

Why Holy Objects are Precious and Wish-fulfilling

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It is mentioned in the benefits of the Buddha Mitukpa practice that even if a person has committed all five uninterrupted negative karmas, still if that person is able to see the Mitukpa mantra at the time of death, then all of these very heavy negative karmas are purified. Why are these five negative karmas—killing one's father, mother, killing an arhat, causing disunity amongst the Sangha, harming the Buddha—called uninterrupted? Because they are so heavy that if this negative karma is collected then immediately after death, without "interruption" of another life, one gets reborn in the lowest hot hell, number eight, the most unbearable one, which has the heaviest suffering. Still, by seeing the Mitukpa mantra all this is purified.

Then, if someone has committed the very heavy negative karma of avoiding the Dharma, which is worse than having destroyed every single holy object—statue, stupa, scripture—that exists in the world, even all that negative karma can be purified by seeing the Mitukpa mantra. And if somebody has created the very heavy negative karma of criticizing holy beings, arya beings—those who have the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness and have achieved the right seeing path, the path of meditation and the path of no more learning, whether Hinayana or Mahayana—that too gets purified by seeing the Mitukpa mantra.

So it is very good to actually write this mantra nicely, frame it and then have it on your altar so that you can see it in your room. It doesn't have to be only in the meditation room, it can also be in the sitting room, kitchen, office, or anywhere inside or outside the house. Then, at the time of death if you can't meditate just look at the mantra. Just keep on looking at the mantra and that will completely take care of your future rebirth, so that you won't be reborn in the lower realms but get a good rebirth. It's the same for other sentient beings, even for animals, who can't meditate at the time of death. If they die while looking at this mantra it is great purification, great protection; it saves them from the lower realms.

Every time you look at holy objects—pictures of the Buddha, statues, scriptures, stupas—they plant the seed of liberation and enlightenment in your mental continuum. So every time you look at them they purify your mind. They plant the seed of enlightenment, which includes all the causes to achieve enlightenment. How? When you look at them they plant a seed or positive imprint on your mental continuum so that later when you meet Buddhadharma, either in this life or in future lives, you are able to understand the words and the meaning of the teachings. From that, you are able to practice the meaning of the Dharma you have understood, which causes you to cease the gross and subtle defilements by actualizing the path and then your mental continuum becomes omniscient mind. This is what is meant when we say that by seeing holy objects it plants the seed of enlightenment on the mind—it contains the whole path from Guru devotion and the three principals up to the two stages of tantra and enlightenment. Seeing holy objects makes us actualize all of this as a result. This is the effect we get from seeing them and this is how they cause us to achieve enlightenment.

Every time we see holy objects it purifies so much negative karma, so many defilements. This is because of the power of the holy object. Holy objects have so much power. It's like an atomic bomb—even though it is small it can bring so much harm and cause so much destruction. That example is negative but what I am saying is that the material has power, like electricity. The material of an atomic bomb has the power to harm and destroy the world. The material of holy objects—statues, scriptures and stupas—has the power to affect our mind, to leave a positive imprint.

It is mentioned in the King of Concentrations Sutra that “Even if you look with anger at a drawing of Buddha done on a stone wall it creates the cause to see ten million Buddhas.” Even if somebody looks at a drawing of Buddha with anger, not with a pure mind or a virtuous thought, but with anger, still because that drawing of Buddha has so much power it purifies the person's mind, their defilements. That doesn't mean the person will immediately be able to see ten million Buddhas, but it purifies the mind and makes the mind develop becoming more and more pure so that later one can see ten million Buddhas—which means many.

There are five paths to achieve enlightenment and the first is the Mahayana path of merit. Within that are three levels: small, middle and great. As soon as your mind achieves the great level of the path of merit then wherever you are, whether you are in a holy place or in the toilet, anywhere, you see numberless Buddhas around you. Numberless Buddhas are always there but we just don't see them because our minds are so obscured. When you reach that level you will actually see uncountable Buddhas in nirmanakaya aspect wherever you are. Then, when you reach the right seeing path, you become an arya being and you can see numberless Buddhas in sambhogakaya aspect. This explains the quotation that “Even if you look at a drawing of Buddha done on a stone wall out of anger it causes to see ten million Buddhas.” So the benefit we get each time we see a statue of Buddha, a picture of Buddha or a stupa is like the limitless sky. It causes us to achieve all the realizations from Guru devotion up to enlightenment and to achieve all the numberless qualities of the Buddha's holy body, speech and mind.

Holy objects only leave positive imprints, no negative imprint. When we watch TV or go sightseeing in the city many of the things we see can leave a negative imprint on our mind, depending on how we look at them. But the benefit that we get from looking at holy objects is like the limitless sky. So it is very important to have as many holy objects as possible outside the house and inside the house - maybe not in the toilet because the bad smell might be disrespectful! - but otherwise everywhere. So that wherever you look, always you see a holy object and always you get these skies of benefit.

Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo mentioned in the Lam Rim teachings that one should treat holy objects as though they were the actual living Buddha, not as material things. Every time you look at your altar think that these holy objects are the actual living Buddha but for the time being the only karma you have is to see Buddha in these forms as statues or pictures. Later, when you achieve the path of merit, you will see them as the actual living Buddha. Your view changes as your mind progresses. That is why it is said that holy objects are manifestations, that Buddha manifests as stupas and so on. Even though there are stories that such and such an artist made them, but without Buddha there is no way this could happen. For example, those whose minds are very pure have the

experience of statues speaking to them. Even though the statue was made by an artist, still it speaks. There are many great meditators who experience this and even simple people with not much knowledge of Dharma but strong faith and devotion. Even though a statue is made by somebody, actually it is a manifestation of Buddha. It is also said in the texts that animals cannot see the Buddha and holy objects as we can, so Buddha is manifesting in this way for us.

It is very important to understand these benefits, then you can realize how important it is to have holy objects and to make holy objects—not just in your own house but in the country or area where you live and in the world. This is so important for sentient beings.

In the Sutra of the Mudra Generating the Power of Faith, Buddha mentioned that: “Just merely seeing a form of the Buddha creates far greater merit than making extensive offerings of many different types—such as umbrellas, banners, food, robes, and so forth—to arhats equaling the number of sand grains of the Pacific Ocean for eons equaling the number of sand grains of the Pacific Ocean.”

That looks unbelievable. There are so many arhats and so many extensive offerings and it is for so many eons—it is unbelievable! But actually, all that merit is very small compared to merely seeing the form of Buddha. It goes on to say: “No question then that making an offering or prostration to the form of a Buddha creates even greater merit than that.”

Now, you have to understand, to be an arhat is not easy. First, you have to have the realization of renunciation—seeing the whole entire samsara, desire, form and formless realm as like being in the center of a fire, or in a prison, or in a poisonous snake’s nest. An arhat doesn’t have the slightest interest or attraction in any samsaric pleasure or comfort for even a second. Only when that realization is stable do you enter the Hinayana path and start progressing through the different levels and paths, gradually ceasing the delusions until even the seed of delusion is completely ceased and you achieve the state of an arhat. So it is not easy to be an arhat. For example, even though many of us met Buddhadharma many years ago, still most of us are unable to have the realization of even the very first meditation of the Lam Rim, death and impermanence or even the usefulness of the perfect human rebirth. So you can see that to be an arhat who has completed all these five paths is not easy, it’s very difficult, it’s unbelievable success and you can feel admiration.

Here we are talking about making extensive offerings to “arhats equaling the number of sand grains of the Pacific Ocean” for “eons equaling the number of sand grains of the Pacific Ocean”—so you can’t imagine how much merit you collect. There is a story about a very poor person in India who had nothing to offer to the Sangha except for a medicinal drink. So they offered that simple medicinal drink to four monks and due to the good karma in the next life the very poor person became a very powerful, rich king in a place in India called Gashika. So the result of making even small offerings is unimaginable.

Still, just merely seeing a statue or form of Buddha, whether the person is Buddhist or non-Buddhist, a believer or not, creates far more merit than that—numberless great merit. So these holy objects are so precious. These pictures and statues are so precious.

Even if somebody makes a very ugly drawing or like a child just draws some kind of design and says it is Buddha, still there is something so the positive effect is there. Therefore holy objects are really wish-fulfilling, unbelievable. Just by existing, these holy objects make it so easy for sentient beings to purify their negative karma—no matter how bad or how much they have accumulated—and so easy to collect extensive merit. They make it so easy for sentient beings to develop the mind in the path to enlightenment, so easy to get out of samsara and so easy to achieve enlightenment. Holy objects are more precious and wish-fulfilling than skies filled with gold, diamonds or even wish-granting jewels because those material things cannot have the same positive effect on your mind that a statue or painting of the Buddha has.

Therefore it is very, very important to have many, many holy objects. Especially for someone like me who is very lazy and unable to practice. It is very important to have many, many holy objects around so that in our everyday life it makes it very easy to achieve enlightenment and we can collect unbelievable merit just by seeing or looking at them. Also, when it is outside I think it's very important to make sure that when you draw or make a statue the proportions are nice, to make it beautiful so that it inspires other sentient beings to want to have the same. That helps them. That's the reason why we are building the Maitreya Buddha statue - the largest statue in the world. The larger it is the more people will come to see it, so the more benefit.

Usually I keep many photos of Buddha and this is also what I give to other people. For me these are the best, the most precious things. These statues and pictures of Buddha are very precious. Priceless. That's also why I give them to other people.

Edited by Ven Sarah Thresher from a talk given at the Mitukpa retreat, Milarepa, August 2002.