

## Take on the Three Principal Causes

The first cause is having a good teacher. The second cause is applying your mind and basic demeanor to the dharma. The third cause is having food and housing so that it is possible for you to practice the dharma. You should try to maintain those three situations and take delight that you have such opportunities.

To take on the first principal cause is to realize the necessity of the teacher, who actually allows you to get into situations. To take on the second principal cause is to realize that one's mind must be tamed. For instance, your mind might be into a business deal, or a teaching deal, or a book-writing deal, or into making a funny kind of monumental experience for yourself... This attitude was not all that prominent when Jamgon Kongtrul wrote his commentary on the slogans, but today we have a lot more choices.

To take on the third principal cause is to realize that it is possible for you to practice the dharma because of right circumstances, because you have taken an open attitude toward your life and have already worked out some kind of livelihood. Your food and clothes and shelter are taken care of, so economically you can afford to practice.

*From Training the Mind & Cultivating Loving-Kindness by Chogyam Trungpa*

## Take on the Three Principal Causes

The three principal causes are what help us to keep our heart open, to remember to exchange ourselves for others, and to communicate. They are the teacher, the teachings, and a precious human birth.

THE TEACHER. First we'll consider the teacher. In the lojong teachings the teacher is referred to as the spiritual friend, the kalyanamitra. The teacher is like a senior warrior, or a student warrior who's further along the path. It's somebody who inspires you to walk the path of warriorship yourself. Looking at them reminds you of your softness, your own clarity of mind, and your own ability to continually step out and open. Something about them speaks to your heart; you want to have a friendship with this person as a teacher. Trust is an essential ingredient: if you enter into a serious relationship with a teacher, you make a commitment to stick with them and they make a commitment to stick with you, so you're stuck together.

Lest one romanticize this relationship, I'd like to repeat something that Trungpa Rinpoche once said: "The role of the spiritual friend is to insult you." This is true. It isn't that the spiritual friend phones you up and calls you names or sends you letters about what a jerk you are. It's more that the spiritual friend is the ultimate Juan. All your blind spots are going to come out with the spiritual friend. The only difference between the spiritual friend and everybody else in your life is that you've made a commitment to stick with him or her through thick or thin, better or worse, richer or poorer, in sickness and in death. We're not too good at keeping commitments these days; this isn't an age where commitment is honored very widely. If you enter into a relationship with a spiritual friend, you're really asking for it. Rather than the cozy, nurturing situation you might have imagined in the beginning - that the teacher is always kind and will replace the mother or father who never loved you or is finally the friend who has unconditional love for you - you find that in this relationship you begin to see the pimples on your nose, and the mirror on the wall isn't telling you that you're the fairest of them all. To the degree that anything is hidden in this

relationship, you begin to see it. Spending time with Trungpa Rinpoche felt like the great expos. Often he would say very little. You'd have some seemingly enormous problem. When you finally got to talk with him, it didn't seem so important anymore. Nevertheless, you'd start to crank up the emotion, and he would just sit there and maybe even look out the window or yawn. But even if he sat there just looking and listening, you still felt exposed to yourself. Even if you were with a group and it didn't seem like you were being noticed, you felt all your awkwardness.

With a teacher you feel all the ways in which you try to con the situation, you feel all the ways in which you try to make yourself look good. You're seeing clearly what you do all the time. But you've made this commitment-one you're not going to run away from, you're not going to write off. This time you're going to stick with it. Staying there becomes like the three difficulties. When you're with the spiritual friend or even thinking about him or her, you begin to see neurosis as neurosis. That encourages you to practice the second difficulty, which is to begin to apply the teachings. And finally, you long to make that a way of life. The spiritual friend does not confirm your existence but serves as a mirror for you to see where you're stuck. The relationship encourages you to wake up.

The most important thing about the relationship with the spiritual friend is that it's basic training for how you relate to every situation in your life. It's all training for you to be grateful to every Juan, and not just the Juan or Juanita that you call your spiritual friend. So when you

*From Start Where You Are : A Guide to Compassionate Living by Pema Chodron*

## **Take up the Three Primary Resources**

The primary resources for working at dharma are a good guru, the proper practice of dharma with a workable mind, and suitable conditions for dharma practice - food, clothing, and so on. If these three are all available to you, take joy in that and pray that they be available to others, too. If they are not all available, meditate on compassion for others and take on yourself the deficiencies that all sentient beings experience in these primary resources. Pray that you and all others may have them.

*From The Great Path of Awakening*

## **Acquire the Three Principal Causes**

The three principal causes here refer to the causes leading to spiritual growth or awakening. The first cause is developing a relationship with a spiritual mentor who is well trained in practical guidance through a lineage of teachers, and is also endowed with insight.

We can save a lot of time and unnecessary suffering by seeking out the first of the three principal causes, a qualified spiritual mentor. But no guru is a substitute for our own intuitive wisdom. Each of us is endowed with the innate potential for insight that is our Buddha nature, and the external teacher is there to unveil this intuitive wisdom. Keep in mind also that many people who claim to be spiritual teachers or enlightened gurus are unqualified from the Buddhist perspective. Simply be very cautious; we can derive far more benefit by patiently seeking out someone who has true depth and substance.

The second principal cause is devoting ourselves to realization: applying ourselves to gaining realization of such truths expressed in Buddhism as the preciousness of human life, right up to the realization of ultimate truth. Regardless of the quality of our spiritual mentor or the amount of learning we have acquired, none of this will transform our lives unless we apply ourselves to earnest practice.

The third principal cause entails creating favorable circumstances for our dharma practice. Some of these are internal, such as faith, intelligence, and enthusiasm. Each of these internal conditions necessary for a beneficial practice is malleable. We are not simply given a fixed amount of intelligence, for example. Intelligence is flexible. It diminishes if not used or if used in a stupid fashion, and it can also be enhanced. The monastic universities of Tibet spent two to three years training the students' intelligence before applying the intelligence to such things as the Perfection of Wisdom teachings, logic, epistemology, ontology, ethics, phenomenology, and so forth. Like intelligence, faith certainly is a prerequisite for any kind of major endeavor, whether in business, philosophy, science, or dharma. If you don't have faith in what you are doing, you're not going to get anywhere. The same is true of enthusiasm. In addition to these necessary internal conditions for a fruitful dharma practice, there are, of course, the external situations. Without sufficient food, clothing, and shelter, for example, we cannot proceed.

If, on reviewing our present situation, we find that we are already endowed with the three principal causes, then rejoice. If we do not have the three, then we should certainly seek to acquire them. But in the meantime we can again transform the unfavorable situation, as we have done before, by recollecting how so many sentient beings are also bereft of these three principal causes. Cultivate compassion for them by taking their misfortune into your heart. Practice the taking and the sending, offering your own merit with the prayer: "May each sentient being be endowed with the necessary causes for his or her spiritual growth and happiness."

*Excerpted from: The Seven-Point Mind Training by B. Alan Wallace*

## **Three Things Maintain Inseparably**

Our body, speech and mind should always be engaged in positive activity. When we are performing virtuous actions such as prostrations, circumambulations and the like, our speech and mind should be in harmony with our bodily movements. When accumulating positive actions of speech, recitation for instance, our body and our mind should also be engaged. If we undertake some positive mental act, the body and speech should also be in attendance. For example, if, while performing prostrations or circumambulations, we chatter, or entertain a lot of negative emotions, this is just like eating polluted food. Therefore, while performing virtuous actions, our body, speech and mind should act inseparably and in unison.

*From Enlightened Courage, by Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche*