

A Gift of Liberation
Course Five—The Seven Doors to Meditation
Homework Master, Class One: The Garden of Karma

1) With Course 5, we are now reaching the fourth of the Six Preliminary Practices. Just to get our bearings, list these six; and state what they are preliminaries to.

[The following are the six preliminaries to a meditation session; and more specifically, one which is focused upon perfecting our relationship with our Heart Teacher.

- (1) Cleaning our room, and arranging our altar.
- (2) Putting forth offerings which are both properly obtained and lovely in their arrangement.
- (3) Sitting on a comfortable meditation cushion in the 7-point posture of Vairochana, and then performing practices such as going for refuge, while maintaining a virtuous state of mind.
- (4) Practicing the vision of the Garden of Karma; this is the preliminary practice we will begin with in Course 5.
- (5) Making the Offering of Seven Parts, along with the presentation of the mandala, which include all the crucial points of accumulating new good karma, and purifying ourselves of old bad karma.
- (6) Asking our Lamas for blessings, in accordance with oral advices, and in a way which changes our heart.]

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2) What are two metaphors which are used to describe the effect of the practice of the Garden of Karma?

[The effect is to bring us to a place where everything is ripe and ready to happen for us. Our negative qualities are “softened” by the Garden of Karma to a point where they are completely ready to be removed, just like a blister or a pimple which has had time to get to the point where it is easily pierced or popped.

Our positive tendencies, on the other hand, are ripened to a point where they are easily fulfilled, just like a fruit which has fully ripened and drops without effort from the tree by itself.]

3) What are three different purposes of the practice of the Karma Garden, and what it can do for us, as described by the lama named Dolpo Sherab Gyeltsen?

[The “Omniscient Dolpo” says that the practice of the Karma Garden helps us (1) accumulate new good karmic seeds; (2) purify obstacles and old bad karmic seeds; and (3) request the Lamas and Angels for their blessings. The power of these three allows us, he says, to “immediately achieve high qualities and realizations that we might expect to take us as long as a century to reach.”]

4) How does Pabongka Rinpoche describe the meaning of the expression “Garden of Karma”? Include here the original Tibetan, and the meaning of both of the words included there.

[The original Tibetan for “Garden of Karma” is *tsok-shing* (spelled TSOGS ZHING in Tibetan). The word *tsok* means *to collect* or *accumulate*, in this case a reference to *collecting* new good karmic seeds (although in this practice we also purify ourselves of old bad ones, and ask our Lamas for help).

There is a well-known practice in the secret teachings which is also called *tsok*, because we gather together or accumulate special offerings

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to perform it. In a modern Tibetan monastery, the word *tsok* commonly refers to any large gathering of monks, for communal prayer or meditation.

The Tibetan word *shing* refers to a *field* for growing crops. A farmer is called a *shingpa*. Aside from the usage here as a garden for planting good karma, the word is also used in reference to an enlightened paradise—the home of any particular Buddha.

Pabongka Rinpoche glosses the expression by saying that “the *collection* here is collecting masses of new good karma; the *field* refers to a place where, in the everyday world, we grow fine crops—and which we therefore come to cherish. With our assembled Lamas in this vision, we are availed of a particularly productive field or garden.]

5) How, according to Pabongka Rinpoche, does the Garden of Karma “outperform” regular gardens?

[The Rinpoche says that most fields used for growing crops can only be planted in a particular season, once a year. But good seeds with our Lamas here in the Garden of Karma can be planted in all four seasons, with good results.

And the return on a bag of normal seeds—such as rice or corn—is only 20 or 30 pounds of grain. With karmic seeds though, in this particular Garden, we can obtain a return of “an infinite amount of grain.”

It’s interesting to note that Jesus speaks of the same idea, saying that in good soil (a good heart) our seeds produce a result which is 30 or 60 or 100 times larger than what we have planted. All this fits in well with the concepts of how karma expands, as taught for example in the programs of the Diamond Cutter Institute.]

Coffee shop assignment: Please meet with at least one other person—or better, a group of people—whom you didn’t know well before this teaching; do your homework together and discuss together any

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questions you have. Please write here where, when, and with whom you did your homework:

Meditation assignment: 15 minutes early in the day, and 15 minutes later in the day, practicing the progression of three preliminary meditation practices: from (1) total immobility to (2) counting the breath to (3) watching whether thoughts that naturally arise in our mind are focused on the past, the present, or the future. Please write here the two times that you started these meditations.