THE MAHAYANA PRACTICE OF THE KEEPING
OF THE EIGHT PRECEPTS

(the Uposhtha Fast)

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

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

Translated by Gelongma Karma Khechog Palmo helped by lama Karma
Thinley Rinpoche. (the HYMN TO CHENREZI, with the help of
Toppoh Rinpoche).

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 Kagyuopa
Line of which the Head Lama is His Holiness Gyalwa Karmapa.

NAMO LOKISHWARAYA
INTERDUCTION

This Nyungnes (Uposhtha) 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

1. ON THE FIRST DAY
   It is advisable to begin eating the heavy meal of the day at II a.m.
   and finish before twelve midday. An early breakfast is also taken
   after the vows and art (puja) is complete (or during the puja).
   No food should be taken after midday.

16
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 practitioners (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 Upasita 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 Chakrezi, 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 Dumbo) 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 practitioner 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 these 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 ima, 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 Buddha-attvas, The Buddha Bhagawan, matchless King of the Sakyas and the Holy Lord Cherrezii.

I pray you, listen to me.

As in days of old the Tathagatas, the Arhats, 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 Fourteen Precepts
Who am called by the same..................from this very
time until the sun rises tomorrow
will definitely keep the Fasting Vows (uposatha) 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, inoxicants (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 Arhats (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 harbied 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 SATTYA / PADMA VIBHU
SHITA BHUNITZA DHARA DHARA / SAMANTA AVALOKITE
HU NG 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 Chenrezig, the Bhikshuni Palmo, Jnana Bhadra and Chandka Kumara, Manjï Bhada, Sangyes Nyempa, the Karmapa VII Mikhyed 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 puj is to Chenrezig, the Eleven-Headed One (or Chenrezig 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 ้ณ: 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

Sangye thamschey dus pi ku / darje tzin pibi ngowo nyic / kunchig sum gyi tsewa te / lama nams bo chag toul lo /

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

Dusum dewar chogy pa chos kyi kuh dro drag snarchen nams la chezaxi nam-khyab stobs khyob pibi chu chig zhol / zhi zhi sde saga la chag toul 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 Amittabha, stressing rays of light,
I bow in devotion.

Syan gyis ma gos lomdug kur / tsegs sangye kyi us la gyes / sras kyi chen gyis drolo zige / cheezaxi lo chag toul 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 Chenrezig I bow in devotion.

Chosho namkhyab chintu yermue khyung / chugs ku zhigdon zhindu so zer rol / thok’s dzing sherab ching la ngag yig l phel / rig rna dewar chugs la chag toul rol /
You who are inseparable from the Dharma Kayas, 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 godesses bearing flowers, incense, butter lamps, scented waters, all presenting them to the Buddhas:

OM the Vajra flowers AH HUM
OM the Vajra incense 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 donor drum : or play music )

THIRD : THE PENTIENCE

All you lamus 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 Consciously or unconsciously 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.

* 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 free 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.

Zang dang tzin pei du pa yi / chos nams thabschen 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 again 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.

23