

On Visiting O.D.D.—Part 1

Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche

April 12th, 2015

So many people have come today! I'm not quite sure why you are all here, but anyway I say "Tashi delek!" to everyone. How are you? I am very well. Actually, each day that we don't die, that is a good day, yes? When we die, before we take our next birth, we won't know where that birth will be—as an animal, in the hells, as a hungry ghost, or anywhere in the six classes of beings. But we do know that right now we have the precious human body, complete with its 18 characteristics, the eight kinds of freedom and ten endowments. Everyone has this—that is wonderful, thank you! For myself, now for 90 years I have been complaining, and as I am not dead yet, it looks like I will complain for a little bit longer. I still think I am handsome, pretty, and smart!

I know a few of your faces. Some of you, I know your names, too. Some of you, I used to know your name and now I don't, but still I recognize your faces. Some of you are old dharma friends, and some of you are new, coming all sparkling. In any case, it is good that so many people have come and gathered here today, so thank you.

I think we can say that the reason for coming together at this place and time is just our karma together, the interdependent connection that we share. I didn't come here to see you guys, frankly; I came to check on the work that the carpenters are doing on the stairs. But, as everyone is here, I am very glad to see you all.

Those who are here, working on the stairs, thank you. I don't know how long until they finish, but as long as they are working, everyone please come and help, supporting them however you can. You don't necessarily have to be a great, strapping lad or strong young lady to come help. You can be an old geezer or an old hag or whatever the case may be. Whatever you can offer, whatever knowledge you can share or offering you have to make, please shut your mouth and come to offer it. Everyone, please do what you can to help and support this project.

Why? Because this is our dharma center—everyone's dharma center. That means it is everyone's place to come and accumulate merit and purify negativity. How do we accumulate merit? By using our possessions and wealth for making offerings, and also by using our three doors: body, speech, and mind. How do we purify negativity? Again, through using our three doors in service of the dharma and by making offerings using our wealth and possessions. Everyone can come and make any kind of offering—of material things or of service. That is why we have a dharma center. Of course, you all know this already. Among the people who are here today, many have been practicing for a long time. Many of you have finished the 500,000 accumulations of the preliminary practices, or ngondro. That means you have done all the prostrations, all the mandala

offerings—looking at the ngondro, you can see how it is one accumulation of merit after another, one kind of purification after another.

Why do we engage in so many different methods to create merit and purify negativity? Is it just so we can get rich? Well, maybe everybody would like that! Is it just so you can become pretty? Sure, you would like that, too—then everybody would gobble you up. Everybody wants to be pretty!

At any rate, we have the opportunity to accumulate merit and purify negativity. We have this place, this building, this temple: Orgyen Dorje Den. Both outerly and innerly, everything is complete here. We can use it as our place to make offerings and our object of offering. We can make offerings of every kind: lovely forms, beautiful sounds, wonderful smells, delicious tastes, and so on. Through those offerings we can accumulate merit and purify negativity. That is what this place is for. This place is suitable for making every kind of offering. You don't need to be ashamed or embarrassed of your offering place. It isn't a small, funky place to make offerings. It is fully endowed with all the necessary qualities. Everything is complete here.

If it is not complete now, what could possibly be missing? The only thing that could be missing in a place such as this, as far as its being a fully endowed place of dharma, is if people don't come and use it for study and practice. The only thing that could be missing is if people don't come to hear the dharma, contemplate the dharma, and meditate on the dharma. Then this wonderful place cannot fulfill its purpose.

This is not a place where you come to get rich, or to garner worldly renown or fame. It isn't that kind of place. It is a place for purifying negativity and accumulating merit, for creating the causes of liberation and, ultimately, the full omniscience of buddhahood.

Temporarily, if you get some little success, don't get puffed up about it. Don't let it make you proud and don't show it off.

Here we are, coming together in this place of dharma. We have all of the supports—those of enlightened body, speech, and mind—all here, complete. We have every support, not merely the physical representations of enlightened body, speech, and mind, but the extraordinary blessings that many great lamas have bestowed on this place. Some of the greatest lamas of our time have come and given whole cycles of empowerments and transmissions, such as the Rinchen Terzod, the Kama, the Gongdu, and others. All of the terma, the treasure revelation teachings, have been transmitted here in one form or another. This isn't just some okey-dokey little temple somewhere. Do you think it is "just okay?" No, I don't think so. I think it is the kind of place that, whatever dharma you want to practice, there is no place you could go that would have greater blessings than what you will receive here. Even if you were to go to a renowned mountain retreat place, I don't think that its blessings would be any more powerful than the blessings that have been transmitted and abide here in this place of dharma.

Why do I think that? Just look at the teachings and transmissions that have been given here! The Rinchen Terzod, the Kama, and so forth have been given – and by lamas such as Yangthang Tulku Rinpoche, who is an emanation of Vimalamitra himself. Emanations of Vimalamitra, Vairochana, and other great masters have come and blessed this place directly. Their blessings and compassion, through the transmissions, empowerments and teachings they have given, are still here, part of the blessing of this place. The greatest among Buddhist masters in our time—certainly the greatest among Kagyu and Nyingma masters—have blessed this place of practice, and you have been able to make connections with them.

You have received everything!

A temple is like a celestial palace. It is a place of practice unlike any other. If you come and study the dharma here, it will be unlike study done in other places. If you come and contemplate the dharma here, it will be unlike contemplation done in other places. That is because of the exceptional blessings and compassion of the lamas who have come here. The blessings here are extraordinary. They are exceptional.

In the future, you can ask great lamas, lamas whom you trust, lamas whose authenticity is beyond doubt, if this is true. When the greatest lineage masters come here in the future, you can ask them, “One time I heard Gyatrul say this—was he lying? Is it really like this?”

I cannot say that I’m not a liar. I’m not a buddha, I am not a bodhisattva, I am not a great master, I am not even a great scholar. I cannot say that I don’t lie. But it would be useless to lie to you on this point.

In the future, please come to this place. Please come and practice, please come and learn, and please come and help. I am not asking you for my own sake. Well, actually, in one way I am. When people come and study and practice the dharma authentically, then they are receiving the lineage blessings; if they are studying and practicing with the thought to benefit me, then I receive those blessings as well. Thank you for that. Wishing to bring this old man some benefit, that is a compassionate motivation. Then I say thank you because your motivation is very good. As for me, I need it! I am this funky old man, 90 years old. I have nothing left in this life but to die.

When we die, what is going to bring us benefit? Is it going to be money? Is it going to be high position or power? No. Is it having a vast following? No. You know this! There are those among you who are rich, who are smart, and who have many qualities. All of you know that those things are not the ultimate refuge. Knowing that all those worldly things are not the ultimate refuge, then you can go for refuge in the Three Jewels with all your heart.

Who are the Three Jewels? I don’t think it is possible for anyone to come to this temple and look around and not know something of what and who the Three Jewels

are. So if you have come here with your eyes open, I think you know something of the Three Jewels.

I talk to you very directly like this, sort of putting you down and playing around. These are the words of a funky old man, a funky old beggar; and you and I, we are like family. So, as if you were really my family, I tell you directly my real advice: Please, always maintain harmony and keep your discipline very purely.

When I say “maintain harmony,” what does that mean? Does it mean maintaining harmony with your boyfriend or your girlfriend? Or if you are a boy, with your boyfriend, and if you are a girl, with your girlfriend, if you happen to be gay or lesbian? Does it mean maintaining harmony with your business partners and associates? No. It means, since you are a Buddhist, you need to maintain harmony with all your dharma brothers and sisters. You need to maintain harmony with all Buddhists, because you all take refuge in the Buddha, you all take refuge in the Dharma, and you all take refuge in the Sangha. Therefore, you all are in the same family in that way. You need to maintain harmony with your dharma family.

The Buddha never taught attachment or aversion, so nurturing your attachment and aversion has no place in your taking refuge in the Buddha. Likewise, there is nothing about taking refuge in the Dharma that means you should be harboring attachment and aversion; and there is no part of taking refuge in the Sangha that means you should be increasing your attachment and aversion, either. The Three Jewels are the antidotes to attachment and aversion, not the embodiments of them. The Buddha with all his qualities; the Dharma, with its countless categories of sutra and tantra; and all of the inconceivable Sangha—such as the Dalai Lama—those who have heard the dharma, and contemplated it, and meditated upon it, and who are bringing the Buddha’s qualities forth in their own mindstreams: All the manifestations of the Three Jewels are to help us eliminate attachment and aversion, not cultivate them. Sangha is *gendun* in Tibetan, which means “those who focus on virtue” or “those with interest in and enthusiasm for virtue.” We take refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, not to increase our attachment and aversion, but to increase our virtue. Nobody taking refuge should be cultivating attachment and aversion. We need to be doing the opposite – decreasing our three poisons. That is what it means to keep harmony.

As Buddhists, we all have one idea. It is as if we were just different parts of one body, because we all go for refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. If you really want to accomplish your own greatest benefit, there is no better way in all the world than this. When I say that there is no better way in all the world to bring yourself the greatest benefit than keeping harmony and pure discipline, again there is no reason to take my word for it. Ask the greatest beings manifest in our time, ask the Dalai Lama himself: “Is there any way greater than harmony and pure discipline to bring about my own

greatest benefit? Gyatrul Rinpoche, this old geezer, said that. Is it true?" Go ahead and ask him—you don't need to rely on my word as your authority.

Keeping pure discipline means guarding your samaya. Guarding your samaya means keeping your vows of refuge. Holding your vows of refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and following them—that is how you keep your samaya. If you say, "I don't know the vows of refuge, or the bodhisattva vows, or the Vajrayana samaya; how do I keep them?" This is the simplest and easiest way to remember: keep harmony and keep pure discipline. If you are keeping the vows of refuge and training at the Hinayana level, you must have harmony with your dharma brothers and sisters. If you are keeping the Mahayana vows and training as a bodhisattva, you must keep harmony with your dharma brothers and sisters. If you are holding the Vajrayana samaya, you absolutely must keep harmony with your vajra brothers and sisters.

Is Hinayana practice meant to increase your aversion? Is Mahayana practice for increasing jealousy? If you are practicing Vajrayana, is that so you can grow your arrogance and pride? No.

If you don't know the specifics of how to keep your discipline according to the Hinayana, then you need to receive teachings and study, because that is important. You need to know how to keep your discipline—know what the vows are and how to protect them. You have plenty of books, in lots of different languages. The Buddha's teachings always state that you need to keep your vows, whatever vows you have, and keep them purely. Is this because you are feeling guilty? Is this because you are about to run out and steal and cheat and kill? No. You need to keep your Hinayana vows, for example, because that is how you protect the virtue you have created, and how you protect yourself from creating non-virtue. When you have this as your foundation, then you can practice all further dharma. You can practice Mahayana; you can practice Vajrayana, outer and inner, and even the stages of mahayoga, anuyoga, and atiyoga. Stage by stage, you can practice every stage of dharma because you have this as your foundation.

You, all of you here today, have received so many empowerments. You have received transmissions and instructions as well. And not from just anybody, but from great masters such as Penor Rinpoche, Theglo Rinpoche, and Jigdral Yeshe Dorje—His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche – and from the Karmapa and the Dalai Lama, even! These are your lamas. Following the dharma is following their teachings, their ideas, not your own idea. If you just follow your own idea, you will never reach liberation.

Keeping harmony and pure discipline means not to transgress the instructions of the Three Jewels. This is how you keep your samaya. This is how you keep every level of your vows. If you really want to be of benefit to yourself, this is how you do it, because if you transgress the Three Jewels' teachings and act out of harmony with them, you bring yourself only more of the great sufferings of the six realms. For lifetime after

lifetime, you will wander, confused and deluded, throughout the six classes of beings, experiencing every kind of suffering. Right now, we have the opportunity to go a different way. We have the opportunity not to take that well-trodden path through the six realms one more time. We have encountered the dharma! Not only that, we have encountered the sutras and the tantras, and even the outer and inner teachings of tantra, and lamas qualified to teach them. The lamas are perfect, the dharma is perfect: we've got it all! If we still ignore it, if we still ignore the teachings of our gurus in favor of going our own way, that's really crazy, isn't it? We say, "I'm not crazy!" No, you are worse than crazy. We say, "I'm not an animal!" No, you are worse than an animal. You are killing yourself! You are throwing yourself into hell! You are casting yourself into the lower realms!

If we ask, "Who is casting us into the lower realms? Who is binding us in the three realms of existence once again?" We ourselves are doing those things. That is crazy, beyond the craziest lunatic.

On the other hand, we have the opportunity now not to go down that path of being so crazy. We have the opportunity to create the cause of attaining the bodhisattva grounds and ultimate buddhahood, instead of the cause for rebirth in the lower realms. You have this. You have this seed, you have this cause: You have received empowerment, transmission, and instruction from fully qualified, authorized masters of the great lineages. You have the seed, the cause—if you waste it, you will surely only accumulate more causes for lower realm rebirth. Then you are really crazy! If we throw away our opportunity to end all suffering, and choose to create more suffering for ourselves instead, that is worse than the craziest of crazies.

Many people think that they are quite scholarly. I am certainly not the one to tell them that they're not. But what I can say is, when it comes to dharma, you have to know the dharma without mistake. I am not saying that this or that person knows the dharma with or without mistake. I can't make that call. But I know that the dharma has to be practiced according to the dharma. The dharma has to be learned according to the dharma and understood according to the dharma, and then practiced or applied according to the dharma. If you make a mistake in these, that is a real mistake. If you make the mistake of failing to study, practice, or internalize the dharma, then that's a really big mistake. That is to end up like me. Even the most scholarly, if they make the mistake of missing the key point of dharma, then that is the biggest mistake, and they will go in the opposite direction of the Buddha and all the lamas.

Don't go the opposite direction of the Buddha! You have the opportunity now to turn and go in the Buddha's direction. Don't miss that opportunity by insisting on continuing on your own way, going the opposite way of the Buddha. You have the opportunity to go the Buddha's way, which means you have the opportunity to hear,

contemplate, and meditate on the dharma—that is how you learn what it means to go in the Buddha’s direction rather than your own.

Some of you are so handsome, pretty, and smart right now. What is the benefit? Well, there is not necessarily any benefit. What are you doing with that? What are you doing with your opportunity, the opportunity afforded you by your youth and intelligence? Are you just creating more causes of your own suffering? Are you really bringing benefit to yourself, or are you sowing the seeds of your own destruction? It is really up to you; you can go either way. You can bring amazing benefit to yourself and others by taking your opportunity to practice; or you can create, once again, the causes of lower rebirth. But you have to begin to hear, contemplate, and meditate on dharma even to understand these distinctions and know which is which, what is virtue and what is non-virtue.

You might say, “Hey, he is always talking about this! He has said this so many times! What about himself?”

Myself? I am just hopeless. Is it because I didn’t have great lamas? No, nobody can say that. I had inconceivable lamas. In Tibet, my root guru was an emanation of Vairochana, an inconceivable tulku of the Dudjom lineage, and I met not just one such realized master but so many! I had so many root gurus in Tibet who were real bodhisattvas.

So you might say, “So, he met a lot of lamas. Then did he never receive teachings?” No, I can’t say that either. They did teach the dharma, profound and vast. But I didn’t have the merit to take advantage of those teachings. I didn’t know how to really internalize those teachings.

So then you might ask, “Okay, if that is how you wasted your time in Tibet, then what about India?” In India, I spent 14 years living with 2,500 monks from every tradition—Kagyü, Nyingma, Sakya, and Gelug. What did I do there? I listened to the dharma. I can’t say that I never had the opportunity to hear the dharma. I did! For 14 years, I listened to the dharma. Do I know what I heard? Do I know what that dharma was? No, because I didn’t meditate, I didn’t practice, and I didn’t accomplish what I had heard.

Let mine be your cautionary tale. Don’t be like me. If you are like me, then when you get old like I am now, you will end up guilty.

It doesn’t matter what nationality you are—Chinese, American, Tibetan, or whatever—please don’t follow the three poisons. People have this endless enthusiasm for pursuing what they think is their own best interest, day and night working for money, fame, and so forth. Actually, they are just strengthening their three poisons. Please, don’t go down that road. Please strengthen your faith and pure vision instead. Please strengthen your altruism and compassion for others, and decrease your three poisons as much as you are able. Please bring into your life the method, which is great

compassion, and prajna, insight—insight into emptiness itself. Please bring method and prajna into your life as much as you can. All of you have qualities; all of you have knowledge; all of you have inner resources. Don't waste these. People think it's such a tragedy if someone wastes or loses their money. To waste your qualities, though, that is worse. Then you are the most shameless loser.

Don't forget that the path really boils down to keeping harmony and having pure discipline. When I say "keeping harmony," I'm not talking about the so-called harmony between husbands and wives, who say that they are married, in a harmonious relationship, when in fact all day and all night, every day, every night, every hour, every month, every year they are just increasing their attachment and aversion. Don't be like that. I'm not saying that it's just Americans who do this, either. Sure, we Tibetans do, and the Chinese, and everyone! The point is, being harmonious doesn't mean increasing your attachment and aversion, day and night, like spouses do. It means having genuine compassion and loving-kindness. In general, though, our ordinary way of doing things is to always increase and nurture our attachment and aversion. That is sort of second nature to us. That is our natural tendency. That is our strong habit. If we really want to say that we are following these inconceivable lamas that we have had the opportunity to meet, including the Dalai Lama and the Karmapa, we need to go the opposite direction from doing business-as-usual like this. Business-as-usual for a sentient being is always to be indulging in attachment and aversion. Your opportunity is the chance to stop indulging in attachment and aversion at this moment. We can stop strengthening those in our minds and instead go the other way.

Your opportunity is now. If you want to wait now, your opportunity will be gone. You'll be finished. You'll end up like me, hopeless and helpless and useless. There are so many things—meaningless, useless things—that we tend to gravitate toward. But now if you want to take your opportunity of dharma, you need to go a different way. Don't take me as your example. Take me as your cautionary tale. You'll end up like me—old and hopeless and guilty—if you don't apply the dharma teachings by studying, contemplating, and meditating on them.

When we speak of study, contemplation, and meditation, we need all three steps. If you only study, then that study is useless. It has no effect on the mind. If you study and contemplate but never meditate, then again you will not see the full effect of those teachings. You have to study, and then contemplate, and then meditate. Likewise, meditation will only work if first you have studied and then contemplated. Through study, you have a basic understanding. That is the quality developed through study. Through contemplation, that understanding deepens until it is firm, certain, and without mistake. That is the quality developed through contemplation. When you reach that point through contemplation, then it is time to engage in meditation. If you ask, "What kind of quality is developed through meditation, once you have studied and

contemplated?” That is the quality of accomplishing your own purpose and others’ purpose, which ultimately are dharmakaya and rupakaya (or form kaya), together. That is why the process of study, contemplation, and meditation is so important. It is the most effective way that you can actually bring benefit to yourself and to others.

For us, as beginners, the process of study is particularly important, and you have plenty of opportunities. You have many books and many teachers. So your first responsibility is to study. Without study, you have nothing to think about. Once you have done some study and you have something to think about, then you need to digest it, you need to chew it up and investigate it completely for yourself. Then, when you arrive at certainty upon it, you need to meditate. It is always this threefold process: study, contemplation, and meditation.

Go that way! Don’t always insist on going your own way. Don’t always just think about MY WAY. The buddhas and bodhisattvas, and the great realized masters of the past, they all achieved realization by going the way of the enlightened ones – not by going what, at the time that they were ordinary beings, was their own ignorant way. We cannot say that we don’t have the dharma, that we don’t have any choice but to go our own way. No, no. We have the dharma. We have the Buddha’s way laid out for us. We have access to teachings on Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana, outer and inner. We have all of the *kama*, or canonical, teachings, and all of the *terma*, or treasure, teachings. We have everything together.

All of the lamas who have transmitted those teachings—the masters who were the sources of those teachings, the lineage gurus who have held them, and the lamas who have taught them to us directly—all have achieved realization by going the way of those teachings, not by going their own way. In Tibet, from Vimalamitra and Guru Rinpoche onward, all the great lineage gurus have gone the dharma way, not some way that they made up as an ignorant being. Likewise, all the great beings in India, in China, in Bhutan, in Nepal, or anywhere else, only achieved realization by giving up their own deluded way and going the way of the dharma.

These great masters of every school of Buddhism, they all have profound faith in the Three Jewels. There is not one among them who lacks faith in the Buddha, the Dharma, or the Sangha.

There is none among them who has not recognized that they alone can improve their own mind by discerning what is good and what is bad, and choosing to do only what is good. The path of practice will only be effective for one who puts it into practice! All sentient beings have the buddhanature. It is up to each one to make a connection to it and bring it forth.

All sentient beings have the buddhanature. Who is this buddha whose nature all beings have? Well, “the Buddha” is the enlightened one. In Tibetan, “buddha” is *sangye*, the one who has purified all negativity and brought to full blossom all qualities. Among

the Three Jewels, the Buddha is the first Jewel. It is this Buddha whose nature all beings share. All beings have buddhanature. This is their nature, which means it is already there. If we didn't already have buddhanature as sentient beings, then dharma practice would be useless. It would be useless to study the dharma, contemplate it, or meditate on it if we didn't have buddhanature. Without buddhanature, we would be like empty pipes. But we are not. Every single being has buddhanature. If we study, contemplate, and meditate on the dharma, we absolutely can attain liberation from samsara and the full omniscience of buddhahood.

That is why we need to hear, contemplate, and meditate on the dharma. If we just hear the dharma and never contemplate it, we will not really know if the dharma that we heard was correct or not. We won't know if our initial understanding is mistaken or not. We have to think carefully, examine it, and clear away our doubts until we are perfectly certain that our understanding is correct—no mistake! Once we reach certainty, then we need to meditate on it. These three always go together: study, contemplation, and meditation. That is because these are precisely the three steps that every great master has taken in order to attain realization. Great masters don't just pop up like mushrooms, seemingly without cause. They study, contemplate, and meditate on the dharma, and based on that they are able to bring about their own benefit and the benefit of all others through their increasing qualities and realization.

Fundamentally, we have to keep harmony and pure discipline. To keep pure discipline, we have to know what that is. We need to know what to adopt and what to reject in our own behavior. We need to know what qualities we should be nurturing and what we should be eliminating from our mindstreams. If we haven't done any study of the dharma, we won't have any clue where to begin. We won't know which things we should eliminate if we find them lurking in our mindstreams. We won't know why. We won't know why faults are negative. We won't know why we should bother eliminating them. We won't know what constitutes virtue. We won't know how to recognize it when it arises in our mindstreams; we won't know the benefits of nurturing it and acting from it. We won't know the faults of acting from non-virtuous motivations, and so forth. We won't know why we need to rid ourselves of faults or increase our qualities. If we never study the dharma, we will never know any of this. That is why we need to study the dharma – so we can keep pure discipline based on these fundamental teachings.

Everyone gets up in the morning and washes their face, so they will be clean and beautiful, and cleans their teeth, getting their fingers in their mouth and everything. We know that we need to clean our faces, but we don't understand the dirt of negativity that we need to clean from our mindstreams. We don't know exactly what constitutes the objects to be eliminated—the passions, the poisons, the afflictions, and so forth.

Please, learn about what is virtue and what is non-virtue, so you can recognize these in your mind. Then when you see non-virtues, you can work to eliminate them; and when you see virtues, you can nurture their seeds, bringing them forth and increasing them, or generate them if you they are lacking. Please, study the dharma so you know how to do to this for yourself. Otherwise, there isn't some seed somewhere that is suddenly going to blossom, and you will suddenly understand spontaneously. You can't rely on some kind of miracle like that. You have to study the dharma so that you understand how to practice.

For myself, I am now quite a funky old man, and I no longer have the energy to eliminate negativity from my mindstream. My habits are too strong. I am like someone who is addicted to opium or to poison, or like a drunkard. I just can't shake the habit of repeating my negativity and bringing myself more and more suffering. I am an old man; I don't have the energy to root out those habits at this point in my life. But you don't have my excuse! You are all young. Your three doors are strong and healthy, and you have the opportunity to slowly root out your bad habits, poisons, and negativity. You can eliminate from your mindstream all that must be eliminated...but only if you actually apply yourself. So please check. And please try.

When we talk about eliminating our negativity, where do we eliminate it to? Where do we throw it away? I don't think an American garbage truck is going to come that we can put all our negativity in, and the truck will haul it away and take care of it for us. What actually happens is you recognize your own nature. The more you recognize your own nature, the more its opposite – non-virtue – is naturally eliminated.

Everyone, please, as much as you can, work in this way to practice the dharma authentically and sincerely. I am not asking you to do this because it will make me younger if you do. It won't make me have a longer life. I mean, I would hope so, but I don't think it is going to work out that way. When you accumulate merit, when you practice and accomplish the dharma, the greatest possible benefit of course goes to yourself. That is my benefit, too! As someone who is practicing dharma, you can make aspirations, and those aspirations can benefit anyone you include in them, including myself – and thank you if you do. But really the benefit of each person's practice falls upon themselves. Likewise, if you refuse to practice, if you ignore your lamas and the transmissions you have received, and continue to be at the mercy of your three poisons, you will experience the results of that negativity.

Every day and always, study, contemplate, and meditate on the dharma a little. That is really my only advice. I don't know anything other than that. I can tell you that I have heard the great lamas teach that the BENZAR GURU mantra of Guru Rinpoche, for example, contains all the qualities of the enlightened body, speech, and mind of all buddhas. I can tell you how the MANI mantra is the embodiment of the compassion of all the buddhas; or how saying NAMO BUDDHAYA, NAMO DHARMAYA, NAMO

SANGHAYA is connecting to the Three Jewels through their names. I can tell you how these are all ways to accumulate merit and purify negativity, which means you are certainly bringing benefit to yourself in the most meaningful possible way, and that this is the only way that you will ever be able to benefit others. It is only through such methods that you will be able to actualize the dharmakaya and the rupakaya. That is what the great masters of the past have taught. I can tell you these things with my mouth, but I haven't realized them for myself. Don't be like me! If you ignore the Three Jewels, you are ignoring all enlightened qualities. Don't be that foolish. Don't be like me!

How did all of the mahasiddhas in all the different countries achieve realization? How did they become great masters, great bodhisattvas? How did they not only practice but accomplish the dharma? They all made powerful aspirations for the good of all sentient beings: "May all sentient beings have long lives, may they be free of illness and every kind of suffering, and may they swiftly achieve liberation from samsara and the ultimate state of omniscience." They all made many such aspirations and constantly worked to bring benefit to others. That is our job, too. If we want to achieve the levels that such great beings have achieved, we have to join our aspirations to theirs and set our motivation in the same way. If we just say, "I give up. No one else looks like they are really practicing authentically; I'm not going to, either!" – of course you have the freedom to do that, but you are not going to accomplish the dharma that way. You are not going to make any progress in your practice that way. If you really want to do yourself some good, you have to follow the examples of the great masters. None of them went their own road. They all cultivated bodhicitta very purely, and through that, accumulated merit and purified negativity, and thus reached the states of liberation and omniscience.

That's really all that I have to say. The very root of everything, the very essence of the essence of dharma, is all contained in ngondro, the preliminary practices. I just want to remind everyone: Don't ignore the ngondro. If you ignore the ngondro, you are blocking your staircase into dharma. You are blocking your gateway to dharma. You are blocking everything. That is all I have to say.

[...Actually, it wasn't. To be continued...]