



a mani stone

## ***Om Mani Padme Hum*** The Meaning of the Mantra in Tibetan Buddhism

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### Overview



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, like the one pictured above, 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.

◆ [The Prayer Wheel: Spiritual Technology from Tibet](#) ◆

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. We begin in the next section with some information about the mantra itself.

## 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 vowel in the syllable *Hu* (is pronounced as in the English word 'book'. The final consonant in that syllable is often pronounced 'ng' as in 'song' -- *Om Mani Padme Hung*. There is one further complication: The syllable *Pad* is pronounced *Pe* (peh) by many Tibetans: *Om Mani Peme Hung*.

Here's the sound of the mantra, chanted by a Tibetan refugee:

[Play Mantra](#)  
Windows .wav

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Real Audio  
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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	<b><i>Om Mani Padma Hum</i></b> mantra of Avalokiteshvara
Tibetan form	<b><i>Om Mani Peme Hung</i></b> mantra of Chenrezig

## The True Sound of Truth

An old story speaks about a similar problem. A devoted meditator, after years concentrating on a particular mantra, had attained enough insight to begin teaching. The student's humility was far from perfect, but the teachers at the monastery were not worried.

A few years of successful teaching left the meditator with no thoughts about learning from anyone; but upon hearing about a famous hermit living nearby, the opportunity was too exciting to be passed up.

The hermit lived alone on an island at the middle of a lake, so the meditator hired a man with a boat to row across to the island. The meditator was very respectful of the old hermit. As they shared some tea made with herbs the meditator asked him about his spiritual practice. The old man said he had no spiritual practice, except for a mantra which he repeated all the time to himself. The meditator was pleased: the hermit was using the same mantra he used himself -- but when the hermit spoke the mantra aloud, the meditator was horrified!

"What's wrong?" asked the hermit.

"I don't know what to say. I'm afraid you've wasted your whole life! You are pronouncing the mantra *incorrectly*!"

"Oh, Dear! That *is* terrible. How *should* I say it?"

The meditator gave the correct pronunciation, and the old hermit was very grateful, asking to be left alone so he could get started right away. On the way back across the lake the meditator, now confirmed as an accomplished teacher, was pondering the sad fate of the hermit.

"It's so fortunate that I came along. At least he will have a little time to practice correctly before he dies." Just then, the meditator noticed that the boatman was looking quite shocked, and turned to see the hermit standing respectfully on the water, next to the boat.

"Excuse me, please. I hate to bother you, but I've forgotten the correct pronunciation again. Would you please repeat it for me?"

"You obviously don't need it," stammered the meditator; but the old man persisted in his polite request until the meditator relented and told him again the way he thought the mantra should be pronounced.

The old hermit was saying the mantra very carefully, slowly, over and over, as he walked across the surface of the water back to the island.

## 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



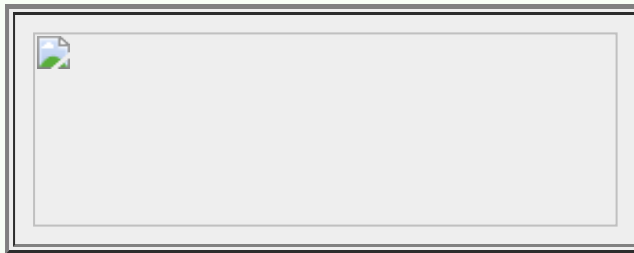
Ranjana script



### [Free Ranjana TrueType Fonts](http://www.geocities.com/ranjanafont/ranjanafont.htm)

<http://www.geocities.com/ranjanafont/ranjanafont.htm>

[More about the Ranjana \(Lantsa, Landzha, Lanydza\) script](#)



If you'd like to learn more about how Tibetan is written, or more about the language in general, you might find this page interesting:

◆ [The Language of Tibet](#) ◆

The next section discusses the meaning of ***Om Mani Padme Hum***.

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## 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.

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 its 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 one's 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*

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"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 Chenresig\*\*](#)

## Glimpsing a Few More Facets of the Mantra

There are many ways to understand the meaning of the mantra. Here are a few of them:

### The Transformation of Speech

[An excerpt from *The Dharma*, by Kalu Rinpoche, from a chapter on The Four Dharmas of Gampopa. ]

"The second aspect of transformation [of confusion into wisdom] concerns our speech. Although it may be easy to consider speech as intangible, that it simply appears and disappears, we actually relate to it as something real. It is because we become so attached to what we say and hear that speech has such power.



Mere words, which have no ultimate reality, can determine our happiness and suffering. We create pleasure and pain through our fundamental clinging to sound and speech.

In the Vajrayana context, we recite and meditate on mantra, which is enlightened sound, the speech of the [Bhodisattva of Compassion], the union of Sound and Emptiness. It has no intrinsic reality, but is simply the manifestation of pure sound, experienced simultaneously with its Emptiness. 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.

At first, the Union of Sound and Emptiness is simply an intellectual concept of what our meditation should be. Through continued application, it becomes our actual experience. Here, as elsewhere in the practice, attitude is all-important, as this story about a teacher in Tibet illustrates. The teacher had two disciples, who both undertook to perform a hundred million recitations of the mantra of Chenrezi, OM MANI PADME HUNG. In the presence of their lama, they took a vow to do so, and went off to complete the practice.

One of the disciples was very diligent, though his realization was perhaps not so profound. He set out to accomplish the practice as quickly as possible and recited the mantra incessantly, day and night. After long efforts, he completed his one hundred million recitations, in three years. The other disciple was extremely intelligent, though perhaps not as diligent, because he certainly did not launch into the practice with the same enthusiasm. But when his friend was approaching the completion of his retreat, the second disciple, who had not recited very many mantras, went up on the top of a hill. He sat down there, and began to meditate that all the beings throughout the universe were transformed into Chenrezi. He meditated that the sound of the mantra was not only issuing from the mouth of each and every being, but that every atom in the universe was vibrating with it, and for a few days he recited the mantra in this state of samadhi.

When the two disciples went to their lama to indicate they had finished the practice, he said, 'Oh, you've both done excellently. You were very diligent, and YOU were very wise. You both accomplished the one hundred million recitations of the mantra.' Thus, through changing our attitude and developing our understanding, practice becomes far more powerful."

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## The Powers of the Six Syllables

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### **The six syllables perfect the Six Paramitas of the Bodhisattvas.**

Gen Rinpoche, in his commentary on the Meaning of said:


"The mantra Om Mani Pädme Hum is easy to say yet quite powerful, because it contains the essence of the entire teaching. When you say the first syllable Om it is blessed to help you achieve perfection in the practice of generosity, Ma helps perfect the practice of pure ethics, and Ni helps achieve perfection in the practice of tolerance and patience. Päd, the fourth syllable, helps to achieve perfection of perseverance, Me helps achieve perfection in the practice of concentration, and the final sixth syllable Hum helps achieve perfection in the practice of wisdom.

So in this way recitation of the mantra helps achieve perfection in the six practices from generosity to wisdom. The path of these six perfections is the path walked by all the Buddhas of the three times. What could then be more meaningful than to say the mantra and accomplish the six perfections?"



## The six syllables purify the six realms of existence in suffering.

For example, the syllable *Om* purifies the neurotic attachment to bliss and pride, which afflict the beings in the realm of the gods.

	Purifies	Samsaric Realm
<i>Om</i>	bliss / pride	gods
<i>Ma</i>	jealousy / lust for entertainment	jealous gods
<i>Ni</i>	passion / desire	human
<i>Pe</i>	stupidity / prejudice	animal
<i>Me</i>	poverty / possessiveness	hungry ghost
<i>Hung</i>	aggression / hatred	hell

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

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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.

H.H. The Dalai Lama has provided just such an analysis, in a Web page [The Meaning of Om Mani Padme Hum](#).

He 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."

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## Resources

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## Web Resources

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[ZaChoeje Rinpoche: The Meaning of Om Mani Peme Hum](#)

[Gen Rinpoche's Explanation of the Mantra of Avalokiteshvara](#)

[Avalokiteshvara and the Mantra Om Mani Padme Hum](#)

[The Meditation and Recitation of Four-Armed Chenresig](#)

[Abbreviated Four-Armed Chenresig Meditation](#)

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## Books



**[\*Wheel of Great Compassion: The Practice of the Prayer Wheel in Tibetan Buddhism\*](#)**

Compiled, Edited & Introduced by Lorne Ladner  
Foreword by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

The first book to provide Western readers with a complete understanding of the prayer wheel.

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For books on the centrality of compassion in Tibetan Buddhism, on Chenrezig and on the Bodhisattva Path, please look at the "Books" section of our page [Chenrezig: The Embodiment of Compassion](#).

## Image Credits

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The source of the blissful woman with a hand held **Mani** wheel is a Web page in Finland: [Paimentolainen ja rukousmylly](#).

The image in the Books section of a woman turning a large gold **Mani** wheel is from the cover of [Wheel of Great Compassion](#).

Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche's teaching "Heart Treasure of the Enlightened Ones," was given at Tibet House in New York in 1984 and published in the volume titled **Essence of Buddhism: Teachings at Tibet House**.

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