

## *To O.D.D. on Receiving Their Invitation Letter*

Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche

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Thank you, I received your invitation to come and stay at O.D.D. for a while. I will come, but I don't know when or how long I will stay there. But whether I come or not, everybody's job is the same: Buddhism, and at least benefit ourselves. How are we going to benefit ourselves? Create merit and purify obscurations. Recognize our weakness and put there strength. We do have plenty of pure, authentic masters, and what they gave us is not a bubble. They gave us solid, precious things. They taught us where to get our strength. Even the United States Congress or the president himself doesn't get what we've got. How did we get it? Because of the merit that you guys created in your past lives. By the power or kindness or cause of creating virtue and purifying negativity in your past lives, you now encounter the opportunities to hear, contemplate, and meditate on the dharma, and particularly the tantras, outer and inner: mahayoga, anuyoga, and atiyoga. Now don't waste the amazing things you have received—it is in your hands. Whether I come to visit or not, you have already received what there is to receive. You know how you received these transmissions: you invited the lamas, served and assisted them, and made offerings. Offerings of money and material things are not so important, but make offerings of hearing, contemplating, and meditating on the dharma as much as you can. Make offerings to those above and be generous to those below you—you all know this, 100 times better than myself. These teachings are in every language these days. The results of such offerings are ripening now, as the inconceivable things you are receiving, and not only now—they will ripen in the future, in this life and many future lives, as further opportunities to accumulate merit, purify negativity, and receive precious teachings from pure lineage masters. Therefore we need to continue making our heartfelt offerings of hearing, contemplating, and meditating on what we have received. Otherwise we waste what we have gained thus far, and we go against our opportunity, cutting it off.

Compared to our opportunity, all worldly wealth is nothing. People think Rockefeller is some big deal, and, yes, he is quite rich. But his wealth won't last one second longer than his merit for having that wealth. When his merit is exhausted, his wealth will be gone. Where is he going to get it again? He never will, unless he has the merit again. And life is short. Not just for Rockefeller! For all beings in the world. We have nothing more than this short life, nothing less than our opportunity to use it. We have nothing missing but nothing extra. By the extraordinary fortune of having the parents that we do, we have a human birth. A precious human birth, with the eight kinds of leisure and ten endowments, blah blah blah. It explains everything clearly in

the ngondro teachings—read them! There is nothing wrong with our situation; everything is perfect. If we are studying and internalizing the ngondro teachings, then we are using our perfect opportunity perfectly. If there is something wrong with a teacher, it is because the lama hasn't really studied the ngondro teachings carefully for themselves. If there are things wrong with the students, it is because they haven't really studied the ngondro teachings carefully, or they study them and then ignore them, thinking they need something beyond that.

It's disgusting—so many students sit with their mouths open, wanting to be fed, but the real nourishing dharma they don't want. You give them ngondro? They spit it out. No, I want another one! I want a bigger one! I want the highest one! What are you going to get higher than ngondro? If you want to progress through the nine stages of the vehicles to reach the top, you need the ngondro as your foundation and then you need to never abandon it. You'll never reach the pinnacle through your gaping, hungry mouth, but just by going step by step. The great lamas have explained how to progress on the path: first Hinayana, then Mahayana, then Vajrayana, outer, inner, and secret. For each stage you need the passport of the previous stage.

Right now, you have a real opportunity. That is your money in the bank. Don't waste what you have in the bank. Tend it well! The more you accumulate merit, the more your obscurations will be purified and you will see more clearly the value of what you have. The more you purify your obscurations, the more merit you will accumulate and your bank account will grow. You are all smart. You understand this. I am called your lama or teacher, but I don't understand this, I just wander around like a beggar. We all need to purify our negativity and accumulate merit, and if we do, we can wake up. That is my hope for everybody, myself included.

What you have received, it is difficult for anyone to receive, even in 100 lifetimes. Don't waste it! Americans are spoiled with material wealth. They are also spoiled with a wealth of spiritual traditions—Hindu, Christian, and all kinds of things. Now don't be spoiled. You have a life as a human being. Of course you don't want to waste it. You don't want your good fortune of being born a human to be for nothing. But beyond that, even, you have encountered the dharma that can bring liberation in a single body and a single lifetime. You have the qualified lamas to transmit it, those pure teachings, you have the opportunities to receive empowerment, transmission, and instruction, and then you have time to learn and practice the teachings as well! You have the perfect cause ripening as the perfect result, which means you must have the perfect karma. Do you think all this will be so easy to get again?

If I come to O.D.D. I know you will all help, support, and care for me, as you offered in your letter. I do know how you take care of me in each detail every time I come. I have no question about that! But at the moment I think it is nice to hang out here a little longer, and then after a while maybe I can come. Anyway, if I come or not,

either way your job is the same: study, contemplate, and meditate on the dharma. Why is that our job? Because we promised in each empowerment that we received, in the conclusion when we commit to keeping our samaya: “TSOWO JI TAR KA TSAL PA, DE DAG TAM CHED DAG GI GYI.” This means, “Just what the principal one commands, all that I will perform.”

From the point of going for refuge onward, that is our job. We go for refuge to benefit ourselves and to benefit others. We generate bodhicitta for others’ sake, and through that we benefit ourselves, too, by accumulating merit and purifying our negativity, and we improve. You can’t say, “I have wasted so much of my time working for others’ benefit!” No. However much you benefit others, you are benefitting yourself. It is the best way to benefit yourself, actually. Look at Buddha Shakyamuni. There is no question that he has brought himself ultimate benefit—just look at his retinue of 21,000 arhats! Was that through selfishness? No. It was through altruism. All buddhas become enlightened through bringing benefit to others. It is the same with Guru Rinpoche, his 25 disciples, and all lineage masters. It is the same with all the dharma that has ever been taught: whether it is Hinayana or Vajrayana or whatever, it was taught to benefit beings. All the teachings are to benefit others, the displays of realization are to benefit others. All is for the sake of others, and through that, one’s own greatest benefit is naturally and skillfully accomplished. You are all focused on receiving the greatest benefit, right? In your business, your work, or whatever. Think about that.

Be more and more open to benefitting others. Benefitting others, you are free of mistakes. We say, “I take refuge!” What are you taking refuge in? Your wife? Your husband? One way, we do take refuge in our spouse—we look to them for support. But going for refuge is not only that. We say we go for refuge in the three jewels: the jewel of the buddha, of the dharma, and of the sangha; and in the lama, the yidam, and the dakini. You all know this. You are all 100 times smarter and more scholarly than myself. You know how to study and how to contemplate, by virtue of being raised in America. How hard you studied in school! What if you just wasted all that time? That would be a real shame. People would say, “He is so stupid—all those years of hard work, and he didn’t benefit himself!” Similarly, in the dharma it would be a shame to waste your opportunities to benefit not only yourself but all other sentient beings, meaning to waste your chance to learn the dharma. You can’t say you know how to study but didn’t have the opportunity to study. You have plenty of opportunities with all the khenpos coming and giving different kinds of teachings. You have plenty of opportunities to contemplate the teachings, too. It is like tasting the food in your mouth to check if it is delicious or not: you need to chew on it. Then you can be ready to swallow it, internalize it through practice, and that way your stomach can be filled. You have all received many teachings, hearing and reading them. Now you need to contemplate them and then practice them. That is up to you. Stage by stage!

Will I come to O.D.D.? Yes. If I come and sleep at your place, will there be any benefit in that? It would be hard to say yes, because I have been here hanging out at your place for 40 years now, and I can't say it has been of great benefit. I have mostly been here in California. What good has that done? Sometimes I went here and there, for instance to Taiwan again and again. Why did I go to Taiwan? For you. To be able to build the centers. I spent every penny of the money I got there. I didn't save any, nothing was mine. Just for the centers. These days here and there many students are generously making offerings to me. Then I can waste it on my food and drinks, enjoying myself because of your kindness. But I have not been able to benefit my students much. That is the sign of my lack of good qualities. I am not complaining; it is my own fault. Each person has to develop their own qualities. If someone has excellent qualities, then it is good for you to have interest in them. It will benefit you.

As for you, in order to develop your own qualities, once you study and contemplate the teachings well, then you need to meditate upon them as much as you can. That is how to receive the real effects of the teachings. Regarding meditation, at least you should cultivate altruism and work to benefit all beings. That is your job, your responsibility. Through altruism, Buddha Shakyamuni practiced and manifested complete enlightenment. We aren't going to achieve realization any other way.

Then when Buddha was enlightened, did he say, "Okay, now I got it! I'm going to keep it for myself!"? No. He shared it, starting with his retinue of five excellent disciples and then others. Stage by stage the teachings spread: the Hinayana teachings on the vows of individual liberation, the Mahayana teachings on the bodhisattva trainings, and outer and inner Vajrayana. But the Hinayana teachings are the foundation. If you don't follow the Hinayana teachings, examining your own faults, it will be difficult to practice Mahayana. Without Mahayana, Vajrayana is nothing, just artificial at most, because you are still thinking only of what is in your own best interest. With this kind of self-concern, it is extremely difficult to be of actual benefit to yourself, and even if you think that you are studying and practicing, there is no real study or practice happening. At that point, practice is just like doing business or dealing with your boyfriend or girlfriend—it is just another activity based on attachment and aversion. Of course you will get nothing from it!

Don't go that way. You have met great lamas, so follow them! Follow their teachings. When it comes to lamas, you have two who are emanations of Vimalamitra—Penor Rinpoche and Yangthang Rinpoche. Theglo Rinpoche came, too, and he is the son of Kunzang Nyima, who was an emanation of Vairochana, as of course Dudjom Rinpoche was, too. And others, as well—many great beings and real bodhisattvas have come! They have not only come, they have given you many opportunities to study, contemplate, and meditate on the dharma. You have had more opportunities than I did to receive teachings. Now please study and internalize them as much as you can.

Even from the A, B, C of ngondro, with the first step of refuge, the point is to study and practice just as the great masters of the past have done. Taking refuge in the Buddha, ask yourself how he studied and practiced to attain all he did. How did his disciples follow him? How did the retinue of arhats practice? How did the Hinayana sangha practice, and the Mahayana sangha, and the outer and inner Vajrayana sanghas?

Actually, these include you—you are part of the Hinayana sangha. You must be, because that is the start. You are part of the Mahayana sangha—well, I don't know if you respect those teachings or not, but as Vajrayana practitioners you must have Mahayana as your foundation so it seems like you must be. I mean, if you don't know Mahayana, how can you call yourself a practitioner of mantra? You all know this, because you have received authentic teachings from pure lineage masters on the meaning of outer, inner, and secret tantra. Of course this means you are part of the Vajrayana sangha as well. You have had no obstacle in that—your great fortune!

The obstacle? I am the obstacle, because I am not professional or perfect, just really dumb-dumb. However, the qualities that I lack, these khenpos and lamas who have come to teach you and give inconceivable transmissions have them perfectly. What you have received, who knows if you will have the chance to receive such things again, or how that would be possible. If you waste it, you waste yourself. Of course, we do waste our chances and throw away our own benefit continuously. What you have received are the blessings and compassion of the Dalai Lama, the Karmapa, Dudjom Rinpoche, Penor Rinpoche, Yangthang Tulku. If you waste what you have received, that is what you are wasting. But to waste ourselves is our tradition, maybe. So it's time to wake up—don't make that tradition or follow that tradition, okay?

Even if I come I won't stay for a long time, or maybe I won't be able to come at all. Who knows? But now you guys have O.D.D. It exists, it is a place where you can study, and contemplate, and practice. It is a place where you can benefit yourself through that study and practice, and where you can benefit others. To benefit only yourself without a thought of others is to not be a Buddhist. It means you have no lineage, because that is not the Hinayana way, or the Mahayana way, or the outer or inner tantra way, or the dzogchen way. To have that motivation shows that you have none of the vehicles. If you are a Buddhist, no matter what vehicle you are practicing, you are of the lineage of Buddha Shakyamuni, and altruism is principal in our lineage. It is cherished as the most precious quality by Buddha Shakyamuni, Guru Rinpoche, and all the lineage lamas of every school. The most important lineage that they hold is the lineage of compassion; without that, there are no lineages of Hinayana, Mahayana, or Vajrayana. Altruism is the basis for accumulating merit and purifying negativity; it is the basis for all offerings, generosity, and helping others. Whatever you are studying, if your motivation is to benefit others then you won't need to complain or make some big

deal, you will simply be grateful for your opportunity to learn and have appreciation for the kindness of the lama who is teaching. That's the way you create merit!

All the teachings and transmissions you have received are the blessings and compassion of the Dalai Lama and other great masters. They all think that the Buddha doesn't lie! If we follow them—without lying, ourselves—then we will come to understand the undeceiving meaning. We will understand the law of karma, and act accordingly, first on the outer, then inner, then secret levels, rather than just going our own way. Going our own way has kept us cycling in the three realms of samsara for lifetime after lifetime until now, millions and millions of times. What causes birth in the hells, as a hungry ghost, animal, human, demigod, or god? This! MY WAY! If we don't make a genuine connection to buddha, dharma, and sangha, then all we have is our own way. Even at best we will only be able to accumulate a little merit, quickly used up. Right now we have an inconceivable opportunity. Don't waste it!

Don't be smart...aleck! Try, everybody. Please try. Be harmonious. That doesn't mean you have to be like you are with your boyfriend or girlfriend, almost trying to eat each other: "I love you! I love you! I love her! I love him!" That love is just self-centered—that's the bottom line. When you are caught up in that, your love and their love are both self-centered. It will never make you satisfied, it will just make you shame yourselves. Shameless and discontent, you will not stand in awe of the three jewels nor fear the law of karma. At that moment you won't even fear the lower realms, you will be entirely under the power of your self-centered desire. That's all you get!

Piece by piece, go through the ngondro (preliminary practices) again and again. Everyone makes such a big deal about the number 500,000 when it comes to ngondro: "I have to reach 500,000!" or "I finished my accumulation of the 500,000!" Yes, that's wonderful. But many people everywhere have finished their 500,000, and some of them are the worst! Look at some of these monks, or former monks who are now just businessmen. They finished their 500,000, and a lot of good it did them—they ended up dropping their robes and chasing the ladies, usually, or chasing the money. I don't think that is the real sign of having done ngondro. It's a sign of not having much merit, of not having accumulated much virtue. Some are the disciples of the great lamas of our time, but that doesn't seem to have been of much benefit to those students. It was more important to be smart, handsome, and rich, and get some pretty lady. How stupid, no brain! What did they get? Nothing. Most of them don't even get temporary success, but even if they do, in the long term they are destroying themselves.

It isn't just some monks, either—look at how greedy and jealous we are. It's almost as if we don't want anyone to have anything good, it should all be for us. Nobody else should be rich, nobody else should be smart or pretty. Don't look at anybody else! Only me! You can't talk to others! You can't touch them! You can't praise them!

That doesn't work! Nothing comes of it. We are never satisfied. From the time Buddha Shakyamuni gave teachings until now, how many millions of people have lived, how many generations have passed! Almost all of them have continued in their self-centeredness and covetousness rather than following the Buddha's teachings. Including us! For all these years—centuries, eons—we have not been able to practice dharma correctly. The proof is that we are still wandering here in samsara. Now that you have the opportunity to practice, don't waste it! Benefit yourself, and then you can benefit others.

Do you think that you can just benefit others without first benefitting yourself through study and practice? I don't think it says that in any Buddhist tradition. Regarding the fruition, one's own ultimate result is dharmakaya; the ultimate result for others' benefit is the rupakaya from that. From the ultimate fulfillment of your purpose as dharmakaya, countless manifestations of others' purpose as rupakaya can emanate. For someone like me, who has not had the intelligence to benefit himself and who knows no dharma, of course there is no benefit to others. I'm just a beggar, I can't feed myself, let alone give food to others. On the other hand, you all have the skill to study and learn, by virtue of having been born in this country. You have translations, both written and spoken. How long and hard have the translators been working so you have the meaning translated into English? Now that you have everything, to ignore it and fail to use it, expecting to get it again, would be a sign that you've been blessed by demons.

How do you use your opportunity, and not ignore it? By recognizing your own faults. We have plenty! If we don't recognize them, we won't be able to see others' qualities, either. First, know that you have faults. Seeing them, then check how to eliminate them. If we just keep them in our bank rather than working to eliminate them, then even to encounter the Buddha face to face would bring us no benefit. Actually, these great lamas we have already met face to face are nothing other than the Buddha's emanations. When we are not working to eliminate our faults, it won't matter what high lamas we meet, or how many. Even to meet with a thousand Buddha Shakyamunis or a million Guru Rinpoches couldn't benefit us. You know this! Therefore, don't point at others' faults, just look to your own.

Of course naturally you are going to see others' faults. That's fine. That can be useful. Whenever you see a fault in someone else, ask yourself, "Do I do this, too?" If you do, then you must recognize that when you do it, it is a fault, too, just as you recognized it as a fault in someone else. Having seen your fault, then you can work to eliminate it. Don't keep it secretly in your pocket; rid yourself of it in a straightforward way, without hiding or boasting. Don't cover your faults up and keep them secret. They are not "the objects to be covered up;" they are "the objects to be eliminated"! If, based on seeing someone else's fault, you are able to recognize and eliminate that same fault

in yourself, then seeing someone else's fault is useful to you. But it is not useful to go around pointing the finger at others' faults. Does that benefit anybody? I don't think so.

If I come to the dharma center, as you have requested, even if I come and snore there for a thousand years, or even if you all came and snored with me, still it wouldn't be of any benefit to you if you are refusing to look at your faults. You wouldn't improve one tiny bit. You would just get worse. So please, if I can come or not, either way please don't waste today or tomorrow of your precious human life. Be honest with yourself and recognize your faults. That is your real job. If I come, there is nothing astonishing in that! If I come, you will gain nothing; if I can't come, you lose nothing. You are a loser if you waste what you have received: the blessings of great masters, and teachings from ngondro up to dzogchen. Then you are really a loser, and everybody is going to say it. Hahaha! You are the biggest loser because you are wasting the Vajrayana, the lineage from Guru Rinpoche; and you are wasting Hinayana and Mahayana, the lineage from Buddha Shakyamuni. If you waste all of Buddhism like this, all the dharma, then you waste many millions' and billions' of lifetimes' worth of merit. On the other hand, if you don't waste your dharma chance, then after this life you don't need to go down to the lower realms again. You don't need to be born into the six classes again. Who has this chance? You do. You can do it, this time. You are all smart. You know you are—you are always boasting about it. Then really BE smart! That means wake up!

If I come to O.D.D., do I need to kiss you all? You already got millions of kisses. They didn't do anything! Parents kiss their children millions of times. That doesn't make the children enlightened, does it? Even animals are affectionate with their babies, and it doesn't look like any of them are getting enlightened. Why does everyone make such a big deal about kissing and hugging? Really, what is the benefit? If I come, I'm not going to kiss you. I'm not going to clean your butt for you, either. Now maybe you don't want me to come?

Anyway, thank you for the invitation. If my body lets me come, I am happy to come. But I'm not young anymore. I think I am! But actually I'm in my nineties, and I have no freedom to do what I want. Here is very pleasant and quiet, and I don't need to deal with any complications or politics from the outside, nor any frustrations or hardships within: everything is just quiet and peaceful. So good! O.D.D. is also nice, but I don't want a lot of people coming to gossip. I myself don't have the energy for a lot of blah blah, either. And I've already been blah blah-ing at you for forty years, I don't think to blah again will be any benefit. If I don't blah, you have lost nothing.

Besides, over the years you have had the chance to hear real teachings from authentic lineage holders, not just this funky guy pretending. If you aren't going to listen to those teachings and take them to heart, then of course anything this old man says now will make no difference at all. Thank you for inviting me, saying you want me to come, that you need me to give advice. But if you really need advice, the only advice



is to practice what you have received from great masters over the years. Their blessings are a billion times more than my life. What liberates merely through sight, sound, touch, or taste: you have received that, if you have faith.

Okay, enough of my lies for now! Thank you, and I will come when I can. But the important thing is that everybody try, with honesty. That is each person's job.

Tashi delek!

*-Gyatral*

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