set at \$25 per day or part day attended.

Online homestudy costs 50% of the inhouse course fee (ie a four week course which costs \$280 inhouse will be \$140 online.)

Accommodation and meals are not included but accommodation is available at the centre at a reduced rate for full-time participants– on registration, students will receive a link to make bookings for accommodation at the appropriate rate. This reduction applies to full-time students only.

Meals are available to purchase from the centre's Big Love Cafe and some accommodation has cooking facilities attached. Having initially registered, students should book both their course and accommodation online through Chenrezig website or through the Chenrezig office.

Sangha members pay no course fee, receive free lunches from the centre and will often be able to stay in sangha accommodation (please make arrangements well in advance).

### **IMPORTANT:**

We are committed to making the Dharma as widely accessible as possible, determined that no serious student will be excluded because of financial constrictions. With this in mind we offer various options including time payments and doing extra work for the course.

It is essential however that all those wishing to take advantage of the possibilities for financial help of any kind contact the course coordinator early and finalise arrangements at least one week prior to the commencement of the course.

If you have any inquiries or special needs regarding costs and payment, please send applications, in writing, to the coordinator at [bsp@chenrezig.com.au](mailto:bsp@chenrezig.com.au) with as many details as possible as soon as you can.

In addition to providing high quality education for lay students, this programme offers a wonderful opportunity to western sangha who receive the teachings completely free of charge. We rejoice that we are able to support the education of our precious sangha in this way, and help to create teachers for Rinpoche's growing number of centres throughout the world.