

To the Sangha, On Respect and Decency

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August 25th, 2016

Following the rules of the monastery or the center is part of respecting the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Why do we respect the Buddha? Because he's Buddha, the awakened one—even his name means he is enlightened. He is worthy of respect, more than anyone in this world, because he is beyond this world. He is not still stuck here, an ignorant and suffering sentient being. Therefore, if we are going to respect anyone, it should be him, because he is beyond everybody. Why do we respect the Dharma? Because it's what the Buddha said. Why do we respect the Sangha? Because they are following the Buddha, practicing the Dharma. They are Sangha because they respect Buddha and Dharma, and we respect the Sangha itself in turn. That is how respect for the Three Jewels starts. If we have that respect with understanding, then we will have faith. When we engage our three doors, we will be creating virtue. If you need to know the reasons, those are the reasons for respecting the Three Jewels.

Everyone, please respect yourself, too.

How do you respect yourself? By respecting Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Respect yourself by listening to the *geku* [the one who “requests virtue” —the disciplinarian, responsible for maintaining good conduct in the sangha.] What the *geku* has to tell you will really benefit you, if you are not proud. Respect yourself by learning how to conduct yourself well, properly and according to the rules. Learn how to do things the right way. That is how to respect yourself and not bring shame on yourself. Learn how to show respect to others, too, so that you keep harmony with everyone. Learn how to respect the Dharma itself, how to properly show respect to the objects of refuge, Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. It is important to be respectful. You don't need to be bowing in every direction, saying, “I am being respectful!” No, no. Just be respectful with your body, speech, and mind.

If you misunderstand or do something wrong, that is why we have a *geku* —to watch and help you do things the right way. First you have to know what the right way is, then you have to do it. The *geku* helps with both. Teachers help with both. That way they are supporting you. I don't think anyone, man or woman, is going to make it just by doing things their own way, without a teacher or someone to guide them. Follow your teacher and your *geku*; don't go your own way, your MY WAY. If you do just go your MY WAY without a teacher, you will just put yourself back in your goddamn hole,

deeply into the sewer. I don't think you can benefit yourself that way. I don't think that is the way to show yourself kindness or to respect yourself.

Having respect also means not being arrogant. Sometimes people think, "I'm not part of this group! I'm not part of this sangha, so I don't have to follow the rules! I don't care about the lineage or the tradition, I can just go my own way!" Then they rudely point their feet here and there and do other things that are disrespectful. That is absolutely the wrong way. Wherever you go, you need to respect the tradition of where you are. Even if it's not your tradition, still you should be respectful of it and try to follow it when you are in that place. Even if they are not your rules, they are the rules of the place. Maybe you don't consider yourself part of this group or that group, but when you are with that group, you need to be polite and respectful.

If you don't want to follow the rules and traditions of the group you are with, then get out! No reason to go into a group and then disrespect everyone and expect them to eat your shit while you break their rules and upset everything. If you only want to go your own way, then go and do it! You don't need to do it in the middle of a group somewhere, disturbing everybody and breaking their rules. That's disgusting behavior, whether you are talking about going into a school or a dharma center or the army or the police or any group or religion! If you want to have your OWN rules, then you can take your OWN rules and get out! That's better than staying and disturbing everyone by being disrespectful. There is no reason for that.

Everybody has rules, not just in the dharma. Even if you weren't a Buddhist, you still couldn't say that you had no rules and could do whatever you want! If you follow any "-ism," not just Buddhism, then you have to follow the rules of that "-ism" and take care with your conduct. The army is not a religion even, but they have rules, too. In fact, each group within the army has their own tradition, absolutely. Police, they do have rules, too. They are not just a bunch of macho guys! Actually, I think even hippies have sort of their own rules and their own ways of doing things and can't just do whatever they want either! What is positive, what is negative, what is respectful, what is disrespectful—everybody has rules like that.

Or watch mothers and their children—absolutely they have rules and right ways of doing things! You can see that with your own eyes. If the mother doesn't know how to keep rules with her children, then the grandma or grandpa can tell her, help her, if they are good people. The mother will listen, too, if she's trying to really help her children and not just being stubborn. There are ways that parents guide, help, and sometimes scold their children so that they can act decently, whether in public or privately. In a dharma center, the geku and teachers do the same thing for the sangha.

When babies are small, they shouldn't crawl freely everywhere, in the middle of the road or in dirty places or bothering other people. They shouldn't pee and shit everywhere. They have to learn when they are young that you can't do that, which means the mommy or daddy or someone has to be always watching, always telling them. Westerners are wonderful in this regard, because they have babysitters so even if the parents are busy, still there is someone watching the children; and because they are getting money then they really pay attention. Wherever children go, someone is watching them, parents or babysitters or teachers. That way the children can develop their wisdom—from how to sit on a chair and other simple things to more and more complicated, deeper things.

Of course, Tibetans don't sit on chairs so they learn how to sit nicely on the floor instead. But either way there is the right way to sit, the polite way. Always there is the right way of doing things. Children have to learn each thing, piece by piece. How to sit, how to stand up, how to walk. For example, if you are in a very dusty place, you should walk without stomping and stirring up a lot of dust so you don't make it dusty for others. In one way these are simple things, but children have to be taught how to think like that, how to remember others. We need to be taught, too, sometimes, or reminded. Sometimes children are better than we are, more like human beings.

There is even the right way to talk—we all know how to talk politely, nicely, not yelling or being harsh or shouting like a drunk person. Westerners, Chinese, Tibetans, others—everybody has sort of the same tradition, nobody just yells or screams for no reason. Everyone follows the rules about how to have a nice conversation. Nobody needs to yell when they're cooking, or when they're in the middle of school, or in a temple or church. Male or female, it doesn't matter—nobody should be rude or disturb others. One way we think it's obvious, of course everybody talks this way; but actually if you think about it, there are rules there. There is the right way of doing things, which is what rules are.

Similarly, of course, there are rules about how to behave at the dharma center and in the temple. Those rules aren't somebody's trip or somebody controlling you; they are the right way of doing things there. They help you create virtue. For example, in the temple you don't need to hug and kiss everybody, there in front of the group, in the middle of the practice or teaching. When you are in the temple, you shouldn't talk and gossip, blah-blah-blah; you shouldn't drink or smoke or even use snuff—that is how the rules used to be in the monasteries. Also, ladies couldn't just hang all over the guys, nakedly or shamelessly, and the men couldn't take out their knives and wave them threateningly or go around sort of half-undressed. We don't need to change those rules or traditions, still it is the same. Still those things are disrespectful. Nobody should

come with dirty hands to paint or arrange offerings, or come to receive teachings without washing up first.

These are all examples of being thoughtless and disrespectful. That style is disrespectful to your dharma brothers and sisters and all others. It is disrespectful to your teachers, too, thinking you can ignore their teachings and do things your own way.

If you do need to talk to someone when you are in the temple, you should go talk quietly in a corner or other place so as not to disturb the dharma activity, the practice or teaching that is going on. If you think you are very pretty, and so of course you need to talk with someone, being so important, still you need to go talk in a corner or outside. You don't need to blah-blah-blah in the middle of the temple. Or if you think you are so handsome that you can get away with anything, actually still you shouldn't stretch your legs out rudely in front of someone. There are rules about the proper way to sit while in the temple—without stretching out your legs, without leaning on someone, if you are healthy and your body works. Of course, if you are sick or your body doesn't work, then that's a different story.

In the monasteries there were even rules about how to wear your zen (robe) and skirt, with variations according to different traditions. Those were the rules for respecting your robes, if you wore robes. Does that mean others can just do whatever they want, that there are no rules for dress for those who do not wear robes? No. Still there are rules. You can't come to the temple naked, for example! You still have to dress nicely, respectfully.

The bottom line is whatever is going on in the temple, a practice or teaching or whatever, don't disturb that, out of respect and to avoid creating non-virtue. Disrespectful things aren't allowed, and things should be done the right way. Why? Is it just someone's idea or someone's trip? No. It is for the same reason you don't have sex in the middle of the temple—because you are a human being! You have a sense of modesty. You are trying to be a decent person. It is out of respect for the center, too. What is the center? It is a place of virtue. So really it is out of respect for virtue. Or you could say, out of respect for the Sangha and the practice. Everyone is there trying to do dharma, so it is out of respect for the Dharma, too. What is the source of that? Buddha! The bottom line is it is all out of respect for the Buddha. That is why we need to know the right way of doing things and follow that. That is all the rules are for. They are not just somebody's trip. They are not just meant for a few people to follow. They are for everyone. Following the rules of the Three Jewels is a way to create merit and purify your obscurations. These aren't just hippie rules or army rules.

Of course, many people get upset if you try to explain the rules or point out that they are doing something wrong, or ask them not to disturb everybody. People are too sensitive all the time. They need everyone to respect them and everyone to lick their butt. They need their “freedom” to embarrass themselves. They need a high, special seat. And if someone says one unpleasant word to them they scream and cry. If you get upset or angry with somebody, you don’t need to scream and cry. You are not dead or wounded. What is your problem? Someone doesn’t respect you? So what? One way, it is not even your business!

Moreover, if you want others to respect you, first you need to give respect: respect others and respect yourself. Do you think that if you are some kind of leader then you can drink and smoke in the middle of the temple, in the middle of a teaching? Do you think if you have some kind of high position then you don’t need to be respectful? No, no, no. Buddhism is not stupid in that way. The dharma doesn’t have two tongues, one for other people and one for yourself. The teachings are the same for everyone. If you want others to respect you, you need to show them that same kind of respect yourself. It’s the same thing. Why would you think you don’t need to show respect? Do you think they have to respect you but you don’t need to respect them?

If they are a human being, it means they are the same as you—you are the same human beings. That deserves respect. If they are a Buddhist, then they are practicing Hinayana, Mahayana, or Vajrayana, same as you. You should respect that, absolutely, otherwise you are disrespecting the Dharma—disrespecting your own tradition. In fact, since those are the same practices that you engage in, the same teachings that you follow, you are disrespecting yourself! If you think you don’t need to respect others but they need to respect you, you are really showing your own fault, your own arrogance and completely wrong thinking. You are bringing shame on yourself and making yourself stupid. You are deeply disrespecting yourself, like in a deep smelly sewer, and nobody else will respect you either. No reason to!

It is shameful to always be pointing the finger at others, saying they need to be respectful, saying they need to be clean and neat but not holding yourself to the same standard. If others need to be decent people and act like real human beings, why don’t you, too? Don’t be a hypocrite! Don’t say others need to act correctly and others need to do this or that. Point at yourself. You are the one who needs to! You need to follow the rules, you need to know the laws and traditions. You need to watch your own body, speech, and mind and control them. What others do is not your business. What you are doing, what your own body, your own speech, and your own mind are doing, that is your business. That is what you need to watch.

With your body, for example, be aware what direction your feet are pointing. With your speech and tongue be conscious of what you are saying. For example, don't go carrying on, blah-blah-blah, pretending you know everything, proudly smoking your pipe, all the while thinking you are so wonderful! I think we don't need to be crass and embarrass ourselves with that kind of arrogance and foolishness. I don't think we need to do that for ourselves, and others don't like it when we are stupid that way either. So why do we need to do it? Whether we consider those others "sangha" or "non-sangha" doesn't matter at all. Either way, there is no reason to upset them with our ego and embarrassing, unmindful behavior.

Everyone especially watch your mouth. Mostly to keep your mouth closed is best. If you say something, be conscious. This is true for everyone. If you are a mother, watch your mouth. If you are a father, watch your mouth. Why do I say to watch your mouth, mommy, daddy? Because that is what will screw up your family. If you are an army leader, same thing. What is really going to screw you up is not the enemy's army but your own mouth. So you need to watch it. Police leader, same thing. The king or queen of a country, same thing! Lama, geku, umzed, chopon, leaders at the dharma center, and all the sangha, same thing! Each human being, same thing. We think our mouths are clean but actually they are dirty, worse than garbage or sewage. We love to make nonvirtue with our mouths. It is so easy for us, we are professional. Please try to be careful, everyone! I am not pointing or poking at just one person, I am poking at *everyone*—everyone is the "one person" who is my target! Or maybe not everyone, maybe just *you*!

Try. Stay humble. You can control yourself. No big deal. You want to control others? First control yourself. If you can keep to the rules well, respecting yourself and others, and you can control yourself well in all ways, then you won't have a problem with others. Others won't bother you too much. You won't have a problem with yourself or with others.

If you don't control yourself, if you don't abide by the rules yourself but think others need to? I don't think so! I don't think that works. If you are like an egomaniac, sitting in the middle of everything, wanting some high seat or big deal, maybe even spitting or smoking or doing you-name-it in the middle of everything, unfortunately others don't like that. They will see your trip, your arrogance, your fault, your negativity. Better that they see your dirty butt than that—that would be less embarrassing! We don't need to embarrass ourselves by being arrogant like that.

We love to boast and try to push ourselves up. You want to be something special, something high? You want everybody to put you up high? Sure, you can be high. Up on the rocky mountains, birds can fly very high, too. So what? Workers go up on the

roof to fix things, higher than everybody, higher than all the seats and thrones. So what? In the jungle, tigers, snakes, and other naughty, nasty dumb guys think, “We are high! We are powerful!” But if you think about them, you don’t think they are high. Still they are animals. Still they are stupid. Still they have no real position, no real power. They can’t control themselves, either. People who want power or fame or a high position, they are like that, too. Like animals. We should realize they should not be objects of our anger, but objects of our compassion. Tigers, dragons, or any fierce animal—they are your object of compassion. You don’t need to kiss or hug them—they don’t know how anyway, they are dumb—just pray for them. People who act like animals, same thing. Same stupidity, all sentient beings. So pray for them, slowly, slowly.

Look at how much everybody wants, how much they think they need, desperately. But they don’t get success, mostly. They don’t get what they want. Think about that, and pray for them. Or if you see an old or blind person with lots of problems, have compassion. More than getting angry or yelling. You know how to get upset, and you know how to be gentle, both. People need *at least* your compassion. Compassion and respect, every time. Every time we go out in public, we need to be careful. We need to watch ourselves, and we need to have compassion for others. You don’t need to kiss or hug everybody, just watch. Look. Piece by piece. When you are polite and respectful to others, with compassion, you are respecting yourself, too. You are respecting others and yourself, both. You are following others’ rules and your own rules together. That is important. That is useful.

If you are powerful, sure, maybe you are a big guy, but who cares? A tiny bullet can still conquer you! Watch on television—giant guys, kung fu guys or cowboys or anybody, they are all afraid of bullets! Giant guys, afraid of tiny bullets! That’s embarrassing, isn’t it? So what is the benefit of being big or powerful? Being a big guy means nothing. One little tiny thing can kill you. Similarly, the mouth and tongue are not weapons, but words can kill giant guys, too—they make people angry and upset; then the people jump up and fight; then it’s easy for someone to be killed. And what was the cause? Just the mouth, that small thing. Just words that you can’t even see. Everyone makes a big deal about being a big guy but it’s actually useless. Having a high position is the same thing. Being pretty or handsome is the same thing. Being a scholar or famous is the same thing.

Wherever you go, wherever you stay, if you want to be high, then first you need to have qualities. If you want to be pretty, first you need to be clean! If you want to be handsome or pretty, you need to know how to take care of yourself, and not just your body but your brain—that is the most important!

You can watch to see how to act well. Everything, stage by stage, watch. Even watch how children play on the playground. They know how to be happy together rather than making each other angry. They know what is nice. They don't act like the king of the world or the king of the animals, like tigers, leopards, or poisonous snakes. They don't hiss and screech, "Don't bother me! Don't touch me! I'm gonna kill you!" because the other children don't like that style. We don't need to do that, either. We are beyond that, beyond being animals. Sort of! If we want to be pretty and gentle, we need to clean ourselves up properly, meaning we need to stop acting like that. You don't need complicated things or elaborate methods. Just clean up your brain. Change your posture so your actions and style are nice instead of rough and nasty. That makes you more pretty. If you want to be handsome, it's the same thing.

If you don't like someone's words, or their food, or drink, or dress, why do you have to make a big deal about it in front of everyone? Does everyone have to put up with your garbage, your complaining? No, no, no. If you don't like something, just check— watch, check with others, step back quietly if you need to. How come everyone has to announce everything they are doing on the loudspeaker? You can just do things quietly, move forward or back or this way or that way depending on what you need. You don't need to complain or boast or tell everybody.

If you do like something, on the other hand, don't be like some Tibetans who just instantly, shamelessly, directly gobble everything up as if they will never be satisfied and as if the whole world belonged to them. That is to go your own way shamelessly— we need to see that. We need to look, understand, and recognize. Recognize your own shamelessness and your own qualities, both. Looking and seeing, those are not such simple things. One way, they are simple, but we don't do them!

Don't be stubborn, only seeing everything your own way and insisting that it be according to your view. Don't disregard others, only caring for yourself and doing everything according to your own way, your own stubbornness. You are not an animal; you weren't born with horns on your head. You don't need to put them there now through being stubborn or bossy.

The bottom line? Everybody please respect each other, especially your sangha brothers and sisters. You should respect everybody anyway if you are a decent human being; but your dharma family you have a special connection to, like your mother or brothers and sisters, and even more close to you, so you should treat them with particular care. Watch your step and watch your mouth.

At Tashi Chöling and the other centers, it seems that things are much better now than they were before. It sounds like things are getting better and better—people have more

respect for one another, which everybody needs outerly. Innerly, people are studying and learning the tradition more deeply, so they have more understanding. Outerly and innerly, both, it seems that people are understanding more and more the right way of doing things, from big things to small things, and so slowly each area is being cleaned up as people actually engage in that way. That is how really we can have some success, holding the real lineage of our great teachers. That is the success of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's order that I come to the West. Everything has been done following that, and now it looks like it is actually working. That is the most meaningful and makes me the most happy—for myself and for everybody, because it means that the dharma is being established here in a way that is being of benefit to sentient beings. When all the students act like real, decent human beings, then that is the foundation for virtue and the dharma centers are really centers of dharma. They are centers of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha; and Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha are in the center of there. Everybody try to do that, okay?

Thank you.

Tashi delek!

-Gyatral