

Dinner Invitations and Santa Claus: Instructions on Tsok and Generosity

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While channel surfing one morning, Rinpoche was asked, "What is the real essence of tsok?"

Tsok doesn't necessarily mean on Guru Rinpoche Day. Anytime! Every second! "Tsok" means a gathering. Really it means you are gathering your merit and wisdom, so "tsok practice" really should mean the time when you are doing that particularly.

Tsok is like when you invite someone over—if you serve nice food and everything is clean, then it is of benefit to them and everybody is happy. If your place is not clean, if the food is dirty, if you didn't invite them properly or you go ahead without them, if you do things in a rude or strange way, then nobody likes that.

Tsok is exactly like that. You are inviting the lamas, yidams, dakinis, and dharma protectors over. Then if you haven't prepared things properly, it is like you have lied to them. Like inviting someone for dinner but there's no dinner. You think the deities don't know but they do know! You are just making yourself stupid if you think you can cheat them like that.

Tsok doesn't have to be fancy but you need to be honest. Whatever you are offering, wash it nicely, prepare it properly. You know if you offered the nicest things or kept them for yourself. You know if you have taken care or not, if you washed your hands and used clean plates, if you were careful to cover your mouth so you weren't breathing on everything and spitting everywhere, and so forth.

I think to offer what is nice and not just funky, to offer with a pure motivation, and to make all the offerings as clean and nice as you can—those are the really important things for your tsok. Why do I call them important? Because those things will make your tsok a method for accumulating merit and purifying negativity. There are many teachings on this. Whether you are making offerings or performing generosity, either way everything should be clean and you should do it as nicely as you can.

If you are very poor and you don't have any nice things to offer, but still mentally and physically you offer the best of what you have, and you make it clean and as nice as you can, trying sincerely, then that is still a real tsok. That is not stinginess. That will absolutely be a method to accumulate merit and purify negativity. But if we are sloppy, or our motivation is lazy or selfish, without faith and without any consideration of others, then of course there will be no such result. Those are meaningless offerings, nothing to do with tsok. Without faith and an altruistic attitude, something's missing. Tsok means the opposite of "something's missing." It means nothing's missing. And not only that, it means more more more, filled up so much. Maybe too much! Too many good things. That's a problem! Too many delicious. Too much merit and virtue—how you gonna hold that? Then another problem! Terrible! Then you

dedicate it to everybody! Horrible! We should have that kind of altruism, like we have so much we can't hold anything. Like we have to give it all away, like we have no choice because we feel that kind of compassion. That is *tsok*, exactly.

That is why when we recite the *tsok* practices, don't forget it is to benefit all beings. It is the biggest generosity. That is *tsok's* real meaning: generosity. Here on the television [showing houses covered in holiday decorations], everyone is making Christmas offerings. That is their *tsok*! Do they have to recite *tsok* verses particularly? No! Look — they worked so hard, they bought so many expensive things, big trees and this and that, and then all the adornments, so now everything is sparkling. Then everybody enjoys it! All these offerings, all the generosity, that is their *tsok*. That is how they are saving merit or "gathering the accumulations," which is what *tsok sak* means in Tibetan. The *tsok* means the accumulation, which means merit, and the *sak* means you are gathering that. It can be ordinary merit or wisdom merit, still it is your accumulation, still you are gathering it.

On the other hand, if you are rich and offer the nicest food and most expensive things but you are just being proud and showing off—is that *tsok*? No way! That is your own boasting ego trip. If you boast, that wastes your merit, they say. Also, pretending to give someone something while in fact you're cheating them, that's not *tsok* either. Again just your ego, cheating yourself. Some people spend lots of money and work really hard, maybe they look really generous, even, making these kinds of upside down offerings. That is just like this go-go lady [a scantily clad Jennifer Lopez appearing in a commercial]—working so hard, getting nothing. Sort of nasty to look at, desperate lady. Look, showing everything, wasting everything, not even some tiny benefit!

In India, there are so many beggars, even in the middle of the road. If you give even one of them something nicely, that is *tsok*: it creates merit and brings benefit. If you are unkind and nasty when you are giving them something, or sort of ignore them and just give them dirty things or garbage, then forget about accumulating merit, you are accumulating nothing but non-virtue. Forget about *tsok*—that is just negative *tsok*, and we already have tons of that!

When you are generous, you need to have respect for the one you are being generous to. When you make offerings, you have respect and faith in the recipient of the offering—the refuge objects or the lama or whatever. With generosity, same thing: you need to respect the one receiving it. Respect means to be kind or polite and perform the generosity with the sincere wish to bring benefit. If you feel compassion for those who are poor, and out of kindness to them you give them something nice and clean to help them, that will benefit them, and through that benefit you will accumulate merit. But even if you give them diamonds and gold, if what you give is just dirty, and you don't care, or you just throw it down like a piece of shit, then there is no merit. It wouldn't matter how many diamonds you gave—no *tsok* there!

Also, I want to tell you something: to be generous to poor people or those who are sick or suffering, that is very powerful. Also to children, because they don't have things, they don't know things, and they can't do things. Anybody who doesn't have things, or who is suffering,

or in a low position or weak—if you benefit them, that merit is very heavy, very strong. But if you cheat them or harm them, that non-virtue is likewise very heavy. Because they have nothing, to give them even something small or help them in some small way is a big deal. But to take something they have, even a small or funky thing, or make any kind of obstacles or difficulties for them, that is very heavy. Don't forget that about the low and the hopeless. They are very heavy.

Just like when you are making offerings, the objects of refuge are the heaviest, too, the lama and the Three Jewels—the most powerful merit comes from offering to them. Also, those who have really been of benefit to you are heavy, too. That is why taking care of your daddy and mommy creates more merit than taking care of others in general. Don't think this idea is just some Tibetan trip. Really those are teachings on karma. We need to know that. I think everybody does know, but sometimes although we know it, we don't do it.

Don't be generous with what is in your hands but at the same time stingy with your thought. If you are going to practice generosity, be generous completely—body, speech, and mind, beginning to end. That way you are wasting nothing.

I am not saying give away all your money! Someone is going to complain, “Gyatrul said I have to give up my millions of dollars!” Give me a break! Don't be stupid! If you want to spend millions, that's wonderful. But even if you just spend two dollars, buying toys or cookies for children, then look—they are so happy. There is merit! If you give someone a cup of tea or coffee or whatever and they enjoy it, same thing. Mentally if you are not stingy at that time, but you are sincere and dedicate the merit, then that is real generosity. It doesn't have to be millions and billions. But to have a 'millions and billions' motivation—yes, that is important.

Hey, look at Santa Claus, on the television every time! He makes everybody happy. It doesn't matter if he is real or not. He is our generosity. Everybody recognizes that, even the children. Therefore, everybody is so happy when they see him! Nobody has to explain or give a Santa Claus teaching, just naturally everybody is happy. Our generosity should be like that. That way tsok.

Tashi Delek!

-Gyatrul