

The Benefits of Prayer Wheels

By Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Buddha said:

The benefit of turning the Dharma wheel is that negative karma and disturbing thought obscurations accumulated over beginningless rebirths are purified without effort. Even other mantras are without doubt completed.

Karma Pakshi, the Second Karmapa, said:

When this great wheel called OM MANI PADME HUM is placed above [a house or roof], the wind that touches the prayer wheel liberates all those transmigrating beings touched by it from the sufferings of the lower realms.

When the prayer wheel is turned by fire, those transmigrating beings who are illuminated by the firelight or who smell the smoke are liberated from the sufferings of the lower realms. When the prayer wheel is placed on the ground, sentient beings who are on the ground or who are touched by the dust are liberated from the sufferings of the lower realms.

If the prayer wheel is placed in water, all the sentient beings who are touched by the water, or who drink the water that has touched the prayer wheel, are liberated from the lower realms.

Padmasambhava purified the land of Tibet and spread the Dharma, especially tantra, all over Tibet. When the Dharma king Songtsen Gampo was constructing the first monastery in Tibet, whatever the workers would build up during the day, spirits would tear down at night. So Padmasambhava came from India, hooked the spirits, and subdued them, putting them under pledge as Dharma protectors to protect the teachings. Padmasambhava said in his teachings:

Those who lack effort to study the Buddhadharma will receive realizations by turning the Dharma wheel and those who do make effort will be supported in their recitation, practice, and so forth by turning it. Inconceivable negative karmas will be purified without effort and they will achieve all the deities together.

The origin of this prayer wheel is as follows. The Arya Compassionate Buddha Avalokiteshvara advised Master Nagarjuna, "In the palace of the country of the nagas, the bodhisattva naga king has a Dharma wheel. Anybody who merely sees, hears, touches, or remembers this wheel is quickly liberated from the sufferings of the lower realms. Take this profound Dharma wheel from them and extensive great benefit for sentient beings will come about."

Nagarjuna went to collect the prayer wheel from the naga king, who told him, “Place this prayer wheel on the earth, in water, fire, and wind, and accomplish extensive benefit for sentient beings and the teachings of the Buddha.”

Nagarjuna then brought the prayer wheel to India and passed it to the Lion-Face Dakini. From the Lion-Face Dakini, it went to the great Indian yogi Tilopa, then to Naropa, and then on to Marpa, who brought it to Tibet and gave it to Milarepa, who in turn passed it to Gampopa.

It is mentioned in the root tantra of Avalokiteshvara, *Padmajalamulatantra*:

Beams emitted from the Dharma wheel to sentient beings naturally cause the four immeasurable thoughts of loving-kindness, compassion, joyfulness, and equanimity to arise in their hearts and they complete the paramitas of charity, morality, patience, perseverance, concentration, and wisdom.

Shakyamuni Buddha said to the bodhisattva Digpa Namsel:

It is said that for the intelligent practitioner, turning the Dharma wheel once is more sublime than doing retreat for one year; for the middling practitioner, turning the Dharma wheel once is more supreme than doing retreat for seven years; and even for the lowest practitioner, turning the Dharma wheel once is more supreme than doing retreat for nine years.

Vajrapani said:

[Turning] this great Dharma wheel can stop all the harms caused by the dey above (who cause epilepsy and so forth); the birth nagas down below; and the tsen, yakshas, and rakshas in-between.

Colophon:

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