

## *Sangye Menla — Medicine Buddha*

Central to the tradition of Tibetan medicine is the Sutra to the King of Healing, the Healing Guru. Medicine Buddha, is so powerful a practice it is said innumerable benefits arise just by hearing his name or mantra, including enhancement of healing practices, intuition and diagnostic skills and the infusing of medicines into potent vehicles for changing health imbalances.

This concise yet simple healing practice is founded in generation and embodiment of the Medicine Buddha's characteristics and compassion practice. Tools to transform poisonous emotions and illness into healing energy for self and others benefits those experiencing pain of any kind, illness, as well as those dying. All can experience relative and ultimate truth as gifted by this practice of embodied compassion.



## **The Sutra of the Medicine Buddha - Bhaiṣajyaguru**

The sutra to the Medicine Buddha, Bhaiṣajyaguru which actually correctly translates as King of Star Sapphire Light, is composed essentially of three main parts.

Firstly there are praises describing the Twelve Great Vows of the Medicine Buddha before when he held aspirations to alleviate suffering of all classes of beings. The second part describes his extensive meritorious qualities, listing the ways he swiftly comes to the aid of those suffering and facing hardships and diseases. Thirdly, the vows of the twelve Yakṣa Generals to benefit sentient beings are enumerated.

This sutra is influential throughout East Asia, and is an absolute staple practice for any Tibetan medical physician. Chagpori adheres to regular practice of not just the Medicine Buddha but other Buddhist sutra and tantra to develop the inner compassion and perceptions needed to heal and assist others.

It contains what is considered the Pure Land teachings on rebirth, and yet also includes more formal esoteric practices of reciting the text, the deities mantra, focused visualizations and making offerings, such as lighting butter lamps, offering incense and the other traditional offerings. This sutra brings a promise of protection against diseases, falling in the lower realms and other misfortunes. The sutra emphasizes how reliance of one's faith in the assistance of the Medicine Buddha, while simultaneously not neglecting the importance of waking up the intrinsic enlightened qualities within through self-generation of this same pure vision.

From the perspective of the mind-only school of Buddhism, our karma, both good or bad, is created from one's mind and projections. Through doing visualization practice of the Medicine Buddha, or just in reciting his name, can change the projections and negative emotions within the mind. The root poisons and aggregates such as ignorance, aggression and attachment or clinging which lead to delusions and pathophysiology of disease can be transformed to selflessness, compassion and wisdom. In this way negative karma is exhausted and purified.

Consider as well that the rGyud-bZhi as our primary medical text, is attributed to the one who has "gone beyond" the relative and ultimate sufferings and is awakened and capable of healing all causation of disease stemming from ignorance.

We must also remember that the entire medical tantras is a conversation between the speech emanation and the mind emanation of Medicine Buddha. The instruction given for healing and maintaining health are derived of a divine source and continue to point to the interdependence of all phenomena which is the hallmark of Tibetan Buddhism.

Medicine Buddha practice is also formally needed for the important task of empowering medicine and doing mantra healings which are sometimes the secret

teachings or antidotes given in the third tantra. These can include the ‘men-drup’ ceremony, while detoxifying medicines, during external therapies and especially for wrathful treatment such as metza (moxibustion) and listed extensively for very specific situations and precise disease states.

Tibetan doctors therefore act as emissary of the superior physician who has “gone beyond.” Through empowerment, practice and application of the instructions for self and frontal visualization and mantra accumulation, doctors become the Medicine Buddha when in practice.

The Medicine Buddha practice can be practiced by anyone, even without a reading transmission or empowerment first being offered. Faith in his ability to render the arisal of disharmonies born of ignorance and the root poisons mingling with form and elements is enough to defeat the “changed state”. This move from homeostasis to disorders and illness is something which all humans must at some point experience due to the truth of Birth, Old Age, Sickness and Death. However the transmutation of ones attachment, anger and ignorance into a wisdom state is the essence of what being awakened to enlightenment means.

It is not that you will not suddenly lack experiencing the sufferings laid out as the Four Nobel Truths. It is more about mitigating the appearance of minor and major diseases. In this way the Root Tantra of Tibetan Medicine describes in the allegory of a tree of health and disease how we can best maintain homeostasis. The knowing and possessing the skill s the Medicine Buddha enumerates upon in the first six chapters of the Root tantra are of seeing how to returning to balance. This is despite our human conditions of unstoppable change and impermanence. The allegory goes on to represent the fruit of our efforts. The three fruits we may obtain by following the Medicine Buddhas guidance are described as happiness, wealth and a spiritual life. These three fruits comes from the two flowers which represent long life and health.



This practice of homage, faith and transforming into the enlightened generation state of Sangye Menla is not just for physicians, but anyone who wishes to gain the fruits of harmony and freedom from relative and ultimate suffering. Commonly called “The Two Truths” in Vajrayāna, this describes the suffering of the relative everyday existence that comes with having a human body, but also the ultimate suffering, of our unknowing and ignorance that gives rise to the three root poisons.

*The above commentary is written by Nashalla G Nyinda TMD Menpa, Ma Acu. I confess any mistakes or omissions as my own. It is with the intention of informing the general public of the authentic and unbroken lineage of the Sowa Rigpa Tibetan Medical system that I give this explanation of the Medicine Buddha practice and importance for all Tibetan Menpa.*