

**The Asian Classics Institute**  
**Practice VI: The Four Powers, How to Get Rid of**  
**Your old Bad Karma**

**Supplement: Fire Purification Instructions**

*The Kit*



**Practice VI: The Four Powers**  
**Supplement: Fire Purification Instructions**

**The Kit:**

1) You need a container to make the fire in: a used tea tin, flower pot, or some other such container. Poke or drill holes in the container so that air can feed the fire.



2) Place the container on or in a dish (one can also put out aluminum foil or place it on a cement slab). The seeds can pop out when the fire really gets going, so protect the surrounding area.

3) You will need black sesame seeds which you will visualize putting your mental afflictions into, and/or black mustard seeds which you visualize putting all your obstacles into. You can buy them at health food stores or Indian shops.



4) You will need a bottle of ghee (clarified butter) or vegetable shortening.



To make ghee yourself, use unsalted butter. It is purer, and salt inhibits burning. In a **microwave**: place 1 pound of butter in a bowl in the microwave for 3-4 minutes. Stir, and then heat for another 3-4 minutes. The butter will then separate. Or, for **stovetop**: place the butter in a thick bottomed pan on a *very low* temperature. Boil for about 45 minutes, letting the butter separate.

A kind of scum will form on the top of the butter. Scoop the scum off with a spoon. Strain the remaining liquid through a tea strainer into a jar. Any remaining scum will catch in the tea strainer, and the clarified butter will end up in the jar. Do not pour out what remains on the bottom of the pan. This is the curd, and it will pass through the strainer and ruin the ghee.

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5) Matches. Wooden matches work best as you use them for starter fuel for the seeds and the ghee which go in the fire container.



6) A pencil and paper for writing down your mental afflictions, especially the really nasty one or ones you are concentrating on. Write it down, wad it up, and place it in the fire. As it burns, it purifies that specific bad deed or problem.



7) A cloth or container to place the fire container in after you are finished to keep everything else clean.



8) A spoon to scoop the ghee.



### **How to Conduct the Fire Ritual**

1) Sit for a few minutes and do a short breath meditation to balance and focus the mind on what you're going to do. Take refuge and generate bodhichitta just as when beginning a meditation. It is better if you can focus your mind on what you are doing instead of sitting down and popping some ghee in a can and setting it on fire without awareness.



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After taking refuge and generating bodhichitta,

- 2) Put about one heaping tablespoon of ghee in the bottom of the can, spreading it out so that it will not smother and drown the matches.



- 3) Take the seeds and put them in your hand, holding them at your heart and visualize whatever you are working on, such as "I'm really critical." Or more specifically perhaps, criticizing your Dharma brothers and sisters. Try to remember all the specific times that you've done this in the last 24 hours. Try to be very specific. Think about where you were, who the other person was, what they were doing, what time of day was it. What exactly the thoughts were in your mind. Visualize them clearly and gather them as blackness in your heart. Using your breath, breathe the thoughts into the seeds. You do this by inhaling and then on your out breath through your nostrils, imagine all the blackness coming out of you on your breath through your nose and into the seeds. Don't leave any inside of you. It may take a few breaths, sometimes it feels like it doesn't want to come out. Make sure it is all in your hand. The seeds should begin to feel heavy, or gross, because your mental afflictions are in there. Feel a strong conviction that all those affliction and negativities are in the seeds.



- 4) Then dump the seeds into the container, on top of the ghee. Make sure they land on the ghee.



- 5) Before you light it take a moment to think about whatever understanding of emptiness you have, however tiny it may be and bring it to mind. Then using a lit match as a symbol of your understanding of emptiness, drop it into the container.



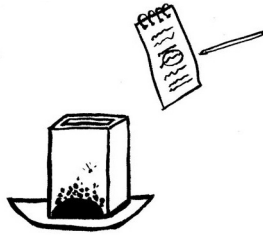
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Drop in five to six more matches, always keeping emptiness in mind. Try to criss-cross the matches so you will get a nice small fire going. While you are doing this think of the different ways in which you understand how emptiness helps to overcome and destroy your mental afflictions.

If the ghee was hard at first it will start to melt, and the seeds will start to sizzle like in a frying pan. If you use too much ghee it will drown the matches. When it gets going well the seeds will start to pop a little bit. Be careful because the seeds may fly out.

When the fire's going a little bit, think about yesterday -- just quickly call it to mind. Whatever the deed was, call it to mind and put it into more of the seeds and then drop them in. Then do the day before, then last week, and then last month. Last month is kind of fuzzy, but still do all the times last month. Then do last year. All the times you criticized or behaved in a judgmental way toward other people. After that try to think about all the tendencies in your mind to do it. What we would call the latent seeds in your mind. Just think about them and put them in the can. This way you can get rid of all your tendencies to even think that way. Try to get rid of any and every little speck of possibility of doing that bad deed again.

If you have a really specific problem you can write it down on a piece of paper.



If you have to put a person's name, circle it because you don't want to burn a person's name. Especially if you are having a mental affliction toward your lama, you don't want to write your lama's name down, then crumple it up and put it on the fire. Put a circle around it, and then it's symbolizing you're not burning it, it is something exempt.

Write down whatever the problem is, crumple it up nicely so it will burn and put it on the fire. Have some conviction in your heart that you are burning that negative deed, that negative way of thinking, or that habit. You are actually destroying it. Think that you know this is symbolic, "this is my mental affliction and it's burning right now. For the moment I am not going to be weighted by it, I'm not going to be controlled by it any longer, I am free of it." If you have major mental afflictions, just doing this once is not enough. You need to do many, many fire rituals (*pujas*). You can do them every day for a month, or three months, and at the end have a really special one, a celebratory fire *puja*. Make this final purification ceremony special.

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When you have completed this final *puja*, think that all the negative karma is finished. Feel, "okay, that's finished, I finished it!"

It's good to try and really focus on a theme. For instance if you are having problems with stinginess, with practicing generosity, and you don't want to be stingy. You can write down your overall problem with generosity, crumple it up, and then throw it in there. You can also write down one specific thing, one habit. Try to keep the theme and not get too distracted and say "Oh yeah, I did this, and oh yeah, I did that other thing too," focusing on different ideas. There are 84,000 negative habits and you could spend a whole month going all over the place.

This practice comes from Kedrup Je, one of Lama Tsongkapa's disciples. The black seeds are from Kedrup Je's tradition symbolizing your bad deeds, *pakpa*. They have been used for maybe two and a half thousand years as a symbol for your mental afflictions. The paper is new and more specific, good for one very specific thing, one very specific issue, maybe a deeper problem.

[Based on a presentation by Elizabeth Heimburg during *The Four Powers of Purification*, taught by Geshe Michael Roach at Vajrapani Institute in Boulder Creek California on October 30, 1999. The text has been lightly edited. May these instructions serve to free all beings from suffering, and bring all to full enlightenment.]

**Geshe Michael Roach on the mantra associated with the Fire Offering**

Geshela: I would do the mantra in connection with the fire offering and I would do the fire offering maybe once a week on your day off, like on Sunday or Saturday. We used to go to the beach and do it. We would have a nice picnic, and everybody would do their fire thing. I want to say one thing about the fire thing. This is one of those things that great lamas do because they know it's more fun to sit and make a fire than to try and meditate for ten minutes. Really, I'm not kidding. Sit there and go into a reverie; sit there and stare at the flame, just letting your mind go. It's an excuse to be quiet for 15-20 minutes. There's something about a flame that's irresistible. You watch the flame, especially on a beach at night or something like that, just watch the flame and then do a real slow Four Powers. And there's something about the flame that holds your attention better than just sitting at home on your bed and trying to meditate. I find it very relaxing and very cleansing. It is said that it's very, very important at the end to say "OK that's over with," especially if you're going to die. If you're close to dying, it's important to go through the Four Powers on all the bad things you ever did to anybody and say "that's over." "I'm over that," and decide that it's finished.

Mantra: *Om vajra daka kaka kahi kaahi sarwa papam dahana basmim kuru soha*

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A mantra works if two things are present: The Buddha wrote it (so that one's okay), and you have to be keeping your vows. You have to be at least trying to keep your vow book, or it doesn't work.

The guts of the mantra is here: *Sarwa* means all, *papam* means bad deeds, *dhana basmim* means purified, *kuru* means I do, *daka* is referring to the deity, like your guardian angel. That's enough, we don't translate the whole thing.

It is good to repeat the mantra every time you throw in some seeds.

(Student) Can you also do it with your rosary?

Geshela: You can also do it on your rosary, but technically we often do it as we're throwing seeds in. Then you go burn up all your bad karmas. It's a cool practice. I think it's not taught enough, or taught clearly enough. So now you have it, and you should teach it to other people too.