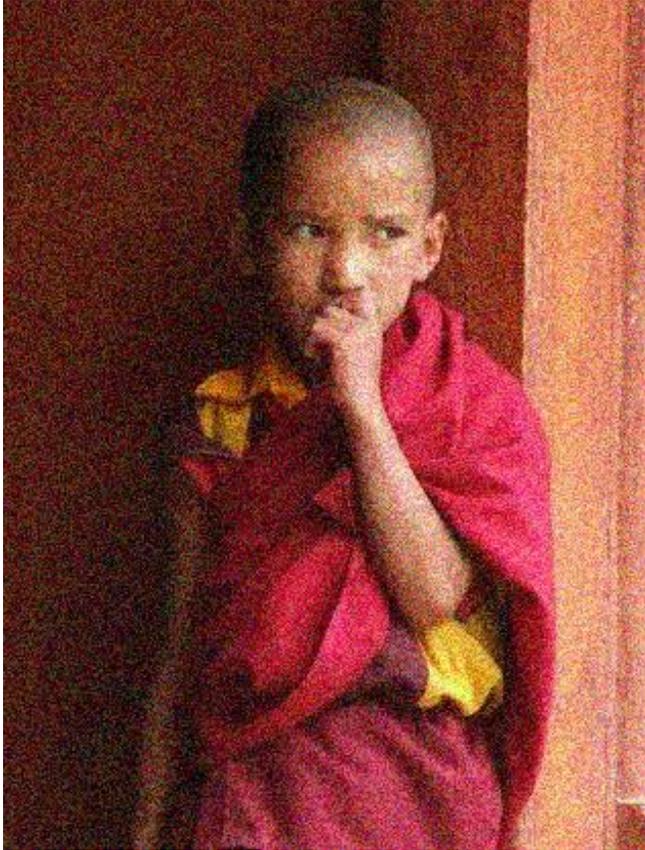


CHAPTER 19 – PERSEVERENCE

Lama Chime Dorje was the very patient, kind and caring teacher of little Garchen Rinpoche. He was also the teacher of a young monk called Damring Wangyal, who was accepted at Gar Gon monastery as a child.



This little monk could not read or write, no matter how hard he tried to learn. Not only did he have problems learning, he had other problems, too.

Due to the negative karmas from his past lives, he committed many negative deeds.

He stole things, he lied, and he hunted and killed insects or small animals.

And he repeatedly broke many rules at the monastery.

Some people at the monastery called him “*Tolei*” which means cow. It is a name given to people who are foolish.

But Lama Chime Dorje never lost faith in this little monk. With great kindness and compassion, the lama would find a way to skillfully help little Damring Wangyal examine his heart and understand that his true nature, his Buddha Nature, is absolute purity.

Every day, Lama Chime Dorje asked Damring Wangyal to come to his room. Then the lama sat down with him and patiently recited *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas* loudly for the boy to hear. By listening to his lama, the young monk could start to learn them.

Every few days, the lama told Damring Wangyal to try to memorize at least one of the 37 stanzas. The stanzas were not long. Here is an example of one stanza:

When one follows a true spiritual friend, faults will dissolve and good qualities will grow like a waxing moon. Consider this friend more dear than your own body. This is the way of a bodhisattva.

Because Damring Wangyal couldn't read, he went around the monastery to look for someone to recite that one stanza for him to hear again and again, so he could memorize it.

But some of the stanzas were difficult to really believe in for a young monk, even for Garchen Rinpoche.

One day, Garchen Rinpoche had to express his doubts. He called out, “Lama Chime Dorje!” “I really don’t believe in many of the verses that you wanted us to memorize. I really don’t!”

“Garchen Rinpoche!” The lama gently raised his eyebrows. He hesitated a moment, then asked, “Why is that so, Rinpoche, please tell me.”

“It is too much for anyone to follow. It is impossible! If you ask me to do *tonglen* for people who are sick and those who are suffering, then that is a different story. But if they were to cut off my head, then how am I to take upon myself their negative deeds through the power of compassion? I sure won’t be qualified to grant anyone the Bodhisattva vows in the future!”

The young Rinpoche cautiously recited one of the most difficult stanzas to follow as he looked into his teacher’s eyes. “Even if others cut off one’s head when one is utterly blameless, taking upon oneself all these negative deeds by the power of compassion is the bodhisattvas’ practice.”

His lama said, “Please tell me then, of all of those verses, in which of them do you believe?”

The young tulku contemplated a short while, and then with a self-assured tone of voice, he recited another verse, which instructs, “...all the unbearable sufferings of the lower realms is the result of wrongdoing. Never committing negative deeds, even at the peril of one’s life, is the Bodhisattvas’ practice.”

Garchen Rinpoche exclaimed, “Karma, that’s all I can believe in, the workings of cause and effect, karma.”

Lama Chime Dorje gazed deeply at the young tulku, who was his own guru long ago. He was completely silent for what seemed like a long time. His eyes reflected only tenderheartedness.

“That is good,” the lama said softly. “If you have that kind of belief, you should continue to nurture unfailing confidence and trust in the law of karma. Based on your understanding of karma, you should investigate your faults and tame your mind. Then slowly, one day, you *will* be able to develop great trust in the rest of the teachings, even those that are most difficult, most impossible.”

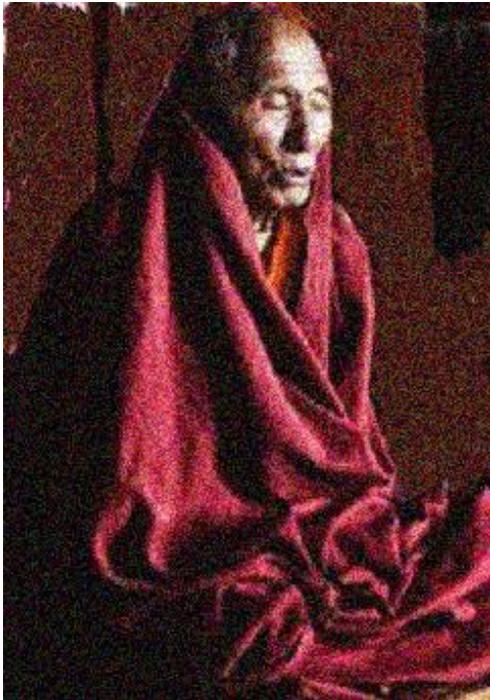
As for Damring Wangyal, after a long, long time, and with much effort and perseverance, he finally could recite by heart each of the stanzas of *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*.

Lama Chime Dorje was very happy that he finally learned it. He continued to give the young monk bits and pieces of teachings, and ever so slowly Damring Wangyal’s harmful behaviors faded away. He overcame so much of his negative behavior because his mind was trained to have compassionate thoughts rather than selfish, harmful and ignorant thoughts.

And, he began to sincerely have thoughts of taking on practices to benefit other beings. So he was on the path of helping himself as well as helping others overcome impurities in their minds, as a true monk and practitioner of Dharma.

When he grew up, Damring Wangyal became a great meditator. Later, when Tibet became occupied by the Chinese, they put him in prison, as they did with many Tibetan monks. When he was in prison, Damring Wangyal secretly practiced his meditation at night.

One day, he knew he would be passing away soon. He gave all of his food away to the other prisoners in his prison cell. Secretly, he prepared to depart from this world. On the day he was about to die, he went around to say goodbye to all his friends in the prison and told them the time that he was going to die was fast approaching.



That night, he sat down in full lotus posture and went into a deep meditation. He passed away sitting in meditation position. He had faced death like a fearless snow lion.

Many people later on talked about how he took his last breath sitting up in meditation, reaching a peaceful state of mind beyond suffering.

Garchen Rinpoche said, “Damring Wangyal died like a Buddha.”

If Damring Wangyal had no spiritual master to guide him through practices to purify his body, speech and mind, who know which of the six worlds he would have been reborn into, with the negative karmas that he had when he was young.

Because of Lama Chime Dorje’s deep kindness, Damring Wangyal was able to abandon his impurities and completely tame his mind.

QUESTIONS:

1. What were some of the weaknesses of Damring Wangyal? (couldn’t read or write, stole things, lied, hunted and killed insects and small animals, broke rules at the monastery)
2. How did he learn to memorize *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*? (he listened to Lama Chime Dorje recite them, and asked others at the monastery to repeat a stanza aloud)
3. How did Damring Wangyal stop his bad behaviors? (his mind became trained to have compassionate thoughts, by the kindness of Lama Chime Dorje)
4. How did Lama Chime Dorje explain to Garchen Rinpoche how to believe in the difficult and impossible teachings? (understanding karma, investigating your faults and taming your mind)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – PERSEVERENCE:

“The pith instruction is habituation, perseverance. If you persevere in practice, your practice will definitely improve It is just like learning anything. It may be difficult in the beginning, but if we keep doing it over and over again, it becomes easy. It is a slow process, and you have to persist even if you fail in the beginning. No matter how often you fall, you must get up and do it again.” Garchen Rinpoche, Quote 89.

From this story of Damring Wangyal, we see that even someone who is a slow learner and who has bad behavior can learn and follow the Dharma. He can also become a great meditator. You don't have to have natural talents to meditate and practice Dharma.

But you *do* have to have perseverance. By the way, it is one of the 6 Paramitas. What is perseverance? It means to keep trying, even if it is very difficult. It might slow and frustrating, and even if you fail, you keep trying. It means to keep doing something over and over again until you get it right. Then once you learn it, it becomes easy to do.

When we were toddlers, we learned to walk. At first we only held our parent's hands. Then on our own we took a few steps and wobbled and fell. Again and again. We had great perseverance to learn to walk! And once we learned, it is so easy! It's natural for a young child to have perseverance to learn to walk, and read, swim, and ride a bike. Or do learn to do something we really love to do. But when we get older, sometimes we don't have the perseverance to do something that takes a lot of effort, and that doesn't seem like fun. Or we don't want to do it unless we get a reward.

But some of the most important things we learn don't give us an immediate reward. And all people who are very successful in life - in their career, or a sports or in the arts - all of them have the quality of perseverance. They suffered through training, practice, failing, and trying again and again. We may not think meditation is fun, and we wonder why we should try to do it. But after years of practice that might seem boring or even a waste of time, you see the benefits, the rewards: you can become calm even in the most upsetting situations, You can think clearly and concentrate well, and you enjoy the extremely peaceful, blissful experience of meditation. To be able to do any great accomplishment, it is important to be able to persevere, try and try through all the difficulties, frustrations and failures, until you succeed.

PRACTICE THIS WEEK: Sit for meditation each morning, or each evening before you go to bed. Chant a mantra several times before you start meditating. Make a good effort to persevere in focusing your mind on your meditation object (for example, breathing, sensations of the body, or loving-kindness)

ACTIVITY: Copy one or both of the mandalas. Students color them carefully with color pencils or markers. Point out that mandalas become beautiful if you have perseverance in planning how you will color each of the areas, and filling each little area between the lines carefully with color.

