

CHAPTER 20 – EQUANIMITY

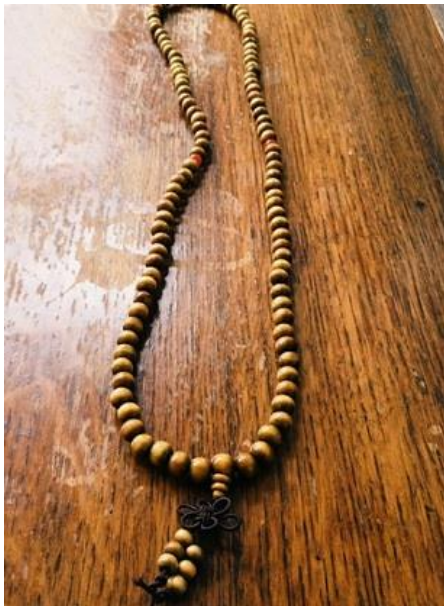
One day, when Garchen Rinpoche was about 19 years old, his kind teacher, Lama Chime Dorje, firmly told him that the time had come for him to receive the 36 vows of a novice monk. And after that, both his dear Lama and his father ordered him to get prepared to enter a retreat, where he would have to stay totally alone for three years, plus three months, three weeks and three days.

At that time, Garchen Rinpoche and two other tulkus of Gar Gon monastery, Mingyur Rinpoche and Namdrul Rinpoche, had many responsibilities. They traveled to different areas on the request of their devotees, and they took care of the monastery. They also did retreats for weeks or months at a time, when they had to stay alone and meditate and do yogic practices. They took turns taking care of these responsibilities and doing retreats.

Garchen Rinpoche was told that the opportunity to practice alone in retreat, to fully understand the mind and attain wisdom, was what every sincere practitioner of the Drikung Kagyu lineage should long for. After Namdrul Rinpoche spent *four* years in meditation and practice all alone, it was Garchen Rinpoche's turn for a long retreat.

Before he officially entered the three year retreat, he had to do some preliminary practices. One of them was to complete 100,000 – yes, one-hundred thousand – prostrations, offering his body, speech and mind to the Three Jewels: the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. He performed the prostrations in his room. It would take several months to complete that many prostrations.

A senior teacher at the Gar Gon monastery, named Ge Jhung, was assigned as Garchen Rinpoche's retreat master, to oversee his progress in his practice. Ge Jhung was a great master and had been a student of the Seventh Garchen Rinpoche. And he lived in the room next to Garchen Rinpoche's room.



As Garchen Rinpoche stretched out his body full length on the hardwood floor in his room, he used his *mala* beads to count the number of prostrations he completed. One day, he got tired of doing prostration after prostration in several sessions per day. He decided to take time to rest and unwind.

Suddenly, he heard his teacher, Ge Jhung, clearing his throat very loudly in the room next door, as if he was trying to remind the young tulku of something.

“A-hem . . . A-hem . . . A-hem!”

Without fail, every time Garchen Rinpoche took a break from his prostrations, his teacher cleared his throat continuously.

“It sounds as if Ge Jhung really needs some hot water!” Garchen Rinpoche thought out loud.

In time, he came up with an idea. Whenever he got tired and needed a rest, he laid down on the floor on his side. Then, half-asleep, he held his *mala* tightly and swung it on the floor, making some noises back and forth with the *mala*, so his teacher would think he was actually prostrating. That gave the young tulku a little bit of a break, and his teacher would not have to clear his throat so often.

Later on, the young Garchen Rinpoche felt very guilty about tricking his teacher into believing he was doing prostrations. He decided to confess his mistake to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, and he did many, many extra prostrations in return to make up for his misbehavior.

He successfully completed 100,000 prostrations, plus his extra ones, and performed the other parts of the preliminary practices before starting his retreat. Those included repeating 100,000 purification mantras, 100,000 offerings, and 100,000 Bodhicitta prayers.

For the duration of the three year retreat, he had to stay in one room. It was on the second floor of the temple. On the day his retreat officially started, Ge Jhung put a protection mantra on the door, sealing the room for the whole three years. During that time, Garchen Rinpoche was not allowed to leave the room or come in contact with any other person except his teacher, and only when needed.

Every day, food was brought to him and left in the outer area next to his meditation area. Tea was also brought to him and left in that area.



Sometime long ago, Garchen Rinpoche received a very nice teapot made of aluminum.

It was quite an impressive present. He liked the teapot very much.

Like a thermos, it could keep the water hot for a long time.

During his three-year retreat, one of Garchen Rinpoche's little sisters was asked to be his attendant.

Every day she was responsible for bringing to his room his tea and the food that the monastery cook had prepared for him.



But the cook always sent the tea for Garchen Rinpoche in an old-fashioned clay teapot that was really old.

Garchen Rinpoche wrote a note to the cook specifically asking for him to please send tea in his favorite aluminum teapot instead.

For some reason, the cook refused to comply with this simple request. So Garchen Rinpoche wrote another note, and then more notes with his request.

And yet day after day, the cook continued to send tea to Garchen Rinpoche in the old clay teapot.

This caused Garchen Rinpoche to feel irritated. He had less and less patience as the days went by and the tea was sent in the same old clay teapot. After so many days of waiting for the change of the teapot, he could no longer resist his irritated feelings and he became totally upset.

He hit the clay teapot with his hand, and a small piece, the spout of the pot, broke off and dropped onto the floor.

The next day, the cook sent tea in the same old clay teapot with the spout broken off. Garchen Rinpoche felt greatly insulted.

“What is wrong with this cook?” he thought. “What is the matter with him? How can I put some sense into his head?”

Then one day, out of frustration, he picked up the clay teapot that was filled with hot buttered tea, he opened the small window in his room, and he threw the pot out the window with all his might.

He thought, “For sure it will break into pieces this time. No more clay pot for this stubborn cook to serve my tea in!”

He was so sure it would be broken and that would be the end of it. Yet, things did not turn out as expected. The clay teapot did not break! It was thrown from the second-story room at the temple, and landed on the ground like a small bird gliding back to earth from flying. The teapot stood firmly on the ground without having spilled a single drop of tea.

Several monks who were gathered in the temple courtyard saw the teapot land on the ground.

Ngudrup Gyamtso, his friend to whom he had given the winter vest, was one of them. He saw when the teapot was thrown from the window above, and how it landed on the ground without breaking into pieces or spilling the tea. At first, Ngudrup Gyamtso stood motionless. He kept

staring at the small teapot, with a look of amazement on his face. Then he walked over to it, carefully picked it up, poured a little tea into his palm, and sipped it. Treating it as holy, he put a bit of tea on the top of his head, and slowly he walked away with the teapot with the broken-off spout.

Even after that day, the cook continued to send the tea to Garchen Rinpoche in the same clay pot. Finally, when nothing seemed to matter anymore to Garchen Rinpoche, the cook changed his mind.

Only then he did he serve Garchen Rinpoche his tea in the one made of aluminum.

QUESTIONS:

1. What was the first practice Garchen Rinpoche had to do before entering the three year retreat? (100,000 prostrations)
2. What did he decide to do when he got tired of doing prostrations, but his teacher would loudly clear his throat whenever he took a break? (he swung his *mala* on the floor so it would sound like he was doing prostrations)
3. What did he do when he felt guilty about it later on? (he confessed his mistake to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and did many extra prostrations)
4. Why did Garchen Rinpoche want his tea served in his aluminum teapot? (he liked it very much, it looked nice and kept tea warm for a long time)
5. When did he finally get his tea served in the aluminum teapot? (after he didn't care anymore)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – EQUANIMITY

“Due to attachment, we take birth in the six realms of samsara again and again.... Tainted by attachment and aversion, we cannot see how things really are. When we think about situations that are less emotionally charged, we come to understand that true intelligence arise within a mind of equanimity, a mind that remains uncolored by attachment or aversion. If you are mindful and recognize your mental arisings, for example, in conversation, you will immediately recognize when you are tempted to say something negative about someone just because you don't like them very much.

....

Tilopa said to Naropa: ‘Son, it is not the appearances that fetter you, it is the grasping at those appearances that fetters the mind.’” Garchen Rinpoche, Quote 41.

Garchen Rinpoche liked his teapot very much. He was attached to it. His attachment caused him to be irritated when he wasn't served his tea in his lovely teapot. Not only was he irritated, he got so upset that he purposely damaged the clay teapot that belonged to the monastery.

Attachment means wanting to have or keep something.

Our attachments make us irritated and frustrated, and sometimes lead to anger and being destructive.

We get upset if we want something and can't get it.

We get upset if we can't get more of something we like.

We get upset if what we are attached to gets damaged, stolen or lost, or doesn't work properly.

Can you think of a time when you got angry about something you like, something you couldn't have, or something that got broken, stolen or lost?

When we are emotionally upset, we don't think as clearly.

We focus on that thing we are attached to.

We fret over not having it, why it broke, why it got lost.

We forget all about karma; maybe we don't think about what we did wrong.

Maybe it got lost, stolen or damaged due to our own neglect, carelessness, or negative karma.

It's not the *thing* that we are attached to that causes us to be so upset.

It's our *attachment* to the thing that makes us upset.

If we weren't attached to it, we wouldn't care what happened to it.

We are attached not only to objects, but also to things we want to do, places we want to go, people we want to be with.

The opposite of attachment is aversion – avoiding what we don't like.

Garchen Rinpoche at first did not like to do so many prostrations when he felt tired.

He had an aversion to doing prostrations when he was tired.

Just as we get upset about attachments, we can get very upset about aversions too.

Can you think of some examples when you didn't want to go somewhere, didn't want to do something, or didn't want to have something?

It's natural to have aversions to things, places or people that are dangerous or could harm us.

For example, we might have aversion to a snake because we think it might suddenly bite.

We might have an aversion to heights, like standing on a ladder, because we are afraid of falling.

And it's natural to have aversions to things that could make us sick or that smell bad, because that naturally protects us from harmful bacteria.

With mindfulness - being aware of our thoughts - we can understand when we are having an aversion to protect ourselves (which is useful), and when our aversion is not useful.

Just like with attachments, it's not the *thing* that we don't like that causes us to be so upset.

It is our *aversion* to the thing that makes us upset.

If we didn't have an aversion to it, we wouldn't care whether we had to deal with it or not.

The way to reduce our attachments and aversions, our likes and dislikes, is to have mindful awareness of them.

Be aware of exactly what is making you irritated.

Think: is it worthwhile being irritated? Will your irritation help you in some way?

Remember that everything is impermanent.

By being mindful, at least you can avoid saying or doing something you regret later.

The more you practice this, the more equanimity you develop.

ACTIVITY: Beanbag toss (to help students be aware of their attachments and aversions)

As a student catches and then throws the beanbag to another student, he or she must call out something that he or she is attached to.

After each student has had a chance to throw the beanbag several times, they instead call out an aversion, something that the student doesn't like.

Garchen Children's Practice
at
Drikung Dharma Surya Center



Om Ah Hum