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HINAYANA-MAHAYANA

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Devotion - Working with the Vajra Master

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In order to dispel doubts and petty concerns and confusion about the nature of devotion, I was requested to talk to you today so that we could discuss in practical terms the workability of the path and the solid, real quality of our experience in working with the vajra master. It's a unique and extremely fortunate situation that we could be here together in this environment, where all of you have been practicing and studying very hard. You have had a very intimate relationship with the vajra master; so the confusions which you might still harbor are tenuous and somewhat transparent in this environment. Because you are hearing the vajrayana and because a certain ground exists, Rinpoche thought it might be helpful for me to talk to you in extremely practical terms about what happens between the teacher and the student.

In the beginning there is something bright and glowing to which we are attracted. The important point about that attraction is that it doesn't have any reason, other than the quality of brilliance. There is no personal reason; there is just seeing that and moving toward that, without weighing the consequences or analyzing the reason for the brilliance, the quality of the brilliance.

In our journey toward that, we discover pain. That pain exists because the brilliance is still far away. Of course, there are all kinds of qualifications about that: pain of this and pain of that. But basically speaking, there is a separation between that and this. Because of that pain we try to figure out how to get closer; and in figuring out, we produce sharper, more defined pain. That defined pain is our discovery of the clouds of

neurosis; and what makes it acute is that our initial feeling is still there, but the clouds are covering up that feeling of simple attraction. And so we latch onto the most immediate handle, which consists of two things: our version, and “it,” or “that.” “That” is a better word, I suppose, and that is what we call the sitting practice. So the combination of our version and “that” is the working basis for our beginning practice on the path.

Then that brilliance becomes more vague than it was in the beginning, which is confounding. At the same time it pushes us to experience further “that.” And through tremendous effort we begin to see the transparency of our version. The brilliance is shining through our version, so our original perception is still vital. It is some sort of reminder shining through our clouds of interpretation, and it prompts us to go through a little hole in the clouds. That stepping through is our practice of the bodhisattva ideal. Fresh from the vagueness of our version, we are still inspired by the clear, absolutely clear, shining brilliance of “that.” So we try and squeeze through a little hole, and we say we will work with others.

So there's a clearing. It's like going through a dense wood and coming to an open field where you can see some expanse, see the horizon off in the distance, and feel the softness contrasting to the density of the forest. The brightness of the sky is quite a relief. Wandering through the meadow, there's a constant sense of spaciousness, as contrast, and some feeling of gentleness. At the same time there's a brilliant light illuminating the meadow or the field, and you begin to realize that because of that light such gentleness exists, such field exists. Everything in that environment is dependent on the light, the brilliance. At that point the light is so brilliant that it could illuminate a world of such beauty, gentleness, and crispness, even the shadows of trees and dew on the grass.

Walking through that meadow, we abruptly come to the end. It is abrupt because we felt somewhat fulfilled because that brilliance was apparent and shining; but also because we were still following it, going toward it. There was still some sense that there

might be something further at the end of this valley. And we come to the edge of a cliff, which I'm sure you've heard about, and for the first time we also come to a sense of real panic. The rest was very childish, because beyond the cliff is brilliance, or "that." And "this" is hesitating. There's a question at that point. What to believe? Is "that" really "that"? But the warmth of the brilliant light, the sun, burns away the fibers of hesitation, simply because "that" is more important than "this."

As students of the seminary and of the vajrayana, you should know quite directly that without the vajra master there is no dharma. And without the vajra master there is no hope whatsoever for anyone sitting in this room to attain enlightenment. Devotion is not a theoretical affair and not something in a notebook. Devotion is simply being completely and totally in love with the vajra master—and this includes everyone. But the question is [laughs] one's doubt and hesitation.

Go back to the beginning if you can. What started you on this trip? Where did you start from? What was your first flash? You say, "Well, I read a book," or "I saw Rinpoche," or "I heard from a friend," or "I studied it somewhere else, which led me to this." Well, that's not what I mean. What was first, absolutely first? What happened? From my personal point of view, which seems safe to talk about, I had only one thing in mind, and it was "that." In this case, "that" was Rinpoche. There was nothing else but that. I wasn't concerned about the hairs of a tortoise.

The point is that in devotion, in the feeling of devotion, you have vast space, because there's no concern for yourself, quite literally. When that occurs, then there is a complete environment for precision. In my relationship with Rinpoche, that's how it works. I'm being quite up front with you, so please listen. Because of my intense longing for him—and "him" is just a reference point, okay?—there's nothing in my mind when I'm *there*. Whatever he says are the words of, the feeling of, the act of wisdom—of teaching. That's how you should be. From nothing at all comes something, comes teaching. Teachings are literal and real, and there is no such thing as self. How to realize

that? Through devotion and intense longing for the vajra master, which is the same as enlightened mind. Because of that, some transmission can occur.

Transmission is precision and clarity; transmission is the creation of a vajra world based on devotion, which is nothing in itself. Longing starts, from the beginning, without ego. Devotion to the master starts, from the very beginning, without ego. Check it out for yourself; it's true. You did it already. But it becomes clouded over and starts to be worked on. So there is frustration and work, space and clearing—"that." Don't fool around in your relationship. The same thing is happening with everyone anyway. Just wake up: that's what's happening. If you think that your little trip means anything, you're wrong. It doesn't mean anything at all. It's just something you waste your time on. Devotion is the same as space. Teaching is the same as energy.

Because I have been instructed to say these things, and because I have the permission of my teacher, I have said these things.

If you have any questions, I would be glad to talk about it.

## QUESTIONS

QUESTION: Is devotion self-existent? I mean, what's longing?

VAJRA REGENT: Oh, come on, that's just seminary bullshit. Come on, it's not like that. It's your guts. You see something there, you want it. Am I right? Do you want it?

Q: Mm-hmm.

VR: Yes, it's something like that. You want it. It's a nonconceptual thing.

Q: But is there anything that is longing for something, or is it just longing, period?

VR: It's a nonconceptual thing. It's nonconceptual.

Q: Thank you.

Q: What happens if the vajra master dies?

VR: Then you die, too.

Q: And that's it?

VR: What do you mean, what happens if Rinpoche dies?

Q: Well, if he dies, then do we—you know, people have asked him this before—do we continue to try and find another teacher, or, you know, an instructor?

VR: Why are you thinking about that?

Q: It just occurs to me. Insecurity, probably.

VR: I don't know what to say. He happens to be alive at this point.

Q: True.

VR: Yes.

Q: When I first knew Rinpoche, it was easy to ask him questions. It seemed the things I cared about a great deal just came to me to ask him. Now it's very hard. It seems as if there's a heavy thing in my head. I want to know things, but I always want to know them afterward. I feel almost afraid—and embarrassed.

VR: Great; that's fantastic. That's because you are still going with the original thing.

Q: But I'm not asking him questions.

VR: Well, push yourself.

Q: I'm afraid to look stupid.

VR: Yes. [Laughs]

Q: Thank you. [Laughs]

Q: So all the questions of, "Am I doing it?" "What is doing it?" and so forth—that's all just conceptualizing?

VR: That's right. But let's talk in terms of our path—don't forget the path.

Q: Well, that brings you back to practice.

VR: Mm-hmm.

Q: I mean, when you have that question of "What is it?" "Am I doing it?" and you begin to get lost in it and obsessed with it, is that missing the message to come back to practice? I mean, coming back to being right here?

VR: No, that's it in itself. Forget about the message.

Q: I mean getting lost in the questions.

VR: Yes, that's right. Go ahead and do that.

Q: Go ahead and get lost?

VR: Yes, if you can.

Q: Thank you.

Q: You said that when we begin, we have some sort of initial inspiration, which is that we click with the vajra master. And then that becomes confused, and we don't know what our relationship is. Then we come out into the clearing, which is some sorting out of that process?

VR: Yes, you feel like you're part of the family, but a distant relative.

Q: It seems the problem is that one always wants to be a closer relative.

VR: That's not a problem — that's it.

Q: I don't quite understand. I mean, that's the situation, but—

VR: That's the nature of devotion. That's the nature of space and the energy, yes. You want to get “that.” That's not a problem. Your ideas about it are a problem.

Q: Well, what's the difference between just continuing one's little trip, and trying to get closer or trying to do those things, cultivate...

VR: Well, the only difference is that you are second guessing. Try to get as close as you can. Don't turn your head around to see, “Did I do it right, the last step?” Don't turn around and look to the past. Do you see what I mean?

Q: I just feel that this is where most people's problems —

VR: You bet. Yes, that's right. It's the reference point to the past.

Q: In Buddhism, we talk about compassion and also about idiot compassion, which is compassion without skillful means. Is there such a thing as idiot devotion?

VR: Well, I suppose the only idiot devotion is checking up to see how devoted you are.

Q: Could it also become a kind of fixation that would block prajna?

VR: The only kind of fixation there could be is the double take. You see, it's very straightforward if you can do it, very straightforward. Just straight ahead. Fixation means something along the side. The thing is, everyone is scared shitless to go straight ahead. You're afraid you're going to dissolve, disperse, explode. You will, if you go straight ahead, sure. But that's no different than at the beginning. That's the point: your initial thing is the same.

Q: Well, in other words, is it important at some point to totally suspend your own intelligence?

VR: Intelligence?

Q: Yes. [Laughter]

VR: What do you mean by intelligence?

Q: Well, like the vajrayana image of jumping into the fire.

VR: Jumping into the fire. Well, what's intelligence? Jumping into the fire?

Q: Well, the split between the two gets very close together. Do you know what I'm talking about?

VR: Maybe. Say something more about intelligence.

Q: Well, I'm actually speaking about the relationship between devotion and a sense of your own intelligence, your own awake.

VR: Tell me something about your experience, not what you've heard at the seminary.

Q: Maybe I'd better do that in private.

VR: Okay.

Q: Good.

Q: About that panic—I'm just speaking from my own experience—there's a sense of coming up against tremendous resistance: "Uh-uh, I don't want to do it. No." I wind up hanging on and hanging on, and that's very painful.

VR: You see, the point is that your absurdity, your mistakes, and your resistance are the ground to learn to experience the vajra world. It's very simple. Maybe you have to give

in to the vajra master so that you can see those trippies coming up. Otherwise, how are you going to see them? You're just going to keep them as yours.

Q: I never saw it so clearly before.

VR: Offering to him—how does it go? It's in the Sadhana of Mahamudra: "Confused thoughts I offer..." That's really true. It's not just some words you read. It takes guts, sure; but the guts are there. That's how you started this whole thing to begin with. You just got kind of stupid along the way.

Q: It sounds so aggressive, as if you could end up banging on his door in the middle of the night.

VR: You might. [Laughter] It's happened before.

Q: I know. But what is sanity then?

VR: There's no safe place, absolutely none. That is the question, I think, of making yourself a raving maniac or making yourself a straightforward vajrayana person. You can't figure that out.

Q: I never used to want to bother him.

VR: Yes, I know. I understand, I understand. You see, the point is that there's that pregnant space between those two extremes of wanting to be solidly controlled and together, so that he will recognize that you are [laughter] — I mean it; no one is kidding here—that he will say, "You did it right." And then there's the other extreme of thinking that you could go completely berserk and just dribble down in the hallway. [Laughter] The point is, don't choose sides between the two; just do what happens—I mean, *be* what is, be what happens.

Q: May I ask another question?

VR: Sure.

Q: What's the difference in our devotion to Rinpoche and our devotion to you?

VR: I don't know.

Q: I mean, is devotion to you being willing to work with you, or should it be more than that, do you think?

VR: Well, as far as I'm concerned, between Rinpoche and me, I don't see any problem.

Q: So it's like the same thing. It's like an emanation or radiation or something.

VR: That's the way it appears to me. As far as I'm concerned, whatever there is of me is him.

Q: All right, thank you.

Q: In a way this is a continuation of an earlier question. I can see stepping out, making a fool of yourself and so on; I can see the necessity for doing that. But at the same time it seems that we're being told continuously not to bother Rinpoche with our petty trips, and in a sense that's all we have to offer.

VR: Oh, really?

Q: Well, in terms of just talking to him, you know, what are you going to say to Rinpoche?

VR: What are you going to say to someone next to you" What are you going to say to me?

Q: Well, it turns out to be kind of trivial a lot of the time. And I personally have some sense of *wanting* to be able to communicate something more than that; but I don't know what it would be.

VR: That's just wasting time, completely. The thing is that you want "that." So you invent little trippies to say in order to get "that." Just understand that, understand that first.

Q: Yes.

VR: Then, if you understand that a hundred percent, whatever comes out would be appropriate in the situation. I mean, if that's where you live, so to speak—to be a little Ram Dass-ian about this [laughter]—if that's where your mind is, the dwelling place of

your mind, then whatever comes up is not your eating up of him, but what he wants of you. You see, it's quite simple, everyone: it's not your trip, it's his trip.

Q: Thank you.

Q: It seems that in being attracted and trying to get too close to Rinpoche, there's a real possibility of stepping on other people.

VR: Yes.

Q: How do you work with that, I mean—?

VR: Don't step on them. Go around. [Laughter]

Q: Well, when you can't have a personal thing with Rinpoche, it seems you're saying that you should just jump more into the phenomenal world, the vajra world, and just use that as your vajra master and don't second guess your experience—

VR: Let's start from the beginning. You people sit here with him in a room, or you pass him in a hallway, or he passes you someplace: that's the beginning. Are you making that complete? Gesture, step, environment—did you get everything? As far as I'm concerned, when I'm with him it's totally his world, and I want to pick up on whatever is there. I think everyone does that, but I just want to reinforce it and tell you that that's it. Do that all the time. Everyone is doing the same thing. Don't miss anything. It's your fault if you miss it.

Q: Maybe I'm being thick, but I'm just not sure what you're suggesting we do when we're not in his presence. You seem to place more priority on that.

VR: No; when you're not in his presence, he [laughs] is the same thing as the phenomenal world. In other words, if your practice is tuned so that you surrender to his every movement, every gesture, it is the same thing with the phenomenal world. There's no difference. That means your mind is open, everything is open and alert; and within space, vast space, there are particular points which become quite apparent and simple. That is called awareness, I suppose; but the ground is devotion. Because you spend such time with him, whether it is one hour or fifteen minutes, that's the entire space. That's all

that there is; there's nothing more than that. And because of that, it's quite easy to be clear about the points in space, or the energy.

Q: So, if I have it clear, working with the phenomenal world brings about a deeper sense of devotion to Rinpoche.

VR: No, no, no, no. It's the other way around.

Q: It seems that working with the phenomenal world makes you appreciate the depth, so to speak, of Rinpoche when you're with him.

VR: I think it's the other way around. Because of your unbiased love affair, because of your unperverted, unrealized love affair with Rinpoche, you can work with the phenomenal world.

Q: Thank you.

Q: When you say unrealized love affair, you seem to say that there's "that" and that's the goal, and that you can leap off the cliff and get to "that."

VR: I didn't say anything about leaping off the cliff and getting to "that."

Q: Oh—you never got to the cliff?

VR: I got to the cliff. [Laughter]

Q: And then what did you do?

VR: And th-e-e-en—[Laughter]

Q: Well, okay. Anyway, you said unrealized love affair.

VR: Yes.

Q: Well, why unrealized?

VR: Oh, that's great! I'm glad you asked that. [Laughs] Because the fabric, the guts of a love affair is the unrealized quality, the loneliness.

Q: So, at the beginning, there's this attraction, and it's—I forget exactly—

VR: Okay, skip the middle. At the end you have it, but you can't hold it.

Q: Mm-hmm—which sounds the same as the beginning. In the middle, you're stupid.

VR: Yes.

Q: And that's the working basis?

VR: Yes.

Q: Why?

VR: Huh? [Laughter]

Q: Well, I like the beginning, I like the end. [Laughter]

VR: Well, get to the end, then.

Q: Well, tell me about the middle. It helps for me to hear this six times.

VR: You've heard it so many times. [Laughter]

Q: It seems when I experience Rinpoche, I experience tremendous—what you're talking about—space and majesty. But my own experience seems like such bullshit in relation to that. And I wonder, what do you with that, what do you do with where you're at?

VR: Just keep going towards "that." Don't worry about the whole crummy manifestation.

Q: But it seems endless.

VR: Well, cop to that: yes, it is endless; yes, there is no self.

Q: How do you cop to that? Saying it doesn't seem to do it.

VR: Hopefully not. Do it. Endless is the same thing as no self.

Q: So there isn't any substance to the whole thing, right now.

VR: Absolutely not.

Q: I was afraid of that. [Laughter]

Q: I'm not clear what you're referring to as the highlights. Is that just like a sense of direction to go in?

VR: Highlights? Did I say something about highlights?

Q: Yes.

VR: What was it?

Q: Just going out and dealing with the phenomenal world, and highlights appear.

VR: No, no, I was talking about the bodhisattva path, not about dealing with the phenomenal world. I was talking about the bodhisattva path when I said, “Rays come through the clouds.” Is that what you mean?

Q: Highlights. Space.

VR: Highlights? Space? Points in space?

Q: You said high points.

VR: I didn't say high points. Points in space—is that what you mean?

Q: Maybe. But I remember something about highlights.

VR: I don't remember highlights.

Q: Well, does somebody remember the term?

VR: What do you want to know? [Laughter]

Q: Well, you were talking about—not the presence of Rinpoche, but sort of giving out and—

VR: Do you mean when he's not around, then what do you do?

Q: Well, yes. I think we're fixated on the idea that if you're devoted, there has to be somebody right there to be devoted to.

VR: Yes. Well, the whole point I was trying to make—I'll say it again—is that when he's around, realize the space. And that space is there all the time. So the phenomenal world becomes your guru. You have to start with the space, which is devotion. You have to start with that. In other words, when you go toward “that,” there is nothing of you there at all. It's the same thing when you deal, practically speaking, with the phenomenal world. Someone walks into the room and you say, “Hello.” You don't have to figure out “How should I say hello?” [Laughter]

Q: Okay.

Q: Okay, so you took us to the cliff. What happens then?

VR: Hmm?

Q: You didn't finish the story.

VR: That's right. It's completely unrequited from there on in. [Laughter] Don't laugh; it's true. You'd better be ready for that. You can't hold it, because it's nothing solid.

Q: But there's no leaping off the cliff?

VR: How many times do you want to hear the word "leap"?

Q: How about "jump"?

VR: How about "skip"? [Laughter]

Q: Well, isn't it unrequited because—

VR: The point is that you can't hold your loved one and possess your loved one, ever. And because of that, there is intelligence, all the time. There's always a Great Eastern Sun, which we've heard about. There is always a rising, because you can't hold it. If you hold it, it's dead.

Q: But it's actually that way from the beginning. It's not something that—

VR: Yes. We went through that, didn't we? Yes.

Q: Are you saying, then, that devotion would be relating to any space in our environment?

VR: That's a very interesting point of view. There isn't such a thing as "any space in our environment." It's not that way. There is original space, which is your environment, always. The rest is purely arbitrary—the lights, the thangka over there, green drapes, a table over here—that's just the way we set it up. But before that, there is just the space of your own being, whatever that is—or our being, or his being. And it doesn't have any qualifications, so you can't try to adjust yourself to space. It doesn't work that way. Space is there first; your self is an afterthought.

Well, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to thank you very much for being very kind to me while I've been here, both times, and I appreciate that. Not because I'm particularly sentimental and think you're great people, but I appreciate it because there's a possibility and a potential for a world that is arising constantly, which we create. That world is a vajra-like world; it is simple, strong, untouchable, unbreakable, crystal. It has

no holes in terms of doubt or confusion about what is. So, I thank you very much for your hospitality, and I look forward to working with you, as is said.