

The Outer Offerings

An Explanation by Lama Tharchin Rinpoche

There are two kinds of outer offerings – peaceful and wrathful. The idea of making peaceful offerings is to offer desirable qualities that are pleasing to the senses. The peaceful offerings are related primarily to the Sutrayana point of view with its emphasis on the accumulation of merit. They create positive feelings and are an antidote to miserliness, and in that way accumulate merit. This is because as sentient beings, we generally have the idea that we should offer “good” things and not offer “bad” things. By thinking in this way, however, we fall into a dualistic mental extreme and lack equanimity. In order not to fall into this extreme, we also make wrathful offerings. Wrathful offerings represent qualities that would normally elicit revulsion in us. Wrathful offerings are related to the Secret Tantra tradition and emphasize the accumulation of wisdom. They liberate our conceptual limitations of accepting what is perceived as positive and rejecting what is perceived as negative. This directly cuts through the conceptual mind and we are freed from both extremes. The lines between good and bad, accepting and rejecting, vanish.

Pure plain or saffron-infused water may be used to fill all the offering bowls (both peaceful and wrathful) or specific substances may be placed in each bowl as indicated. Offerings are usually placed below or in front of the objects of refuge on the shrine. The peaceful offerings commonly begin at the shrine’s right and end at the shrine’s left (our left to right when facing the shrine). The wrathful offerings are commonly laid out in the opposite direction. You may have a set of seven peaceful offerings or include both peaceful and wrathful offerings.

The general peaceful offerings include:

1. **Drinking water** (Sanskrit: *argham*; Tibetan: *chö-yön*) as an offering for the mouth. We use pure, clean water that we visualize as containing the three white substances (milk, yogurt, and butter) and the three sweet substances (sugar, honey, and molasses).
2. **Foot-washing water** (Sanskrit: *padyam*; Tibetan: *zhab-zil*) as an offering for the body. Use pure water as an offering. Traditionally it may have been prepared with white and red sandalwood and other cleansing substances.
3. **Flowers** (Sanskrit: *pushpé*; Tibetan: *mé-tok*) as an offering for the eyes, including beautiful flowers that grow in soil or water. Use a bowl of rice with a flower set in it as an offering.
4. **Fragrance** (Sanskrit: *dhupé*; Tibetan: *pü*) as an offering for the nose, both naturally existing and man-made. Use a bowl of rice with two sticks of incense as an offering. The two sticks of incense together symbolize skillful means and wisdom. Other traditions may arrange the incense differently.
5. **Light** (Sanskrit: *aloké*; Tibetan: *mar-mé*) as an offering for the mind, such as sunlight, moonlight, and jewel-light, as well as the light of pristine awareness. Use a butter lamp or candle either by itself or set in a bowl of rice.
6. **Perfume** (Sanskrit: *ghendé*; Tibetan: *dri-chab*) as an offering for the body. Use pure water or water scented with perfume, saffron, or any other beautiful smelling substances.
7. **Food** (Sanskrit: *newidhé*; Tibetan: *zhal-sé*) as an offering for the tongue. The substance contains one hundred tastes and one thousand powers. Use a bowl of rice with a *zhalsé* torma. If you do not have a torma, it is fine to use a whole piece of fruit or an unbroken biscuit.
8. **Music** (Sanskrit: *shapdha*; Tibetan: *rolmo*) as an offering for the ears, particularly ritual music. This is not represented by a symbolic offering on the shrine. According to some traditions, people place *ting-shak* (small cymbals or a conch) in a bowl of rice on the shrine, but we do not

do this in the Nyingma tradition. Music should be offered as the actual sadhana music of the bell and damaru as well as other instruments.

The general wrathful offerings include:

1. **Blood drinking water** (Tibetan: *T'hrak gi chö-yön*); use pure water
2. **Poisonous foot-washing water** (Tibetan: *Duk-chu zhab-sil*); use pure water
3. **Flower of the five senses** (Tibetan: *Wangpo metok*); use a permanent support torma or one made of tsampa or oats
4. **Great fat burning incense** (Tibetan: *Tsil chen gi duk-pü*); use incense as with the peaceful offering
5. **Great melted fat lamp** (Tibetan: *Zhun chen gi mar-mé*); use a lamp or candle as with the peaceful offering
6. **Bilious perfume water** (Tibetan: *Tri-bai dri chab*); use pure water
7. **Wrathful food offering** with brain, fat, bone marrow, rotten meat, etc. (Tibetan: *Sha-rü gi zhal-sê*); use a permanent support torma or one made of tsampa or oats
8. **Skull damaru** (Tibetan: *Tö-nay rolmo*); as with the peaceful offering, music is not represented by a symbolic offering on the shrine