



# OUR TASHI CHOLING COMMUNITY



# INTRODUCTION





### About this Booklet

This booklet contains an overview of our Tashi Chöling Community Structure. ***Please feel free to take a copy with you!*** Tashi Chöling is here for everyone, and everyone is invited to participate and get involved!

### About Tashi Chöling

Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche founded Tashi Chöling in 1980 and began building the statues and temples here at the instruction of his own teacher, His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche, Jigdral Yeshe Dorje. Gyatrul Rinpoche describes the purpose of Tashi Chöling as follows:

*Tashi Chöling is here to benefit all beings. As a place to practice and learn the dharma, the Buddha's teachings, it is for everybody. The statues, paintings, books, and other sacred objects are here as a blessing for everybody, so that everyone can make a connection. The big Vajrasattva statue down in the garden, it is so blessed! Even just to see it brings benefit, whether the one looking at it is a man or a woman, rich or poor, old or young—even the birdies and bugs in the garden that see it, it really has special blessings. It benefits everybody. Even the wind that blows by the statues, whoever it touches afterwards, they receive some benefit, some blessing. That is the real meaning or purpose of Tashi Chöling, to bring benefit to everyone.*

Accordingly, everyone who makes any kind of connection with Tashi Chöling, even just catching sight of a statue or spending a moment or two making a prayer in one of the temples, is part of the community here. We are always so glad to see in our Guest Book that we have had visitors from all over the world, making a connection to this sacred place and fulfilling Rinpoche's original intent in establishing it. Whether you are a one-time visitor stopping by to see the statue garden, someone who comes once a year to attend one of our annual retreats, or a local who comes here frequently, all are part of Tashi Chöling's community.

### Everyone is Welcome Here!

In the Buddhist tradition, any connection with a sacred place is a blessing, and to participate or contribute in any way shows one's appreciation. Participating and contributing to the upkeep of Tashi Chöling connects one more deeply to the wisdom and compassion it represents, which are said to be the fundamental nature of all beings. Thus, everyone is encouraged to enjoy the temple and grounds, make prayers and do spiritual practices here (from any tradition based on the principals of wisdom and compassion), and contribute or participate in whatever way you are inspired to. Offerings can be made in the statue garden anytime or in the temples when they are open during events. Traditional offerings include fruit, flowers, incense, and so on, but anything clean and pleasing can be offered. There are donation boxes near the garden gate and in the temple if you wish to make a monetary offering (or you can donate through our website anytime), and all donations are used to support the temple and its activities. Please join our mailing list by signing up in order to be kept updated on events and news at Tashi Chöling and to receive the messages and teachings for the community frequently sent out by Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche. Send an email to [tcnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:tcnewsletter@gmail.com) to sign up for our mailing list.



# SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR



## Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche

Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche is the spiritual director of Tashi Chöling as well as several other centers, including Orgyen Dorje Den in Alameda, California; Dorje Ling in Portland; and the Yeshe Nyingpo center in Ensenada, Mexico. Born in 1925 near the Tibetan border with China, Gyatrul Rinpoche was recognized at the age of seven as a tulku of Dhomang Monastery in Tibet. In 1959, as the Cultural Revolution impacted Tibet, Rinpoche fled for India and lived there for twelve years. During his initial years of exile in Buxa, India, he served as an elected representative of the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism who had congregated there.



Requested by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche to move to the West in order to spread the Buddhist Dharma, Gyatrul Rinpoche came to America in 1972. Rinpoche was appointed by His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche as the spiritual director and representative of the Yeshe Nyingpo centers on the west coast of the United States and of Tashi Chöling Center for Buddhist Studies in southern Oregon. In addition, the Ven. Gyatrul Rinpoche has been instrumental in founding Buddhist centers for study and practice in several other locations in the U.S. and abroad.

Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche is well-known for his wit and humor, his ceaseless compassion, his insight and genuine humility, and for presenting the traditional Tibetan Buddhist teachings in a way that is accessible and contemporary yet true to the traditions he embodies and upholds. Through uniquely skillful teaching techniques he continues to bring students to the profound Vajrayana path and provide the sublime guidance that is indispensable to its practitioners.



# OUR TASHI CHÖLING COMMUNITY



## Tashi Chöling Leadership

Rinpoche has recently indicated that he does not intend to name a spiritual heir or single leader for Tashi Chöling. Instead, he has appointed a group of teachers, a geku and assistants, board, staff, and other leaders who he expects to work together to guide Tashi Chöling into the future. He has said he also expects the entire sangha to work with the leaders in taking care of and supporting Tashi Chöling so that it can fulfill its mission and be of benefit to future generations.

From an excerpt of Rinpoche's March 20, 2017 teaching, "On a Spiritual Heir":

*People have been asking me, who will make all the decisions when I am gone? Who will take over when I die?*

*Actually, the centers already have leaders. You have teachers, you have gekus (disciplinarians), you have chant leaders and chopons, you have treasurers, presidents, board and staff members. How many years have you had these leaders? The Americans need to stand up and take care of their own dharma centers! I established these centers for the Americans, so it is on their heads. Everybody needs to stand up! After all these years, if you aren't standing up, it's shocking. Not just the leaders, but everyone needs to stand up and watch; stand up and help.*

*People want me to say "heir!" But I don't want to. That's not the choice I am making.*

*People keep asking me who is the one lama or one teacher or one leader for Tashi Chöling and the other dharma centers after I die. It is whoever can teach; whoever can practice; whoever has pure faith in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha! Whoever has real generosity. Whoever has true compassion for ALL sentient beings, and serves others with body, speech, and mind. Whoever has gone for refuge in the Three Jewels in order to bring their own greatest benefit as dharmakaya. Whoever has gone for refuge, sincerely and purely, with an altruistic motivation. Whoever helps to create representations of enlightened body, speech, and mind for the sake of beings.*

*Whoever studies, contemplates, and meditates on the dharma. Such people are bringing benefit to themselves and others.*

*Students sometimes ask, “Who’s going to take over the centers?” Nobody’s going to take over! You need to study, contemplate, and meditate on the dharma. As much as you can, please! Practice as much as you can, in order to bring about the ultimate result—one’s own greatest good as dharmakaya; the greatest good of others as rupakaya. Doing this, there is no “taking over.” Naturally there is just an increase in your good qualities. That’s the point! When you go to school, there isn’t any talk of “taking over,” is there? No. Just studying and learning whatever the teacher teaches. It’s the same with the centers. The real “taking over” is the knowledge and qualities that come from hearing, contemplating, and meditating on the dharma. Without that, there is no “taking over.” Until enlightenment, we need to “take over” in this pure, genuine way of improving ourselves and increasing our qualities by relying on the dharma.*

### **How We Can Support Each Other as a Community**

In accordance with Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche’s wishes that his American students run Tashi Chöling in the future, he has requested several sangha members to serve in the roles of teachers, staff, and board members. These people will support and provide guidance to the overall Tashi Chöling community through teaching, organizing retreats and other events, and overseeing the care and maintenance of the temple and grounds. In addition, Rinpoche has provided guidance to the entire sangha concerning what everyone can do to be an active member of the team taking care of Tashi Chöling and helping it flourish and grow so that it can serve the needs of future sangha for many generations to come.

The remaining pages of this booklet contain three emails that were sent out in Fall of 2016 concerning Tashi Chöling’s community structure and how we can all work together to support Tashi Chöling and each other. The sections are: (1) Tashi Chöling teachers, staff, and board; (2) the Geku and Assistant Geku Roles; and (3) the Role of the Sangha. Rinpoche also provided teachings for the second and third topics, and those are included in this booklet as well.

Finally, please feel free to contact any of the Tashi Chöling teachers, staff, board, and gekus named in this document in person or by email at [tashicholingconnection@gmail.com](mailto:tashicholingconnection@gmail.com). We welcome your suggestions, input, ideas, volunteer efforts, and involvement in taking care of Tashi Chöling. *Thank you!*



# TASHI CHÖLING

## TEACHERS,

## STAFF,

## AND BOARD



### Tashi Chöling Teachers, Staff, and Board

*Tashi Chöling's community is comprised of the "sangha" or "those who are intent on virtue." Within the sangha, there are those who hold specific roles of responsibility, namely the teachers and the members of the board and staff. The individuals holding these positions can be called both "leaders" and "servants" since their duties require them both to guide and to serve Tashi Chöling and the greater sangha, with the broadest intention of preserving the buddhist doctrine and benefitting beings. This document provides an explanation of these roles and how they work together to support Tashi Chöling.*

#### Tashi Chöling Teaching/Advising Staff:

The sangha members who are teachers or advisors at Tashi Chöling were all requested by Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche to teach and serve the sangha in this capacity. Their main task is, of course, to teach the Buddhist dharma in a pure, authentic, and traditional manner in accordance with Gyatrul Rinpoche's guidance. There are several people who currently serve in this role and several others whom Rinpoche has named as up-and-coming teachers or advisors. Current teachers and advisors and some of the topics they have taught include:

- **Lama Bruce Newman** leads the Marig Munsel 4-year program and teaches other Buddhist topics.
- **Lama Chonam** gives Vajrayana instruction, leads the Yeshe Lama and Chetsun Nyingtik retreats and meditation classes, and teaches other topics. He is an advisor for planning Tashi Chöling teachings and dharma programs. He is one of the vajra masters for regular practices.
- **Lama Les Collins** leads the Bardo retreat.
- **Mathew Small** leads the Ngondro retreat.
- **Sangye Khandro** gives Vajrayana instruction and Troma Nagmo cycle instruction, leads the Tröma, Yeshe Lama, Chetsun Nyingtik



retreats and meditation classes, and teaches other topics. She is an advisor for planning Tashi Chöling teachings and dharma programs. She is one of the vajra masters for regular practices.

### Tashi Chöling Staff

Rinpoche has stressed the importance of having a core group of organizers or staff members who oversee the general care and ongoing maintenance of the temple and grounds as well as ensure that regularly-scheduled practices are supported. He has recommended people who are present at Tashi Chöling on a regular basis and have the time to devote to day-to-day operations. Staff members also request help from other sangha members, as needed, to ensure that Tashi Chöling is cared for properly. The current Tashi Chöling staff members and their primary day-to-day roles in serving Tashi Chöling and the sangha are:

- **Ani Baba** oversees maintenance and cleaning of the main shrine room; she does the daily morning and protector practices for Tashi Chöling; she supports ritual music and trains others; she runs the Vimala pecha department and processes website orders; she offers statue-stuffing for sangha members on request.
- **Ani Yeshe** serves as head chopan at monthly practices and retreats. She helps coordinate and assist with East Wing cleaning. She also helps coordinate volunteers for other regular temple jobs such as polishing and making saffron rice.
- **Derek Ridler** helps oversee construction projects and maintenance activities, including coordinating volunteers for maintenance and cleaning; he also provides lama support.
- **Ila Reitz** oversees ritual activity at Tashi Chöling; she provides lama support and translation; she is the main coordinator for Vajrakilaya and Vajrasattva retreats; and she does overall event planning and scheduling.
- **Keith LaCoste** is the main Tashi Chöling umzed; he oversees ritual music and training of other umzeds and instrument players; he makes tormas and trains others in torma-making; he handles audio recordings of teachings in the temple; and he oversees all of the Vimala archives' digitization projects.

- **Lisbeth LaCoste** handles emails and other communications for Tashi Chöling; she oversees ritual drumming and trains others; she oversees the Vimala bookstore, website, and archives; she is the main retreat coordinator for Tashi Chöling's closed retreats; and she assists with overall event planning.
- **Mike Osugi** helps oversee construction projects and maintenance around the temple and grounds, including the water system and garden care.
- **Nick O'Connor** is Tashi Chöling's Geku (disciplinarian and Center coordinator); he oversees the staff; he oversees spending and does the bookkeeping; he helps with retreat coordination for our main two public retreats, Vajrakilaya and Vajrasattva.
- **Samantha Cheney** oversees grounds and facilities, including the water system; she offers retreat support, including coordinating culinary support for retreats and lamas; she manages room and board arrangements.
- **Shashi Reitz** offers lama support and translation.
- **Tony Reitz** helps oversee construction and other projects around Tashi Chöling.

### Tashi Chöling Board

The board is comprised of sangha members who have been requested by Rinpoche to assume responsibility for ensuring that the legal formalities and financial planning required by the IRS are appropriately accomplished every year in order to maintain Tashi Chöling's 501(c)3 non-profit status.

In that role, the board members serve the sangha in several ways:

- Oversee and conduct fundraising activities in order to make sure Tashi Chöling has the funds it needs to fulfill its mission, goals, and objectives.
- Establish a yearly budget and ensure that funds raised under Tashi Chöling's 501(c)3 status are spent for the purposes they were intended.

- Ensure that all activities at Tashi Chöling are within its non-profit mission, goals, and objectives and take into account both short-term and long-term needs of Tashi Chöling.
- Ensure that Tashi Chöling has an active insurance policy.
- Establish policies and guidelines that help protect Tashi Chöling and its sangha.

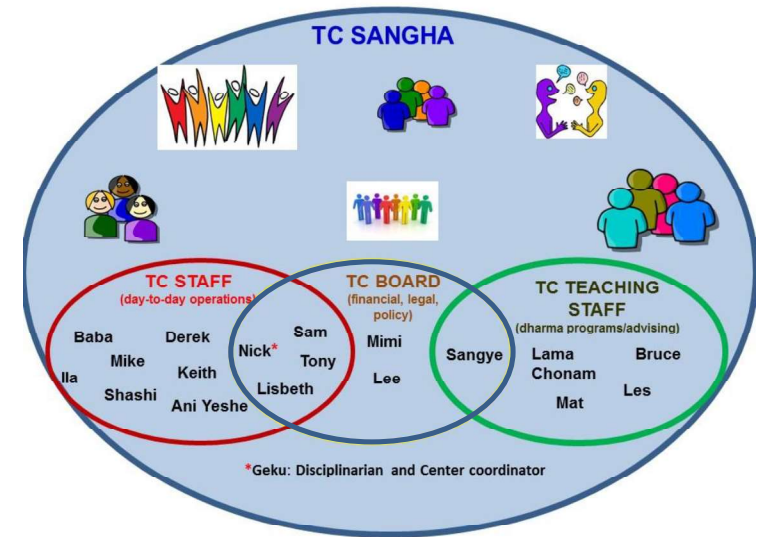
The current Tashi Chöling board members are Lee Furbeck, Lisbeth LaCoste, Mimi Hohenberg, Nick O'Connor, Samantha Cheney, Sangye Khandro, and Tony Reitz.

The board also has an executive committee that serves as board liaisons for the Tashi Chöling community—in particular, if anyone has a concern that affects one of the areas of the board's responsibility outlined above, they can come to a member of the executive committee to discuss it. In addition, the executive committee acts as consultants for teachers and other staff, where needed or requested, to help them ensure that their activities take into account all aspects of Tashi Chöling's interests that need to be considered. The executive committee members are: Tony, Lisbeth, Samantha, and Nick.



### TASHI CHÖLING COMMUNITY STRUCTURE AT-A-GLANCE

The graph below provides a pictorial view of our current Tashi Chöling Community Structure. The named individuals were requested by Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche to serve the sangha through teaching, organizing retreats and other events, and overseeing the care and maintenance of the temple and grounds:







# THE GEKU AND ASSISTANT GEKU ROLES



## The Geku and Assistant Geku Roles

One of the crucial positions in any Tibetan Buddhist monastery is that of the “geku,” which is usually translated as “disciplinarian.” As Rinpoche has defined it, the word literally means “requesting virtue”—“ge” is virtue; “ku” here means “requesting.” Therefore, in the broadest sense the role of the geku is to request the sangha to engage in virtuous conduct and avoid nonvirtue and to support them in these activities. The sangha must understand how to respect and follow the geku correctly, and the geku must have a pure intention coupled with experience and knowledge to guide the sangha toward virtue. With this, the gathering of sangha can fulfill its purpose, which is to act in accord with the dharma and benefit themselves and all beings.

In a traditional monastery, the geku not only would watch the conduct and behavior of the sangha and enforce the monastery’s rules, but he or she would be well-versed in every aspect of the monastery’s activities and rituals. At a glance, the geku would be able to tell if the offerings had been made correctly, for example, or if the umze (chant leader) were chanting properly and in accord with the tradition. Regarding the position of geku at Buddhist centers in general, at the October 16, 1980 Pacific Region Yeshe Nyingpo board meeting, Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche defined the role as follows: “The geku serves as Center Coordinator and supervises the maintenance of the center and its ritual objects to make sure they are ready when needed for teachings and ceremonies. He or she also sees to the needs of the resident and visiting lamas, provides liaison with other centers and the corporate officers, assigns other duties to the other officers as needed, and coordinates all activities of the center.” In essence, the geku is the “chief of staff” at a Buddhist center.

The current geku at Tashi Chöling is Nicholas O’Connor, who was appointed to the position by Rinpoche in 1993. He has subsequently been trained and guided by Rinpoche throughout the few decades on the many aspects of how to serve the sangha in this capacity in the unique context of a modern American dharma center. Rinpoche has made it clear in public statements and private conversations that he expects Nick to continue serving the sangha in the position of geku for the rest of his life. However, in light of Nick’s changing role based on the demands of his

health and energy, as well as the constant growth and expansion of Tashi Chöling's projects and programs, Nick's intention is to gradually hand over many aspects of his role to assistant gekus and other competent individuals, while he remains in more of an advisory position. Rinpoche has given his full support to this transition and mentioned that this is what they do in the traditional monasteries as well, with the elder or previous gekus guiding the younger. He says, "It's time for the young people to stand up, watch, and pay attention!"

Thus, with Rinpoche's encouragement and approval, Nick has appointed two people to step into the assistant geku role at Tashi Chöling, effective immediately: Ila Reitz and Lisbeth Duncan-LaCoste. These two individuals have, in fact, already been helping him with several aspects of the geku role as defined above. Their specific roles will be as follows:

- Ila will act as primary coordinator for the yearly Vajrasattva and Kilaya retreats as well as some other retreats and practice intensives. She will continue to oversee the care and preparation of ritual objects to make sure they are ready when needed for teachings and ceremonies. As the main announcer at the Vajrasattva and Vajrakilaya retreats and other events, she will provide guidance and suggestions to the sangha about behavior in the shrine room and on the grounds; and, in addition, she will help to oversee discipline, seating, and ritual instruments in the temple. She will continue to act as a liaison for visiting lamas and other centers.
- Lisbeth will be the primary coordinator for closed retreats such as Chetsun Nyingtik, Yeshe Lama, and Troma. She will provide liaison with other centers and corporate officers and help Nick and Ila with coordinating many of the activities of Tashi Chöling, including event and activities scheduling. Since she is present at the monthly pujas and most events, she can oversee in-temple discipline, seating, and ritual instruments for those events and retreats.

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*Lisbeth and Ila send the following message to the sangha:*

*Dear Dharma Family,*

*We want the sangha to know that we are very happy to try to be of service in these capacities as assistant gekus, and we look forward to continuing to work with everyone to keep the center and its activities running smoothly. Rinpoche himself has remarked again and again in recent years at how pleased he is by the growing harmony and discipline in the sangha as a whole—how everyone is practicing so well together these days, supporting each other, and being friendly and helpful. Thus, our goal is simply to support and encourage the sangha in its already well-established excellent conduct and habits of practice and be available to troubleshoot or offer reminders as needed.*

*We hope that everyone feels welcome to approach either of us if situations or issues arise that pertain to our newly defined roles. We also welcome feedback and discussion as we gain experience in these positions.*

*Lisbeth LaCoste and Ila Reitz*

*Please feel free to contact us at: [tashicholingconnection@gmail.com](mailto:tashicholingconnection@gmail.com)*

## *On the Geku*

Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche

August 25th, 2016

Everyone who comes to the dharma center comes for the same reason: Everybody comes here for the dharma. Whether you are young or old, rich or poor, pretty or handsome or ugly, smart or dumb, high or low makes absolutely no difference—everybody comes for the dharma. That means everybody comes to create virtue and purify nonvirtue. Therefore, everyone needs to conduct themselves with virtue. The dharma center has rules—what to do and what not to do. Is that because it is a prison? No. The dharma tradition, piece by piece and step by step, teaches you what is virtue and what is nonvirtue. The whole thing is for that. The rules at the center are to help you create virtue and avoid nonvirtue because that is the center's reason for being. The rules are to help you study and practice well, too. So everyone should know the rules and then follow them. That is each person's job. That is how we respect ourselves, respect each other, respect the center, respect our dharma brothers and sisters, and, bottom line, respect the Three Jewels, which are the source and foundation of all dharma, both the dharma of scripture and the dharma of realization.

The *geku* helps you with that. What is a *geku*? [The term is frequently translated as “disciplinarian” and in Tibet is the title given to the head disciplinarian in a monastery.] Look at the name—“*geku*” means “requesting virtue.” “Ge” is virtue; “ku” here means “requesting.” Therefore, the *geku* is the one who requests the sangha to act with virtue. That means if someone doesn't know the rules, the *geku* tells them what the rules are. If someone knows the rules but isn't following them, being a little bit naughty like a child, the *geku* reminds them like a mommy or daddy would remind their child. If someone is being really naughty, making obstacles or other stupid things, then the *geku* will act more wrathfully, just like a parent scolding or punishing their child for being bad or to keep them from harm. That is how the *geku* is always requesting everyone to act in a virtuous way and stay inside virtue.

The *geku* is there to watch and benefit each person—old or young, male or female, rich or poor, smart or dumb. Each person needs to listen to the *geku*, and the *geku* needs to watch each person. Not because they are a spy! The *geku* watches to see what you are doing, and what you need to do and not do. The *geku* watches you to support you in dharma, in good conduct, and in proper practice. The *geku* watches you to support you in avoiding nonvirtue. In this, they are showing you kindness like your best friend! The *geku* helps you not to be naughty! That is a real friend, that is someone really being of benefit to you, more than someone who just has a sweet mouth and maybe wants your money.

If you don't listen to the *geku*, they have the freedom and duty to stand up, to enforce the center's rules, to keep you from nonvirtue or to stop you from doing it. That is not the *geku*'s trip. That is *your* trip, your naughtiness getting you in trouble. The *geku* is just doing their job! Actually, in Tibet the *geku* would know each piece of the monastery and ritual, so when they were watching they would know instantly if even one piece or one hair was out of place or wrong. The *geku* would not only keep everyone from being naughty, the *geku* also would know the tormas perfectly, the umzed's (chant leader's) job perfectly, the chopon's (ritual assistant's) job perfectly, and so on. A fully qualified *geku* would watch every aspect of monastery life and make sure it was all being done in accord with the dharma, “requesting virtue” in every place.

In a monastery, it was the law or rule that the *geku* would whack the monks when they were naughty. They would have to—that was the custom and the rule. Here we don't do that, but the idea is the same—there will be consequences or punishment if someone is really being negative, really pushing against the center's rules, going their own way. We do need that. Sometimes people are too much! Too much their *own* way, too negative, or too crazy. Therefore, we need a *geku*.

Some people don't like the *geku* and don't understand that the *geku* is helping. They think the *geku* is like their enemy. Actually, getting angry at the *geku* is like children getting angry with their mommy or daddy for

scolding them. Lots of people in Tibet don't like the geku, especially children and younger people. But older people, they do like the geku, they respect the geku and respect the rules. They know those benefit the monastery and the sangha, so they appreciate that. That is like understanding that parents scolding their children are showing them the greatest kindness by keeping them from harm and nonvirtue and teaching them the right way of doing things. Those people understand. Rather than thinking the geku is your enemy, it would be better to say "thank you." That would be like children saying "thank you" to their parents. Usually nobody does—even when they are grown up, many children are just waiting for their daddy and mommy to die so they can get their money!

Anyway, in one way, the geku is like everyone's mommy and daddy; but in another way, the geku is like the police. Many people behave well just out of fear of the geku, like criminals who decide not to do naughty things because they are afraid of the police. If someone wants to do something naughty, but they think, "The geku's going to see me, going to get me!" and then they don't do it, then still the geku is keeping them in virtue rather than nonvirtue, even though the person isn't trying to follow the rules in a virtuous way. The person doesn't think that the geku is helping them; but since the geku's presence is keeping them from nonvirtue, actually that is of great benefit to them, even if they don't like the geku or run away. And the geku is always checking everywhere, like the police always checking everything. In Tibet, the gekus were also like the police because, although they didn't have guns, they did have long sticks and they would really whack you, too! So in some ways, the geku is like the police.

Since the geku is always running around the dharma center in the ten directions, watching everything like a mommy or daddy, they can never just plop down and relax and hang out. In that way, a geku is like everyone's servant, without any freedom. So the geku is like the

sangha's mommy and daddy, and like the police, and everybody's servant, all together.

Some people think the geku only scolds and is nasty. No, no. The geku's job is to be always checking each person and each situation. If someone is sick during a practice, for example, the geku will make sure the person has someone to help them or that they are comfortable. In each situation, the geku watches and helps, whatever is needed. Sometimes they need to scold, sometimes they need to praise, sometimes they say something, sometimes they don't say anything. They have to check.

You can use the example of the umzed—they have to know when to chant high or low, short or long, fast or slow, and when to stop and start. The umzed chants according to the tradition and rules of chanting, but also watches the lama because sometimes something needs to be changed. The umzed knows they can change the chanting this way but not that way, according to the tradition. They know how to properly adjust the chants according to the timing on each particular day or occasion, too. Everyone is following the umzed during the practice, but the umzed can't just chant however they want; they have to chant according to the rules, traditions, and what is appropriate.

In the same way, the geku has to check and act skillfully in each situation. The geku's job is to make sure everybody knows the rules and is following them. Just like parents dealing with their children, sometimes the geku has to say things in a soft way, sometimes in a hard way. The geku has to keep the rules firmly and clearly, but also sometimes be flexible. Not like being flexible about your girlfriends and boyfriends, the way some people are, shamelessly chasing everyone, even doggies. To be really flexible doesn't mean to embarrass yourself by being shameless. The geku has to always check carefully because many different kinds of situations arise and there are many different kinds of people, sometimes being very stupid or negative. The geku always has to see.

Everybody has rules that they follow. Every monastery in Tibet had rules and leaders, whether it was big or small, whether it was for ngakpas (Mantrayana practitioners) or monks, and whatever school it belonged to. At dharma centers in the West, it's the same thing. Even if you just have three or five people at a dharma center, you can't just babble nonsense instead of chanting the practice, for example. Just because a center is small doesn't mean it doesn't need rules. It is still a place of virtue, a place of pure practice and dharma, right? That means you need rules to guide you in virtue. Whether you have five people or 10,000, in either case to give up the center's rules would be disrespectful to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. That means you are not a Buddhist, even! That means you are saving negativity and cleansing away your merit, and I don't think any of us need to do that! We come here to practice—that means to save merit, what is positive. We don't need to mix in negativity with that. We don't need to mix in being dumb. Therefore, whether your sangha or group or center is big or small, there have to be rules. Then everyone knows how to respect the Three Jewels and how to respect each other. Then there can be harmony.

Everyone has to follow the lama, the geku, and the umzed. During practices, everyone has to follow the umzed, not just chant their own way. Everyone has to follow the geku, which means following the rules of behavior. Everyone has to follow the lama, hearing the teachings and then remembering them. Don't be like me, not knowing the teachings or not knowing the rules and just being dumb. Each person needs to learn by hearing the teachings, and each person needs to know the center's rules for themselves. Then you will know how to act. That is how you keep harmony and respect at a dharma center or monastery, no matter how small or how big. Even if you go to a giant Gelugpa monastery of many thousands of monks, each one knows the rules equally and follows the rules equally. Each one—whether they are an ordinary monk or lama or tulku or whatever—follows the geku and at practice time follows the umzed. Even the high lamas don't chant their own way but follow the umzed all together. It would be embarrassing to chant differently than

the umzed—embarrassing *and* disrespectful. In the same way, even the high lamas listen to the geku and follow the monastery's laws. In Tibet, even the Dalai Lama did this! Being a high lama meant nothing; a rule was a rule. It would be embarrassing to disregard the monastery's rules and just do things your own way. In one way embarrassing, in one way really negative nonvirtue.

If someone insists on doing things their own way, against the dharma center's rules, then it is the geku's job or duty to tell them not to do things that way. In Tibet, if you didn't listen at that point, the geku's duty would be to really whack you! I don't think we do that in America, but the idea is the same—if somebody really is insisting on violating the center's rules and refusing to listen to the geku, then there will be consequences. Is that because the geku has a problem or it is the geku's fault? No. It is part of the geku's job in maintaining harmony and good conduct. The lamas have their jobs presiding as the vajra master at practices and so forth, teachers have their jobs of teaching, the umzeds have their jobs of leading the chanting, and the geku's job includes keeping discipline. Each individual in these positions has their own job to support the whole center.

The lama, the geku, the umze, the chopon, and the whole sangha in general—nobody gets to just do things their own way. In general, whatever religion or tradition you are practicing, there are rules and ways to do things. Everyone needs to follow those. Who is watching over those things at the dharma center? The geku is watching. That's the geku's job. The geku even watches the lamas. The lama can't just sit any way they want on the throne—they can't lie down up there, or lounge in some strange way. That would be embarrassing! They don't want to embarrass themselves or the whole dharma center. There is a tradition of the right way to sit on the throne, the right way to practice, and the right way to teach. There are likewise traditions for how to chant and play the instruments. When you are doing these things, you want to do them according to the tradition, correctly and well. It would

be embarrassing just to do them your own way, or just a funky way, or not to know the correct way and so to just do them kind of hippie style. There is a reason each thing is done in a particular way.

Everyone needs to respect the geku, and the geku in turn needs to watch and act carefully, not just screaming or being unnecessarily harsh. The geku watches everyone the same. They can't just scold people they don't like and ignore the negativity of the people they do like. The geku is not there to make anyone high or low, but to help everyone stay on the path of virtue. The geku and sangha need to fit together, respecting each other. That keeps harmony. Then the sangha and geku are supporting each other, functioning together in dharma.

Everybody try, okay? We all need to stand up, to support each other, to respect each other and respect ourselves. In one way, each person has to be their own geku, requesting virtue of themselves, watching their own behavior. Then the outer geku supports that. Everybody try, okay? With respect instead of gossiping!

Tashi delek!

*-Gyatral*





# THE ROLE OF THE SANGHA



## The Role of the Sangha

At a Chimed Sok Tig Longevity weekend in August 2016, Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche said:

*You built this temple how long ago? And how many people, men and women, worked to build it? And after they finished, Penor Rinpoche and other lamas came and practiced highest dzogchen ceremonies and consecrated this space in many ways. In every corner of this place there are amazing details and craftsmanship, which all came about through the hard work of the sangha. Now you have a place for your own learning, your own practice. Now Tashi Chöling belongs to whom? To you guys, the hard workers. I am pushing everything on your heads!*

### Who are the Tashi Chöling Sangha?

"Sangha" is defined as, "those who are intent on virtue." Though in different contexts, the word "sangha" can refer to an assembly of bodhisattvas or a gathering of the ordained, in this context, "sangha" refers to all those who have the wish to engage in virtue, abandon nonvirtue, and tame their own minds. Whenever we have pure intention, we are sangha, wherever we are. When we gather at Tashi Chöling or any dharma center to study, work, or practice, we are more than just a group of people—we are a gathering of sangha, connected by our focus on virtue.

Tashi Chöling does not belong to one individual; it exists for the sangha's collective use, inasmuch as all sangha members use it for the pursuit of virtue. Without the sangha, Tashi Chöling would be merely a museum of Tibetan Art, unable to fulfill its purpose of benefitting beings. In fact, without the sangha, Tashi Chöling would neither exist nor endure—its prosperity and success depends solely on the continual offerings of hard work, care, and donations by its members. Those who guide and administer Tashi Chöling, namely the teachers, board, and staff, are nothing other than sangha members, servants of the greater sangha

community, who are entrusted with watching over this precious place of refuge.

So what are the rights and responsibilities of the sangha? As exemplified in the following quotes collected from teachings, Rinpoche is constantly guiding us to a more and more refined notion of what it means to be "sangha":

"What sangha really means is those who are engaging in virtue. Whenever anybody is engaging in virtue, that's sangha."	"You are brother and sister. We are all very close, that is why we are able to come together and receive teachings."
"Respect each other."	"Thank you, for coming and working so hard."
"We all need to learn, how to chopon, how to umze, how to make tormas, and about the meaning. Then we can practice."	"We're really good at pointing out other people's faults, but not when it comes to pointing out our own."
"This is your temple. Take care of it!"	"If someone is working, help them!"
"Point your finger at your own nose."	"Where is everybody? Why don't they come and help?"
"Don't stand around with your mouth open—stand up! Wake up!"	"Come and practice."
"Love each other."	"Come and help."
"Work together."	"More than gossiping together, we can teach each other."
"Everybody try."	"Support each other."
"Practice nicely together. Learn the practices, slowly, slowly, the right way to do them."	"Thank you all for practicing so nicely together, so harmoniously and diligently."
"Be harmonious."	"Don't say it's his job or her job. It's your job."
"We say we don't have time but really we don't understand impermanence. Not understanding impermanence, then we have a lot of 'not-having-time.'"	"The real work of the sangha is creating the supports of enlightened body, speech, and mind so that these will be here for generations into the future."
"Come to tsog. Bring an offering—that is how you make the connection."	"Everyone can learn. Those who know, show how."

## How Do We Support Tashi Chöling?

As Rinpoche has said: *Care for the temple in the same way you would care for your own house.*

We are all Tashi Chöling volunteers... So please feel free to come and help out *any time!* There are many projects and tasks that must be done on a weekly, monthly, and yearly basis. Please consider volunteering to help with one of these on an ongoing basis!

Current areas where we are looking for committed, long-term volunteers are:

1. Taking the trash to the dumpsters in Hilt once a week
2. Taking recyclables to town once a week.
3. Helping with grounds upkeep, infrastructure maintenance, and repair projects.
4. Cleaning the East Wing once a month.
5. Fixing potholes and drainage in the roads in the spring and fall.
6. Putting up prayer flags in the spring.
7. Pulling weeds in the garden.
8. Helping with digitizing materials for the Archives.
9. Regular monthly donations from all sangha members.

If you would like to volunteer for one of these tasks, please contact us at [tashicholingconnection@gmail.com](mailto:tashicholingconnection@gmail.com) and we will connect you with the appropriate staff member.

Our teachers, in their kindness, have given us many diverse ways to practice and participate. Whatever your skills, talents, or capabilities, there is always a way for you to take part in what is going on here. As Ven. Gyatrul Rinpoche once said about a construction project: *Everyone can participate. If you can't pound [hammer nails], then carry things. If you can't carry, then you can help cook. Everyone should help. This is our temple, our merit.*

## How Can I Get Involved with a Project at Tashi Chöling?

If you are interested in helping in areas such as construction, maintenance, gardening, archiving, temple, ritual support, etc., please feel free to contact the people overseeing those activities at

[tashicholingconnection@gmail.com](mailto:tashicholingconnection@gmail.com) and let us know. We would love to hear from you!

Sangha members are also welcome to make suggestions for projects or offer to sponsor a project (for example, sponsoring the replacement of prayer flags, purchasing items for the temple, and so on). In general, sangha members' project ideas are first taken to the staff, who review the suggestions and help the project sponsor think through the details and consider how the project relates to other activities going on at Tashi Chöling at the time. If funding is needed for a given project, then the staff—in particular, Nick O'Connor—will work with the project sponsor to determine how best to fund the project. Nick and the staff may decide that the project idea should be taken to the board to determine if, how, and when money can be made available for the project, and if the project is in tune with Tashi Chöling's mission, goals, and objectives.

### How Do We Know What's Going On?

The best way to stay tuned to what's happening at Tashi Chöling is to subscribe to the [tcnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:tcnewsletter@gmail.com) mailing list. We regularly communicate information on projects and events, updates on what's happening, and teachings from Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche on a regular basis. You can also check the website calendar at <http://www.tashicholing.org/programs.html> for dates, times, and locations of events.

*(A special note to Gmail users: TC Newsletters automatically go into your "promotions" folder until you tell Gmail to put them into your "primary" folder. So if you signed up for the Newsletter but don't seem to be receiving any, look in your "promotions" folder!)*

### What's Next?

Rinpoche has given us clear guidelines for how he would like the Tashi Chöling sangha, staff, board, and teachers to function, and we hope we have presented an accurate picture of his wishes in this series of emails. We look forward to serving each other in the ways he has recommended so that his activities of spreading the dharma can flourish without obstacle! Please do not hesitate to contact any of the Tashi Chöling teachers, staff, and board if we can be of service to you or the sangha at large in our areas of expertise.

### *To the Sangha: On Respect and Decency*

Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche

August 25th, 2016

Following the rules of the monastery or the center is part of respecting the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Why do we respect the Buddha? Because he's Buddha, the awakened one—even his name means he is enlightened. He is worthy of respect, more than anyone in this world, because he is beyond this world. He is not still stuck here, an ignorant and suffering sentient being. Therefore, if we are going to respect anyone, it should be him, because he is beyond everybody. Why do we respect the Dharma? Because it's what the Buddha said. Why do we respect the Sangha? Because they are following the Buddha, practicing the Dharma. They are Sangha because they respect Buddha and Dharma, and we respect the Sangha itself in turn. That is how respect for the Three Jewels starts. If we have that respect with understanding, then we will have faith. When we engage our three doors, we will be creating virtue. If you need to know the reasons, those are the reasons for respecting the Three Jewels.

Everyone, please respect yourself, too.

How do you respect yourself? By respecting Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Respect yourself by listening to the *geku* [the one who "requests virtue"—the disciplinarian, responsible for maintaining good conduct in the sangha.] What the geku has to tell you will really benefit you, if you are not proud. Respect yourself by learning how to conduct yourself well, properly and according to the rules. Learn how to do things the right way. That is how to respect yourself and not bring shame on yourself. Learn how to show respect to others, too, so that you keep harmony with everyone. Learn how to respect the Dharma itself, how to properly show respect to the objects of refuge, Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. It is important to be respectful. You don't need to be bowing in every direction, saying, "I am being respectful!" No, no. Just be respectful with your body, speech, and mind.

If you misunderstand or do something wrong, that is why we have a geku—to watch and help you do things the right way. First you have to know what the right way is, then you have to do it. The geku helps with both. Teachers help with both. That way they are supporting you. I don't think anyone, man or woman, is going to make it just by doing things their own way, without a teacher or someone to guide them. Follow your teacher and your geku; don't go your own way, your MY WAY. If you do just go your MY WAY without a teacher, you will just put yourself back in your goddamn hole, deeply into the sewer. I don't think you can benefit yourself that way. I don't think that is the way to show yourself kindness or to respect yourself.

Having respect also means not being arrogant. Sometimes people think, "I'm not part of this group! I'm not part of this sangha, so I don't have to follow the rules! I don't care about the lineage or the tradition, I can just go my own way!" Then they rudely point their feet here and there and do other things that are disrespectful. That is absolutely the wrong way. Wherever you go, you need to respect the tradition of where you are. Even if it's not your tradition, still you should be respectful of it and try to follow it when you are in that place. Even if they are not your rules, they are the rules of the place. Maybe you don't consider yourself part of this group or that group, but when you are with that group, you need to be polite and respectful.

If you don't want to follow the rules and traditions of the group you are with, then get out! No reason to go into a group and then disrespect everyone and expect them to eat your shit while you break their rules and upset everything. If you only want to go your own way, then go and do it! You don't need to do it in the middle of a group somewhere, disturbing everybody and breaking their rules. That's disgusting behavior, whether you are talking about going into a school or a dharma center or the army or the police or any group or religion! If you want to have your OWN rules, then you can take your OWN rules and get out!

That's better than staying and disturbing everyone by being disrespectful. There is no reason for that.

Everybody has rules, not just in the dharma. Even if you weren't a Buddhist, you still couldn't say that you had no rules and could do whatever you want! If you follow any "–ism," not just Buddhism, then you have to follow the rules of that "–ism" and take care with your conduct. The army is not a religion even, but they have rules, too. In fact, each group within the army has their own tradition, absolutely. Police, they do have rules, too. They are not just a bunch of macho guys! Actually, I think even hippies have sort of their own rules and their own ways of doing things and can't just do whatever they want either! What is positive, what is negative, what is respectful, what is disrespectful—everybody has rules like that.

Or watch mothers and their children—absolutely they have rules and right ways of doing things! You can see that with your own eyes. If the mother doesn't know how to keep rules with her children, then the grandma or grandpa can tell her, help her, if they are good people. The mother will listen, too, if she's trying to really help her children and not just being stubborn. There are ways that parents guide, help, and sometimes scold their children so that they can act decently, whether in public or privately. In a dharma center, the geku and teachers do the same thing for the sangha.

When babies are small, they shouldn't crawl freely everywhere, in the middle of the road or in dirty places or bothering other people. They shouldn't pee and shit everywhere. They have to learn when they are young that you can't do that, which means the mommy or daddy or someone has to be always watching, always telling them. Westerners are wonderful in this regard, because they have babysitters so even if the parents are busy, still there is someone watching the children; and because they are getting money then they really pay attention. Wherever children go, someone is watching them, parents or babysitters or teachers. That way the children can develop their wisdom—from how to



sit on a chair and other simple things to more and more complicated, deeper things.

Of course, Tibetans don't sit on chairs so they learn how to sit nicely on the floor instead. But either way there is the right way to sit, the polite way. Always there is the right way of doing things. Children have to learn each thing, piece by piece. How to sit, how to stand up, how to walk. For example, if you are in a very dusty place, you should walk without stomping and stirring up a lot of dust so you don't make it dusty for others. In one way these are simple things, but children have to be taught how to think like that, how to remember others. We need to be taught, too, sometimes, or reminded. Sometimes children are better than we are, more like human beings.

There is even the right way to talk—we all know how to talk politely, nicely, not yelling or being harsh or shouting like a drunk person. Westerners, Chinese, Tibetans, others—everybody has sort of the same tradition, nobody just yells or screams for no reason. Everyone follows the rules about how to have a nice conversation. Nobody needs to yell when they're cooking, or when they're in the middle of school, or in a temple or church. Male or female, it doesn't matter—nobody should be rude or disturb others. One way we think it's obvious, of course everybody talks this way; but actually if you think about it, there are rules there. There is the right way of doing things, which is what rules are.

Similarly, of course, there are rules about how to behave at the dharma center and in the temple. Those rules aren't somebody's trip or somebody controlling you; they are the right way of doing things there. They help you create virtue. For example, in the temple you don't need to hug and kiss everybody, there in front of the group, in the middle of the practice or teaching. When you are in the temple, you shouldn't talk and gossip, blah-blah-blah; you shouldn't drink or smoke or even use snuff—that is how the rules used to be in the monasteries. Also, ladies couldn't just hang all over the guys, nakedly or shamelessly, and the

men couldn't take out their knives and wave them threateningly or go around sort of half-undressed. We don't need to change those rules or traditions, still it is the same. Still those things are disrespectful. Nobody should come with dirty hands to paint or arrange offerings, or come to receive teachings without washing up first.

These are all examples of being thoughtless and disrespectful. That style is disrespectful to your dharma brothers and sisters and all others. It is disrespectful to your teachers, too, thinking you can ignore their teachings and do things your own way.

If you do need to talk to someone when you are in the temple, you should go talk quietly in a corner or other place so as not to disturb the dharma activity, the practice or teaching that is going on. If you think you are very pretty, and so of course you need to talk with someone, being so important, still you need to go talk in a corner or outside. You don't need to blah-blah-blah in the middle of the temple. Or if you think you are so handsome that you can get away with anything, actually still you shouldn't stretch your legs out rudely in front of someone. There are rules about the proper way to sit while in the temple—without stretching out your legs, without leaning on someone, if you are healthy and your body works. Of course, if you are sick or your body doesn't work, then that's a different story.

In the monasteries there were even rules about how to wear your zen (robe) and skirt, with variations according to different traditions. Those were the rules for respecting your robes, if you wore robes. Does that mean others can just do whatever they want, that there are no rules for dress for those who do not wear robes? No. Still there are rules. You can't come to the temple naked, for example! You still have to dress nicely, respectfully.

The bottom line is whatever is going on in the temple, a practice or teaching or whatever, don't disturb that, out of respect and to avoid creating non-virtue. Disrespectful things aren't allowed, and things should be done the right way. Why? Is it just someone's idea or

someone's trip? No. It is for the same reason you don't have sex in the middle of the temple—because you are a human being! You have a sense of modesty. You are trying to be a decent person. It is out of respect for the center, too. What is the center? It is a place of virtue. So really it is out of respect for virtue. Or you could say, out of respect for the Sangha and the practice. Everyone is there trying to do dharma, so it is out of respect for the Dharma, too. What is the source of that? Buddha! The bottom line is it is all out of respect for the Buddha. That is why we need to know the right way of doing things and follow that. That is all the rules are for. They are not just somebody's trip. They are not just meant for a few people to follow. They are for everyone. Following the rules of the Three Jewels is a way to create merit and purify your obscurations. These aren't just hippie rules or army rules.

Of course, many people get upset if you try to explain the rules or point out that they are doing something wrong, or ask them not to disturb everybody. People are too sensitive all the time. They need everyone to respect them and everyone to lick their butt. They need their "freedom" to embarrass themselves. They need a high, special seat. And if someone says one unpleasant word to them they scream and cry. If you get upset or angry with somebody, you don't need to scream and cry. You are not dead or wounded. What is your problem? Someone doesn't respect you? So what? One way, it is not even your business!

Moreover, if you want others to respect you, first you need to give respect: respect others and respect yourself. Do you think that if you are some kind of leader then you can drink and smoke in the middle of the temple, in the middle of a teaching? Do you think if you have some kind of high position then you don't need to be respectful? No, no, no. Buddhism is not stupid in that way. The dharma doesn't have two tongues, one for other people and one for yourself. The teachings are the same for everyone. If you want others to respect you, you need to show them that same kind of respect yourself. It's the same thing. Why would

you think you don't need to show respect? Do you think they have to respect you but you don't need to respect them?

If they are a human being, it means they are the same as you—you are the same human beings. That deserves respect. If they are a Buddhist, then they are practicing Hinayana, Mahayana, or Vajrayana, same as you. You should respect that, absolutely, otherwise you are disrespecting the Dharma—disrespecting your own tradition. In fact, since those are the same practices that you engage in, the same teachings that you follow, you are disrespecting yourself! If you think you don't need to respect others but they need to respect you, you are really showing your own fault, your own arrogance and completely wrong thinking. You are bringing shame on yourself and making yourself stupid. You are deeply disrespecting yourself, like in a deep smelly sewer, and nobody else will respect you either. No reason to!

It is shameful to always be pointing the finger at others, saying they need to be respectful, saying they need to be clean and neat but not holding yourself to the same standard. If others need to be decent people and act like real human beings, why don't you, too? Don't be a hypocrite! Don't say others need to act correctly and others need to do this or that. Point at yourself. You are the one who needs to! You need to follow the rules, you need to know the laws and traditions. You need to watch your own body, speech, and mind and control them. What others do is not your business. What you are doing, what your own body, your own speech, and your own mind are doing, that is your business. That is what you need to watch.

With your body, for example, be aware what direction your feet are pointing. With your speech and tongue be conscious of what you are saying. For example, don't go carrying on, blah-blah-blah, pretending you know everything, proudly smoking your pipe, all the while thinking you are so wonderful! I think we don't need to be crass and embarrass ourselves with that kind of arrogance and foolishness. I don't think we need to do that for ourselves, and others don't like it when we are stupid



that way either. So why do we need to do it? Whether we consider those others “sangha” or “non-sangha” doesn’t matter at all. Either way, there is no reason to upset them with our ego and embarrassing, unmindful behavior.

Everyone especially watch your mouth. Mostly to keep your mouth closed is best. If you say something, be conscious. This is true for everyone. If you are a mother, watch your mouth. If you are a father, watch your mouth. Why do I say to watch your mouth, mommy, daddy? Because that is what will screw up your family. If you are an army leader, same thing. What is really going to screw you up is not the enemy’s army but your own mouth. So you need to watch it. Police leader, same thing. The king or queen of a country, same thing! Lama, geku, umzed, chopon, leaders at the dharma center, and all the sangha, same thing! Each human being, same thing. We think our mouths are clean but actually they are dirty, worse than garbage or sewage. We love to make nonvirtue with our mouths. It is so easy for us, we are professional. Please try to be careful, everyone! I am not pointing or poking at just one person, I am poking at *everyone*—everyone is the “one person” who is my target! Or maybe not everyone, maybe just *you*!

Try. Stay humble. You can control yourself. No big deal. You want to control others? First control yourself. If you can keep to the rules well, respecting yourself and others, and you can control yourself well in all ways, then you won’t have a problem with others. Others won’t bother you too much. You won’t have a problem with yourself or with others.

If you don’t control yourself, if you don’t abide by the rules yourself but think others need to? I don’t think so! I don’t think that works. If you are like an egomaniac, sitting in the middle of everything, wanting some high seat or big deal, maybe even spitting or smoking or doing you-name-it in the middle of everything, unfortunately others don’t like that. They will see your trip, your arrogance, your fault, your negativity. Better that they see your dirty butt than that—that would be less

embarrassing! We don’t need to embarrass ourselves by being arrogant like that.

We love to boast and try to push ourselves up. You want to be something special, something high? You want everybody to put you up high? Sure, you can be high. Up on the rocky mountains, birds can fly very high, too. So what? Workers go up on the roof to fix things, higher than everybody, higher than all the seats and thrones. So what? In the jungle, tigers, snakes, and other naughty, nasty dumb guys think, “We are high! We are powerful!” But if you think about them, you don’t think they are high. Still they are animals. Still they are stupid. Still they have no real position, no real power. They can’t control themselves, either. People who want power or fame or a high position, they are like that, too. Like animals. We should realize they should not be objects of our anger, but objects of our compassion. Tigers, dragons, or any fierce animal—they are your object of compassion. You don’t need to kiss or hug them—they don’t know how anyway, they are dumb—just pray for them. People who act like animals, same thing. Same stupidity, all sentient beings. So pray for them, slowly, slowly.

Look at how much everybody wants, how much they think they need, desperately. But they don’t get success, mostly. They don’t get what they want. Think about that, and pray for them. Or if you see an old or blind person with lots of problems, have compassion. More than getting angry or yelling. You know how to get upset, and you know how to be gentle, both. People need *at least* your compassion. Compassion and respect, every time. Every time we go out in public, we need to be careful. We need to watch ourselves, and we need to have compassion for others. You don’t need to kiss or hug everybody, just watch. Look. Piece by piece. When you are polite and respectful to others, with compassion, you are respecting yourself, too. You are respecting others and yourself, both. You are following others’ rules and your own rules together. That is important. That is useful.

If you are powerful, sure, maybe you are a big guy, but who cares? A tiny bullet can still conquer you! Watch on television—giant guys, kung fu guys or cowboys or anybody, they are all afraid of bullets! Giant guys, afraid of tiny bullets! That's embarrassing, isn't it? So what is the benefit of being big or powerful? Being a big guy means nothing. One little tiny thing can kill you. Similarly, the mouth and tongue are not weapons, but words can kill giant guys, too—they make people angry and upset; then the people jump up and fight; then it's easy for someone to be killed. And what was the cause? Just the mouth, that small thing. Just words that you can't even see. Everyone makes a big deal about being a big guy but it's actually useless. Having a high position is the same thing. Being pretty or handsome is the same thing. Being a scholar or famous is the same thing.

Wherever you go, wherever you stay, if you want to be high, then first you need to have qualities. If you want to be pretty, first you need to be clean! If you want to be handsome or pretty, you need to know how to take care of yourself, and not just your body but your brain—that is the most important!

You can watch to see how to act well. Everything, stage by stage, watch. Even watch how children play on the playground. They know how to be happy together rather than making each other angry. They know what is nice. They don't act like the king of the world or the king of the animals, like tigers, leopards, or poisonous snakes. They don't hiss and screech, "Don't bother me! Don't touch me! I'm gonna kill you!" because the other children don't like that style. We don't need to do that, either. We are beyond that, beyond being animals. Sort of! If we want to be pretty and gentle, we need to clean ourselves up properly, meaning we need to stop acting like that. You don't need complicated things or elaborate methods. Just clean up your brain. Change your posture so your actions and style are nice instead of rough and nasty. That makes you more pretty. If you want to be handsome, it's the same thing.

If you don't like someone's words, or their food, or drink, or dress, why do you have to make a big deal about it in front of everyone? Does everyone have to put up with your garbage, your complaining? No, no, no. If you don't like something, just check—watch, check with others, step back quietly if you need to. How come everyone has to announce everything they are doing on the loudspeaker? You can just do things quietly, move forward or back or this way or that way depending on what you need. You don't need to complain or boast or tell everybody.

If you do like something, on the other hand, don't be like some Tibetans who just instantly, shamelessly, directly gobble everything up as if they will never be satisfied and as if the whole world belonged to them. That is to go your own way shamelessly—we need to see that. We need to look, understand, and recognize. Recognize your own shamelessness and your own qualities, both. Looking and seeing, those are not such simple things. One way, they are simple, but we don't do them!

Don't be stubborn, only seeing everything your own way and insisting that it be according to your view. Don't disregard others, only caring for yourself and doing everything according to your own way, your own stubbornness. You are not an animal; you weren't born with horns on your head. You don't need to put them there now through being stubborn or bossy.

The bottom line? Everybody please respect each other, especially your sangha brothers and sisters. You should respect everybody anyway if you are a decent human being; but your dharma family you have a special connection to, like your mother or brothers and sisters, and even more close to you, so you should treat them with particular care. Watch your step and watch your mouth.

At Tashi Chöling and the other centers, it seems that things are much better now than they were before. It sounds like things are getting better and better—people have more respect for one another, which everybody needs outerly. Innerly, people are studying and learning the tradition more deeply, so they have more understanding. Outerly and innerly,

both, it seems that people are understanding more and more the right way of doing things, from big things to small things, and so slowly each area is being cleaned up as people actually engage in that way. That is how really we can have some success, holding the real lineage of our great teachers. That is the success of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's order that I come to the West. Everything has been done following that, and now it looks like it is actually working. That is the most meaningful and makes me the most happy—for myself and for everybody, because it means that the dharma is being established here in a way that is being of benefit to sentient beings. When all the students act like real, decent human beings, then that is the foundation for virtue and the dharma centers are really centers of dharma. They are centers of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha; and Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha are in the center of there. Everybody try to do that, okay?

Thank you.

Tashi delek!

*-Gyatral*

