

~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
Lavender Hill Spa in Calistoga, April 2012.*

Part I

A Motivation of Universal Compassion

The work that you are doing, giving massage, is very beneficial to people. Of course you know this, and of course you do it primarily in order to bring that benefit. It seems that everyone has a very good motivation. But your motivation is something that you should check, because if you make your motivation even better, if it is purely altruistic, then the benefit you bring will be even greater—for the clients you work on and for yourself, too.

In Buddhism, the mind is what must be worked with. The mind is more important than either the body or speech. Of course, the work that you are doing is physical, helping the physical body, but when that suffering is eased, then mental suffering is eased, too. When the body relaxes, the mind can relax. In the same way, you bring not only your skill and physical strength when you work on someone, you also bring your mind, your motivation.

The work that you are doing, helping to bring ease and relieve others' sufferings, is naturally compassionate. The altruistic basis of that work is strong and continuous whether or not you are aware of it. However, if you recognize it, it is an opportunity to consciously make your motivation altruistic and compassionate, too. The nature of your work supports and expresses the generation of compassion in your mind. Therefore, you are in a situation which makes it relatively easy to have and maintain a pure motivation.

You can check your own mind, your own motivation—in fact, who else could check it for you? Ask yourself, is your main purpose to do your work for money, thinking constantly

and only of how much you'll be paid? Of course, the money is part of why you do your work, yes. However, if your mind is compassionate, then that need only be a small part of your motivation, and the greater part of your focus can be altruistic. Whether a client is old or young, male or female, rich or poor doesn't matter—just try to benefit them, whoever they are, however much you can. Don't think about how much they can pay you, but of how much you can help ease, support, and bring delight and comfort to their body for their benefit.

~ teaching continues in Part 2...

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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...

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Part 3

Focusing on the Benefit of Others as You Work

Where I grew up, there were a lot of herders—sheep herders, yak herders, goat herders. For the herders, the most important thing was their animals, and they always were thinking of them, their needs, and their comfort—where can they find clean water and good grass, what are the best paths to use, where will they be safe, and so forth. They didn't spend too much time thinking about themselves, mostly just their animals.

I don't know about carpenters in this country, but when I have seen builders in other countries, mostly it is the same thing. Honest workers care about doing a job nicely—using the best materials they can get and making the building as strong and solid as they can for their employers. They think about that rather than about themselves. Of course, everybody cares about the money a little bit, but honest carpenters try to do their best job to be of benefit to the ones who own the building or who will use the building, not thinking about themselves too much.

Same with cooks, who try to prepare everything nicely for the pleasure and health of the ones who will be eating it. Farmers, too, try to grow their crops well to benefit those who will eat or use them. Even gardeners and landscapers check everything carefully, always trying to make everything pleasing and lovely and caring tenderly for their plants.

These examples are not so profound, but just everyday instances of people whose focus is on caring for something else without so much obsession with themselves. You should

try to do this same thing when you are working, too—consciously set your intention to benefit others as much as you can, and then carry out that intention by caring for them to the very best of your ability. Focus just on helping them.

~ teaching concludes in Part 4...

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Part 4

The Chance to Give Up Self-Centeredness

The motivation to be of benefit to others is like the pure compassion that is the main teaching of the Great Vehicle. Great practitioners in past times and even these days have trained and are still training in just this way.

The ultimate result of such mental training is said to be freedom from suffering.

Actually, karmically the result of actions based on a compassionate motivation will be that you will not have illness or other sufferings in the future. Even in the short term, the mere fact of briefly loosening the bonds of your self-centeredness by cultivating such altruism is already a relief and delight.

In this way, the clients who come to you are giving you the opportunity to release your self-centeredness and self-grasping, and to cultivate compassion and loving-kindness. They are also giving you the chance to practice patience through the effort and hardship of your work and to be generous with your skill and energy. In this way, you can see all your clients as friends helping you to develop compassion, patience, and generosity—and these are said to be greater than any diamonds or gold.

Compassion is the heart of the Great Vehicle practice. Its practitioners train in generosity to others, enriching themselves with that precious quality instead of material wealth. They take care of others as the highest method of protecting themselves—giving up self-concern and protecting others as even more precious than themselves, which in fact is the greatest protection. In such ways, the Great Vehicle practitioners train in profound kindness.

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In Vajrayana, or the Vajra Vehicle, practitioners likewise practice compassion. They have reverence for the deities of their practices, understanding what they symbolize, and make offerings with the compassionate wish that those offerings might benefit others, not thinking, “may this offering benefit ME.”

All schools of Buddhism are based on the idea of letting go of self-grasping and bringing benefit to all sentient beings. You can read books—there are so many available now in English—on the fundamentals of Buddhism and on how to cultivate compassion particularly, if you think these might be of benefit to you. You can try to be ever more pure—meaning purely altruistic—in your intention and actions. Of course, you are generally working in a positive way, but you can consciously recognize that compassionate motivation and enhance and sustain that, so your mind is more open.

Your sponsor, John, is working for others. You are surrounded by all these statues and images of Buddhas. Therefore, you might want to learn a little about Buddhism, and have your intention in harmony with the intention of the sponsor, that same altruism.

The statues here are all buddhas and bodhisattvas—masters who have developed perfect, unwavering compassion. Actually, the buddhas and bodhisattvas are not different from you, because it looks like your mind is compassionate, just as theirs are.

It’s not their bodies that make the buddhas and bodhisattvas worthy of respect. What makes them enlightened is not if they are handsome, pretty, or powerful. It is their mind that is enlightened, which is perfectly peaceful, perfectly compassionate. Liberation from self-centeredness is the real liberation. If we can free ourselves from mental negativity, that is real freedom.

It looks like you guys are already working in that way. That is amazing, beautiful. Thank you.

I have been to Hong Kong, Taiwan, China, India, Nepal—they do have massage in all those places, but not like what you are doing here, with real caring and compassion.

Therefore, I thought that since you are naturally going in the direction of altruism, you might want to take this opportunity to learn about this amazing tradition that the Buddha Shakyamuni taught about how to cultivate compassion and wisdom.

You don't need to be arrogant or uptight or proud. Just try, humbly. If you connect to any of the Buddha's teachings and find them useful, that will benefit you.

In one way, of course, this is none of my business, but one way every time I come to the spa you are so kind to me—you have kind words, and your work on my body is so kind.

You are all very gentle with your work and your speech, it is like being in a flower garden with you all—but you are not uptight, so we can all enjoy and laugh together.

Thank you for having that quality, and I hope that you keep that quality and slowly deepen and strengthen its compassionate basis.

These are just the suggestions of a funky old man.

Thank you again for your kindness.

Good Luck!

Tashi Delek!

