

Om Mani Padme Hum

---- The Meaning of the Mantra in Tibetan Buddhism

Tibetan Buddhists believe that saying the mantra (prayer), **Om Mani Padme Hum**, out loud or silently to oneself, invokes the powerful benevolent attention and blessings of Chenrezig, the embodiment of compassion. Viewing the written form of the mantra is said to have the same effect -- it is often carved into stones, and placed where people can see them.

Spinning the written form of the mantra around in a **Mani** wheel (or prayer wheel) is also believed to give the same benefit as saying the mantra, and **Mani** wheels, small hand wheels and large wheels with millions of copies of the mantra inside, are found everywhere in the lands influenced by Tibetan Buddhism.

It is said that all the teachings of the Buddha are contained in this mantra: **Om Mani Padme Hum** can not really be translated into a simple phrase or sentence.



It is appropriate, though, to say a little about the mantra, so that people who want to use it in their meditation practice will have some sense of what they are doing, and people who are just curious will understand a little better what the mantra is and why it is so important to Tibetan Buddhists.

The Mantra **Om Mani Padme Hum**

The **Mani** mantra is the most widely used of all Buddhist mantras, and open to anyone who feels inspired to practice it -- it does not require prior initiation by a lama (meditation master).

The six syllables of the mantra, as it is often pronounced by Tibetans -- **Om Mani Padme Hum** -- are here written in the Tibetan alphabet. Reading from left to right the syllables are:

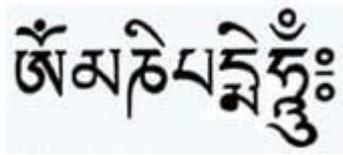
Om	Ma	Ni	Pad	Me	Hum
(ohm)	(mah)	(nee)	(pahd)	(may)	(hum)

The mantra originated in India; as it moved from India into Tibet, the pronunciation changed because some of the sounds in the Indian Sanskrit language were hard for Tibetans to pronounce.

Sanskrit form	Om Mani Padme Hum mantra of Avalokiteshvara
Tibetan form	Om Mani Peme Hung mantra of Chenrezig

The Common Mani Scripts

The mantra **Om Mani Padme Hum** is found written in two different ways in (and on) **Mani** wheels and on jewelry, etc.: in the ancient Indian Ranjana script and in Tibetan script:



Tibetan script

Ranjana script



The Meaning of the Mantra

"There is not a single aspect of the eighty-four thousand sections of the Buddha's teachings which is not contained in Avalokiteshvara's six syllable mantra "Om Mani Padme Hum", and as such the qualities of the "mani" are praised again and again in the Sutras and Tantras.... Whether happy or sad, if we take the "mani" as our refuge, Chenrezig will never forsake us, spontaneous devotion will arise in our minds and the Great Vehicle will effortlessly be realized."

Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche

-- Heart Treasure of the Enlightened Ones

People who learn about the mantra naturally want to know what it means, and often ask for a translation into English or some other Western language. However, **Om Mani Padme Hum** can not really be translated into a simple phrase or even a few sentences.

----"Behold! The jewel in the lotus!"

This phrase is often seen as a translation of the mantra. However, although some mantras are translatable, more or less, the **Mani** is not one of them; but while the phrase is incorrect as a translation, it does suggest an interesting way to think about the mantra, by considering the meanings of the individual words.

The Dalai Lama has provided just such an analysis, and concludes his discussion with this synopsis: "Thus the six syllables, **Om Mani Padme Hum**, mean that in dependence on the practice which is in indivisible union of method and wisdom, you can transform your impure body, speech and mind into the pure body, speech, and mind of a Buddha."

All of the Dharma is based on Buddha's discovery that suffering is unnecessary: Like a disease, once we really face the fact that suffering exists, we can look more deeply and discover it's cause; and when we discover that the cause is dependent on certain conditions, we can explore the possibility of removing those conditions.

Buddha taught many very different methods for removing the cause of suffering, methods appropriate for the very different types and conditions and aptitudes of suffering beings. For those who had the capacity to understand it, he taught the most powerful method of all, a method based on the practice of compassion. It is known as the Mahayana, or Great Vehicle, because practicing it benefits all beings, without partiality. It is likened to a vast boat that carries all the beings in the universe across the sea of suffering.

Within the Mahayana the Buddha revealed the possibility of very quickly benefiting all beings, including oneself, by entering directly into the awakened state of mind, or Buddhahood, without delay. Again, there are different ways of accomplishing this, but the most powerful, and at the same time the most accessible, is to link ones own mind with the mind of a Buddha.

In visualization practice we imagine ourselves to be a Buddha, in this case the Buddha of Compassion, Chenrezig. By replacing the thought of yourself as you with the thought of yourself as Chenrezig, you gradually reduce and eventually remove the fixation on your personal self, which expands your loving kindness and compassion, toward yourself and toward others, and your intelligence and wisdom becomes enhanced, allowing you to see clearly what someone really needs and to communicate with them clearly and accurately.

In most religious traditions one prays to the deities of the tradition in the hopes of receiving their blessing, which will benefit one in some way. In the vajrayana Buddhist tradition, however, the blessing and the power and the superlative qualities of the enlightened beings are not considered as coming from an outside source, but are believed to be innate, to be aspects of our own true nature. Chenrezig and his love and compassion are within us.

Chenrezig: The Embodiment of Compassion

In doing the visualization practice we connect with the body and voice and mind of the Buddha by the three aspects of the practice. By our posture and certain gestures we connect with the body, by reciting the words of the liturgy and by repeating the mantra we connect with the voice, and by imagining the visual form of the Buddha we connect with the mind.

Om Mani Padme Hum is the mantra of Chenrezig. In the words of Kalu Rinpoche, "Through mantra, we no longer cling to the reality of the speech and sound encountered in life, but experience it as essentially empty. Then confusion of the speech aspect of our being is transformed into enlightened awareness."

That enlightened awareness includes whatever we might need to understand in order to save any beings, including ourselves, from suffering. For that reason the entire Dharma, the entire truth about the nature of suffering and the many ways of removing it's causes, is said to be contained in these six syllables, ---*Om Mani Padme Hum*

"Buddha of great compassion, hold me fast in your compassion. From time without beginning, beings have wandered in samsara, Undergoing unendurable suffering. They have no other protector than you. Please bless them that they may achieve the omniscient state of buddhahood.

With the power of evil karma gathered from beginningless time, Sentient beings, through the force of anger, are born as hell beings and experience the suffering of heat and cold. May they all be born in your presence, perfect deity."



--The Meditation and Recitation of Four-Armed Chenrezig