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The Meaning Of The Short Chenrezig Mantra, Om Mani Padme Hum

MANI is method, PADME is wisdom; so MANI PADME is method-wisdom. Buddha revealed the lesser vehicle teachings, the Mahayana paramitayana teachings and the mahayana vajrayana teachings. There is method-wisdom in the lesser vehicle teachings, method-wisdom in the mahayana paramitayana teachings and method-wisdom in the mahayana Vajrayana teachings. So MANI PADME contains everything: the hinayana lesser vehicle teachings of method-wisdom, the mahayana paramitayana method-wisdom and the mahayana vajrayana method-wisdom.

By practising method-wisdom together, as signified by MANI PADME, one purifies the stains of body, speech and mind. This is signified by the OM - A U MA - these three sounds integrate to make OM, which signifies the vajra holy body, holy speech and holy mind of Buddha. By practising the method-wisdom signified by MANI PADME together, one purifies one's own ordinary body, speech and mind and they become inseparable from Buddha's vajra holy body, holy speech and holy mind. So the OM - AH U MA - signifies the three vajras.

Then, MANI PADME also signifies the mahaanuttarayoga tantra path. What I explained before is general. Now, more specifically, by depending on the path of the generation stage, which is the method of the profound secret mantra that ripens the mind, and on the completion stage, which liberates the mind, you can cease the circle of suffering, the base-time ordinary birth, death and intermediate state; actualize the path-time dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, nirmanakaya; and achieve the result-time dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, nirmanakaya. So achieving these three kayas, which are inseparable, is signified by the OM - A U MA.

Then, another meaning of MANI PADME: PADME is lotus, MANI is jewel. The lotus grows from mud but is unstained by the mud, so the reason why the Compassionate Buddha is holding a lotus is to signify that the Compassionate Buddha has completely purified and abandoned the root of samsara, ignorance - the concept of true existence. Not only that, but the Compassionate Buddha has purified even the subtle imprints and obscurations by the great wisdom directly perceiving emptiness. Therefore the Compassionate Buddha is not abiding even in the lower nirvana, the extreme of samsara. The Compassionate Buddha is not bound in that blissful state of peace, that is why he or she - whichever way is manifested - is holding the white lotus.

The reason why the Compassionate Buddha is holding a jewel in the hand, which in Sanskrit is "MANI", is that the Compassionate Buddha has achieved the highest peerless peace, the great enlightenment and because the Compassionate Buddha's holy mind is bound by great compassion he or she is not just abiding in that state of peace but instead manifesting in whatever form fits the different sentient beings with their different characteristics of mind. In this way, the Compassionate Buddha reveals various skilful means to fit the different sentient beings, and, like a wish-granting jewel, eliminates every single problem and suffering of the sentient beings and grants every single benefit and happiness to the sentient beings - temporary happiness and ultimate happiness. Because the Compassionate Buddha fulfills the wishes of all sentient beings the two hands are put together in the mudra of holding a jewel.

Now the meaning of HUM. In the root tantra Dorje Tsemo ("Tip of the Vajra") it is mentioned: I am going to explain the meaning of HUM. HUM destroys the suffering. It kills the evil beings by the mantra... This means the many sentient beings who harm or destroy the teachings of Buddha, the source of all sentient beings' happiness. ...and it cuts the lasso of samsara. A lasso is something that you use to tie things, like tying an animal to a stick, post or hook. The "lasso of samsara" is attachment, which ties us to samsara. So HUM cuts the lasso of samsara. Therefore, remember the HUM is the supreme one.

MANI PADME is the Compassionate Buddha Chenrezig's holy name. So MANI PADME is like calling "Mum!", "Mother!" or "Father!" MANI PADME is just like calling out to your mother or father. HUM persuades the Compassionate Buddha's holy mind. It is an imperative: "May the blessings of your holy mind, the great compassion, enter my heart, my mental continuum!" So that is the essential meaning of the HUM in OM MANI PADME HUM.

Other than this, MANI is dependent-arising, the truth for the all-obscuring mind. All of existence can be condensed into two truths: the truth for the all-obscuring mind or dependent-arising and the truth for the absolute wisdom. So MANI signifies the truth for the all-obscuring mind, dependent-arising, and PADME signifies the truth for the absolute wisdom. Then HUM is the unification of dependent-arising and emptiness.

Also, MANI is appearance. First we label "I", then there is the appearance of an I existing from its own side, independent and unlabelled. So the MANI signifies appearance: the appearance of samsara, nirvana, the appearance of whatever is in this room, of oneself and others, everything. All these appearances appear to exist from their own side and not as merely labelled by the mind. Then PADME signifies emptiness. So you see, all these appearances including I, action, object, samsara, nirvana, all these things that are appearing to us as existing from their own side and not as merely labelled by the mind, all these are completely empty, right there. They do not exist at all, not even the slightest atom. Because everything that exists is merely labelled by the mind, everything is empty. So MANI is appearance; PADME seeing that all these appearances are empty of true existence; HUM the inseparability of emptiness and appearance.

For example, while you are seeing a mirage, there is the appearance of water but at the same time you understand that there is no water. Similarly, all these things appear to you as truly existent but you understand at the same time that this appearance is not real, it is empty. So MANI signifies appearance; PADME signifies emptiness; HUM unifies these two.

From the general meaning I gave in the very first explanation of OM MANI PADME HUM you can see that depending on how much you understand the method-wisdom of the lesser vehicle path, the paramitayana path and the lower tantras such as kriya tantra you can elaborate on your understanding of the mantra. There are also ways to relate OM MANI PADME HUM to the generation and completion stages of highest tantra, mahaanuttarayoga tantra. And you can relate OM MANI PADME HUM just purely to the completion stage: MANI is the illusory body, PADME is clear light, and HUM the unification of these two, the result - the unification of no-more-learning.

So by reciting HUM, you persuade Chenrezig's holy mind and the blessings of Chenrezig's holy mind enter into your own heart. Because of this cause blessing, you actualize the method-wisdom of the whole path to enlightenment - sutra, mahayana, vajrayana - which is signified by MANI PADME. Your ordinary body, speech and mind are purified and transform into, for example, the Compassionate Buddha's vajra holy body, holy speech and holy mind, which is signified by AH U MA - OM.

When somebody who knows the whole path recites OM MANI PADME HUM, it is like doing a direct meditation on the whole path to enlightenment. So by thinking of the meaning, you can meditate on the whole path by reciting OM MANI PADME HUM.

(Edited from a talk given at Mee Toh School, Singapore, 25 January 1993)

The Benefits of Reciting One Hundred Million Manis

A letter by Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

The benefits of reciting Compassion Buddha mantra are infinite, like the limitless sky. Even if one doesn't have much intellectual understanding of Dharma, even if the only thing that you know is Om Mani Padme Hum, still the happiest life is a life lived with an attitude free of the eight worldly concerns. If one lives one's life with that pure attitude free of attachment clinging to this life and then just spends one's life chanting Om Mani Padme Hum - this six-syllable mantra that is the essence of all Dharma - that's the purest Dharma.

It looks very simple, very easy to recite. But it's not simple when one thinks of the benefits. Here I'm going to mention just the essence of the infinite benefits:

Reciting this Compassion Buddha mantra one time completely purifies the four defeats of breaking the four root vows of liberation for self [Pratimoksha vows] and purifies the five uninterrupted negative karmas. It is said in the tantra Padmatrawa (rgyud padma trwaba) that it purifies the four root and five uninterrupted, and that all the negative karma without exception get purified.

It is also said in the discourse called Exalted Eleven-Faced One: "Bhagawan (Destroyed, Qualified, Gone Beyond), my heart mantra has such great miracle power that by reciting it one time, the four root downfalls of liberation for self are purified."

If one recites precisely as explained in the text, there is no question that one gets all these benefits.

It is also mentioned in the tantra that one achieves the four qualities of being born in the Amitabha Buddha pure land and other pure lands, at the time of death, one will see Buddha and lights happen in the sky (meaning white light or different colored clouds appear), the devas make offerings, and one never goes to the lower realms [the hell, hungry ghost and animals realms]. One will go to the pure land of Buddha or one will be reborn as a happy migrator being.

It is written in the tantra text Padma Chöpen gyi Gyud: "Sons and daughters of the race, anyone who recites the mantra Om Mani Padme Hum while thinking of me, even just one time, or just even remembering or keeping [the mantra] on the body, purifies five uninterrupted negative karmas, the nearing five uninterrupted negative karmas and all the negative karmas and they abandon the eight realms where there is no opportunity to practice Dharma: hell, preta, animal realm and so forth.

"One will not experience suffering of body, speech and mind. One will be free from fears of vicious animals, cannibals, human beings, non-human beings and sickness. One will actualize the meaning of Dharmakaya; one will see the holy face of Great Compassion, the rupakaya." One who recites ten malas a day, if they go into the water to swim, whether into a river, ocean or whatever, the water that touches the person gets blessed.

It is said that up to seven generations of that person's descendents won't get reborn in the lower realms - hell, hungry ghost and so forth. The reason for this is that due to the power of mantra, the body is blessed by the person's reciting the mantra and visualizing their body in form of the holy body of Chenrezig. Therefore, the body becomes so powerful, so blessed that this affects the consciousness up to seven generations and has the effect that if one dies with a non-virtuous thought, one is not reborn in lower realm.

Also, when such a person who has recited ten malas of Om Mani Padme Hum goes into water - it can be a river or ocean - the water that touches the person's body gets blessed, and then this blessed water purifies all sentient beings, however many billions of billions there are in the water, for example in the ocean. So it's unbelievably beneficial.

That person who does the meditation and recites the mantra when they go into the water, even to swim or play in the water, saves the animals in that water from the most unbelievable suffering of the lower realms. If that person is walking in the road and the wind touches that person's body and then goes on to touch insects, their negative karma gets purified and it causes them to have a good rebirth.

You have to understand that similarly, when that person does massage and touches others' bodies, the negative karma of those people gets purified. Such a person becomes meaningful to behold; being seen and touched by others all becomes a means to liberate other sentient beings. If a person who did Nyung Ne well is on top of a mountain and down below someone else sees that person, their negative karma gets purified.

Some of these benefits are mentioned in the tantra Thuk Je Chen po Ton Shak Pe Gyu.

So this means that even if the person's breath touches other sentient beings' bodies, their negative karma gets purified. Anybody who drinks the water where such a person swims gets purified.

A very high Amdo lama, Kungthang Jampelyang, said: "If you are able to request from the heart, even if you do Nyung Ne for one day and recite the six-syllable mantra, even though you have created the negative karma to be reborn in the hell realm without break and be burned there for years equaling the sand grains of this big earth, even those karmas get purified."

This is mentioned in a tantra text that this lama quotes. Kungthang Jampelyang also said: "You have collected limitless negative karma created from beginningless rebirths, and even in this life you may transgress the three vows, collect negative karma with the gurus and with vajra friends, then with the holy objects of the Three Rare Sublime Ones, and carelessly used the polluted food and so forth [food offered by people with devotion or which was offered to the Sangha community by people with faith]. As you are abiding on the precipice of the hell realms, when you meet such Dharma as this, if you do have a mind, then there is no choice. You have to put all your capacity into this practice."

It is also written in the sutra called Samato go pe Do: "If this six-syllable mantra is written by hand on rocks or on stone walls and then men, women, children, daughters, sons and any sentient being touch this mantra with their hand or look at it, just by merely seeing it they become Bodhisattvas of the end of samsara."

In a text composed by the very learned Sera Je Geshe, Geshe Jampa Chodrak: "Thus, by meditating on the holy body of Compassion Buddha just once, hearing the holy name just once or keeping the word memorized or seeing the six-syllable mantra written or just touching it by hand, one gets protected from spirits called De and spirits called Za, which cause paralysis, from Yamas, evil vicious animals, diseases, dangers and harm from human beings and non-human beings, and whatever wishes of this life one has - such as long life, wealth, power and so forth - get fulfilled exactly as wished.

Then the five uninterrupted negative karmas and so forth, such as extremely heavy negative karma collected from beginningless time get purified, and one receives good rebirth through all one's future lives and one is able to see Compassion Buddha's holy face and so forth...

"If it is said that there are such limitless skies of benefits from remembering the qualities of Arya Compassionate-Eyed One and remembering the kindness and blessings and even just reciting

the holy name, then one must attempt to practice, making offerings and requests and so forth." These comments come from a text by Geshe Jampa Chodrak and I also say the same thing.

We are unbelievably fortunate to have met with the Dharma and to have the opportunity to do recitation and meditation on Compassion Buddha. It is so easy to purify whatever negative karma collected, not just in this life, but in past lives.

Because we have met the Buddha Dharma, and especially this method, the practice of Compassion Buddha and recitation of the mantra, it is so easy to purify negative karma and collect extensive merit and so it is easy to achieve enlightenment. So we are unbelievably fortunate.

Therefore, there is nothing more foolish than not taking advantage when one has this great opportunity. Normally, one gets distracted continuously, and wastes one's own life. Not only that, but all the actions done with ego and with the three poisonous minds [anger, attachment and ignorance] create negative karma, the cause of suffering. Using this perfect human body to create only suffering - nothing more foolish than this can be found in existence.

There's a tradition to do Compassion Buddha retreat, reciting 100 million Om Mani Padme Hum mantras. It's very common in many places to hold this retreat - in Tibet, Nepal, India and Ladakh. This one at Chenrezig Institute will be the first time such a retreat is held in the West, and the first in the FPMT organization.

This is to happen there once each year - only once each year! If you're feeling guilt in your life, by attending this retreat, through purification, you overcome this.

The retreat is not just chanting mantras with sadhanas, but also includes taking eight Mahayana precepts, if not every day, at least frequently. That day, whatever merit you collect increases 100,000 times. This becomes such an easy way, a quick way, to purify, collect extensive merit, achieve enlightenment and liberate sentient beings from unimaginable sufferings and bring them to enlightenment quickly.

So you are unbelievably fortunate to attend this retreat! Even if you can't attend the whole complete retreat, you can participate for two months, one month or at least a few weeks. You could even do just one week. Hopefully this same retreat will also be established in Mongolia. Especially there, since the main food is meat, there has been so much killing and this practice helps very much for that. After the temple in Mongolia is built, hopefully thousands of people will attend the retreat there. Gradually too, I would like for this retreat to be established in other parts of the West.

This retreat also blesses the country and brings so much peace, happiness and prosperity.

Even if you know the teachings on how to meditate on bodhicitta, you still need to receive the special blessings of the deity, Compassion Buddha, therefore you need to do meditation and recitation to pursue the deity's blessing.

Therefore the recitation of this mantra is one way to actualize bodhicitta, to be able to transform the mind into bodhicitta, and to make your meditation on bodhicitta effective.

Generally, according to my experience, in my home Solo-Khumbu in the Himalayas in Nepal, there are people who live their life chanting Om Mani Padme Hum and have no idea of the three principles of the path, not even the words. They can't read or even know the alphabet, but have great devotion to compassion and bodhicitta and live their lives reciting Om Mani Padme Hum. Such people are warm-hearted, very kind, very compassionate. This is a proof from my experience that it has effect of transforming the mind into a good heart and compassion.

Without bodhicitta, you cannot cause all the happiness for all sentient beings. You cannot do perfect work for all sentient beings. That cannot happen, and you cannot achieve the complete qualities of the realizations and cessation, even for yourself.

So you are most welcome to join the 100-Million-Mantra Om Mani Padme Hum Retreat!

Colophon: Composed by Lama Zopa Rinpoche during a stay at Deer Park Buddhist Center in Madison, Wisconsin in July, 2000. Scribed and edited by Lhundup Damchö