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**The Shamanism Magazine**

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Sacred Hoop is an independent magazine about Shamanism and Animistic Spirituality.

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We hope you enjoy reading the article. Nicholas Breeze Wood (editor)

**T**he major goal of my life has been to preserve both Tibetan Buddhist religion and culture, and Prayer wheels have always been an integral part of that culture. In old Tibet, everywhere you looked, you saw people, particularly older people, spinning prayer wheels from morning to night, while reciting the mantra *Om Mani Padme Hum*.

This mantra is the most widely used of all the Buddhist mantras, and its meaning is vast and deep. In brief, *Om Mani Padme Hum* is the mantra of Chen-rezi (Avalokiteshvara), the Bodhisattva of loving kindness and compassion. Each of the six syllables represents one of the six realms of existence a being can be born into: the hell realm, the hungry ghost realm, the animal realm, the human realm, the demi-god realm and the god realm. Although difficult to accomplish, some very diligent people have been able to recite 100,000,000 *Om Mani Padme Hums* in one lifetime.

The word mantra comes from Sanskrit, and its literal meaning is 'protection of the mind.' In Tibetan Buddhism reciting mantras is one of the most effective ways in which a person can actively create a peaceful, relaxed, and happy state of mind. Spiritually, mantras manifest and catalyze the enlightened mind through sacred sound and the invocation of Deities, Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Dakinis, Dharma Protectors and other spiritual beings'. The power of the prayer wheel comes from the incalculable compassion of all the myriads of these spiritual beings who want to guide everyone to enlightenment as quickly as possible.

#### PRAYERS GOING OUT

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

The largest prayer wheel in Tibet once held 100 million mantras. At Sakya Monastery in Seattle, in North America, we have 32 traditional prayer wheels surrounding a chorten; each of which contains 100,000 block-printed mantras.

The idea for hi-tech prayer wheels using DVDs to contain the mantra rather than block printed mantras on paper came from Chuck Pettis, the president of Sakya Monastery. The new wheels use DVD optical disk storage technology to put more mantras inside a prayer wheel than any other ever created. By releasing 1,349,580,000,000 mantras with each revolution, they are capable of radiating an incalculable amount of merit, peace, kindness, and relief from suffering to all beings.

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.

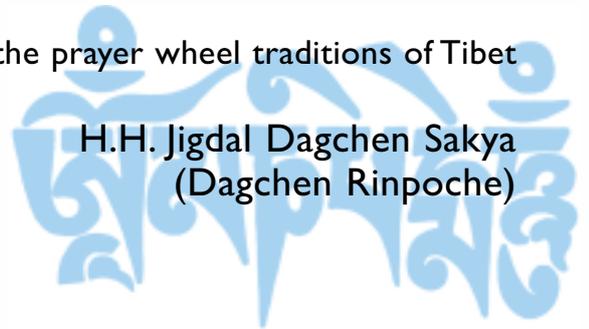
The caretaker of the Earth Sanctuary, where the wheels are installed, introduces many people that are doing spiritual retreats to the prayer wheels. Every single one of them has wanted to



# TURNING THE DHARMA

the prayer wheel traditions of Tibet

H.H. Jigdal Dagchen Sakya  
(Dagchen Rinpoche)



**“Turning the Dharma Wheel is better than listening, reflecting and meditating for eons”**

Sakyamuni Buddha

spin them as part of their retreat. When the prayer wheels were first installed, he brought a Native American Sundancer to see them. The Sundancer spun them and said he could see the prayers spiraling out of the wheel. Now every time he comes to the 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.

**USING PRAYER WHEELS**

Prayer wheels should be turned clockwise with a single-pointed concentration of body, speech, and mind. The activity is easy to do, the meaning and purpose is great, and so is the benefit. 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. You can spin a prayer wheel during your daily meditations, or while walking around a chorten or other sacred place, or even while watching television or listening to the radio or music.

**THE BENEFITS OF WHEELS**

The practice of the prayer wheel



**The Lion-Faced Dakini, [above] gave the prayer wheel practice to Guru Rinpoche, who brought it to Tibet**

has many ‘magical’ benefits. According to tradition, the prayer wheel was brought to Earth from the realm of *nagas* (dragon-like beings who live in oceans) by the great Bodhisattva Nagarjuna because he was told by Chen-rezi, in a vision that the benefits to living beings would be enormous. Nagarjuna gave the prayer wheel practice to the Lion-Faced Dakini, who in turn gave it to Padmasambhava (Guru Rinpoche), who brought it to Tibet.

Sakyamuni Buddha said that turning a prayer wheel once is better than having done years of retreat, intensive spiritual practice. He said, ‘Turning the Dharma wheel is better than listening, reflecting and meditating for eons.’

Use of the prayer wheel is one of the easiest ways to purify past negative karma, nonvirtuous actions, defilements, and obstacles that prevent us from realising our true self and understanding the true nature of reality. Other prayer wheel benefits include:

- Transforming one's home and property into a very peaceful, pleasant, holy land or ‘high heavenly realm’.
- Saving all the beings in the area from rebirth in the lower realms (e.g., incarnation in the hungry ghost realm).
- Purifying body, speech and mind.
- Accumulating extensive merit for oneself and all beings in the area.
- Preventing harm from spirits and negative beings.
- Healing sicknesses and protecting people from contagious diseases and epidemics.

**USING VISUALISATION**

Spinning a prayer wheel is not a mindless exercise, and should be done with the proper intentions. The prayer wheel practice should be visualised as a manifestation of the body, speech and mind of the Buddha. With our hands (body) we spin and move the prayer wheel. With our speech, we recite one of the mantras in the prayer wheel (e.g. *Om Mani Padme Hum*). And with our mind, we engage in visualisations or recitations, using our motivation and intention to bless all beings and bring peace to our surroundings and the entire world.

Visualisations and meditations that can be done while spinning a prayer wheel include:

- Reciting *Om Mani Padme Hum*. This strengthens our mind and brings the optimal intention to the spiritual practice and increases the benefits to all sentient beings.
- Visualising beams of light, bright like the sun, radiating out from the prayer wheel in all directions. The light beams destroy the negative karma and sufferings of all beings.
- Dedicating the merit<sup>2</sup> of one's prayer wheel practice to purify the underlying cause of someone's illness in order to promote healing.

The Buddha once said that ‘undedicated merit is like a drop of water on a stone; it soon evaporates and disappears.’ Dedicating the merit of a spiritual



The Tibet-Tech prayer wheels are the first to use DVDs to store mantras inside them

Here we see the DVDs inside and the wheel from the outside

practice or a ceremony is like adding a drop of water to the ocean; it will persist for as long as the ocean exists.

After turning the prayer wheel, it is beneficial to dedicate the merit of this spiritual practice for the liberation of sentient beings, the generation of *bodhicitta* (love and compassion for all beings), and the long lives and works of one's teachers (Lamas).

### MAKING THE DVD WHEELS

The Tibet-Tech prayer wheels are the first to use DVDs to store mantras inside a prayer wheel. Each of the eight mantras contained in the prayer wheel were placed into an evenly spaced 10 by 5000 cell Microsoft Excel worksheet, which was converted to an Adobe Acrobat PDF file containing 50,000 mantras.

One thousand of these PDF files were compressed in to a single file containing 50 million mantras. As many of the files as possible were copied to a DVD, The DVD duplicator used lasers to read and write the mantras, so it is like the mantras were written by light onto a rainbow on each DVD.

Sixteen copies of each DVD were made for each single prayer wheel so that a total of 128 DVDs are contained in each. They were stacked onto a sandalwood 'life-tree' obelisk painted with the three mantra syllables, *Om Ah Hum*, symbolising the body, speech, and mind of the Buddha. Below and above the stack of DVDs are the Earth Wheel and Sky Wheel symbols, etched into brass.

Finally the DVDs were enclosed by a copper and brass cylinder housing, and *Om Mani Padme*

*Hum* was embossed into the outer copper casing.

Each cylinder sits on top of a box which contains the bearing and mechanisms to count each revolution of the prayer wheel. The prayer wheel is turned by putting one's hand on one of the four arms at the bottom of the cylinder and spinning the prayer wheel clockwise.

After the prayer wheels were assembled, on May 13, 2004, they were blessed and consecrated by myself. The blessing ceremony had three parts. The first part was a praise of the mantras, then the prayer wheels were consecrated, and finally, a 'Dedication of Merit' prayer was recited to benefit all sentient beings and to work for a more peaceful world. As long as the Universe exists, these mantras will remain potent.

We initially built three Tibet-Tech prayer wheels to be installed at the Earth Sanctuary nature reserve and meditation parkland on Whidbey Island near Seattle. After feeling the power of the prayer wheels however, 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 my home has become very peaceful.

I always ask people how they feel while at the Earth Sanctuary. Almost everyone says, 'peaceful,' with a big smile on their face!

We are all very blessed to be born as human beings and to have the opportunity to practice spiritual

traditions. The prayer wheel is one of the simplest and most powerful Tibetan Buddhist spiritual practices, and I encourage all people to do prayer wheel practice for the happiness and relief of misery of all beings in all realms.

Sacred Hoop wishes to thank the staff of the Snow Lion Newsletter and Sakya Monastery for their help in producing this article. Main photo on page eleven courtesy of Professor Warren G. Gold, University of Washington.

#### NOTES:

1: There are many beings in Tibetan Buddhism besides Sakyamuni Buddha. *Bodhisattvas* are beings who have reached enlightenment but have vowed to be reborn until all other beings have reached enlightenment too.

*Dakinis* (Sky Dancers or Sky Walkers) are enlightened female spirits, sometimes taking human birth.

*Dharma Protectors* are fierce beings who protect the teachings, people and sacred places. Many of them come from pre-Buddhist, shamanic Tibet. Tradition has it that when Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava) brought Buddhism to Tibet he went through the land confronting the powerful land spirits, and making them swear oaths to protect the Dharma until the end of time.

2: Merit is the beneficial energy a ceremony or meditation creates. In Buddhism it is generally dedicated to all beings 'so that all beings can reach enlightenment', or can also be dedicated to a specific situation such as a sick person or tragic situation. It is similar to the Native American tradition of dedicating a ceremony to 'all my relations', so that the positive effects can radiate out through the web of all creation.

H.H. Jigdal Dagchen Sakya (Dagchen Rinpoche) is a Head Lama of the Sakya sect and Sakya Monastery of Tibetan Buddhism in Seattle. He 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 telling of his life in old Tibet and his life in the West.

Sakya Monastery  
108 NW 83rd St,  
Seattle, WA.  
98117. USA  
Tel: (001 from the UK)  
(206) 789 2573  
[www.sakya.org](http://www.sakya.org)  
[monastery@sakya.org](mailto:monastery@sakya.org)

Tibet-Tech prayer wheels are available to buy. Contact Chuck Pettis of Earth Sanctuary [www.earthsanctuary.org](http://www.earthsanctuary.org)  
Tel: (001 from the UK)  
(425) 637 8777  
[cpettis@earthsanctuary.org](mailto:cpettis@earthsanctuary.org)

*below: prayer wheels in the Jokhang monastery, Lhasa, Tibet*



The power of the prayer wheel comes from the incalculable compassion of all the myriads of these spiritual beings who want to guide everyone to enlightenment as quickly as possible.

