

The Use and Benefits of Prayer Wheels

By His Holiness Jigdal Dagchen Sakya

In May of 2004, Sakya Monastery of Tibetan Buddhism (www.sakya.org) in Seattle along with Earth Sanctuary (www.earthsanctuary.org) completed the design and construction of three Tibet-Tech prayer wheels, each with 1.3 trillion mantras inside them. Through March 9, 2005, these prayer wheels have been spun over 375,000 revolutions, releasing 507,837,506,940,000,000 mantras.

The primary goal of the traditional Tibetan prayer wheel practice is to relieve the miseries of all beings. Merit, peace, and kindness are radiated through the blessings of the mantras inside the prayer wheel and by the intention and concentration of the spiritual practitioner.

Many Buddhists recite *Om Mani Padme Hum*, the six-syllable mantra of loving kindness and compassion for Chenrezi, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. Although difficult to accomplish, some very diligent people have been able to recite 100,000,000 *Om Mani Padme Hum*'s in one lifetime. If we assume that one recited 100,000,000 mantras in each 80-year lifetime, it would take 406 aeons (i.e., a span of one billion years) to recite as many mantras released from these three prayer wheels in these nine months. This has incalculable merit and benefit for all beings.

Here is what Chuck Pettis, who facilitated the design and construction of the Tibet-Tech prayer wheels says about his personal experience with these prayer wheels.

We initially built three Tibet-Tech prayer wheels to be installed at Earth Sanctuary nature reserve and meditation parkland on Whidbey Island near Seattle. After feeling the power of the prayer wheels, I kept one for my shrine where I spin it in conjunction with my daily spiritual practices. I can feel my bodily sensations change as I spin it; it feels like a spiritual and pure "high" as I am motivated to generate maximum Bodhicitta. It gives my practices more meaning and our home has become very peaceful. At Earth Sanctuary, I always ask people how they feel while at Earth Sanctuary. Almost everyone says, "peaceful," with a big smile on their face!

Here are a few additional comments from people who have personally experienced the power of the Tibet-Tech prayer wheels:

- *The energy is so soft and sublime; thank you from the depth of my heart on behalf of all suffering beings.*
- *As Caretaker of Earth Sanctuary, I introduce many people that are doing spiritual retreat to the prayer wheel. Every single one of them has wanted to spin the wheel as part of their retreat. When the prayer wheels were first installed at Earth Sanctuary, I brought a Native American Sundancer to see them. He spun them and said he could see the prayers spiraling out of the wheel. Now every time he comes to Earth Sanctuary he makes a point to go spin the wheel and actively encourages others to do so also. He feels the prayer wheel is very good for the earth and for all beings.*

How to Use a Prayer Wheel

The prayer wheel should be turned clockwise with single-pointed concentration of body, speech, and mind. The activity is easy to do, the meaning and or purpose is great, and the benefit is

great. It is easy and fast to turn the prayer wheel and it does not require great physical strength or many repetitions.

Mindfully turning a prayer wheel produces the same merit and benefits as having recited the number of mantras inside the prayer wheel. This is accomplished through the clockwise turning of the prayer wheel which activates and releases the power of the mantras inside. The Meditational Deities, Dakinis, and Dharma Protectors automatically help us when we turn a prayer wheel.

When to Use a Prayer Wheel

You can spin a prayer wheel during your daily meditation and mantra recitations. The prayer wheel can be spun while performing group spiritual practices such as Chenrezi, The Heart Sutra, A Praise of the Twelve Deeds of Lord Buddha, etc. The prayer wheel should not be spun while the Lama is speaking or giving a spiritual teaching. The prayer wheel can also be spun circumambulating a stupa, a sacred place and even while watching television or listening to radio or music.

There is an excellent "Method for Meditating with the Prayer Wheel" in the book, *Wheel of Great Compassion: The Practice of the Prayer Wheel in Tibetan Buddhism* by Lorne Ladner.

Proper Construction of Prayer Wheels

Prayer wheels should be constructed under the guidance and direction of an experienced Lama. Prayer wheels should also be blessed and consecrated by a Lama.

In old Tibet, mantras inside prayer wheels were hand printed. More recently, the mantras have been put on microfilm. In our Tibet-Tech™ "modern" prayer wheels, the mantras are put onto DVDs, very carefully and accurately.

Some people have asked, "How can mantras be put onto DVDs? Will they still work?" The answer is "yes." If we think the prayer wheel has great benefit for all beings, then it does provide great benefit. Consider the following spiritual passage written by the Shakya monk Kunga Sangpo for the sake of students in accordance with the teaching of Acarya Shraddhakarawama.

*For all phenomena that arise from a cause,
The Tathagata has taught their cause and their cessation;
This is the teaching of the Great Ascetic.*

*Do not perform any misdeeds at all,
Practice excellent virtue!
Completely tame the mind!
This is the doctrine of the Buddha.*

Prayer Wheel Benefits

Using the prayer wheel produces extraordinary and inconceivable benefits. Here is a listing of benefits of spinning the prayer as described in two ancient Tibetan Buddhist texts. First, here are benefits as translated and summarized from the *Ma ñi'i phan yon*¹ or "The Benefits of Ma ñi."

¹ *Ma ñi 'khor lo'i phan yon*. Palace Monastery [sic], Gangtok, Sikkim: Sherab Gyaltzen Lama for Dzongsar Khyntse [sic] Labrang, 1985. Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Literature Series, Volume 136. 25 pages. "On the benefits to

- The Meditational Deities, Dakinis, and Dharma Protectors automatically help us when we turn a prayer wheel.
- Turning the prayer wheel has the power to quickly bless; it has the vastness of great skill in means; its actions are quick; the power of turning the wheel brings freedom from demons/obstacles, anti-Buddhists, vow-breakers, 80,000 ghosts, 360 evil spirits, 18 untimely deaths, averts all obstacles; and will guard you. All enemies will be overcome.
- The prayer wheel is like a precious jewel: whatever you wish for, it will accomplish all the supreme and ordinary attainments.
- Turning this wheel with great remorse and confession will eliminate the five actions of immediate retribution, the four heavy (bad deeds), the eight wrong views, and the ten non-virtues.
- If you turn the wheel by hand, whoever sees you turning the wheel, touches you or the wheel, remembers you or the wheel, is struck by the shadow of you or the wheel will never go to the three lower realms and will be established on the stage of Buddhahood.
- Turning the wheel is more powerful than 100 monks doing long life prayers and mantras, and more powerful than 108 meditators visualizing the vajra protective circle.
- Any man or woman who turns the wheel will obtain whatever they wish for that is in harmony with the Dharma.
- Whoever turns the prayer wheel will not be born as a householder with wrong views, as a cripple, blind, deaf, mute, or as a pauper.
- You will get an impartial enlightened mind acting for the benefit of beings.

Here are benefits of spinning the prayer wheel as translated from the *Ma ni 'khor lo'i phan yon*² or "The Benefits of the Prayer Wheel:"

- One turning of a prayer wheel is equal to reading one time the Tanjur (the translated commentaries on the teaching of the Buddha).
- Turning the wheel twice is equal to reading the translated Word of the Buddha (Kanjur) once.
- Turning the wheel three times eliminates the obscurations of body, speech, and mind.
- Turning the wheel ten times eliminates misdeeds as large as Mt. Meru.
- Turning the wheel 100 times is equal to Yama, King of the Dharma.
- Turning the wheel 1,000 times one will realize the meaning of the Dharmakaya, beneficial to oneself.
- Turning the wheel 10,000 times accomplishes the benefit of others, beneficial to others.
- Turning the wheel 100,000 times, one will be born as an attendant to Chenrezi.
- Turning the wheel one million times, the sentient beings of the six realms will obtain an ocean of happiness.
- Turning the wheel ten million times, delivers all sentient beings from hell.

be derived from the use of the prayer wheel and the recitation of the Avalokiteśvara formula[.] Reproduced from a block print from the 'Bri-guñ Ñi-ma-lcañ-ra blocks"

² *Ma ni'i phan yon*. Palace Monastery [sic], Gangtok, Sikkim: Sherab Gyaltsen Lama for Dzongsar Khyntse [sic] Labrang, 1985. Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Literature Series, Volume 142. 11 pages. "On the benefits to be derived from the repeated utterance of the Om-ma-ñi-padme-hūm formula, dhāraṇī of Avalokiteśvara[.] Reproduced from an ancient manuscript from the Library of Jokhang Lama Gyaltsen of Sikkim.

- Turning the wheel 100 million times, one will become equal to noble Chenrezi.
- According to the *Chu klung chen po 'i mdo* (The Great River Sutra), turning the wheel once has greater benefit than meditating for seven years. Turning the wheel once has greater benefit than an eon of teaching, learning, and meditation; greater benefit than striving with the six perfections for an eon; has greater benefit than teaching and learning the Three Baskets and the Four Classes of Tantra for an eon. Reciting the six-syllable mantra and turning the prayer wheel on holy days is equal to the good fortune of a thousand Buddhas. The person who turns the prayer wheel will become the Bodhisattva follower of a thousand Buddhas.
- At the time of death, placing the prayer wheel at the Brahma aperture makes the transference of consciousness unnecessary.

We are all very blessed to be born as human beings and to have the opportunity to practice the Dharma. The prayer wheel is one of the simplest and most powerful Tibetan Buddhist spiritual practices. I encourage all Lamas, Dharma Centers, monasteries, and students to do the prayer wheel practice for the happiness and relief of misery of all beings in all realms.

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H.H. Jigdal Dagchen Sakya is a Head Lama of the Sakya sect and Sakya Monastery of Tibetan Buddhism in Seattle. Dagchen Rinpoche was raised and trained as a religious leader in old Tibet. The Sakya leaders hold a position third only to His Holiness the Dalai Lama in rank. Dagchen Rinpoche is also one of the few elder non-sectarian (ri-me) lineage holders living today. He is currently working on completion of his four-volume biography documenting his life in old Tibet and his life in the West.

Lama Tulku Yeshe and Dr. Jeffrey Schoening translated and summarized the *Ma ni 'khor lo'i phan yon* and *Ma ni 'khor lo'i phan yon* texts for this article on prayer wheels.