

~From the Archives of Teachings by Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche~

Advice on Bringing the Dharma into Your Life (Even if You Aren't Buddhist)

*Words offered from a self-proclaimed "funky old man" to the massage therapists at the
Lavendar Hill Spa in Calistoga, April 2012.*

Part 2

You Don't Have to Become a Buddhist to Benefit from the Buddha's Teachings

John Cashman, your employer, is a Buddhist, which means his intention is to bring benefit to all. You are in the position to align your intentions to his by learning about that perspective—Buddhism, or *the dharma* as the Buddha's teachings are called within the tradition. Doing this will bring greater success and benefit in your work because you will understand the intention of the place and the founder, and you can bring your own mindset into harmony with it. With a little understanding of the dharma, you can see in the case of your employer, his generosity and kindness are not just someone being casually nice but rather are part of his conscious intention to do good for all.

Do you have to become Buddhist? No, of course not. However, you can use the ideas of universal compassion and loving kindness that are found in the Buddha's teachings to enhance your own work. This will make the benefit that you bring even more profound, so that when you are working you are not only working physically but also training your mind in pure altruism. Trying to consciously make your intention altruistic and sustain that compassionate awareness as you work will benefit both yourself and those you work on, more and more deeply.

Of course there is a business transaction, but your intention can be primarily altruistic rather than focusing on the "I'll work hard on this person and they'll give me something" aspect. You have the opportunity to do your work each day quite purely.

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~Translated and edited by Shashi Reitz~*

If you find the ideas of altruism and compassion in Buddhism useful, you might want to learn more about the teachings that they came from. You also might be interested in the law of karma, which explains why we must try to be compassionate and pure in our conduct. It explains that the reasons that we have difficulties and that the people you see have difficulties—mental, emotional, and physical—are because we made mistakes. We didn't know the proper way to act or how to conduct ourselves physically, verbally, and mentally—especially mentally. Our principal mental mistake is selfishness, the opposite of which is compassion.

The law of karma explains that we made such mistakes. We made so many mistakes, in fact, that we tied ourselves up in knots, we created problems which now we experience in our bodies and minds. Small problems and big problems both—problems such as short life, sicknesses of all kinds, poverty, and hardship. Understanding where our problems and sufferings come from, you can also see the remedies—qualities such as kindness and insight.

You can also learn the dharma teachings on the truth of the impermanence of all things. You can see these for yourself! However long you have been working here, you can see the changes people have undergone. Some were young and healthy when you met them, now they are sick. If you have been here a long time, the young ones are now getting old. That means you are, too, ha ha! Nobody wants to know that, of course. Some of the ones you met are now gone, or almost gone—funky old men like me, almost gone, time to die!

For me, trying to do any kind of real spiritual practice with a focused mind doesn't work anymore. My brain doesn't function well these days, so the days for training my mind in any real practice are over.

Consider your own situation and what you observe around you and decide for yourself if there is truth in the idea of the impermanence of all things.

Our life is finite, so try to use it in a meaningful way, in a compassionate way, rather than just focusing on yourself or just spacing out.

You can learn about the fundamentals of Buddhism. You can learn about the qualities that a Buddhist practitioner is trying to cultivate in their own mind, the qualities that Buddha Shakyamuni himself cultivated to their ultimate point and taught others how to do so themselves—wisdom, compassion, loving kindness, altruism. As Buddhists, we take refuge in the Buddha and we follow his teachings—there are sets of his teachings called the Foundational Vehicle, the Great Vehicle, and the Vajra Vehicle. If you aren't a Buddhist, then you probably aren't following any of those teachings, but you can still learn about them and see if they are useful to you. You don't need to become Buddhists, but if you find his teachings useful and try to apply them, then you can make your mind more and more pure in the sense of being full of patience and goodness, your motivation more and more compassionate.

This will benefit you by helping to bring you long life, health, freedom from illness and distress, and success in both ordinary and spiritual ways. And finally, at the time of your death, such training in compassion and understanding can bring liberation or positive future life, fortunate future experience. The Buddha himself said so.

I am not trying to sell you anything, but I thought that since your work is already in service of others, you could use that as a basis of making your mind more altruistic as well. This will be of tremendous benefit to both yourself and your clients. That, in fact, is something that anyone can see, not just Buddhists. Not only Buddhists are drawn to people who are compassionate and have a liking for those who are kind. Anyone can see that such people are more at peace, harmonious with both themselves and others.

~ teaching concludes in Part 3...