



THE YOGA OF DEVOTION: SUPPLEMENT TO READING THREE

THE QUALITIES OF A GOOD DHARMA TEACHER

I. Why finding a good teacher is so important

Pabongka Rinpoche, commentary on Je Tsongkapa's *The Principal Teachings*:

“Now what kind of lama should he be? It takes a guide who knows every turn of the path just to get you somewhere you can reach in a single day. For a lama who's supposed to lead you on to freedom and the state of knowing all things, you're going to need one who has all the requisite qualities. It's important to find a really qualified lama; it's not something you shouldn't care much about, because you're going to end up like him – for better or for worse. The student comes out according to the mold, like those little clay tablets with holy images pressed into them.”

Pabongka Rinpoche, *Liberation in Our Hands*, Day 8:

“Investigating whether a prospective teacher does or does not possess these attributes should be done *before* we undertake to serve him. Moreover, the need to investigate whether someone is qualified to act as a guru doesn't apply only to those persons who are seeking a spiritual teacher whom they might serve. It also applies to those persons who may wish to act as spiritual teachers themselves. . . They, too, should investigate themselves to find out if they possess all the necessary attributes that would qualify them to be a guru. . . And if they discover that they don't possess all the necessary attributes of a guru, they must take whatever steps are necessary to acquire them.”

II. Qualities of a good dharma teacher listed in traditional Buddhist texts

A. The traditional ten qualities

Maitreya, *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras (Mahayanasutralamkara)*:

Rely on a teacher who is disciplined, serene, thoroughly pacified;
Has good qualities surpassing those of the students; is energetic; has a wealth of scriptural knowledge;
Possesses loving concern; has thorough knowledge of reality and skill in instructing disciples;
And has abandoned dispiritedness.



II. Qualities of a good dharma teacher listed in traditional Buddhist texts, cont.

B. If you can't find a teacher who has those ten qualities

Je Tsongkapa, *The Great Treatise*, Chapter 4:

“Question: Because this is a degenerate time, it is difficult to find a teacher who has these good qualities in their entirety. Therefore, what should we do if we do not find such a teacher?

Reply: The *Tantra Requested by Subahu* states:

Just as a chariot with one wheel
Will not go down the path even though it has a horse,
So too, without assistants for meditation,
People will not gain attainments.
These assistants should have intelligence, a good appearance, great purity,
Be of reputable lineage, and inclined toward the teachings.
They should have great confidence, perseverance, and have disciplined the senses.
They should speak pleasantly, be generous and compassionate,
Forbear hunger, thirst, and the afflictions,
And not worship other deities and brahmins.
They should be focused, adept, grateful,
And have faith in the three jewels.
Since those who have all such good qualities
Are very rare in this age of strife,
Mantra practitioners should rely on an assistant who has
One half, one quarter, or an eighth of these qualities.”

Je Tsongkapa, *Preparing for Tantra*:

“We are though now in the days of degeneration, and so perhaps it is difficult to find someone who possesses each and every one of these [ten] qualifications. In such a case, we must follow the advice of the Lord of Lamas. . . . These and other such lines are telling us that the Lama we seek must at least possess a complete set of five different qualities: He must have brought his mind under control, by following the three trainings; he must have realized thusness; and He must have love.”



II. Qualities of a good dharma teacher listed in traditional Buddhist texts, cont.

C. The bare minimum

Je Tsongkapa, *Preparing for Tantra*:

As a bare minimum, the Lama must surely fit the following description. He must occupy himself more with the Dharma than with the things of the world. He must as well occupy himself more with the concerns of the future life, than with those of the present one. He must occupy himself more with helping others, than with helping himself. He is never careless in what he does, or says, or thinks. And, finally, he never leads his disciples along a path which is mistaken.”

Pabongka Rinpoche, *Liberation in Our Hands*:

“If even such qualities as the five which were mentioned become rare in these degenerate times, it is essential that we rely on someone who at least has more virtues than faults, gives more importance to future lives than to this life, and is more concerned with others than himself.”

III. “The Magic of Empty Teachers” (Quiet Retreat Teachings by Geshe Michael Roach, March 8 - 11, 2001, Diamond Mountain Retreat Center, St. David, Arizona)

Day One: We need the perfect Teacher

Imagine the concert hall without one.
The blessing of living touch;
Instant depth, tricks and pitfalls,
Generations to the beginning.
A companion for life,
And like-minded friends;
Entry to a new world
Of people, places, and tools.
Someone to take you
Outside, beneath, and beyond yourself.
Don't be afraid to fish for the best;
Hook them with your service.
But first be clear
That what you want to learn
Is what They teach,
Or the marriage will never last.
In a world created



Moment to moment by imprints,
You master all things
By mastering one:
Serving others;
The high hard art of serving others.
Nothing for yourself;
Not even “I come to learn to serve,”
But rather “I come to serve and learn.”
A relief to hear it said.
Learn to serve others
With a thousand hands,
From trifles
To deathlessness.

Day Two: What makes the perfect Teacher?

Find and become the perfect Teacher:
A Grandmaster with a big toolbox,
An open bag of candy,
A desert dandelion, and the air we
breathe;
Stainless steel; a sculptor
Of every stone, with a master plan;
A mother bird
With a single motive.
Rocket fuel, and a match;
An echo, a taskmaster
Correcting and driving
With carrot and stick.
A gas pedal, a general
With the orders, a pillow,
An ant with winter coming,
Branching tunnels ready.
A chameleon on
The same old rock,
A lawn of grass,
An old temple gong.
Pruning shears
For a fresh sapling,
Mount Meru and
A rubber ball.
A teacher of learning and teaching;
And learning, teaching, an honor.
A builder glad to go to first grade
Even in their own school.



DIAMOND MOUNTAIN UNIVERSITY

A proud poppa,
A push from the nest,
Genghis Khan and lieutenants,
A maker and passer of the torch.
A spider in a big web,
Peer revelry,
A free referral service;
A piggy bank, teddy bear, bureaucrat.
A golden magnet,
Symphony conductor,
An old pair of shoes
And an old hat.
An active player
By their own gameplan;
A kid single-pointed
On a double-scoop cone.
A gem carver,
A new edition of an old book,
Triple evolution,
Trail blazer and lion.
A golden retriever
And a koala bear,
Gold to file or cut or melt,
A scientist and detective.
A word to the wise,
A ballerina
One or two gathered
Or in the arena.
A seal
In a quiet sea,
A match
Made in heaven.

Day three: What makes the Teacher perfect?

Both good and bad are imprints;
Nothing was ever anything else.
Learn to maintain the good ones
And learn to rip out the bad.
Pushed into this life
On the dying gasp
Of a great saint;
Living off another's credit.
Born on the down escalator
Turn and double-time up;



Very few get ahead,
Very few even notice.
“Look the other way.”
“Compromise; make the best of it.”
“Struggle with them.”
“Move on.”
“You are bad. Just stop it.”
“Find some good in it.”
“It’s a test.”
No, take control
Of your destiny:
Make your teacher perfect.
Locate and cut the imprint, new or old,
By doing the opposite for others, unilaterally.
A transformation will come, or did,
Or another or more, or both.
Hard or soft,
Use emptiness and
The act of truth;
We have no other choice.
In an empty teacher
There need be no will;
Not an excuse for the corrupt –
Their reward is the hell they hoped for.
And so the process
Of making your perfect Teacher
Makes you perfect;
This itself is the teaching
The magic of empty teachers.
Oh please do come
And use your teacher so.

Day Four: Why is the Teacher perfect”

“Vajradhara, Keeper of the Diamond,
Has come again.”
But how can we be sure?
See and feel the stone.
There is space
And it is place
They live and die without it.
There is wind
And it is motion
They live and die without it
There is water



And it is moisture
They live and die without it
There is fire
And it is warmth
They live and die without it.
There is earth
And it stands up
They live and die without it.
Twilight worlds
Beneath a rose petal
On the open sea
In the dark of night
On the petal one diamond
So none less is sent;
No boy for the job,
No fool for a Dalai Lama.
He comes for the final step
And She is Vajradhara
For You are the coming Buddha,
You are the coming Buddha.

IV. ANOTHER LIST: THE QUALITIES OF A GOOD TEACHER

1. A good teacher loves, believes in, and is enthusiastic about what he or she is teaching.
2. A good teacher doesn't proselytize but teaches only when asked to teach.
3. A good teacher is a good student and is always learning.
4. A good teacher practices what he or she preaches.
5. A good teacher knows the subject well enough to convey it simply.
6. A good teacher knows his or her audience and speaks to them at their level.
7. A good teacher says "I don't know" when he or she doesn't (and then makes efforts to find out).
8. A good teacher admits when he or she is wrong (and is grateful for the correction).
9. A good teacher is always prepared.
10. A good teacher is always on time – begins on time and ends on time – and expects the students to be on time too.
11. A good teacher serves, and never exploits, his or her students. A good teacher doesn't need anything from his or her students.
12. A good teacher knows that the role of the teacher is different than the role of the father/mother, lover, therapist, boss, or best friend, and does not confuse those roles.



DIAMOND MOUNTAIN UNIVERSITY

13. A good teacher doesn't play favorites.
14. A good teacher knows he or she can't be the right teacher for everyone.
15. A good teacher respects other good teachers and rejoices in their successes.
16. A good teacher "owns" the subject and does not just parrot someone else's words.
17. A good teacher clones the teachings, not the students
18. A good teacher adapts the form of the teachings, not the content.
19. A good teacher is grateful to his or her teachers.
20. A good teacher produces students who are good teachers.
21. A good teacher knows he or she has succeeded when a student becomes better than he or she in the subject.
22. A good teacher regards teaching as a great privilege and is grateful to students.
23. A good Dharma teacher does not sell Dharma. Dharma is not a commodity.