

Appendix Three: The Yoga of Offering Food

INTRODUCTION THE THREE WAYS OF OFFERING FOOD

There are Hinayana and Mahayana ways of offering food. The Mahayana way includes both Paramitayana and Secret Mantra, or Vajrayana. Making charity of food to all sentient beings, including those who live in our bodies, is the Mahayana way.

The Hinayana way of offering food is basically as expressed in the prayer by Nagarjuna, where he says that the purpose of eating food is not to develop the body, to put on weight or become fit—purposes that come only from attachment—but simply to survive in order to practice Dharma. Food should be eaten without the three poisonous minds of ignorance, attachment and anger. With the motivation seeking your own freedom from samsara, offer your food to the

Triple Gem and then eat it. This is the Hinayana way of eating food. The Mahayana sutra way of eating food is to dedicate every spoonful of food and mouthful of drink to all sentient beings, including those living in your body. In this way you make a connection with all sentient beings such that when, in future lives, they eventually become human, you can reveal the Dharma to them and lead them to enlightenment. The Mahayana way of offering food is thus done with bodhicitta motivation, as are all the daily actions of a Mahayana practitioner, thereby becoming a cause for achieving enlightenment.

The Mahayana tantra way of eating food is to see yourself, your guru and the deity as one, and make every bite of food and every mouthful of drink a tsog offering. Offer everything you eat and drink to the oneness of the three: guru, deity and yourself.

The way to do this practice is to understand that you are all the buddhas but in the aspect of the deity you are practicing. You are in the aspect of the deity but are, in reality, all the buddhas. If you make the food offering with that awareness, that meditation, every single thing you eat and drink becomes a tsog offering. Every bite and every sip become an extraordinarily powerful means of purifying all negative karma, defilements and degenerated samaya vows and collecting vast amounts of merit.

With this meditation, the guru yoga mind seeing yourself as one with your guru and deity, you create more merit than that of making offerings to all the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and all the statues, scriptures, stupas and thangkas of the buddha in the ten directions. The merit of making offerings to all Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and all statues, scriptures, stupas and thangkas in the ten directions becomes insignificant when compared to the merit you create when you offer each spoonful of food and each mouthful of drink to yourself as one with your guru and deity.

The main thing here, however, is thinking of and making offering to yourself as the guru. Thinking of yourself as your guru and making offering with guru yoga mind is an unbelievably powerful means of creating merit. There's a huge difference in the amount of merit created between offering to the Buddha without thinking of the guru and offering by thinking of the guru; you create vastly more merit when you think of the guru and make offering.

You can apply this practice to all other daily activities in order to create extensive merit. When you enjoy objects of the five senses—beautiful sights, sounds, smells, tastes and tangible objects—or when you receive something from somebody, if you think that you are making an offering to yourself as the guru-deity, you create an enormous amount of merit. In this way you can make everything you do in your daily life extremely meaningful. Similarly, when you wash yourself, if you do the washing yoga of offering a bath to the guru-deity, it becomes a very powerful means of purification.

As the great Tibetan yogi Milarepa, who attained enlightenment in just a few years of this brief lifetime of the degenerate age, said, “Every time I walk, I circumambulate all the holy beings; everything I eat becomes a tsog offering.” There's more to this quote, but in short, it means that everything he did became a powerful means of purifying his mind and creating merit and, therefore, a quick path to enlightenment.

Similarly, whatever you do—eating, walking, washing, everything else—can become a very powerful method for quickly achieving enlightenment. As you purify and collect extensive merit, you bring yourself closer to enlightenment, every minute of every day. In this way, you make your life most beneficial, meaningful, satisfying and fulfilling. Through this Mahayana practice, which is based on the Hinayana and adorned with the Vajrayana, your life becomes most beneficial, not only for yourself but for all sentient beings.

THE FOOD OFFERING PRACTICE MOTIVATION

“The purpose of my life is to free all living beings from all suffering and its cause and lead them to full enlightenment.

“There are numberless hell beings from whom I receive all my past, present and future happiness, all realizations and enlightenment. They are the kindest, most precious beings in my life. Therefore, I must liberate them from all suffering and its cause and lead them to enlightenment by myself, alone.

“There are numberless hungry ghosts from whom I receive all my past, present and future happiness, all realizations and enlightenment. They are the kindest, most precious beings in my life. Therefore, I must liberate them from all suffering and its cause and lead them to enlightenment by myself, alone.

“There are numberless animals from whom I receive all my past, present and future happiness, all realizations and enlightenment. They are the kindest, most precious beings in my life. Therefore, I must liberate them from all suffering and its cause and lead them to enlightenment by myself, alone.

“There are numberless human beings from whom I receive all my past, present and future happiness, all realizations and enlightenment. They are the kindest, most precious beings in my life. Therefore, I must liberate them from all suffering and its cause and lead them to enlightenment by myself, alone.

“There are numberless sura beings from whom I receive all my past, present and future happiness, all realizations and enlightenment. They are the kindest, most precious beings in my life. Therefore, I must liberate them from all suffering and its cause and lead them to enlightenment by myself, alone.

“There are numberless asura beings from whom I receive all my past, present and future happiness, all realizations and enlightenment. They are the kindest, most precious beings in my life. Therefore, I must liberate them from all suffering and its cause and lead them to enlightenment by myself, alone.

“There are numberless intermediate state beings from whom I receive all my past, present and future happiness, all realizations and enlightenment. They are the kindest, most precious beings in my life. Therefore, I must liberate them from all suffering and its cause and lead them to enlightenment by myself, alone.

“In order to do all this, I must first achieve full enlightenment myself. Therefore, I am going to practice the yoga of eating and make charity to all sentient beings, including those who live in my body, and, through the connection with all sentient beings I have created by making food charity to them at this time, bring them to full enlightenment by teaching them Dharma when they become human.”

VISUALIZATION

If you are familiar with the visualization, visualize the Guru Puja merit field. If not, simply visualize the deity that you practice, for example, Chenrezig, Tara or Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. But when you visualize the single aspect, remember that in essence it is your root virtuous friend, who is, in essence, all gurus, Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and the statues, stupas, scriptures, and thangkas of the ten directions.

Visualizing in one of these ways, make the offering, thinking that numberless buddhas throughout the ten directions receive an immeasurable amount of nectar.

BLESSING THE OFFERINGS

OM AH HUM HA HO HRI (3x)

Mantra to multiply the offerings

OM NAMO BHAGAVATE VAJRA SARA PRAMARDANE TATHAGATAYA / ARHATE SAMYAKSAM
BUDDHAYA / TADYATHA OM VAJRE VAJRE / MAHA VAJRE / MAHA TEJA VAJRE / MAHA VIDYA
VAJRE / MAHA BODHICHITTA VAJRE / MAHA BODHI MĀNDO PASAM KRAMANA VAJRE /
SARVA KARMA AVARANA VISHO DHANA VAJRE SVAHA (3x)

Extensive Power of Truth

By the power of truth of the Three Rare Sublime Ones,
The blessings of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas,
The great wealth of the completed two collections,
and the sphere of phenomena being pure and inconceivable;
May these piles of clouds of offerings arising through transformation by the
bodhisattvas Arya Samantabhadra, Manjushri, and so forth – unimaginable and
inexhaustible, equaling the sky – arise and, in the eyes of the buddhas and
bodhisattvas of the ten directions, be received.

We also bless all the extensive offerings in all FPMT center gompas, East and West, at Kopan, Tushita Dharamsala, and everywhere else. In the house where I live in America there are well over 400 water bowl offerings, thousands of light offerings and flowers as well, so you can offer all those offerings, too, along with any offerings at your own house. You can bless them all together here.

Again, recite the mantra to multiply the offerings:

OM NAMO BHAGAVATE VAJRA SARA PRAMARDANE TATHAGATAYA / ARHATE SAMYAKSAM
BUDDHAYA / TADYATHA OM VAJRE VAJRE / MAHA VAJRE / MAHA TEJA VAJRE / MAHA VIDYA
VAJRE / MAHA BODHICHITTA VAJRE / MAHA BODHI MĀNDO PASAM KRAMANA VAJRE /
SARVA KARMA AVARANA VISHO DHANA VAJRE SVAHA (3X)

OFFERING THE FOOD

Offering to the Guru Puja merit field or the one deity that you are visualizing as everything¹

If you make offerings to just one statue of Buddha, you collect unimaginable merit, creating causes for enlightenment, liberation from samsara and good rebirths for hundreds of thousands of lifetimes.

Therefore, it is unbelievably more meaningful making offerings to the holy objects in the *Guru Puja* merit field.

Put your palms together and prostrate to each guru in the merit field (or to the one deity that you are visualizing as everything), meditating that their essence is your root virtuous friend. Visualize that each one receives numberless nectar food offerings and generate infinite bliss within his mind. Do these three actions—prostrating, offering and generating infinite bliss—over and over again, as many times as possible or at least twenty-one times. This also applies to each of the following offerings to all the other holy objects.

Offering to all the Buddhas, Dharma and Sangha in the ten directions

Next, prostrate and make numberless nectar food offerings to all the Buddhas, Dharma and Sangha in the ten directions, meditating that their essence is your root virtuous friend. From your side, generate infinite bliss within them.

Offering to all the statues, stupas, scriptures and thangkas of the ten directions

Next, prostrate and make numberless nectar food offerings to all the statues, stupas, scriptures and thangkas of the ten directions, meditating that their essence is your root virtuous friend. Generate infinite bliss within them as many times as possible.

Offering to His Holiness the Dalai Lama and all other virtuous friends

Next, prostrate and make numberless nectar food offerings to the Buddha of Compassion, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and all your other virtuous friends, meditating that their essence is your root virtuous friend. Generate infinite bliss within them as many times as possible.

Offering to all the holy objects in India

Next, prostrate and make numberless nectar food offerings to all the holy objects in India, meditating that their essence is your root virtuous friend. Generate infinite bliss within them as many times as possible.

Offering to all the holy objects in Tibet

Next, prostrate and make numberless nectar food offerings to all the holy objects in Tibet, including the stupa we built at Sera monastery and the Shakyamuni Buddha statue in the Jokhang, Lhasa's central temple,² meditating that their essence is your root virtuous friend. Generate infinite bliss within them as many times as possible.

Offering to all the holy objects in Nepal

Next, prostrate and make numberless nectar food offerings to all the holy objects in Nepal, for example, the Swayambhunath stupa³ and the Boudhanath stupa,⁴ as well as all the other holy objects in Nepal, meditating that their essence is your root virtuous friend. Generate infinite bliss within them as many times as possible.

Offering to all the holy objects in all other Buddhist countries

Next, prostrate and make numberless nectar food offerings to all the holy objects in all other Buddhist countries, such as Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand and the rest, meditating that their essence is your root virtuous friend. Generate infinite bliss within them as many times as possible.

Offering to the Medicine Buddhas, Ksitigarbha and Chenrezig

Next, prostrate and make numberless nectar food offerings to the seven Medicine Buddhas for success, to Buddha Ksitigarbha so that you can fulfill the wishes of all the sentient beings, instantly bringing them all happiness up to enlightenment, and to One-Thousand-Arm Chenrezig so that you can develop great compassion and liberate numberless sentient beings from all their suffering and

bring them into full enlightenment, meditating that their essence is your root virtuous friend. Generate infinite bliss within them as many times as possible.

Offering to all sentient beings ⁵

Then make numberless nectar food offerings to every hell being, every hungry ghost, every animal, every human being, every asura being, every sura being and every intermediate state being. They fully enjoy those offerings and become completely liberated from all suffering and its cause. They all become enlightened in the aspect of the deity you practice.

MAKING OTHER OFFERINGS

Offering to the Guru Puja merit field or the one deity that you are visualizing as everything

Now prostrate and make all those other offerings—the light offerings wherever you are, those in your own houses, the extensive offerings in all FPMT center gompas and all the extensive offerings in the house in America that I mentioned before—which are nature of infinite bliss, to each guru in the Guru Puja merit field (or to the one deity that you are visualizing as everything), meditating that their essence is your root virtuous friend.

Do these three actions—prostrating, offering and generating infinite bliss—over and over again, as many times as possible or at least twenty-one times.

Continue doing the three actions of prostrating, offering and generating infinite bliss as many times as you can while making offerings to all the other holy objects as follows:

Make extensive blissful offerings to:

All the Buddhas, Dharma and Sangha in the ten directions
All the statues, stupas, scriptures and thangkas of the ten directions
His Holiness the Dalai Lama and all other virtuous friends
All the holy objects in India
All the holy objects in Tibet
All the holy objects in Nepal
All the holy objects in all other Buddhist countries
The Medicine Buddhas, Ksitigarbha and Chenrezig

[For a total of twenty-one times or however many times you are able.]

DEDICATION

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may all those sentient beings suffering unimaginably now in the hell, hungry ghost and animal realms, any FPMT students who have passed away recently, those whose names were given to me, for whom I promised to pray, who rely on me, may they all be liberated from all the suffering

immediately, especially the suffering of the three lower realms, and find rebirth in a pure land where they can become enlightened right away. Otherwise, may they receive a perfect human body, meet a perfectly qualified Mahayana guru and in that way achieve enlightenment as quickly as possible.

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may my simply hearing that a sentient being is sick cause that sentient being to recover immediately; may my simply hearing that somebody has died cause that sentient being never to be reborn in the lower realms ever again but immediately be reborn in a pure land and become enlightened there.

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may those sentient beings who have been born human being but have no opportunity to practice Dharma achieve enlightenment quickly by meeting a perfectly qualified Mahayana guru, receiving Mahayana teachings and putting those teachings into practice.

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may all the members of my family, all FPMT students and benefactors, those who sacrifice their lives serving others through the FPMT, those who rely on me, those for whom I promised to pray, those whose names have been given to me and those serving me now, be healthy, have long lives, and may all our wishes succeed immediately according to the holy Dharma. May we be able to actualize the entire path, from guru devotion up to enlightenment, especially bodhicitta and the clear light, without even a second’s delay, this being the purpose of life.

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may the holy wishes of all my virtuous friends, including His Holiness Dalai Lama, the Buddha of Compassion, succeed immediately; may they all have stable lives, and may all the FPMT Sangha be able to complete their scriptural understanding and realize the entire path to enlightenment in this very lifetime by receiving all protection and needs.

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may all the projects in the FPMT succeed immediately by receiving everything required. May all the social service centers, the meditation centers, hospices, schools and so forth immediately pacify all physical and mental suffering of all sentient beings by spreading the complete stainless teaching of Lama Tsongkhapa in the minds of all the sentient beings by receiving everything required.

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may all the projects, buildings, temples, statues, stupas, scriptures, the five-hundred-foot Maitreya statue and all other projects in the West and in the East, including the Mongolian nunnery, monastery and other buildings, succeed immediately by receiving everything required. May the five-hundred-foot Maitreya statue and all our other projects cause bodhicitta to arise in the minds of all sentient beings. And due to that, may everybody have perfect peace and happiness and may nobody experience war, famine, disease, torture, poverty, sicknesses or the dangers of fire, water, air, earth or car or airplane accident, from now on. May all these projects cause all sentient beings to achieve enlightenment as quickly as possible.

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, from now on, whatever action I do, whatever I experience—ups and downs, happiness or misery, health or illness, gain or loss, wealth or poverty, praise or criticism, life or death, even rebirth in hell— whatever happens to me, may all my life experiences become most beneficial and, by myself achieving enlightenment, cause all sentient beings to achieve enlightenment as quickly as possible.

“May the numberless sentient beings who worked for, suffered, died or created negative karma in the evolution of this food, the benefactors who provided this food, and all other sentient beings as well never separate from the Triple Gem, always collect merit by making offerings to the Triple Gem, and always receive the blessings of Triple Gem.

“May the realizations of the path, from guru devotion up to enlightenment, especially bodhicitta and the clear light, be actualized in my own mind and in the minds of all sentient beings without even a second’s delay.

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, which are empty from their own side, may the I, which is empty from its own side, achieve my personal deity’s or Guru Shakyamuni Buddha’s enlightenment, which is empty from its own side, and lead all sentient beings who are empty from their own side, to that enlightenment, which is empty from its own side, by myself alone, who is also empty from its own side.”

NOTES

1. Where it says, “to the Guru Puja merit field or the one deity that you are visualizing as everything,” if you are visualizing just one aspect, the essence of which is the many gurus of the Guru Puja merit field, each time you make offerings, prostrate or generate infinite bliss with that meditation, you create numberless causes of enlightenment, liberation from samsara and good rebirths in hundreds of thousands of future lives; numberless causes of all those different levels of happiness. You create numberless causes each time because you are visualizing that one buddha as everything —your root guru, all other gurus, Buddha, Dharma, Sangha and all other holy objects.

2. The most precious Shakyamuni Buddha statue in the Jokhang, Lhasa’s central temple, was built for Buddha’s mother according to Buddha’s own instructions, blessed by Buddha himself and liberates thousands and thousands of sentient beings every day.

3. The Swayambhunath stupa is the most precious stupa in Kathmandu. It contains a natural crystal stupa that appeared from the lake that used to fill the Kathmandu valley and is the embodiment of the holy mind of all the buddhas, the Dharmakaya. Shakyamuni Buddha himself predicted its discovery. This precious stupa is inside the Swayambhunath stupa. That’s why this stupa is the most precious holy object in Nepal.

4. The Boudhanath stupa, which is also called the All-encompassing Wish-fulfilling Stupa, was constructed by a woman who passed away when it had been built only up to the vase. After her death, her four sons completed it. As they were making prayers upon its completion, all the buddhas and bodhisattvas absorbed into it; that’s why it’s called “All-encompassing.” The eldest brother prayed to become a Dharma king in the Land of Snows, Tibet. The next brother prayed

to the stupa to become a minister and offer service to his brother, the king, when he spread Dharma in Tibet. The next brother prayed to become an abbot in order to pass on the lineage of the ordinations and spread Dharma in Tibet.

The youngest prayed to become a powerful yogi in order to pacify the obstacles to his brothers' spreading Dharma in Tibet. In their next lives, all four brothers became important holy beings in Tibet, just as they had prayed—a Dharma king, a minister, an abbot and a powerful yogi.

The powerful yogi was Padmasambhava. When Samyé, the first monastery in central Tibet, was being built, spirits would come at night and tear down what the people had built during the day. There were many obstacles. So the people invited Padmasambhava to come from India and subdue those spirits. He did so and converted them into protectors, to protect the Dharma in Tibet. Thus, Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism was spread and preserved in Tibet for many years and many beings achieved realization of path and become enlightened. Now this tradition has spread to many countries all over the world, and the fact that every year, many tens of thousands of people are able to follow the path to enlightenment and make their lives meaningful is due to the power of that stupa. The lam-rim teachings we receive and practice, making our everyday life meaningful, came from that stupa, and the wishes made by anybody who makes offerings to or circumambulates that stupa get fulfilled.

5. Sometimes Rinpoche offers the food to all sentient beings at the beginning of the practice. In that way, since the food is no longer yours—it now belongs to all sentient beings—your attachment to it is eliminated or reduced, and you make the offering on their behalf.

6. See Lama Zopa Rinpoche's Teachings from the Vajrasattva Retreat, Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive, 2000, p. 625, for the ten benefits of offering.

7. See Teachings from the Vajrasattva Retreat, pp. 224–5, for the eight benefits of putting the palms together in prostration.

Colophon: Teaching first given by Lama Zopa Rinpoche in Brisbane, Australia in 2000. Edited by Nick Ribush and posted as "The Yoga of Offering Food" on the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive website, www.lamayeshe.com. The Extensive Power of Truth was added by Kendall Magnussen, March 2010.