

In Your Own Best Interest

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Everybody wants something better than they have in this life. This is why you need to be more smart, more kind to yourself, and benefit yourself more effectively. The most effective way to benefit yourself is to benefit others. Having the opportunity to benefit others is your best chance to benefit yourself. Therefore, don't think, "I am working for others but they don't pay me!" Their kindness to you is in giving you the chance to benefit them -- the chance to practice, the chance to make progress on the path to enlightenment. You want them to give you money, too? Don't spend each second that you are working for others thinking, "But they don't pay me!" Don't waste your merit from the beginning in that kind of negative, disgusting thinking. We are only able to practice by relying on others: We need them as objects of our compassion in cultivating bodhicitta, we need them as the objects of our patience when we are training our minds, and so on. All of the buddhas have only attained realization by relying on others, too. Without sentient beings to rely on in our practice, we will not be able to attain buddhahood. We need to recognize how others are bringing us benefit in this way all the time.

In Tibet, lots of lamas and monks would travel around and perform ceremonies at the request of various patrons. If their motivation was good, then those ceremonies were opportunities to accumulate merit, based on their wish to help the patrons and to use the practices to benefit all sentient beings. To perform them required study, contemplation, and meditation: study in learning the rituals, contemplation in understanding their meaning, and the practices themselves were opportunities for meditation. But for all too many monks and lamas, it seemed that they only considered the ceremonies as their means of getting money and being fed delicious meals. Their motivation was quite negative, even though they were performing what appeared to be dharma practices. Here in America, you think that someone should pay you to study the dharma, someone should pay you to contemplate it, and someone should pay you to meditate. That's your motivation? Really? Nothing about benefitting others? Not even the thought that you could bring genuine benefit to yourself?

If you need to bring yourself benefit, you have to rely on others to do it. If you need to bring benefit to others, of course others will be involved! We are always going to be engaging with others, so we can't escape cultivating bodhicitta, which is the right way to relate to others. First we need to learn how to give rise to loving kindness and know the methods for cultivating compassion. This is not compassion for your boyfriend or your girlfriend or your money, okay? This is not the compassion of saying "I love you" with your liar's mouth.

In addition to compassion and loving kindness, you need to recognize that all the suffering you experience with your body and mind is caused by negative karma that you have accumulated because of being under the power of the five poisons. You have accumulated vast negative karma because mostly you interact with other beings by killing them, stealing from them, lying to them, and so on -- all motivated by selfishness. You make the seeds of your own hot hell suffering, cold hell suffering, hungry ghost suffering, and all the rest. You plant the seeds of your own torment, and then they grow and multiply. The kind of seed you plant will determine the kind of plant that will grow: rice from a rice seed, barley from a barley seed, medicinal herbs from medicinal seeds, poisonous flowers from poisonous seeds.

Regarding your karma, the seeds that are sprouting for you are affecting not only yourselves but those connected to you. If you have planted beneficial, medicinal seeds, when those sprout, you can share the medicinal herbs that blossom from them with those beings who have connection with you. Who will teach us how to do this? How can we become expert at planting beneficial seeds? By correct, sincere study and practice of the dharma -- this is how you bring yourself benefit without mistakes. You can trust the dharma not to lead you astray if you study it, contemplate it, and then meditate on it. That is the only guarantee of bringing benefit to yourself and others.

You are a practitioner, so don't only focus on yourself. You will never be successful in your practice that way. For countless lifetimes we have thought only of ourselves and yet failed to bring ourselves benefit. In each life, and even when wandering in the bardo, we have cultivated the opposite of compassion. Look, even now that is how everyone lives. On the television, they are showing the slaughterhouses in Africa, with thousands of pig corpses hanging from the ceiling, all killed for someone's "myself." We are always thinking of non-virtue, the opposite of benefit, seeing others with indifference or aversion instead of compassion. Look at all the pigs and cows and chickens that these farmers want to raise -- is it out of kindness, to take care of them? No, it is out of kindness to themselves, or so the people think: They think by killing and selling these animals, they are doing themselves a favor. For "myself" the butcher killed them, the seller sold them, the shipper shipped them, the buyer bought them, the cook cooked them, and now the people are all chowing down -- each one thinks they are so smart, thinks they have really figured out how to benefit themselves. Actually, each one is harming himself, each one must really hate himself to screw himself up and condemn himself to continued experience of the six realms' sufferings like that.

This is why it is so important to know the difference between virtue and non-virtue, between what brings benefit and what brings harm. How can we tell them apart? Buddha Shakyamuni taught us and showed us what it means to have your own best interests at heart. He gave up everything: money, power, fame, and even his parents, wife, and son. Why did he do that? Was he so stupid, he didn't appreciate how good he had it? And even before he was Buddha Shakyamuni, why did he practice for eon after eon? Couldn't he find a job? No. It was for the sake of all sentient beings. He knew the difference between virtue and non-virtue, and based on the pure virtue of his altruistic intention he became enlightened, a completely perfect buddha. He purified all 84,000 categories of non-virtue and perfected skillful method and wisdom. This means he was completely successful in bringing benefit to himself. As a fully enlightened buddha, he can also benefit others without error or confusion. That is the source of all his enlightened activity. He has no reason to lie to us, and in his omniscience he could not possibly make a mistake. What does he, the ultimate source and embodiment of wisdom, tell us about virtue and non-virtue?

The Buddha tells us that nobody could send us to the hells except ourselves. Can we blame our mom or dad? No, nobody but ourselves. Lots of people want to blame Mommy or Daddy. But what did they do? They gave us this human body, this human life. Just think about it: Did your parents benefit you or harm you, giving you this body? Nobody could say that they harmed you. They gave you the chance to be a human being, and you cannot blame them if you use that chance to make hot and cold hells for yourself instead. Just like the butchers, thinking they are so cleverly bringing themselves happiness when actually they are creating their own torture.

Everybody wants to ignore their parents, their teachers, their gurus. Why not? After all, we ignore all of the buddhas! But if we ignore everybody who can benefit us, then how can anybody help us? If we want to develop outer, inner, and secret qualities, we need a teacher. If we want a human birth, we need parents. If we want to be able to study, we need to learn how from our mother and father. If we want to

receive empowerment, transmission, and instruction, we need a guru. Why do we ignore all of those who can really benefit us?

Similarly, we refuse to learn the subjects that will really benefit us -- the value of virtue and the harm of non-virtue. Who is harmed by our failure to recognize non-virtue for what it is? We are. Those connected to us, too, are harmed by that connection. Some people take their misunderstanding of non-virtue so far as to try to conquer the whole world for their own benefit. To benefit ME, make everything stable for ME, protect ME! Make who famous? ME! The world has plenty of such heroes: Hitler, Mao, and so many others. How many people did they kill? Are they our examples of those who have brought benefit to themselves? Or were they their own worst enemies? They successfully sent themselves to the deepest hells -- is that the pattern we want to follow?

Who are our real examples of successfully benefitting themselves and others? Buddha Shakyamuni, Guru Rinpoche, their followers including the 25 disciples, the 108 tertons, and countless other treasure revealers and enlightened emanations who are performing enlightened activity throughout the world. What have they done successfully? What kinds of qualities do they have? Well, they have freed themselves from samsara and actualized the ultimate state, omniscience. They have not only practiced but accomplished the dharma. In contrast, what have we accomplished? What kinds of qualities do we have? Well, we know how to cheat our parents for twenty bucks, we know how to take anything as the basis for our five poisons, and we have skillfully created all six realms' worth of samsaric suffering through our selfish pursuits. Those are our amazing qualities. Considering these two examples, ourselves and the buddhas: Which one do you trust? Which do you want to follow? Which has the qualities that you want to cultivate?

Yet despite how clearly necessary it is to follow what the buddhas taught if we want to be happy, through the blessings of our bad habits it is easy for us to ignore the buddhas and continue in our own stupidity. We have many books, but we don't read them. Or we read them, but we don't think about them. Or we think about them, but we don't practice them. You would rather sit and space out and say, "This is my practice, I am doing Dzogchen!" You think that you can do your "Dzogchen" and that means you don't need to practice the real way, you can ignore the teachings on the law of cause and result, the teachings on impermanence? That is not clever. That is the most stupid thing to do, because not only are you following your own samsaric trip, but you are doing it in the name of dharma and thus cutting off any chance for real practice. This is to reject the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni and Guru Rinpoche, the teachings of all their emanations. This is to waste your teachers and their teachings.

But if I say such things, you get angry. "That's not true! I'm smart! I'm intelligent! I'm a scholar!" Really? How come someone as smart as you has everything backwards and upside down? Why does such a smart person poison himself, shoot himself, jump into the forest of razor-leaved trees of his own accord? That is what we do. We fashion our five poisons into millions of weapons to be used against us, and create all the sufferings of the six realms for ourselves. We need to recognize that this is what we are doing, and call negativity by its rightful name. Even the human and gods' realms are not free of this suffering: In the human realm, we are tormented by the four great rivers of suffering; and the gods suffer from jealousy and from having to face the end of their godly pleasures. The Buddha taught this, and he has no reason to lie. Yet although he describes our sufferings so exactly and names their causes in such detail, still we do not believe him. We do not believe any of the buddhas or bodhisattvas, at least not enough to actually practice. If we are not going to trust them, then whom can we trust?

We are happy to trust those who harm and betray us -- our five poisons. We are happy to go jumping after the cheaters and liars who are in the power of their own poisons, too. We forgive them and have patience with them, again and again, when they inevitably betray us. We trust in the ten non-virtues, and through them we reject what is beneficial to ourselves and others. We refuse to engage in virtue and, therefore, we create short lives of misery and poverty for ourselves.

But we are suspicious of the buddhas. I don't know if we should trust this Shakyamuni! Even if billions of buddhas came, they would not benefit us because we won't trust them. Then who? Is the lama going to benefit us? Forget it! Nobody is going to trust the lama if they disbelieve the Buddha. Actually, the only reason you have a precious human rebirth now is because at some time in the past you did rely on some great being and accumulate sufficient merit through their kindness that now you can have this inconceivably fortunate circumstance. But somehow we don't want to trust them again. I don't know -- these lamas want to show us how to achieve outer, inner, and secret qualities. Should we check on them? They can show you how to actualize the qualities of enlightened body, speech, mind, and activities. Be careful -- if you follow them you might get liberated! Keep an eye on them!

Even when we understand something, we don't use that knowledge. That is why we fail to make even a needle-tip's-worth of virtue. We experience sufferings of every kind, but we treat our karma like it is business -- meaning we try to blame it on everybody else: It's not MY fault, it is the fault of my wife, my husband, my brother, my sister, my neighbor, my friend, my country. THEIR faults are causing my problems; I HAVE no faults. Thinking you have no faults is a sure sign of having great faults. If we were sincere in our desire to practice, we would be willing to admit we have faults, and work to recognize and then eliminate them. This is how all the realized beings of the past have practiced, and these are the teachings of the lineage, from Buddha Shakyamuni down to ourselves. Do we trust the lineage teachings? No. We play games with them. We think we can use them however we want.

That is one way people screw themselves up, thinking they are so smart. Some people refuse to simply practice as it describes in the ngondro teachings, but think that they can still claim to be doing authentic practice by just concentrating on something-or-other of their own concoction, some idea or view or whatever. You are just playing games! You are ignoring the compassionate teachings of all the buddhas and peaceful and wrathful deities, and the manifestations of the four kinds of enlightened activity. Those teachings are not for somebody else. They are for you, to benefit you, and other sentient beings like you. It is a great mistake to think that you do not need to do the ngondro practices.

Others are caught up in their nationality, thinking they are special because they are Tibetan, or Indian, or Chinese, or European, or American. Nationality doesn't benefit you at all, does it? You are still in the six realms of samsara.

Others are obsessed with money. But at death, your money disappears like a bubble, doesn't it?

In each of the above cases, there is no thought of the law of cause and result. Whatever causes you create, their results will arise. We reject that idea. We would rather hear somebody's MY WAY that doesn't confront us with the truth about the law of cause and result. Many smart people are teaching wrong things, just teaching their own way. We learn MY WAY from somebody, then we are as stupid as that MY WAY. Being a scholar means nothing -- if they follow a negative or stupid person, even a scholar will be quite negative or stupid.

In ngondro, the sufferings of the six realms of samsara, and especially the three lower realms, are explained, as well as their causes and how to eliminate them. This is what the Buddha taught -- that we suffer, that our sufferings have causes, and that those causes and, therefore, those sufferings can be eliminated. Think for yourself: What will happen if you don't eliminate those causes of suffering? Be honest. That is what the Buddha is doing -- just being honest, telling the truth. The Buddha's words are free of the darkness of ignorance. His wisdom sees every detail of the workings of karma and the way appearances arise through interdependence. His wisdom also realizes the emptiness nature of all those appearances. This is his twofold omniscience. He sees all beings' karma clearly, their sufferings large and small, brief and long-lasting. He sees the law of cause and result clearly, and then he explains it to us clearly. What do we do? We don't believe it! We don't believe what is clear and reasonable. We accept what the CIA says, the sneaky and secret, what is darkened by ignorance. We don't accept what is in the light for all to see. That is our MY WAY again -- isn't it wonderful? We are proud to be so successful in MY WAY. We won't let even the Buddha cheat us out of MY WAY. We are too smart for him.

"I AM something!" Sure -- that must mean you are beyond Buddha, beyond Jesus, beyond Mother Mary, beyond all the enlightened beings. You must be beyond them to dismiss their teachings. We don't see our own faults, how could we see others'? We can't give our five poisons to somebody else, but in our delusion we try to: We see our own faults as others' and then think we are clean and pure. If we were to see our faults, and not only see them but understand that virtue leads to happiness and non-virtue to suffering, we would want to rid ourselves of our faults. If we want happiness, we should check to see if we are making the causes of happiness.

In this country, even if a thousand buddhas were to come, still it would be very difficult for the people to accept their teachings. If someone claims to be a buddha, though, they can convince some people with hollow heads to follow them. The hippies used to say they were God, or Jesus, or Buddha, or Guru Rinpoche. I don't think they wanted to harm themselves and others like that. They didn't know. But actually that's quite harmful. Karma is never lost, positive or negative. Whatever is created, it remains until it ripens and is exhausted. We are willing to work so hard for our possessions, thinking we will have them forever. Actually, possessions are quite easy to lose. The virtue you create, on the other hand, you will not lose. Of course, non-virtue is the same: It stays with you like your shadow. You cannot escape it.

Each person wants to think that they are handsome, smart, pretty, youthful, and everybody loves them. But you don't like yourself, you don't treat yourself in a loving way and do what is best for you -- why would others like you if you don't like yourself? Everyone is lost to the power of their three poisons. Therefore, egos inflate and pride swells. Read and think about the law of cause and result, which is the antidote to that stupidity. Look at the Three Jewels, look at how they got the outer, inner, and secret qualities they have. Did they buy them in a market or earn them through a business deal? Did they steal them? No. Each person plants seeds in their own field and reaps the harvest, good or bad, that they themselves grew. You don't need to take my word for it. You don't need to trust me at all, but are you going to also refuse to trust Buddha Shakyamuni and Guru Rinpoche? Or what about Jesus, if you are a Christian? He didn't teach non-virtue either. He didn't create great negativity and send himself to hell. That is not how or what he taught. None of the enlightened beings tell us to engage in non-virtue, so where did we get the idea that it is such a wonderful thing to do? Why do we refuse to listen to the teachings of enlightened beings? We respect them because they have rid themselves of non-virtue. We understand something of their qualities, or we wouldn't hold them as our objects of refuge. We, on the other hand, are not enlightened, we are not God or Jesus or Buddha. We cannot see for ourselves how things function, which is why we rely on those who can.

If we call ourselves Buddhists, that means we are followers of the Buddha. The Buddha taught the law of cause and result. Thus, as Buddhists we should trust that this is how things work. If we are refusing to get rid of our habits of non-virtue, or refusing to create virtue, that proves that we do not accept the law of karma, the Buddha's teaching. Why bother calling yourself a Buddhist at that point?

Why would we act like this? It's crazy. Are we drunk? Did we have too many beers? No. We are stupid in our servitude to our five poisons. We are fanatical in our self-grasping. We might be so wise and scholarly but not understand the difference between virtue and non-virtue, and then all our learning does us no good at all. No being wants to harm himself, but look at how dumb we are. Nobody wants to create virtue either. We want a high position and worldly recognition and wealth. Are the causes of these virtue or non-virtue? This is all explained in the ngondro teachings, so everyone has heard it. Whatever tradition you follow -- Kagyu, Sakya, Gelug, or Nyingma -- the teachings on the law of cause and result are the same. First we need to recognize virtue and non-virtue. What are their benefits and faults? What happens if you eliminate non-virtue? What happens if you don't?

When it comes to the foods we need to eat and the medicines we need to take, we think about them carefully and take action accordingly. We accept and trust the teachings we receive on what we should and shouldn't eat if we want to have a long life. We consider the consequences and change our habits. However, regarding our karma we are really dumb. We don't accept or trust those teachings. We don't have horns on our heads, but in this regard we are worse than animals. It is not that we are lazy. For example, everyone is happy to work so hard washing their faces, shaving their mustaches off, putting on their makeup, and on and on. So sorry, though, the result of all your effort is you are still not handsome or pretty. If you want to be clean and pretty, you need virtue. It is non-virtue that is our ugliness. Eliminating our non-virtue, including the two obscurations and our outer, inner, and secret negative habits, slowly rids us of our ugliness and yuckiness at every level. If we make the causes for purity and beauty, the results will inevitably come. Just like when you plant a rice seed, a rice plant will grow; or if it's a flower seed, a flower will grow; or if an apple seed, an apple tree will grow: In the same way, your virtue or non-virtue will produce nothing but its own result of happiness or suffering, qualities or faults. Why do we refuse to accept this and do what is best for ourselves? We don't need to be geniuses to understand this point or to apply it to our lives. We just need to be honest.

In Tibet, many old men and women just sat and recited MANI mantras all day with faith, sometimes turning a prayer wheel. With this kind of very sincere practice, even though it was so simple, they had great confidence and faith; and even at the moment of death, they did not need to rely on lamas or anyone, they just trusted in their own sincere practice. That is an example of people really working in their own best interests. They really loved themselves, they were really kind to themselves. How come all the young flashy smart people can't manage to do that? Think about it.

Tashi Delek!

-Gyatrul

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