

WORK AS PRACTICE APPLYING THE THREE SUPREME METHODS

To apply the Supreme Methods, begin by refining your intention, thinking that you will perform the work for the sake of all sentient beings as you say the following:

Today I vow to work for the benefit of all beings.
May I be a guard for those who are protectorless,
A guide for those who journey on the road.
For those who wish to go across the water,
May I be a boat, a raft, a bridge.

Before beginning a day of volunteer work students should recite the following prayer:
Even the remembrance of your name dispels the hope and fear of nirvana and samsara. To walk the path to enlightenment, I take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Following all the bodhisattvas of past, present and future, may I emulate their infinite activity to free beings from suffering. Eventually may there be continual joy in the activity of helping others. In that aim, I shall begin by-offering my energy and time today to...{*Quietly say to yourself the activities that you intend to offer today. For example, “cleaning the teaching hall”*}

To apply the second wholesome attitude, avoid the pride that shadows your good intention and say:

Whatever I do today is ultimately just a concept. Relatively, there is a necessary structure just as there is in dreams. In my night-time dreams, my eyes are shut; still, I see. Whatever I see is an illusion. There is nothing to see and no-one seeing. But in the relative world of the dream, the construct of “the way to see” is still needed. So I shall do my job as properly as possible.

The third wholesome attitude is applied by dedicating the merit with the following:

And now as long as space endures,
As long as there are beings to be found,
May I continue likewise to remain
To drive away the sorrows of the world.

Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche spontaneously offered this liturgy during the 2005 retreat at Sea to Sky Retreat Centre. During the 2009 retreat, the wording was slightly revised. The dream example for the second wholesome attitude was composed at Khyentse Labrang in January 2013.

❖ Liturgy Commentary

When working for the dharma, motivation is so important. If one approaches an offering of service with basic good intention, then one accumulates merit. But when three wholesome attitudes known as the Three Supreme Methods are applied, an outwardly mundane task can even become a paramita.

To apply the Supreme Methods, begin by refining your intention, thinking you will perform the work for the sake of all sentient beings. Remember you are not making an offering of service to bolster your self-gratification, recognition, or mileage points. As Shantideva said, look upon yourself as a utensil and think: "Today I vow to work for the benefit of all beings..."

Since it is going to be very difficult to remember to apply the three wholesome attitudes with every page you photocopy or every stroke of the scrub brush, *before beginning a day of volunteer work students should recite the following prayer.* "Even the remembrance of your name dispels the hope and fear of nirvana and samsara..."

To apply the second wholesome attitude, avoid the pride that shadows your good intention. Remember that the work and its accomplishment is an illusion. If you can maintain this attitude throughout your task it is ideal, but most likely you will forget. So immediately after reciting the prayer above you should reflect in this way: "Whatever I do today is ultimately just a concept..."

The third wholesome attitude is applied by dedicating the merit you've accrued to all sentient beings. Ideally, you will do this when you finish your work. However, since you may forget to dedicate the merit later, it can be offered at the beginning by thinking: "And now as long as space endures..."

❖ General Commentary

There was once a person who though poor in material wealth was rich in aspiration and so wished to train on the path of the bodhisattva. In this aim he sought to take the bodhisattva vows and went to a master to make his request. The teacher told him that precious, pristine bodhicitta cannot easily be cultivated within the defiled mind of greed, anger and negative emotion and that a dearth of merit will certainly prevent the blossoming of bodhicitta within our being. The master instructed his would be student that to take the bodhisattva vow, he must first increase his treasury of merit through offering. The impoverished man had only service to give, but since the teacher was a potter, the student offered him a day of working the clay. Through the merit generated from this offering the student was able to take the bodhisattva vow and ultimately became one of the 1,000 Buddhas of this eon.

The famous account of Milarepa's first encounter with his teacher Marpa took place in a field. In search of Marpa, Milarepa came upon a man plowing a plot of land. He told the man he had come to request teachings from Marpa, and asked for directions. Never having seen him before Milarepa did not realize it was Marpa himself working the field. Marpa looked him over from top to bottom three times and then agreed to lead him to Marpa. But he told Milarepa to first finish the plowing, and pointing to a jar of wine said, "Afterwards, drink this." Milarepa finished the plowing and drank

the wine as Marpa instructed. It is believed those simple acts became the first auspicious link to Milarepa fulfilling the great task of liberating sentient beings. Thus, the exalted Drakpa Kagyu lineage was initiated.

Although the term “karma yoga,” or the offering of service happens to be known mainly within the Hindu tradition, these stories show it exists in Buddhism as well. In Buddhism we seek to dismantle this net of illusion. This is what we call enlightenment. Apart from that, there is no such thing as enlightenment. In order to unravel the net of illusion, one has to invoke and receive the blessings of Buddha, Dharma, Sangha and guru. As Patrul Rinpoche said, there are three methods of invoking the blessings.

“There are three ways to please the teacher and serve him. The best way is known as the offering of practice, and consists of putting whatever he teaches into practice with determination, disregarding all hardship. The middling way is known as service with body and speech, and involves serving him and doing whatever he needs you to do whether physically, verbally or mentally. The lowest way is by material offering, which means to please your teacher by giving him material goods, food, money and so forth.” Pg 145 In the Words of My Perfect Teacher

Many of us don't have the time, enthusiasm, and drive to truly dedicate our whole life to practice as Milarepa did. If you are endowed with the merit to have such circumstances, then of course one should not waste the opportunity. However, many of us do not have such merit and think that practicing our whole life is not within our reach. So we don't even begin. There are small steps we could take though, for instance offering a day of service scrubbing the floor. But we think, “That's too insignificant,” and end up doing nothing at all. The great methods seem unachievable, and we think the small won't do any good.

As Patrul Rinpoche said, if a horse pulling a chariot sees one blade of grass on the roadside, he will eat it if there is opportunity. He will not think, “Oh, it is only one blade, let's wait for a bigger bunch.” Likewise we should gather merit whenever there is a chance. If the right motivation is brought to bear, the means of accumulating merit surround us in every direction, especially for the Mahayana practitioner. In Zen temples masters tell students to clean the toilets repeatedly, even when they are already spotless. The virtue lies in the action, not the goal.

❖ Philosophy Of Offering Service

If one starts with the intention to help the dharma and sentient beings not only will we accumulate merit, but there will also be fewer conflicts with others. Disagreements can arise because everyone thinks their own way is best. But with proper motivation as the basis for our activity we will remember to pause and evaluate how important the issue is before reacting.

If we apply the Three Supreme Methods to everything we do—even something as ordinary as photocopying a stack of papers for a dharma center—not only does one accumulate merit, the undertaking actually becomes a paramita. Imagine that... photocopying as a perfected virtue. You may think, “How can making a photocopy enlighten all sentient beings?” Obviously, a Buddhist center won't need

you to copy the words of Donald Rumsfield. It is more likely to be something to do with the dharma, something that in one way or another is to benefit sentient beings. If ten people read a prayer you've copied and one of them—even for a split second—has a genuine understanding of dharma, then the seed of buddhahood is being planted. And it is all because of your photocopying.

The accumulation of merit is in no way limited to traditions such as lighting 100,000 butter lamps or working for a center. If you are a vajrayana student whose master tells you to copy Donald Rumsfield's words 200,000 times, completing the task will garner even more merit. Still, we humans are attached to form and it is easier for us to accept that scrubbing the floor of a temple will accumulate merit. So be it.