

On Group Practice and the Blessing of Sangha

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When you practice as a group, the practice is particularly strong. There is a special blessing or power in group practice. What is that power? That is the power of sangha. That is the blessing of the precious jewel of the sangha. That is what the high lamas say, it is not something I am making up, okay? If you have faith in the Three Jewels, there is faith in the sangha, and there is that blessing in the practice. If you have wrong views toward the sangha, then forget it—you are finished! Sangha is very heavy—your connection with the sangha can take you up or down, depending on you. If you have faith, then there is a very great blessing. If you have wrong view, then, whoa, that is very heavy negativity. You go to hell and bring down those with a connection to you, too.

In Hinayana, they say sangha is a gathering of fully ordained monks. In another sense, though, the word sangha in Tibetan is “gendunpa,” which means “those intent on virtue.” Actually, anyone who is focused on virtue and sincerely following the Buddha’s teachings is included. In one way, “sangha” means “sincere practitioners.” It doesn’t mean the ordained particularly, although they are a special category, of course, and should be respected—they are wearing the Buddha’s clothes, following the Buddha’s law. Therefore, we respect them. But sangha is not only that. Fully ordained or novice or lay practitioners, sutra or mantra practitioners, ngakpas or monks or laypeople, that doesn’t matter. Anyone sincere and with faith in the Buddha, following his teachings, trying sincerely—that is sangha. Hopefully we are there, too! Hopefully we are sincere and honest, trying to follow the Buddha, not just following our own mouth! Nobody ever said the sangha was someone who followed their own mouth or their own butt. That is not the precious jewel of the sangha.

No matter what kind of robes you wear, if you are arrogant and think that you know everything, or if you complain and focus on others’ faults, then you are not real sangha. If someone else is a monk or nun or not, a ngakpa or not—that is not your business! If you are just focused on others’ faults, then you are not focused on virtue, you are focused on non-virtue! How can you be a “gendunpa,” “one focused on virtue,” then? You are not holding your vows of refuge and bodhicitta, even, so you are not even really a Buddhist—how could you even speak of being a lay practitioner or a novice or fully ordained monk or nun, and forget about being a ngakpa! Close your mouth! Open your eyes! Watch your own vows, your own business!

If you don’t know what sangha is, then you don’t know buddha or dharma, either. These are not simple, shallow, or superficial things. These are the most deep, the most heavy. If you are a Buddhist, that means you take refuge. What are the objects of refuge? Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. How can we call ourselves “Buddhist” if we don’t know what we are taking refuge in? We need to know the Three Jewels—Buddha, Dharma, AND Sangha. If people think the sangha is ONLY the ordained, or ONLY bodhisattvas, or ONLY their “my way” idea, then they don’t really know the dharma. You think sangha means something special, only pretty or handsome

people, only rich ones or scholars? No, no. Sangha is nothing to do with pretty or ugly, rich or poor, high or low. Sangha means whoever is sincere in their heart, following the Buddha. Those who are following the Buddha—that means following him into virtue. Trying to do that. Not following him to some city or building or destination. Your destination is beyond samsara. Actually, where is that? Far away? No. Nothing far away. You don't need to go running in the ten directions. Where you gonna go? Your samsara is here. Your liberation? Here, too. Your five poisons? Here. Your Three Jewels? Here. Everything here. Your rigpa? Here. Everything's nature—where you gonna look for that? Someplace else? Good luck! Where you gonna search?

Whoever wants to make sangha just one piece or put it in the corner, I think first they don't know dharma. Then, second, they don't know sangha, either. They don't know sangha's blessing or power. What is real sangha? Real sangha are those who have faith. They keep harmony. They trust their practice. They have faith in their lineage—the Three Jewels. Sangha aren't just a group of people hanging around, maybe kissing and hugging each other, maybe fucking each other, cheating and lying to each other. That's not sangha. That's the opposite of sangha. Those are samaya breakers, breaking their own commitments, breaking their pledge with each other. Sangha is not embarrassing like that. Sangha is trying, sincerely, not breaking anything. Buddha doesn't need to lie...Dharma doesn't need to lie...so Sangha doesn't need to lie, either! Think about it—Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Three together. Buddha isn't embarrassing. Dharma isn't embarrassing. That means Sangha isn't embarrassing, either.

You think sangha are those with big egos, thoughtless and careless, with giant horns of pride on their heads, lying with their dirty mouths? Eat my shit! Sangha also does not mean those too sensitive and complaining all the time, selfish and without a thought for others. If people are really practicing and really trying sincerely, they won't go in that direction. They'll go in the opposite direction, becoming more and more soft, their minds more and more flexible, happy to sit in any low place or even in a dirty place or even outside the door. When everybody is getting tea, they aren't just wanting the biggest cup, the best cookie, the most delicious everything. Disgusting, if that is our view, that is our motivation. At tsok, thinking, "Where is my food? Where is my wine? I didn't get the one I like!" My goodness, you aren't embarrassed? Coming to practice and not even one second having faith, just looking around to see who is the pretty lady for you to chase, who is the handsome rich guy for you to gobble up—you think that is the way to create merit? You think that way you are the Jewel of the Sangha? You think that way you are benefitting yourself, or benefitting others? Think about it carefully!

Sangha absolutely is not shameless or disgusting like that. Sangha means having faith in the Buddha, not treating him like a businessman, trying to cheat him. Sangha means having compassion for all beings—not wanting to cheat and fuck everybody. Wake up and think about it, okay?

Sangha means getting better, better. More and more dropping your five poisons, dropping your trip, dropping your biggest shit. Try to be that kind of sangha, okay? Not other way sangha. Sangha means ego getting less and less, qualities getting more and more. Try that. That way you really support each other—more than kissing and hugging. Virtue supporting virtue, merit

supporting merit—not ego supporting ego. That way you are real sangha. That way I think blessing, power is there. That way I think practicing together, everybody trying, everybody in harmony, then really that is so wonderful. Really there is a special quality there.

When you come to tsok on Guru Rinpoche day or to Vajrasattva retreat or to any practice anytime, try to really come and focus. That way you benefit yourself, you benefit others, both. It's your opportunity. Don't come and watch all the ladies or all the guys, just for that. Don't come just for a cup of tea or to eat the delicious things in tsok, either. Really that way you are cheating yourself. Real sangha isn't cheating themselves—or anybody else, either. Try to be real sangha, not real disgusting ones. Practice sincerely. Try sincerely. Okay? Everybody try.

Tashi Delek!

-Gyatral

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