Confession is an honest acknowledgment and sincere regret for harm caused through body, speech or mind.
It is made in the presence of the field of merit (Buddhas, bodhisattvas, etc.) to provide guidance and safety)—not to a divine judge who can erase karma, but as a relational practice that restores trust and dissolves isolation.
It includes reliance on refuge and bodhicitta, application of remedies, a realistic resolve not to repeat the harm, and appropriate reparation where possible.
It is therefore not merely saying, "I have done wrong; forgive me"; others may forgive us personally, but no external being can absolve our karma—the causes of purification must be created through our own change of mind and conduct.

Golden Light Sutra Study Series
Lama Zopa Rinpoche • A Practice Framework for the Golden Light Sutra

Nine of the Thirty-two Marks of a Buddha's Body are the fruits of this practical approach to Chapters 4 and 5. His 2001 Portland teachings used the 21-chapter FPMT version, so they illustrate the shared confession method and the Karma chapter generally. They are not a complete commentary on the Golden Light Sutra's chapter structure.

- **1. Orientation**
  - Purpose of this map
    - Approach the sutra as living practice
    - Connect recitation with the Lamrim
    - Unite purification, merit, bodhicitta and wisdom
    - Move from personal benefit to universal responsibility
    - Translate inspiration into changed conduct
  - Textual relationship
    - Portland teachings: 21-chapter FPMT recension
    - Shared material: confession chapter
    - 31-chapter Chapter 4: dream and confession
    - 31-chapter Chapter 5: karmic obscurations
    - Apply the practice framework carefully
    - Do not present inference as direct oral commentary
  - Characteristic movement
    - To Lama Zopa Rinpoche's teachings
    - Precious human life
    - Death and impermanence
    - Karma and refuge
    - Renunciation
    - Bodhicitta
    - Sutra recitation and merit
    - Emptiness
    - Vast dedication
  - Core principle
    - The same recitation can have very different spiritual scope depending upon motivation. The practice framework deepens when the text is used to attain enlightenment for every sentient being.
- **2. Motivation Determines the Scope**
  - Motivation for this life
    - Health
    - Success
    - Protection
    - Relief from immediate problems
    - Useful but limited aim
  - Motivation for future lives
    - Avoid lower rebirth
    - Obtain a precious human rebirth
    - Meet Dharma and qualified teachers
    - Continue the path
  - Motivation for liberation
    - Recognise the unsatisfactory nature of samsara
    - Abandon causes of cyclic existence
    - Seek freedom from karma and afflictions
    - Do not present inference as direct oral commentary
  - Mahayana motivation
    - Every being wants happiness
    - Every being wishes to avoid suffering
    - My present capacity is limited
    - Complete awakening gives the greatest capacity to help
    - I will practise for all beings without exception
  - Motivation formula
    - I will read and contemplate this sutra
      - To purify every obstacle
      - To complete merit and wisdom
      - To attain enlightenment
      - For the benefit of every sentient being
  - Check the mind
    - What do I most want from this session?
    - Who is included in my motivation?
    - Am I seeking only relief from discomfort?
    - Can I enlarge the purpose without pretending?
    - Renew motivation when attention wanders
- **3. Precious Human Rebirth**
  - What makes this life precious
    - Human intelligence
    - Capacity for ethical choice
    - Ability to hear and reflect
    - Opportunity to meditate
    - Access to Mahayana teachings
    - Support of spiritual friends
  - Freedoms
    - Freedom from conditions that completely prevent practice
    - Space to question habitual assumptions
    - Opportunity to choose virtue
    - Opportunity to confess and change
  - Endowments
    - Inner capacities
    - Outer availability of Buddha's teaching
    - Teachers and communities
    - Personal interest and confidence
  - Three reflections
    - Recognise its qualities
    - Recognise its great usefulness
    - Recognise its rarity
  - Application to the sutra
    - I can read the words now
    - I can examine my conduct
    - I can generate compassion
    - I can create causes for future Dharma
    - Use the opportunity rather than postpone
  - Misunderstanding
    - Precious does not mean comfortable or superior
    - Its value lies in capacity for transformation
    - Reflection should produce gratitude and energy, not pride
- **4. Death and Impermanence**
  - Death is certain
    - No one avoids death
    - Lifetime to death continually decreases
    - Ordinary activity does not guarantee time for practice
  - Its time is uncertain
    - Lifespan is not fixed
    - Conditions sustaining life are fragile
    - Many causes of death exist
    - The body itself is vulnerable
  - What helps at death
    - Possessions cannot accompany the mind
    - Body cannot accompany the mind
    - Reputation cannot accompany the mind
    - Loved ones cannot prevent separation
    - Only Dharma habits and karmic tendencies continue
  - Practice effect
    - Clarifies priorities
    - Weakens procrastination
    - Makes confession urgent
    - Deepens appreciation
    - Encourages dedication for the dying
  - Brief contemplation
    - If this were my final year, what would change?
    - Which resentment would lose importance?
    - Which repair should not be delayed?
    - What Dharma habit do I want available at death?
  - Balanced urgency
    - Not panic
    - Not morbidity
    - Not neglect of ordinary responsibilities
    - Purpose: meaningful, compassionate use of time
- **5. Karma and Ethical Causality**
  - Basic principle
    - Happiness arises from virtuous causes
    - Suffering arises from nonvirtue
    - Intention is central
    - Actions establish habits and potentials
    - Results depend on conditions
  - Four characteristics
    - Karma is definite in its correspondence
    - Results can increase
    - Results are not experienced without relevant causes
      - And conditions
    - Created karma is not simply lost
  - Ten nonvirtues
    - **Body:** killing, stealing, sexual misconduct
    - **Speech:** lying, divisive, harsh, uncontrolled speech
    - **Mind:** covetousness, harmful intent, wrong views
  - Ten virtues
    - Protect life
    - Practise generosity
    - Use sexuality responsibly
    - Speak truthfully
    - Create harmony
    - Speak gently
    - Speak meaningfully
    - Cultivate contentment
    - Cultivate benevolence
    - Develop correct understanding
  - Practical emphasis
    - Observe small choices
    - Do not wait for dramatic wrongdoing
    - Purify quickly
    - Rejoice in small virtue
    - Dedicate before anger or wrong views weaken the purpose
      - Dedicate the merit promptly toward enlightenment, before later anger or wrong views weaken the virtue. A short form is intended Mahayana purpose.
  - Karma is not punishment
    - No external judge is required
    - Karma is causal, not fatalistic
    - Understanding should increase compassion
    - Do not blame suffering people
- **6. Refuge and the Field of Merit**
  - Refuge
    - Buddha: the fully awakened guide
    - Dharma: real protection from suffering and its causes
    - Sangha: realised and practising community
    - Refuge gives direction to confession
    - Guru Śākyamuni Buddha
    - Embodies Guru, Buddha, Dharma and Sangha
    - Represents the living source of the path
    - Radiates compassion and wisdom
    - Witnesses confession without condemnation
  - Field of merit
    - The field of merit is the visualised assembly of guru, buddhas, bodhisattvas and other objects of refuge. Practitioners make offerings and confess harm to this field yielding a rich harvest; they are a powerful basis for accumulating merit and purifying obscurations.
    - Lineage gurus
    - Buddhas
    - Bodhisattvas
    - Arhats and āryas
    - Ḍākas, ḍākinīs and Dharma protectors
    - Three Jewels gathered in one field
  - Simple visualisation
    - Visualise Buddha before you
    - Light embodies wisdom and compassion
    - All lineage blessings are present
    - You are not practising alone
    - All sentient beings surround you
  - Balanced understanding
    - Visualisation supports the mind; perfection is unnecessary
    - Devotion is not uncritical personality worship
    - Rely on qualities, teachings and ethical guidance
- **7. Purification Practice**
  - Four opponent powers
    - **Reliance:** refuge and bodhicitta
    - **Regret:** concern for harm and consequences
    - **Remedy:** recitation, virtue and wisdom
    - **Resolve:** realistic restraint
  - Reliance
    - Turn toward the Three Jewels
    - Remember all sentient beings
    - Restore the two damaged relationships
      - The two relationships needing restoration are with sentient beings, renewed through compassion and kindness; and with the Three Jewels, renewed through confidence and trustworthiness.
    - Receive the practice as medicine
      - **Receive the practice as medicine** means: recognising that harm arises from the afflictions and harmful karma that cause suffering, and applying it sincerely rather than merely reading or reciting the words.
  - Regret
    - Recognise the action as poison
    - Do not confuse regret with self-hatred
    - Be specific where possible
    - Include forgotten actions broadly
    - Let regret produce energy for change
  - Remedy
    - Read the Golden Light Sutra
    - Recite prayers and praises
    - Make offerings
    - Rejoice and request
    - Perform opposing virtue
    - Meditate on emptiness
    - Repair harm wisely
  - Resolve
    - Make an honest promise
    - Use a definite period when necessary
    - Identify triggers
    - Prepare an alternative action
    - Renew without despair after failure
  - Evidence of purification
    - Less wish to repeat harm
    - Greater honesty
    - Stronger restraint
    - More compassion
    - More useful conduct
- **8. Merit Practices**
  - Although Buddhist texts speak of accumulating merit as if it were a quantity, the practice is better seen as a relational spiritual cultivation in which generosity, ethical conduct and prayer gradually reshape the doer's ethical karmic potential rooted by collapse into one's actual practice.
  - Merit practices are not a quantity to be accumulated in a powerful basis for its creation, and dedication directed toward the welfare and enlightenment of all beings.
  - A better image is a seed and its growing conditions, not money in an account.
  - Why merit matters
    - Merit matters because it creates the favourable inner conditions and outer circumstances, including supportive circumstances and access to Dharma—that enable purification, spiritual realisation and effective benefit to others.
    - Creates supportive conditions
    - Makes the mind receptive
    - Supports concentration and insight
    - Increases capacity to benefit
    - Complements purification
  - Offerings
    - Actual offerings
    - Mentally transformed offerings
    - Beauty and goodness throughout the world
    - Offer without possessiveness
    - Dedicate for beings
  - Mandala offering
    - Offer the universe symbolically
    - Counter miserliness and grasping
    - Create causes for teachings and realisations
    - Offer body, possessions and virtue mentally
  - Rejoicing
    - Delighting sincerely in our own and others' virtue counters jealousy and creates work without needing to perform for external approval.
    - Rejoice in personal virtue
    - Rejoice in others' virtue
    - Rejoice in bodhisattva activity
    - Rejoice in teachings and Dharma practice
    - Rejoice without comparison
  - Requests
    - Requesting the gurus and buddhas to remain and to turn the wheel of Dharma, dedicated toward Dharma for guided, and creates causes for heart-liberating teachings again.
    - Request teachers to remain
    - Request the Dharma wheel to turn
    - Request teachings suited to beings
    - Support conditions for teaching
    - Practise what has already been received
  - Vast dedication
    - Direct all accumulated merit toward enlightenment for the benefit of all beings. This step completes beneficiaries, purposes, duration and ultimate result.
    - All merit: past, present and future
    - All beings: no one excluded
    - All suffering: immediate and ultimate
    - All stages of the path
    - All places, communities and environments
    - Endurance of teachers and Dharma
    - Complete buddhahood
    - Benefit continuing until samsara is emptied
  - Merit is not a bank balance
    - It is positive causal potential
    - Motivation and object affect its scope
    - Dedication gives direction
    - Wisdom prevents reification
- **9. Renunciation**
  - Meaning
    - Wish for freedom from samsara
    - Recognition that conditioned pleasures cannot satisfy completely
    - Turning from causes of suffering
    - Not rejection of people or ordinary kindness
  - What is renounced
    - Ignorance
    - Afflictions
    - Compulsive karma
    - Grasping at samsaric solutions as final
    - The on-going pleasure party that keeps me trapped in the samsaric gaol
  - Connection with confession
    - Regret sees the defects of nonvirtue
    - Resolve turns away from repetition
    - Renunciation enlarges resolve beyond one action
    - Purification serves liberation
  - Reflection
    - Which recurring pleasure leaves dissatisfaction?
    - What affliction keeps promising happiness?
    - What would genuine freedom look like?
  - Misunderstandings
    - Not depression
    - Not hatred of the body
    - Not withdrawal from compassion
    - It is clear-eyed freedom-seeking
- **10. Bodhicitta**
  - Definition
    - Aspiration to attain complete enlightenment
    - Purpose: benefit every sentient being
    - Two intentions united
    - Not compassion alone
  - Equanimity
    - Loosen fixed friend-enemy-stranger categories
    - Recognise changing relationships
    - Include every being impartially
  - Recognising kindness
    - Dependence on parents and carers
    - Dependence on workers and communities
    - Dependence even on difficult people for practice
    - Interdependence makes gratitude realistic
  - Love and compassion
    - Wish beings to have happiness and its causes
    - Wish beings to be free from suffering and its causes
    - Great compassion assumes responsibility
  - Special intention
    - I will contribute to their freedom
    - Prayer becomes responsibility
    - Responsibility becomes the wish for full capacity
  - Generating bodhicitta
    - My present abilities are limited
    - A buddha knows needs and methods completely
    - I will attain that state for beings
  - Application to recitation
    - Read on behalf of all beings
    - Let each passage become service
    - Include difficult people explicitly
    - Dedicate every benefit universally
- **11. Ultimate Bodhicitta and Emptiness**
  - Conventional bodhicitta
    - Aspires to enlightenment for all beings
    - Develops method and merit
    - Engages compassionate activity
  - Ultimate bodhicitta
    - Wisdom directly realising emptiness
    - Cuts the root of samsara
    - Removes reification from practice
  - Empty person
    - **Empty person** — The person is empty of that no person exists independently, upon body, mind, causes and relationships, rather than being a self-sufficient core. Karma and responsibility remains, but change and purification are possible.
    - Exists in dependence on body and mind
    - Cannot be found as an independent self
    - Causal continuity remains
    - Responsibility without permanent guilt
  - Empty action
    - **Empty action** — An action exists and has consequences, but it does not exist independently; it arises and ceases in dependence on causes, circumstances and a sequence of events.
    - Depends on motivation, agent, object and conditions
    - The complete process is called the action
    - No fixed core exists from its own side
  - Empty purification
    - **Empty purification** — Purification is real and effective, but it is not a substance that removes another substance. It arises through causes such as refuge, confession, restraint, ethical change and wisdom.
    - Depends on regret, reliance, remedy and resolve
    - The whole transformative process is called purification
    - Not a solid substance removing another substance
  - Union of method and wisdom
    - **Union of method and wisdom** — Method—especially compassion—gives direction and energy to the purpose and wisdom prevents beings, while compassion remains, from treating beings as mere instruments or projects.
    - Compassion prevents dry detachment
    - Wisdom prevents solid guilt and superstition
    - Together they lead toward buddhahood
- **12. Power of Sutra Recitation**
  - Ways of engaging
    - Hear
    - Read
    - Recite
    - Remember
    - Contemplate
    - Explain appropriately
    - Preserve and support
    - Live its ethical meaning
  - Inner benefits
    - Creates Dharma imprints
    - Directs attention toward awakening
    - Strengthens refuge and confidence
    - Encourages virtue
    - Supports purification
    - Accumulates merit
  - Beneficiaries
    - The reader
    - Family and friends
    - The sick and dying
    - Those who requested prayers
    - Communities and countries
    - Beings in all realms
  - Wider purposes
    - Peace
    - Healing
    - Protection from obstacles
    - Environmental wellbeing
    - Flourishing of Dharma
  - Balanced interpretation
    - Do not reduce recitation to magic
    - Do not reduce it to private psychology
    - Join prayer with ethics and beneficial action
    - Remain humble about unseen causality
- **13. Benefit to Society and the World**
  - Individual transformation
    - Less harmful speech
    - Less anger and greed
    - Greater patience
    - Greater generosity
    - More responsible choices
  - Relational transformation
    - Repair damaged relationships
    - Reconcile divisions
    - Protect vulnerable people
    - Create trustworthy communities
  - Community dedication
    - Peaceful conflict resolution
    - Ethical leadership
    - Access to food, shelter and medicine
    - Care for refugees and displaced people
    - Harmony between communities
  - Environmental dedication
    - Healing of ecosystems
    - Protection of animals
    - Clean air, water and soil
    - Wise collective consumption
    - Compassionate climate responses
  - Principle
    - Begin with mind transformation
    - Express it through practical service
    - Dedicate beyond what can presently be accomplished
- **14. A Lama Zopa–Style Session**
  - 1. Settle
    - Establish posture
    - Let breathing become natural
    - Remember the purpose
  - 2. Lamrim motivation
    - Precious human life
    - Death and impermanence
    - Karma
    - Renunciation
    - Bodhicitta
  - 3. Field of merit
    - Visualise Guru Śākyamuni Buddha
    - See all lineage beings present
    - Place all sentient beings around you
    - Take refuge and generate bodhicitta
  - 4. Seven limbs
    - **Seven-Limb Prayer**
    - Reciting the Seven-Limb Prayer (Tib. ngöndro) is a practice of very type of offering, actual and imagined.
    - I declare all my negative actions accumulated since beginningless rebirth
    - And rejoice in the merit of all holy and ordinary beings. Please, remain until the end of cyclic existence
    - Turn the wheel of Dharma for the benefit of all beings
    - I dedicate my own merits and those of all others to the great enlightenment.
    - Prostrate
    - Offer
    - Confess
    - Rejoice
    - Request teachings
    - Request teachers to remain
    - Dedicate
  - 5. Read or recite
    - Read clearly and attentively
    - Pause at meaningful passages
    - Relate them to one present habit
    - Imagine benefit reaching beings
  - 6. Reflect
    - What harm needs confession?
    - What virtue needs cultivation?
    - How is the pattern dependently arisen?
    - What action will embody the reading?
  - 7. Dedicate vastly
    - Dedicate all merit
    - Include all beings
    - Include immediate and ultimate needs
    - Dedicate for Dharma to flourish
    - Seal with emptiness
- **15. Advice for Sustainable Practice**
  - Start within capacity
    - A short sincere session is worthwhile
    - Avoid commitments that breed discouragement
    - Increase gradually
  - Maintain continuity
    - Choose a regular time
    - Keep the text accessible
    - Use a short motivation on busy days
    - Return gently after interruption
  - Work with obstacles
    - Sleepiness: improve posture and timing
    - Distraction: shorten sections and recollect purpose
    - Doubt: study and ask qualified teachers
    - Guilt: distinguish responsibility from fixed identity
    - Pride: remember dependence and kindness
  - Integrate daily life
    - Protect life
    - Speak gently
    - Rejoice in others
    - Repair quickly
    - Dedicate ordinary work
  - Measure what matters
    - Less self-centredness
    - Less pride and jealousy
    - Greater ethical sensitivity
    - More compassion under pressure
    - More stable connection to Dharma
    - Greater ability to benefit
- **16. Contemplation Questions**
  - What is my real motivation for reading the sutra?
    - **Example:** I can use my intelligence, freedom and time to read the sutra, but if I read from habit, boredom, repair harm and create causes to meet the teachings again.
  - How am I using my precious human opportunity?
    - **Example:** I can use my intelligence, freedom and time to read the sutra, but if I read from habit, boredom, repair harm and create causes to meet the teachings again.
  - What would I regret leaving unpractised at death?
    - **Example:** I have left unpurified resentment, harm caused by harsh speech, neglected relationships, and Dharma I have recognised as helpful but made no sincere effort to change.
  - Which understanding of karma changes my daily choices?
    - **Example:** Remembering that intentions and actions establish habits and potentials, I can pause before replying angrily and choose speech that will not create further suffering.
  - What does refuge mean in practice rather than words?
    - **Example:** Instead of relying on my confusion automatically, I rely on the Buddha's example, apply the Dharma as the remedy, and seek guidance from the Sangha.
  - Which opponent power needs strengthening?
    - **Example:** I may feel regret and resolve a remedy, but if I do not recite the sutra or perform virtue regularly and committing not to use harsh speech for the rest of the day.
  - Can I rejoice without comparison or rivalry?
    - **Example:** When another person succeeds, I can delight in the good they have created without measuring that achievement against my own status or ability.
  - Do I take access to teachers and Dharma for granted?
    - **Example:** I may postpone teachings or practise irregularly because I think I can always find them available, remembering impermanence encourages me to use them carefully, express gratitude and apply what I receive.
  - What am I actually renouncing?
    - **Example:** I am not renouncing people, happiness or life, but habits that repeatedly harm others and habits and the mistaken belief that temporary sensuary pleasures can provide lasting satisfaction.
  - Which beings are hardest to include in bodhicitta?
    - **Example:** Ordinary people include someone who has harmed me, a public figure whose actions I find harmful, and someone I find difficult and satisfaction provoke anger in me.
  - How does emptiness change the experience of guilt?
    - **Example:** Emptiness allows me to acknowledge the harm fully without believing that the action defines a fixed identity. Karma remains, but purification and pattern arise **dependently**; change remains possible.
  - How can recitation become beneficial action today?
    - **Example:** After reciting for those who are suffering, I can embody the prayer by speaking kindly, helping someone practical, repairing a relationship, or listening life or repairing a damaged relationship.
  - What would make my dedication truly vast?
    - **Example:** Dedicate the merit of the practice to every sentient being—friends, strangers and difficult people—for their immediate wellbeing, ultimate liberation and eventual complete enlightenment.
- **17. Memory Spine**
  - Collapse the map to the branch for rapid review.
  - Motivation determines spiritual scope
  - Precious human life makes practice possible
  - Impermanence makes practice urgent
  - Karma makes conduct meaningful
  - Refuge gives direction and support
  - Four powers transform confession
  - Merit creates supportive conditions
  - Renunciation seeks freedom from samsara
  - Bodhicitta makes the practice Mahayana
  - Emptiness prevents fixed guilt and superstition
  - Recitation joins prayer, ethics and service
  - Vast dedication directs all virtue to awakening
- **18. Connections and Extension Points**
  - ← Map 1 · Master Overview
  - ← Map 2 · Chapter 4
  - ← Map 3 · Chapter 5
  - → Map 5 · Practice and Lamrim Connections
  - Add source references here
    - Portland transcript or audio section
    - FPMT practice advice
    - Lamrim text reference
    - Qualified teacher's clarification
  - Add personal study notes here
    - Key quotation
    - Meaning in context
    - Practice application
    - Question for teacher
- Visual Key
  - Colours
    - Gold — Sutra text, transmission and preservation
    - Red — Karma, obscuration, confession and purification
    - Orange — Bodhicitta, merit and aspiration
    - White/Silver — Dependent arising, emptiness and wisdom
    - Purple — Lama Zopa Rinpoche's practice framework
    - Green — Meditation, ethical application and daily practice
    - Blue — Orientation, context and supporting explanation
    - World Blue — Collective karma and conditions in the world
  - Content Symbols
    - Sutra — Teaching, claim or imagery arising from the Golden Light Sutra
    - Dharma — Core Buddhist doctrine or principle
    - Bodhicitta — Compassion, love or the Mahayana motivation
    - Lama Zopa — A practice emphasis drawn from Lama Zopa Rinpoche's approach
    - Lamrim — Connection with the graduated path to enlightenment
    - Collective — Communities, countries, environment or collective karma
  - Study Symbols
    - Practice — Meditation, recitation or practical exercise
    - Analysis — A point for close examination or analytical meditation
    - Insight — An interpretive connection that clarifies the teaching
    - Remember — A central point or concise summary worth retaining
    - Caution — A common misunderstanding, extreme or possible misuse
    - Contemplate — A question for personal reflection or discussion
  - Navigation Symbols
    - ← Previous map — Return to an earlier map in the series
    - → Related map — Continue to a related detailed map
    - References — Sources, textual parallels or extension material
  - Visual Key — Explanation of the map's symbols and colour
  - — Ordinary supporting node without a special category