

## **Real Protection: The Higher Goal of Yoga**

*Transcription which was excerpted from a lecture by Geshe Michael Roach during the Tibetan Heart Yoga Series 3 Teacher Training in September of 2005, in Tucson, Arizona.*

And, this is a very famous idea in Buddhism, and also in Hinduism yoga tradition, of, In Tibetan we call it *kyamdro*, which means to go for refuge or to go for shelter or to seek protection in Sanskrit it's *saranam gacchami*, "I go for protection" or "I go for shelter". And we wanted to talk about the idea of protection. What does it mean? Especially during the exercises, during the asanas, how are you taking protection? What does protection mean? And what we put in the reading, it's in the notebook, I forget where it is, you guys probably know, twenty-two... there's an ancient textbook about protection and there's a monastic textbook from the greatest monastery in the world, what was it?

When Lama Zopa comes, it's Sera Jey, alright? Or anyway there's a classic presentation, and in the monastery we tend to debate it, and overkill it and then you kind of forget what it means. But protection means two things, if you think about it. Something is putting you into danger. There's danger, something wrong, something that can hurt you. So protection implies there's a danger. And then secondly, you believe that someone can help you. You go to someone because you believe they can help you. So seeking protection always involves two parts. Something is threatening you, there's a danger and then you think something can help you and you go for protection. I always think of running to your mom. The first protection you ever run to is your mom, right? And you run to them because you believe they can stop your big brother from

hitting you. And that's a kind of seeking protection. So that's the process of seeking protection.

There are four levels of protection to think about, four levels of danger in our lives. First stuff is very normal stuff, like, "I don't have enough money." That's a danger. "My relationship's not working so well." That's a danger. "I have some kind of sickness, disease, in my body." That's a danger. Those are like first level dangers, normal dangers. Okay? Second level danger is death itself and what will happen to you after you die, right? Where will you go after that? You know people think, "I don't have to worry about that right now, I've still got some time to go." And I've had students in these classes who are not here anymore. You know ... was here right, in New York and just suddenly died.

And it'll happen, you know, it can happen. So the second level of danger is death itself and what will happen after you die. Where will you go afterwards. You need serious protection, not just protection against not getting dessert after dinner, which happens to me constantly. Okay? Third level of protection is—they call it the condition of life itself. Meaning aging and death, you see? So really number two is where you will go after you die. And number three is death itself and the process of aging. So it's like you spend three hours here doing this new yoga series you're three hours older, you're three hours closer to your death. And nobody gets younger in a yoga class, unless you're doing it very well, tantrically. But that's the condition of getting old and dying itself.

The last kind of danger, the last kind of problem, is that everybody has that problem, you see what I mean? We need to seek extraordinary protection, which means, number four differs from the first three in that you break out of

worrying about yourself and you're worried about everyone. "I must protect everyone." Protection must go beyond my immediate financial problems, or relationship problems, or health problems. It must go beyond what will happen to you after you die. It must go beyond the fact of death and aging, and in the end we must seek protection for everyone. You must be concerned about everyone. It's not real protection unless you do it for everybody. Unless you try to protect everyone. How would you feel if you got protected then everyone in your class? You're teachers right? Most of you are going to be teaching yoga. So now you have a new responsibility—a very very severe and serious responsibility. Can you protect the students in your class, not from injury, not from discomfort, not from obesity, right? Can you protect them from death itself? You see? Can you take that responsibility for your students?

We were in a yoga class in New York, Om Yoga. And Cyndi Lee, right? The first chapter of Yoga Sutra, she offered the place, and we taught and then she didn't come after the second night, or something, and I felt like sorta dissed, you know? Like, I'm an important teacher, and you didn't show up, and I said, well, you know, I asked, Jennifer Brilliant, her assistant, I said, "Where's Cyndi" and she said, "Well she had to go somewhere." And I'm like, "Yea, I know, but where?" And she said, "She went to a funeral." And I said, "Oh, I'm sorry, you know, who was it?" And she said, "one of her students." And I said "Oh I'm very sorry". And then, she said, "she died during her yoga class, in our center." She died in the middle of a yoga class.

So, once you've heard this protection thing, you're going for the big time—the reason for these classes, like you should say in your next yoga class, wherever you teach, and you should look at those students and think, "I don't want this

one to die on me, during my watch”. You know what I mean? Like, I got plans for my students that exceed making them thin and strong. I don’t want someone to die who’s in my care. If there is anyway to save a person, on a higher level, I must do it for my students. You should look at the students in your class, when you walk in, look at them in the face and think “I don’t want this one to die, because I didn’t teach them properly.” If there is some way to take people to a higher level, if there is a way to change the body into an angel’s body—then you have a grave responsibility to do it for them, to help them do it. Now when they walk into class, it’s a whole different thing. You’re not just trying to help them lose weight, or look better, or feel better. You don’t want to be a teacher of this level of yoga, where you find out that the reason they didn’t come back was because they died, or seriously ill. You can prevent those, yoga can prevent those. Higher level of yoga can prevent those. That’s what we’re here for. That’s protection. You want to give them protection.

I want to talk briefly about, and then we’ll start the series, what we traditionally go for protection in is called the Three Jewels. And you should know this. *Tri Ratna* in Sanskrit, *ratna* means a jewel or a gift. Comes from a verb *ra*, which means to offer something, a gift, and *tri* means three. So *tri ratna*, three jewels. And it’s a Buddhist idea, but like many Buddhist ideas, I think you can use it in your yoga classes, non-secretarian. You can present it as a concept. None of these ideas has to be Buddhist. I personally prefer, like in the business books we do or the Christian talks we do, we strip out all the references to Buddhism itself. It’s the ideas that are important, it’s not the images or the icons. It’s not what you call it. It’s the ideas that can save peoples’ lives, whether they’re Christian or Hindu, it doesn’t matter. So, in that context also, if you do the accreditation, whatever you call that, for this course,

which I really beg you to do, and we don't give you the full manual until you do. You're going to be required to take an additional course, you can do it by correspondence, you can do it on the web for free. It's a course called the Bodhisattva Vows ... it's the seventh course in the ACI Series. This is a list of sixty something vows, that a Buddhist takes, they commit to be a Bodhisattva to try to help other people. So I'd like you to study that course and to study the vows, even if you have no intention of following the Buddhist path, okay? You don't have to take the vows, you don't have to commit to the vows. They're just a cool code of life. They're just a very sweet code of life. And I think it'll be helpful for your students. So, we ask you to do this accreditation, whatever you call it, certification process, that you take that course. If you're in New York, you should probably take it live with somebody. In other cities, LA, you can take it live with other people. Diamond Mountain. We listened to it in three-year retreat, every Sunday, we listen to the tape recorder when we were doing mantras and it's easy, you just sit there, listen to some talks and fill out some ridiculous homework. And it's a very beautiful code of life and it would be very helpful for your students. But again, that doesn't mean you have to in anyway be interested in or commit to a Buddhist path. So I'm gonna talk about the Three Jewels, *konchok sum*, in Tibetan.

The first one is called the Enlightened Being; the Jewel of the Enlightened Being. And that just means someone who has followed the path sincerely and reached the ultimate goal and they are infinitely able to help other people. When you do the sun meditation, you are sort of pretending to be them. You are like God, in a way. You are looking at the planet Earth. You are wishing well on everyone there. You are hoping you can take care of all of them. You are sending aid and comfort to every being on the planet. And at some point in

your spiritual development, you will be that. You will be like that. Your mind is working on a level beyond earth. Your body is made of light. You can stand at the same moment on a billion planets and serve every person there, in any form they need. You can be a dog, you can be a next-door neighbor, you can be their daughter, you can be their grandmother. Everybody. You have this power.

So we believe in these beings and, and we seek their help, we seek their protection. That's called the Jewel of the Enlightened Being. That's called the Real One, then there's the apparent one. The apparent one is like pictures, images. We believe Saraswati or Yangchenma in Tibetan is an Enlightened Being, and we seek her assistance. She's the Goddess of composition, music, and poetry. You can pray and Saraswati will come and help you. So that is not protection. We were in Israel. We had a cool night with a Rabbi. We went to Shabbat at my friend's house and we had Shabbat with the whole big family. And then the Rabbi came, specifically to debate with me, and we had such a good time. And his first question was, "what about images? Do you believe in images?" Because in the Jewish tradition, you can't make an image of God.

And my friend had bought a Buddha image. and the Rabbi is his teacher. So and he's like, "I can't get him to get rid of this Buddha image." And I'm like "well we believe that they're useful because they remind you of an Enlightened Being, but they're not Enlightened, there's nobody in the wood. You know what I mean, right? Sometimes people get out of hand and they start worshipping the wood, or the stone, or this image of the Enlightened Being. And, so in a way in the Jewish tradition, that's very profound, it's beyond most people's minds, that you shouldn't be attached to the format.

Maybe it looks Tibetan. Maybe it looks Chinese. Maybe it looks Indian. Maybe it looks American. You shouldn't be attached to the format. It's the essence, you know they are an Enlightened Being. They're an Angel. They can appear anywhere in the world and they do. So they're careful when they teach the Three Jewels, the Enlightened Being we're talking about ain't in the wood. It ain't any particular paper, or form, or culture, doesn't matter, it's what's behind it. It's the Enlightened Being themselves. Okay?

Second Jewel, we call the Jewel of the Dharma. If you ask anybody what does Dharma mean, they will say it's the teachings, it's the wisdom. Gyume Khensur Rinpoche will come here on Friday. He's going to come here and he will give a Dharma teaching. He will speak about the teacher of the First Dalai Lama. He will give a teaching from the teacher of the first Dalai Lama, very profound teaching. So he will give his teaching, that's the Dharma right? We call that the apparent Dharma. It's not the real Dharma. That's just the Dharma in some kind of format. So what's the real Dharma? What's the Dharma that can protect *me*? Understanding the echo—understanding that everything in your life bounces off other people back to you. That's the real Dharma. You see what I mean? Why? That one can protect you. These Tibetan words here are Dharma, they can't protect you if you can't read them. Okay?

But if you have this idea in your head, "every problem I had this week was bouncing off other people, after I did it to somebody else." Every problem in my life is bounced back from me. I did it to somebody and it's bouncing back. Then your whole life changes. Then you have protection. You have real protection. Life must get better. Why? "I don't like the crap. I don't like that." So how do you get rid of it? Stop bouncing it off other people. Okay? That's

protection. That's real protection. It goes all the way up to not dying. If you had as much care for other people as you have about your own life, you wouldn't die. Death would not come back to you. You see? If you had as much concern about others as you have about yourself, you wouldn't die.

If you're getting older it means you're not keeping up. You're using up more karma than you're making. You're not being nice enough to others. Not enough. It's not enough. What's the sign? Look in the mirror every morning, if he looks older, what you're doing is not enough. You have to do more. So that's real protection. Understanding the echo effect. How many things don't come from the echo? Point to how many things in this room don't come from you bouncing off others. That's emptiness. Okay. So when somebody says emptiness. You can say, yea, it means all the stuff in this room that's not bouncing off somebody, that I didn't do. And that's nada, nothing, zero. There's nothing like that. That's emptiness. It's not some black thing, or thinking about nothing, or "nothing matters, do whatever you want". It's not that. It means you must do kind things to others. It's the opposite of that, right? You must do kind things for others, there's nothing that doesn't bounce off others back to you. That's emptiness. That's real protection. They say that the Dharma is the ultimate protection, that understanding about echoes is the ultimate protection. That will save you. It will save you from anything.

Last protection. Last one. They call Sangha or Sangha Jewel. Sangha is to come together—it comes into Greek as *syn*. Gha means "to come", it comes into some Sanksrit as *phem* which means, "come, help me, come!" It's a calling mantra. So synagogue, means to come together. It's the exact translation into greek of sangha, ok, synagogue is the exact translation of the word sangha. Sangha means coming together, or the community. Who is the community? You are,



the people who come together to struggle to save the world. That's the community. The people who are really interested in the higher level of yoga. The people who want to protect other people in the world, help them, save them. They are the highest sangha, then you are the community—you are sangha. Ok, that's sangha. In the traditional sense, sangha might be considered people who have taken robes, but it means any spiritual group of people. We are sangha. Today we are the sangha. That's only apparent sangha.

People who have directly understood emptiness, people who have directly seen emptiness, are real sangha—ultimate sangha. They are the people who can really help you. They are the people who can really protect you. And the purpose of yoga, one big purpose of yoga—open the channels. When the prana comes from the side channels into the central channel, if you can get to a point in your asana practice where all the energy is shoved into the middle channel, you will see emptiness directly. That's the original purpose of yoga, okay? Get the prana into the sushumna—central channel—and if enough gets in, you see emptiness directly. Then you become the real protection for everybody—then you can really protect everybody. Within seven lifetimes after that you'll become enlightened, okay? So that's a big reason to do yoga—we're working from the outside to get this thing to happen on the inside.