

## *On Making Offerings*

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Whenever we practice, we always make offerings--in Vajrasattva, Yeshe Tsogyal, Guru Rinpoche, Amitabha, Tara, Kilaya, all the practices have offerings. Our Vajrasattva practice, it even has the word 'offering' in the title: *The Practice of Offering to Vajrasattva as the Lama*. Do we know how to make offerings? Sometimes, some people seem to. Some people haven't learned yet. Some people don't care. When you make offerings, you have to keep the discipline of offering. Discipline doesn't just mean the rules that the ordained and lay practitioners must follow. Discipline means mindfully following the correct way to do something. We keep the discipline of offering not because the offering needs it but because we do. We need to use clean and proper materials, assembled and arranged in the correct way. Don't disregard this point. The physical offerings, whatever they are, need to be clean.

This doesn't mean that you make offerings with a kind of haughtiness: "That's not good enough for MY offering." Offer whatever you can, humbly. Choose the best that you have and then offer it with a mind that is clean, too, meaning free of the three poisons. That is the most important kind of cleanliness. Offer it with a mind that is not small, either: don't be stingy or discriminatory. Don't be lazy, but learn the proper way to regard the offerings, the one making the offering, and those being offered to. Usually we ignore the right way to offer. We say, "so what?" I have seen so many people with that attitude, again and again--enough to make you sick. One way people think "so what?" because they don't know the right way to offer. One way it is just pride. That is just impurity heaped upon impurity, worsening the problem.

Actually, merely not having perfect offering materials isn't the worst thing. Our mind is usually much more impure than the physical offering. With our three poisons we will make even the most pure offering substance impure. Then how can you use it to accumulate merit or purify obscurations? You are making your obscurations heavier and heavier. You are strengthening your negative habits, which brings nothing but a negative result. Offerings are a powerful way to accumulate merit, but when you defile them by having a mind filled with the five poisons, then you accumulate the opposite: non-virtue. Non-virtue brings suffering. So now what happened to your virtuous offering?

Always offer what is clean and nice, and always make the offering with a mind untainted by the three poisons. Some people complain about the Geluggas being too fancy and uptight, but actually their discipline is excellent. Whether an offering is large or small, they always keep it clean and offer it respectfully. I can't say if their minds are pure or not, but physically they make offerings very purely and mindfully. Nobody should complain about that. It is a quality, not a fault! Look at yourself--you should be making offerings in such an excellent way, too! Their conduct in the temple is also exemplary: they sit neatly all in rows, tidy in their dress and manner. They don't sit proudly or sprawl here and there, disheveled and carelessly dressed.

Some Nyingma lamas sometimes aren't so careful with their conduct--they just want to use their body, speech and mind to go chasing the ladies. I've seen plenty like that. They don't keep the discipline of pure, clean offering, they just say, "Oh, it's okay" because they don't want to take the time to do it properly. They are busy, chasing the ladies. Actually it's not "okay." Offerings need to be done well, because they are our opportunity to accumulate merit. For yourself, you need merit--therefore make careful, pure offerings. For others, you want to benefit them--therefore make careful, pure offerings.

When the sangha are sloppy and lazy in their conduct, messily making desultory offerings, then others seeing them will not think well of that dharma practitioner or activity. Forget about being inspired to faith, they very likely will develop wrong view, which is a great non-virtue. Therefore when you do dharma it is not just for yourself. You have to think about benefitting others, starting on the outer level. Through your own beautiful, respectful offerings you can help others have faith, appreciation, and respect for the temple or your shrine, and the representations of enlightened body, speech, and mind there.

It is the same with everyone's conduct in the temple. By conducting yourself well, you inspire faith and correct view in others. The lamas, monks, sponsors, ritual assistants--everyone needs a place to sit, nicely. And not just these 'big guys'--everyone, poor or ugly or whatever, everyone should be respectfully given a seat, nobody ignored. Then the assembly is a fine sight to see! Each person needs to keep their own place clean and neat. When your seat or your room or your house or your property is tidy then it benefits you, increasing your "wind horse"--your fortune, charisma, auspicious circumstances, and so on. If everything is messy, filthy and funky, then one's wind horse declines. Your clothes should be clean and tidy for the same reason. Westerners can do this very well, although some don't, they would rather be smelly their own way. You might ask, "What if I'm in some remote place, high on a mountain? Does it matter if I am clean or dirty there, where nobody is watching?" My feeling is, why not be clean? A real mountain retreat is naturally clean itself--clean sunlight, rocks, rivers, trees. We can come and not disturb that, but rather keep ourselves clean, too, in harmony with it.

What is the real 'unclean?' Our three poisons. We make plenty of those! We need to look at our own faults, our own poisons. Not so that we can report them to others, but so that we can see them ourselves. That's useful. To ignore or deny them, thinking we become great heroes if we pretend we have no faults--or worse, if we point out others'--that's no good. One way, this isn't my business. One way, it is. Anyway, I am telling it to you.

Keep things clean, so your wind horse won't diminish. Keep things clean, and then your offerings are real offerings. If an offering is careless and messy, that's not an offering: you are ignoring the buddha, dharma and sangha, the very ones you are allegedly offering to! How is there any offering left in that act? There is no merit, there is no accumulation of virtue or elimination of obscurations. Just an increase of obscuration instead--more and more and more in our ongoing refusal to be careful. It doesn't matter if we are old or young, male or female: if the mind is filled with negativity, only negativity will be accumulated. Then our offerings to the Three Jewels and other sacred recipients will just be offerings of the three poisons; in our generosity to sentient beings we will only give our three poisons. That is a terrible offering. An offering's small size or imperfections don't necessarily make it bad, but having a mind filled with the poisons does. The size of the offering is irrelevant to its power; it is the motivation that is important.

Some people say that there's no need to be careful with the gektor, the tormas offering to the obstructors, because it is being offered to ghosts and negative spirits. Actually we don't know who those spirits are, negative or realized or whatever. Some say, "You don't need to bless the gektor with the SOBHAWA mantra as you do all the other tormas." I think whether an offering is to the Three Jewels or a form of generosity to sentient beings, either way we should keep it clean and offer it respectfully. And you want to talk about ghosts and spirits? Look at your own mind. Some people think that they are so special, practically liberated already. I would be careful to check if you are really being honest with yourself about that. Thinking you are special only increases your obscurations and poisons. It is a sign your mind is completely untamed--hey, that sounds like the biggest demon to me! Real lamas, in contrast, have

tamed their minds. I am not speaking of those who are called lamas but who carry on like war heroes or generals, or businessmen, or con artists. I am not talking about some lamas who say they are doing practice but actually are just running after sex. Hey, you guys, wake up! This is the time for real practice-- sex is not the point! I don't care if you are a so-called ngagpa (mantrayana practitioner) or fully ordained or a lay person or whatever: when you are practicing you should maintain dharma conduct. Running after ladies or guys is not dharma conduct, nor is it the conduct of an authentic ngagpa. It is only lust. Whatever practice you do, try not to mix it with the five poisons like this.

Try to do clean practice and keep a clean shrine and clean offerings, because for us there is great benefit in that. That is the smart way: to accumulate merit in every way, including making offerings, practicing, keeping and venerating representations of enlightened body, speech, and mind, watching our own conduct, and everything else. For realized dzogchen practitioners, those who hold the view of purity and evenness, then it is fine for everything and even themselves to be an upside-down mess, because they have no negativity in their mindstreams. But for us ordinary guys, there is still a huge difference between clean and unclean because our minds are so obscured. Our minds aren't just tainted by the three poisons like some faint smell, but filled with them, to the point that even if someone were to give us a big bag of more poisons it would be hard for that to make us any dirtier. Therefore, keep everything as clean as you can. One way Westerners are uptight about things being clean, but in another way not really. In the end it doesn't matter what country you are from or what your personal trip about it is, you still need to be clean because that is beneficial. Please, everyone, try to use your opportunities to make offerings. The buddhas aren't greedy. That's not why they instruct us to make offerings to them. They are trying to help you get enlightened, to help you gather merit. You can't say you haven't had the explanation. But are you going to ignore it? I hope not.

Tashi Delek!

*-Gyatrul*