

THE BENEFITS OF THE PRAYER WHEEL

The Source of the Practice of the Mani Wheel

As the great master Nagarjuna was predicted by the Great Compassionate One: “In the naga’s country in the palace of the King of Nagas, the bodhisattva possesses one very powerful Dharma wheel. Just by seeing, hearing, touching, or remembering the Dharma wheel, you will quickly be liberated from the suffering of the lower realms. With this you will produce extensive works for sentient beings.”

The Limitless Light Buddha Amitabha said: “For the benefit of sentient beings of the degenerate age, I have explained the benefits of the mani wheel. The one who practices while turning equals the fortune of the thousand buddhas.”

The Founder Savior, the unequalled Shakya King, told the bodhisattva Dripa Namsil: “It is more beneficial to turn the Dharma wheel one time than [to be] a meditator of highest capacity who engages in one-year retreat on the essence meaning of mantra. It is more beneficial than [to be] a middle capacity meditator who does retreat for seven years or a lower capacity meditator who does a nine-year retreat.”

Manjushri said: “The four protectors and the ten direction guardians will protect you from all obstacles, from all directions and corners. The negative karma of the lower realms, the five uninterrupted actions, and the ten non-virtuous actions are purified. You will travel to all the pure lands of the buddhas, and in the Blissful Pure Land. You will be reborn on the lion’s throne in the lotus heart of the Blissful Pure Land. You will perform the actions of all the buddhas in all directions.”

Manjushri said: “This great Dharma wheel protects you from all the harm-givers, devas, spirit possessions, from the nagas down below, from Steno in the middle, and from the multitude of yakshas.”

From *The Peerless Wish-Granting Jewel Tantra*: “The person who turns this wheel which possesses OM MANI PADME HUM will be blessed by all the gurus, the deities will grant realizations, those gone to bliss will pay attention to him or her, and the Dharma protectors will eliminate all obstacles.”

From *The Will of the Action of the Compassionate Eye Loving One*: “Each time you turn this OM MANI PADME HUM Dharma wheel equals the number (of the mantra) of the approximation retreat.”

The benefits of establishing the Dharma wheel in earth, water, fire, and wind: “When you put this great wheel OM MANI PADME HUM up in the wind, all those sentient beings who are touched by the wind and all those migrators abiding in the direction of the wind will be

liberated from the sufferings of the lower realms. When you place the Dharma wheel in the fire, any sentient being who smells the smoke and all those migrators who see the light of the fire will be liberated from the sufferings of the lower realms. If you place the Dharma wheel in the ground, all those migrator beings who receive the dust and the sentient beings abiding in that ground will be liberated from the sufferings of the lower realms. If you place the Dharma wheel in water, all those sentient beings abiding and drinking the water will be liberated from the sufferings of the lower realms.”

Therefore, the fortunate capable beings turn the great Dharma wheel upright: the highest intelligent person will achieve enlightenment and work for sentient beings; the middle capable being will achieve fortunate rebirth and join the holy Dharma; and the lowest capable being will achieve good rebirth, separate from the ten non-virtuous actions.

If you place the Dharma wheel at home and turn it, the migrator beings abiding in that house will be liberated, and the home will become similar to the Potala (Pure Land of Chenrezig). At the time of death, if you place the Dharma wheel with OM MANI PADME HUM next to your head and make requests with intense devotional mind, without need of practicing *powa* (transference of consciousness) your consciousness will be transferred in one instant to the heart of the Compassionate One. Therefore, without qualms of a two-pointed mind in this profound supreme Dharma wheel, one should cherish it, build the Dharma wheel with perseverance, and turn it with an intense wish.

The Savior Loving One Maitreya said: “If you offer good divine robes to the profound Dharma wheel, you will receive good clothing for 500 lifetimes. Due to the merits of having offered the hook to the profound Dharma wheel, you will be able to go through all the paths of liberation. By the merits of offering the hanging weight, you will become the savior of all migrator beings. You will accumulate more merits than having recited 100,000 times 10,000,000 mantras. The titans and the harm-givers will prostrate to you. You will control human beings, wealth, and food. All your connections will become meaningful, and sentient beings touched by your shadow will be liberated from the lower realms.”

If you offer various needs – food and so forth – to this Dharma wheel with OM MANI PADME HUM, you will become the thousand wheel–turning Dharma king, enjoying whatever you wish. And at the end you will meet the Superior Compassionate Eye Looking One. For those fortunate beings who reveal this Dharma wheel possessing OM MANI PADME HUM to others, or explain or spread the teachings of this wheel, it is like spreading the teachings of the buddhas.

From *The Tantra Possessing the Lotus Garland*: “In short, all the accumulation of vices, defeats, downfalls, and so forth will be purified without effort. One is liberated just by seeing and hearing.”

From *The Tantra of the Circle of Six Thousand*: “Even for the person who turns this precious wheel, any sentient being who sees, hears, remembers, or touches him or her completes the

merits, purifies defilements, and achieves enlightenment.”

From *The Sutra of the Great Chu Lung*: “By the merits generated by offering a golden pinnacle (to the Dharma wheel), one will receive perfect enjoyments for eons. Due to the merits of having offered services, one will possess a good heart and clear mind wisdom. The person who turns the Dharma wheel will become the son of the thousand buddhas, the guide of all migrators. Thus is explained by the Buddha. When death comes, place the Dharma wheel at your crown and you won’t need to practice *powa*. When you carry the Dharma wheel and meet other sentient beings, even those who have killed their father or mother will be liberated. Even the sentient beings who see the wheel on the bridge will be liberated.”

Dictated to Fabrizio Champa Palgye in Dharamsala March 1998, for Richard Gere who came for His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s Losar teachings.

The Mani Wheel

Around Losar 1998, I had a silver prayer wheel that had been ordered by Lama Pasang. Richard Gere was in Dharamsala at that time and did not know about mani prayer wheels, so I mentioned how I had found a prayer wheel text and how important and beneficial prayer wheels were. In the past, in Solu Khumbu, I hadn’t believed that turning a prayer wheel could become Dharma, because Dharma has to do with the mind. But all the Solu Khumbu old people, including my mother, used to turn prayer wheels almost all day, even when crossing mountains by foot.

Then I found a text that had belonged to the Lawudo Lama, who is said to be my past life incarnation and whose name was Lama Yeshe. Most of the texts left in the Lawudo Lama’s very humid cave were handwritten, so I had to dry them out on the roof for a while. While doing this, I noticed one old scripture called *Mani Kumbum (The 100,000 Teachings on Mani)*. There were two or three lines talking about the lineage of prayer wheels. Nagarjuna received it from the land of the nagas, who had originally received it from Chenrezig. Nagarjuna passed the lineage on to Lion-Face Dakini; she passed it to Padmasambhava, and he then brought it to Tibet. These references gave me faith.

Then the text explained the visualization of how different colored beams of light emanate from the mantra OM MANI PADME HUM throughout the six realms of samsara, purifying sentient beings of the five types of delusion and generating the five types of wisdom in their minds. This, too, gave me faith in prayer wheel practice.

When I told Richard about all this, he immediately said that he was fully convinced and also had faith in the practice, so I gave him my silver prayer wheel. Later he had to go to Bombay to raise funds for people with AIDS and took the prayer wheel with him. Many actors came to meet him, and because he was carrying the prayer wheel, they touched it and felt its power. One actress felt so much power that she started to shake.

Anyway, I translated the benefits of prayer wheels for Richard, choosing quotations from a text compiled by the Seventh Panchen Lama, Tempai Nyima, which I had received in Sydney from Kechog Rinpoche, an incarnate lama from Sera-me Monastery. As well as explaining the extensive benefits of prayer wheels, this text also tells you how to make them. The end few quotations are from another text by a Kagyu lama; it might be based on the explanations of Karma Pakshi, the Second Karmapa Lama.

My root guru, His Holiness Trijang Rinpoche, built the McLeod Ganj prayer wheel that is situated near the many Tibetan restaurants and Indian vegetable shops. It was built for people young and old to turn and circumambulate in order to purify their negative karma and collect extensive merit to quickly get out of samsara and achieve enlightenment. It was also built in memory of one of His Holiness Trijang Rinpoche's attendants who had taken care of and served Rinpoche since he was very young. This attendant had passed away in India, so the prayer wheel was built for his purification as well, for him to complete the path and achieve enlightenment. That was the immediate cause for building that prayer wheel, but of course, it was to benefit everyone else as well.

When Geshe Rabten Rinpoche lived in Dharamsala, he used to keep a large prayer wheel in front of him and would turn it by pulling a string connected to its bottom. He was my first philosophy teacher in the Buxa refugee camp. He was a great scholar and a highly attained yogi. It is quite rare to see geshe from the three great monasteries Sera, Ganden, or Drepung with prayer wheels, so it was always surprising to see Geshe Rinpoche with one, but that might have been because his root guru was His Holiness Trijang Rinpoche, and perhaps when His Holiness Trijang Rinpoche built the prayer wheel in McLeod Ganj, Geshe Rinpoche realized the important benefits of prayer wheels.

Sometimes houses in Tibet and Solu Khumbu would contain large prayer wheels, with smaller prayer wheels near your bed to turn. They often had small bells on them. In Amdo, Lama Tsongkhapa's Kumbum Monastery has many prayer wheels, as does Tashi Drang Khyil Monastery, which has many prayer wheels all the way around its perimeter. The main temple in Lhasa also has rows of small prayer wheels around it.

Besides the extensive benefits of prayer wheels taught in texts, there's also my own experience. Some years ago at Chenrezig Institute in Australia, even though I had been there many times, when Geshe Lama Konchog was resident teacher, the place seemed extremely serene, peaceful and very special. I thought it must be due to Geshe Lama Konchog's realization of bodhichitta. Later, however, it occurred to me that Chenrezig Institute now had a small prayer wheel that had been built by Geshe Lama Konchog, and I realized that the peace must, in fact, be due to that.

After that, I went to Brazil. One lady there, who I call Amala, had been working for Tarthang Tulku's center for a year, rolling mantras and working on holy objects. In all that time she had never even seen Tarthang Tulku, which she found quite hard. She gave me a book by one of his students, about how at his centers the students work at making holy objects, such as statues, stupas, and prayer wheels. It said that after a prayer wheel has been made, the place completely transforms, becomes very peaceful. That line in the book also increased my faith and confirmed my impression that Chenrezig Institute was serene because of its prayer wheel.

So, in addition to what the texts mention, my own experience is also that prayer wheels transform the environment into a peaceful one and bless all beings nearby, including the insects on the ground, protecting them from rebirth in the lower realms.

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