

Thanksgiving Teaching, Part II

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I am glad that everyone is enjoying their turkey, chowing down. You all think this is your wonderful good fortune: it doesn't get any better than Thanksgiving turkey! Actually your real turkey dinner is your precious human rebirth--really it doesn't get any better than that! The real turkey is your own benefit and others' benefit, and this human rebirth is the best possible circumstance for creating that. You can speak and understand the meaning of others' words, you can learn and apply the teachings on what is virtue and non-virtue. You can learn to control your body, speech, and mind through hearing, contemplating, and meditating on the dharma. Not only do you have a precious human birth, you have the place where you can study and practice. And not only the place: you have the dharma itself, which has been transmitted to you by extraordinary lineage masters who have worked so hard for our sake, including the Dalai Lama, Dudjom Rinpoche, Penor Rinpoche--emanations of Vimalamitra, Vairochana, and others, not just ordinary guys. You have amazing merit from previous lives to have made such connections--recognize your extraordinary good fortune. You won't find anything more precious or priceless in this whole world, even if a god came to give you the most wonderful thing that cost more than anything in the universe, still it wouldn't touch the good fortune of your circumstances. So don't waste them!

How do we waste our precious human birth? By failing to respect each other. We always need to respect one another. First of all, we are sangha. Secondly, we are dharma friends. Thirdly, we are sentient beings, objects of compassion in our ignorance. We need to have patience with all sentient beings, because they are not suffering less than we are--all our brother and sister beings do not know what to do or not do. They are suffering from being blind and deaf to what could bring them benefit. And ourselves? We are not special--we are ignorant beings in samsara, too. What does our ignorance look like? Look at what all the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and all their emanations have all done: working day and night for our sake and the sake of all beings. Look at what we work day and night for: our own gain, a bigger house, more wealth, fame, and beauty. Then if we stumble upon a little merit, we throw out our faith, compassion, and other qualities in order to go running after that bit of worldly success like a doggie. We'll give up all our dharma in favor of our three poisons, and obey them eagerly with body, speech, and mind. Of course it all boils down to the mind--virtue or non-virtue, being a decent or a bad person--the body and speech are just followers. So watch out for the mind! That is what you need to control. If you control the mind, then the body and speech as its servants will also be controlled.

Everything depends on the mind. It is the mind that is the object to be eliminated: the mind of the five poisons. Likewise, it is the mind that is the object to be accomplished: the mind of virtue, the mind of the blossoming of all wisdom qualities. If you recognize this, you will have faith in the Three Jewels and follow them. If not, you will accumulate great negativity again and again, as you have up until now. More than your turkey dinner, the buddhadharma needs to be gobbled up. That is what you should use, the medicine you should take. Until now you have just dipped a toe in the pond of dharma. It is time to go for the whole thing, with all your heart.

Look at the examples of the great teachers and emulate them. You don't have to bow and scrape to show your faith and respect. Just calm down, becoming more and more peaceful. Wherever you are, wherever you go, be peaceful. Have everything be okay, nothing a big surprise or a big exciting deal. Check carefully and watch carefully what to do and what to avoid. The essence of milk is butter. The essence of this human life, what makes it meaningful, is creating virtue and eliminating negativity. Always please remember the real turkey--your virtue--and enjoy the turkey dinner of making great waves of merit for yourself and others.

And by the way, the last thing: I'm not saying don't eat meat. I am saying, whether you are eating meat or anything else you are connecting to the negativity created in the production of that food; therefore, whatever you eat, recite the MANI mantra, pray to Chenrezig, and dedicate the merit to all sentient beings.

Thank you, and Happy Chicken Turkey Naughty Day!

Tashi delek!

-Gyatral