

Helping Others, Helping Ourselves

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So, the topic of the talk is how, by helping others, we can help ourselves. I think, first of all, we have to realize how dependent we human beings are. When we are young, when we are born, we are born without any abilities; we're just complete nuisances and the only thing that we can do is cry and make lots of shit! And then, for a long time afterwards, we have to be looked after. Then again, when we grow older, it's the same, we become totally dependent on others and in the middle, for a short time, we think we are very independent and very strong. There is a story I remember, a Tibetan story.

Neemneek and his elderly Parents

There were parents and they gave birth to a child and they loved the child very much, they called him Neemneek, meaning hearts and eyes. It means like our hearts and our eyes. He was very loved, whatever he needed they gave and every little wish was fulfilled. They sacrificed everything for his needs and education. They did everything to make this boy happy and satisfied. Then the boy grew up, became a young man, fell in love with a girl, got married and brought the girl home. When his parents were getting older, Neemneek and his wife said his parents were doing this and that and that they were not very nice. They said they were not co-operative or working or helping and so on. So then they had a child also. The grandparents wanted to be very near and nice to the grandchild but Neemneek's wife was not so happy about that. As time went on, they said again that the old parents were complaining too much and were too difficult, so they put them outside of the house into the barn. They gave them some food but not enough. But still there were more and more problems and one day Neemneek became very angry with his parents and he decided to throw them away. He put them in two baskets and carried them a long distance away near to a river and left them there and came back home. He thought he was at last rid of his old parents who were useless and complaining and just too problematic.

Then, when he was coming back, he saw his little child who was maybe six or seven years old and the child said, "Where are my grandparents? And where are the baskets?" Neemneek said to him, "Why do you want the baskets? I threw them away." And the child said, "I need the baskets because I need to throw you away too. When I grow up I will need to throw you out, so I need the baskets!" Then Neemneek awoke and came to his senses. He and his wife ran to bring back the old parents and they brought them home and tried to be nice to them. They knew that if they were doing that, then the same would be done by their own child to them, because they were teaching him to do that. We all know how dependent we are on others. If we teach by example how not to care for old people then, of course, our young ones will do the same to us. It is very important to understand this, at least if nothing else to show our young ones that it's good to help others and then they might help us when we need them. Human beings live on the love of others.

I think I've told this story many times before. Many of you will know it but some of you will not. It's a story from Tolstoy, not one of his own short stories, but from his collection of folk tales. And this story is very important, I think very interesting.

Human Beings Live by the Love of Others

It's said that in Moscow, or near Moscow, there was a cobbler who was making shoes. He was a good-hearted person who gave lots of credit and made things but his customers did not pay if they didn't have money, or they would say that they would pay later. And he was okay with that but he was very poor. It was almost Christmas time so he thought he would go to Moscow and get all the money that people owed him and buy a very nice warm fur coat for his wife, as they had only one between themselves so far, and also buy lots of things for Christmas and have a very nice Christmas. So, he went to Moscow but everybody had been having difficult times and nobody paid him any money so he came back not carrying very much.

Then, near to his house, there was a church and it was dark and late and when passing through the church he saw somebody, a naked

man fallen down in snow. At first he thought not to get involved in this, it could be a lot of problems. Then he thought, "How can I let this man die? It's Christmas time, its below 30/40 degrees and he is naked and he will certainly die. So I have to go and see at least." And it was, indeed, a totally naked man and the cobbler asked him, "Who are you where did you come from?" The man was not very clear and the cobbler didn't understand him but he put his coat on the man and took him home.

When they got near to his house, his wife saw him coming with nothing but a completely naked man! She wasn't happy, she was very unhappy, and she nearly didn't let them in. But then she thought, "I can't do this, I have to let them in, it's so cold outside and if I don't let them in they may die." So she let them in and said to her husband, "Well, what is it?" And he explained about finding the man in the churchyard. And then she said, "It's okay, we have a little soup let's share." At this, the man smiled and, when he did, it was such a beautiful smile that the whole room lit up. They asked him some more about himself and he still wasn't very clear but they said he could stay but only if he worked. The man said, "I'm ready to do anything, you just have to teach me."

And so, the cobbler taught the man how to make shoes and he learned so quickly that within a few days he was a better cobbler than his master. Anything he was taught, he learned immediately. He also worked very quickly and soon he had made many shoes. Not only that, but they were really the best shoes and the cobbler's shop became famous. People came from far to give him orders for shoes and, one day, a rich and powerful man came on his horse and cart with a driver. He came with expensive leather and he said, "With this leather, can you make a shoe that will last at least three years?" When he said this the cobbler looked at his apprentice and asked him, "Can you do this?" And the apprentice said, "Yes." The rich man told the cobbler that he would pay whatever the cobbler liked but that the shoes had to be strong enough to last at least three years. Then the rich man left. After he left, the apprentice smiled again; he usually didn't talk or say much at all, he just worked, and this was only his second smile.

A few days later, the cobbler was shocked to find out that the apprentice had not made a shoe after all but instead had made a kind of slipper that is usually used for dead bodies in Russia. The cobbler was very angry: "How can you do this to me? This leather is so expensive we may not be able to find it anywhere and, even if we did, we could not afford to buy it." He was just about to shout some more at the apprentice when there was a strong knock at the door. The cobbler opened the door and it was the driver of the rich man who had asked for the shoe for three years. He said, "Actually, we don't need the shoe now, we just need slippers for the dead. My master died suddenly." The cobbler told him that it had already been done.

Then, after a few days, a lady came with two little girls and one of the little girls had a problem with one leg; it was a little shorter than the other. The lady was nice and very kind to the little girls and she said that she needed a shoe for the little girl that would make her higher and more balanced. The apprentice made the shoes for the little girl and then they left.

After they had gone, the apprentice smiled again and when he smiled, the whole room lit up. He said to the cobbler and his wife, "Thank you very much, now it's time for me to go." They were very shocked and said, "But why are you going and where are you going? You don't have anybody; you have nowhere to go. We are making it so nice here, why can't you stay?" But the apprentice said, "No, I need to go, I am not a human being, I am an angel." They asked him to tell them his story and he told them.

He said, "I am an angel and, one day, I was sent to bring the soul of a lady who was about to die and this lady had just given birth to twin girls. She was so concerned about the two little girls that she begged and begged that she should not die and her soul taken away. She said that if she died there would be no one to look after the two little children and they would die too, so she begged me to let her live. I was so moved by that, so I went back to God without the soul but God was angry and he said to me, *"Your wings are taken away so that you can't come back to heaven before you have learned the three most important things about human beings. Only after you have learned the three most important things about human beings can have your wings back and return to heaven."*

“So”, the apprentice continued, “the three times I smiled, I’d learned the three most important things about human beings. The first time was when I was totally naked, had nothing, knew no one, had nothing to wear but you and also your wife took care of me. So, the first thing I learned was that human beings have compassion, have concern and have love for others. That’s the first thing I learned. It wasn’t easy for you, but you helped me. Second thing I learned about human beings was when the rich and powerful man came and insisted we make a shoe that would last for three years. But at that very moment I could I see my friend, an angel, just behind him about to take his soul and I understood that human beings do not know when they are going to die. That was the second thing I learned about human beings. And then the third thing I learned was when the two little girls and the woman looking after them came here. I knew that they were the orphans of that lady who died, whose soul I was supposed to take away. I didn’t take her soul away but she died anyway and when she died her body fell on one of the children and her leg was damaged. But someone else, who had nothing to do with the girls’ mother and had no connection to her, was not her relative or friend, was taking so much care of these two little children. From that, I learned that human beings live by the love of others. So now that I’ve learned the three most important things about human beings, I can go back to heaven.”

And, with that, he spread his wings and flew out, through the chimney, I think.

So, we human beings all live on the love of others and even during that short time that we are supposed to be independent, we are not independent, we are still dependent, we need the love of others, we need appreciation from others, we need help and support from others. If we don’t support each other and help each other, we cannot get anything done. We can’t be successful or happy; we cannot do anything or progress. It’s like the saying: “When the trees support each other, then we have houses and cities, when human beings support each other we have society, we have civilization.” If there is no support, there is no society or civilization, so the whole civilization of human beings, society of human beings, survives on supporting and helping each other.

This is very important to understand. When we understand this, that we are not independent, that we are dependent, we are completely dependent, we live by the love of others and the support of others, we grow by that. Not only at the time of dying but also the bit in between. When we understand this, we have to do the same. When we are able to, we have to help others and when we help others, they will help us also. So when I help somebody, when I help society, when I do something good, something that's useful and beneficial, I'm doing it for myself. I'm doing it for society, for my own people, it's "WE".

There is this saying in Sanskrit in India: "For the sake of the world one must sacrifice one's country, for the sake of one's country one must sacrifice one's village, for the sake of one's village one must sacrifice one's family for the sake of one's family one must sacrifice oneself." The world is the most important thing, because the world includes every one of us, our country, our village, our family, myself. So, if the world is going bad, then how can my country be good, my village, my family be good? So, therefore, the world is most important. But then the country is more important than my village and family and myself, because we are all included in the country. So, if the country is in a very bad situation, a negative situation, getting into wars and famines, then it will affect my village and family, and myself. Then, my village is important because that is where my family and I live. Then, next in importance is my family because I am there also.

But, I think that way of looking at this can become a little reversed in a very materialistic egoistic way, in a kind of ultra-modern way of looking sometimes. For my sake, I sacrifice my family, for the sake of my family, I sacrifice my village, for the sake of my village, I sacrifice my country, for the sake of my country, I sacrifice my world. For me, I sacrifice the whole world! Sometimes it's like that nowadays, but that's totally idiotic because it's not possible. I cannot have something really good if everyone is in a bad shape. So, the most important understanding is to think about how dependent I am, how interdependent we all are. When I know that I am interdependent with others, if I do something for others, it's not just others who are benefitting but I am also being benefitted. It's not like a business (transaction). When I do something that I know and understand is

something beneficial then I feel more useful, more important, more meaningful. But if I think only of what ways I need to help myself and nobody else, what should I do? Maybe we have to think that. What should I do if I just want to help myself and nobody else? What should I do? Should I just close my door and sit in a room? Cook myself very nice food and sleep all day. That may be nice for a few days but then what would happen?

My father once said he slept for one month. My father is a very strange person because my grandfather was like the Prime Minister of Lingstang Kingdom and when he died, my father was quite young. The King wanted my father to come and stay in the capital as his minister but he didn't want to go. He felt he didn't want to go. He didn't want to do anything, he just wanted to run around with the local boys. But my father was called and so he was forced to go to the palace. But he said he wasn't well and he slept and slept and slept. He told us he slept for a month. But after one month, he couldn't sleep; he couldn't sleep even in the night. He wanted to run away and so he told one of his elders who said that he shouldn't run away and, if he felt he had to, he would make some other arrangements for him. And it was like that.

So how do I help myself only? It's very difficult to help just me alone. Therefore, if I'm just doing something only for me and no one else, eventually it's not doing good for me also because I'm a social being I'm interdependent. If I want to become successful and happy, how do I do that? We all think that if I am loved and liked by many people then I am successful, I am happier. But I cannot be liked and loved by lots of people just sitting by myself, alone, doing nothing. If I need to be liked and loved, I need communication with others. I need to love and like other people. I need to do things liked by other people. Then, if I want to be important, how do I become important? If I want this, I need someone to think I'm important. If only I think I am important, then I won't become important. If I want to be important I need to do things others think are important. If I want to become famous, how do I become famous? I become famous if I do something that everyone appreciates. So, even from a worldly point of view, if I want to be important, famous or liked and loved, I need to do something that is good for many people, useful and helpful to other

people. The more I do to help other people then the more I am actually helping myself.

The leaders are always good about this, the politicians. "Please give me the opportunity to serve you!", they say. I don't know with what kind of any real motivation or not but they understand this. To help yourself, you have to help others. "I want to serve you, please give me the opportunity." Whether they serve or not, that is another matter.

Not only that, if we really understand from a karmic Buddhist point of view, if I do something that's helpful, that is beneficial, that's kind with good intentions to help others, then that is accumulating positive good merit for myself. So the more I am doing positive things, the more I am getting positive results, positive karma.

The last time we went for a pilgrimage to India, I took a group of people from The West. We went to Bodhgaya and you know how difficult it is there. We saw Thrangu Rinpoche and he said, "Yes, going to Bodhgaya is a most important thing to do because going there you have the opportunity to practice all six Paramitas." You can practice generosity and discipline and patience. You can practice everything. It's so important, so good, although everyone may pester you there but you can look at it as an opportunity to do something because that's how I gain positive deeds, so it is helping me. From a Bodhisattva's point of view, it's said that the human realm is a much nicer place, a much more positive place than the heaven realm because in heaven everyone has everything they need and there is not much you can do to help. But here, there is poverty and there is sickness, so we have so many things we can do to help. We have so many opportunities to do positive things, so it is one hundred thousand times nicer than heaven. To find an opportunity to do something helping other beings is regarded as great because it's a way to accumulate positive deeds and if I accumulate positive deeds, I'm developing, I'm progressing. I'm getting nearer to enlightenment, so it's much more help to myself as to others. That is the general understanding.

But even from a mundane point of view, I don't know whether all of you have seen this too, but I've read an article someone sent me, a research paper done in Harvard University. Some people did

research on how much joy people get by spending their money on themselves or others and the final conclusion was that they found people found much more joy in spending their money on others than themselves. I was not very convinced! Maybe they were Buddhist or something or used some wrong methodology to find that out.

Then I was thinking, in one way it is possible. I was thinking that if I have five euros and went out and there is an ice cream parlour (there is very nice ice cream in Helsinki), and I buy an ice cream for myself and ate it. It's very nice, it's very, very nice. But after I eat the ice cream, how do I feel? Probably I would say, I am too fat already and everybody says I should not eat too much ice cream! Maybe I didn't do very well and it is not a good idea to do that. Then it's finished but I don't feel too satisfied and too happy with what I did. I enjoyed a few minutes and then, in the evening, I feel I shouldn't have too much dinner because I had too much ice cream. So, my enjoyment is finished. But what if I took the five euros and did something like gave it to someone who needed it or donated it to a charity, something I usually don't do. At that time, I might think that I shouldn't do this and maybe have some ice cream instead. But after I come back from giving the money away, I think I would feel happier with myself, I would be proud of myself and say: "Today I did something I didn't do for a long time, I gave five euros to a charity." I did one good thing at least and then, also, tomorrow I would think that yesterday I donated five euros, not a small amount for me. Usually what I do is count it in Indian rupees. That's why I never buy anything because whenever I go shopping I look at the price tag and calculate it in rupees and then I can't buy it. So I calculate in rupees, sixty-eight times five is many hundred rupees, so I've done a great thing (giving to charity)! So maybe, even next year, I can think that last year I did something. Maybe as long as I live I can feel proud of myself: "That time in 2012I went and did this!" So, I can be proud of myself all my life.

I think I enjoy myself much more by doing that than having ice cream and then it's finished after that. I think it's like that, when I do something good, do something positive, something helpful, that it gives me much more joy and meaning, much more purpose than just doing something for myself. And that is what makes me happy and satisfied. If I do something good and then, at the end of life, when I'm about to die, if I look back at my life and ask what did I do, I think it's

only good things I can remember. If I did something good and helpful for other people and I can say I did that, I did those things, I can feel good about those things. I can feel proud not just about how much food I ate, or some ice cream and chocolate I ate, or that I slept a lot, although that's very nice! I don't think I'll feel good about that. So, doing something for others is actually, in a way, really helping myself, even if you don't believe it has karmic consequences.

Of course, it is also natural if you do something for others, they will usually do something for you. But it's not like a business transaction, that if I do this then they will do something for me. But, generally, if you are generous, you will find that people are generous too. It's like that.

I found this Jataka story and it's quite interesting actually. I've been telling Jataka stories recently to lots of people. I've known this Jataka story for a long time but I forgot about it and recently when people in Europe were worried about their economic situation and things like that, I suddenly remembered the story and I told it to them. It's not only a story of somebody with nothing becoming rich and successful but also the process is very interesting. It's more than just somebody going from rags to riches. So, some of you may know it, but I'll tell it again.

The Dead Mouse

There was a young man, one of the former lives of Buddha. He is unemployed. It doesn't say this in the text, but it looks as if he is unemployed. He is hanging around in the town, just hanging around. Then he sees the advisor to the King, someone like the Prime Minister, is walking with some important people and they pass and he listens to what they are saying. And the advisor to the King is saying that, if you have intelligence and perseverance, then even with a dead mouse you can become a millionaire. Then he passes on. So the young man keeps this in his mind and walks home. On the way home, he sees a dead mouse. Before, he may not have cared but because he had heard this from the Prime Minister, he picks up the dead mouse and goes home.

Then someone else is coming, walking at his side and this person sees that he is carrying a dead mouse, and he says, "Oh, I see you have a dead mouse." The young man replies, "Yes, I have a dead mouse." The man says, "Can you give the dead mouse to me because I have a cat and he would love the mouse?" The young man says "Okay", and he gives him the mouse and the man gives him some coins in exchange. Then the young man walks along. Now he has some coins, and he sees a sweet shop and goes and buys some sweets with the coins and walks on. He sees some children coming from the forest where they'd picked flowers and he gives them the sweets. They are very happy and give him all the flowers. Now he has lots of bunches of flowers. So he takes the flowers to the temple where people want to offer flowers, so they buy them from him and then he has some more coins. Again, next day, he goes and buys sweets and sees the children and gives them the sweets, and they bring lots of flowers and every day he goes and gives the children the sweets and sells the flowers. After a few days he can make his own sweet shop! So he does this and I think he continues to give sweets to the children.

And at that time, it is of course the time when there are many horses, so people cut grass to feed the horses. Grass cutters would come to the town to sell grass. One day it's raining heavily and the grass cutters come and take shelter at the young man's sweet shop. So, he gives sweets to everyone for free and they are very happy and very grateful. They tell him, "We want to do something good for you, what can we do?" And he says, "I don't know but I'll tell you if I need help." So, after few days, he hears that a big horse trader is coming to the town with 500 horses and he knows that they will need lots of grass. He tells his grass cutter friends and asks them to give him one day's worth of their grass for him to sell and also asks that they don't sell their grass until he has finished selling his. He also says he will help them sell theirs after that. So they agree and 500 horses arrive and they have no grass and he is the only one who has grass. He sells it to them at a very good rate and then he helps the grass cutters to sell their grass at a very good rate too. So, he becomes much richer and the grass cutters too get some benefit.

Then he hears that there is ship coming to the city from a foreign country. He understands that, in the place from where the ship is coming, the people value rubies very highly. He makes a golden ring

with a ruby in it and takes it to the ship and presents it to the captain. The captain is extremely happy and says that he wants to help him and introduce his people to the people in the city. The young man is overjoyed and he takes all the businessmen and introduces them to the businessmen in the town and they do a lot of good business and he gets a good share out of that. He becomes really very rich now with hundreds and thousands.

Then he thinks, "How did I become so rich? It's because of the advice of the adviser to the King. I received his advice and this is why I became so rich and I am very grateful to the advisor to the King, so I must thank him." Then he took half of his money, that was many hundred thousands, and went to see the adviser and offered this money to him and said, "This is just to thank you, for I took your advice and I became very rich, so thank you very much." The adviser to the King was shocked because it was so much money. He said, "But what did I do? I didn't do anything. I don't even remember you." And the young man said, "No, you don't remember me because you haven't even seen me before but I heard you talking about the dead mouse and I took it as advice and that is how I became so rich."

The adviser was very pleasantly surprised and thought, "This is a very special man. At such a young age he became so rich because of a little thing that I mentioned. And he took it so nicely and he made it happen in such a nice way. He is very special and persevering and intelligent and lucky. And he is still single! So maybe I should marry him to my daughter." So he proposed the hand of his daughter to this young man who gladly accepted because she was beautiful and a very nice girl. So he became the son-in-law to the chief adviser to the King and he became more powerful and rich and he had a nice family. Eventually, when the adviser to the King passed away, he was appointed as the adviser to the king.

So, from one dead mouse to the most important person in the kingdom. Just by doing something that's good for others, good for him too, but good also for others. By doing something that was helping others. There's nowhere in this story about him cheating or having any negative thoughts; he was trying to help, and help more and more, and he progressed that way. So I thought it was a very nice story. Of course, it is totally Buddhist!

{From audience:}

Question 1. So how to find a dead mouse? It's very clean here so we don't find any dead mice.

Question 2. What did the dead mouse get from this?

Rinpoche: It's not necessary for it to be a dead mouse. It can be anything.

There is a person in Poland who made a business with ashes, ash. When coal burns it becomes ash and nobody wants it because it's waste. If someone takes away the ash, you will pay them but he understood the importance of ash, he is an engineer. He found out that ash is a mineral and he understood that seeing it as a waste was wrong. As it is a mineral, so it can be used in many ways, almost like cement. It can be used for building roads and things like that. So he exploited that and built a company and became a millionaire. Now he's attending conferences all over Europe and all over the world. His name is Tomaz but we call him Tomash. So it's like that. It's still going on, not from a dead mouse but from ash and I think from anything else. Actually, sometimes we have to understand it this way, when I do something for others, it's not just doing something for others but it's something for us all. I think many people who feel that they have no job satisfaction, it is because they think it means they are doing work, a job, something you get paid for. But, it's not useful in helping anybody then you have no job satisfaction. It's therefore important to do something that you at least think is helpful to someone or some people. The more you think like then you will feel good about yourself. It would be a more purposeful, more meaningful life.

That's why, when sometimes young people came to ask me, I used to teach in the university for 17 years, and they asked me, "I want to find a profession that's really, really interesting, what can I do? What do you think is the best?" And I was thinking and thinking and couldn't find anything to tell them. I know some people who took up sports as a profession because it was very interesting for them and after some time I asked them if it was interesting. They told me that since it became a job, it was no longer interesting. Finally, I was

convinced to tell them, the students, that maybe it's not the right way to think about this. If you want to find interesting things, that's not the right question. This is because, whatever is interesting now, after a few days or months or years, is not that interesting. So, maybe you shouldn't ask this, you shouldn't try to find the most interesting thing to do. The best thing to do is to find something that is most useful; that you think would be very helpful, very beneficial to society and to lots of people. If you do something that you know is very useful and very helpful and essential for society, then even if you are not so interested in it, you feel you are doing something good and useful. At least you feel you are doing something good and you never feel useless or needless. I usually nowadays say that you don't look for something interesting but you look for something that's helping, that's useful that's benefitting more people in society and when you can do that, eventually that is the most satisfying and fulfilling thing to do. So, that's the way I understand it.

So if you have any questions you are most welcome.

Question: Could you say something about dedication to merit at the end of practice in relation to this? Last year I think you mentioned something about this also. I often wonder at the end of practice when I'm dedicating merit, am I dedicating to all beings?

Rinpoche: Now, in Buddhism everything has a beginning, middle and end. The beginning is the aspiration; try to generate a good aspiration, motivation. Then middle; try to do something positive. Then the end; try to do the dedication in the same way as you have done the aspiration. So the aspiration is that you try to think properly and say what is the most important thing for me. Then you come to the conclusion that because everyone wants to be free from suffering and everyone wants everlasting peace and happiness, including myself, so I wish to do something towards that and I want to contribute towards that. I wish to bring an end to everyone's suffering and I wish to bring everlasting peace and happiness to everybody. And, in order to do that, I would like to dedicate that. That would be the most important thing for me.

Therefore I should do whatever I do; today this practice, also this work, I do towards this end. So that is the aspiration. So if I do something to help, that's for that. If I do some work, that's also for that. If I do something to improve myself, that's also for that. You know that the main purpose, the main motivation and main objective is that. So, when that aspiration or motivation is clear, it's said that how good or how positive your action is depends on your motivation. Your action itself, just on its own, is not necessarily a good or bad action. Even if I say, for example, give a talk on dharma, is it a good one or a bad one? Maybe you say that it can't be bad but it could be bad also. If my motivation was that I want to give a talk because I want to become popular or I want to make people like me. And I want to squeeze their money out of them, or something like that, I could have a very bad motivation. Then, if that is my motivation my talk is bad, it's a bad action because my motivation is bad, I have a bad agenda. So even a seemingly good action, you cannot, of itself, say how good or bad or positive or negative it is. It is the agenda, so therefore the motivation is the deciding factor whether anything I do is positive or not positive. Motivation is the deciding factor. So, if I do not have good motivation, I have to change my motivation; that is the whole idea. Sometimes we start with a good motivation and then become corrupted. It's very easy. We are not very strong people so we can become corrupted easily. I have to remind myself again and again of this motivation. I have good motivation then I do the action, any good action, then after I've done that, I should do the dedication.

Dedication becomes very important from the Buddhist point of view because that's how you share the result. So if I say that by these deeds, whether I do meditation or I do something helpful to people, or good, I say something like this is dedicated so that I get a dead mouse! Then maybe I get a dead mouse but, after I get the dead mouse, all the power of the dedication is finished. So it's very wrong and sometimes, too, if you do the dedication for the wrong purpose. This is the idea from the Buddhist point of view, if you do a very good action and then make a dedication it has its power. Therefore if you do a very good action and you dedicate it in a bad way you have a bad result. They say that most of the powerful bad people in the world have done something really great, really good, and made a wrong prayer, a wrong dedication. There is this story that a long time ago

the Boudhnath Stupa was built by a lady who was looking after the king's chickens. Do you know the story?

Chicken Lady and the Stupa

This lady was looking after the king's chickens and wanted to build a stupa but she didn't have land. So, she went to the king and said, "I want to build a small stupa, can you give me land?" The King said, "How much land do you want?" And she said, "Just as much as a cowhide". The king said, "Okay, you take that". So she took a cowhide and cut it into small threads and then she put them around the area and she took that land. Then the ministers came and said, "Why are you taking all this land?" And she said, "I was given it by the king". The ministers told her that the King had only given her the land the size of a cowhide and she said, 'But this *is* only the size of a cowhide!' The King couldn't say anything because once a king gives their word they can't go back on it. So she got the land.

Then she was building the stupa and her four sons were helping her. While they were building, she died and her four sons finished it with the help of an ox that carried mud and things like that. When they were finished they made a dedication and one son said, "By the merit of building this stupa, may I be able to bring the spiritual teachings, the dharma, across the Himalayas to the barbarian country of Tibet." Then another son said, "When that happens, may I be able to help him to give these teachings." And another brother said, "When that happens, may I be able to dispel all the obstacles." The last brother said, "May I help him with that." So it's said that they became the King of Tibet and the Pandita, the bodhisattva Santaraksita. One of them became, I think, the minister to the king.

But they forgot about the ox, so the ox became very angry. He said, "They are making lots of dedications and things like that but I did the same work and they are not even remembering me. So that's not good." Then he said, "May I be able to destroy all the things that they have built." But there was also a black bird, like a crow, that was around at that time and he was happy about what the lady and her sons were doing building the stupa. He would carry little bits of mud too. And, when he understood what the ox was saying, he told him

that it was bad and made a dedication to be able to stop the ox destroying all that had been built.

So it's said, later on, during the time of King Trisong Detsen, he brought Buddhism to Tibet he also brought Santaraksita and then Guru Padmasabhava. He also built Samye and things like that. But after two generations, there was this king called Langdarma, Trisong Detsen's grandson. He was very much against Buddhism and he destroyed all the monasteries. Then this Lhalung Palgyi Dorje, the rebirth of this bird, he came with the hat of the crow and he killed him.

So this is why it's said that, after you have done a very good, very strong, positive action, if you make a bad dedication it can be bad, very powerful. All these powerful negative people are because they have done something very good but have made a bad dedication. Therefore you must make a good dedication. So, at the end you make a very positive, a very good and limitless dedication because the stronger the dedication is a way of multiplying your positive deeds. If you say that this dedication is to get rid of somebody's headache then maybe it will help to get rid of the headache and after the headache is finished all of the power of the positive deed is finished. But if you say that the positive deed helps all sentient beings become enlightened with lasting peace and happiness with all their suffering finished, and then also to help to get rid of the headache, then it might get rid of the headache too but it is not finished until it all happens. So a BIG dedication is very important. In the Buddhist system, even if it is originally meant for a small thing, you make a big, big dedication for all the sentient beings and then also this small thing. Then also, when you make a dedication in Buddhism, you make it like this:

This practice, this positive deed, whatever I did, together with all the positive things I've done in all my past, all the positive things I'm doing now in this life, and all my positive things I will do in the future, all of them put together then I dedicate for all the beings.

That's how it's done and it's said that is a skillful way of dedicating so that nothing is wasted and is also multiplied.

Question: Can I continue with the questions? How does that work? When they say that a Bodhisattva makes a dedication, how does that actually work? How does it have so much power? When it's said that someone like Tara was able to dedicate to help all beings be free from fear and then that happens. But how?

Rinpoche: Explain your question please.

Question: I was just wondering the mechanics of it. How is it possible if I make a wish to help all beings and I dedicate my merit in the same way for everyone? I can understand how it can have a psychological effect on me, personally, to be more open and generous but how does that impact, how does anyone get my merit? How can I, in the future, connect with people like that?

Rinpoche: I think it's not that they get your merit but that you become more powerful. It's about the dependent arisings, the causes and conditions, the same theory, same effects that create the right kind of conditions. That's the whole thing. Sometimes you can see that some people want to do something good and they can do a big thing. Some people want to do something good but it doesn't become big. Why? Sometimes these two people when you look at their talent they are equal, maybe even one is more. From a Buddhist point of view, that is the effect. Some people have positive action, you can say positive dedication behind them, merit. Then if they want to do a positive action it becomes very powerful, becomes very strong. And some people try and try and try but it doesn't become very much. So that's why it's said it's because of that. Lots of people want to do lots of good things and some people cannot; it doesn't happen. Why? Because there is not much dedication behind it.

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