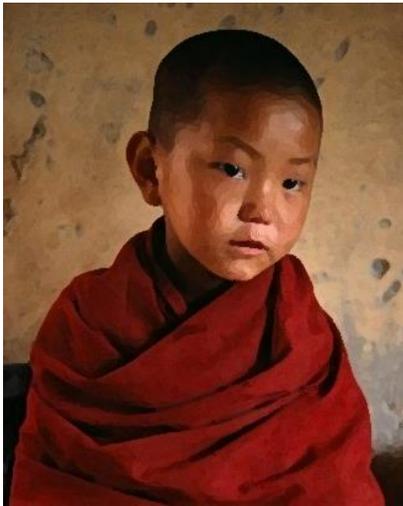


# THE LIFE OF PHAGMODRUPA – Selflessness and Humility

Usually, it is considered fortunate to be born into a wealthy, respected family. But according to the Buddha's teaching, wealth and social status of the family are not important for a great spiritual being. For this reason, Phagmodrupa was born to a poor family in Tibet, in the year 1110, about a thousand years ago. His father was a cruel man who often misbehaved, and who wasn't interested in developing a good character. The family supported themselves by a dishonest business. But the little Phagmodrupa was not affected by his family's misbehavior and dishonesty.



When he was just a little boy of four years old, he was taken to live in a monastery with his uncle who was a monk, and was ordained there as a little beginner Buddhist monk. He wore little red robes just like the older monks.

He learned to read and write easily by his own effort, with only basic instruction from his teachers. He was eager to learn.

As he grew a bit older, he learned the Dharma, reading and studying it all the time.

Although he had good monks to teach him, when he was 18 years old, he realized he should be trained in the precious knowledge and wisdom by the great Buddhist masters while he was still young, in order to have the best opportunity to practice meditation and Dharma during his life. So, he went on a very long journey in search of the well-known masters living in central Tibet.

He studied Vajrayana Buddhism with several great spiritual masters, yogis and scholars in central Tibet, and received the final ordination as a Buddhist monk at age 25, so he was then qualified to teach others. He had excellent self-discipline, and was very careful to follow all the monks' rules. He worked hard to develop virtues and avoid any negative qualities. If he made even a little mistake, he would admit it in front of all the monks. When he was given offerings that he could keep for himself, even a special offering of a horse that he could ride, or other wonderful things, he didn't keep them, but shared them with the other monks.

He refused to drink any alcohol even when it was offered to everyone at spiritual gatherings of monks and yogis, called Ganachakra feasts. Also, he was a vegetarian, refusing to eat even the tiniest piece of meat, even though it was difficult, because there were not many different kinds of foods available in central Tibet – other than meat, there was only milk, cheese and butter and only a few types of grains and vegetables. So, he ate only those things. He always blessed the food and drink before he ate.



He felt grateful to be a servant of everyone, because he liked the opportunity to help everyone he could help, taking their difficulties away. He took care of all the other monks, not thinking about what he wanted, but only what they needed. He ate the food left in their bowls rather than serve himself fresh food.

Although he was such a well-educated scholar, having learned from many great masters, and was greatly admired, he didn't have any pride or even the slightest arrogance or jealousy. He treated everyone equally – poor or uneducated people the same as wealthy educated people.

For more than 15 years, he learned Dharma from several great masters. By that time, he had the best virtuous qualities and was very wise compared to the monks he was staying with. But still, he didn't think that he had learned enough. He felt that he needed to find a highly qualified Lama who could really lead him to enlightenment. He heard about Gampopa, the powerful yogi monk who was a student of the famous Milarepa. So, along with another monk, he went to the Gampo monastery to see the great master.



As soon as he saw Gampopa, they had a discussion, and from that discussion, right then, the inner meaning of the Dharma teachings became clear to Phagmodrupa. All impurities, hopes and fears in his mind disappeared. He saw Gampopa directly as a buddha.

Phagmodrupa stayed with Gampopa for two years at the Gampo monastery. He showed the highest respect and devotion toward Gampopa, and even treated his attendants and senior

monks as if they also were the Lama Gampopa. He bowed toward all the monks, even those who were younger than he was, which is not what monks usually do.

People started noticing the great qualities and wisdom of Phagmodrupa, and they wanted to learn from him, so they became his students. Many people from faraway places heard that when any person meditates near Phagmodrupa, they have powerful meditation experiences, even if they were not good at meditation. So they took long journeys to learn from him, and soon he had many thousands of students. A man offered his meditation hut in a place called Phakmodru, for Phagmodrupa to live in – and that is how Phagmodrupa got his name. Soon, his students built meditation huts near his, and then a monastery, called Densa Thil, which later became very famous, was built for him and his students.

Everyone admired his great humility. He would do chores that others didn't like to do, such as carrying heavy containers of water. He went with groups of monks on long walks to beg for food from the local people, according to the tradition of Buddhist monks in India and some other countries, and as Shakyamuni Buddha had done, even though it was unusual to do this in Tibet, where the weather was so cold and snowy. He didn't think of himself as any more special than any other monk, and didn't care about getting offerings of special foods and clothing. What was offered to him, he gave away to poor people or to the other monks, never wasting any offerings, and he always dedicated the merit for others. He wasn't interested in his own enjoyment.

One day, he was wearing a shirt that was very faded and looked old, like a beggar's shirt. One of his students requested that he wear a new shirt, since the monastery had enough material to make him a shirt. But Phagmodrupa didn't care about nice clothes, and he said,

“Whatever cloth you have, use it for the other monks.”

Phagmodrupa was so advanced in meditation that he didn't really need to practice so much, but he did anyway, so he would be a good example to others, and then they would meditate and be peaceful, full of virtue and wisdom. Even when he travelled a long distance, the others who traveled with him would sleep, but Phagmodrupa sat up straight and meditated.

Every month, there were two weeks for teaching, during which he and the students meditated only in the morning, and then two weeks when he and his students were in meditation retreat, meditating all day every day. He emphasized that early morning is the best time to meditate. One day, a spiritual master asked him to tell his life story. Phagmodrupa humbly replied,

“I don't have any special qualities to speak of, and I have never thought about this life. I just always did my four sessions of meditation every day, even when I was studying.”

When another master said to Phagmodrupa, “You have the qualities of a Buddha,” Phagmodrupa humbly replied, “Even ordinary beings with this kind of effort and perseverance will definitely achieve these qualities.”

He said, “I fully concentrate on the essence of the meditation practice for the benefit of all sentient beings, and as my practice progresses, my five afflictive emotions – attachment, aversion, ignorance, jealousy and pride - become purified. I have achieved confidence in the practice of loving-kindness, compassion and Bodhicitta without attachment to myself – with selflessness – so I can help all sentient beings become enlightened, using many different methods. I am free from clinging and being concerned about myself and everything related to me.” He didn’t think about “me” and what is “mine.”

When he was 61 years old, one day an evil-minded person put poison in Phagmodrupa’s food. After he ate it, he felt terrible pain throughout his whole body. One of his students, with great devotion and love for Phagmodrupa, found out what happened and asked him,

“Because of this negative action, will your enemy go to a hell-world?”

Phagmodrupa wasn’t at all upset with the man who poisoned his food. He didn’t think “That man harmed me, he put poison in *my* food, now I may die.” Instead of thinking about himself, he felt great compassion for the man who did such an evil deed due to his ignorance. The man hadn’t learned how important it is to have lovingkindness and to live according to Dharma. Phagmodrupa wanted to forgive the man, and didn’t want him to suffer the terrible results of his bad karmas. He replied,

“I have accepted responsibility for this person so that he will not go to a hell-world, and he will not even go to one of the lower worlds - the realms of the hungry ghosts or animals.”



He requested that four of his senior monks do a very special chanting and purification practice to undo the bad karma of those having evil thoughts, especially for the person who poisoned his food. After they did so, Phagmodrupa began to feel well, happy and peaceful again.

Several of his students suggested that they do powerful healing mantras for him. Along with those mantras, according to the rules, one is supposed to drink some alcohol. But Phagmodrupa said,

“Although my life is at risk, I will not permit anyone to drink alcohol, because it will cause a lot of negative karma.” He explained the benefits of never drinking alcohol, and warned his students, who he cared about more than himself, never to drink it. Soon after that, he passed away.

## QUESTIONS:

1. How old was Phagmodrupa when he first became a monk? (four years old)
2. What food did he never eat? (meat)
3. What did he do with offerings that were given to him? (shared with poor people or other monks)
4. People from far away heard that what would happen if they meditated near him? (they would have powerful meditation experiences)
5. What did he feel toward the man who put poison in his food? (compassion, forgiveness)
6. What are some good qualities Phagmodrupa had? (humility, selflessness, compassion, self-discipline, wisdom)

## DHARMA DISCUSSION – Selflessness and Humility

*“I have achieved confidence in the practice of loving-kindness, compassion and Bodhicitta without attachment to myself – with selflessness . . . I am free from clinging and being concerned about myself and everything related to me.”* (Phagmodrupa, The Great Kagyu Masters, p. 211)

*“Give your pride and self-importance to the wind. Remain in the state that is free of pride.”* (Milarepa, 100,000 Songs of Milarepa, transl. by Christopher Stagg, p. 586)

*“By regarding yourself humbly, you perform self-benefit. . . . If you maintain humility, you will gain renown.”* (Milarepa, 100,000 Songs, p. 451).

*Selfishness, hypocrisy and deception, these three are the cause of falling into the three lower realms.”* (Milarepa, 100,000 Songs, p. 553)

*Conduct that’s harmonious with other people makes you attractive. By pleasing your Dharma friends, your wishes are fulfilled. By pleasing your guru, blessings will come.”* (Milarepa, 100,000 Songs, p. 451)

*“Hypocritical ones who have not given rise to bodhicitta and compassion have much purifying to do.”* (Milarepa, 100,000 Songs, p. 643)

*“Toward all sentient beings without realization, continuous compassion and love are important.”* (Milarepa, 100,000 Songs, p. 555)

We are always thinking about ourselves - "I" and "me" and "mine" – because we are worried about what could happen to *me*, what might happen to *my* things, what might happen that *I* don't like, what if *I* don't get what I need. We have to protect and take care of ourselves. Many of these worries are about what another person might do or say, or think about me, or do with my things, that I might not like.

Because people are often inconsiderate or unkind, or they ignore you, insult or embarrass you, or may take something away from you.

They do this because they have negative thoughts – arrogant, jealous, selfish, hateful or judgmental thoughts.

But what if no one ever had those kinds of thoughts and behaviors?

What if all their negativities disappeared, and everyone was always completely kind, considerate, helpful, honest, and unselfish? It's hard to imagine!

But let's just imagine how your life would be at school, at home, at your favorite activities.

It would be relaxing, and it might be a little boring! No more arguments! No fierce competition!

No thrills from getting revenge on mean people! No excitement of watching other people fight!

But then you wouldn't have to worry so much about yourself – you would have no fear.

You wouldn't worry about protecting yourself and your things, and making sure you get what is fair. You wouldn't feel bad about yourself or how you look.

So, you could spend more time doing what is important, and what you like to do.

You really can't imagine how pleasant it is not to worry about yourself, because you haven't had a chance to experience it.

The great masters like Phagmodrupa have experienced it.

They know what it's like to have no fear or worry.

They weren't worried about other people, being harmed or not getting what they need, because they knew that whatever happens, good or bad, is the result of their own past karmas.

And they feel confident that they are good and worthy; no one can make them feel upset about themselves. So they didn't have to think so much about themselves.

How do they do it? They developed their compassion and merit by always trying to help others.

They weren't trying to grant all the wishes of others, but were trying to give them what everyone really wants – real peace and true happiness.

So they were "selfless," they had "selflessness," the opposite of "selfish" and "selfishness."

When they work hard to help all beings to be peaceful, happy, and free from suffering, and when they are meditating and praying for others to be happy, then automatically they aren't thinking or worrying about themselves.

Then they can experience the deep peace and happiness, and share it with others.

We can do that too, in a very simple, easy way.

When we say our prayers, "May all living beings . . . have happiness . . . may they be free from suffering. . . ," we're not thinking about ourselves, but building up good karmas/merits instead.

Also, whenever someone upsets us, if we wish for that person to have happiness and be free from suffering, then we feel more compassionate, so it helps our feelings of anger, worry or hatred go away.

So, whenever you feel uncomfortable or angry around someone, say a quick prayer in your mind: “May you have happiness and be free from suffering” or “May all beings have happiness and be free from suffering.”

And remember that when you do these prayers, you are building up merit and the power of compassion rather than gathering negative karma by getting angry.

#### ACTIVITY – Hangman game:

On a whiteboard or large paper, the teacher draws a gallows (like a number “1”) and dashes, each dash representing a blank space for each letter of a secret word. Any student may guess the word at any time, and if he is correct, he wins.

The game starts as follows: Students sit in a circle or in a row. The first student calls out a letter that he guesses might be in the word. If it is in the word, the teacher writes it in the appropriate blank space(s). If it is not in the word, the teacher writes the letter below the gallows and draws a circle on the gallows representing the head of a man being hung. The student sitting next to him guesses a letter, and if it is not in the word, a line is drawn down from the head, representing the trunk of the man being hung. Each student takes a turn guessing a letter. Wrong guesses successively result in one arm drawn from the trunk, then another arm, then a leg, and then another leg, then a hand, another hand, a foot, another foot, an eye, another eye, and a mouth. At that point the man is hung, and if the students haven’t guessed the word, the teacher writes it on the blank spaces, and there is no winner.

Several games may be played, using any of the secret words listed below. The teacher may discuss the words to reinforce the lesson and the lessons from the previous chapters.

Each winner of a game gets a small prize, such as a candy. Then the teacher offers candy to each of the other students, who didn’t win, and asks the winners how they feel about that. Ask the winners: do the winners feel that only they should get the candy? Or can they try being selfless, not thinking about themselves and what they like, but instead having compassion for those who didn’t win?

humility   selflessness   Phagmodrupa   criticize   praise   endurance   Gampopa   Milarepa