

The Aroma Charity For Spirits

by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

General Instructions

Meaning of the term *sur* translated here as “aroma”

Here, the Tibetan word “sur” (*gsur*) refers to the smell of roasted flour that is offered to spirits. Usually this offering is made at sunset or thereafter because spirits are on the move then, and it is known as the time when spirits gather. This is also the time when dakinis¹ gather.

Materials

Use a roasting pan that is not cracked, broken, or worn out.² The fire itself should not produce much smoke; a smokeless bed of hot coals will do. The fireplace should be clean.

Use clean flour mixed with “men-chey” (*sman phye*). Men-chey can be obtained from the Tibetan Medical Center, Dharamsala or other Tibetan pharmacy. I think it is a mixture of “sang-druk” (*bsangs drug*), an incense made of six different shrubs. It is also used for black tea offerings. When His Holiness Song Rinpoche offered tea to the merit field, to protectors, or to worldly gods, he used a mixture of men-chey and black tea.

In addition to men-chey, include the powder of crushed jewels, such as coral, pearls, or other jewels. All this is mixed with the flour. This mixture would be a perfect substance for the offering.

The Ritual

Refuge and Bodhichitta

Recite the prayer taking refuge and generating bodhichitta three times. Rely on Buddha with your whole heart, for the sake of all sentient beings as well as yourself. You can think of all the numberless buddhas or just think of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha as the object of refuge.

I go for refuge until I am enlightened.

To the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Supreme Assembly.

By my my merits from giving and other perfections,

May I become a buddha to benefit all sentient beings. (3x)

Sang gyä chhö dang tshog kyi chhog nam la

Jang chhub bar du dag ni kyab su chhi

Dag gi jin sog gyi pa sö nam kyi

Dro la phän chhir sang gyä drub par shog (3x)

Then generate bodhichitta by considering each beneficiary in the six realms, such as:

I must free every one of the numberless hell beings, who are the source of all my past, present, and future happiness, from all suffering and its cause, the defilements, and bring them to enlightenment.

I must free all the numberless spirits, who are the source of all my past, present, and future happiness, from all suffering and its cause, the defilements, and bring them to enlightenment.

I must free all the numberless animals, who are the source of all my past, present, and future happiness, from all suffering and its cause, the defilements, and bring them to enlightenment.

Likewise, I must free all humans, gods, demigods, and intermediate state beings, who are the source of all my past, present, and future happiness, from all suffering and its cause, the defilements, and bring them to enlightenment.

To do this I must achieve enlightenment myself. Therefore, I am going to practice the charity of aroma: offering aroma to the merit field and giving aroma to sentient beings.

Self-Generation and Invocation

Instantaneously I appear as Khasarpani (an aspect of Chenrezig), white in color with one face and two arms, the right hand granting sublime realizations, and the left hand resting on a moon cushion and holding the stem of a white lotus. I am seated in the half-vajra posture and have an antelope skin draped over my left shoulder. Light radiates from the syllable HRIH in my heart, inviting the guests of nirvana and samsara³ who take their seats on comfortable cushions.

Blessing the Substances

Here, the flour mixture is blessed.

OM VAJRA AMRITA KUNDALI HANA HANA HUM PHAT

Sprinkle blessed water from the vase⁴ on the flour mixture while reciting this mantra. Visualize each drop of water transforms into hundreds of wrathful Kundali deities who dispel all interferers from the offering substances, like using the inner offering to dispel interferers.

OM SVABHAVA SHUDDHA SARVA DHARMA SVABHAVA SHUDDHO HAM⁵

Meditate on the emptiness of the offering substances and the emptiness of yourself (including the mind itself) such that no dualistic objects appear. Everything becomes emptiness.⁶ Meditate so there is no gap between the object meditated on and the meditator. This wisdom ceases the two kinds of defilement: the obscuration of disturbing thoughts, and with the support of bodhichitta, the obscuration of knowledge. Through the cessation of these two defilements your ordinary body, speech, and mind are transformed into your deity's vajra holy body, vajra holy speech, and vajra holy mind.

Within this state of emptiness the syllable BHRUM appears. This syllable is in actuality your non-dual wisdom experiencing emptiness with great bliss. The syllable BHRUM transforms into a precious vessel, vast and spacious. The syllables OM AH HUM⁷ appear above the vessel and melt into light, which transforms into perfect aroma that pervades all the earth and sky, delighting all the senses. This is enjoyed by the guests merely through the power of reciting the words.⁸

Mantras

OM AH HUM (3x)⁹

NAMA SARVA TATHAGATA AVALOKITE OM SAMBHARA SAMBHARA HUM (7x)

This mantra is called “The Mighty and Great King.” It functions to allow the guests to receive the gift just as you imagine it. It may also be possible for them to receive the gift just as they wish.

OM GÄNDE KAME GUNA PUJA IDAM KHA KHA KHA HI KHA HI (7x)

Outer Offerings

Small ting-sha cymbals may be used for the music offering.

Before making the offerings and using the cymbals, recite:

OM PÄDMO USHNISHA BIMALI HUM PHAT (7x)

then blow on the cymbals. This empowers the cymbals to purify with their sound the negative karma of anyone who hears them, thus liberating these beings from the lower realms. Offer the sound to the merit field keeping in mind that this includes the three jewels of refuge encompassing the ten directions.

OM ARGHAM, PADYAM, PUSHPE, DHUPE, ALOKE, GANDHE, NAIVIDYA, SHAPTA PRATICCHA HUM SVAHA

Recite the Four Tathagatas’ Names¹⁰

DE ZHIN SHEG PA RIN CHHEN MANG LA CHAG TSÄL LO

DE ZHIN SHEG PA ZUG DZÄ DAM PA LA CHAG TSÄL LO

DE ZHIN SHEG PA KU JAM LHÄ LA CHAG TSÄL LO

DE ZHIN SHEG PA GYÄL WA THUG JIG PA THAM CHÄ DANG DRÄL WA LA CHAG TSÄL LO

While reciting the names, think that all sentient beings receive the respective benefits of each recitation. When each name is recited with prostration,¹¹ these benefits, according to Lama Atisha and his disciples, are as follows:

Recitation of the first name: Spirits and all other sentient beings are released from their disturbing thoughts, such as miserliness, as well as their negative karma and its result, such as poverty, and enjoy with satisfaction whatever they desire.

Recitation of the second name: All beings are freed from their miserable bodies, and acquire perfect,¹² strong bodies.

Recitation of the third name: All beings are released from all physical illness, and enjoy the supreme taste.¹³

Recitation of the fourth name: All beings are liberated from the fear of being tormented by others and enjoy peace.

Offering the Aroma

To the merit field:

*Offer the aroma to the merit field that includes the lama, deity, Three Jewels of refuge, dakas and dakinis, and Dharma protectors, just as visualized in the *Guru Puja*. Imagine that they experience infinite bliss by smelling this aroma. Make this offering in the extensive way.¹⁴*

To sentient beings:

Offer the aroma to all sentient beings in the six realms including the intermediate state. When they smell this all-pervasive aroma, they experience whatever they want and need, including the

complete path of method and wisdom. This causes them to cease all defilements and to become perfectly enlightened in the aspect of the Compassionate Buddha.¹⁵

Supplementary Practice:

Recite:

OM SARVA NIVARANA VISKAMBINI HUM HUM PHAT (7x)

This is the mantra of the bodhisattva Sarva-nivarana-viskambini, "Eliminating All Defilements." The benefit of reciting it is that you will not experience a torturous death.

Teaching Dharma to the Spirits

This can be done by reciting verses from the Bodhisattvacharyavatara that express the benefits of bodhichitta.

Bidding Farewell

Now that you have been satisfied with various gifts, including the precious gift of Dharma, that has freed your minds, you may each go to your own homes.

Dedication

You can use extensive dedications, such as, "Due to the merits of the three times collected by me..."¹⁶

Benefits of This Practice

This practice is a way of collecting extensive merit and pacifying obstacles to one's Dharma practice, projects, or business. In this way, it brings success to all these endeavors. Furthermore, by making charity, it results in prosperity and wealth. It causes you to be born in a pure land. Another benefit is that spirits are fed by the aroma and are thus freed from their terrible hunger. Also, the Dharma teaching they receive frees them from the cause of all their torment. Thus, there is the benefit that they enjoy happiness and are freed from the cause of suffering. There is testimony to this effect: one night Ven. Lhundup Ningje (Paula Chichester) went to bed and fell into a semi-conscious state between wakefulness and sleep. At that time, she saw spirits gathered around the fireplace where the smoke was still rising from this practice. They were enjoying this aroma so much and expressed their appreciation and happiness to her.

Colophon:

This practice is based on a commentary to a liturgy composed by Pabongkha Rinpoche given by Lama Zopa Rinpoche on May 24, 1999, in Aptos, California, and transcribed by Ven. Thubten Pemo; it was later edited into this practice by Tubten Pende. It has been lightly edited for publication in November 2001 by Ven. Cosntance Miller, FPMT Education Services.

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1. A class of tantric deities.
 2. It may be possible to dispense with the roasting pan, and sprinkle the flour directly onto hot coals.
 3. The guests of nirvana refers to the merit field, namely the gurus, the Three Jewels of refuge, tantric deities, sutra buddhas (such as Medicine Buddhas), bodhisattvas, arhats, dakas and dakinis, and Dharma protectors. The guests of samsara refers to worldly protectors, the place lords, and the objects of compassion, i.e., all sentient beings, including those to whom you owe karmic debts.
 4. The vase water can be blessed with a standard ritual and kept handy in a jar or other container for when you need it.
 5. SVABHAVA means nature, SHUDDHA means pure, SARVA means all, DHARMA means things, together they refer to the emptiness of all objectivity, i.e. whatever is apprehended by the mind, which can refer to

the aggregates. SVABHAVA SHUDDHO, which also literally means pure nature, refers to the emptiness of the mind, the apprehender of objects. HAM means oneself, which can refer to the emptiness of the person, or can indicate that oneself is the emptiness of the subject and object, experiencing great bliss, as in the practice of taking the clear light as the path of dharmakaya.

6. Emptiness refers to the non-existence of inherently existing objects of mind and an inherently existing mind itself. There is no inherent existence, and you meditate on the total non-existence of these apparently inherently existing things.
7. OM AH HUM refer to the vajra body, speech, and mind of all the buddhas.
8. His Holiness Song Rinpoche told Lama Zopa that spirits who are waiting for charity can hear your words and will view the gift in the way it is described. This is why H. H. Song Rinpoche recommends to never criticize the gift as spirits will see it just as described. Conversely, if it is described beautifully they will see it that way even if made from paper. H. H. Song Rinpoche always made beautiful images for pujas with tools he carried for this purpose.
9. OM for the substance's purity, AH for its transformation into nectar, and HUM for its expanse. The meanings of OM and HUM can be interchanged; there are many interpretations of their meanings.
10. These names refer to Shakyamuni, Avalokiteshvara, Manjushri, and Vajrapani respectively.
11. Fold hands in front of your heart, recite the buddha names, and regard them respectfully.
12. Perfect bodies are those with the 32 signs and 80 exemplifications.
13. The defilements are purified and bodhichitta arises in their hearts.
14. Lama Zopa Rinpoche has an extensive form of making offerings to the merit field, which can be used here; it includes many examples of each of the Three Jewels in the ten directions.
15. This can be done in the same way as the giving part of the *Tonglen* practice.
16. See the FPMT dedication prayers and special FPMT dedication prayers in *Essential Buddhist Prayers*, vol. 1, Dedications section.