

CHAPTER 17 – ALTRUISM

There was a man who was very devoted to Garchen Rinpoche, who had great faith in the young tulku. This man had been a lama when he was young, but he decided to get married rather than continue living his life as a monk. He and his wife lived in a large house, with quite a bit of wealth. But after some time, the man got a very serious illness.

The man's family requested Garchen Rinpoche to come to their house to perform blessing ceremonies for the ill man. The little tulku planned to come to their house on a certain day, but he had to postpone the trip. He had so many duties at the monastery, he felt that there wasn't any time left to go on that day.

Days passed, and Garchen Rinpoche had not gone to visit the ill man. The family again requested that he come to see the man, as they knew he was very ill and it was important that Garchen Rinpoche perform the blessing ceremonies. But again, when the day came for him to visit, he had been so busy, and he was tired at the end of the day. So he decided to postpone it again. He thought that he would go very soon, within the next few days. But every day there was so much to do at the monastery! Day after day, he kept thinking he would go the next day.

The man's wife came to the Gar Gon monastery to pay respect to Garchen Rinpoche, not just once, but ten times or more! That was a reminder, again and again, that he must go and see her ill husband. But the tulku was always busy trying to do everything he was supposed to do at the monastery. Sometimes he had to spend all day in religious gatherings and meetings. Then in the evenings, he only wanted to rest, so he didn't agree to travel to anyone's house to give blessings.

This is also what happened when other people with illnesses or difficulties came to request that he come to their home and pray for them. He often said, "Oh, I can't go tonight; I will go tomorrow morning." Morning came and went, and he often never made it to their house. He felt compassion toward these suffering people and he wanted to comfort them. But his desire to go to their house to help them was not strong enough for him to give up his own time and convenience. He felt like he didn't have time to go.



Finally, one night, Garchen Rinpoche made it to the ill man's house. The man had very much confidence in the young tulku. He felt a deep connection to the little Garchen Rinpoche.

When he finally arrived, the man was so happy to see him! But the man had become very, very sick. He was very weak and in pain. Yet, he had patiently waited for the young Garchen Rinpoche to

come after so many days.



The man requested an Amitabha empowerment, and Garchen Rinpoche granted his wish. The man became absolutely delighted.

First he was sprinkled with water, to purify the body. Then he received nectar in his hands, to drink, to purify the speech. Next he experienced the blissful wisdom mind of the Buddha Amitabha. Last, he received the instructions to understand the nature of the mind.

By this empowerment, the man could use the Phowa technique to direct his mind toward Buddha Amitabha and transfer his consciousness into the Pure Land of Great Bliss. Then he could be able to feel a definite connection to the Buddha Amitabha and be able to experience this extremely pure and joyful state of mind.

By this technique of Phowa, he could avoid being reborn into one of the six realms, in the cycle of existence.

Instead, he could go directly to the Pure Land, where he could freely choose whether he wants to take a rebirth to benefit other beings as a Bodhisattva, or to receive further teachings in the Pure Land to become fully enlightened.

Once he received the empowerment from Garchen Rinpoche, the man felt his last wish was fulfilled. There was no more reason to wait. It was late at night, and the man passed away, in peace, with the young tulku right there with him.

The family was so thankful that Garchen Rinpoche had come to give his blessing and be with the man in his last moments. As a token of their appreciation, the man's family offered him a very expensive horse. It was the man's own horse – strong, beautiful and rare.

The young Garchen Rinpoche thought deeply about all that had happened - the man being a lama, and getting sick, the family asking Garchen Rinpoche to come to the house to bless him, the wife coming again and again to the monastery, his busy schedule at the monastery, the evenings that he just wanted to rest, the man patiently waiting and waiting so many days while sick and in pain, the man's happiness when he finally came, and his passing away after all that waiting. The young tulku realized that this man, a lama, was not even able to die; he had to wait for Garchen Rinpoche to come and give blessings before he could leave this world. He thought deeply about the decisions

he had made to postpone the trip to see the man. He had been lazy, thinking about himself, his own need for rest, and not the man's needs and the family's needs.



The little tulku thought, "He had so much love for me and I cannot waste this gift of his horse." He could have kept the horse to ride and enjoy. But that would only benefit himself. So instead, he decided to do something much more worthy of such a great gift. He asked for the horse to be sold.

He used the money that was given for the horse to do something that benefits others. In the monastery were two sacred but very old thangkas, a painting of the Eight Manifestations of Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava), and a painting of Milarepa's life story. Garchen Rinpoche asked for an artist to restore the gold colors on the thangkas. For now and for many years into the future, thousands of people would notice the beauty of the thangkas, so they would remember the great deeds and qualities of Milarepa and Guru Rinpoche.

He dedicated all the merit of this good deed to the benefit of the man, the lama, who died.



QUESTIONS:

1. Why didn't the ill man just invite another Rinpoche to give him blessings? (he was very devoted to Garchen Rinpoche, and had a deep connection with him)
2. What is the word that means to delay, put off until later, things we have to do? (procrastinate)
3. What did Garchen Rinpoche realize later was his mistake in not visiting the ill man? (he was lazy, thinking about himself and not thinking about others' needs)
4. Why did he think "I cannot waste this gift of his horse?" (it would only benefit himself and not others)
5. To whom did he dedicate the merits of having the thangkas restored? (the ill man who died)
6. Why does it benefit others for the gold color on the thangka paintings to be restored? (many people would notice the beauty of the thangkas, so they would remember the great deeds and qualities of Milarepa and Guru Rinpoche, and be inspired to do good deeds and have great qualities too)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – ALTRUISM

"In order to avoid causes of suffering, we must give up self-cherishing attitudes and cultivate an altruistic mind that seeks the benefit of others." Garchen Rinpoche, Quote 2.

"There are many thoughts of ignorance such as dullness, fogginess, discouragement, laziness, depression, or irritation without reason. In particular, if we are lazy we will not accomplish anything, neither in a worldly sense nor in dharma. The supreme antidote is mindful-awareness, it will overcome all negativities. These thoughts are fleeting, they will not last, and they come and go." Garchen Rinpoche, Quote 11.

"...[W]hen you think of others, you do not think about a self. If you are self-centered, your mind becomes narrow, like a block of ice. But when you let go and send out love to others, you will notice how your mind expands. The mind becomes open and spacious, like a vast ocean or the sky.

Bodhicitta is the preliminary practice, bodhicitta is the main practice, and bodhicitta is also the result." Garchen Rinpoche, Quote 49.

Little Garchen Rinpoche realized he had procrastinated, he waited until later to do something important. He realized he had been a bit lazy.

He wasn't extremely lazy -- he had so many things he had to do at the monastery, that he didn't have free time, and he was tired after the long busy days.

But surely if his mother had needed him, he would have gone immediately to her.

He would have made it a priority to see her because of his attachment to her.

But he didn't make it a priority to see the ill man. And that was a mistake.
He was thinking about himself – that he wanted to rest.
He wasn't paying enough attention to the needs of others.

A word that means thinking of the needs of others rather than yourself is “altruism.”
Garchen Rinpoche learned that he wasn't being “altruistic” when he was focusing on himself and not how he can benefit others.

“Altruism” doesn't mean we do something for others that's wrong or unreasonable.
It means not being selfish, not being lazy, not ignoring or forgetting what others might need.
It means thinking about what others may want rather than just what we want.
Basically, it is remembering to be loving and compassionate to others – having bodhicitta,
liking to help others, liking to make others comfortable and happy.

For example, if you are thirsty, do you just grab something to drink for yourself, or do you offer something to drink to others around you?
Do you offer to let others play, or do you wait until another person asks to play?
Do you wait for your mother to bring you something, or do you offer to bring something for her?
Do you often offer to help clean up, or carry things for others?

Here is some examples of a person who is being lazy.
When asked to do something he doesn't feel like doing, he might say:
“Why do I have to do that?” or “But I did it last time” or “I'll do it later.”
He might procrastinate, pretend he didn't hear, or sneak away when it's time to do work.
He might look for fun things to do instead of the work he is supposed to do.
Or he may try to make someone else do some of the work.

There are times when we feel tired, irritable, discouraged or even depressed, and that makes us feel lazy and forgetful.
Remember that these are just temporary feelings.
To help get rid of those negative feelings, you can remember to practice mindfulness:
try being mindful while you walk, or when you drink or eat something, or do some mindful breathing. You could try doing some mindful yoga poses.

When it's not just an occasional tired or irritable mood, but a lazy habit, it's very hard to break that habit.
And, if we don't want to help others because we're lazy, then others get annoyed, or angry with us.
Also, it's difficult for a person with lazy habits to get a good job, or to be successful in life.

Sometimes we might think that if we relax a lot and avoid helping others, then we are happier.
But if you're lazy and don't care about what others are thinking, do you really feel better?
When you are altruistic, then your mind becomes full of love, which is a happy feeling, and others appreciate your kindness and thoughtfulness. And you feel better about yourself.
Just like laziness can be a bad habit, altruism can be a good habit.

PRACTICE THIS WEEK

Be aware of your thoughts and responses when asked by your parent or teacher to do something. Do you do what they asked right away? If you don't do it right away, are you really unable to do it? Is someone asking you to do something that is wrong, or unreasonable? Are you trying to procrastinate?

ACTIVITY – Make a poster with a list:

Copy one of the quotes below on posterboard or paper. You may want to write it in pencil first, centered on the paper. Then use a marker to write the quote neatly over the pencil.

Then, under the quote, write a list of things you do, or can do, at home to be of benefit to your family members.

“In order to avoid causes of suffering, we must give up self-cherishing attitudes and cultivate an altruistic mind that seeks the benefit of others.”

- Garchen Rinpoche.

“If you are self-centered, your mind becomes narrow, like a block of ice. But when you let go and send out love to others, you will notice how your mind expands. The mind becomes open and spacious, like a vast ocean or the sky.”

- Garchen Rinpoche

Some examples of items for the list:

Set the table

Clear the table

Put dishes in the dishwasher

Wash dishes

Put clean dishes away

Take out the trash

Clean my room

Make my bed

Put dirty clothes in hamper

Put away clean laundry

Carry groceries

Help put groceries away

Clean the kitchen floor

Wipe the table

Clean the countertop

Clean the sink

Clean the bathroom

Help with yard work