

THE YOGA OF OFFERING FOOD



Lama Zopa Rinpoche gave this precious
food offering teaching and practice
on Christmas Day, 25 December 2000,
at Langri Tangpa Centre,
Brisbane, Australia.

LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

THE YOGA
OF
OFFERING FOOD

How to Make Eating the Cause of
Enlightenment for Oneself and All
Other Sentient Beings

Edited by Nicholas Ribush

LAMA YESHE WISDOM ARCHIVE • BOSTON
www.LamaYeshe.com

First published in 2003
10,000 copies for free distribution

LAMA YESHE WISDOM ARCHIVE
PO Box 356
WESTON
MA 02493 USA

© Lama Zopa Rinpoche 2003

Please do not reproduce any part of this
booklet by any means whatsoever without
our permission

ISBN 1-891868-09-8

Front cover photographer unknown
Designed by Mark Gatter

Printed in Canada on recycled, acid-free paper

Please contact the LAMA YESHE WISDOM
ARCHIVE for copies of our free booklets

CONTENTS

Introduction: The three ways of offering food	7
The Food Offering Practice	13
Motivation	13
Visualization	16
Blessing the offerings	16
Offering the food	18
Making other offerings	24
Dedication	26
Commentary	32
Offering food with meditation on emptiness	32
Dedication	39
Notes	41

PUBLISHER'S ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We are extremely grateful to Lama Zopa Rinpoche for his eternal and unsurpassed love, compassion, wisdom and guidance; to all our benefactors—large and small, regular and occasional; to the kind Jesse Sartain, who has generously sponsored the production of this book; and, of course, to the great Lama Yeshe, who started it all and whose kindness exceeds that of the buddhas of the past, present and future.

May whoever sees, touches, reads, remembers, or talks or thinks about this book never be reborn in unfortunate circumstances, receive only rebirths in situations conducive to the perfect practice of Dharma, meet a perfectly qualified spiritual guide, quickly develop bodhicitta and immediately attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

INTRODUCTION

THE THREE WAYS OF OFFERING FOOD

There are Hinayana and Mahayana ways of offering food. The Mahayana way includes both Paramitayana and Secret Mantra, or Vajrayana. Making charity of food to all sentient beings, including those who live in our bodies, is the Mahayana way.

The Hinayana way of offering food is basically as expressed in the prayer by Nagarjuna, where he says that the purpose of eating food is not to develop the body, to put on weight or become fit—purposes that come only from attachment—but simply to survive in order to practice Dharma. Food should be eaten without the three poisonous minds of ignorance, attachment and anger. With the motivation seeking your own freedom from samsara, offer your food to the

Triple Gem and then eat it. This is the Hinayana way of eating food.

The Mahayana sutra way of eating food is to dedicate every spoonful of food and mouthful of drink to all sentient beings, including those living in your body. In this way you make a connection with all sentient beings such that when, in future lives, they eventually become human, you can reveal the Dharma to them and lead them to enlightenment. The Mahayana way of offering food is thus done with bodhicitta motivation, as are all the daily actions of a Mahayana practitioner, thereby becoming a cause for achieving enlightenment.

The Mahayana tantra way of eating food is to see yourself, your guru and the deity as one, and make every bite of food and every mouthful of drink a tsog offering. Offer everything you eat and drink to the oneness of the three: guru, deity and yourself.

The way to do this practice is to understand that you are all the buddhas but in the aspect of the deity you are practicing. You are in the aspect of the deity but are, in reality, all the buddhas. If you make the food offering with that awareness, that meditation, every single thing you eat and drink becomes a tsog offering. Every bite and every sip become an extraordinarily powerful means of purifying all negative karma, defilements and degenerated samaya vows and collecting vast amounts of merit.

With this meditation, the guru yoga mind seeing yourself as one with your guru and deity, you create more merit than that of making offerings to all the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and all the statues, scriptures, stupas and thangkas of the buddha in the ten directions. The merit of making offerings to all Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and all statues, scriptures, stupas and thangkas in the ten directions becomes

insignificant when compared to the merit you create when you offer each spoonful of food and each mouthful of drink to yourself as one with your guru and deity.

The main thing here, however, is thinking of and making offering to yourself as the guru. Thinking of yourself as your guru and making offering with guru yoga mind is an unbelievably powerful means of creating merit. There's a huge difference in the amount of merit created between offering to the Buddha without thinking of the guru and offering by thinking of the guru; you create vastly more merit when you think of the guru and make offering.

You can apply this practice to all other daily activities in order to create extensive merit. When you enjoy objects of the five senses—beautiful sights, sounds, smells, tastes and tangible objects—or when you receive something from somebody, if you think that you are making an offering to

yourself as the guru-deity, you create an enormous amount of merit. In this way you can make everything you do in your daily life extremely meaningful. Similarly, when you wash yourself, if you do the washing yoga of offering a bath to the guru-deity, it becomes a very powerful means of purification.

As the great Tibetan yogi Milarepa, who attained enlightenment in just a few years of this brief lifetime of the degenerate age, said, “Every time I walk, I circumambulate all the holy beings; everything I eat becomes a tsog offering.” There’s more to this quote, but in short, it means that everything he did became a powerful means of purifying his mind and creating merit and, therefore, a quick path to enlightenment.

Similarly, whatever you do—eating, walking, washing, everything else—can become a very powerful method for quickly achieving enlightenment. As you purify and collect extensive merit, you bring yourself

closer to enlightenment, every minute of every day. In this way, you make your life most beneficial, meaningful, satisfying and fulfilling. Through this Mahayana practice, which is based on the Hinayana and adorned with the Vajrayana, your life becomes most beneficial, not only for yourself but for all sentient beings.

THE FOOD OFFERING PRACTICE

MOTIVATION

“The purpose of my life is to free all living beings from all suffering and its cause and lead them to full enlightenment.

“There are numberless hell beings from whom I receive all my past, present and future happiness, all realizations and enlightenment. They are the kindest, most precious beings in my life. Therefore, I must liberate them from all suffering and its cause and lead them to enlightenment by myself, alone.

“There are numberless hungry ghosts from whom I receive all my past, present and future happiness, all realizations and enlightenment. They are the kindest, most precious beings in my life. Therefore, I must liberate them from all suffering and its cause and lead them to enlightenment by myself, alone.

“There are numberless animals from whom I receive all my past, present and future happiness, all realizations and enlightenment. They are the kindest, most precious beings in my life. Therefore, I must liberate them from all suffering and its cause and lead them to enlightenment by myself, alone.

“There are numberless human beings from whom I receive all my past, present and future happiness, all realizations and enlightenment. They are the kindest, most precious beings in my life. Therefore, I must liberate them from all suffering and its cause and lead them to enlightenment by myself, alone.

“There are numberless *sura* beings from whom I receive all my past, present and future happiness, all realizations and enlightenment. They are the kindest, most precious beings in my life. Therefore, I must liberate them from all suffering and its cause and lead them to enlightenment by myself, alone.

“There are numberless *asura* beings from whom I receive all my past, present and

future happiness, all realizations and enlightenment. They are the kindest, most precious beings in my life. Therefore, I must liberate them from all suffering and its cause and lead them to enlightenment by myself, alone.

“There are numberless intermediate state beings from whom I receive all my past, present and future happiness, all realizations and enlightenment. They are the kindest, most precious beings in my life. Therefore, I must liberate them from all suffering and its cause and lead them to enlightenment by myself, alone.

“In order to do all this, I must first achieve full enlightenment myself. Therefore, I am going to practice the yoga of eating and make charity to all sentient beings, including those who live in my body, and, through the connection with all sentient beings I have created by making food charity to them at this time, bring them to full enlightenment by teaching them Dharma when they become human.”

VISUALIZATION

If you are familiar with the visualization, visualize the *Guru Puja* merit field. If not, simply visualize the deity that you practice, for example, Chenrezig, Tara or Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. But when you visualize the single aspect, remember that in essence it is your root virtuous friend, who is, in essence, all gurus, Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and the statues, stupas, scriptures, and thangkas of the ten directions. Visualizing in one of these ways, make the offering, thinking that numberless buddhas throughout the ten directions receive an immeasurable amount of nectar.¹

BLESSING THE OFFERINGS

OM AH HUM HA HO HRI (3x)

Mantra to multiply 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 BODHICITTA VAJRE /
MAHA BODHI MĀNDO PASAM KRAMANA
VAJRE / SARVA KARMA AVARANA VISHO
DHANA VAJRE SOHA (3x)

The power of truth

“By the power of the truth of the Three Rare Sublime Ones, the blessings of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas, the great richness of having completed the two merits, and the inconceivable pure sphere of existence, may it become only like that.”

We also bless all the extensive offerings in all FPMT center gompas, East and West, at Kopan, Tushita Dharamsala, and everywhere else. In the house where I live in America there are well over 400 water bowl offerings, thousands of light offerings and flowers as well, so you can offer all those offerings, too, along with any offerings at

your own house. You can bless them all together here.

Again, recite the mantra to multiply 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 BODHICITTA VAJRE / MAHA BODHI MĀNDO PASAM KRAMANA VAJRE / SARVA KARMA AVARANA VISHO DHANA VAJRE SOHA (3x)

OFFERING THE FOOD

Offering to the Guru Puja merit field or the one deity that you are visualizing as everything¹

If you make offerings to just one statue of Buddha, you collect unimaginable merit, creating causes for enlightenment, liberation from samsara and good rebirths for hundreds of thousands of lifetimes.

Therefore, it is unbelievably more meaningful making offerings to the holy objects in the *Guru Puja* merit field.

Put your palms together and prostrate to each guru in the merit field (or to the one deity that you are visualizing as everything), meditating that their essence is your root virtuous friend. Visualize that each one receives numberless nectar food offerings and generate infinite bliss within his mind. Do these three actions—prostrating, offering and generating infinite bliss—over and over again, as many times as possible or at least twenty-one times. This also applies to each of the following offerings to all the other holy objects.

Offering to all the Buddhas, Dharma and Sangha in the ten directions

Next, prostrate and make numberless nectar food offerings to all the Buddhas, Dharma and Sangha in the ten directions,

meditating that their essence is your root virtuous friend. From your side, generate infinite bliss within them.

Offering to all the statues, stupas, scriptures and thangkas of the ten directions

Next, prostrate and make numberless nectar food offerings to all the statues, stupas, scriptures and thangkas of the ten directions, meditating that their essence is your root virtuous friend. Generate infinite bliss within them as many times as possible.

Offering to His Holiness the Dalai Lama and all other virtuous friends

Next, prostrate and make numberless nectar food offerings to the Buddha of Compassion, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and all your other virtuous friends, meditating that their essence is your root virtuous friend. Generate infinite bliss within them as many times as possible.

Offering to all the holy objects in India

Next, prostrate and make numberless nectar food offerings to all the holy objects in India, meditating that their essence is your root virtuous friend. Generate infinite bliss within them as many times as possible.

Offering to all the holy objects in Tibet

Next, prostrate and make numberless nectar food offerings to all the holy objects in Tibet, including the stupa we built at Sera monastery and the Shakyamuni Buddha statue in the Jokhang, Lhasa's central temple,² meditating that their essence is your root virtuous friend. Generate infinite bliss within them as many times as possible.

Offering to all the holy objects in Nepal

Next, prostrate and make numberless nectar food offerings to all the holy objects in Nepal, for example, the Swayambhunath stupa³ and the Boudhanath stupa,⁴ as well

as all the other holy objects in Nepal, meditating that their essence is your root virtuous friend. Generate infinite bliss within them as many times as possible.

Offering to all the holy objects in all other Buddhist countries

Next, prostrate and make numberless nectar food offerings to all the holy objects in all other Buddhist countries, such as Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand and the rest, meditating that their essence is your root virtuous friend. Generate infinite bliss within them as many times as possible.

Offering to the Medicine Buddhas, Ksitigarbha and Chenrezig

Next, prostrate and make numberless nectar food offerings to the seven Medicine Buddhas for success, to Buddha Ksitigarbha so that you can fulfill the wishes of all the sentient beings, instantly bringing them all happiness up to enlightenment, and to

One-Thousand-Arm Chenrezig so that you can develop great compassion and liberate numberless sentient beings from all their suffering and bring them into full enlightenment, meditating that their essence is your root virtuous friend. Generate infinite bliss within them as many times as possible.

Offering to all sentient beings^s

Then make numberless nectar food offerings to every hell being, every hungry ghost, every animal, every human being, every asura being, every sura being and every intermediate state being. They fully enjoy those offerings and become completely liberated from all suffering and its cause. They all become enlightened in the aspect of the deity you practice.

MAKING OTHER OFFERINGS

Offering to the Guru Puja merit field or the one deity that you are visualizing as everything

Now prostrate and make all those other offerings—the light offerings wherever you are, those in your own houses, the extensive offerings in all FPMT center gompas and all the extensive offerings in the house in America that I mentioned before—which are nature of infinite bliss, to each guru in the *Guru Puja* merit field (or to the one deity that you are visualizing as everything), meditating that their essence is your root virtuous friend.

Do these three actions—prostrating, offering and generating infinite bliss—over and over again, as many times as possible or at least twenty-one times.

Continue doing the three actions of prostrating, offering and generating infinite

bliss as many times as you can while making offerings to all the other holy objects as follows:

Make extensive blissful offerings to:

All the Buddhas, Dharma and Sangha in the ten directions

All the statues, stupas, scriptures and thangkas of the ten directions

His Holiness the Dalai Lama and all other virtuous friends

All the holy objects in India

All the holy objects in Tibet

All the holy objects in Nepal

All the holy objects in all other Buddhist countries

The Medicine Buddhas, Ksitigarbha and Chenrezig

DEDICATION

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may all those sentient beings suffering unimaginably now in the hell, hungry ghost and animal realms, any FPMT students who have passed away recently, those whose names were given to me, for whom I promised to pray, who rely on me, may they all be liberated from all the suffering immediately, especially the suffering of the three lower realms, and find rebirth in a pure land where they can become enlightened right away. Otherwise, may they receive a perfect human body, meet a perfectly qualified Mahayana guru and in that way achieve enlightenment as quickly as possible.

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may my simply hearing that a sentient being is sick cause

that sentient being to recover immediately; may my simply hearing that somebody has died cause that sentient being never to be reborn in the lower realms ever again but immediately be reborn in a pure land and become enlightened there.

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may those sentient beings who have been born human being but have no opportunity to practice Dharma achieve enlightenment quickly by meeting a perfectly qualified Mahayana guru, receiving Mahayana teachings and putting those teachings into practice.

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may all the members of my family, all FPMT students and benefactors, those who sacrifice their lives serving others through the FPMT, those who rely on me, those for whom I promised to pray, those whose names have been given

to me and those serving me now, be healthy, have long lives, and may all our wishes succeed immediately according to the holy Dharma. May we be able to actualize the entire path, from guru devotion up to enlightenment, especially bodhicitta and the clear light, without even a second's delay, this being the purpose of life.

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may the holy wishes of all my virtuous friends, including His Holiness Dalai Lama, the Buddha of Compassion, succeed immediately; may they all have stable lives, and may all the FPMT Sangha be able to complete their scriptural understanding and realize the entire path to enlightenment in this very lifetime by receiving all protection and needs.

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may all the projects in the FPMT succeed immediately by

receiving everything required. May all the social service centers, the meditation centers, hospices, schools and so forth immediately pacify all physical and mental suffering of all sentient beings by spreading the complete stainless teaching of Lama Tsong Khapa in the minds of all the sentient beings by receiving everything required.

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may all the projects, buildings, temples, statues, stupas, scriptures, the five-hundred-foot Maitreya statue and all other projects in the West and in the East, including the Mongolian nunnery, monastery and other buildings, succeed immediately by receiving everything required. May the five-hundred-foot Maitreya statue and all our other projects cause bodhicitta to arise in the minds of all sentient beings. And due to that, may everybody have perfect peace and happiness and may nobody experience war, famine,

disease, torture, poverty, sicknesses or the dangers of fire, water, air, earth or car or airplane accident, from now on. May all these projects cause all sentient beings to achieve enlightenment as quickly as possible.

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, from now on, whatever action I do, whatever I experience—ups and downs, happiness or misery, health or illness, gain or loss, wealth or poverty, praise or criticism, life or death, even rebirth in hell—whatever happens to me, may all my life experiences become most beneficial and, by myself achieving enlightenment, cause all sentient beings to achieve enlightenment as quickly as possible.

“May the numberless sentient beings who worked for, suffered, died or created negative karma in the evolution of this food, the benefactors who provided this food, and all other sentient beings as well never separate from the Triple Gem, always

collect merit by making offerings to the Triple Gem, and always receive the blessings of Triple Gem.

“May the realizations of the path, from guru devotion up to enlightenment, especially bodhicitta and the clear light, be actualized in my own mind and in the minds of all sentient beings without even a second’s delay.

“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 the I, which is empty from its own side, achieve my personal deity’s or Guru Shakyamuni Buddha’s enlightenment, which is empty from its own side, and lead all sentient beings who are empty from their own side, to that enlightenment, which is empty from its own side, by myself alone, who is also empty from its own side.”

COMMENTARY

OFFERING FOOD WITH MEDITATION ON EMPTINESS

Offering food with the motivation “I’m going to practice the yoga of eating and make charity of this food to all sentient beings in order to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings” is a *bodhicitta* practice and is based on *renunciation* of samsara. The third aspect of the path to enlightenment is meditation on *emptiness*.

Think that your I, the actions of eating, offering and making charity, and the object, the food, as well as all other phenomena—enlightenment, hell, samsara, nirvana, happiness, problems, virtue, non-virtue and everything else—are nothing other than merely imputed by the mind.

The way in which all these phenomena exist is merely imputed, or labeled, by the mind, but no sooner has our mind imputed them than they appear back to us as *not* merely imputed by the mind. Although they exist as merely labeled by the mind, they appear back to us completely

opposite to their reality, as something else entirely. Immediately upon mere imputation, everything appears back to us as not merely labeled by the mind.

According to the second division of the highest of the four schools of Buddhist philosophy, the Prasangika Madhyamaka, the object of refutation is the extremely subtle hallucination of things not appearing as merely labeled by the mind. The appearance of phenomena as slightly additional to mere imputation by the mind is a hallucination, an illusion created by ignorance. As soon as our minds merely impute “this” and “that,” negative imprints left on our mental continuum by wrong conceptions in the past cause our minds to project the hallucination of inherent existence on this or that object in the present.

For example, even though there’s no I, no self, on our aggregates, ignorance makes it appear to us as if there really is an I on the aggregates. There’s a label on the base, but ignorance creates the illusion that the label, whatever it is, really does exist there on the base.

Depending upon its shape, an object becomes a suitable basis for labeling—the aggregates, a

table, a flower, a leaf or a stem. These shapes are all bases for labeling, and our mind creates the appropriate label. But then ignorance creates the illusion that the label really does exist there on its base, which is a complete hallucination.

While there's no I on the base of the aggregates, the association of body and mind, our mind labels I on the aggregates and then immediately projects that there really is an I on the aggregates. While there's no table on the base, we label table on the base of the table and then project that there really is a table there on the base. We label flower on the base of the flower, the shape that can validly receive the label flower (or leaf, stem or whatever), and then our mind hallucinates that the flower really exists there on its base. This doesn't mean that all those things—I, table, flower—don't exist. They exist, but not there, on their base.

Seeing things as existing on their base is one way of explaining inherent existence. We can also describe them as established from their own side or as existing by nature. There are different ways of describing the hallucination of inherent existence, which is our fundamental hallucination. Believing it to be true, we perpetuate our ignorance and

create all our other misconceptions. The wrong conception of self-existence prevents us from seeing the reality of phenomena, their ultimate nature.

On the basis of ignorance, the projection of the inherent existence of subject, action, object, of everything, attachment arises. Then, when something disturbs our attachment, anger arises. It's the same with jealousy, pride and all our other negative emotional thoughts. They are all based on the appearance of inherent existence projected by ignorance. Ignorance is like a mother hen and the other delusions are like her chickens.

Every day, we create more and more ignorance in this way. The moment we allow our minds to hold onto the belief that objects' appearance of inherent existence is true instead of regarding it as empty, a hallucination, an illusion or a dream, we create more ignorance, the root of samsara. With respect to the inherently existent I and the inherently existent aggregates, the moment we allow our mind to believe, to hold onto that appearance, we create the root of samsara. That wrong conception is the ignorance that is the root of samsara.

As long as we don't meditate on emptiness, practice awareness, or mindfulness, of emptiness,

dependent arising, as long as we don't regard hallucinations as the hallucinations they are, we are constantly creating the root of samsara. That's how ignorance creates all the suffering and problems we experience, such as the sufferings of rebirth, aging, sickness and death.

The wrong conception of inherent existence is the main creator of the ocean of samsaric suffering that we have been experiencing since beginningless time. That ignorance is the real king of the enemies, the leader of all that gives us harm.

All these things that appear as not merely labeled by mind—I, action, object, everything—are all projected by ignorance as a result of negative imprints left on our mental continuum by previous ignorance. Therefore, the I that appears in that way is totally non-existent. The I that appears that way is a complete hallucination; it is completely non-existent, totally empty. All actions that appear that way are also total hallucinations, totally non-existent, empty. Food and all other phenomena—enlightenment, hell, liberation, samsara—that appear as real, from there, are total hallucinations. They are all totally empty, completely non-existent.

Therefore, concentrate on emptiness with precision. In emptiness, there's nothing. There's no this or that. There's no I, no you, no coming, no going, no eating. In emptiness, there's not even emptiness itself. In emptiness, even the emptiness doesn't exist.

Those who have received a great initiation of lower tantra or, especially, highest tantra, can, while everything is empty, generate that wisdom into the mandala of the deity and the food you're offering into nectar. Then meditate that while everything is empty, like space but not space, it still exists. How does it exist? It exists in mere name, as merely imputed by the mind. Although things exist, they are empty. Since they exist in mere name, they are empty of existing from their own side. They are empty from their own side.

Thus, everything is the union of emptiness and dependent arising. This is a very special realization of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha; one that Lama Tsong Khapa greatly praised.

Buddha experienced this unity, gave teachings on dependent arising, and in that way liberated numberless sentient beings from suffering. By showing dependent arising, Buddha liberated

numberless sentient beings from oceans of samsaric suffering and brought them to enlightenment. He did this in the past, is doing it now, and will continue to do so in future. This is how Buddha liberates sentient beings. He gives them teachings on the truth, on the nature of phenomena, on dependent arising. This is also the way in which we ourselves get liberated from samsara and, with the support of method, bodhicitta, achieve full enlightenment.

Transform the food into nectar in a jeweled container. While the jeweled container is empty, it's labeled jewel container and then appears. The food is labeled nectar and then it appears. It is emptiness and dependent arising unified.

DEDICATION

By generating bodhicitta motivation, the thought of benefiting all sentient beings and making offerings to all buddhas, in these few minutes, we have collected limitless skies of good karma, the cause of happiness. We have collected limitless skies of merit, good karma, by making offerings to the *Guru Puja* merit field or one aspect of buddha visualized as everything. Because holy objects are numberless, we collect immeasurable merit by making offerings to them. Even when making offerings to one aspect, since the essence of that one aspect is numberless holy objects, we still create infinite merit.

We have collected limitless skies of merit by making offerings to all Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, the ten directions' statues, stupas, scriptures and thangkas, our gurus and all deities. We have collected limitless skies of merit by making charity to all sentient beings. We have collected limitless skies of merit by making all these offerings to the *Guru Puja* merit field, the unimaginable holy objects in each country, the Medicine Buddhas, Ksitigarbha and One-Thousand-Arm Chenrezig.

If we make only one offering, we collect numberless causes of enlightenment, liberation from samsara and good rebirths, but here, we have made an unimaginable number of offerings. Therefore, we have collected countless causes of all happiness up to enlightenment many, many times.

As the sutras explain, each different offering has ten benefits,⁶ temporary and ultimate. So we have collected countless numbers of these. Also, we have prostrated to numberless holy objects. Even by prostrating, we have collected numberless causes of enlightenment, liberation from samsara and good rebirths. Putting our palms together in prostration has eight important benefits,⁷ the last of which is enlightenment. Thus, we have collected those eight benefits numberless times.

NOTES

1. Where it says, "to the *Guru Puja* merit field or the one deity that you are visualizing as everything," if you are visualizing just one aspect, the essence of which is the many gurus of the *Guru Puja* merit field, each time you make offerings, prostrate or generate infinite bliss with that meditation, you create numberless causes of enlightenment, liberation from samsara and good rebirths in hundreds of thousands of future lives; numberless causes of all those different levels of happiness. You create numberless causes each time because you are visualizing that one buddha as everything—your root guru, all other gurus, Buddha, Dharma, Sangha and all other holy objects.
2. The most precious Shakyamuni Buddha statue in the Jokhang, Lhasa's central temple, was built for Buddha's mother according to Buddha's own instructions, blessed by Buddha himself and liberates thousands and thousands of sentient beings every day.
3. The Swayambhunath stupa is the most precious stupa in Kathmandu. It contains a natural

crystal stupa that appeared from the lake that used to fill the Kathmandu valley and is the embodiment of the holy mind of all the buddhas, the Dharmakaya. Shakyamuni Buddha himself predicted its discovery. This precious stupa is inside the Swayambhunath stupa. That's why this stupa is the most precious holy object in Nepal.

4. The Boudhanath stupa, which is also called the All-encompassing Wish-fulfilling Stupa, was constructed by a woman who passed away when it had been built only up to the vase. After her death, her four sons completed it. As they were making prayers upon its completion, all the buddhas and bodhisattvas absorbed into it; that's why it's called "All-encompassing." The eldest brother prayed to become a Dharma king in the Land of Snows, Tibet. The next brother prayed to the stupa to become a minister and offer service to his brother, the king, when he spread Dharma in Tibet. The next brother prayed to become an abbot in order to pass on the lineage of the ordinations and spread Dharma in Tibet. The youngest prayed to become a powerful yogi in order to pacify the obstacles to his brothers'

spreading Dharma in Tibet. In their next lives, all four brothers became important holy beings in Tibet, just as they had prayed—a Dharma king, a minister, an abbot and a powerful yogi.

The powerful yogi was Padmasambhava. When Samyé, the first monastery in central Tibet, was being built, spirits would come at night and tear down what the people had built during the day. There were many obstacles. So the people invited Padmasambhava to come from India and subdue those spirits. He did so and converted them into protectors, to protect the Dharma in Tibet. Thus, Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism was spread and preserved in Tibet for many years and many beings achieved realization of path and become enlightened. Now this tradition has spread to many countries all over the world, and the fact that every year, many tens of thousands of people are able to follow the path to enlightenment and make their lives meaningful is due to the power of that stupa. The lam-rim teachings we receive and practice, making our everyday life meaningful, came from that stupa, and the wishes made by anybody who makes offerings to or circumambulates that stupa get fulfilled.

5. Sometimes Rinpoche offers the food to all sentient beings at the beginning of the practice. In that way, since the food is no longer yours—it now belongs to all sentient beings—your attachment to it is eliminated or reduced, and you make the offering on their behalf.

6. See Lama Zopa Rinpoche's *Teachings from the Vajrasattva Retreat*, Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive, 2000, p. 625, for the ten benefits of offering.

7. See *Teachings from the Vajrasattva Retreat*, pp. 224–5, for the eight benefits of putting the palms together in prostration.

LAMA YESHE WISDOM ARCHIVE

The LAMA YESHE WISDOM ARCHIVE (LYWA) is the collected works of Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche and a section of the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT; www.fpmt.org). The ARCHIVE was founded in 1996 by Lama Zopa Rinpoche, its spiritual director, to make available in various ways the teachings it contains. Distribution of free booklets of edited teachings is one of the ways.

Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche began teaching at Kopan Monastery, Nepal, in 1970. Since then, their teachings have been recorded and transcribed. At present the LYWA contains some 7,000 cassette tapes and approximately 40,000 pages of transcribed teachings on computer disk.

Here at the ARCHIVE, we preserve the tapes and transfer them to digital media; edit and publish the teachings for free distribution; edit teachings for publication as trade books; and maintain and develop our Web site, www.LamaYeshe.com.

All this work depends upon the compassion of kind readers like you. Please help us make the Dharma, especially the teachings of Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche, freely available by sending us your generous donation today.

LAMA YESHE WISDOM ARCHIVE
PO Box 356, Weston, MA 02493, USA
Telephone (781) 899-9587
Fax (413) 845-9239
info@LamaYeshe.com
www.LamaYeshe.com

DEDICATION

Through the merit created by preparing, reading, thinking about and sharing this book with others, may all teachers of the Dharma live long and healthy lives, may the Dharma spread throughout the infinite reaches of space, and may all sentient beings quickly attain enlightenment.

May all our benefactors and their families have long and healthy lives and may all their wishes succeed in accordance with the holy Dharma.

In whichever realm, country, area or place this book may be, may there be no war, drought, famine, disease, injury, disharmony or unhappiness, may there be only great prosperity, may everything needed be easily obtained, and may all be guided by only perfectly qualified Dharma teachers, enjoy the happiness of Dharma, have only love and compassion for all beings, and only benefit and never harm each other.

LAMA THUBTEN ZOPA RINPOCHE was born in Thami, Nepal, in 1946. At the age of three he was recognized as the reincarnation of the Lawudo Lama, who had lived nearby. Aged ten, Rinpoche went to Tibet, where he stayed until the Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1959 forced him into exile in India, where he met Lama Yeshe. The Lamas went to Nepal in 1967 and started teaching Dharma to Westerners. In 1974, they began traveling the world to teach and establish centers of Dharma. When Lama Yeshe passed away in 1984, Rinpoche took over as spiritual head of their organization, the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition, which now numbers some 150 centers and activities in almost thirty countries worldwide and continues to flourish under his peerless leadership.