

On Visiting O.D.D. — Part 2

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You have many books you can read about the ngondro practices; you don't have to listen to me explain them. I don't know to explain, anyway. I don't know the dharma! But you have many resources to draw on nevertheless, teachings on Mahayana, Hinayana, and everything. Khenpo Namdrol Rinpoche and so many other lamas have come and taught—we need to review their teachings, study them, contemplate them, and then meditate on them. You can look and see for yourself about the different traditions, see for yourself how they are all Buddhist, despite differences of name, presentation, or chanting style.

Originally, the Tibetan tradition didn't even come from Tibet—it came from India. Those of you who are familiar with the stories of the development of the Nyingma lineage know how that transpired. You can learn about all the different lineages, about how the traditions of Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana developed. You can learn about how Buddhism was brought from India into Tibet through the kindness of Guru Rinpoche, Vimalamitra, and others; how the lineage was established in Tibet and held purely. Not just the Nyingma lineage, either—you can learn how the Kagyud, the Sakya, and the Gelug lineages were each established. I am not saying that any one of these is special or superior to the others. None is special; none is bad or lesser, either. They are all Buddhist lineages, they are all authentic traditions, regardless of their differences of name and so forth. To think that one is bad and another good, or that there is some kind of hierarchy among them, is ridiculous. They all have the same goal; they all bring the same result.

Always study, contemplate, and meditate on the teachings. That is the important thing! It doesn't matter what school you belong to. If, out of bias, sectarianism, or favoritism, you proclaim, as if it were some big deal: "I am a Nyingmapa!" "I am a Sakyapa!" "I am a Gelugpa!" "I am a Kagyudpa!" "I am a Jonangpa!" "I am this!" "I am that!"—that is completely deluded. Please don't ever engage in that kind of sectarianism. If you are just saying that you are a Kagyudpa, or that you belong to this or that school, to identify your lineage and the lamas that you follow, then of course that's fine. It's good—you need to know your own lineage and the source of wisdom of the lamas that you follow. But to talk about lineage with any contaminating influence of exclusivity, sectarianism, or politics creeping in is to destroy the dharma, not hold the dharma. If you destroy the dharma, you certainly end up in the hells. Of course that means there will be no liberation or buddhahood! As much as you can, please, try to

practice the dharma, not destroy the dharma. As much as you can, please, try to hold the lineages, not destroy them.

To be a keeper of the dharma rather than a destroyer of it, we need to have faith. That is why we need to study, contemplate, and meditate on the dharma. If you don't know how to have faith, you need to go back to the ngondro, or read in teachings on generation stage practice. There are teachings in many places about how to generate faith, what that means and what that process is.

We have to have faith in the Three Jewels, and we have to have bodhicitta. When you are generating bodhicitta, you always have to think, "Is this just for myself alone? No. This is for the sake of all sentient beings, so vast in number that they fill space itself. For their sake, I will now practice dharma—I will now study, contemplate, and meditate. For their sake, I will now engage in generation or completion stage practice."

If you are a Buddhist, it means you should always be performing any dharma activity for the sake of all sentient beings. That's how Buddha Shakyamuni did it, and he was not stupid! Guru Rinpoche was not stupid. All the lineage lamas, they have not been stupid, either. Whenever we develop or increase our three poisons based on the traditions we belong to or the school we identify with, we are dragging ourselves down and dragging the dharma down with us. We are showing that we have no understanding of the dharma.

We need to know the important foundation of all the different schools: that all schools look to Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha as the objects of refuge. That is the important thing! The slight differences in styles of chanting, or in the presentations of certain ideas, and so forth, those are differences established in those lineages by the lineage masters. They are not differences we should take as reasons to increase our attachment and aversion. Those are not differences that we should use to try to justify sectarianism or harbor a sense of hierarchy among the traditions in our own mind. The dharma is for all sentient beings, not just for those following a certain tradition. Not just for those of a particular country, either! Not just Americans, or Tibetans, or Chinese, or the people of any one country. Whenever we are viewing a group of practitioners, a school, a lineage, or any group with attachment and aversion, that is not the Buddha's way. That is not the dharma. That is how we destroy the dharma.

We have received so many precious transmissions from great lamas of various lineages. This means we have made the commitment that we will always try to do things their way—the lineage masters' way, the Buddha's way, not our own way. As much as you can, please, let go of doing things your own way, and really try to just do things the Buddha's way, without always bringing in attachment and aversion. We have made the promise again and again that we will rid our minds of negativity. If we continue to indulge in sectarian and biased views, we are just creating the causes of our own future rebirth in the lower realms.

When you come here to the dharma center, it is the same: it doesn't matter what nationality someone is or what lineage or group a person belongs to. If someone is American, Canadian, French, Chinese, Tibetan, Japanese, male or female, rich or poor — it doesn't matter! Anyone who comes here with faith, wishing to engage in virtue, they are welcome! We should tell no one who comes in this way that they are not allowed to come. Anyone who says "You are not allowed to come to this place of virtue and engage in virtue!" will not be able to be liberated by the Buddha's teachings, because they are not on the path; they are not following Buddha Shakyamuni. Whoever wants to come and engage in virtue, which is what this center is for, they are welcome!

According to every single path that the Buddha taught, in all of the different schools and presentations of the dharma, it is never said that we should be increasing our attachment and aversion. Regardless if you are practicing according to Hinayana, Mahayana, or Vajrayana, up to and including dzogchen, any kind of practitioner — any Buddhist — is not supposed to be increasing their attachment and aversion. No group of Buddhists exists as a group in order to foster attachment and aversion. The differences and variations between the lineages are not meant to be used as a support for attachment and aversion.

If you ask, "What is attachment? What is aversion? What is their basis?" — they come from ignorance! They are the children of delusion! That means they are based in stupidity. When we increase our attachment and aversion, we are increasing our stupidity. Please remember that, and never fall into ludicrous sectarianism or bias toward any group. We should be welcoming and we should be open.

Anyone who wants to come and use the temple as it is intended, they are welcome. This doesn't mean that people can come and destroy the place! When people come to the temple, they need to use it with respect. It is not suitable or acceptable to treat it disrespectfully or to damage it. That doesn't just mean blatant destruction of something. It means coming and being wasteful of the things here at the dharma center, or throwing them away needlessly or breaking them thoughtlessly — any form of disrespecting the center or wasting its resources. That is not appropriate, because this is a place for creating virtue, and to waste the dharma resources is not virtuous. When we do, we are wasting the dharma. We are disrespecting, or ignoring, or belittling, or mistreating the dharma. Instead of that, please come and help as much as you can. Rather than coming and detracting from this place, the appropriate way to interact with the dharma center is to come and offer — make material offerings, offer your support and help, offer your body, speech, and mind in service of the activities here, and so on.

This is not just a place for "O.D.D. people." Actually, there is no such thing. Anyone who wishes to come and make offerings or perform virtue here with faith and devotion, this place is theirs. This does not belong to just a few people. It is a place to engage in dharma, so it belongs to all those who wish to engage in dharma here.

You have come together today and performed this Vajrasattva practice, having heard that our dharma brother, Lama Yeshe, passed away a short while ago. That you have, therefore, come together here as dharma brothers and sisters to recite Vajrasattva mantra is wonderful! This is a wonderful, meaningful tradition. You don't need to be a great scholar, you don't need to know anything more than how to recite the Vajrasattva mantra, or the MANI mantra, if you want to do something really meaningful and beneficial, having heard the news that Lama Yeshe passed away. Nobody can say that they don't know OM BENZAR SATTO HUNG or OM MANI PEME HUNG. Even to recite the shortest or simplest mantra, or the verses of refuge in the Three Jewels, but to recite with faith and devotion and then dedicate the merit and make aspirational prayers for his benefit—this is very powerful.

This also creates a habit. All of us here, we are going to die. At the time of our death, each of us will have to face whatever habits we have created. If, in response to your dharma brother Lama Yeshe's death, you have made the habit of accumulating MANI mantras, for example, then you will have that habit at the time of your own death, and that will be very useful to you. So thank you for coming and engaging in such a good and valuable tradition. I hope you keep it in the future, and whenever news of the death of one of your vajra brothers or sisters reaches you, since you know how to recite Vajrasattva mantra or MANI mantra, I hope you come together and do this—it is a wonderful, virtuous thing to do. This is part of how we can keep our pure discipline and keep harmony.

When we speak of keeping harmony, actually it should not be possible for someone who is a Buddhist not to be harmonious. Unfortunately, however, we live in bad times, with bad karma, and we are surrounded by bad omens. So, of course there is disharmony! This disharmony is like the sign of the presence of demons, ghosts, or negative spirits. It is really the sign that we have powerful attachment and aversion in our own minds. If you want protection from the dangers of these negative times, or if you want protection from negative spirits or your own negative karma, the way to protect yourself is to turn away from your attachment and aversion, to lessen them. Doing practices like MANI mantra or Vajrasattva mantra are the direct antidote to your attachment and aversion. That is the very best protection. This is how each of us has to protect ourselves. So, as much as you can, please do this.

Whenever you come here to the temple, you perform prostrations, you clean the place, and so forth. You should see the entire temple as the same. The whole temple is an offering. The whole temple is an opportunity to make offerings and purify negativity. It isn't okay to have everything be dirty on the back as long as it looks good on the front. No. This is the place where we come to take refuge in the Three Jewels. This is the place where we have, maintain, preserve, and enrich our representations of the Three Jewels. They shouldn't be dirty! These are the objects we rely on to

accumulate merit and purify our negativity. So, please, respect them as such. And clean the back sides as well as the front!

In the future, you should always have respect for all the different dharma centers. The dharma centers need to support each other. Here you have O.D.D.; up in Oregon, you have Tashi Choling in Ashland and Dorje Ling in Portland; there is a center in Austin, Texas, and another in Montana; and even in Los Angeles, there was an old center that now looks like it's waking up again. These different centers are all dharma centers, and all branch centers. Even if you don't consider that they are branches of each other, through their connection of lineage, however, they still have the basic connection that they are places where the Buddha's teachings are taught. These are all places where the teachings are studied and practiced, and people are trying to engage in the dharma. Buddhism is Buddhism. You should respect all the Buddhist places. You should respect all of the places of dharma, and not have any kind of sectarianism or prejudice toward any of them just because of differences in style, tradition, or the nationality of the people there. Always avoid engaging in attachment and aversion. Always avoid going that way, going into politics. As much as you can, there should be mutual support among the dharma centers.

In the future, if some of you can go to Tashi Choling, if events are happening there, for example, or if people from Tashi Choling can come here—that is wonderful. At each center, there are people with knowledge and skills who can contribute in many ways at the various centers. People here can go to help at Tashi Choling and other places, or people from Tashi Choling can come here to teach and work and so forth—everyone can show each other how to do different things. The centers shouldn't be isolated. Up at Tashi Choling, there are those who have some knowledge, like Sangye and Lama Chonam, Shashi and Ila, and others—there's a whole bunch, actually, at all the different centers. Sometimes you can go there, sometimes they can come here, or whatever works. The point is there should be mutual support and engagement between the centers. I am going to Tashi Choling soon myself, to stay for the summer. Although there has already been a consecration of the new Guru Rinpoche temple, when all the last pieces are put together and the offerings all arranged and so forth, we are going to offer a tsok in celebration, like an official opening of the temple. If anyone would like to come to the celebration, information about that will be available, and everyone is welcome to come and participate at that auspicious time.

Then in the winter, if I am not dead, I'll come back here to the Bay Area. If I have died, on the other hand, please say MANI mantras and think of this funky old man with compassion. If I die, that doesn't mean that the harmony between the centers dies, too. If I die, it doesn't mean that respect for your dharma brothers and sisters dies. If I die, it doesn't mean that the fact you are all dharma siblings dies. You should have more respect and be in greater harmony, and keep your vows and discipline more and more

purely. Until buddhahood, this is your job, whether this funky old man is alive or dead. Hearing, contemplating, and meditating on the dharma—this is your job.

If you are not studying and contemplating the dharma well, if you are practicing in just a wishy-washy way, you are destroying your opportunity to engage in pure dharma. You are making an enemy of yourself, and you are cheating yourself out of the most valuable thing that you have. Everyone thinks that losing money is some big deal; but it is so much more stupid to lose your opportunity to practice dharma. Of course, you are not only losing your opportunity to practice, but you are closing yourself off to any chance of liberating yourself from samsara and achieving the ultimate state of omniscience. So please, keep pure samaya—use your opportunity to practice sincerely.

So I guess that is good night!

Tashi delek!

-Gyatral