

Attuning to Om Mani Padme Hum

by Darvesha Victoria McDonald

This mantra has two different pronunciations depending on its source of origin. The Prayer Wheel Dance rendition uses the Sanskrit pronunciation (Om Mah nee Pahdmay Hoom), while the Partner Dance and the Thousand-Armed Chenrezig use the Tibetan pronunciation (Om Mah nee Peh me Hung).

As in all Tibetan Buddhist teaching, this Mantra has many levels of understanding. In fact it is said that all the 84,000 teachings, traditionally ascribed to the Buddha, can be explained in terms of this Mantra.

This is the Mantra used to activate one's identification with the Bodhisattva of Compassion (Chenrezig in Tibetan, and Avalokitesvara in Sanskrit), by those who have been initiated into this deity practice. The sound is said to be the vibration of compassion itself. On each of the six syllables of the Mantra, the practitioner may direct compassion to each of the six realms of existence.

'Mani' is the jewel, the compassion of the heart that fulfills the desire of beings to attain freedom from suffering. 'Padme' is the lotus that draws up through itself the muck in which it grows, bringing forth flower, essential nectar, and aromatic sweetness. This is a metaphor for the Tantric path, wherein the practitioner transforms the ordinary and mundane into the extraordinary and sublime. Any experience, pleasant or unpleasant, is skillfully utilized for the transformation of consciousness.

The jewel and the lotus can also be known as symbols of the masculine and feminine; when brought together, they become the metaphor for union and integration.

Finally, like all other phenomena, the jewel, the lotus, the sound, and the entire meaning of the Mantra can be known as impermanent and empty of self-inherent existence. Through this realization one achieves the goal of the path: freedom from suffering.

Where compassionate method (Mani) meets the wisdom of ultimate reality (Padme), there is (the possibility of) enlightenment – the realization of the eternal Now, void of dualistic conception. Therefore the sages sing, "On Mani Padme Hum, Hail to the Jewel in the Lotus!"