



Dolpo Tulku Rinpoche Teachings

Gratitude towards the Lama

In the first ten years of my life, I was still a child of course, I never thought about the mind of enlightenment, compassion or how I could benefit others. Only when I met my Buddhist teachers I received the chance to contemplate on love and compassion a little, based on their instructions, even though at that time I couldn't engage in any advanced types of meditation. This arising of beneficial thoughts was solely due to the kindness of these lamas, which I can never repay in my lifetime. At least that is my view.

When we receive the vows for taking refuge in the Three Jewels, the most important point is to give up harming others. If we think about everything that we do during a lifetime, then getting rich, famous or any of these things are not really important. But to take the resolve not to harm other beings - that is something of utmost significance.

If, for example, we are someone with no connection to such teachings and we enjoy fishing, then taking a boat out to the lake to fish might be a way to cheer ourselves up when in a bad mood. The question whether we are hungry or not in this context is not important. So to feel better, we first put the fish through the suffering of inserting a metal hook in its mouth and then through the suffering of death. This kind of behaviour is based on ignorance, which can be overcome by taking a vow not to hurt any sentient being. The thought on which this vow is based is that every being is the same in its desire to avoid suffering and in its wish to attain happiness. This is what our teachers share with us and this kindness we can never repay.

The refuge vows are just the entrance point, though. The teachers continue to explain to us the different aspects of the ground, the path and the result of the spiritual teachings as well as how we have to practice them. But actually, just learning not to harm and to benefit others is a condensation of the entire Buddhist path. The kindness we are shown here can only be fathomed over time. The more we realize how kind our teachers are, the stronger our love and devotion grow.

When we practice Guru Yoga meditation, then no matter how hard we try to visualize the Buddha in front of us, we cannot materialize him. We have a proverb about our relationship with our teachers: "Even though he has the same qualities as the Buddha,

his compassion is greater than the Buddha's." The last part here is very important. If we think deeply about our life and our interactions in society, then acting with compassion and with the wish to benefit others is invaluable. And it is our teachers who show us the methods to give rise to these feelings and actions. Whether we actually implement them or not is another question, but without their kindness we would never know how.

Or if we contemplate on emptiness due to what we have learned and are able to integrate this view into our thinking realizing how this can help us in our life, then slowly we will start having a heartfelt appreciation for our teachers. We naturally become aware of their value without merely trying to see them as deities. If we visualize the teacher as a deity without any heartfelt feeling towards him, it is hard to get any results.

The important point in selecting a teacher is to find one who keeps his sacred vows and commitments (dam tsig in Tibetan) and who has more qualities than us. Whether he is an extraordinary meditation-practitioner is not so important. These days there is often a sense of, 'Oh, he or she is just someone who gives me some information on Buddhism. That is not my teacher. I have another teacher.' That is big mistake. If someone introduces us to Buddhism, this person is kinder to us than the Buddha himself, as the proverb said. No one can show greater kindness to us. But to say that someone is just an information-dispenser and not our teacher because he or she is neither famous nor rich, nor gives us instructions to higher meditation practices is very prevalent. Many people only want famous teachers.

I met someone, who told me that a friend of his was teaching him the 'Introduction to the Middle Way'. So I asked him: "Is he one of your teachers then?" He answered: "No, he is just a friend of mine. I have another teacher." But if we get taught a text as profound as the 'Introduction to the Middle Way' and get the chance to grasp its meaning without acknowledging the person who teaches us as one of our teachers, we are committing a grave mistake. That is erroneous thinking.

Another problem many people have these days is to look for potential faults in the teacher and even worse, gossip about what he does or doesn't do. This will hinder us from becoming an appropriate student or to ever get a teacher that fulfils our requirements. In this world it is almost impossible to find anyone without any fault. Therefore, as I said before, choose someone who has more qualities than you, but don't be unrealistic in your requirements.

Please don't get me wrong now. This explanation about feeling gratitude towards your lamas is not meant for my own safety. I want to point out to you where you might run into difficulties. We have met here for this teaching and will go different ways when it finishes in a few days. Then we might meet again next year and separate again. So this is not so much for my own sake, but for you to learn how to deal with your teachers in general. But maybe you are thinking: "Oh, today he really told us off!"

For my part, I really have a pure view of my teachers and I remember their kindness deeply. If I contemplate on them and then engage in Guru Yoga, the practice becomes meaningful because I have a sincere feeling of gratitude towards them.

On the other hand, if we disregard their kindness of having given us the refuge vows, explaining the philosophical texts, giving us insight into the nature of reality etc., and only follow someone because he is famous and attractive, then our feeling is not one of gratitude but a sort of excitement or adoration. We can have the same feeling for someone like Michael Jackson. We could even fall unconscious just at the sight of him. But this is not a very deep-rooted feeling. If one day someone tells us some gossip about our teacher, we might immediately lose faith. But if our feeling towards the teacher is based on gratitude for his kindness to us, we will not change our minds because of some rumours. Our pure view, devotion and love will be stable no matter what.

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