

The Benefits of Prayer Wheels

By Chatral Sangye Dorje

Om swasti!

*I bow down before the one from whom great clouds of
immeasurable compassion
gently and beautifully envelop beings with rains of the
four ways of taming disciples,¹
thereby sowing a harvest of beneficence and happiness
for them –
the incomparable teacher Śākyamuni.*

*The vajra enlightened speech of all triumphant buddhas
is Amitābha,
whose indestructible wisdom kaya was miraculously
born in the clear ocean of Sind
as the important and renowned second Buddha,
Pema Jungney – I hold you as my crown jewel.*

*The enlightened activity of buddhas is unceasing
during the final dark times of existence.
It churns the depths of samsara and contains the power
of four types of liberation.²
It manifests as prayer wheels for the fortunate to be
tamed.*

¹ Tibetan: ‘dul ba rnam par bzhi. This means taming through the great merit of wisdom body (sku bsod nam chen pos ‘dul ba); taming by direct perception of wisdom mind (thugs mngon sum pas ‘dul ba); taming by unfathomable miraculous activity (rdzu ‘phrul bsam mi khyab pas ‘dul ba); and taming by knowledge through wisdom speech (gsung rig pas ‘dul ba).

² Liberation upon sight, sound, recollection and touch.

Thus it is also appropriate to worship these wheels with complete devotion.

This homage introduces the path and the explanation follows here:

Buddha Śākyamuni revealed an inconceivable number of ways to skillfully and compassionately tame disciples. The six-syllable mantra is included among these methods.³ It is the quintessence of all secret, vidyās, and dhārani mantras, representing the indivisibility of deity and mantra. This principal mantra has been perfectly written five hundred million times as a dhārani and rolled up to place inside a prayer wheel. Now the time has come to explain the origin of this kind of precious Dharma prayer wheel.⁴

There are three parts to my teaching: an explanation of the origin of prayer wheels along with their benefits; an explanation of how to make large prayer wheels; and finally a presentation of how to support these roots of virtue through dedication and aspiration prayers for unsurpassed awakening.

Generally in the teachings of many of the new and old schools and in the teachings classified as sūtra, mantra and direct instruction (upadeśa) there are numerous instructions about making prayer wheels powered by the four elements as well as hand-held wheels. These instructions are also found in the long orally transmitted lineage (Kama) and in the Treasure tradition lineage (Terma). Not only do such instructions exist but they actually have been put into practice by many masters of the

³ i.e. Om Mani Pema Hung

⁴ This was written on the occasion of the consecration of Samten Lama's great prayer wheel.

old and new schools in India and Tibet. This prayer wheel tradition spread throughout the countries of India, Nepal, and the Tibetan regions. It is undeniable that great waves of benefit have ensued from this incredible enlightened activity, and countless beings have attained liberation and omniscience.

It is said:

Even if space were to disappear,
the blessings of mantra will not vanish.
The awareness-mantras propounded by gods and rishis
are undeceiving.
Therefore then how could the activity of secret mantra
deceive?
These teachings come from the one free from desire
[the Buddha].
They have never deceived and they never will.
Mantra and interdependence are inconceivable.

Specifically the origin of the six-syllable prayer wheel is expounded in genuine ancient texts as follows:

Noble Avalokiteśvara gave Master Nāgārjuna a prophecy saying:

In a palace in the land of nāgās,
Bodhisattva Nāgā King has a very precious Dharma
wheel
that brings about swift liberation from the lower realms,
through mere sight, sound, thought or touch.
If you retrieve it, there will be great benefit for sentient
beings.

So he prophesized.

Then, Master Nāgārjuna miraculously departed for the land of nāgās and made this request to Bodhisattva Nāgā King:

Nāgā King, please listen to me.

Noble Avalokiteśvara prophesized that I should journey to the land of nāgās because you, Bodhisattva Nāgā King have a precious Dharma wheel that liberates all suffering of the three lower realms by sight, sound, thought or touch.

Thus I have come to request this from you as he instructed.

Please give me this Dharma wheel out of your compassion!

Bodhisattva Nāgā King replied:

My precious Dharma wheel that quickly liberates all six classes of sentient beings from the great suffering of the lower realms by mere sight, sound, recollection, or touch was given to my nāgās by the previous Buddha Dīpaṃkara.

Afterward all nāgās were filled with happiness and many also became enlightened. Previously Avalokiteśvara requested the profound mantra of this Dharma wheel from the buddhas. It is the essence of the dhārani mantras: Om Mani Padme Hung. Since my prayer wheel is filled with this mantra, which gathers as one the wisdom body, speech, mind, qualities and activities of all buddhas, I will give it to you. However you should also serve the teachings of the Buddha and benefit sentient beings through making profound prayer wheels powered by the four elements.

So he said and then he gave the wheel along with practical instructions.

Then Arya Nāgārjuna brought the wheel to the human realm to the land of Aryas, India, and presented it there to Lion-faced Dākinī. She gave it to the mahāsiddha Tilopa and he then gave it to the great pandit Naropa. Naropa gave it to Marpa Lotsawa, and then it went to Milarepa, Dagpo Lhaje, and then to Grey-Headed Khampa. This is the progression of the lineage. Finally it came to the siddha Karma Pakshi, whose collected writings contain much information about the benefits of prayer wheels. I briefly mention this lineage here in order to bring forth confidence and inspiration.

Moreover the Indian scriptures and the Treasures of Guru Padmasambhava have both extensive and concise oral instructions on prayer wheels. These are authentic teachings containing practical instructions for making prayer wheels along with explanations of the benefits. Through carefully reading these, mistaken ideas can be discarded and eyes of intelligence gained. It is very important not to fall into the trap of doubt.

Related to what I have mentioned above regarding the benefits of prayer wheels, I will explain a bit further using scriptural quotations.

It is said:

Buddha Amitābha
explained the benefits of the six syllables
in order to benefit sentient beings living in dark times.
Someone who spins a prayer wheel
while simultaneously reciting the six syllables
has fortune equal to one thousand buddhas.

The perfect words of the Triumphant Buddha Who Speaks the Truth say:

Dripa Namsel listen carefully!⁵
Compared to a supreme practitioner who meditates
on the essential meaning for one year,
turning a prayer wheel once is better.
Compared to an intermediate practitioner who meditates
on the essential meaning for seven years,
spinning a prayer wheel once is better.
Compared to an inferior practitioner who meditates
on the essential meaning for nine years,
turning a prayer wheel once is better.
Compared to eons spent listening, contemplating, and
meditating,
spinning a prayer wheel once is better.

Buddha Dripa Namsel said:

Compared to practicing the ten paramitas for a thousand
eons,
spinning a prayer wheel once is better.
Compared to expounding and hearing the *tripiṭaka*
and the four classes of tantra for eons,
spinning a prayer wheel once is better.

Noble Avalokiteśvara said:

The great dhāraṇī prayer wheel is more exalted than
other prayer wheels.
Fortunate beings with trust in it
should spin it and pray.

⁵ Sarvaṇīvaraṇaṣkambhin

This will be supreme protection for this life and the next.

The tantra *Unsurpassed Wish-fulfilling Jewel* says:

Whoever spins a mani-mantra prayer wheel –
will be blessed by all lamas,
will be granted siddhis by the wisdom deities,
will be known by all buddhas,
and will have obstacles dispelled by the dharma-
protectors.

The *Final Testament of Avalokiteśvara* says:

Each revolution of a six-syllable mantra prayer wheel
is a complete mantra recitation.
One spin of a prayer wheel [containing one mantra] is
multiplied by one,
and ten spins multiply tenfold.
Writing one hundred mantras multiplies [the recitation]
one hundred-fold.
Spinning that ten times multiplies the recitation one-
thousand-fold,
and this becomes one-hundred thousand and so on.
Therefore oral instructions on prayer wheels are
important.
Not understanding them but trusting in other teachings
is akin to a blind person trying to be a guard.
How could the aim be achieved?
Or it is like an idiot trying accomplish something grand,
or like an old donkey sinking into mud.
Oral instructions on prayer wheels are very important.

Avalokiteśvara's Guhyasamaja Tantra states:

Here is the visualization for a mani mantra prayer wheel:

From the great Dharma wheel rays of light emanate and completely gather the emotional poisons, suffering, and negative habitual tendencies – the seeds of the six classes of beings – without exception.

Then they dissolve back into the six-syllable prayer wheel.

Imagine that negative emotional states and karma, along with their seeds, and the habitual tendencies of the six classes of beings, along with their seeds, are burned, destroyed, and purified.

If you possess these oral instructions you will be liberated from the causes, conditions, and results of samsara, and from all negative emotions, karma, transgressions, and obscurations.

Prayer wheels are what sever the root of samsara.

This instruction is extremely secret and important for practice.

Radiating lights rays from the mantras of these precious wheels – the application of activity – penetrate all beings, and loving-kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity – the four-immeasurables – are spontaneously established in their minds.

The six paramitas - generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, contemplation and wisdom – are perfected.

Glorious Vajrasattva said:

Whoever earnestly spins a prayer wheel
will attain the first bodhisattva ground Very Joyful.
The ten grounds will be perfected
all the way up to the tenth ground, Clouds of Dharma.

The paths from the first – the Path of Accumulation –
all the way up to the fifth, the Path of No More
Learning,
will be completely perfected.
One will attain the result of the five kāyas and five
wisdoms,
and will achieve spontaneously present buddhahood.

The *Windmill of Enlightened Deeds of Sublime Masters* says:

All sentient beings that are touched by the continuous
wind of prayer wheels will be liberated.

The *Windmill of Enlightened Deeds of Lopon Padma* says:

Here is the purpose of prayer wheels:
for those who lack diligence to practice the oral
instructions,
and who abide freely,
they bring the attainment of *siddhis*.
For those who are diligent,
they function as supports for pure mantra recitation.
They can even purify
infinite negative deeds effortlessly.
The many wisdom deities and gods of the desire realm
can be accomplished simultaneously.
The one in whose name the prayers in a wheel are
written and spread
will experience purification of faults
and the perfection of noble wisdom qualities,
even if he or she does not wish this.
Beings of the eight unfree states will be liberated
merely by being touched by the shadow of a prayer
wheel.
Any of the four elements that have been touched by a
prayer wheel
liberate the lower realms just by their contact.

This has been taught by the triumphant buddhas.
In sum, even if someone has many negativities and faults,
they are purified effortlessly.
Even touching a prayer wheel just once can result in liberation.
They bring the effortless attainment of happiness, goodness and many enlightened qualities.

So it is said, and furthermore:

There are benefits of making prayers wheels from the four elements,
And in the case of a great wheel filled with the six-syllables,
if it placed in a high place with wind
sentient beings who are touched by this wind
and all those who live in the direction of it
will be liberated from the suffering of the lower realms.
When a fire is lit beneath it,
sentient beings who smell the smoke
and those who are touched by the light of this fire
will be liberated from the suffering of the lower realms.
When such a prayer wheel is built upon water
then all sentient beings who live in that water
and all beings who drink it
will be liberated from the suffering of the lower realms.

And:

If a great prayer wheel is constructed and spun inside a home,
then all that live in that home
will be liberated from the suffering of the lower realms,
and it becomes just like the palace of Avalokiteśvara.

And:

If a mani wheel is put on the pillow at the time of death
and intense prayers are made,
there is no need to request transference.
In one instant the consciousness itself transfers directly
into the enlightened heart of Avalokiteśvara.
Therefore, don't have any doubt or uncertainty about
these profound mani wheels.
Make efforts to construct them and spin them intensely
with yearning –
it is most important to be diligent.

Regarding the way of spinning prayer wheels it is said:

If you spin a prayer wheel written with Om Mani
Padme Hung like an umbrella,
your body will be good and your sense faculties clear.
If you spin it carelessly,
you will be reborn with a weak body.
If you spin it sideways,
you will be reborn as a hunch-backed animal.
If you spin it upside-down,
you will be reborn as a cripple.
If you do not construct a prayer wheel properly,
you will be reborn as a blind person.
If you develop wrong views
about the sound of prayer wheels,
you will be reborn deaf.
If you denigrate prayer wheels,
you will be reborn as a stupid mute.
Therefore if fortunate ones properly spin these great
prayer wheels vertically,

those who are most intelligent will attain Buddhahood and benefit sentient beings.

Those who are of middling intelligence will be born as humans and connect with the sacred Dharma, and the least intelligent will be born as humans, will abandon wrong-doing, and engage in virtuous activities.

Second is a description of the history of constructing this great prayer wheel endowed with these benefits.

Drida Zelmo Gang is renowned within the area known as the “Four Rivers and Six Ranges” or Dokham in the country of greater Tibet. Here there is a great river, flowing with gold, to the south of which is the abode of the protector Pemai Genyen Chenpo Yonten Ritra or Dorje Drag. Also called Rege, this is a place where in previous times the great awareness-holder from Katog, Dorje Tsewang Norbu, lived. He was a great siddha as famous as the sun and moon. Samten, the son of Chodo, comes from his lineage. Samten is naturally endowed with a pure mind for the Dharma and loves to be generous.

In central Nepal is a special site near a great holy sanctuary of primordial accomplishment, which has been blessed by many previous buddhas. There is found a great stūpa, Gomasala Gandha, prophesized by the triumphant buddhas. Rege Samten thought it would be beneficial to construct a great prayer wheel in the center of the four paths to the east of this Swyambhu stūpa, and discussed his idea with me, Sangye Dorje, a follower of Padmasambhava. I also thought this activity would be beneficial and wrote to Akasu Devi, a natural yogini, to request her help in obtaining favorable conditions to secure some land to build the house for his prayer wheel.

Recognizing the virtue of this activity, Akasu Devi made great effort and presented our request to the peerless Nepalese King Shripanch Sarkar Birendra Bir Bikram Shah, and our wish was granted. Then Minister Shri Gundze Shari Prasad Singh came especially to the sacred site and arranged the auspicious circumstances to begin. Subsequently I performed the rituals for the consecration of the land according to our scriptural tradition and then in the sixteenth rabjung, we began construction on the first day of the tenth month of the female wood hare year, a Wednesday, which is the perfect day for accomplishing. Finally in the ninth month of the fire dragon year on the occasion of the great celebration of the Buddha's descent from heaven, the consecration was performed.

The third section is a final teaching on dedicating these unsurpassed roots of virtue through excellent aspirations for perfect enlightenment. Here we say:

The unceasing stream of virtue gathered from such
noble deeds like these
and only wholesome, I dedicate for parent beings
equal to the extent of space
so that samsara's ocean of suffering will be emptied
and all will realize the state of unsurpassed perfect
awakening.
Temporarily, through the strength of this totally pure
virtue
may sickness, famine, war and fighting in the world
be pacified.
May gentle and timely rains fall
so crops and animals will always be healthy.
May we connect to the noble qualities of the higher
realms.

May all who see the sublime form of this prayer
wheel,
and hear, recollect or spin it with their hands,
as well as all who honor it with homage and
offerings,
or are touched by its wind,
purify obscurations and perfect the accumulations.
Whilst we have been building this wheel itself,
may all who have connected to it
through offering wealth or food
including even the smallest living beings that have
died at the site
attain the pure seed of liberation.
May the stainless tradition of prayer wheels
filled with the sacred mantras of bodhisattvas and
buddhas,
spread to all reaches of the universe,
and through the unceasing wisdom activity of the
Triple Gem
may sentient beings equal to the extent of space find
happiness.
May the difficulties and obstacles
faced by those who have faith in the Buddha's
teachings be pacified,
and may they be able to sustain themselves properly
endowed with the peerless support of the freedoms
and advantages of a human rebirth.
Free from the worry due to merit diminishing or
excessive hardship for livelihood,
may their food, clothing and shelter be stable
and may they awaken upon the path to liberation.
May the three noble activities of study,
contemplation, and meditation
undertaken by virtuous practitioners everywhere
be like the waxing moon – growing and increasing.

Even at the end of existence, may the buddhas'
delightful supreme path not decline
and its explanations and accomplishment remain
unspoiled.

May all benevolent gods who rejoice in the teachings
and the oath-bound guardians with great strength and
power
always protect us like excellent watchmen, never
distracted.

May the glory of perfect excellence converge
and may those who have aversion to the Buddha's
teaching
and injure its followers, intend to cheat them
or rob the wealth and support offered
for constructing temples and statues
be disrupted and finished by the signs of fierce
activity and subjugating mantras.

Ultimately may all connections, both positive and
negative,
turn into vessels for the completely pure path of
liberation.

May all who tread upon the paths of the three
vehicles
remain steadfast in their renunciation
and dredge samsara from its depths.
May everything be auspicious!

The sponsor Dampa Sampten, with pure motivation and jewels
of devotion and generosity, requested me and I, Chatral Sangye
Dorje, wrote this in the female fire dragon year in the ninth
month. May it be virtuous!

Sarva Dha Kalaya Nam Bha Wantu