

Certain Types Of Teachers We Should Avoid

By Patrul Rinpoche & Chatral Rinpoche

Patrul Rinpoche in “*Words of My Perfect Teacher*”¹:

On the other hand, there are certain kinds of teachers we should avoid. Their characteristics are as follows.

Teachers like a millstone made of wood. These teachers have no trace of the qualities arising from study, reflection and meditation. Thinking that as the sublime son or nephew of such and such a lama, they and their descendants must be superior to anyone else, they defend their caste like brahmins. Even if they have studied, reflected and meditated a little, they did so not with any pure intention of working for future lives but for more mundane reasons—like preventing the priestly fiefs of which they are the incumbents from falling into decay. As for training disciples, they are about as well suited to fulfilling their proper function as a millstone made of wood.

Teachers like the frog that lived in a well. Teachers of this kind lack any special qualities that might distinguish them from ordinary people. But other people put them up on a pedestal in blind faith, without examining them at all. Puffed up with pride by the profits and honours they receive, they are themselves quite unaware of the true qualities of great teachers. They are like the frog that lived in a well.

One day an old frog that had always lived in a well was visited by another frog who lived on the shores of the great ocean.

“Where are you from?” asked the frog that lived in the well.

“I come from the great ocean,” the visitor replied.

“How big is this ocean of yours?” asked the frog from the well.

“It is enormous,” replied the other.

“About a quarter the size of my well?” he asked.

“Oh! Bigger than that!” exclaimed the frog from the ocean.

“Half the size, then?”

“No, bigger than that!”

“So—the same size as the well?”

“No, no! Much, much bigger!”

“That’s impossible!” said the frog who lived in the well. “This I have to see for myself.”

¹ *Kunzang Lama'i Shelung The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, Patrul Rinpoche. Padmakara Translation Group, Shambala Boston 1998, pp. 139-141

So the two frogs set off together, and the story goes that when the frog who lived in the well saw the ocean, he fainted, his head split apart, and he died.

Mad guides. These are teachers who have very little knowledge, never having made the effort to follow a learned master and train in the sutras and tantras. Their strong negative emotions together with their weak mindfulness and vigilance make them lax in their vows and samayas. Though of lower mentality than ordinary people, they ape the siddhas and behave as if their actions were higher than the sky. Brimming over with anger and jealousy, they break the lifeline of love and compassion. Such spiritual friends are called mad guides, and lead anyone who follows them down wrong paths.

Blind guides. In particular, a teacher whose qualities are in no way superior to your own and who lacks the love and compassion of bodhicitta will never be able to open your eyes to what should and should not be done. Teachers like this are called blind guides.

*Like brahmins, some defend their caste,
Or in pools of fear for their fief's survival
Bathe themselves in bogus study and reflection;
Such guides are like a millstone made of wood.*

*Some, although no different from all ordinary folk,
Are unthinkingly sustained by people's idiot faith.
Puffed up by profit, offerings and honours,
Such friends as these are like the well-bound frog.*

*Some have little learning and neglect their samayas and vows,
Their mentality is low, their conduct high above the earth,
They have broken the lifeline of love and compassion—
Mad guides like these can only spread more evil.*

*Especially, to follow those no better than yourself,
Who have no bodhicitta, attracted only by their fame,
Would be a huge mistake; and with such frauds as these
As your blind guides, you'll wander deeper into darkness.*

The Great Master of Oddiyana warns:

*Not to examine the teacher
Is like drinking poison;
Not to examine the disciple
Is like leaping from a precipice.*

You place your trust in your spiritual teacher for all your future lives. It is he who will teach you what to do and what not to do. If you encounter a false spiritual friend without examining him properly, you will be throwing away the possibility a person with faith has to accumulate merits for a whole lifetime, and the freedoms and advantages of the human existence you have now obtained will be wasted. It is like being killed by a venomous serpent coiled beneath a tree that you approached, thinking what you saw was just the tree's cool shadow.

*By not examining a teacher with great care
The faithful waste their gathered merit.
Like taking for the shadow of a tree a vicious snake,
Beguiled, they lose the freedom they at last had found.*



What follows is part of one of the last interviews of Chatral Sangye Dorje, one of the prominent Lamas of our age.²

“How will the rise and fall of the Dharma be like in the future?”

Chatral Rinpoche replied, “Support and take refuge in those spiritual masters who focus their practice in solitary retreat. Before one attains enlightenment, one should also enter into solitary retreat to focus on one’s practice under his or her close guidance and mentorship. If not, it will be just like now, where everywhere is flooded with Khenpos who give empty talks. Those ignorant ones, who run after fame and fortune, and establish their own factions, will cause people to have aversion for Buddhism and lead to the extinction of Buddhism sooner or later. Hence, it is said that the authentic Dharma is not in the monasteries, it is not in the books and not in the material world, but within the mind. There is a need to awaken it through practice and to realise (actualise) it, in order to be called the continuation or preservation of the Dharma.”

² <http://khordong.blogspot.it/2017/09/some-last-words-quelques-derniers-mots.html>