

Advice Regarding Gurus



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Advice Regarding Gurus



Introduction

In Tibetan Buddhist centers, you often witness a great deal of devotion displayed and communicated with respect to the guru (spiritual teacher). This short text introduces newcomers to this practice and explains why such emphasis is placed on establishing and maintaining a positive relationship with a guru.

How do we gain realizations?

It has been the experience of spiritual aspirants throughout the ages, that the quickest way to gain profound spiritual transformation is not only through study and meditation, but to combine these activities with devotion. Devotion renders your heart-mind soft and pure, thereby creating the inner conditions for your study and meditation to be successful.

It is akin to growing a beautiful garden. In order to make it bountiful, not only do you need to plant seeds and water them, but you also have to prepare the soil by removing weeds, stones, and adding fertilizer. You require sunshine as well.

Why in Tibetan Buddhism is devotion directed towards the guru?

The qualified guru acts as a living embodiment of the inner qualities you seek to develop.

The more you contemplate the qualities of your guru – such as his or her compassion, joy, wisdom and skill in imparting the teachings – the more your admiration and respect will grow.

If you devote yourself to a guru, while focusing on his or her qualities, great blessing will ensue. The pure mind of devotion will awaken in you all the enlightened qualities that you appreciate in your teacher. The greater the admiration and proper devotion; the quicker your spiritual progress will be.

However, the opposite is true as well. Once you have taken someone as your guru, if your mind becomes negative towards him or her, that negative mind will make further spiritual progress difficult; and the qualities that you have already developed will degenerate.

Much of your spiritual progress depends on your attitude towards your teacher, so don't jump in too fast. Although training to correctly devote oneself to a qualified guru is said to be a feature of the quickest path to enlightenment, proceed wisely. It takes time to cultivate a stable mind of devotion.

How do gurus benefit us?

Gurus share not only their knowledge of the spiritual path and the practices leading to inner growth, but also their inner experiences. They explain how to bring about transformation based on how it worked for them, and based on their particular spiritual tradition.

Why do I require a guru?

Although you can learn a lot from books, if you want to become excellent in any field of knowledge, you have the best chance of success if you have a qualified teacher. This is true if you aim to become a ballet dancer, a pianist, a pilot, a craftsman, a scientist, etc. – for just about anything. Likewise, if you aspire for spiritual development, your progress will be safer and faster if you are under the guidance of a qualified guru.

Do I need to take a guru now?

No. It is perfectly fine to take part in teachings or retreats without regarding the teacher as your guru. Simply respect the teacher as you would a professor sharing valuable information about inner development.

Later, when you know more and feel this is the spiritual tradition you wish to follow, you can then look for a suitable guru.

This relationship is the most important decision of your life. Once you have taken someone as your guru, it is a lifelong commitment with respect to that person. Therefore, take your time, check your prospective guru well and be sure you are ready to cultivate your mind in this way. There are extensive teachings on how to train yourself in thought and action with respect to your guru for greatest benefit and in order to avoid obstacles to your spiritual development. A list of helpful resources on this topic can be found below.

How do I establish a guru-disciple relationship?

This can be done by directly asking the teacher to become your guru or simply by making the determination: “From now on, I will relate to this person as my guru. I will put into practice whatever

he or she teaches and, when needed, I will request personal advice.”

It is important to know that if you take an initiation, oral transmission, or vows from someone, you automatically establish a guru-disciple relationship with that person. Therefore, it is advised not to take an initiation, oral transmission, or vows unless you feel confident that you can commit to this kind of relationship with that person.

What should I do before choosing a guru?

Gain some understanding of the spiritual journey that you are about to undertake, realize the immensity of the task, and become familiar with the teachings on guru devotion according to Tibetan Buddhism, so that you fully understand this aspect of your spiritual training. Then, humbly look for a qualified guru.

What qualifications should I look for in a guru?

There are many sets of qualities listed in classic Buddhist literature for various levels of gurus. It is good to study them. You can start with any of the references listed on p. 8.

For a beginner, it is sufficient if your prospective guru is endowed with good ethics, compassion, has more spiritual knowledge than yourself, lives by the principles that he or she teaches and is someone with whom you feel there is good communication.

What qualities should you have as a student?

You should be honest, open minded, have great aspiration for inner development and be ready to put the spiritual advice you receive into practice.

How many gurus can you have?

You can have as many as you feel are beneficial. Still, at the beginning, it is better to have only one main guru. If you ask for advice from many teachers, you may get different instructions and end up confused.

How do I appreciate the guru's kindness?

We hold as dear the persons that benefit us in our life such as our parents, partners, friends, etc. who only bring us temporary benefit.

The guru helps us in a much deeper way. He or she leads us to experience deep inner peace in this life, a good after-life, liberation from all our disturbing emotions forever, and, finally, to the blissful omniscient state of a buddha.

Thus, the benefit that the guru bestows on us is incredibly far-reaching. It is in that sense that their kindness is incommensurable.

What if my guru asks me to do something that I don't understand, or am unable to do?

Respectfully, ask for clarification. If you are unable to do what is advised, sincerely explain to your guru why you cannot do so; avoid getting upset.

What if I am having a problem with my guru?

If you find yourself in a difficult situation with your guru and are unable to work it out, meet with an experienced Dharma friend for help to skillfully understand and respond, according to Dharma. If you find the situation beyond your ability to transform it

into the spiritual path, you can seek guidance from the Center Director or Spiritual Program Coordinator at your nearest FPMT Center.

How can I learn more about this topic?

The following resources can be acquired through the Foundation Store on the FPMT website: shop.fpmt.org

Books

The Heart of the Path: Seeing the Guru as Buddha, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand, pp. 251-300,

by Pabongka Rinpoche

Fifty Stanzas on the Spiritual Teacher, by Aryashura with commentary by Geshe Ngawang Dhargey

The Fulfillment of All Hopes: Guru Devotion in Tibetan Buddhism, by Lama Tsongkhapa, translated by Gareth Sparham

Wise Teacher, Wise Student, by Alexander Berzin

Courses

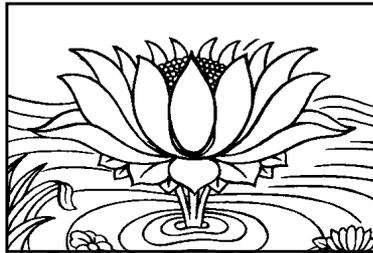
Discovering Buddhism, Module 4: The Spiritual Teacher

Living in the Path: Guru is Buddha

Conclusion

Wishing to reach enlightenment for the benefit of all living beings is the most beautiful thing you can do with your life and to have a guru on this fantastic inner journey is the most precious thing.

The inner connection with your guru will grow naturally over the years; as will your gratitude when you start having realizations. Be well and enjoy your steps on the path!



Colophon & Credits

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Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition



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