

CHAPTER 13 – HUMILITY

For years, the young Garchen Rinpoche studied at the monastery with his father as his teacher. But his father never seemed to be satisfied with his progress.

The young tulku sometimes felt so frustrated that negative thoughts swirled in his mind.



One time, as he was drinking his butter tea, all of the frustration seemed to burst inside him. He couldn't take it any longer. He wanted to scream at the top of his lungs to release all the pressure he felt deep inside. But how could he? His fear of his father's anger kept him quiet.

So without knowing what else to do, he bit hard on the rim of his tea cup.

It was a traditional Tibetan tea cup, one of the few things that a Tibetan would always travel with. It was made with a special wood with silver on the inside and at the base. But now his tooth made a dent on the rim of his tea cup.

He also had a big doubt - about who he was. He wanted a clear answer. So one day he asked his father:

“How did they recognize me? How could they be sure that I am Gar Rinpoche, that I am the reincarnation of the previous Gar Rinpoche? Am I truly so?”

His father replied, “You should never have such doubt, but you should continue to learn and develop into a being of exceptional qualities.”

His father continued, “Nevertheless, although you were recognized as the previous Gar Rinpoche's incarnation, never think of yourself as him! Always place him on the crown of your head – visualize him above you. In that way, you should think of him and humbly ask to receive his blessings.”

While he was a young tulku, on special occasions his father, mother and some older lamas told him stories of his own past lives, the First through Seventh Garchen Rinpoches. The lamas also taught him about the masters of the Kagyu lineage – Tilopa, Naropa, Marpa, Milarepa, Gampopa, Phagmodrupa, and finally Jigten Sumgon, who was his lama, his teacher, in a past life when he was called Gar Chodingpa many lifetimes ago, hundreds of years ago.

Garchen Rinpoche's father was not always critical of him. When his father taught him instructions pointing out the nature of the mind, based on *Mahamudra*, his father was surprised by how quickly his son was able to understand what it meant. These were the same instructions that the great yogi guru Tilopa gave to his student Naropa many hundreds of years ago in India.

His father said to him, “So there are two types of *Mahamudra* practitioners. One that is spontaneous and one gradual. You are the spontaneous practitioner of *Mahamudra*!” his father concluded.

So it seemed that the ever-demanding Guru, the “second Marpa,” was quite happy on that day!

But it was actually the only rare moment that Garchen Rinpoche could remember that his father ever offered him any encouraging words or appreciation.

His father then went on to give him advice on how his son should carry on the perfect qualities of humility and patience.

“You have this ability to grasp the greatest meaning of *Mahamudra*, of mind and emptiness, due to the compassion and loving-kindness and streams of blessings from the wisdom-mind of the previous Garchen Rinpoche.”

“Nevertheless, *don't* simply think that you *are* Garchen Rinpoche! You should always think of Garchen Rinpoche above your crown and continue to strive to develop yourself into a being of exceptional and beneficial qualities!”

Other than that, it seemed that nothing else he did could ever please his father, his guru. He wondered whether his father had any feelings at all for him. When people came to pay respect to the young tulku, his father later would insult him with hurtful comments: he is no good at this, he is no good at that...his study was going nowhere...his behaviors were getting worse.

But his father was not at all like a wrathful and ferocious “second Marpa” to his little sister! Kunzang Choedon, Garchen Rinpoche's little sister, thought their father was a very kind man! She never saw any anger on their father's face! There was always such an atmosphere of love around their father when she was with him. He never hit her or the other brothers and sisters, and he always treated them with tenderness.

To her, their father was like a Buddha. When their father was at home for a visit, at night as she went to sleep she saw their father meditating in his room. Then when she woke up in the morning, he was already awake and sitting in meditation again. Just seeing him filled her with so much love and happiness.

Everyone respected their father. He was not only a great yogi, but also a wise man, a therapist, a doctor, and a spiritual healer who was able to help many sick and dying people.

When he was preparing to go back to the monastery for a prayer retreat along with another one of Garchen Rinpoche's sisters, little Kunzang Choedon begged their father to bring her along too. They stayed at the monastery three or four months. While they were there, she never saw her tulku brother being naughty or rough. He always showed warmth and care toward all his younger brothers and sisters.

QUESTIONS:

1. When the young Garchen Rinpoche was drinking butter tea and was so frustrated he wanted to scream, what did he do instead? (bit into his tea cup)
2. Did his father agree that he really was Garchen Rinpoche? (yes)
3. What did his father tell him to do, to not think of himself as the great Garchen Rinpoche? (strive to develop good qualities, think of Garchen Rinpoche above the crown of his head)
4. Did his father ever appreciate him? (yes, once, when he quickly understood the teaching of *Mahamudra*, the nature of the mind)
5. What did Kunzang Choedon think of their father? (he was a very kind man, tender and loving, like a Buddha)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – HUMILITY:

“Whenever we think – oh! I have particularly good qualities of such and such and I have understanding and knowledge, this reinforces our self-clinging to the extent that we are not really able to see the good qualities of others. This is truly the definition of pride....Thus it is very important for us to show respect to others.” Garchen Rinpoche, Quote 102

“Jealousy and pride can be tricky and are difficult to recognize; they sometimes manifest as a subtle feeling of dislike. For example, when someone tells you how great you are, you feel good about it.... When others are praised, we do not like to hear about it....When others criticize us, we get angry....

In fact, when others blame you, they cannot add a fault to you that you do not possess. When others praise you, you are not becoming a greater person because of that. Whatever others say about you does not affect your faults and qualities...If you do not have the fault for which you have been accused, there is no need to be upset, since criticism does not make you have the fault. If you do have that fault for which you have been accused, then the person pointing it out to you becomes your kind teacher helping you to improve. Dzogchen Patrul Rinpoche said, ‘...Always look at your own faults, but never look at others’ faults.’” Garchen Rinpoche, Quote 6

We learned from this story that Garchen Rinpoche’s father was not just an angry man with a bad temper. Actually, he was a kind man.

So why did he treat Garchen Rinpoche with such extreme anger and criticism?

He had the very difficult task of being the guru to the young tulku, to make sure he was well disciplined and educated, with the very great qualities that a Garchen Rinpoche should have.

He couldn’t just be an average boy – he had to develop great virtues!

One great virtue is humility, being humble.

His father told him to visualize the Seventh Garchen Rinpoche above the crown of his head and humbly ask to receive his blessings. What does “humbly” or “humble” mean?

It means not being egoistic, not thinking that you are better than others, and not showing off. Thinking in a nice way about the greatness of others, the success or good qualities of others. Also, it means remembering that you are not perfect, you have faults or weaknesses.

Young Garchen Rinpoche was instructed to think of the Seventh Garchen Rinpoche above his head, and be humble, so he would think of the great qualities of the Seventh Garchen Rinpoche rather than thinking of himself as the great Garchen Rinpoche.

Why did his father teach him to do that? What might happen if he thinks of himself as the great Garchen Rinpoche?

He might become full of pride and egoistic.

Why is that so bad? A lot of very successful people are full of pride and egoism, aren't they? People who have a lot of pride and ego think of themselves as more important than others. They become arrogant, and don't care much about others. They don't want to help others much. They think about themselves and what they want, so they become more selfish and self-centered. They don't try to develop lovingkindness and compassion.

Garchen Rinpoche's father didn't want him to become like that!

He wanted his son to develop more selflessness, lovingkindness and compassion, and to help others, to become a well-respected spiritual leader, like the previous Garchen Rinpoches.

Why do you think that when people came to pay respect to the young tulku, his father later would insult him with hurtful comments?

Perhaps when people come to pay respect, and bow to the young tulku, that could make him feel powerful and proud. So if his father reminds him of his faults, what he is not good at, then he won't feel powerful and proud. His father was trying to make sure he stays humble.

How do we know if we are humble or not?

If we like to show off, we are not being humble!

If we often expect people to tell us how great we are, or what good things we did,

or if we get upset when they don't, we're not being humble.

If we like to “put others down,” criticize others, or point out something bad about them, we are not being humble.

Usually, when we like to criticize others, it's because we're insecure – we're worried about what others might think of us, and we try to think of others as worse than we are, so we look better in comparison.

But, we shouldn't think of ourselves as worse than others either! This is very important!

We shouldn't “put ourselves down,” criticize ourselves harshly, or think that we are not as good as others.

That is not humility; it is insecurity. It could make us very unhappy.

Instead, we should just notice our mistakes and what we need to improve on, and work on doing better next time.

What about being confident?

It's very good to be confident that we can do something well.

But we should be careful that we are not trying to show off to others.

So how can we develop our humility in a way that is good for us?

We should try to avoid comparing ourselves with others.

Instead we should just do our best and not worry about how others are doing, or what they think.

When people say good things about us, that doesn't make us a better person, so we shouldn't feel too proud about it.

If people say bad things about us, or point out a fault or weakness, and it's not true, their words can't turn us into a bad person, and can't make us have that fault or weakness, so we shouldn't let it upset us.

If it is true, then we can feel thankful that they showed us something we need to improve on.

We shouldn't try to find something bad about someone, or focus on their negative qualities.

We should look at our own faults, not at the faults of others.

If you feel upset when someone else is praised or admired, then try praising him or her yourself.

Think of what you like about that person, or what they are good at.

If you're the one who admires something about that person, then you feel like he is a friend and you don't feel upset anymore.

This is a good way to develop humility.

One thing you might notice about humility is that those people who have the quality of humility are much more loveable to others.

People who are proud, vain or arrogant, may be popular for some time, but others often find it difficult to really love them.

PRACTICE THIS WEEK: Notice the talents that your friends, brother, sister, cousins, classmates, neighbors, or teammates have. Try to notice more and more talents of other people, without comparing their talents with yours.

ACTIVITY: For each of the questions or comments below, circle the response that best shows you have humility, but are not too critical of yourself.

1. Will you help me do this?
 - a. I am good at this, let me do it.
 - b. I am not very good at it either.
 - c. Okay, I can help you.

2. You won!
 - a. But you did really well too!
 - b. It was just luck - usually I lose.
 - c. I know.

3. We lost the game again.
 - a. I know, I stink at this game.
 - b. It wasn't my fault. You were in my way.
 - c. I think I need to practice more.

4. You are so good at this!
 - a. Thank you.
 - b. No I'm not that good.
 - c. I beat all of them.

5. Hers was the best one.
 - a. She copied someone else's.
 - b. And mine was not very good.
 - c. Yes, it was beautiful.

6. You could have done better.
 - a. Why do you always pick on me?
 - b. I'll try to do better next time.
 - c. I always mess it up.

7. That was a big mistake you made.
 - a. I'm sorry. I'll try not to do it again.
 - b. But he did even worse than I did.
 - c. I hate it when I make mistakes.

8. He got the highest grade on his project.
 - a. I'll never get a good grade in that class.
 - b. He is really smart.
 - c. That's because his parents helped him.