

Advice given during teachings by Geshe Tenzin Tenphel.

Monday morning, 23 April 2001

We must examine whether or not we have interferences and, if we find that we do, we must eliminate them. We can be quite sure that we will find that we have the condition of much familiarity with the afflictions! In general most of us here do not have misleading friends given that we live in a Dharma center, but we should examine whether or not this is our case because, as the Tibetans say, "Where the Dharma flourishes, the maras flourish." Therefore, because we live in a Dharma center, while our Dharma flourishes we may also experience many interferences such as being influenced by misleading friends.

In the past there was a lama from Drepung Monastery called Uma Denpe Dronme who said "Negative friends do not necessarily appear before us with horns and fangs!" If this were the case we would naturally stay away from such people, whereas, misleading friends are often those who appear to be friendly and charming but in fact take us away from our Dharma studies and practice. When this occurs, we have to free ourselves from them as otherwise it will be easy for us to be influenced by them due to the latencies of actions deposited on our mental continuum. This is because we experience results similar to the cause experientially and results similar to the cause functionally, meaning that we engage in actions that we familiarized with in past lives. In this way, our negative actions, rather than our positive actions, increase. In order to ensure that this does not happen, we need the assistance of merit.

When I was a monk in Sera Je Monastery we made daily prayers for the purpose of overcoming interferences to our studies. In addition, we made other prayers in relation to the debating class which were also for the purpose of eliminating interferences. We would also regularly ask for divinations and asked the lamas what could be done to clear away our interferences, but in spite of all this many monks did experience interferences. This is my own experience. You who have come here from all over the world to study here at the Institute have done so while bearing many hardships. Through understanding that there will be many difficulties, it is important to make a strong determination to bear these hardships so as to be able to continue your studies. In addition, you should constantly pray to be successful in your studies as many people are watching you and hoping to emulate you in the future. I am mentioning this because I know all of you are putting much effort into your studies.

Being here in the West there is not the support of daily group prayer sessions that there is in the monasteries. In spite of this, even though we only do two Guru Pujas and one Tara Puja each month, still not every one participates! Since there are only these three pujas it is important that everyone come as these are not done just for one's own purpose but are done for the sake of all sentient beings and are therefore of great benefit. Making prayers just for oneself is like someone sweeping the floor with a single strand of grass. On the other hand, just as sweeping a floor with all the strands of a broom is much more effective in removing dust, so too is making prayers as a group. I would therefore like to encourage all of you to come to these pujas.

While living in a monastery, I saw that there were monks who came to the pujas and actually recited the words of the pujas and others who came but did not recite the words.

However, I noticed that those who actually recited the words of the prayers did not experience many obstacles, whereas those who did not recite the words of the prayers constantly experienced difficulties. If one actually does the pujas, one will be able to bring one's studies to completion and then be able to benefit others. In this way, one's time as a student will have been of great benefit.

Tuesday morning, 24 April 2001

Yesterday it was said that misleading friends do not have fangs and horns on their head, rather they smile at us and so forth. If we dedicate ourselves to studying, thinking, and meditating without distraction this would be the very best. However, it is important to remember that we are beginners and so it is easy to become stressed and therefore to easily become angry. We should be careful to avoid this by making a regular daily schedule of meditation, study, rest, exercise, and so forth. In this way, we will be able to continue our studies.

As beginners we have latencies from previous lives that cause us to be distracted and so forth, therefore, if we push too much to study, read the texts, and so forth we will quickly exhaust our energy. This can be avoided by making a reasonable schedule of daily activities. I myself saw this in the monasteries where some of the younger monks would initially put a great amount of time and energy into their studies but the older monks would take this as a sure sign that after a few years those monks would entirely give up their studies. For example, there was a monk I lived with who, when he had to do his turn working in the kitchen, would be found already studying very early in the morning. Older monks predicted that this monk would not succeed and, in fact, after some years he gave up studying. This is because, having depleted his energy, he became tired due to forcing himself too much.

Therefore, it is important that you students make a balanced schedule of study and rest so as to avoid the risk of giving it all up. When the body is tired, you should not force yourself to do more than you are capable of. There are, of course, exceptional cases such as Lama Zopa Rinpoche whose mind is so strong that his body can keep on going. I myself, when we were studying Lama Tsongkhapa's *Treatise Differentiating the Interpretable and Definitive*, would stay up very late debating and would then go home and recite texts even until 2:30 AM. I went on like this for about two years but then began to feel pressure in my chest and shoulders as if someone were sitting on me. I understood that this came from studying too much and that if I went on in this way I would risk giving it all up. So I decided to study in a more relaxed way so that I would be able to continue my studies until the end.

If you are given the choice of studying for five years or fifteen years it is better to choose the longer period of time. By choosing to study in a short period, one needs to apply great energy to one's study but this can provoke chronic problems in the body. Therefore, we should keep a long-term vision thinking "I will continue to study for a long time, just like a river flows on in time." If we do this, we will guarantee that we have enough energy to continue, whereas if we do not we will experience interferences to our studies, such as illnesses and so forth. As we all know it is very important to have good health. Thus, the best is to have a long-term vision in one's studies. Personally I think it is preferable to make a simple program that includes study, meditation, relaxation, and so forth in order to continue, given that our body and energy are limited.