



VAJRA REGENT ÖSEL TENDZIN

The Path of Radiant Wisdom Intensive Training Seminar

Orcas Island, Washington

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[Path of Radiant Wisdom, Intensive Training Seminar]
[Orcas Island, Washington]

Talk four of 6
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DONALD MILANI:

[laughter]. Let's start with that. Good evening and hello. The Regent has asked me to give this evening's talk, which is about the spiritual friend. And as you can tell I'm quite nervous. This is the first time I've done this, but here we go. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Donald Milani [laughter]. I've worked for the Regent for three years now as his personal secretary. And also my wife and I live with the Regent and his wife and four children at the Kalapa Court in Boulder. So, to get right into it, taking our inspiration from the refuge vow, which is that last thing that took place, a question may arise; what do we do now? We have our practice, our shamatha practice, just straightforward and good. We have our relationship to sangha members. We emulate the Buddha who overcame aggression and attained enlightenment in this lifetime. That's good. But at the same time we may realize that because of our habitual patterns and ignorance we have a tendency to fool ourselves. Our intention may be pure but we do the wrong things and we may hurt other people.

So at that time when we see that that's happening we need to realize we have to take instructions from an expert, a person who has actually travelled the path and knows all the different intricacies of it. And that person, of course, is called a dharma teacher. In sanskrit it's called the *kalyanamitra*, which is the word for spiritual friend. This person is like a doctor. When you have an illness you don't have the expertise to diagnose for yourself what is wrong with you so you go to this person who is an expert. A person who has studied those things and has trained in those things for many, many years.

As Lord Gampopa says in his famous text that the Regent has been quoting throughout the seminar, which is in Tibetan called the [Tibetan title]; the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*. And in that text Gampopa says quite simply that by yourself alone you simply don't know how to attain enlightenment. So you actually have to seek out the instructions of someone who does know. Naropa said that all of the Buddhas of the three times, including Shakyamuni, relied on the instructions on the instructions from teachers throughout many lifetimes. A real flesh and blood person. So even the big guys, even the big shots went through the very same process that we're doing at this very moment. They went to seminars [laughter], they sat a lot of meditation, they had to work with their hang-ups and their neurosis. Absolutely no one has done it alone.

So at this point you may think, is there a contradiction here? [laughter] The buddhadharma has always said to us don't rely on a god, don't rely on any external person who is going to save you or help you in any way. Well that's true, but the answer is simple, there are still others and there's still other people and you are not separate from others. It's like the doctor again. You go to him, he checks you out, he prescribes medication, but you, your body, you're the one who has to get better. He doesn't give you any zap into instant health. And you have to do it on your own. And any doctors who you go to who do give you that zap, or think they can, you should be very suspicious of them. Cause as we've seen from our practice, that really doesn't work. You have to go through it on your own.

So this spiritual friend works in the same way as a doctor, and there are some traditional similes of a teacher, spiritual friend. One of the similes is that he is a guide in unknown territory. You're taking a journey and he'll say, watch out up here there's landslides that come down the mountain so you watch out as you go around that side of the mountain. And he'll say, watch out for this forest it has lots of wild animals. And he'll say, be careful when you go into that city because there's lots of thieves, be after your money or whatever, your [laughs]. And he'll say watch out for that group of islands, the San Juans, they're very sleepy they have a very sleepy quality, you should watch out there. Another analogy is that he's like a boatman who helps you cross the river of samsara. Even if you're on the ship of dharma, say you're, you have your

meditation and everything, if you don't have a guide, you don't have a person who knows the route, you can't find your way and you're carried away by the momentum of your own karmic activity from the past.

So this spiritual friend sounds like a pretty good guy. And a nice fellow. And the next question is how do you find one? Well, Gampopa again gives some guidelines and that is that the spiritual friend is known by his sign or marks in his behavior. You could say he has the behavioral marks of a bodhisattva or an enlightened being. And these marks are as follow: in his body and mind he or she, body and mind are gentle and not abusive and his mind is without deceit and fraud. And the main point Gampopa makes is that spiritual friend should be full of compassion towards all beings. With that compassion, the spiritual friend practices the good and wholesome, which are also known as the six *paramitas*, or the six transcendent actions, actions which transcend the karmic chain of cause and effect, or ego. And those are generosity, discipline, patience, exertion, meditation and *prajna*, or transcendent knowledge. I'm not going to go into those tonight because the spiritual friend's coming back to talk about those [laughter].

Another mark of the spiritual friend is that he would not ever give up his practice of the dharma, not even for the sake of his own life. This sort of person is unshakeable. He's like a mountain. And he has the confidence of his convictions and he will not sell out to materialism of any type. So, now you've found him, how should you relate to him? That is the question [laughter]. Relating to the spiritual friend, well, Gampopa says you should have certain attitudes. Should treat him like, he or she, like a precious jewel and also you should treat that person like a doctor, because it is a matter of life and death. And just simply be grateful, humble and open. That's the main point, is just to be open.

Of course, in relating with the spiritual friend a question arises about your embarrassment and your doubt about him or her, which is what your practice is all about. It's just like you're embarrassed to go to the doctor and take your clothes off. Or giving a talk like this [laughter] he says you should give a talk. So basically you should just be open and relax, be who you are [laughter] not too embarrassed and the main point is to have a sense of humor about yourself [laughter]. And in fact the spiritual friend will often joke with you to get you to relax. You'll go to him and you'll say, "I feel like I'm going crazy." And he'll say, "We should have you committed immediately." And you'll say, "I want a second opinion." And he'll say, "Alright, you're ugly too." [laughter] I've been working on that one all day, thank you very much. [laughter and applause] So doubt [laughter] what do you do with your doubt? [uproarious laughter] What do you do with your doubt? Well, basically not much. You just simply have to listen to his instructions and check them out for yourself. It's the only way to go.

Now there's a traditional way of getting the sort of feeling of the attitude you should take towards the spiritual friend, which is the traditional approach, which comes from the Indian tradition which is called the Seven-Fold Offering. These seven are: prostration, offering, confession, rejoicing, requesting to teach and asking to remain. The seventh one is dedicating the merit, right? So prostrating, you all saw that during the refuge ceremony, it's basically a sign of respect. We nowadays do the bow, just as we bow to the shrine. Offering is simply openness, humbleness, giving your arrogance up, just being open. Confession is just acknowledging the fact that you're lost in samsaric activity, so you just take the simple attitude of humbleness. Rejoicing, I like that one because it sort of shows that things aren't so stiff and serious as we might think, and we can actually celebrate the dharma and have some cheerfulness. Requesting to teach is obvious. Request the teacher to teach the egoless dharma. And asking to remain is, in a traditional sense meaning not passing into nirvana so that you come back and continue to teach sentient beings throughout many lifetimes. And dedicating the merit is, of course, whatever instructions that you have received and have entered your

stream of being you actually will dedicate that towards others. So it's not just for yourself.

But the most basic way to serve the spiritual friend, and the one that I'm the most familiar with from my own experience, is simply to serve him. So what does that really mean? As Gampopa says in the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, he quotes the *Gandavyuha Sutra*, which is a mahayana sutra, and he says the enlightenment of a Buddha is obtained by serving spiritual friends. So what type of service can you do? Well, anything you can, and sitting, believe it or not, is serving the teacher and in fact is the best service possible. You might think that some type of material offering would please the teachers, but actually that's not so. They could care less as a matter of fact. The best way you can serve the teacher is to follow his example. Not hurt others, have compassion for all beings, and develop transcendent awareness. And you can read about how many students did this in the lives of Naropa, Marpa, Milarepa, Ösel Tendzin and so on. So I think that's just about it. Seventeen cards. By the way does anyone know what the Tibetan word Trungpa, as in Chögyam Trungpa, Rinpoche?

STUDENT: Servant

DM: Right. Trungpa means attendant, a servant. So that's it. Goodness, I did it. I'd just like to add a little disclaimer at the end that I'd like to say that any mistakes I've made should be considered my own. The dharma that my guru has taught is perfect and any mistakes are from my own lack of understanding. So at this point we could have some questions and answers. Let's get the microphone [inaudible: now?]. This is an early edition of the Jewel Ornament. It now comes in maroon.

QUESTION: Who published that edition?

DM: Shambhala publishes it, yes.

Q: It has a very nice letters.

DM: -that's *ah* on the cover, Tibetan letter, last letter of the Tibetan alphabet. And it's a seed syllable for egolessness.

Q: Thank you.

QUESTION: I've got an obvious question. Is there anything you could convey in a setting like this of what the Regent has taught you in your capacity as his secretary, being so close with him for these years?

DM: Well there's a lot of it. Do you have anything in mind particularly?

Q: I do, actually. In discussion group today the questions came up around the Regent's particular style, not so much in a negative way as in terms of just the many aspects of his seeming joy in his existence and energy and that sort of thing and the issue of how that was connected with what the topics have been for the last few nights, cutting through the kind of illusions we have about conditioned existence. I guess I was wondering about what you've seen of that, what kind of direct expression you've seen. Cause things could get confusing, also.

DM: I still don't get what you're getting at.

Q: Difference partying and transcending.

DM: Ah! [laughter] There we go! [laughter] Listen, that's the vajrayana and you have to ask him about that personally. He's expert. I'm not. So, got out of that one, but please ask him.

QUESTION: [inaudible]

DM: Say more?

Q: [inaudible]

DM: Well, we haven't gotten there yet. We have to cover the ground. The dharma of golf. Well, when he plays golf he walks down the fairway and he thinks about the dharma, specifically usually he's teaching. So he tells me that he never thinks about the words, just thinks about the feeling he needs to evoke. And he just walks down and suddenly it comes to him, he says, "I've got it." So if that helps you at all. Not so good, huh? [laughter] Some people like it some people don't.

Q: It's a start.

DM: Well, he thinks about the dharma all the time. He really does. And all those activities he's doing; playing golf, listening to Annie Lenox and the Eurythmics [laughter] he's thinking about the dharma. Actually works that way. He says to me little things like, "Oh, hm, relates to the dharma." Watches everything in that way. That's why he doesn't sleep much he has such an active mind. He's thinking about the dharma all the time. Anything else?

Q: Thank you, it was very good.

DM: Microphone? Could you raise your hand please? Go ahead you can assemble it.

QUESTION: For those of us who are not around the kalyanamitra all the time but are around meditation instructors, other members of the sangha, you got some general advice for how something that's approximating that relationship or something that can be carried out?

DM: Yeah. [inaudible - DM and questioner overlap each other]. In terms of being around him? Being around a teacher?

Q: Yeah.

DM: Hm. Well, the Vajracharya has set up serving so people can be around him. He has *kusung* who attend him so people can be around him. He has *dorje kasung* so people can be around him. Oh if you live in Portland, yeah.

Q: Yes, I think I wasn't very clear about it. We aren't around the Vajracharya, we aren't around the Regent but we are around people who are not precisely peers and are not precisely gurus and...

DM: Well, the way I've heard the Regent answer that question is you should try and check in whenever you can. Come to programs like this.

QUESTION: You mentioned doubt-

DM: -doubt

Q: -earlier and I was wondering if you could say a little bit more about that.

DM: Well, from my own experience, it's my own trip but I take a very tough sort of attitude with myself, and not giving up. If I have doubt I look into it, I check it out, sort of in that way and really go towards it rather than away, rather than stepping back and thinking "thinking". Go towards it. Check it out. I've always been direct like that, that's the way I've done it. I think that's [laughs]...

Q: In your talk when you mentioned that when you sort of made a correlation with embarrassment, were you meaning doubt about like what you're doing, like why am I doing this-

DM: -sure

Q: -or were you meaning doubt about the teacher?

DM: Both. Yeah. All of those.

Q: Ok, thank you.

DM: Um hum. Her first.

QUESTION: You mentioned that, excuse me, you mentioned that the dharma, when you learn it, it isn't only for you.

DM: Um hum.

Q: Can you elaborate on how it, how you pass it on?

DM: Well [laughter] you could teach others to meditate, you could simply be an open, straightforward person and that communicates to people, they might get interested and say, what's with you, how come you don't kill flies, things like that [laughter]. See you're simply not holding the dharma for yourself.

DM: Is that it? [laughter] One more, huh?

QUESTION: Under your heading, how to find a spiritual friend what I really heard was how to recognize him when you find him. I'm assuming that not everyone at the seminar will have the Regent for their spiritual friend. Where do you find other candidates? [laughter]

DM: I don't know where you would go but the marks are clear according to the Buddhist tradition if you agree with those marks then you could look around.

Q: I'm not asking this question facetiously.

DM: Um hum.

Q: Ok, thank you.

DM: But according to the Buddhist tradition those are the marks of a spiritual friend.
[laughs] What? Jenny?

QUESTION: When you were talking about the marks I shifted from the spiritual friend to the practitioner and perhaps you could just say what those marks are again, because there seems to be a shift from the spiritual friend to the practitioner.

DM: What do you mean a shift?

Q: Well, maybe I got sort of involved in the relationship between the spiritual friend and the practitioner so that I wasn't focusing on the spiritual friend but I thought that it, at least in my mind, it wasn't altogether clear. Could you just say what they are again? It seemed to involve relationship. Those marks seemed to be not blond hair and glasses-

DM: -that's right

Q: -and a three-piece suit or whatever [laughter]

DM: Body, speech and mind. Body and speech are not abusive, you do not cause harm to yourself and you do not have aggression towards your environment.

Q: See when you say "you" there then I immediately take it on as an instruction rather than as an example.

DM: Oh, um hum.

Q: The spiritual friend does not do these things?

DM: Yeah. Did I make that clear? Did I say you? I didn't say him? Sorry about that.

STUDENT: You said him.

DM: I did?

Q: Ok

STUDENT: You said him or her.

Q: -Keep going

DM: -Him or her

Q: -He or she

DM: -Ok. And in his mind he is not deceitful. He is not trying to win you over for his own gain or for his own enjoyment or whatever.

Q: The others?

DM: That's all that Gampopa listed. That's all I said, I think.

Q: So there has to be some kind of realization on the part of the student to recognize this sort of thing. That in order to find a spiritual friend you have to be ready for that kind

of, your intelligence and your compassion would have to be developed to a certain point in order to be open enough to recognize them. Is that right?

DM: I think so. It has to be a person probably who is searching, wondering, inquisitive about their existence and their path. There's a famous story of Shariputra was looking for a teacher. He was one of the early disciples of the Buddha. He was walking down a road and he saw this monk coming towards him and just from the look of the monk and his deportment was, he said to him, did the Regent tell this story already? In one of his earlier talks? He said, which is really traditional for Indians, he said, "Where are you going? What are you doing? [with an Indian accent] That's what they always say to you in India. Said to him, where are you going? Who is your teacher? What does he teach? Cause he could just tell from the guy he had this presence about him.

And that's when he recited those famous lines, *Om Ye Dharma Hetu Prabhava Hetun Teshan Tathagata Hyavadat Teshan Ca Yo Nirodha Evam Vadi Mahasramanah Svaha*. Which means, those dharmas which have a causal characteristics, the thatagata taught the cause of them and also their cessation. Which is the basic teaching of cause and effect and egolessness. And supposedly Shariputra got enlightened right on the spot. So just from, he was searching and he was inquisitive and he was looking for something and he recognized this in this monk.

Q: Thank you.

DM: [laughs] They're giving me lots of trouble tonight, these three [laughter].

QUESTION: I was just suddenly-

DM(?): -good god.

Q: Put that gun away Mister. We translate into English and we come up with the word friend, spiritual friend. And the word friend in our conventional experience has certain connotations and based on your own experience, which I see a lot of marks of your having a lot of experience of this kind of friendship, could you say what friend really means?

DM: Yes, traditionally it's said that the friend talks to you on an eye-to-eye level. He says, "How's it going" basically. You say, "Well, depressed." And you talk on that sort of level. From my own experience, that's what it's like. He says to me, "How's it going?" I say, "I'm scared." Or, "I'm uptight". And you work on it from that level.

Q: How is, how is it different from the ordinary sense of friend? Is it different?

DM: Well the spiritual friend is just that he has spiritual understanding and he has some realization of what mind is and what reality is about.

Q: Does he always confirm you? You know, like conventional sense of friend is ?

DM: -oh, I see what you're getting at

Q: -yeah [laughter]

DM: They're really working on me tonight, these three. That's a good point. Jim is bringing up a point that the Vajracharya has spoken extensively about that in a worldly friend will always try to confirm you, say everything's going to be alright, it's ok. The

spiritual friend is a tough guy. He may say you're not doing ok and you should do this instead. Thank you. There are eighty-four thousand dharmas, I couldn't speak about all of them tonight.

QUESTION: What is the role of devotion in a relationship with a spiritual friend?

DM: That's coming up too. But basically from the Tibetan Kagyü path it's very important, this sense of respect that you have for the spiritual friend extends to a sense of complete devotion. But, Mr. Tendzin is going to speak further on that this weekend.

QUESTION: My question came up when he was talking last, on Monday night, about talking refuge in Buddha, dharma, sangha, and in the context of taking refuge in sangha, he said, he advised us not to hang out with non-sangha. And he also said that a couple of weekends ago at the Chariot of Liberation ITS very, very strongly. And I can really understand that he means don't just hang out in a real casual, having a good time way that is very samsaric. But my question is more when one has close friends and particularly in this situation I'm thinking about family who aren't Buddhist and where a lot of conflict does arise about the connection, them seeing that connection to buddhadharma takes you away from them, so lots of anger coming up, but to just discard that situation feels really lacking in compassion.

DM: Well, I think he meant hanging out in terms of your mind. In that you indulge in the dharmas of samsara. I don't think the vicinity matters that much, it's more your mind attitude. It's more connected to the dharmas of nirvana, the egoless dharmas.

Q: Well, he said that I think he said that they would drag you down and I can see that the intention could be not too, would be to keep your mindfulness there, but that there is a conflict but it seems a bit like chickening out to say well, I'm sorry I can't communicate with you because you might drag me down, you might drag me away from practice.

DM: Yeah, I don't think he meant that. I think he meant more the mind quality. That's it's fine to, of course, talk to those people, you don't have any choice. But you don't need to indulge in unwholesome activities. I think that's what he said. I wanted to, you should ask him about that.

Q: Somebody asked him in Boulder about it and said the Vajracharya has-

DM: -you talking about the weekend we just did?

Q: Yeah.

DM: That's a different story.

Q: Ok.

DM: Well, it was a vajrayana program, we were talking about vajra dharma and in that sense you don't hang out at all in terms of your mind and he was recommending not in body or speech either.

Q: Thank you.

DM: I think that's enough. Thank you very much, I'm sorry I was so nervous. I really appreciate you so much, you were so kind.

STUDENT: On behalf of the, all of the students of the Vajracharya and of Ösel Tendzin assembled here, those of us who are also students have been around a while, appreciate very much your courage and your sense of humor and devotion in coming down to teach tonight. Well done.

DM: Thank you. I just aspire to be a Trungpa, be an attendant. Thank you very much.