

On the Concluding Vajrasattva Practice for Emma Belle (Part 1)

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In a few days, we will do the concluding Vajrasattva practice for Emma. There are several things I have been wanting to tell everybody, and I don't know if I will come to the practice, so here they are. First, thank you, everyone, for coming and doing these practices. I say thank you but actually you can thank yourself--it is the greatest kindness you could show yourself, to practice sincerely. The practices now and in the future, anytime, are not just for Emma or just for one person, and in the same way, not only one person gets the benefit. These practices benefit everybody, and the dharma center, too. I don't think Emma needs our practice, but we do!

The center is really getting better, too. That is another reason I say "Thank you." These days Tashi Choling is much better than it used to be--there is no more gossip and slander. Very good, thank you! That is how to continue in the future, rather than going down again. Also these days everyone is coming together under the guidance of our geku (disciplinarian) and other leaders, and everyone is working together. That's the way, okay? That's how we can accumulate merit and purify negativity.

We don't need any more gossip or slander. We don't need to be harboring and cultivating pride and ego in our mindstreams. We don't need to be growing the three poisons like a crop. We don't need to be encouraging our habits of attachment to ourselves and what is ours and aversion to others. Whatever study, contemplation, or meditation we do, our gossip, slander, and poisons make it a waste.

Of course, often people don't take the time to really learn and contemplate the dharma, so they don't have any virtue to ruin, particularly. They just are under the thumb of their poisons, so busy. They think studying the dharma is some big deal. People think, "The dharma is so complicated--I don't understand!" That's true. Of course you won't understand...unless you study a little bit. I have been wanting to tell everybody, you need to learn a little bit! I am not saying you need to study giant books and extensive commentaries, just look in the ngondro. There are plenty of teachings there that are simple, short, and not complicated. But don't think that this means they are trifling or nonessential. They are the key to all understanding and practice of dharma.

For example, what happens first in the ngondro? You contemplate and practice on the four thoughts that turn the mind. You can say that these are easy to understand. That's true. You have probably heard many teachings on the four thoughts and could talk about them extensively yourself. But they are not so easy to internalize. They bring about a big result: when you internalize them through long contemplation and clear understanding, they will turn your mind away from samsara, and rather than chasing samsara you will start to chase the dharma

instead. What else is going to make that change in your mindstream? Until now, we have never found a way to turn away from samsara ourselves. We have just followed the "I" demon.

Then consider the qualities of the objects of refuge. Consider the benefits of taking refuge and of cultivating bodhicitta. If there will be no benefit, then why do it? Nobody is forcing you. So think carefully and examine for yourselves. Actually, the benefits and qualities of refuge and bodhicitta are boundless. If we try to encompass them with our ordinary minds, we can't. They are inconceivable.

Do you know the meaning of refuge? That means knowing the qualities of enlightened body, speech, and mind. If you do know them, you will have faith. That is how you can check yourself.

Do you know what bodhicitta is? Do you know it according to outer, inner, and secret explanations? Check your own understanding. Do you have trust in bodhicitta and keep it close in your mind and heart? That is how you can check how deeply you understand it.

If you have no refuge, you are not a Buddhist. If you have no compassion, you are likewise not a Buddhist. If you think you can have bodhicitta or even just compassion while still focusing exclusively on yourself, that is not possible. There is no bodhicitta without extending your thoughts and care to others.

"Yes, I like him--he's American." Or, "Yes, he's Chinese." Or, "Yes, he's Indian." "No, not that guy--he's not one of us." "He's not one of MY people." Such racism and favoritism are the opposite of the dharma. That's not being a Buddhist. That's not the style of a real Buddhist. That's not the way someone who has the refuge vows or is engaged in the bodhisattva trainings will act. Of course, that means a person holding the subsequent trainings in generation or completion stages would not act that way, either. We all need to be careful of this.

We need to look at our own faces and see our own faults. Our faults are what we should be eliminating. We don't need to play with them any more. Qualities are what we should be cultivating. We don't need to hide from them anymore, either, trying to escape. Failing to eliminate faults and cultivate qualities, you will end up like me. Who is really the stupid one? Worse than the one who doesn't know the difference between faults and qualities is the one who knows but doesn't lift a finger to improve themselves. One like myself! Don't follow my example.

One way, regarding a teacher with no qualities, such as myself, if their students have difficulty cultivating qualities, it is the teacher's fault. It is no wonder the students have trouble! However, that is not entirely the case here. Despite my failings, I have had the good fortune to be able to bring many great high lamas here to teach you all and give you precious transmissions. Such lamas are not like myself. You can see the difference between them and me. They have inconceivable qualities. They are realized masters like the great mahasiddhas of the past.

Therefore all the conditions for authentic dharma practice are complete, because you have all the blessings and commitments from this pure source.

We can't say that we don't know what our commitments--our samaya and vows--are. The lamas have explained what the samaya are in connection with each empowerment that you have received. We can't say, "The lama didn't say anything, just grabbed the bumpa and that's it!" We can't say that the lama didn't explain the vows or the meaning of the ritual, even down to the tormas and other objects that were used. Yangthang Rinpoche always explains when he gives transmissions. Penor Rinpoche likewise would always give commentary, and many other lamas have given those teachings again and again. Look at Khenpo Jigphun, how he described everything, stage by stage.

We should not ignore such wonderful teachings from such inconceivable lamas. If we ignore them, we are ignoring Buddha Shakyamuni himself. We are ignoring Guru Rinpoche. We are ignoring the enlightened body, speech, mind, quality, and activity blessings of all buddhas of the ten directions. We are not demons! We are not ruras! Yet if we ignore all the buddhas, we are little better than demons. What makes us do it? What is the fiendish power within us that would make us ignore all the enlightened ones? It is our belief in the "I." Until now, we have been so convinced of its truth that we have not been able to change that belief. It is still with us, and still very powerful. Please think about that, examine for yourself if it's true, and wake up. "Wake up" means to pay attention to those teachings on samaya.

If we break our commitments to the lineage masters, of course we will not be able to create great virtue. We will be samaya-breakers: how could we ever attain liberation? It is worth examining your own mindstream a little to avoid this. Check your refuge and your bodhicitta. If you want to know how to keep your samaya with these great masters, you need that foundation, purely and sincerely. First you need to make sure you are a Buddhist, before you can even begin to wonder if you are keeping your samaya. That means to check your refuge--are you keeping your refuge vows?

When we take refuge, it is in the buddha, dharma, and sangha. When we take refuge in the buddha, we are not taking refuge in our own faces, nor in some go-go lady or playboy, because these have not attained liberation from samsara. We are taking refuge in what is beyond samsara, which is enlightened body, speech, and mind. When we understand that these are beyond all things in the world, then we can take refuge in them. Then we don't need refuge in the go-gos.

When we take refuge in the dharma, we are taking refuge in sutra and tantra, in mahayana and dzogchen, including all the high-sounding teachings that everyone gets so excited about, blah, blah, blah. Anyway, we are taking refuge in ALL the buddha's teachings, because they are all methods by which beings can achieve liberation and the ultimate state of omniscience. They are the methods we use to accumulate merit and purify negativity. Without that, we have nothing.

With that, we can have all the qualities developed on the stages and the paths, including the qualities of buddhahood itself.

When we take refuge in the sangha, we are taking refuge in those who are purely practicing the buddha's teachings. Those are the ones whose example we should follow. Many people say, "I'll take refuge in the buddha, okay--especially a handsome one--and the dharma maybe, but the sangha? Forget it?" That shows you don't understand the ngondro--go back and read the books, think about the practices! The sangha help us on the path, they give us an example to follow--they are following the buddha, which we are trying to do, too, and they are embodying the dharma, which we are trying to learn. Don't be stupid and arrogant, thinking that you are better than that!

Think about what you know of the Three Jewels, and check your own mind to see if you have faith in them based on that. Buddha, dharma, and sangha are easy to understand superficially, but they are very profound. You could think about them for your whole life and still not fathom all their qualities. Thinking of them with faith, and increasing your faith in them by increasing your understanding of them, that is how you keep your refuge vows and samaya.

[to be continued...]

Tashi delek!

-Gyatrul