

Revised Guidelines for the Dharma Students of the Venerable Zasep Tulku Rinpoche

Canada, 2013

In these times of rampant consumerism and rapid technological and cultural change, more and more people are searching for a spiritual path that will help them live more meaningful lives and find deep inner peace. Many seekers are turning to Buddhist meditation as a way to address and overcome the problems of everyday life. The idea of living life in a more meaningful way, in a more mindful way, has profound appeal. Some people, moving beyond the idea of simply living more mindfully, espouse the *Mahayana* Buddhist path, which gives detailed instructions on how to transform their ordinary troubled minds into the serene mind of Enlightenment.

I have been teaching the Buddhadharma in the west for the past 37 years. In 1976, the Venerable Geshe Thubten Loden and I were the very first Tibetan Lamas to become resident teachers in Australia. Today, Buddhism is the fastest growing spiritual tradition in Australia. In 1981, I arrived in North America to teach. Since those early years, I have seen the Buddhadharma take root and flourish in the West; I am hopeful that it will continue to grow.

In my 37 years in the West, I have learned so much about so much about the Western way of life. I think that, generally speaking, people in the West are kind, sensitive, caring, honest, generous and helpful. Western education provides ample opportunities to study philosophy and human psychology; outside of formal education, bookstores have shelf upon shelf of self-help books; for those who cannot help themselves, the Yellow Pages list column after column of counselling professionals. Yet in spite of the availability of so much material about thought, thinking and feeling, and emotional well-being, many Westerners seem confused, lacking in self-confidence, and full of self-blaming and even self-loathing. In the midst of crowds, they feel loneliness; in the midst of plenty, they feel hunger. This is not to say that people in the East don't have similar problems: they do, especially since the old social order is

breaking down in many places in the East. But in these guidelines I am talking particularly to my Western students.

I have found that many people in the West spend a great deal of time either thinking about the past or dreaming about the future, with the result that they are never in the present. When they look back, they often are full of regret for what was or what was not, and when they look forward, they are full of expectations that seldom come to fruition, leading to more regret when the future they had been dreaming about has become the past. Buddhist meditation teaches how to be in the present, how to be present. Some people think that a meditation practice is an escape from everyday life, but in truth, a meditation practice teaches us to be present in the world with a peaceful and compassionate mind. Some people also think that only ordained *Sangha* or *yogis* can be good practitioners, but the Buddha taught the Dharma for the benefit of all people, be they ordained or lay. With the right motivation, everyone can be a good Dharma practitioner.

Why do we need a Dharma teacher?

Many people in the West ask why a spiritual teacher or guide is necessary. Sometimes when Westerners turn to spirituality as a way to deal with their malaise, they think they can get all the guidance they need from the self-help section of a bookstore or from the Internet. This approach is likely to result in more rather than less confusion. Others may be determined to find a spiritual teacher who can show them a true spiritual path, who can give them spiritual support when they are struggling, and comfort when they are suffering, when they are experiencing *Dukkha*. This spiritual teacher may exemplify for the seeker what it means to be a spiritually realized person. The knowledge and wisdom that this person has, his Dharma realizations, become the seeker's Refuge and protection from *Dukkha*.

In the East, the idea of a spiritual teacher-student relationship is an ancient one, having been there for millennia. After he renounced the life of a prince, Prince Siddhartha went looking for a possible teacher. He placed himself under the spiritual guidance of two renowned Brahmin

teachers, Master Alara Kalama and Addaka Ramaputta; then, deciding to become an ascetic, he practised severe austerities for years before realizing that self-mortification was not the way to achieve his goal. Great Buddhist scholars like Nagarjuna and Asanga had teachers, as did Mahasiddhis such as Tilopa. Atisha was so eager to meet his teacher Dharmakirti that he embarked upon a dangerous 13-month sea voyage to Sumatra in Indonesia to meet him. Marpa travelled to India to study under Naropa. And the founder of our tradition, Lama Je Tsong Khapa, studied under many great masters in Tibet. In the Tibetan Buddhist view, the spiritual teacher is the root of all spiritual realizations and attainments. According to *Mahayana* and *Vajrayana* teaching, we should consider our teacher as a Buddha for our own spiritual benefit. According to the Theravadin tradition, a Dharma teacher is a very special spiritual friend known as *Kalyana-mitta (mitra)*. Spiritual friendship is *Kalyana-mittata*.

A Dharma teacher is a spiritual guide who can show us how to meditate correctly so that we can make progress on our spiritual path and gain Dharma realizations. I suggest you study Lama Je Tsong Khapa's *Lamrim Chenmo*, in which he clearly defines the qualities of good Dharma teachers and students. Some people have the fortunate Karma to recognize a good Dharma teacher immediately upon meeting one, but others are full of indecision and doubt, and cannot make up their minds to commit to a particular teacher. They may spend their whole life shopping for the perfect teacher and yet never find him or her.

When we are shopping around for a teacher, we will find teachers with widely different personalities. Teachers come in many shapes and sizes because each of us is different, with different attitudes and aptitudes. With Dharma teachers, there is no one size fits all. Most Buddhist teachers are calm, gentle and very kind towards to their students; they are usually highly disciplined because this is how they were trained. Some teachers may have very strong personalities, and can seem very stern, dogmatic or possibly even wrathful. A handful of teachers are real yogis or yoginis who are eccentric, spontaneous, and unpretentious.

In truth, I think it is hard to choose a Dharma teacher wisely. Some people use logic and reason to select a teacher, others intuition and faith but really, a lot of it comes down to personality. Some people are attracted to a teacher because he or she is celebrated for being charismatic and inspiring or for writing many books. Others are attracted to a teacher's appearance, to the warmth of his or her smile, and to his or her teachings on topics like love and compassion. Still others are attracted to teachers who can do magic tricks, such as making an iron rod glow just by rubbing it with their hands, or by causing a rain of rings to fall from their fingers. Yet still others choose a teacher who gives people big hugs as his or her way of teaching. Some extremely naïve people will blindly follow a teacher who claims to be perfect and infallible, shutting their eyes to his or her imperfections. You can choose whomever you want be your teacher, but the most important thing is that you find a teacher who is compassionate and wise, has impeccable integrity, and is well-respected as a teacher. He or she should not be prejudiced, biased or hypocritical, and his or her conduct should not contradict the very teachings he or she is giving.

Some teachers may disparage or even denounce other teachers because they don't agree with their positions on various doctrinal issues or because they do not approve of their life style. It is useful to remember what Buddha said in the well-known *Kalama Sutra*, which advises seekers how to choose the right teacher. The Kalamas were a clan who were confused by many teachers who passed through their territory, criticizing and contradicting each other. Buddha told the Kalamas not to believe something simply because it is often repeated, because it is a scripture, or because it is stated by an authority. He told them to test everything that said with their own experience: only if it proves conducive to goodness and happiness should it be accepted as true.

One of the most important things in a teacher-student relationship is for the student to be able to communicate directly with the teacher so that he or she can ask questions and have an honest discussion if one is needed; it is always good to have a teacher who encourages questioning; you don't have to accept anything on blind faith. There is old Tibetan saying, "A

guru is like fire, if you stay too close you get burned; if you stay too far away, you don't get enough heat." I think some people actually prefer a teacher who is very remote and personally inaccessible so that they can only relate to him or her at a distance; without direct contact they feel safe, knowing they won't ever be close enough to get burned. Other people would like to have constant easy access to a teacher so that they can ask questions all the time, without having ever having to figure out the answers for themselves. Some people look upon a Dharma teacher as a family doctor, one who will give them a new prescription for happiness whenever they think they need one. Teacher-student relationships are nuanced, with both teacher and student bringing their dispositions and their histories into their interaction. In my own case, different people see my relationship with my students in different lights. A few people have told me my students treat me with too much reverence while others have told me I am too casual and relaxed with my students and should demand more reverence! I cannot please everyone; indeed I doubt there is any teacher who can.

If someone is fortunate enough to have the good Karma, he or she will eventually find a good teacher who is willing to commit to being the student's teacher and spiritual guide. On his or her side, a Dharma student must be sincere and willing to commit to and trust the Dharma teacher. A healthy teacher-student relationship makes for a healthy Dharma practice. The Dharma teacher will guide the student step by step and assist him or her in everyday Dharma practice. The Dharma teacher and student must have mutual respect and appreciation. The student should take the teachings and instructions into his or her heart and learn the correct protocols of teacher and student relationships.

Becoming a Dharma student

To become a student of a particular Dharma teacher, a person should go to the teacher to make a formal request to be accepted as a student. The Dharma teacher may test the student's sincerity by asking him or her to wait for a period of time, to study Dharma texts, or do retreats and other training in order to be qualified as a student. Once a Dharma teacher is happy with the student's enthusiasm, sincerity and willingness to study and practise Dharma, then the

teacher will accept the person as student.

How to study Dharma

In this materialistic age, it is a fortunate person indeed who opts for a spiritual path and is able to study Dharma. On the must-study list are Buddhist *Sutras* and *Shastras*, philosophical texts written by great teachers like Nagarjuna, Asanga, Chandrakirti, Vashubandu and Shantideva, and commentaries written by great masters like Lama Je Tsong Khapa and his lineage holders. We should study Dharma no matter our age. Sakya Pandita said, “RIGPA NANGPAR CHE YANG LHOB,” which translates as “You should study Dharma today even if you are going to die tomorrow.”

Dharma teaching and Dharma practice is both temporary and ultimate Refuge. I especially advise my students to study *Lamrim* texts like Lama Je Tsong Khapa's *Lamrim Chenmo*, which I mentioned above, *Lamrim* texts written by the first Panchen Lama and the fifth Dalai Lama, and Kaybje Pabongka Rinpoche's great *Lamrim* text, *Liberation in the Palm of your Hand*. It is very important to study and practise *Lamrim* always, no matter how advanced you are. *Lamrim* practice is the very heart of Dharma practice. If you consistently practise *Lamrim*, then your Dharma practice will have a solid foundation, and you will not have any problems with lack of commitment. Your faith in the Three Jewels will continue to grow steadily, and your realizations increase accordingly.

The Preciousness of Dharma traditions and lineages

In Tibetan Buddhism, there four principal schools or traditions: Nyingma, Sakya, Kagyu and Gelug. Lama Je Tsong Khapa's tradition is known as the Gaden Tradition, which is another way of saying Gelug. Lama Je Tsong Khapa is the emanation and embodiment of the Buddhas Manjushiri, Avalokiteshvara and Vajrapani; he is known as second Buddha of this age. The four Tibetan Buddhist traditions each have their precious teachings; each of the four traditions is perfect in its own way and has its own beauty, power and glory. Each of the traditions must retain their original method and style of teaching as this preserves the uniqueness of its

lineages. In the Gelug tradition of Lama Je Tsong Khapa, we have the *Bodhichitta* lineage of Maitreya Buddha and Asanga, and the *Shunyata* lineage of Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti. We have the blessed lineage and practices of Atisha and his disciple Dromtonpa; there are two main Chöd lineages, those of the Gaden Tradition and the Dakini ear-whispered lineage. There is a very sacred Gaden ear-whispered lineage called Jamyang Chokor, which are ten initiations handed down by Manjushri through Lama Umapa Pawo Dorje to Lama Je Tsong Khapa. There are also the unique thirteen sacred initiations of Tagpu Dag Ngang Chu Sum -- “the clear vision near lineages.” I have been fortunate to receive these initiations from Rongtha Kyabgon Rinpoche.

When you practise according to the lineage of your teacher, your practice becomes part of the lineage of your teacher. This means you do the practice just as your teacher does and as his or her teachers did before; this prevents you from going off the track and your practice becomes solid and strong. However, and this is very important, you should not assume that you are qualified to do the practices that your teacher has done or is doing without knowing clearly where you are on spiritual path. We have an old Tibetan saying: “If the fox jumps on the tail of a lion, the fox could break her back.” Your Dharma teacher has his or her own personal practices, which could include advanced secret deity *sadhana* practices. You do not need to know, let alone do, every practice that your teacher does.

Non-sectarianism and non-confusion

Throughout history, Lama Je Tsong Khapa’s Gelug tradition has been remarkably non-sectarian. Lama Je Tsong Khapa himself studied under and received many initiations from masters of different traditions. I encourage my students to respect all traditions and lineages of Tibetan Buddhism and all other Buddhist paths. In addition to studying Tibetan Buddhism, I have personally studied in the Theravadin Buddhist tradition, having entered a Thai monastery and ordained as a Theravadin *Bikkhu* in 1975. I also practised *Vipassana* meditation under the most renowned master Achaan Buddhadasa at Wat Sowanmok in Thailand. There is a Tibetan word, REMI, which literally translates as “not taking sides, being non-sectarian,” but it really means

emphasizing the similarities of different sects. It does not mean mixing together many different practices. The idea of REMI is good, but I am not sure how many true REMI practitioners there are these days. I think REMI is a nice idea, like sharing Dharma with your friends. I don't have problems with the idea of REMI. Actually, my grandmother was a devotee of the Kagyu tradition and many of my family members were also Kagyu; some were Sakya and a few were Nyingma. My family members were very respectful of each other's traditions, lineages and practices; they accommodated and supported each other. My great uncle Sachu Tulku Rinpoche was a revered Guru of the Karma Kagyu tradition; he was a master of the six yogas of Naropa. My great uncle Taruk Tulku Rinpoche was a revered Guru of Sakya tradition; he was a Tantric master and a Tibetan Amchi doctor. My own previous incarnation, Lama Karma Kunchog Tenzing, was a scholar, astrologer and yogi of the Karma Kagyu lineage and abbot of Zuru monastery in Tibet. As a young boy, I was recognized as the true incarnation of Lama Karma Kunchog Tenzing by Jetrung Rinpoche of the Nyingma tradition, who was head of Jetrung Gumpa in Zadoh district, Tibet, by the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa Rangjung Rigpe Dorje and by Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche. Because my previous incarnations were as Karma Kagyu Lamas, I have deep feeling and love for the Karma Kagyu lineage. In fact, I have raised funds to rebuild Zuru Monastery in Tibet.

However, unless you are an advanced practitioner, you should not mix different traditions, lineages, and teachings because you do not know how to make sense of them in a deeply meaningful way. It is unwise and unnecessary to mix practices, taking from here, taking from there; to do so is to create confusion within your own practice. Generally, people in the West, even people who have studied the Dharma for years, are a bit skeptical about the importance of Dharma traditions and lineages. Nonetheless, I strongly believe it is important to practise within a tradition, to follow the lineages of that tradition, and to practise in accordance with them. An eclectic mix of teachings and practices is a recipe for confusion that will in all probability impede progress on the spiritual path. I think some Western people develop a rebellious attitude when Dharma teachers like me say this; they think we are trying to control their minds by persuading them that the only worthwhile tradition is our own personal

tradition. But we say it out of concern for the student that he or she will drown in a sea of confusion. I am certainly not interested in controlling the mind of anyone else; I am only interested in controlling and subduing my own mind so that I can become a good vehicle for following to the path of Buddha.

Organizing your Dharma practice

Ask yourself questions about the state of your Dharma practice and where it is at this point in your life. Ultimately you have to take responsibility of your own Dharma practice. The teacher is not going to practise for you. If you do not practise Dharma, no teacher anywhere can transform you into a Buddha. According to the Buddhist teaching of *Tathagatagarba*, we all have Buddha nature naturally, and we are all destined to become a Buddha sometime in the future, but there is no Enlightenment without Dharma practice. Buddha said life is like a dream. It is as transient as a flash of lightning; twenty, forty, sixty, eighty years pass as quickly as clouds moving across the sky. We think there is time, but there is not. We will all die one day. We have to be serious Dharma practitioners now. Organizing our own Dharma practice means being aware of time: what practices do we have the time and energy to do before death comes?

Annual retreats

I request that my students do a month-long retreat each year; the minimum is ten days. If you wait for the time for to do retreat, the time will never come. You should make plans for a retreat and do it as soon as possible. I have seen people talk about doing a three-year retreat for three years instead of actually doing the retreat. If you are truly committed to doing a three-year retreat, the opportunity will come to you: you can make it happen and it will, because there are generous Dharma friends who would like to help your retreat. At this point, I would like to tell you the inspiring story of Zava Damdin Rinpoche of Mongolia, who completed a four-year Vajra Bhairava Yamantaka retreat in a tiny yurt at his monastery in the Gobi desert, where the weather gets very cold in winter, down to -40°C in December. Out of the blue, Zava Rinpoche's root master Guru Deva Rinpoche told him to do the retreat, without much time for preparation. Zava Damdin Rinpoche successfully completed the retreat due to

his deep commitment and unbelievable guru devotion to Guru Deva Rinpoche. The Venerable Geshe Losang Thupten Rinpoche and I visited Zava Damdin Rinpoche every summer or autumn, and gave him advice and support. Zava Damdin Rinpoche is the only Lama who has done a four-year retreat in Mongolia since the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991.

I personally have been very fortunate when it comes to retreats. I did my first retreat when I was fifteen, a Vajra Bhairava Yamantaka retreat with my teachers Geshe Thubten Wangyal and Jhampa Kelsang Rinpoche. We did the retreat at Kailash Kuti house, named after holy Mt. Kailash in Tibet. It is located in the mountains above the hill station town of Dalhousie in the foothills of the Himalayas. I have two ways of looking back at this retreat. On the one hand, it was very powerful, amazing actually. On the other hand, it was mentally and physically exhausting, difficult beyond words. Indeed, my teachers advised me not to talk about my experience. My teacher Geshe Thupten Wangyal was very strict and highly disciplined; we would start our first session at 4:30 A.M.; we practised four sessions a day, with our last session ending around 9:00 P.M. – not much sleep for a young boy Lama! We ate very simple food, such as rotis, rice and potatoes. It was very cold in the winter, with lots of snow: the only source of heat was a little wood stove. I was really afraid that we would be attacked by jungle leopards in the night; one female would come very close to our retreat house, and when it was a full moon, she would roar through the night. I was nervous about going out for walks at nighttime, but my teacher told us that a roaring leopard was a good omen. After that, I was excited whenever the leopard came near our retreat house. My second retreat was Naro Khachod Vajrayogini. It too was very powerful; a good experience overall. I had wonderful dreams. It is always very inspiring when one has an opportunity to do a retreat with one's teacher.

Guidance for your practice

Whenever you have important questions regarding your Dharma practice, you should not hesitate to contact me. As I would like to do more retreats in the near future, I may be unavailable to answer your questions directly. In this case, please contact a senior student at

one of my centres.

Initiating into Tantra

There are different ways of receiving initiations. An initiation may be taken purely as a blessing, for protection or healing. Most of the thousands of people in Tibet, in India and in the West who flock to the Kalachakra initiations take the initiation as a blessing and to create auspicious conditions for the future. In order to receive a Tantric initiation as an actual empowerment, and not just as a blessing, you are required to take Refuge and Bodhisattva vows before the initiation. When you take a higher Tantric initiation, you are additionally required to take Tantric vows. Traditionally in Tibet, students completed the five foundation practices before taking a higher Tantric initiation, but this tradition has been relaxed somewhat in the West. I advise my students to do the foundation practices whenever they are ready. The five foundation practices are one, taking Refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha; two, Guru Yoga; three, Vajrasattva practice; four, prostrations; and five, Mandala Offerings.

If you feel you are not ready to take Tantric initiations, then you should not feel under pressure to do so. In truth, the practices of *Sutrayana*, *Lamrim*, and the Three Principal Aspects of the Path (Renunciation, *Bodhichitta*, and *Shunyata*) are more important practices. When you are ready to take initiations, you could opt to take one or two initiations, as you wish; if you are not sure which initiation you should take, ask your teachers.

Here is list of *Kriya Tantra* and *Yoga Tantra* initiations that I offer. I am not suggesting you take all of them.

- • Green Tara, for overcoming fear, removing obstacles, gaining great protection and liberation
- • Four armed Chenrezig, the compassion of all the Buddhas, emanated as a deity
- • Chenrezig Gyalwa Gyatso, for developing Great Compassion and generating the clear light of bliss and Enlightenment
- • Black Manjushri, for the cultivation of wisdom, healing, and good health
- • Chöd initiation, for cutting attachment and self-grasping, experiencing the two truths, and cultivating *Bodhichitta* and *Shunyata*

- • Hayagriva, the emanation of Chenrezig and Buddha Amitabha, for healing sickness, gaining protection, and generating Great Compassion
- • Maha Vairochana, for the purification of negative Karma and the development of luminosity and clear light towards Enlightenment
- • Manjushri, the wisdom of all the Buddhas, emanated as a deity
- • Medicine Buddha, for healing the body and mind; potentially one could become a healer
- • Sarasvati, Buddha of wisdom and creative arts such as music, writing, and painting
- • Singhamukha, for healing and exorcism, overcoming negative forces, and becoming fearless
- • Vajrapani, the power of all the Buddhas, emanated as a deity
- • Vajrasattva, for the purification of Karmic obscurations to realizations
- • White Mahakala, the Buddha of Great Compassion for all living beings, for generating wealth and prosperity and fulfilling all your wishes and dreams

Here is a list of the *Anuttaryogatantra* initiations that I offer. Again, one deity practice will suffice:

- • Chittamani Tara, the highest form of Tara practice, with generation and completion stages to Enlightenment
- • Yamantaka, the wrathful aspect of Manjushri, and the opponent power to death and the *maras*. Prominent commentaries express this practice is the most powerful practice for Enlightenment
- • Guhyasamaja, for the cultivation of the illusory body, highest and condensed sacred Vajrayana practise.
- • Heruka Five Deities according to the Mahasiddhi Vajra Ghantapa tradition, for the cultivation of clear light and bliss, and Enlightenment within this life
- • Heruka Body Mandala according to the Mahasiddhi Vajra Ghantapa tradition –

the same as the Heruka Five Deity practice

- • Vajrayogini (Naro Khachod) according to Mahasiddhi Naropa. Prominent commentaries express this is the most sacred *Yidam* (*Yidam* = heart bound) practice according to the Gelugpa and Sakyapa lineages

Instead of taking additional initiations, I suggest you focus on the deity practice(s) you have already received. If you are a first timer and fairly new to Tantric practice, you could take one or two *Kriya Tantra* initiations for the deities of your choice. There is a Tibetan Buddhist tradition of choosing a personal deity, a *Yidam*. If you are not sure how to choose a personal deity or *Yidam*, consider which deity you feel most connected to, and seek advice from your Guru.

When you decide to take an initiation, you should find out what are the daily commitments and vows. Some teachers do not explain the commitments at the time of the initiation. Later, you hear commitments were given but you are not sure what they were; should this happen, you need to find out and then keep them as best you can.

Keeping your Dharma practice pure and not giving up when you face a spiritual crisis

We try to keep our physical body health by exercising regularly, eating nutritious food and drinking pure water. Likewise, we should keep our Dharma practice healthy without contaminating it with our own mental defilements. As human practitioners of Dharma, we make mistakes; from time to time we may break our vows and commitments. When we do so, we feel that in some way we have let down our Gurus, and the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. We may have faced many obstacles due to unfavourable conditions and lack of time and energy, but at the same we also know that we have made lifetime commitments. We try to practise every day, but sometimes we feel that the practices have become routine recitations, an obligation and no more. This can happen especially when our lives are too busy and we are very tired. When this happens, we need to make time for a retreat to renew our commitments and refresh our practice. When we break our vows and commitments, we should do purification such as Vajrasattva mantras, prostrations, and reciting the Sutra of the Three Heaps

by chanting the names of the thirty-five Buddhas. Those of us who have done retreats on Vajrayogini, Yamantaka or other *Anuttarayogatantra* practices could do self-initiation as a method of purification for broken *Samaya* and commitments. Do not think your practice is no longer worth the effort just because you have broken your commitments; do not abandon your commitments and daily practice; just pick up where you left off. My kind teacher, the most holy Tara Tulku Rinpoche said, "If you forget to eat breakfast, you don't give up there and then. The next day, you go ahead and eat breakfast. Simple."

Our Dharma practice could become weakened for a number of reasons. One contributing factor is the state of our mind. If your commitment and devotion are not well grounded, not solid, you could be influenced by others who are fearful and confused about their own Dharma practice. These days it is easy to get confused about Dharma practice and the teacher-student relationship. Some of the confusion has arisen from inexperienced Western teachers who lack skill and experience in how to teach and guide Dharma students. But a big part of the confusion has been caused by the Eastern teachers, who unfortunately have imported their sectarian views to Western Dharma communities. I alluded to this earlier. Certain groups condemn other groups, and certain teachers condemn other teachers. Not only do they condemn each other's practices, but they even condemn the personal deities that others practise. People become superstitious, and act in a ridiculous and silly manner. If we take Refuge to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, the Three Jewels will protect us. We don't need to be worried about spirits harming us. Machig Labdron, the famous enlightened Tibetan Chöd master said, "There is no demon or bad spirit outside of our mind; the real demons and bad spirits are your own confused and superstitious mind." Milarepa, the equally famous enlightened Tibetan yogi said, "If you think evil spirits will harm you, then they could because you imagine they are real; otherwise, there are no evil spirits; it is your entire mind."

The Buddha always said one must use a logical mind, and not practise with blind faith. There are three Tibetan sayings that express this:

GANG ZAG LA MA TAN CHOLA TAN means one should not rely on a teacher based on blind

faith, but should instead contemplate the Dharma and rely on Dharma. It means that there are no human beings who are not fallible; human beings make errors, but the Dharma is always reliably correct;

TSEG LA MA TAN DON LA TAN means one should not rely merely on words of others, because words are unreliable and easily misinterpreted; one should instead contemplate on the deep meaning of what is being said;

DRANG DON LA MA TAN NEY DON LA TAN means do not rely on relative truths, but contemplate absolute teaching and absolute truth.

Dharma study on line

In many ways the computer and the Internet have made our lives simultaneously easier and busier. Forever Googling, Emailing, playing online games, there is always the danger that we could become Internet junkies. We can even feed our addiction by visiting Dharma sites. There is a lot of Dharma information on the Internet, some of it excellent, some of it not so good. It could be helpful to study Dharma online, but when we do so, we risk losing our connection to the living, breathing human beings around us. Computers lack the human touch. From time to time, we all need to sit down with our Guru and our Sangha friends to share our Dharma practice, do Pujas and have a cup of tea together. This does not happen when we are glued to a computer; cyberspace can be lonely and isolating.

Children and the Dharma

Children are our future. We must think how to educate our children in the Dharma. Buddhist parents must not neglect their children's Dharma education; I have seen too many Western Dharma parents who don't give enough Dharma education to their children; they are too soft and too concerned that their children may become rebellious if they are strict with them. They take a laissez-faire attitude, hoping that one day their children will magically take up a Dharma practice just because they were given a good impression of Buddhism when they were young. If this happens, great, but in my view it is important that children have some formal instruction about the Dharma when they are young. Early Dharma education will

remain in their mind stream for the rest of their life. I personally am so thankful to my grandfather, who always took such good care for me and who gave me a good opportunity to study and practise Dharma, even when we had to go through so much suffering escaping from Tibet and then struggling in India as poor Refugees.

Nowadays we have many worries about children. There is so much violence passing as entertainment. In my opinion, children should not watch destructive and violent movies, play violent video games or visit unsuitable websites on the Internet. Parents need to put limits on what sort of things their children watch. I think a lot of the sites on the Internet are a kind of drug, just as addictive as the ones that are swallowed, injected, or smoked.

Right livelihood and Dharma finances

Right livelihood is one of the aspects of the eightfold noble path; it is a Buddhist principle that it is important that we as Dharma practitioners practise right livelihood. We must not hurt other people and animals, and we must make the best use of the earth's resources, in ways that do not do social and environmental damage. (The Venerable Walpola Rahula clearly explains the eightfold path and other fundamental tenets of Buddhism in his excellent introductory text, *What the Buddha taught*; I highly recommend it.) Buddha was so kind: he gave detailed advice in the *Sutras* on how to organize our Dharma life and Dharma finances. The Buddha said lay people should think about their finances, earmarking funds for their family, putting something aside for emergencies, and saving a little for their old age. We should also put money aside to study the Dharma and do retreats as well. It is not a requirement of Dharma practice that practitioners be poor: being poor does not make you a better Dharma person. The point is to not be attached to the material things you have, but to just enjoy them. When you are facing poverty, you can't help yourself, you can't help your family, and you can't help others.

However, when a Dharma practitioner has ample material resources, he or she is in a position to practise generosity by using discretionary income to help others. I would like to suggest that you, as my Dharma students, either donate a certain amount of your income to your Dharma centre or do volunteer work for it. You should likewise donate money or time to worthy causes in your community. I request that you support Gaden Relief Projects, which has been active for

25 years, providing medical treatments, health clinics, shelters (yurts) for single homeless mothers in Mongolia, and installations for solar energy. We should become socially engaged Dharma persons, we should become socially engaged Buddhists. When we do, it will be awesome!

In the above pages, I have given advice to and set up guidelines for my students and for Dharma students in general. I do not claim for a moment that what I have said is absolutely correct, but I have said it with sincerity and the best of intention. I am not trying to judge who is and who is not qualified as Dharma teacher or student. I am trying to help students who wish to find the right Dharma teacher, improve their student-teacher relationship, and deepen their Dharma practice. I have no desire to promote myself as a great teacher and gather more students. I have wonderful Dharma students and Dharma friends in Canada, Australia, the USA and Mongolia. I am very proud of them for practising Dharma for many years and doing so much humanitarian work. I have appointed half dozen of my senior students as Dharma teachers, and they are doing wonderful job.

Zasep Tulku Rinpoche, Canada, 2013