

## **Financial Management**

Finances and money can be one of the most painful and stressful topics we have to relate with in our roles as leaders. This is for two reasons:

- Our vision is expansive, our resources (energetic, financial) are not yet
- Money is a loaded topic in our world.

There are some important guidelines in working with money which are very helpful. The most important point is having a good view.

### *View of Money and Finances*

Working with money can be viewed as a practice, so we should first look at our view of money. Our job as a sangha can be very simply defined: to preserve, protect, realize and propagate the teachings of the Buddhist Kagyü and Nyingma lineages and the Shambhala lineage. In doing this, we are working with both the teachings as well as a container to hold the teachings and enable others to connect with them. To build and develop these containers, we need both exertion and money. The Vidyadhara Trungpa Rinpoche also taught about the importance of money for our sangha. In particular, he emphasized that we should regard money as mother's milk: "It nourishes us and it nourishes others". Money is simply energy.

On a simple and matter-of-fact level, money is important in what we do. We can also move slightly beyond the matter-of-fact level, and not just regard money as a form of energy to help build containers, but also look at and work with money and its relation to our psychological states of mind.

In our world, money is so many things. There are few issues as loaded as money in our daily life of giving and taking. In some sense, in the world of materialism, our whole life becomes reduced to a business deal of trying to take more than we have to give. Money is the means and the measure of this business-deal approach to life. Money is also, like nothing else, the object of passion, aggression and ignorance. And in a world governed by materialism, money actually seems to replace the process of the twelve nidanas as being the cause and the effect of all activity. In fact, money offers us wonderful and delightful possibilities of exploring the depths of samsara.

But according to both the Buddhist and the Shambhalian approaches, we could develop a very different view of money. From the Buddhist point of view, starting as beginning practitioners we can work to overcome our neurosis; we can learn to work with our passion, aggression and ignorance relating to money. If we are too loose and sloppy with money, then we can learn to tighten up, to be more precise and mindful with our money. We can learn to watch how we might want to spend money to entertain ourselves, or how we might have an aversion to being careful with money as a form of aggression. If we are

too tight, we can watch how we cling to money, how we become insecure when we do not have enough money, how we feel resentful when people ask us for money. Above all, we can develop a sense of precision, carefulness and simplicity in relation to money, as we can to everything else.

On the bodhisattva path, we can also work with money as an object of generosity. Giving money and material objects is one of the aspects of the Dana paramita, along with giving protection from fear and giving the dharma. We can practice nonconceptual giving—giving fearlessly, openly and without strings attached.

Equally, as Shambhalians, we can connect with the fundamental richness and sacredness of our world. Rather than feeling poor first, we first can feel rich. We have these precious teachings, we have our community, we have our kingdom, on the spot. We should not have any hesitation about working with money; we should feel confident to cultivate a sense of richness in all that we do. From that sense of richness, that absence of poverty mentality, money flows naturally as an expression of our inner wealth.

This latter point is very important in our view of money. Where there is inspiration and a sense of richness, money will follow naturally. We must trust money as an expression of energy. When people care about and love something, there is no limit to the amount of money they can be willing to contribute. Both Suzuki Roshi and Trungpa Rinpoche expressed this point on a number of occasions. So fundamentally, it is most important to work on our community and our sense of connection to the dharma. If that flourishes, then money will not be a problem. In fact, we can take an even stronger stance on this by acknowledging its opposite: where there is too much money to build a container, and not enough exertion and inspiration, the danger of corruption is very high.

### Commitment

In addition to relating and working with money, our whenever we talk about monetary issues, we also end up talking about peoples commitment. There are a number of ways that people can express their commitment to their path—in their practice, in their exertion for their community, as well as in their financial contributions. We could say that it is the job of the meditation instructor to work with people's commitment to their practice, and the job of the centre coordinator or director to work with people's exertion for their community. In the same way, we cannot view our work as only the impersonal administration of money; but we must also be willing to relate to people and their commitment to the path, as expressed in their financial support. This requires a lot of sensitivity, too—for while we must relate to their commitment as expressed in their financial support, we should never relate to them solely based on their financial contribution. In our sangha, the human being is always more important than the money flows.

From this point of view, a financial commitment to the community is actually an important expression of the practitioners' commitment to their own sanity. It is important

that everyone has the opportunity to express that commitment, and actually does so. And when we have a group of people committed to supporting the sangha, then that commitment can have a profound radiance—it can radiate out a sense of strength and a sense of richness to the wider world.

### *Skilful Means in Working with Finances*

There are a number of useful guidelines for working with money.

- Basic sanity and care is the starting point. This is a very commonsense level of financial skill: we do not need to be great financial planners, but rather be willing to be disciplined and to develop our sanity with regard to money. This is very similar to the Hinayana level of the Buddhist path. We must have some willingness to develop discipline and continually relate to the financial situation. This includes ensuring that financial information is recorded properly, that money is handled properly, that the community receives reports on how money is handled, and that one is aware of the basic financial facts (for example, how many participants are required for a program to break even).
- Openness to skilful means. Beyond that, we must also be willing to work with skilful means. As money can be a very painful topic, we must learn the skilful means of being gentle with people, while also being firm with them about their role in supporting the sangha. We must learn how to be strict in financial planning and decisions, but also learn when to be generous to help other people and the sangha grow.
- Remain open and receptive when dealing with money. Money can make a tremendous difference in our relationships and our communication: when we are discussing money that can arouse tremendous resentment in people, so we must learn to work with that very skilfully. At the same time as we become more serious and careful with money, it is crucial that we never allow financial issues to dominate our concerns for our fellow sangha members. If we make unreasonable financial demands on people, this can cause them pain and resentment and harm their relation to the sangha and the path. We must always be ready to work skilfully and be generous to ensure that resentment doesn't lead to a lack of communication. If people get stuck on the topic of money, we must be ready to give them the gift of kindness, either financially or with supportive words. All these aspects relate to the Mahayana level of the Buddhist path.
- Finally, we must be willing and able to hold our seat with kindness and dignity. Based on being careful and trained with our money, and learning to be strict and generous at the same time, we can develop confidence in our view of money. We can see it as important and unimportant at the same time, and understand its measure in all decisions. Based on this confidence, if our sangha is not behaving responsibly, then we can be firm and take our seat, blocking decisions which will

negatively affect the sangha's energy and thus also the finances. Equally, if we find ourselves stuck in a poverty mentality, we can be generous and let some money flow to help uplift some program or aspect of our community.