Offering Lights

A practice to accumulate the most extensive merit



composed by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition
Education Services

Notes regarding this practice:

Altar and Gompa Set-up

- *Set up as many electric lights or candles as possible. Before actually lighting them, start the practice.*

  Be especially careful in the case of many candles: Do not set them very close to one another, especially if they are in plastic holders, as the excessive heat may melt the plastic and result in a fire out of control. Also, it is good to cover the surface where candles are sitting with aluminum foil or some other flame-resistant covering.

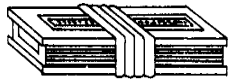
  In addition, one can put out as many other offerings (food, etc.) as one wishes.

Practice tips

If one wishes, the Light Offering Prayer found on pp. 11–12, composed by Lama Atisha, can be added to the basic practice before the dedication prayers.



Care of Dharma Books



Dharma books contain the teachings of the Buddha; they have the power to protect against lower rebirth and to point the way to liberation. Therefore, they should be treated with respect – kept off the floor and places where people sit or walk – and not stepped over. They should be covered or protected for transporting and kept in a high, clean place separate from more mundane materials. Other objects should not be placed on top of Dharma books and materials. Licking the fingers to turn pages is considered bad form as well as negative karma. If it is necessary to dispose of written Dharma materials, they should be burned rather than thrown in the trash. When burning Dharma texts, it is taught to first recite a prayer or mantra, such as OM, AH, HUM. Then, you can visualize the letters of the texts (to be burned) absorbing into the AH and the AH absorbing into you, transmitting their wisdom to your mindstream. After that, as you continue to recite OM, AH, HUM, you can burn the texts.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche has recommended that photos or images of holy beings, deities, or other holy objects not be burned. Instead, they should be placed with respect in a stupa, tree, or other high, clean place. It has been suggested to put them into a small structure like a bird house and then seal the house. In this way, the holy images do not end up on the ground.

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The benefits of making light offerings

It is said in *The Ten Wheel Sutra of the Essence of Earth (Kshitigarbha)*, "All comfort, happiness and peace in this world come from making offerings to the Rare Sublime Ones (the Triple Gem). Therefore, those who want comfort, happiness and peace should always try to make offerings to the Rare Sublime Ones."

In general, all goodness in samsara and nirvana comes from making offerings to the Triple Gem, but specifically, different kinds of offerings bring you different benefits. Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, the fourth of the thousand buddhas of this fortunate eon, whose holy mind was enriched with the ten powers, announced in the *Tune of Brahma Sutra Clarifying Karma* that making light offerings brings you ten benefits:

1. You become like a light in the world.
2. You achieve (when born human) the clairvoyance of the pure flesh eye.
3. You achieve the devas' eye.
4. You receive the wisdom of knowing what is virtue and what is non-virtue.
5. You are able to eliminate the darkness of ignorance, the concept of inherent existence.
6. You receive the illumination of wisdom; even in samsara you never experience darkness.
7. You receive much wealth and enjoyment.
8. You are reborn in the deva or human realm.
9. You quickly become liberated.
10. You quickly attain enlightenment.

Devas or human beings who accumulate the merit of making one light offering – or even a handful of flowers – will see the fully enlightened buddha, Maitreya.

The Sutra of Arya Maitreya says, "Those who offer a thousand lights or a thousand blue utpali flowers or make the pinnacle of a stupa or a holy form will be reborn when Maitreya Buddha shows the deed of gaining enlightenment and will receive his first Dharma teaching."

It is also said that those who offer even one flower or rejoice in the merit of others who offer will achieve buddhahood. This means that even if you don't get enlightened during the time of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's teaching, during Maitreya Buddha's teaching your mind will ripen and you will gain liberation.

Offering light, in particular, is a special door of dependent arising for quickly completing the accumulation of merit and receiving great blessings. It is said in the second chapter of the root tantra of Chakrasamvara, who is a manifestation of Shakyamuni Buddha, "If you want sublime realizations, offer hundreds of lights."

If you want to know the detailed results of making offerings to holy objects or of offering service to the buddha or other holy objects, you should study *The Sutra of the One Who Looks with a Compassionate Eye (Avalokiteshvara)*, the *Sutra of Sogyal*, where Buddha gave instruction to King Sogyal, or the *Könchog Tala*.

The text, *Immortal Drum Sound Mantra*, says, "If you devote yourself to the Inconceivable One, the results will similarly be inconceivable." In the same way, *The Sutra of the One Who Looks with a Compassionate Eye* says, "Since the dharmas (i.e., the qualities) of the buddha gone thus (tathagata) are limitless, making offering to the tathagata brings limitless, infinite, inconceivable, incomparable, unimaginable, numberless benefits."

The Small Quotation (*Lung-ten-tseg*) sutra says, "It is possible for the moon and stars to fall to earth, for mountains and forests to rise up into the sky and for the water of the great oceans to completely dry up, but it is not possible for the great sage (the buddha) to tell a lie. Keep this in mind and generate strong devotion to and faith in the root of all happiness and goodness – actions and their results (karma) and the blessings of the Three Precious Rare Sublime Ones. While you have this body and possessions – which are as if borrowed for a year, a month or a few days – night and day, all the time, attend to the practice of taking the essence of this human life, whose short duration is like a flash of lightning, by planting as many seeds as possible in the special field of merit."



Colophon:
This practice was originally composed by Lama Zopa Rinpoche in Taiwan in February 1994. The FPMT Education Department first made it available to practitioners of the FPMT in May 1998. It had been lightly edited for publication by Ven. Constance Miller. That version was subsequently polished further and included as an appendix in *Teachings from the Vajrasattva Retreat*, Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive, 2000. With only a few changes to adapt it to this format, this booklet has been produced from the material in that appendix. With thanks to the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive.
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The Light Offering Prayer composed by Lama Atisha was translated by Ven. Pemba Tenzing Sherpa.

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Be able to see directly the actual pure lands of the complete and perfect buddhas,
May they unify with Buddha Amitabha in inseparable oneness,
Please bless me and may my prayers be actualized as soon as possible
Due to the power of the truth of the Triple Gem and the assembly of deities of the three roots.

TADYATHA OM PÄNCHA GRIYA AVA BODHANI SVAHA (7x)

The light transforms into single brilliant five-color wisdom.
On a lotus and moon disk the syllables OM and DHI appear.
From them, one hundred and eight beautiful goddesses of light, Marmema, appear, wearing beautiful garments and precious garlands.
Every goddess holds lights in her hands and from them emanate billions of trillions of infinite replicas of light-offering goddesses.
All of them make light offerings uninterruptedly to all the buddhas in the buddha-fields throughout all of space and to the peaceful and wrathful deities.

Thus, due to the merits of having made such a light offering
May all the benefactors, the deceased and migrating beings of the six realms benefit;
May all their degenerated samaya and broken vows be restored;
May all their superstitious obscurations be purified;
May all their bad karma, negativities, and obscurations be purified;
May the three realms of samsara become empty immediately.
Please grant control, power, and realization.

The Actual Practice



Setting a good motivation

Before lighting the candles, generate bodhichitta.

The purpose of my life is not only to solve my own problems and gain happiness for myself but to free all beings from their problems and lead them to all happiness, especially the state of full enlightenment. Therefore, I myself must first achieve complete enlightenment. To do this, I must complete the two accumulations—the merit of fortune (method) and the merit of wisdom. Therefore, I am going to make charity of the light offerings and offer lights to the merit field.

Also remember to motivate for the success of particular projects, for people who have passed away or are sick, or for other specific purposes.

Refuge and Bodhichitta

I go for refuge until I am enlightened
To the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Supreme Assembly.
By the merit 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 pä sö nam kyi
Dro la phän chhir sang gyä drub par shog (3x)

Blessing the light offerings with OM AH HUM



As soon as you light the candles or switch on the electricity, bless the lights by reciting OM AH HUM three times. In general, if you don't bless offerings immediately, they can be entered by the possessing spirit *Tse-bu chig-pa*, and then making those offerings can create obstacles for you; it can cause mental damage. In the case of possessed light offerings, without control, you fall asleep when listening, reflecting and meditating on the holy Dharma. Similarly, if you don't bless all other kinds of offering, various possessing spirits can enter them. Making those offerings can then damage your mind and create obstacles for yourself.

Making charity to the beings of the six realms

Think that you have received these offerings through the kindness of all sentient beings. Think, "These lights are not mine." Make charity of the offerings to all the hell beings, pretas, animals, humans, asuras, and suras. This is done to counteract the thought that the light offerings belong to you. Think that you and all other beings are going to make offerings to the buddha together. Generate great happiness at having accumulated infinite merit by thinking in this way.

Offering prayer

I actually make and mentally transform the offerings of humans and devas. May Samantabhadra clouds of offerings pervade the whole sky.

Bless the offering substances by reciting the mantra that allows each buddha to receive inconceivable offerings and the prayer, Power of the Truth.

Mantra to increase 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 MÄNDO PASAM KRAMANA VAJRE / SARVA KARMA AVARANA VISHO DHANA VAJRE SVAHA *(3x)*

Light Offering Prayer

Composed by Lama Atisha



One can recite this prayer when making even an individual light offering, or in the context of the extensive light offering practice (see pg. 12). After lighting a candle or a butter lamp or any lights, the prayer can be recited in conjunction with the visualization.

May the light of the lamp be equal to the great three thousand worlds and their environment,
May the wick of the lamp be equal to the king of mountains – Mount Meru.
May the butter be equal to the infinite ocean.
May there be billions of trillions of lamps in the presence of each and every buddha.

May the light illuminate the darkness of ignorance of all sentient beings
From the peak of samsara down to the most torturous hell,
Whereby they can see directly and clearly all the ten directions'
Buddhas and bodhisattvas and their pure lands.

OM VAJRA ALOKE AH HUM
E MA HO

I offer these beautifully exalted clear and luminous lights
To the thousand buddhas of the fortunate eon,
To all the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the infinite pure lands and of the ten directions,
To all the gurus, meditation deities, dakas, dakinis, Dharma protectors, and the assembly of deities of all mandalas.

Due to this, may my father, mother, and all sentient beings in this life and in all their future lives,

Special mantra so that prayers made come to pass

CHOM DÄN DÄ DE ZHIN SHEG PA DRA CHOM PA YANG DAG PAR DZOG PÄI SANG GYÄ NGO WA DANG MÖN LAM THAM CHÄ RAB TU DU PÄ GYÄL PO LA CHHAG TSHÄL LO

Final dedication prayers

Due to the blessings of the eminent buddhas and bodhisattvas, due to unbetraying dependent arising and due to my special attitude, may all my pure prayers be accomplished immediately.

With Lama Tsong Khapa as our direct guru in all future lifetimes, may I, my family, and all other sentient beings never be separated from the complete pure path praised by all victorious ones.

Due to the merits of myself and others, may the victorious teachings of Lama Tsong Khapa, Losang Dragpa, flourish for a long time. May all the centers and projects of the FPMT immediately receive all the conditions necessary to preserve and spread these teachings.

May all obstacles be pacified and may the FPMT organization in general and the meditation centers in particular—all our activities to preserve and spread the Dharma, particularly Lama Tsong Khapa's teachings—cause these teachings to continue without degeneration and to spread in the minds of all sentient beings.

May those who have sacrificed their lives to benefit others through this organization have long, healthy lives, may all their activities please the virtuous friend, and in all their lives, may they always be guided by perfectly qualified Mahayana virtuous friends. May all their wishes succeed immediately, in accordance with the holy Dharma.



Power of the Truth

By the power of truth of the Three Jewels,
Of the blessings of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas,
By the power of the great might of the completed two collections,
And of the completely pure, inconceivable sphere of reality,
May all these offerings become just so.

Making the offerings

Make offerings to all holy objects, visualizing them as manifestations of your own root guru, who is one with all other virtuous friends. Since the virtuous friend is the most powerful object in the merit field, by offering like this, you accumulate the most extensive merit. In his text, The Five Stages, *the savior Nagarjuna said, "Abandon making other offerings; try purely to make offerings only to your guru. By pleasing your guru, you will achieve the sublime wisdom of the omniscient mind."*

In the root tantric text Buddhaya, *Guru Vajradhara said, "The merit accumulated by making offerings to just one pore of the spiritual master is more sublime than all that accumulated by making offerings to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions."*

As you make each offering, think that "Having received the offering, the guru's holy mind experiences great bliss." This completes the offering.



First, offer to all the holy objects in your own room or temple by visualizing that they are manifestations of your own root guru, who is one with all other virtuous friends.

Make offerings to all the holy objects in whatever country you are in by thinking of them as manifestations of your own virtuous friend.

Make offerings to all the holy objects in India, in particular, the Bodhgaya stupa, where the Buddha showed the holy deed of enlightenment, and all other holy objects in India, thinking of them as your own virtuous friend.

Make offerings to all the holy objects in Tibet, in particular, the holy statue blessed by the Buddha himself, and all other holy objects in Tibet, thinking of them as your own virtuous friend.

Make offerings to all the holy objects in Nepal, in particular, the most holy precious object, the great holy stupa at Bouddhanath, and all other holy objects in Nepal, thinking of them as your own virtuous friend.

Make offerings to all the holy objects in all the remaining Buddhist countries, thinking of them as your own virtuous friend.

Make offerings to all Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha in the ten directions, thinking of them as your own virtuous friend.

Make offerings to all holy objects in the ten directions – statues, stupas, scriptures etc. – thinking of them as your own virtuous friend.

There is also a special way of making light offerings according to Highest Yoga Tantra, in which great bliss is generated in all the holy minds.

The actual light offering prayer

Next recite the actual prayer of the light offerings – five, ten, one thousand times, whatever – depending on how many times you want to make the light offerings:

I offer these clouds of actually arranged and mentally created light offerings equaling the infinite sky – manifestations of my own innate awareness, dharmakaya – to all gurus, the Three Precious Sublime Ones and all statues, stupas and scriptures, which are manifestations of my guru.

At this point, one can also recite Atisha's Light Offering Prayer as many times as one wishes (see pp. 11–12.)

Dedication

By generating bodhichitta, making charity to all sentient beings, and making the actual light offerings to the gurus, the Triple Gem, and all the holy objects in the ten directions, you have accumulated infinite merit, which should therefore be dedicated.

Due to this merit, may the light rays of the five wisdoms completely purify all the degenerated samaya vows of those for whom I promised to pray, of those who pray to me, of those whose names I have received to pray for, principally servants, benefactors and disciples, and of all remaining migratory beings, living or dead, right now.

May all the sufferings of the evil gone realms cease right now.
May the three realms of samsara be empty right now.
May all impure minds and their obscurations be purified.
May all impure appearances be purified.
May the five holy bodies and wisdom spontaneously arise.

Due to these infinite merits, may whatever sufferings sentient beings have ripen on me right now. May whatever happiness and virtue I have accumulated, including all the realizations of the path and the highest goal enlightenment, be received by each hell being, preta, animal, human, asura, and sura right now.

Having dedicated in this way, you have accumulated infinite merit, so rejoice.

May the precious sublime thought of enlightenment, the source of all success and happiness for myself and all other sentient beings, be generated without even a second's delay. May that which has been generated increase more and more without degeneration.

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 I, who am empty from my own side, achieve enlightenment, which is empty from its own side, and lead all sentient beings, who are empty from their own side, to that enlightenment, by myself, alone.

Whatever white virtues I have thus created, I dedicate as causes enabling me to uphold the holy Dharma of scriptures and insights and to fulfill without exception the prayers and deeds of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the three times.

By the force of this merit, in all my lives may I never be parted from Mahayana's four spheres, and may I reach the end of my journey along the paths of renunciation, bodhichitta, the pure view, and the two stages.

Special mantras to increase the merit 100,000 times

CHOM DÄN DÄ DE ZHIN SHEG PA DRA CHOM PA YANG DAG PAR DZOG PÄI SANG GYÄ NAM PAR NANG DZÄ Ö KYI GYÄL PO LA CHHAG TSHÄL LO (3*x*)

JANG CHHUB SEM PA SEM PA CHHEN PO KÜN TU ZANG PO LA CHHAG TSHÄL LO (3*x*)

TADYATHA OM PÄNCHA GRIYA AVA BODHANI SVAHA (7*x*)

OM DHURU DHURU JAYA MUKHE SVAHA (7*x*)



Common pronunciation:
TAYATA OM PANCHA GREEYA AWA BODHANEE SOHA
OM DURU DURU DZAYA MOOKAY SOHA