

On the Geku

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Everyone who comes to the dharma center comes for the same reason: Everybody comes here for the dharma. Whether you are young or old, rich or poor, pretty or handsome or ugly, smart or dumb, high or low makes absolutely no difference— everybody comes for the dharma. That means everybody comes to create virtue and purify nonvirtue. Therefore, everyone needs to conduct themselves with virtue. The dharma center has rules— what to do and what not to do. Is that because it is a prison? No. The dharma tradition, piece by piece and step by step, teaches you what is virtue and what is nonvirtue. The whole thing is for that. The rules at the center are to help you create virtue and avoid nonvirtue because that is the center’s reason for being. The rules are to help you study and practice well, too. So everyone should know the rules and then follow them. That is each person’s job. That is how we respect ourselves, respect each other, respect the center, respect our dharma brothers and sisters, and, bottom line, respect the Three Jewels, which are the source and foundation of all dharma, both the dharma of scripture and the dharma of realization.

The *geku* helps you with that. What is a *geku*? [The term is frequently translated as “disciplinarian” and in Tibet is the title given to the head disciplinarian in a monastery.] Look at the name— “geku” means “requesting virtue.” “Ge” is virtue; “ku” here means “requesting.” Therefore, the *geku* is the one who requests the sangha to act with virtue. That means if someone doesn’t know the rules, the *geku* tells them what the rules are. If someone knows the rules but isn’t following them, being a little bit naughty like a child, the *geku* reminds them like a mommy or daddy would remind their child. If someone is being really naughty, making obstacles or other stupid things, then the *geku* will act more wrathfully, just like a parent scolding or punishing their child for being bad or to keep them from harm. That is how the *geku* is always requesting everyone to act in a virtuous way and stay inside virtue.

The *geku* is there to watch and benefit each person— old or young, male or female, rich or poor, smart or dumb. Each person needs to listen to the *geku*, and the *geku* needs to watch each person. Not because they are a spy! The *geku* watches to see what you are doing, and what you need to do and not do. The *geku* watches you to support you in dharma, in good conduct, and in proper practice. The *geku* watches you to support you in avoiding nonvirtue. In this, they are showing you kindness like your best friend! The *geku* helps you not to be naughty! That is a real friend, that is someone really being of benefit to you, more than someone who just has a sweet mouth and maybe wants your money.

If you don't listen to the geku, they have the freedom and duty to stand up, to enforce the center's rules, to keep you from nonvirtue or to stop you from doing it. That is not the geku's trip. That is *your* trip, your naughtiness getting you in trouble. The geku is just doing their job! Actually, in Tibet the geku would know each piece of the monastery and ritual, so when they were watching they would know instantly if even one piece or one hair was out of place or wrong. The geku would not only keep everyone from being naughty, the geku also would know the tormas perfectly, the umzed's (chant leader's) job perfectly, the chopon's (ritual assistant's) job perfectly, and so on. A fully qualified geku would watch every aspect of monastery life and make sure it was all being done in accord with the dharma, "requesting virtue" in every place.

In a monastery, it was the law or rule that the geku would whack the monks when they were naughty. They would have to—that was the custom and the rule. Here we don't do that, but the idea is the same—there will be consequences or punishment if someone is really being negative, really pushing against the center's rules, going their own way. We do need that. Sometimes people are too much! Too much their *own* way, too negative, or too crazy. Therefore, we need a geku.

Some people don't like the geku and don't understand that the geku is helping. They think the geku is like their enemy. Actually, getting angry at the geku is like children getting angry with their mommy or daddy for scolding them. Lots of people in Tibet don't like the geku, especially children and younger people. But older people, they do like the geku, they respect the geku and respect the rules. They know those benefit the monastery and the sangha, so they appreciate that. That is like understanding that parents scolding their children are showing them the greatest kindness by keeping them from harm and nonvirtue and teaching them the right way of doing things. Those people understand. Rather than thinking the geku is your enemy, it would be better to say "thank you." That would be like children saying "thank you" to their parents. Usually nobody does—even when they are grown up, many children are just waiting for their daddy and mommy to die so they can get their money!

Anyway, in one way, the geku is like everyone's mommy and daddy; but in another way, the geku is like the police. Many people behave well just out of fear of the geku, like criminals who decide not to do naughty things because they are afraid of the police. If someone wants to do something naughty, but they think, "The geku's going to see me, going to get me!" and then they don't do it, then still the geku is keeping them in virtue rather than nonvirtue, even though the person isn't trying to follow the rules in a virtuous way. The person doesn't think that the geku is helping them; but since the geku's presence is keeping them from nonvirtue, actually that is of great benefit to them, even if they don't like the geku or run away. And the geku is always checking

everywhere, like the police always checking everything. In Tibet, the gekus were also like the police because, although they didn't have guns, they did have long sticks and they would really whack you, too! So in some ways, the geku is like the police.

Since the geku is always running around the dharma center in the ten directions, watching everything like a mommy or daddy, they can never just plop down and relax and hang out. In that way, a geku is like everyone's servant, without any freedom. So the geku is like the sangha's mommy and daddy, and like the police, and everybody's servant, all together.

Some people think the geku only scolds and is nasty. No, no. The geku's job is to be always checking each person and each situation. If someone is sick during a practice, for example, the geku will make sure the person has someone to help them or that they are comfortable. In each situation, the geku watches and helps, whatever is needed. Sometimes they need to scold, sometimes they need to praise, sometimes they say something, sometimes they don't say anything. They have to check.

You can use the example of the umzed—they have to know when to chant high or low, short or long, fast or slow, and when to stop and start. The umzed chants according to the tradition and rules of chanting, but also watches the lama because sometimes something needs to be changed. The umzed knows they can change the chanting this way but not that way, according to the tradition. They know how to properly adjust the chants according to the timing on each particular day or occasion, too. Everyone is following the umzed during the practice, but the umzed can't just chant however they want; they have to chant according to the rules, traditions, and what is appropriate.

In the same way, the geku has to check and act skillfully in each situation. The geku's job is to make sure everybody knows the rules and is following them. Just like parents dealing with their children, sometimes the geku has to say things in a soft way, sometimes in a hard way. The geku has to keep the rules firmly and clearly, but also sometimes be flexible. Not like being flexible about your girlfriends and boyfriends, the way some people are, shamelessly chasing everyone, even doggies. To be really flexible doesn't mean to embarrass yourself by being shameless. The geku has to always check carefully because many different kinds of situations arise and there are many different kinds of people, sometimes being very stupid or negative. The geku always has to see.

Everybody has rules that they follow. Every monastery in Tibet had rules and leaders, whether it was big or small, whether it was for ngakpas (Mantrayana practitioners) or monks, and whatever school it belonged to. At dharma centers in the West, it's the same thing. Even if you just have three or five people at a dharma center, you can't just babble nonsense instead of chanting the practice, for example. Just because a center is

small doesn't mean it doesn't need rules. It is still a place of virtue, a place of pure practice and dharma, right? That means you need rules to guide you in virtue. Whether you have five people or 10,000, in either case to give up the center's rules would be disrespectful to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. That means you are not a Buddhist, even! That means you are saving negativity and cleansing away your merit, and I don't think any of us need to do that! We come here to practice—that means to save merit, what is positive. We don't need to mix in negativity with that. We don't need to mix in being dumb. Therefore, whether your sangha or group or center is big or small, there have to be rules. Then everyone knows how to respect the Three Jewels and how to respect each other. Then there can be harmony.

Everyone has to follow the lama, the geku, and the umzed. During practices, everyone has to follow the umzed, not just chant their own way. Everyone has to follow the geku, which means following the rules of behavior. Everyone has to follow the lama, hearing the teachings and then remembering them. Don't be like me, not knowing the teachings or not knowing the rules and just being dumb. Each person needs to learn by hearing the teachings, and each person needs to know the center's rules for themselves. Then you will know how to act. That is how you keep harmony and respect at a dharma center or monastery, no matter how small or how big. Even if you go to a giant Gelugpa monastery of many thousands of monks, each one knows the rules equally and follows the rules equally. Each one—whether they are an ordinary monk or lama or tulku or whatever—follows the geku and at practice time follows the umzed. Even the high lamas don't chant their own way but follow the umzed all together. It would be embarrassing to chant differently than the umzed—embarrassing *and* disrespectful. In the same way, even the high lamas listen to the geku and follow the monastery's laws. In Tibet, even the Dalai Lama did this! Being a high lama meant nothing; a rule was a rule. It would be embarrassing to disregard the monastery's rules and just do things your own way. In one way embarrassing, in one way really negative nonvirtue.

If someone insists on doing things their own way, against the dharma center's rules, then it is the geku's job or duty to tell them not to do things that way. In Tibet, if you didn't listen at that point, the geku's duty would be to really whack you! I don't think we do that in America, but the idea is the same—if somebody really is insisting on violating the center's rules and refusing to listen to the geku, then there will be consequences. Is that because the geku has a problem or it is the geku's fault? No. It is part of the geku's job in maintaining harmony and good conduct. The lamas have their jobs presiding as the vajra master at practices and so forth, teachers have their jobs of teaching, the umzeds have their jobs of leading the chanting, and the geku's job includes keeping discipline. Each individual in these positions has their own job to support the whole center.

The lama, the geku, the umze, the chopon, and the whole sangha in general—nobody gets to just do things their own way. In general, whatever religion or tradition you are practicing, there are rules and ways to do things. Everyone needs to follow those. Who is watching over those things at the dharma center? The geku is watching. That's the geku's job. The geku even watches the lamas. The lama can't just sit any way they want on the throne—they can't lie down up there, or lounge in some strange way. That would be embarrassing! They don't want to embarrass themselves or the whole dharma center. There is a tradition of the right way to sit on the throne, the right way to practice, and the right way to teach. There are likewise traditions for how to chant and play the instruments. When you are doing these things, you want to do them according to the tradition, correctly and well. It would be embarrassing just to do them your own way, or just a funky way, or not to know the correct way and so to just do them kind of hippie style. There is a reason each thing is done in a particular way.

Everyone needs to respect the geku, and the geku in turn needs to watch and act carefully, not just screaming or being unnecessarily harsh. The geku watches everyone the same. They can't just scold people they don't like and ignore the negativity of the people they do like. The geku is not there to make anyone high or low, but to help everyone stay on the path of virtue. The geku and sangha need to fit together, respecting each other. That keeps harmony. Then the sangha and geku are supporting each other, functioning together in dharma.

Everybody try, okay? We all need to stand up, to support each other, to respect each other and respect ourselves. In one way, each person has to be their own geku, requesting virtue of themselves, watching their own behavior. Then the outer geku supports that. Everybody try, okay? With respect instead of gossiping!

Tashi delek!

-Gyatral