

On Teaching and Learning—Part 2

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Can I ask you something? I have a question: How does it work in this country? Do the teachers have to call up the students and say, “I have something to teach you—is it okay if I come and teach?” Do the teachers have to ask the students, “Can I teach you?” It looks like these days it is becoming that way, particularly in Buddhism with our people. It is very strange! I don’t think it is like this in any country in the world, except maybe it is becoming this way here. In any other country, the students request the teachers to please come and teach. The students invite the lama to come, and ask them to teach on a particular subject, and then they prepare the teaching place and everything very nicely, and then the lama comes and the teaching happens. It looks like it is not happening that way here, really. One way I am just joking, but one way it really is strange this way.

It is especially strange because we already have places for teachings—we have all the dharma centers. It is not like before when we always had to struggle to find places to have teachings, and we didn’t have much money to rent nice ones, and so on. Now we have Tashi Choling and O.D.D., Dechen Ling in Ashland, and Dorje Ling in Portland; we have Austin, Montana, and Ensenada, too. Nobody can say they don’t have a place to hold a teaching.

Don’t say that you don’t have teachers, either! At Tashi Choling, O.D.D., and elsewhere, you have lots: Matthew, Bruce, Lama Chonam and Sangye, Shashi and Ila, Lama Drimed, Les, Keith, and others. You have plenty! At O.D.D., Lama Drimed is teaching these days. He is not a dumb guy; he knows things. He had amazing teachers! Right now he’s teaching about generation stage and refuge and everything, piece by piece. That is a very good opportunity for you. Hopefully, people are coming to listen! Les is teaching the bardo, continuously, again and again. Those are amazing bardo teachings—we all need to hear them again and again. Do you hear that? Not just one time, okay?

We have places for teachings and we have teachers—now students need to learn! If you have teachers to teach but you refuse to learn, then they are wasting their time. Actually they are not wasting anything—you are wasting your dharma.

You have teachers, and you have places for them to teach. So then what is it? Do you think you don’t need to learn? That these teachers have nothing to teach you? We are none of us born knowing everything. What we don’t know, we need to learn. Even the great lamas learned and studied—even His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche. Even the

Dalai Lama! All the lamas, no matter how high, had to learn. Your American president had to learn, too, so many years in school.

Education in the United States is number one, it looks like, so why do you need to be stuck, thinking you don't need to learn? You have the tradition of learning. Through your country's kindness, your parents' kindness and grandparents', everything was set up for you to go to school and study from the time you were young. There is no reason anyone in this country would not know how to study.

Likewise with the dharma: If we had no tradition to learn, no teachings and no teachers, then we would really have a problem. But we don't have that problem, either! We have a wonderful, wonderful lineage through the kindness of the lineage gurus, who are our daddies and mommies. Don't make excuses anymore! If you make an excuse, then what do you have? You just have your excuse, you don't have any knowledge. You lost your knowledge, you lost your chance—what a loser! If you want to get smarter, at least start by not being a loser. If you are honest with yourself, then you won't be a loser. Don't ignore yourself and your chance—stand up! The United States is a place to stand up. You can stand up here, you have no excuse. America has room for whatever people want to do; nobody is going to shoot you or put you in jail if you want to learn.

One way, everyone has a job, because without a job they would have no food. So one way everyone is busy, I can agree with that. But sometimes people use their job as an excuse, so they can slip away. We have a strong habit of slipping here and there, sneakily, not being honest with ourselves. That's interesting, making obstacles for ourselves. What is making the obstacle? Our dishonesty with ourselves and our pride.

It is not only teachers who can become prideful, thinking that they know something. Many times students start to learn, and as soon as they learn a little something, then they pop up, thinking that now they know exactly how to do everything and are professional. Actually, if you want to be so smart and professional, you need to do everything according to the dharma. That means how you are learning, too.

If you are sitting and listening to a lama teaching, that's learning. If you are learning how to serve the dharma by being a chopon (ritual assistant), or umzed (chant leader), or even geku (disciplinarian), that's wonderful—that's also learning! But whatever thing you are learning, your way of learning should be in harmony with the dharma—that means quietly, humbly, respectfully. Learning means you have to listen. Every time you want to argue and insist on your own way, first shut your mouth and check: Am I just going MY WAY? Learning means that you recognize that you don't have knowledge or understanding, so you have to ask someone to explain. The whole reason you are learning is that you don't know. You already know your MY WAY; you

are learning so that you can have a different way, the pure lineage way. Therefore, don't forget that!

Don't forget that harmony is the most important thing. When you teach, you need to teach in a way that is harmonious with the students. When you learn, you need to stay in harmony with the teacher and the other students. Without harmony, there is just fighting and negativity, no dharma. That's fine. If you want to make your own obstacle and ruin your own success, go for it. But at least for others who are trying sincerely, don't make obstacles for them. Keep the obstacles to yourself, if you feel you have to make them.

I am not saying never to ask questions. Sometimes people don't ask any questions, because they are scared or shy or I don't know what. If you don't ask questions, how are you going to get an answer? But sometimes people ask questions because they think they are very important people with very important questions. Then that means they are not keeping their learning pure. They are going in the opposite direction of the dharma way, just going their "highway of MY WAY" again.

What does it mean to stay in harmony with the dharma while you are learning? Go back to the ngondro and look! What is there, as the basis of everything? Refuge, having faith, giving up the eight worldly concerns. Bodhicitta, compassion for others—that means giving up your trip. Don't lose your bodhicitta! If your bodhicitta is firm, then your refuge will be firm, stable, vast, and expansive—then you can benefit all sentient beings, not just one or two. Whatever you are learning, you need to benefit the dharma. That will benefit all sentient beings. You don't need to go MY WAY, although we have a long, old tradition of it. I have repeated a million times that everyone needs to keep a watch out for their MY WAY, and in one way people these days are dropping their way a little bit. One way, though, mostly people still don't see their own MY WAY. Please, everybody, just drop that. Give it up.

When you are teaching, don't use the MY WAY to teach. When you are learning, don't put your own idea into what you are learning. Don't try to pull the dharma into your MY WAY. Actually, we think we have a WAY to do things, we think we have some tradition of our own, but actually good luck trying to find it! We don't have a WAY or a tradition or a lineage of our own. We just do this and that like animals or children. If someone asks us what we are doing, what tradition we are following, we say, "My tradition!" Bullshit! You don't have a tradition. You don't know enough to have a tradition, even a wrong one! Your MY WAY doesn't exist! You didn't have a MY WAY when you were born, you only had your mommy's way. Growing up, you had your parents' way and teachers' way. As Buddhists, we have Buddha's way and the way of the Buddha's lineage holders and emanations, the bodhisattvas.

What way is that? It is the way of softly, purely, cleanly bringing benefit to other sentient beings and to the buddhadharma. If we are going that way, then we can really

call ourselves Buddhists, because that is all the buddhas' way, no question. If we are teaching that way, we are really teaching the Buddha's teachings. If we are a group following that, then we are a real sangha, or Buddha's group. If we have a center going that way, it is a real Buddhist center. A geku who follows that way is a real Buddhist geku. The umzed also needs to follow that way, and of course the chopons, too. None of these should be going their own way. Don't be like a funky Indian restaurant, or like cowboys or hippies, just making everything up without thinking. Don't make your brain dirty that way. You were born clean and grew up clean; you need to be clean when you die, too. So don't pollute yourself with some strange style. Whatever job you are trying to do, what you don't know, you need to ask. Others know things—use that knowledge! Don't just do things the way that you like—that is without any lineage. Of course, when you learn, everything is going to seem strange at first. The pure lineage seems strange, the pure teachings seem strange. That is because we were born and grew up just following our own ideas. Just following your own idea is the same as just following your five poisons, because we are all filled with the five poisons. What can we trust not to be based in the poisons? The Buddha's way. That's the strange one. Just following the poisons and all the while calling yourself a Buddhist is embarrassing and harmful, both to yourself and others. Our own style doesn't benefit anybody!

You don't have to take my word for it—look to the lineage masters. What way did they all choose? Penor Rinpoche, Dudjom Rinpoche, Khyentse Rinpoche, none of them had some MY WAY that they followed. Did they say MY WAY? No, never. They always said, "My teacher's way," "My guru's way," "My refuge objects' way—Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha." Because that is the way they followed, they developed their qualities and attained realization. Because of that, they became lineage holders. Because we had pure lineage holders, we could receive empowerments—outer, inner, and secret—purely and cleanly, from the pure source. We need to keep the samaya for our empowerments. Rather than just eating and destroying what we received, like children, we need to hold them as precious. That keeps our samaya. Holding the dharma as precious, then you can drop your MY WAY. It isn't your precious one any longer.

It doesn't matter who you are, whether umze, chopon, geku, or anyone trying to help the dharma: please keep yourself humble and don't fall into MY WAY. Going MY WAY, you never grow up. Following your teacher's way, the lineage way, then stage by stage you can go up and up. Look at the Gelugpas, the real ones—they are so clean! The Kagyudpas, too, I used to know were very clean. The Nyingmapas go Guru Rinpoche's way, clean or not. The Sakyapas go Sakya Pandita's way. Each group, their own lineage is very pure and clean. Then why do we, the followers, have to become dirty with MY WAY? Did the lineage masters not know how to go the dirty way? Were they too stupid, is that why they didn't go that way? No. They knew, of course! They knew those ways and they dropped them. They gave up what is negative—self-centeredness—and

what is positive they got from Guru Rinpoche. They got refuge, bodhicitta, and everything that comes from those—all through the real lineage way. Then they followed that. That is the way of compassion.

We don't need compassion—we have MY WAY, being self-centered! We don't need pure faith—we have pure self-centeredness! If we don't have a pure motivation to benefit sentient beings, how will we be able to benefit the buddhadharma? Buddhadharma is not our idea. Without a pure motivation, we have no reason to go the pure dharma way; we might as well go our own way. But if we sincerely want to benefit beings, then we don't want to go our own way, we just want to follow the dharma. Watch the buddhas and bodhisattvas, particularly Buddha Shakyamuni and Guru Rinpoche. You have their life stories, you can watch them on videos or read them in books. Or learn the life stories of the bodhisattvas such as Shantideva. That way you will see how they trained and what their example is. Those are our examples of real Buddhists. That way we can see how to conduct ourselves, since we are trying to be Buddhists, too.

We need to benefit others. Therefore, teach each other and learn from each other. Don't arrogantly keep what you know to yourself. Don't teach army style, barking out commands. One way, actually, we do need some army style because we are so stubborn. Our stubbornness is our baby horns. We don't have tails, but we do have baby horns of stubbornness, baby fangs of pride, baby claws of arrogance. These are harmful! These things are our real enemies, our five poisons. Therefore, everybody, try. If teachers are a little bit army style, still they need to be not only that way. Teachers need to keep harmony when they teach.

Keeping harmony doesn't mean hugging and kissing. If you just hug and kiss everybody, that's not harmony, and anyway you will get tired of it and then turn nasty—you know that. Keeping harmony means being kind, more and more, slowly, slowly. Look at mommies and daddies: they are never tired of caring for their children. Look at birds and animals, how they take care of their babies day and night. It is the same thing with your dharma friends—you need to take care of them with that sort of kindness, steadily, not going up and down all the time. How can you help them? By sharing what you know, teaching them how to do things according to the lineage. When you can't help them, then let them do what they are doing. Their business is their business. But what we can do to be of benefit, we should do that.

Listen to each other! When someone is teaching you something, you need to listen and follow that. Some people have a tradition of thinking, "He's not my father! She's not my mother! I don't have to listen to them!" If someone is teaching you something that you don't know, if someone is teaching you the tradition according to our lineage, then what is your trip? They are trying to benefit you! They are there for you, explaining to you! You are not giving them some wonderful gift, letting them teach

you! That's a disgusting attitude! Also, if someone is teaching you something, then you need to follow that. Don't just keep holding to your own way of doing something—then there is no point in their teaching.

I don't speak your language or know your traditions, and I am an old, funky, ugly corpse. It's time, soon, for me, and I have no freedom to say good-bye; but I have no choice but to go, either. I am going soon, so please, I am requesting like a beggar, please take care of yourselves, be careful not to make a mess of yourself or make yourself dirty. You all like to keep yourselves so clean and don't like to be dirty. Well, self-centeredness and all those kinds of ego trips are the most dirty, the worst mess. They are not just a mess that you don't like, they actually destroy you. Your five poisons destroy you. Our five poisons or ten poisons or whatever—among them, ignorance is the biggest demon. If you have ignorance, then you have ego. Then you have anger, jealousy, hatred, desire. You are never satisfied. Every kind of suffering comes from that. Try not to go that way so much. To be a Buddhist means to follow the buddhas. Who are those guys? They are bodhisattvas who became enlightened for sentient beings. Not for themselves! You can see how they did this by reading their life stories. Do they have MY WAY, their arrogant way or nasty way? No, no. When we show MY WAY, instantly other people see our claws or fangs or angry wrathful demon face. Demon or demoness, doesn't matter! Ugly is ugly. Poison is poison. If you want to be pretty, you need to slow down and watch your style, clean up your five poisons. If you want to be handsome, same thing. If you want to be smart, same thing. If you want to be truly compassionate, you really have to do that.

Lots of people say, "I am *compassionate*!" Yes, George Bush said that, too. Do you know his style of compassion? He said, "Hahaha, Iraq doesn't listen to us, so compassionately, Colin Powell, I say bomb it!" That is his kind of compassion. But actually lots of people have a similar kind of compassion—business people especially, sometimes. Both men and women. Please examine your own mind to see if this is your kind of compassion.

Everybody try to go the right way, not necessarily a flashy way, but sincerely. I don't know anything, but I saw lots of things, watching everybody all these years. Please, I hope you guys listen to me. That is why I am blah-blah-blah-ing at you, because I hope it will be of benefit. But actually is it my business? No.

One way, I am an old man and I don't know anything. All this is not my business. But through my karma or something—bad karma or good karma, I don't know—I got stuck here with you guys. That is my excuse! Excuse me! Anyway, you guys are always saying you love me. If you really love me, or trust me, or something, then please try to learn. The dharma that you have, it is not something trivial or weak. What we have is that which liberates on sight, on hearing, on touch. It is that kind of powerful. It has that kind of essence. Whether you have the nine yantras, or a thousand

yanas, or just a quarter yana, still you need to learn it. Nobody is born with all wisdom; that is why we need to learn. We are just born, stupidly. At least, I was, and I think that everyone is like me, just dumb-dumb. Our mothers even needed to teach us how to suck her breast so we wouldn't die. That is how dumb we are when we are born; I don't think any of us were great scholars at our birth. I don't think we have that kind of reason to be proud.

Right now you have the freedom to learn, the opportunity to learn, a pure tradition that you can learn, everything. So learn, rather than gossiping, slandering, and chasing each other go-go style, worse than pigs and dogs. Go-go ladies and playboys, your time is finished! Enough's enough! No more going that way, just shut up and put up and try to learn. Try to be useful to yourself. Try not to bring shame on your country or your people any more. You say, "I am American! This is my freedom!" Really? What is your education? "I have a go-go education!" Or, "I have a playboy education!" Really? I didn't know that humans had that kind of education. I thought that was animals' style, not grown up human beings'. I didn't know that education meant learning how to shame yourself. Or worse, being shameless, proud to be a go-go girl! Proud to be a playboy! That's disgusting, did you know that? Please, don't go that way anymore. Your life is something short, and your go-go ways are useless. Learning the dharma, on the other hand, means learning something meaningful, and something that is not only meaningful in this life but that will be the most important thing at the time of your death, and what will really be useful in your future lives. Think about that, before you waste your learning opportunity!

Please remember, the lama doesn't need to request you to come, okay? That's enough of this stupid tradition, I don't know where it came from. You guys need to request the lamas to teach. If you don't know what to request, you have teachers you can ask about what you need, too. Then what they teach, you need to listen to that and then practice it.

Teach and learn—that is my request. Or, if you don't want to follow my request, then that is my order!

Tashi delek!

-Gyatral

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