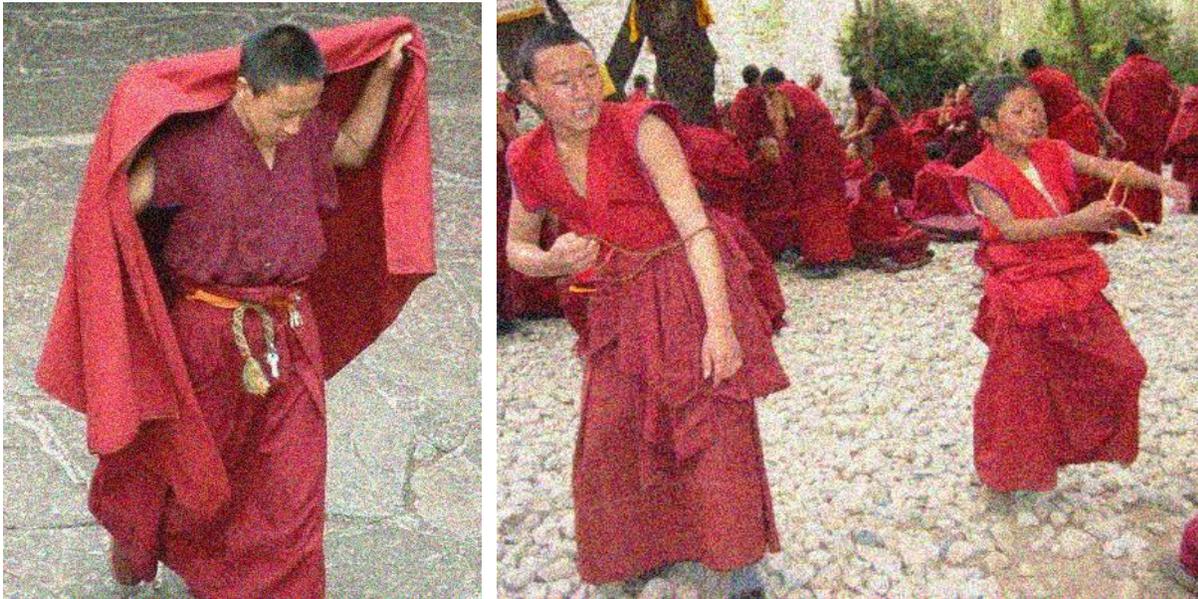


CHAPTER 15 – COURAGE

In the spring and summer, Garchen Rinpoche and the other monks at the Gar Gon monastery wore a monks' outfit of three pieces: (1) a maroon colored lower robe, wrapped around the waist, with folds in it, held up by a belt, (2) an upper maroon wrap-shirt with blue piping around the cap-sleeves, that could be worn over an undershirt, and (3) an everyday maroon shawl, draped around the body.



Garchen Rinpoche was told that the two shoulders of the wrap-shirt represent a lion's mane, and a lion, being the king of the jungle, has no fear in his heart – he is always calm, cool, collected and confident. Like the mythical snow lion of Tibet, the monks- those who wear the wrap-shirt - are said to represent fearlessness, cheerfulness in all situations, and a mind free from doubt and desire.



These are Asian lions – see the mane spread out over their shoulders?



And this is the mythical snow lion of Tibet as shown on the Tibetan flag.

In the winter, the winds flew over the snow-capped mountains to the lower valleys, and brought an extremely strong draft into the monastery. The young monks of the monastery usually were the ones who suffered the most from this dreadful weather.



So Garchen Rinpoche was offered a big, thick maroon outer robe made of sheep wool to wear. His outer long-sleeve shirt and vest also were made of sheep wool. When he had to sit down to study or meditate, he was wearing his big, warm wool cloak.

When Garchen Rinpoche, was born, there were four other boys born in the local Gar area in the same year, 1937. Three of those boys joined the same monastery, Gar Gon, as Garchen Rinpoche and also became monks. One of those three was named Ngudrup Gyamtso, who came from a rather poor family.

Garchen Rinpoche heard that just before Ngudrup Gyamtso was born, the boy's father had a very special dream of the Seventh Garchen Rinpoche placing a tiny piece of crystal in the baby's heart. It was just the father's dream, and the crystal was a dream symbol – it means something very wonderful, like a gift, passed on from the Seventh Garchen Rinpoche to the baby. So the young tulku felt that he was in some way connected with Ngudrup Gyamtso from the past life.

One morning in the winter, when it was still dark and the sun was just starting to rise, Garchen Rinpoche heard the footsteps of someone walking outside across the empty courtyard. He could feel the cold air wafting through the dark hallway as he heard the footsteps of the young monk coming to his room. It was Ngudrup Gyamtso. He didn't have any warm woolen clothes. He just had his regular monk's clothing. Suddenly Garchen Rinpoche had an idea.

In the afternoon, the young Ngudrup Gyamtso came back up to Garchen Rinpoche's room with a pot of salted Tibetan butter-tea. Garchen Rinpoche calmly received his tea. Then, suddenly, he pulled out from underneath his low table something that looked like a thick, folded piece of clothing. He put it in Ngandrup Gyamsto's hands and declared: "You can wear this. It's for you. It's yours now."

Ngudrup Gyamtso was in shock. He couldn't open his mouth to say anything. He kept staring at the maroon piece of clothing in his hands. His eyes were moist with emotions, and his heart was beating very fast. Monks don't often get gifts, especially not young monks, and especially not from other young monks.

"Don't worry, it's yours!" Garchen Rinpoche reassured him, sounding happy.

Then, little Ngudrup Gyamtso quickly tucked the surprise present under his arm and backed out of the room. He walked very fast to the end of the hallway, but his heart wouldn't stop racing.

As he was trying to make his way back to the monks' quarters, he ran into Garchen Rinpoche's senior assistant, who was a very serious and disciplined monk, and who was also the manager of the monastery - the boss - who made sure everyone at the monastery behaved properly and did what they should do. From a distance, when he saw little Ngudrup Gyamtso walking, the manager could see that he was carrying something that looked like a piece of clothing, and his behavior didn't seem normal. The manager became suspicious.

He called out to Ngudrup Gyamtso, but the little monk continued to walk away from him. Then the little monk started to run.



Ngudrup Gyamtso was very fearful of being caught even though he knew he had done nothing wrong. Just the thought of carrying something that was not supposed to belong to him cast a shadow of doubt all over him.

He continued to run, and the monastery manager ran after him, yelling out his name.

Ngudrup Gyamtso hit a wall and fell down, and at that moment the piece of clothing also fell out from his arm. It landed on the ground. It looked like a sleeveless winter vest. It didn't look like the normal wrap-vest with the two shoulders representing a fearless lion's mane. This vest laid flat on the ground, bare and crumpled.

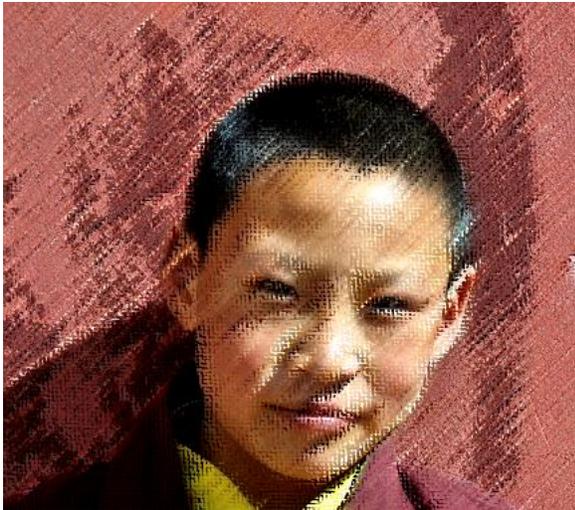
The monastery manager thought for sure that he had stolen the piece of clothing from Garchen Rinpoche. Little Ngudrup Gyamtso then got punished for a crime he did not commit. The manager smacked the little monk and yelled in his ear about the crime of stealing. Then the manager picked up the vest, folded it back neatly, and dragged the little monk up to Garchen Rinpoche's room.

The manager reported to Garchen Rinpoche, "This worthless Ngudrup Gyamtso stole something from you and I've already punished him."

Tears were streaming down Ngudrup Gyamtso's face as he stood there, as if he were a thief, listening to his crime being announced. Younger monks did not dare to disagree with the monastery manager. He was the "big boss" and they had to respect his authority. And in those days, children rarely questioned or disagreed with adults.

But then, summoning all of his courage, he raised his voice and protested repeatedly, "I did not! I did not steal it. Rinpoche gave it to me!"

Garchen Rinpoche couldn't believe what was happening. He never expected it to end like this. How could he tell the manager of the monastery that he was wrong?



But the tough fighter in him suddenly arose like a lion inside him. He turned to look at Ngudrup Gyamtso's eyes, and quickly saw a glimmer of a reflection of himself in Ngudrup Gyamtso's eyes.

He thought, "I did something that was kind. It wasn't wrong." His kind teacher at the monastery, Lama Chime Dorje, had taught him about giving one's own happiness in exchange for another person's misery.

Garchen Rinpoche loudly and clearly agreed with his friend. "Ngudrup Gyamtso is right! He didn't steal it. I gave it to him!"

He walked over to stand next to the little monk accused of being a thief, his companion on the path of a Buddhist monk. He was almost ready to snatch the maroon vest from the manager's hand! Then, however, thinking that he needed to be somewhat more thoughtful, he added:

"I wanted to give it to him. It was mine, but it is his now. Just give it back to him!"

The manager gave it back to the little monk.

From the day he received the vest from Garchen Rinpoche, and for years afterward, it was never separate from him. Day and night it was wrapped around him, giving him a genuine warmth, like love that warmed his heart and spread to others around him.

Years and years later, after Ngudrup Gyamtso was no longer a child, he himself became the manager of the monastery, responsible for the well-being of 80 young monks and the whole monastery. At that time, and even later, when his hair turned silver with age, Ngudrup Gyamtso loved to talk about this story of his younger days.

QUESTIONS:

1. What do the two shoulders of the monk's wrap-shirt represent? (lion's mane, courage of a lion)
2. What qualities does a snow lion – and a monk who wears the wrap shirt - represent? (fearlessness, cheerfulness, and a mind free from doubt and desire)
3. Why did Garchen Rinpoche give his wool vest to Ngudrup Gyamtso? (it was cold in the winter in the monastery, and Ngudrup Gyamtso was from a poor family and didn't have warm wool clothes)
4. Why did the monastery manager punish Ngudrup Gyamtso? (he thought the little monk had stolen the vest from Garchen Rinpoche)
5. Why did Garchen Rinpoche stop himself from snatching the vest from the manager's hand? (because he should be more thoughtful, it would be disrespectful to the manager)

DHARMA DISCUSSION - COURAGE:

“In prison, Khenpo Mūnsel taught me this: ‘When you find yourself in a troublesome situation, when you are in great pain, when an intense emotion arises, only then will you know where you are at with practice.’ He added, ‘Adverse circumstances will reveal your hidden faults.’ If you are able to hold awareness unwaveringly during such a time, and thus if you are not carried away by the force of the emotion, it is a sign you have gained experience in practice.” Garchen Rinpoche, Quote 8.

“Even if you experience some temporary suffering circumstances, you will understand that this is the result of our own actions of self-grasping and you are now purifying this negative karma. If you now cultivate bodhicitta, you will not suffer again in the future. So if you experience some suffering now, you must understand that this is the result of your own actions, and is not caused by anyone else. If you understand this, you will accept your own suffering and avoid negative actions to avoid future suffering.” Garchen Rinpoche, Quote 57.

“...[W]hen difficulties and suffering arise, do not grasp at them, let these thoughts dissolve into space....The Buddha is nowhere apart from your own mind.” Garchen Rinpoche, Quote 28.

“[W]henever you encounter difficulty, consider: ‘this life is like a dream, before too long it will come to an end, and when it comes to an end, I must be prepared.’” Garchen Rinpoche, Quote 2.

***“I rely on you, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, until I achieve enlightenment.
Please grant me enough wisdom and courage to be free from delusion.
If I am supposed to get sick, let me get sick, and I’ll be happy.
May this sickness purify my negative karma and the sickness of all other beings.
If I am supposed to be healed, let all my sickness and confusion be healed, and I’ll be happy.
May all other beings be healed and filled with happiness.
If I am supposed to die, let me die and I’ll be happy.” Lord Jigten Sumgon, Prayers for Using
Wisdom and Courage.***

In the story, Ngudrup Gyamtso was fearful when he got caught by the monastery manager, because he felt the doubt, and perhaps slight guilt, that he had something that he was not supposed to have.

And the monastery manager was a high authority, more important than a school principal! He made sure monks did exactly as they were told; they would never dare “talk back” or disagree with him.

But, Ngudrup Gyamtso, realizing he hadn’t done anything wrong, had the courage to speak up and say the truth - the courage to speak up to a very powerful authority and tell him that he was wrong!

And Garchen Rinpoche too had courage. He had courage to defend his friend, and let the manager know that he was wrong. He had the courage to immediately admit the truth, that he gave away something that was given especially to him, and he risked getting punished for that.

This is a type of courage that is very important in the Dharma – speaking up for the truth, defending those who are innocent, even if others might disagree with us. Sometimes it’s easier to just look the other way and not risk getting in trouble yourself, or wait for someone else to speak up. But when we have compassion for others and the courage to help them, we create good karma.

Can you think of some other situations which require courage? There are plenty of dangerous or risky things that some people like to do to show off their courage, that don’t involve helping others. This is for the ego; this is not a Dharmic kind of courage.

Courage that arises from compassion is Dharmic courage.
Courage to help someone when it’s difficult to help them, is Dharmic courage.
Courage to do the right thing when it is easier to do the wrong thing, is Dharmic courage.
Courage to be a leader and do the right thing when your friends don’t want to, is Dharmic courage.

Courage to face difficulties is another type of Dharmic courage. We all don’t want to lose a friend, fail at something, or get injured or sick. When something bad happens to us, we need the courage not be overcome with emotion – fear of what will happen next, anxiety, depression, anger, or blaming others. Instead we must have the courage to calmly accept what has happened.

Because nothing can happen to us except what we deserve according to our own actions, our own karmas.

Anything that causes us suffering is the result of our karmas.

When we suffer from difficulties, we are burning away the results of our negative karmas.

So in a way, the difficulties are actually good, because our negative karma is disappearing!

And now we are doing good karmas, so we won't build up more bad karmas.

When we have courage, we can remain calm. And when our mind is calm, we can think clearly of the best way to handle a situation, or of the best solution to a problem.

PRACTICE FOR THIS WEEK: Try to notice when you feel anxious, nervous, fearful or worried. Be mindful of the feelings in the body – for example, fast heartbeat, sighing, shallow rapid breathing, moist palms, fidgeting, “butterflies” in stomach, slight nausea, tightness in throat, irritability, impatience, wishing time would go faster, wishing people would move faster, “jumpiness,” spending more than usual time or attention on digital media.

Then do some mindful breathing. Breathe slowly, and imagine breathing in peace, and breathing out tension. Focus only on the feelings of breathing- in the nose, in the chest, movement of the stomach. Let the thoughts dissolve into space, like smoke drifting away.

Once you feel more relaxed, identify what is making you anxious or worried. If you aren't sure, close your eyes and think of various tasks, people, events, or things that might be causing the anxiety. Perhaps it is something you must learn from, or a decision you must make. Perhaps it is a result of a past karma – remember, by experiencing it now, it is purifying you of that karma. Again, do mindful breathing.

Next, imagine the Buddha Nature in your heart, the perfect version of you, calm, cool, confident, cheerful and courageous in all situations. Whatever it was that was making you anxious, consider it is just a temporary cloud passing by. Imagine the Buddha Nature guiding you and giving you the courage to do the right thing.

ACTIVITY: Color a snow lion with color pencils, markers, or watercolor paint.

