

## Benefits of the Sera Je Food Fund

### *Advice from Lama Zopa Rinpoche*

I just want to explain some things about the Sera Je Food Fund, just for your education and also maybe you can pass some of this on. [To paraphrase,] Buddha said in the [Arya Sanghata Sutra](#): the result of making charity, even the size of a single strand of hair, is happiness that you will experience for 80,000 eons. You will enjoy great wealth.

If you look in the sutra you can find the exact quote. This sutra was given during Buddha's time of teaching and it has special benefit. This quote means if you make charity of anything, even just a tiny amount, the result of this is happiness for an unbelievable, unbelievable, unbelievable length of time. Just from making charity one time.

Regarding the Sera Je Food Fund, this is making offerings to Sangha ... wow... wow! Can you imagine the merit of that? Even making small charity the size of a single strand of hair? Can you imagine? In the monastery there are Sangha living in the five vows, but the majority of the Sangha are living in higher vows such as getsül (36 vows) and gelong, a fully ordained bhikshu (253 vows). Most of the Sangha are gelongs and living in highest number of vows ... wow... wow ... wow! One creates so much merit by making offerings to Sangha due to the power of the object.

There are four ways to collect extensive merit:

- 1) Motivation – if your motivation is bodhichitta when you make charity, you create skies of merit.
- 2) Living in the vows – if you are living in the vows when you make charity, you collect even more merit. If you are living in the five vows, eight vows (this does not refer to the Eight Mahayana Precepts, but this refers to the Hinayana pratimoksha), 36 vows of a getsül or 253 vows of a fully ordained monk (or 354 vows of a fully ordained nun, a gelongma). The higher the number of vows that you are living in when you make the act of charity, the more merit you create. For example, once you have taken bodhisattva vows, you collect merit every single day. Each time you make charity, the merit increases millions of times. If you are also living in the tantric vows, you can't imagine the merit that you create. This comes from the power of living in the vows.
- 3) Power of the object – this refers to those who you make charity to. At Sera Je Monastery the Sangha are all living in different levels of vows, so making offerings to them creates an unbelievable amount of merit because of the power of the object. Most of the Sangha are also living in bodhisattva and tantric vows and maybe some are arhats

or bodhisattvas. The merit created by making offerings to them is unbelievable. Making just one offering to a bodhisattva ... wow ... unbelievable. Then making offering to a buddha ... wow! The highest object is your guru. You collect the greatest, highest merit and you get the greatest purification; this is the quickest way to achieve enlightenment.

- 4) Power of causative phenomena (cause and result) – phenomena is not permanent; it is changing within one second by causes and conditions. Among all [types of] giving charity to others, one creates the most merit by giving teachings. [There is] incredible benefit in giving teachings, even just one word of teachings. There is one quote from sutra that says that teaching one verse of Dharma to one sentient being creates far more greater merit than offering to the Buddha numberless worlds equal in number to dust particles of the river Ganga [Ganges], with each world filled up with gold, the seven types of jewels, diamonds, and wish-granting jewels. It's unbelievable. Just teaching one verse of Dharma to one sentient being has great benefit. Now, if there are two sentient beings, three sentient beings ... wow ... wow! And it goes on like that, unbelievable! Here, the offering is being made to Sangha who are studying Dharma, many who are teachers and teaching in the monastery, often traveling all over the world to teach.

There is more explanation about these four points in the *Lam-rim* in the section on karma. If you want to understand more, you can look in the book [\*Liberation in the Palm of your Hand\*](#) by Kyabje Pabongka Rinpoche in the section on karma and the four ways of collecting extensive merit.

Creating merit wisely is the cause of greatest success and fulfills all your wishes; this is the best business. In business, the dollar goes up and goes down. Property values go up and go down. Something is valuable one day and then the next it is not. With good karma, the merit is always the same; it does not go up or down. If you create extensive merit, with a good Dharma motivation, then the result is always happiness: this-life happiness, future-life happiness, and ultimate happiness – enlightenment. By making charity, practicing morality, meditation and so forth, this becomes the cause of happiness. If it is done with a Dharma motivation, such as the motivation of not being attached to this life – samsara's happiness – and not being attached to future-life happiness and seeking to live in renunciation, then with that motivation, if one meditates, listens to Dharma teachings, practices charity and morality, then this becomes the cause of ultimate happiness, total liberation from the oceans of samsaric suffering and the causes – karma and delusion.

If you make charity, practice morality and so forth with the motivation of bodhichitta, then whatever you do in your life – eating, walking, sitting, sleeping, doing business and so forth – doing everything with bodhichitta, the thought to achieve enlightenment for all sentient beings

who are numberless, all the numberless hell beings, numberless hungry ghosts, numberless animals, numberless human beings, numberless suras, numberless asuras and numberless intermediate state beings, then everything you do becomes the best Dharma. This is the path of a higher capable being and this is the best Dharma. With this motivation then, all one's actions become the cause of full enlightenment and it becomes the most powerful way to purify all the defilements. The result is full enlightenment. Amazing, amazing, amazing, really amazing! This is how to make your life so meaningful ... amazing ... amazing!

Then you are able to enlighten numberless sentient beings, numberless hell beings, numberless hungry ghosts, numberless animals, numberless human beings, numberless suras, numberless asuras and numberless intermediate state beings. Even just to be able to enlighten numberless hell beings, you can't imagine that. Wow ... wow ... wow ... wow!

Can you imagine the merit of making offerings to the Sangha of Sera Je Monastery with the motivation of bodhichitta? The merit that you would create? Amazing! This is the way to generate the most profit – it is like sky. It is the cause for you to achieve enlightenment and to eliminate all the defilements, to completely actualize all the realizations, to have omniscient mind and full enlightenment and then to bring numberless sentient being to full enlightenment ... wow ... wow ... wow ... wow!

There is one story mentioned in the sutra teachings about a very poor person who offered medicinal fruit called *manton* to four monks. It didn't say if the monks were arya monks, meaning those having directly perceived emptiness. It just mentions four pure monks living in 253 vows. This poor person just made charity one time, not many offerings over and over again. Due to that good karma, in his next life he was born as a king in a place called Kasnigar in India. Due to the act of making that charity, he was reborn as a most powerful, wealthy famous king in his next life. There are many similar stories like this; this is just one example.

According to experience, karma is like this: cause and result. The cause is just giving medicinal food one time, just something incredibly small. But if to whom you offer is a Sangha member, a fully ordained bhikshuni, the good karma that is created from that act is very powerful.

Any offering that is made to the Sera Je Food Fund, the result from that will be unbelievable. Expect to be a powerful, wealthy, famous king in the next life. The merit created just simply from making an offering is unbelievable, unbelievable, and this is without mentioning one's motivation, just the act of making offering to the Sangha.

Then the karma created will not decrease, it will not go up and down, like the stock markets.

In the section on karma in the *Lam-rim*, it is mentioned:

1. Karma is definite – once created, it is definite you will experience the result.
2. Karma increases.
3. It is not possible to experience karma if you have not created the cause.
4. Karma once created never gets lost, even over many billions and zillions of eons, it never gets lost. Whether it is virtue or non-virtue, you will definitely experience the result sometime.

But good karma can get destroyed by anger, heresy and so forth if the merit is not dedicated to achieve enlightenment for sentient beings and if it is not sealed with emptiness.

One can purify negative karma by generating compassion, bodhichitta and loving kindness towards sentient beings, by seeking happiness for them, to liberate them from all the sufferings. Also, fulfilling your guru's wishes and obtaining advice is the most powerful way of purification and also to collect merit; this is the quickest way to achieve enlightenment.

It is mentioned in the *Lam-rim* that there are different methods for purifying negative karma:

1. Making offerings to Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.
2. Reciting mantras.
3. Reading Dharma texts, in particular reading texts such as the *Prajñāparamita* or texts on purification.
4. Reciting Buddha's names.
5. Meditating on emptiness and meditating on loving kindness, compassion and bodhichitta.
6. Making statues and holy objects, and writing Dharma texts and so forth.

I'm not sure this is complete, but this gives you an idea.

If you have created negative karma, then it is best to purify it in the above ways. This is the best, most powerful way so that you don't have to experience the result – suffering – and so you don't have to experience the suffering in the human realm at all, or take rebirth in lower realms, where you have to suffer for many eons. If you purify the negative karma, then you don't have to experience the negative karma. Maybe you will experience some form of suffering in the human realm, some sickness or someone criticizes you, but by experiencing that, you finish the karma and don't have to experience eons in the lower realms suffering at all. Or, if it is not completely purified, then you may get reborn in the lower realms, but it is for a very short time. There are different levels of purification depending how you do purification.

What I want to say regards the second outline of karma, that karma is expandable. Karma, once created, is expandable. For instance, [consider] one small seed of a neem tree. It is tiny, but the result of planting that seed is a huge tree with branches that can cover huge 500 horse carriages. From one small virtue, the result can be unbelievable; karma is much more expandable than outside phenomena. This is why it is so important in our lives to be so careful not to create even small negative karma, and to create even small good karma.

Another benefit of offering to the Sera Je Food Fund is that all the monks living in the monastery are studying the pure Buddhadharma, Dharma that was taught by Buddha and the pandits such as Nagarjuna, Asanga and also the great scholars and highly attained teachers and Tibetan lamas. Sera Je Monastery is one of the main places in the world to study Tibetan Buddhism (there is also Ganden and Drepung, and the Upper [Gyuto] and Lower [Gyume] Tantric Colleges). Also, Sera Je Monastery is one of the main colleges in the world to study the Lama Tsongkhapa tradition, to learn debate and to study all the scriptures very extensively. Debate is a very specialized way of learning the teachings, like a scientist who examines the path to enlightenment, understanding all the delusions, karma, the five aggregates, all of Buddha's qualities and so forth. This is what is needed to be understood so we can be free from suffering forever.

Buddha sacrificed his life for three countless great eons and practiced the six paramitas and achieved enlightenment – the dharmakaya and rupakaya (Buddha's holy mind and Buddha's holy body) – and then taught the holy Dharma, the 100 volumes of sutra. Then the 200 volumes of commentaries on the sutras were taught by the great pandits, the great ancient Indian scholars, highly attained ones and great yogis from India and Tibet. These are the teachings that are extensively taught at Sera Je Monastery.

There are five major texts that are taught in Sera Je Monastery:

(1) *Abhidharmakosha* by Vasubandhu, (2) *Parmanavartika* by Dharmakirti, (3) *Abhisamayalamkara* by Maitreya Buddha, (4) *Madhyamaka* by Chandrakirti, (5) *Vinaya* (Root Sutra) by Buddha Shakyamuni and also commentaries by other Indian and Tibetan masters.

***Abhidharmakosha*** has eight chapters. The first chapter explains about the elements; the second chapter is about the faculties; the third chapter is on the universe and sentient beings dwelling in it; the fourth chapter is on karma; the fifth is about afflictive emotions; the sixth is on the Buddhist paths and persons engaging in those paths; the seventh talks about exalted wisdom and Buddha's qualities; the final eighth chapter explains about the concentrations and so on.

***Parmanavartika*** has four chapters. It explains mainly about mind and its functions; past and future lives; valid and invalid cognitions and persons; direct and inferential cognitions; the four

noble truths; love; compassion; and the basis, the path and its results according to the Sautrantika (Sutra school) and Chittamatra (Mind Only school).

**Abhisamayalamkara** has eight chapters. It explains about mind and its functions; valid and invalid cognitions; direct and inferential cognitions; the four noble truths; love; compassion; bodhichitta; the six perfections; five paths; ten bhumis (grounds); and qualities of the buddhas and spiritual teachers, etc.

**Madhyamaka** has ten chapters. It explains about love; compassion; bodhichitta; two and four truths; five paths; ten bhumis; six perfections and the qualities of bodhisattavas and buddhas in great detail. Particularly [it explains] about emptiness, interdependence, as well as the wisdom realizing emptiness in every detail. In summary, it is about the basis which is the two truths, the path which is the method and wisdom, and the result which is the two kayas, emphasizing more the wisdom side. This scripture explains mainly according to the Prasangika-Madhyamaka (Consequences Middle Way school).

**Vinaya** explains about all the eight pratimoksha vows, *yarne* (monk's summer retreat) *gaye* (break after the retreat) and *sojong* (restoring and purifying ceremony). All the things that ordained ones should avoid and things that they should practice.

Making food offerings to the Sangha at Sera Je actually helps to continue the extensive learning of Buddha's teachings. It directly sustains and continues the pure unbroken lineage of Buddha's teachings in this world.

If there is no food fund, then it is very difficult for the monks. They would not be able to stay in the monastery and they would have to work to earn money. Or, they would not have enough food [while in the monastery] and then would be unable to study [anyway]. If this happened, then Buddhism would disappear in this world.

All sentient beings' happiness comes from Buddha's teachings, from the study and practice and actualization of Buddha's teachings.

First, one has to receive the direct and unbroken lineage of the scriptures and then after that, one has to practice them and have realizations. All realizations of Buddha's teachings are based on living in the vinaya (getsül/ma and gelong/ma) If there is no lineage of the vinaya existing, then the teachings of Buddha no longer exist. If there are no ordained Sangha (getsül/ma and gelong/ma) then the teachings of Buddha do not exist. It depends on the existence of the vinaya and people living in it (monks or nuns). Now you can see that the Sera Je Food Fund helps to continue the teachings of Buddha in this world.

For all happiness, one needs to actualize the path, to practice the teachings. And for that, you need ordained Sangha. So it is very, very important on so many levels.

There are 2,800 monks in Sera Je Monastery whom we usually offer food to (breakfast, lunch and dinner). Can you imagine and most of them are getsül or gelongs – fully ordained ... ? Wow! Wow! Wow! Can you imagine the merit of just offering a small container of medicinal food to just four monks just one time? The merit created is unbelievable; it creates the cause next life to be born as a king who is very wealthy and powerful. Can you imagine that every day this food fund is offering food to 2,800 monks three times a day?

I am trying to raise about US\$5 million to be a root fund [endowment] and from that the interest will cover the cost of all the food each year for all the Sangha. Any amount offered has incredible benefit: US\$1 million, US\$10,000 or even a few hundred dollars.

This is an unbelievable, unbelievable opportunity to contribute. Any amount to the root fund will go on and on, supporting the Sangha with the interest. The monks will make specific dedication prayers for all donors, dedicating the merits so that any benefactor will achieve happiness this life, in the next life and up to enlightenment, to achieve this life's happiness with no obstacles and all success.

This is just to give you a rough idea of different ways to present the benefits of the Sera Je Food Fund.

Thank you very, very, very much. I hope this is helpful to explain or use as a basis to explain to others. Thank you very much. And if one can understand this, wow ... wow! So amazing! Also, [explain] to any of your friends.

With much love and prayers,

Lama Zopa

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