

The Benefits of the Clouds of Offerings Mantra

A Teaching by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

OM NAMO BHAGAVATE VAJRA SĀRA PRAMARDANE / TATHĀGATĀYA / ARHATE
SAMYAK SAṂBUDDHĀYA / TADYATHĀ / OM VAJRE VAJRE / MAHĀ VAJRE / MAHĀ TEJA
VAJRE / MAHĀ VIDYĀ VAJRE / MAHĀ BODHICHITTA VAJRE / MAHĀ BODHI MAṆḌOPA
SAṂKRAMAṆA VAJRE / SARVA KARMĀVARAṆA VIŚHODHANA VAJRE SVĀHĀ

Before we bless the offerings by reciting the *Clouds of Offerings* mantra three times, I would like to take the opportunity to explain the benefits of this mantra.

This mantra is not only for blessing; it also has the power to multiply the offerings. There are numberless buddhas, and by reciting this mantra, each buddha receives skies of offerings. That's why it's called the mantra of the "clouds of offerings." The mantra has two functions: blessing and increasing.

There are eight benefits of reciting this mantra explained in the Buddha's teachings, the *Kangyur*:

FIRST, the minute you remember this mantra, you gain the benefit of having made offerings to all the buddhas abiding in the ten directions, which equal the number of the atoms in the sand grains of the Pacific Ocean.¹

(Can you imagine? It means that whether you offer just one stick of incense, one light offering, one piece of fruit, or one biscuit, you get the benefit of offering to all these buddhas. And not just to as many buddhas as there are grains of sand in the Pacific Ocean, but as many buddhas as there are atoms in all of these grains of sand! That means you gain unimaginable, inconceivable merit! And by doing so, you create that many causes of enlightenment and, by the way, liberation from samsara, happiness of future lives, and so on.)

SECOND, you get the benefit of having prostrated to the holy feet of all those buddhas. (You can see that the benefits of this mantra are beyond our imagination!)

THIRD, you receive the benefit of having made offerings of flowers, incense,² garlands of flowers, ornaments, ointments, Dharma robes, umbrellas, banners, flags, animals,³ sitting cloths,⁴ divine dress, food, various ornaments, and so forth to all the buddhas abiding in the ten directions (as described above).

FOURTH, you are freed from all negative karmas. (It becomes great purification.)

FIFTH, you gain all the merits.

SIXTH, you will see all the buddhas and bodhisattvas and they will “give you breath.” (This means that because of all this merit and purification, sooner or later you will be able to see all the buddhas and bodhisattvas and they will liberate you.⁵)

SEVENTH, you will be protected by *nagas*; *devas*; *nöjin*;⁶ smell-eaters;⁷ *asuras*; *garudas*; *miamchi*;⁸ Dorje Chenpo;⁹ Vajrapani, the Owner of the Secrecy;¹⁰ and the Four Guardians.¹¹ They will always stay by you, protect you, and guide you. If others try to inflict harm, they will hide you from that.

EIGHTH, when you die, your consciousness will transfer from this world to Amitabha Buddha’s pure land, the Blissful Realm. (In this pure land there is no suffering and you can become enlightened.)

You receive all these qualities and benefits just by remembering this mantra once, without any need to do retreat.

I often recite this mantra. I even try to recite it before eating although it is not commonly recited as a food offering prayer. After the food is blessed using the highest yoga tantra blessing, I try to recite this mantra.

Sometimes you might wonder how it is possible that there could be such a mantra that can bring all these benefits. The reason is because a buddha has inconceivable qualities. A buddha is free from all the defilements, gross and subtle, and complete in all the qualities. Because of this, a buddha has inconceivable power and qualities. A buddha can endow this mantra with power and dedicate it for us sentient beings to have as an easy way to get extensive benefit and receive all happiness. This is what we have to understand.

Recently, Geshe Sopa Rinpoche explained that in one of the chapters of *Bodhicaryavatara* it says Chenrezig¹² blessed his own name so that the minute sentient beings hear it, they can purify their negative karma and be liberated from the lower realms, and plant a positive imprint on the mind that will eventually liberate them from samsara. That is why the Chenrezig mantra OM MANI PADME HÜM is so powerful. Sentient beings can be liberated even by hearing Chenrezig’s name or mantra. A buddha has the power to do this.

It’s the same thing with the Vajrasattva mantra that has so much power. And it’s the same with those powerful texts and teachings like the *Arya Sanghata Sutra* or the *Sutra of Golden Light*. A buddha blessed these texts so that sentient beings can get all these benefits. Just as worldly people can make atomic bombs to destroy the world, a buddha can bless mantras, names, texts, etc. so that they can liberate us by purifying many eons of negative karma. There are even a few mantras that purify 100,000 eons of negative karma! A buddha can do all this.

A buddha is so compassionate to us sentient beings, making such mantras available for us to easily and quickly purify our negative karma and collect extensive merit so we can achieve realizations and enlightenment quickly. We should make use of these in our daily lives. We should try to use every single opportunity to collect the most extensive merit because, as we want happiness, we need to create all the causes—merit—for happiness. We must attempt to accumulate the greatest, most extensive merit because this makes it easy to achieve enlightenment as well as all other kinds of success.

Here, I want to emphasize that we must memorize this mantra. We must memorize it because we can't take the prayer book everywhere we go—to the restaurant, office, and so on. Everybody *must* memorize this. If you haven't memorized this mantra, it's a great loss even from the point of view of the first benefit: blessing and multiplying the offerings so that each buddha receives skies of offerings. Even if you don't know all those other benefits, still you can see that it's a great loss not to know and use this mantra. This is such an easy way to achieve all the happiness up to enlightenment. If you don't use it, there's nothing more crazy or foolish than that.

Animals don't have a human body so they can't memorize this. Even if they wanted to, it's impossible because they can't learn to read, they can't understand the meaning of words, and they can't recite them. But we have a human body with all the opportunities, so if we don't take advantage of this, it seems we are more foolish than the animals. If you don't do this, there's nobody else to blame; it's your own loss. You can't complain to Buddha or the bodhisattvas or sentient beings. Not knowing how important this is, not seeing the value of this practice, and being lazy is all your own loss. This is not a long mantra; it's very short. Once you have learned it and can recite it by heart, you can use it wherever you are, and every time you use it, you collect these eight benefits. Even just the first benefit—that numberless buddhas each receive skies of offerings—just that much is amazing!

Colophon:

Edited by Ven. Sarah Thresher from transcripts by Ven. Ailsa Cameron from teachings at the Mahamudra retreat and Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga retreat with Lama Zopa Rinpoche. With gratitude to Nicholas Ribush and the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive, Crestone, Colorado, March 26, 2009. Further edited by FPMT Education Services, 2019.

Notes

- 1 In the text it usually says *ganga*, so people translate it as the “River Ganges,” but *ganga* is not only the River Ganges. When you bless the vase water, it talks about transforming it into “the divine water *Ganga*,” but the River Ganges—the river in Varanasi, India, that the Hindus believe is holy water and use to wash away negative karma—is the interpretive meaning. The definitive meaning of *ganga* according to highest yoga tantra is the transcendental wisdom of nondual bliss-emptiness. But here, and in many of the texts where it talks about the benefits [of recitation], it’s not the River Ganges, but the Pacific Ocean. This is explained by Phabongkha Dechen Nyingpo in his commentary on the *Bodhicaryavatara* and in teachings by other lamas as well.
- 2 Incense as powders, in sticks, etc.
- 3 These are offered to the protectors.
- 4 Such as the *dingwa* that the monastics sit on.
- 5 “Give breath” or “free the breath” is like when someone is suffocating because they can’t breathe so you give them breath. That is like giving them life or freedom, liberating them. When we take the tantric vows, it talks about “liberating those who are not yet liberated from their delusions,” “liberating those who are not yet liberated from the subtle defilements,” and “liberating those who are still suffering in samsara,” particularly the lower realms, who are suffocated by all that suffering. To these beings who are experiencing the heaviest suffering of the lower realms “I will give breath,” which means I will liberate them from the sufferings of the lower realm, the hell realms. So, “giving breath” means liberating or giving freedom.
- 6 Skt. *yakshas*. *Nöjin* is literally “harm-giver,” but in this context it doesn’t actually mean giving harm but giving protection from harm. For example, the Medicine Buddha has twelve great groups of *nöjin* in his entourage. Simply by making offerings every day to the Medicine Buddha, you are protected by those twelve great groups of *nöjin* and they are surrounded by 700 protectors who also protect you. Also, Namthöse’s entourage has *nöjin*. There are many types of *nöjin*. Maybe some give harm, but here, they are protecting you from harm.
- 7 Skt. *gandharva*. Smell-eaters are those who have died and been reborn in the intermediate state. They are the beings we give food to in the *sur* (burnt offering) practice.
- 8 Skt. *kinnara*. They are the eight worldly gods.
- 9 Dorje Chenpo may be the name of a naga.
- 10 Vajrapani’s name is the Owner of the Secrecy.
- 11 These Four Guardian Kings are visualized at the bottom of the *Guru Puja* merit field.
- 12 According to the Chinese tradition, it is Kwan Yin. The Buddha of Compassion manifests in a male or female aspect according to the different karma of sentient beings.