

Relying on the Guru

By Yangsi Rinpoche

From the general advice on the kind of attitude with which to rely upon the spiritual teacher according to the *Lamrim Chenmo*, there are nine points, or nine ways in which to devote yourself to the spiritual teacher.

The first of these nine points is the instruction to abandon your sense of independence and develop a sense of reliance or devotion toward your spiritual teacher that is like an obedient son or daughter. You should have the mental attitude that allows your spiritual teacher to guide you without resistance. Being obedient here means making sure that the way in which you think and the way in which you act are harmonious with the wish of the spiritual teacher. Sometimes the teacher will give you certain advice as to what to do or what not to do. Even if from your point of view that particular advice does not appear appropriate or does not seem to fulfill the necessity of the situation, for the sake of being able to train your mind in the practice of pure devotion, you should be able to give up your interest and follow that advice.

Many of the disciples who serve Lama Zopa Rinpoche can be considered as examples of disciples who give up independence and freedom like an obedient child. When you serve Rinpoche, you give up your interest in sleep. You give up your interest in food. And you give up your interest in time for yourself. If you want to serve Rinpoche, you have to be able to give up all these things.

Upon encountering a pure, virtuous friend, you should think: "What can I do to fulfill the wishes of my spiritual teacher?" You should think like this, rather than being concerned with what you want or what you need. Although at first it may feel like you are giving up a lot – your freedom, your independence, your own interests, and so forth – indirectly, this is the very best way of taking care of yourself. This kind of attitude parallels that of the bodhisattvas, whose only thought is to benefit others, whose attitude embodies the altruism of having totally renounced self to cherish others. By thinking only of others, they have taken care of themselves completely.

The second point from the general advice on devoting

yourself to your spiritual teacher is that your mind of devotion to your teacher should be unshakeable like a vajra. When you practice devotion, it shouldn't be only for a week, or a month, or at the most a year. Your devotion shouldn't be subject to limitations of time and circumstance. It should be as stable and unchanging as a vajra. If you do not have that vajra-like quality in your devotion, then if someone comes along and tells you that you are just wasting your time, you may be swayed.

The third point is that your mind of devotion to the spiritual teacher should be like the earth. Just as the ground carries all existence, and all things are born and grow on it, in the same way, you should develop the strength of mind willing to shoulder the responsibility of fulfilling the wishes and advice of the spiritual teacher. You should aspire to develop the mind that is never tired of the advice of the spiritual teacher, or tired of the next thing to do. But please understand that having earth-like devotion doesn't mean that you have to actually be able to carry out everything that the spiritual teacher wishes. What it means is that mentally, from your side, you should be determined to fulfill as much of the advice of the spiritual teacher as you possibly can. This means that when the spiritual teacher asks you to do something, you do not think "Why do I have to do that? My teacher could do it himself." Regardless of how great or small the task, you should maintain a mind like the earth, fully prepared to bear the complete responsibility for fulfilling the advice of your spiritual teacher.

The fourth general point of advice is that your devotion be stable like a mountain. In trying to fulfill the wishes or advice of the spiritual teacher, you are certain to incur both physical and mental hardships. Rather than allowing your sense of devotion to decline under this strain, you should maintain it with the endurance of a mountain. Sometimes in Tibetan we say that when our stomachs are full and the sun is shining, we have the complete appearance of being a very good practitioner. But, when hardships come, we show the aspect of being a totally worldly person. Instead of a type of devotion that is subject to the conditions of a particular situation, you must aspire to

cultivate devotion that is stable like a mountain, regardless of the difficulties you may experience.

The fifth point of advice is to cultivate an attitude of devotion that is like the devotion of a servant to the world. This advice counteracts the attitude whereby one wants to do selective service – only wanting to serve in the immediate circle of the spiritual teacher, not wanting to do distant jobs, and only wanting to do those jobs that are high-profile. In the expression of your devotion to your spiritual teacher, you should be able to follow every piece of advice regardless of whether you think it is good or bad, or whether it's near or distant. Your service should be without limitations and conditions. When you are very new on the spiritual path, you may experience the pitfall of wishing only to offer service in the immediate area of the spiritual teacher, where you will be recognized by others. This act of service, however, is completely warped by the eight worldly dharmas.

The sixth point of advice is to develop devotion that is like a sweeper. This means that you should offer service to the spiritual teacher free of the mind of superior complexes. For example, if your spiritual teacher doesn't know anything about computers, and you offer service with an attitude of pride in your superior knowledge of computers, you are not fulfilling this advice. When you offer service, you must offer service with a mind that is totally free of thoughts of feeling superior and so forth. You must hold your spiritual teacher as the most supreme in every respect, and offer your service with that kind of attitude.

The seventh point of advice is to express your devotion with a mind like that of a vehicle that carries every load, no matter how great. In fulfilling the wishes of the spiritual teacher or in undertaking the advice of the spiritual teacher, you must aspire to be able to take on the most difficult, the most undesirable tasks.

The eighth point is having devotion to your teacher that is like a dog's. Whether you treat a dog badly or treat it well, this animal will remain totally devoted to you. In the same way, in the course of your relationship with your spiritual teacher, even if that teacher totally ignores you, doesn't give you any particular attention, doesn't hold you in any particular regard, and so forth, rather than feeling unhappy or disturbed by this, you must not lose your sense of faith and respect. Above all you must not feel unhappy or negative about the situation. Sometimes you may feel, "I have offered so much time, so much service in fulfilling the wishes of the teacher; I've made many offerings, and yet this lama didn't even dedicate prayers

for me or bless me or greet me." Should such thoughts occur in your mind, they are transgressions of this particular point.

The last point is cultivating a sense of devotion that is like a ship, ready to come and go at any time. For example, if your spiritual teacher told you to leave McLeod Ganj in one of those terrible buses to Delhi right that very moment just to pick something up and come right back on the next bus, you must be willing to go, feeling no sense of difficulty, no sense of hesitation or resistance. Even if you end up in the very last seat on the bus, you should feel that it's no problem at all.

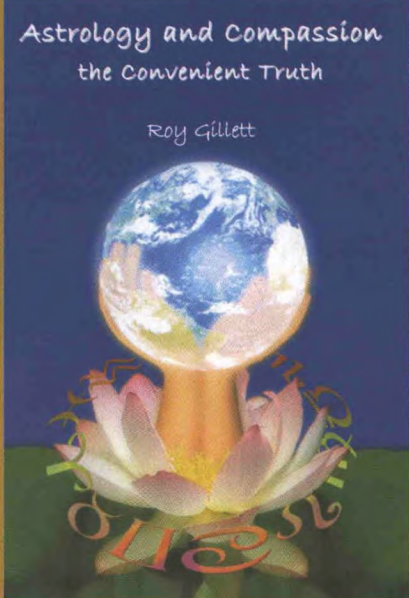
It is a great fortune to have the opportunity to practice these nine points of advice in relation to a spiritual teacher who embodies all of the ten qualities. Training our mind in these ways involves a lot of letting go of ourselves, and brings about enormous benefit.

These are the general instructions on how to express devotion to the spiritual teacher. ☸

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Roy Gillett



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