

A Guide to the Gompa



Donna Svennevik Photography



SHANTIDEVA
CENTER

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Introduction

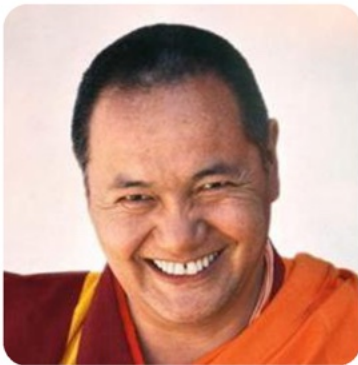


Welcome. This booklet introduces the images and statues found within the gompas. The sacred images within this gompas are more than works of art. The Buddha statues, thangkas, and lineage teachers each embody the wisdom, compassion, and teachings of the Buddhist tradition. They serve as reminders of the path to awakening and inspire reflection, mindfulness, and kindness.

May this booklet bring insight and inspiration.

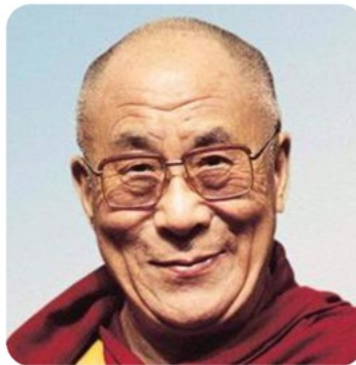
Lineage Teachers

Shantideva Center practices Tibetan Buddhism in the Gelug tradition. Our teachers are holders of the Mahayana Buddhist lineage, which began with Shakyamuni Buddha and has been passed down through an unbroken succession of realized masters from generation to generation. The Center is affiliated with the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT), an international organization dedicated to preserving and transmitting the Mahayana Buddhist tradition of Lama Tsongkhapa. Tsongkhapa was an influential Tibetan Buddhist monk, philosopher, and tantric yogi whose activities led to the formation of the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism. This tradition was brought to the West by our founders, Lama Thubten Yeshe and Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche. His Holiness the Dalai Lama serves as our inspiration and spiritual guide. Through this living tradition, we preserve and share the authentic teachings of the Buddha.



Lama Thubten Yeshe

Lama Thubten Yeshe (1935-1984): was a Tibetan Lama who, while exiled in Nepal, co-founded Kopan Monastery (1969) and the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (1975).



**His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama,
Tenzin Gyatso**

The 14th Dalai Lama is the world-renowned public face of Tibetan Buddhism, as well as an advocate for interreligious harmony and scientific dialogue. He also advocates for peaceful human rights of the Tibetan people, a dedication that has earned him the Nobel Peace Prize.



Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Lama Zopa Rinpoche (1945-2023) was a Tibetan Buddhist scholar and meditator who, for 39 years, oversaw the spiritual activities of the extensive worldwide network of centers, projects and services that form the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT), which he founded with Lama Thubten Yeshe.

Altar



A Tibetan Buddhist altar is a sacred space that represents the enlightened qualities of the Buddha, Dharma (the teachings), and Sangha (the spiritual community). An altar typically includes images or statues of the Buddha, offerings such as water bowls, flowers, or candles, and sacred texts, such as a sutra. The purpose of an altar is to support practitioners on the path to enlightenment. By making offerings, we can practice positive qualities such as generosity and cherishing others. By seeing images, we can be inspired about our own Buddha potential. While enlightened beings don't require offerings on an altar, the altar is designed to help us purify and develop our minds to its highest potential.



Water Bowl Offerings: Water offering bowls are sacred vessels used in Tibetan Buddhist practices to accumulate merit, cultivate generosity, and reduce greed by making daily offerings to the Buddha. Typically set in groups of eight, these bowls are usually made of brass, copper, or silver and filled with fresh water (or the following categories of offerings) every morning: water for drinking, water for bathing, flowers, incense, light, perfume, food, and music.



The Prajnaparamita Sutra: The Prajnaparamita sutras ("Perfection of Wisdom" sutras) are a group of discourses attributed to the historical Buddha Shakyamuni that present the Mahayana path to enlightenment of a Bodhisattva. They explicitly teach the nature of reality ("emptiness") and implicitly teach the path to enlightenment.

A sutra is a discourse or teaching attributed to the Buddha that preserves wisdom and guidance of the Buddhist path. In Tibetan Buddhism, sutras are considered sacred texts that contain teachings on topics such as compassion, wisdom, ethics, meditation, and the path to enlightenment.



Stupa: Stupas, one of the most ancient icons in Buddhist art, are powerful symbols of the mind's limitless potential. In other words, they represent the mind of enlightenment. Stupas are filled with sacred images, mantras and the relics of holy beings. Building or sponsoring a stupa is a very powerful way to accumulate merit and purify negative karma.



Shakyamuni Buddha: Siddhartha Gautama, who eventually became known as Shakyamuni Buddha, the historical founder of Buddhism, was born in India approximately 2,500 years ago. Shakyamuni Buddha was the son of the king of the Shakyas, a small tribe whose kingdom was located in what is now central Nepal. “Shakya” is taken from the name of this tribe and “muni” means “sage” or “saint.” As a boy, Shakyamuni was deliberately shielded from the harsh realities of life, having been brought up in a royal palace. Seeking the answers to life’s perplexing questions, he eventually renounced his princely status around the age of 19 and began living a religious life. After leading a life of mendicancy and meditation, he attained nirvana at the age of 30 in Bodh Gaya, in what is now Bihar, India. He then traveled around India for several decades, offering teachings and building a monastic order (sangha). He passed away in Kushinagar (in modern day Uttar Pradesh, India). It is said that his final words were, “Decay is inherent in all composite things. Work out your salvation with diligence.”



Amitayus: Amitayus (Sanskrit: Amitayus, “Infinite Life”) is the Sambhogakaya (apparitional body) aspect of Amitabha Buddha in Mahayana and Tibetan Buddhism, specifically embodying longevity, merit, and wisdom. Often depicted holding a long-life vase.



White Tara: White Tara (Sita Tara) is a revered female Buddha in Tibetan Buddhism representing compassion, long life, healing, and serenity. Born from Avalokiteshvara’s tears, she is often called the “Mother of Compassion” and features seven eyes—on her face, palms, and soles—to see all beings and suffering across the universe.



Yellow Dzambhala: Yellow Dzambhala is the most popular Tibetan Buddhist deity of wealth, prosperity, and generosity, embodying the manifestation of Buddha Ratnasambhava. He is depicted as a stout, yellow-colored figure holding a mongoose (Nehulay) that spews jewels in his left hand, often sitting on a lotus, sun, and conch shell.

He helps eliminate poverty, obstacles, and illnesses, allowing practitioners to focus on spiritual growth.



Three Buddhas of Long Life:

Amitayus (Top): Amitayus (Sanskrit: Amitayus, “Infinite Life”) is the Sambhogakaya (apparitional body) aspect of Amitabha Buddha in Mahayana and Tibetan Buddhism, specifically embodying longevity, merit, and wisdom. Often depicted holding a long-life vase.

White Tara (Left): White Tara (Sita Tara) is a revered female Buddha in Tibetan Buddhism representing compassion, long life, healing, and serenity. Born from Avalokiteshvara’s tears, she is often called the “Mother of Compassion” and features seven eyes – on her face, palms, and soles – to see all beings and suffering across the universe.

Namgyalma (Right): Namgyalma (Tibetan: Tsuktor Namgyalma; Sanskrit: Ushnishavijaya) is a prominent female deity in Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism embodying longevity, purification, and deathless wisdom. As one of the Three Long-Life Deities (along with Amitayus and White Tara), she is worshipped to eliminate disasters, increase vitality, and prevent lower rebirths, with her powerful mantra often used to purify negative karma.



Relic of Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche:

Following the passing of Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche in 2023, his kudung (holy body relic) has been a focus of devotion, with ceremonies including circumambulations and prayers held at locations like Kopan Monastery. Rinpoche taught that relics are manifestations of a Buddha's actions, designed to bless sentient beings, and they can multiply when treated with faith.



Relic of Lama Thubten Yeshe: Following the passing of Lama Thubten Yeshe in 1984, precious relics (ringsel) were found among his cremation remains, which are considered sacred symbols of his enlightened mind. These relics were preserved and are, in part, enshrined in a stupa at Kopan Monastery. Relics were also distributed by Lama Zopa Rinpoche to various FPMT centers.

Thangka



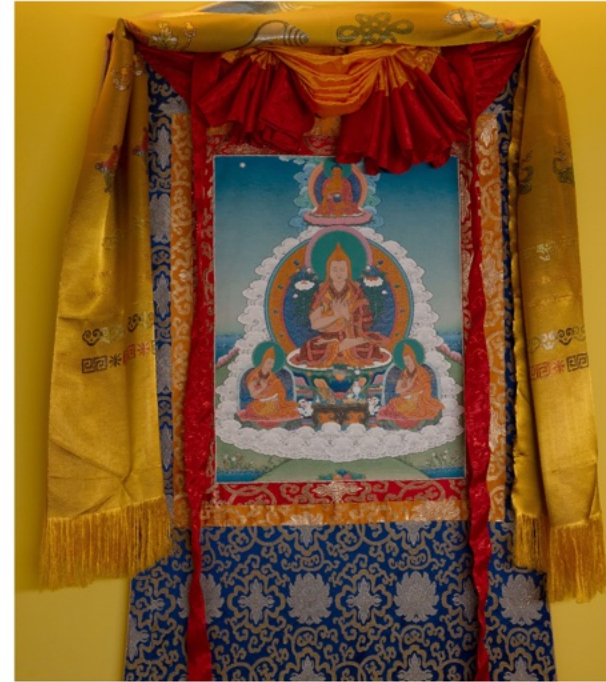
A thangka is a traditional Tibetan Buddhist painting, usually created on cotton or silk, that depicts Buddhas, bodhisattvas, deities, mandalas, or important spiritual teachers. Thangkas serve as objects of devotion and meditation, helping practitioners visualize enlightened qualities and deepen their understanding of the Buddhist path.



Shakyamuni Buddha: Siddhartha Gautama, who eventually became known as Shakyamuni Buddha, the historical founder of Buddhism, was born in India approximately 2,500 years ago. Shakyamuni Buddha was the son of the king of the Shakyas, a small tribe whose kingdom was located in what is now central Nepal. “Shakya” is taken from the name of this tribe and “muni” means “sage” or “saint.” As a boy, Shakyamuni was deliberately shielded from the harsh realities of life, having been brought up in a royal palace. Seeking the answers to life’s perplexing questions, he eventually renounced his princely status around the age of 19 and began living a religious life. After leading a life of mendicancy and meditation, he attained nirvana at the age of 30 in Bodh Gaya, in what is now Bihar, India. He then traveled around India for several decades, offering teachings and building a monastic order (sangha). He passed away in Kushinagar (in modern day Uttar Pradesh, India). It is said that his final words were, “Decay is inherent in all composite things. Work out your salvation with diligence.”



Vajrasattva: Vajrasattva (Tibetan: Dorje Sempa) is a central figure in Vajrayana Buddhism embodying the purity of all Buddha families, primarily practiced for purifying negative karma, obscurations, and broken vows. He represents the “Diamond Being” or “Thunderbolt Being,” often visualized as a white deity holding a vajra and bell to cleanse body, speech, and mind.



Lama Tsongkhapa: Tsongkhapa, meaning, “the man from Tsongkha” or “the Man from Onion Valley,” (c. 1357-1419) was an influential Tibetan Buddhist monk, philosopher, and tantric yogi whose activities led to the formation of the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism.



Padmasambhava: Padmasambhava, also known as Guru Rinpoche, is an 8th century Buddhist master who was central in bringing Buddhism to Tibet. His tantric mastery allowed Buddhism to firmly take root in the region. He is the primary figure of the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism, though he is highly respected across all lineages.



Manjushri: Manjushri is the Mahayana Buddhist bodhisattva embodying transcendent wisdom (Prajna), often depicted as a youthful prince holding a flaming sword to cut through ignorance and a lotus supporting the Prajnaparamita sutra. He represents the realization of ultimate insight.



Avalokiteshvara: Avalokiteshvara is the Mahayana Buddhist Bodhisattva of Great Compassion, embodying the mercy and compassion of all Buddhas. His name translates as "Lord who looks upon" with compassion, and he vows to help all beings until they are liberated. Avalokiteshvara is depicted in many forms. In China, he is known as Guan Yin, in Japan, Kannon, and in Tibet, Chenrezig.

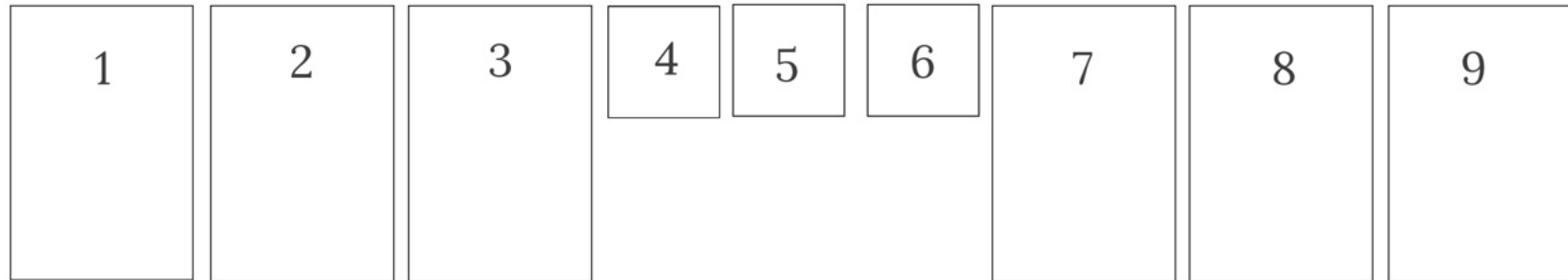
Final Thoughts

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this gompa booklet. Special thanks to George Cuesta for his writing, Donna Svennevik for providing the majority of the photographs, and the volunteers for their time, talent, and generosity that made this booklet possible.

Thank you to Yogis & Yoginis for sharing the space.
May we all find peace, compassion and wisdom.

Site Map for the Gompa

wall



1 Vajrasattva

2 Manjushri

3 Lama Tsongkhapa

4 Lama Thubten Yeshe

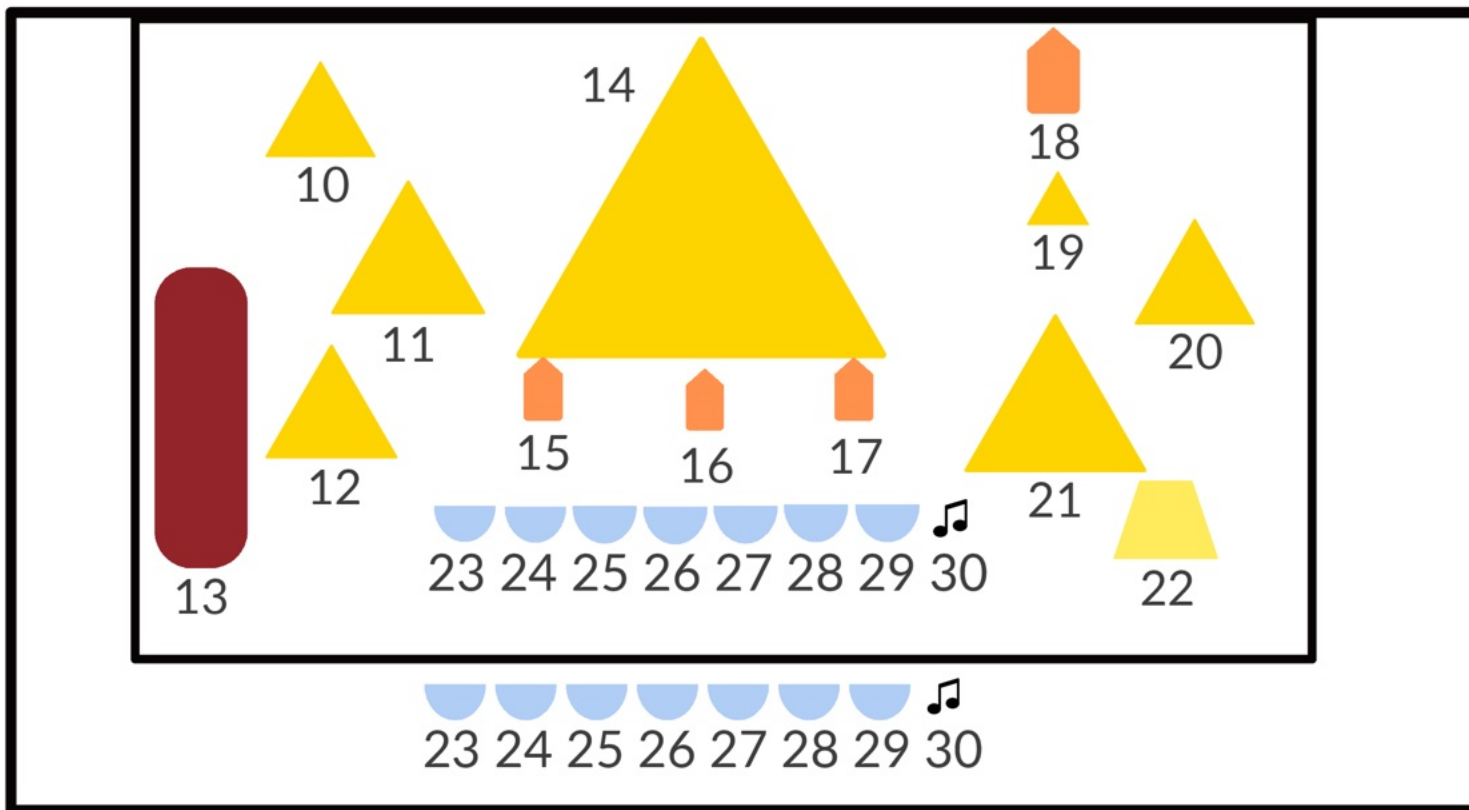
5 H.H. the 14th Dalai Lama
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6 Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche

7 Padmasambhava

8 Avalokiteśvara

9 Shakyamuni Buddha



Altar view from above

10 Three Buddhas of Long Life: Amitayus,
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12 Shakyamuni Buddha
13 Prajnaparamita Sutra
14 Shakyamuni Buddha
15 Relic of Lama Thubten Yeshe
16 Relic of Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche
17 Relic
18 Relic of Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche
19 Yellow Dzambhala

20 Shakyamuni Buddha
21 White Tara
22 Stupa
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24 Water for bathing
25 Flowers
26 Incense
27 Light
28 Perfume
29 Food
30 Music

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Water bowl offerings..... 

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