

~From the Archives of Teachings by Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche~

HEART ADVICE ON TSOG, AND OTHER MATTERS

*A teaching read to those gathered at Orgyen Dorje Den on January 14, 2012,
to practice Vajrasattva in connection with Dungse Thinley Norbu Rinpoche's Parinirvana.*

Part 5

The Power of Tsog

How do we purify our negativity? Well, we need some methods. Fortunately for us, we have been given a whole wealth of methods. We have been given, for example, confession, and fulfillment, and tsog offering. Actually, these are the most powerful methods, they are the best way to accumulate merit and purify obscurations. That is why they were revealed. That is why the treasure revealers went to such great lengths to make them available. That is why Guru Rinpoche went to all the trouble of concealing them and preparing them for us. Of course, his activity is completely effortless, so you might say that he didn't really go to any trouble at all, but that is you just wanting to be lazy. Guru Rinpoche is not lazy like you, don't make that mistake.

So we have a method, this method of offering tsog, which is why we have gathered here today. We say that we "offer" tsog, and yet the word tsog itself already means a gathering. When you gather or collect or bring things together, that is tsog. And, in fact, the words "accumulate merit" are actually "to gather the accumulations" – to gather the accumulations of merit, or to accumulate the gatherings of merit, however you want to say it. It is a bringing together. You bring things together and then, in this case, you offer them.

But even as we are engaged in this wonderful practice, this wonderful method for purifying negativity and accumulating merit, we have to remember that no matter how beautiful or elaborate the ritual might be, the purpose is really to benefit beings – to benefit *all* beings. And that includes yourself! So don't be stingy; don't say, "Just me." But don't be

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stingy and say, “Just everybody else,” either. Accumulating merit for all beings means for yourself *and* for others.

We have this idea of tsog, offering tsog, the ganachakra feast. Now, for a lot of Americans, tsog means that you put some cookies on a plate. But actually, the word tsog has a lot of meanings beyond that. Don't leave out the cookies—it is o.k., you can have the cookies. Nobody is going to take them away from you; don't freak out, you can still offer cookies at tsog, and you can still eat as many of them as you want. I'm not going to stop you. But you should know while you are eating them, when you look around the room, *that* is also tsog. The room is filled with tsog: It is filled with a gathering of practitioners, the gathering of the sangha. The substances that are gathered, they are also a tsog, they are also an accumulation. The merit that is produced by that gathering and offering, that is also a tsog, that is also an offering and an accumulation. The results of that will also be a tsog. The positive results of that will also be a great accumulation of merit, a great expression of merit.

When it comes to the tsog substances themselves, of course, you have received many teachings from lamas much higher than myself. So I don't think that I can really tell you anything new, but just to remind you: The physical substances are important. When we gather the actual tsog substances, keep in mind that we are very attached to the material world, and so for us using material substances is significant. Therefore, it is an important support and connection for our practice. We gather these substances that we are attached to and then we offer them. We offer them with great humility to the Three Jewels, to the objects of refuge, to the lama, the gathered sangha and so forth, and we also offer them as kindly generosity to all sentient beings, who have nothing. Either way, you want to make that offering beautiful and wonderful.

It should be as excellent as you have the means to make it. It should be pleasing to all five senses. As much as you can, bring the delights of all the senses together. So the tsog substances should be beautiful to look at. Their form should be beautiful. The sounds should

be beautiful. This means the chanting and the music of the practice itself, those should be beautiful. They are part of the offering, they are part of the tsog. The taste—of course taste is very important, everyone is always worried about how the tsog is going to taste. But before you get all worked up about how it is going to taste to you, you are actually going to offer it to others first. So you might want to think a little bit about what it is going to taste like for them because it is not just for you, it is also for them. So the taste should be wonderful and myriad, a great variety. The smell should also be beautiful—whatever incense is offered, and the fragrance of the foods themselves. Whatever flowers you include, if they have a scent, it should be a sweet scent. It shouldn't be stinky.

Of course, you Americans take a bath every five minutes, so you yourselves are probably not too smelly. But if you really want to be clean, you should stop worrying about the shower and start worrying about Vajrasattva, and then you will begin to smell really sweet no matter what your clothes might have on them. And as far as touch, anything that you offer should be smooth or pleasing to the touch. So, the five senses should be delighted by the gathered tsog substances.

By making the substances fully endowed with all desirable qualities in this way, then it is a most excellent offering. That is an offering worthy of being presented to the buddhas, the lamas, yidams, dakinis, and dharma protectors. That is a generous gift worthy of being given with great kindness to those who have nothing, hoping that it will completely satisfy all of their wants and needs and that it will fulfill all of their wishes. So everything should be clean and pure.

While we are on the subject of tsog substances, there is an interesting conflict where some people think if there is no meat and alcohol, then it is not tsog; and some people think if there *is* meat and alcohol, then it is not tsog. So it seems like either way, you are going to have people who think there is not tsog happening. Actually, the lamas have said that meat and alcohol are tsog substances, but they have also explained their symbolic meaning and

their ritual import within the practice. Based on that, if you have meat and alcohol, then yes, it is appropriate and suitable to include a small amount of meat and a small amount of alcohol in your ritual, knowing that this is according to the lama's instructions. Yet, we do not need to include a lot of either meat or alcohol because we are making an offering, not just drinking and chowing down based on our own desire; and it is true that we don't have the view to know that those substances are like all other substances, even ones we don't like. So therefore, yes, if you have them it is good to include them, but it is not necessary. It is still tsog if there is no meat and alcohol. It is still tsog if there are no cookies, either. You can use other things. But if you do have them you *can* use them. You can say you *should* use them but definitely with the understanding of the reason why. So that should be actually simple and now nobody has to worry about it whether they are there or not. But everyone can understand how to relate to them and why, and then we can all think about the practice again.

~ teaching continues in Part 6...