

TIBETAN PRAYER BEADS AND MANTRAS

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By Michael Erlewine (Michael@Erlewine.net)

[What follows is a short excerpt from a much longer video on Tibetan prayer beads (malas) and the mantras that are said with them. Probably not for everyone, but for those who would like to know more about using prayer beads properly, this should help.]

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZlXo6kTYktE>

As for reciting mantras, it is taught to recite them clearly, distinctly, at whatever speed you can manage. Tibetans are adept at very fast recitation, although the only benefit I can see in that is accomplishing greater numbers of recitation. Having spent many years around Tibetans at all kinds of pujas and empowerments I can say they say mantras so fast that to me it is just like the hum or drone of an engine. I often cannot tell (if I don't already know) which mantra they are saying. And they don't recite mantras in a monotone, but it seems the sound (often almost melodious and quite striking) rises and falls by degrees, gets almost silent and then erupts again.

Most mantras are not said in Tibetan, but rather in Sanskrit, although a form of Tibetanized Sanskrit, for example. The reason for this is that since most of these mantras came from ancient Sanskrit, it is thought that part of their power is wrapped in Sanskrit and might be lost were they to be translated into Tibetan. This is the same reason I was taught my practices in Tibetan, rather than English, to keep from losing any power in the language.

As an example of Tibetan-Sanskrit, perhaps the most famous mantra, the "Mani" mantra (of kindness and compassion) is pronounced "OM Mani Padme Hum," but Tibetans pronounce it "Om Mani Pay-me Hung," and so on. There has been considerable discussion of reforming the Tibetanized pronunciation to the original Sanskrit, and I heard this myself from His Eminence Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche before his tragic death, but nothing has changed that yet, that I am aware of.

Saying mantras is much like Shamata meditation, only with mantras the object of focus is the mantra, rather than the breath or some object like a pebble. One learns to allow the mind to rest on (in) the mantra.

