

The Benefits of Alms Bowl
Taught by H.E. Garchen Rinpoche
2018
[Source: Bodhicitta Workshop]

For us as sangha—the Dharma robes that we wear and the alms bowl that we hold are distinctive. The meaning they hold are both deep and profound. For example, the Dharma robes that we wear are different. Whether red or yellow, we can think of it as the Buddha's clothes. This is “recollecting the Buddha.”

For the livelihood of the sangha, one should think, “Where does my livelihood come from?” It is offered by people with their faith and devotion. Sentient beings should think that (the Three Jewels) are complete in a single sangha to whom we make offerings. Their body is the Sangha, speech the Dharma, and mind the Buddha. This is the devotion of sentient beings. One should also regard one's own livelihood in this way—they are the faith, devotion, and accumulation of merits of all beings. So, we should think that this is the Buddha's bowl. This is “ the Buddha”.

Next, what did the Buddha say? The Buddha discussed love and compassion. Having love and compassion for all sentient beings is “recollecting the Dharma.” In this way, if the concept of cause and effect enters the mind streams of all sentient beings, then they are the Sangha. This will lead them onto the path of liberation and all-knowingness. Hence with this bowl, we can truly understand what Lord Jigten Sumgon said, “As a follower of the Buddha, one should recollect the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.”

With this bowl, you should think, “Oh! This is the Buddha's bowl” or “This is the Buddha's alms bowl.” That is the thought we should have when thinking of the alms bowl. When seeing the bowl, think: “Oh! This is the Buddha's bowl, I am a sangha.” In doing so your mind is not apart from the Three Jewels. In this way, the one that is offering the food accumulates countless merits, no different than offering the food to the Buddha directly. The one receiving the food is also free of the obscurations of misusing the offerings. There are such inconceivable benefits to thinking of the alms bowl in this way.

When this bowl is in front of you, think, “Oh! This is the Buddha's bowl.” At that moment, you think of the Buddha. Each time you think of the Buddha, the five heinous crimes will be cleansed. In this way, recollecting the Dharma is love and compassion. Reflect that the Buddha talked about karma and effect. In this way, you can remember the Dharma. Through recollecting the Dharma, if you know the importance of love and compassion, your mind is the mind of the Sangha. Whoever has love and compassion is the Sangha.

Now these objects contain the blessings of the Buddha and the Three Jewels. This is very important and greatly beneficial. If you understand the ultimate virtue, the one making the offerings will accumulate great merits. It is the same as actually offering to the Buddha. If one enjoys the offerings with an altruistic mind, and recollects the Buddha and the Dharma, he or she would not have the obscurations of misusing the offerings. Such qualities are inconceivable.

This bowl is very important. If you place this bowl on the shrine, in the practitioner's mind, making offerings to it is no different from making offerings to the Buddha. The merit is

extremely vast. Therefore, all the sangha—regardless of religions, races, and genders, whoever it is, as long as you have faith in the Three Jewels, you may hold this bowl, and you will obtain merits. Especially now we are able to produce it in large quantities, making it better and more solid.

Previously, I have made it many times. The quality of some wood is not good, some were not solid, some were easy to break, some cracked and so on. Among all the bowls, this one is the best. It is solid, looks nice, and contains great blessings. You should think, “This is the Buddha's bowl.” Please use the bowl.

Translated by the GDI translation group and edited by Greg Bell in Aug 2018.