

Entering the Guru's World
May 8, 1979

I AM EXTREMELY HAPPY to be here with all of you. You have been taking part in this Vajradhatu seminary. You have taken the opportunity in your lifetime to practice the buddhadharma to hear the noble teaching of the buddhadharma, and to do that in the company of the sangha. That is extremely fortunate.

At this point in your studies, you are about to enter the vajrayana path—first of all, in terms of hearing. So I thought it would be beneficial for all of us to discuss the prospect of hearing the vajrayana teachings, as well as the prospect of entering the presence of the one who gives the vajrayana teachings—in other words, the guru.

We could say that this is some kind of crescendo, some kind of high point in our lives as practitioners. On the other hand, as buddhists, we should understand at this point that our path, our journey, and our understanding are continuous, rather than high and low. Nevertheless, we have come to the portion of our education as buddhists which is called the vajrayana teaching. And on the whole, the vajrayana teaching is inseparable from the reality of the guru, the vajra master who presents the final teaching, the ultimate teaching of buddhadharma.

Up to this point you have been doing extremely well, and that is obvious. But on the other hand, there could be, there might be, some holding back. There might be some little corner, some little pocket which you would like to reserve. It is not necessary at this point to label that pocket, to try to find out what it is that you would like to hold back. But it is necessary to state clearly at the beginning of the vajrayana teaching that you will not, you cannot, go further if you continue to carry that pocket with you. If you try to do so, ladies and gentlemen, if you try to do so, the vajrayana will remain secret teaching. It is called the secret teaching because it demands your total commitment, your total hearing, your total contemplation, and your total meditation.

Suppose you were aspiring to the greatest ideal of your life: let's say the greatest ideal in your life was to become a bankteller. You work very hard to get an interview with the personnel director of the bank; you want the job very badly. You want to be accepted as a teller among tellers. [Laughter.] So you straighten up and put on your best suit of clothes. You try to be correct and dignified so that you could be hired. You have some notion that you have the intelligence to be a bank teller; you think you actually can do it. But you must impress the manager that you actually can do it, and that involves your presence, how you present yourself. In the same way, when you enter the vajrayana teaching, how you present yourselves is extremely important. We're not talking about façade, because if

you don't have the qualifications, you will surely not last very long. But we are talking about your motivation and intention to receive further teaching.

If you presented yourself to the manager all dressed up, thinking that you had done your best, and then you were turned down for the job, you would say to yourself-. "Why? Why was I turned down? I did everything I could. I put on my suit and combed my hair. " But there is one thing that is still necessary: you can't simply put on your suit, comb your hair, sit up, and think that the manager-or the vajra master, in this case-is going to accept you. There is something more than that.

Commitment to the environment of vajrayana

At this point, we must take part in the total environment of this teaching, of this path we are about to become involved with. When you walk in the door of the vajrayana, there is a floor or ground, there is a sky, there is a seat, there is the vajra master, and there is the sangha around you. So in other words, you must pay complete attention to what is being said, what you are about to receive-complete attention. And that means complete attention to your environment, as well. Simply because you have finished the first two sections of this seminary does not necessarily mean that you can actually hear the vajrayana teachings. When you step through that door, your credentials will not help you; only total awareness will help.

So you must join in the vajrayana atmosphere. You must commit yourself to the totality of the vajrayana teaching. As we have said, and as you have read in the transcripts, this teaching is the culmination of the turning of the wheel of dharma. Being so, it is very precise. Being so, it demands your total attention. If you are not attentive to it, then you might find yourself outside of that atmosphere and that environment. You might find yourself completely confused. Any kind of resentment or confusion or insanity that might develop arises simply because you have not fully committed yourself to the atmosphere, to the environment of the vajrayana teachings. So you must do that. (I am trying to speak to you from my own experience.)

Regarding the guru as Buddha

The second step in entering the vajrayana is connected with how you regard the guru, the one who presents the teachings. That guru is none other than Buddha. It has been said in the texts that even the buddhas of previous times paid homage to the vajra masters who imparted the teachings of vajrayana to them so that they could attain enlightenment. And if the buddhas of the past have done so, what about ourselves? Seeing your guru as Buddha is essential to being attentive to the teachings.

Now this particular guru that you have, you might have various thoughts about him, but those thoughts are inconsequential. The truth is that this guru is presenting the complete teaching to you, and therefore this guru is none other than Buddha. When you regard

your guru in that way, you begin to open your ears and eyes and become attentive. You actually listen; you actually receive the teaching.

Approaching the guru with hands joined

But how to receive the teaching?—that is the point. With all of us, the image of how to receive teaching is one of Joining our hands together. Press your hands together at the level of your heart. That attitude is one of extreme gratitude; that is your attitude as a disciple of the guru. You have had such good fortune to hear these teachings in your lifetime that you press your hands together at the level of your heart. You close the gap, so to speak; you close the gap between doubt and speculation by pressing your hands together at the level of your heart. You seal the gap between speculation and doubt. And you approach the vajra master, the guru, in that way. That is the appropriate behavior for a student of the vajrayana.

By doing so you are not courting the vajra master; you are not in any way manipulating your existence as a student or the existence of the teacher. You are not manipulating the situation at all. You have put your hands together, which is your commitment to approach the guru Buddha, the one who presents the ultimate teaching.

So you are doing that—or you should do that. By doing so, you actually affirm the respect you have for your own intelligence as well as for the guru. That is the gesture of hands joined. You affirm your respect for basic intelligence. At the same time, by doing so you overcome your frivolity, your habitual pattern of the way you make a request, the awkwardness you feel. I suppose you're gone through that experience of awkwardness in the mahayana. At least since you have been here, you have experienced how awkward you feel when you approach the teacher. So when you are in the presence of the vajra master, you join your hands and you bow your head slightly. I'm not simply talking about something literal, by the way. I hope you understand that. I'm talking about a state of mind: Joining your hands and slightly bowing your head in the presence of the teacher has the power to overcome your frivolity.

That display of respect for the guru is recognition on the spot, simple recognition that being in the presence of the guru is the source of cutting your frivolity, cutting your laziness, cutting your speculation on the spot. The presence of the guru alone, to begin with, cuts your frivolity. Then [snaps his fingers] we can actually go further.

Prostrating

What do we do next? When we have approached the guru with Joined hands and when the very presence of a living Buddha has cut our frivolity on the spot, what next? How should we conduct ourselves~ We should make a prostration. We should surrender body, speech, and mind to the one who imparts the teachings to us. We should surrender body, speech, and mind. The image of that surrender is making prostration.

Number one, we have committed ourselves to the environment. Number two, we have taken the proper attitude of approaching the teacher. Now, number three, we should give up any sense of possessing the teachings whatsoever, or possessing anything for ourselves. That is making prostration: offering body, speech, and mind to the guru.

You see, ladies and gentlemen, if the guru is Buddha, then you have no need of holding back, there is no fear of repercussion. When you offer body, speech, and mind to the guru, it's not as if the guru needs all that, you know. It is simply your own recognition that such a wonderful event could occur in your life, that you have made that kind of commitment. You prostrate, which means: "No matter what obstacle occurs, I will give my total being to this path, to this practice-no matter what obstacle occurs." When you prostrate, that is what you say: you will not hold onto any comfort whatsoever.

Do you know what I mean by comfort? There are so many different kinds of comfort. But when you prostrate, that means you are not leaving anything behind in your living room—your good old chair, the painting you like so much, your mother's gift to you—all of that. You are giving it away. You are prostrating and you are giving up the past—completely. Are we still together on this? All right. So that is the next step after Joining your hands together: offering body, speech, and mind—prostrating—in other words, giving up the past.

Offering

Next is offering. (You're very jumpy. Why is that? Are you nervous? [Laughter.]) Once you have prostrated, then you make an offering because you realize on the spot that this teaching is so precious and so real that you can't bargain at all. Even your prostration doesn't matter at this point. Just prostrating doesn't exactly enter you in; it doesn't exactly make you fit to receive teaching. You must also make some offering.

And what is it that you offer? You should offer the very best, the very best expression of your desire for enlightenment, as Marpa did to Naropa. He gathered together a lot of gold because gold was the very best, and he offered it to Naropa. He worked for years and years in order to accumulate that much gold, and then he brought it to India. After so many years of hardship, after waiting so long to meet Naropa, he brought his gold to India and presented it to his guru, saying, "Please give me the teachings." He didn't offer his Indian cat's eye, or the old shawl that his mother had left him, or his diary of how his father had died. He understood that he should offer the very best. Why? Because the very best means the expression of one's very best intention to receive teaching.

As we know, Naropa threw the gold into the air and said, "All of this is gold to me." But don't be confused, please, friends. That throwing of gold is the guru's position and the guru's action. It is because Marpa offered the gold that Naropa threw it into the air. And then everything became gold. Do you know the story~ Everything became gold. Marpa

offered Naropa the gold, and Naropa said, "Look at this." He threw it up into the air, and everything became gold. And then [snaps his fingers], some understanding occurred in Marpa.

Marpa was not stingy, not in the least. He worked very hard and offered everything he had in order to receive teaching. Do you think Marpa would offer junk? So your mentality in receiving the vajrayana teachings, which you are about to hear, should be the same as Marpa's—all of you, all of you. Do you think you can offer trinkets?

It is not simply enough that you prostrate; you must also offer. What that means is simply that any wealth, fame, good fortune—anything that occurs in your life which is good—you actually offer it in order to receive teaching. In other words, you do not hold onto any spiritual ego whatsoever. Got that? Listen, listen: that's what offering is all about. Offer the best. Don't hang onto any spiritual ego. Otherwise you can never completely enter that door into the vajra mandala, the world of the guru, the atmosphere we have talked about. In the case of Milarepa, as you know, he didn't have any money. He wanted the teachings very badly, but he didn't have any gold. However, Marpa said, "I demand gold," and Milarepa replied, "All I have is my effort; I can give you my effort." But he didn't even say that; he just said, "I give you my effort." He didn't say, "I can"; he said, "I give you my effort." And Marpa answered, "Okay. Build this, build that." Now you, ladies and gentlemen, who are so secure on your cushions here—that's very nice. Will you build? That's the kind of offering you must make if you don't have any gold. If you have gold, you must offer gold first; and then beyond that, you must build a house, a castle of awareness. That is the vajrayana practice.

So offering means that there is nothing left of you. After you have made your prostration, then you give away anything that is still left—which is your wealth, your accumulation of ideas about how you are going to hear the vajrayana teaching. That is your offering. You actually give the best of what you have.

After you have done so, then you begin to feel some sense of being connected to the vajrayana. You have offered the best basic goodness of who you are, your own buddha-nature; then you begin to see who you have offered that to: the vajra master. You begin to see that the vajra master is the embodiment of basic goodness, or buddha-nature, the one who has awakened buddha-nature.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, you have walked along this far, you have hammered out very well—well, reasonably well. And now you have come to the gates of the vajrayana—the big iron gates—and you want to make a commitment. I think you do. I suppose you do. In any case, you must. [Laughter.] How you enter is with hands joined, with prostration, and with offering. And you begin to notice for the first time that somebody has awakened buddha-nature, that somebody actually embodies buddha-nature. The guru himself is the living Buddha.

Following the guru's instructions

So, feeling significantly embarrassed, significantly disrobed, you recognize that the guru is the embodiment of the teachings you would like to receive. Then there is only one further step: following his instructions. That is the culmination of how to approach this teaching completely: following the guru's instructions.

The guru is pleased, extremely pleased, because he sees your own basic intention. He sees what you want, which is without aggression, passion, or ignorance. What you want, what you would like to achieve, is the essence of buddhadharma. You would like to achieve the enlightenment of all the buddhas. That is what you want, and he is pleased by that. You have come with folded hands, you have made your prostration, you have made your offering. You are not keeping anything for yourself whatsoever. And he is extremely pleased to teach you. So you are awake, you are here in the environment of the vajrayana, and now you must follow the instructions of the guru.

Ladies and gentlemen, please, let me tell you more. You are going to hear so much in the next two and a half weeks, but your memory is short if you think there is something to be gained. You may take notes upon notes if you think there is something to be gained. All right, take your notes-but follow the instructions of your guru. What are they? Comb your hair to the left or to the right. You think there is some metaphysical thing, don't you? You're really intent upon vajrayana being the magical display of your own mind. Please let me tell you at this point that following instructions is the ultimate offering, Just as the jetsun Milarepa did, the one who had no money. He said, "All I can do is to follow your example."

Following the example of your guru means just what we started out talking about at the beginning of tonight's lecture, ladies and gentlemen: awareness of entering the environment of vajrayana. Having that awareness means that you have heard everything. You haven't forgotten anything; therefore you can follow even the most minute detail of how to button your coat. That is how you should proceed in the next month

Finally, I would like to say that being without the guru is like the blind leading the blind. If you have any questions we could have a discussion at this point.

QUESTION: Vajra Regent, it seems like doubt and speculation are part of a sort of sloppy process that we go through. We have doubt, and then we hear something and we say, "Well, I understand it as blah, blah, blah, blah. And further than that, it's maybe this and that." That seems to be the kind of process which is always going on when we're talking to our teacher. Does that continue in the vajrayana?

VAJRA REGENT: No [abruptly]. Although it could, it could, if you like.

Q: Well, it's pretty painful when it does, in this situation.

VR: Well, don't jump the gun, don't jump the gun. You see, that's what everybody wants to do: they want to jump the gun. At this point, since we're together, all of us, we are just talking about the ground, how to enter this vajrayana teaching. So let's not jump the gun, okay?

Q: When you were talking about walking in with hands joined-

VR: Entering. I didn't say anything about walking.

Q: Okay, entering with hands joined-

VR: I would like to be precise about what I said.

Q: Okay-and you were talking about the importance of awareness of the environment, did you mean specifically the vajra world, the guru's environment? Are you talking about a more vipashyana sense of

VR: Well, it's more than that. There's a vipashyana sense, yes, of course. How could we not have that? But that is just to begin with. This awareness of environment is also the sense that we are completely enclosed in our awareness. Ceiling, lights, floor, shrine, teacher, microphone, zafu, body, everything-you don't miss a trick, you see?

Q: So therefore it's vajra—

VR: That's right.

Q: There's no way out.

VR: No missing anything.

Q: Thank you.

VR: You're welcome.

Q: Vajra Regent, you were talking about devotion to the guru-

VR: Was I?

Q: —who is the vajra master—

VR: Was I saying that? Did I say that?

Q: Yes, you did.

VR: Did I?

Q: Yes.

VR: Oh. [Laughter.] Yes?

Q: And, well, I'm thinking-

VR: When did I say that?

Q: All evening.

VR: [Laughs.] Yes. So?

Q: So-

VR: This is supposed to be the famous devotion talk, so it must be so. [Laughter.]

Q: Well, you are the Vajra Regent, so I'm thinking: what is the difference between devotion to the vajra master and to the vajra regent, if any-,

VR: Well, that's exactly what we think: "I am thinking." [Pause.] What's the difference between the two, you mean?

Q: Yes.

VR: Well, I don't know.

Q: Maybe for you it isn't important, but for me-[laughter].

VR: Well, very strictly speaking, from my point of view, without the guru I would never, never have heard these teachings. So from my point of view, whatever life I have is dedicated to that one.

Q: I read today that Rinpoche decided there would be no Trungpa line any more.

VR: My dear, I don't know anything about that stuff, so please don't ask me. Let's stick to our topic, okay? I don't know anything about that. All I know is that I met such a good teacher in my life. What can I say about the past, present, and future? All I know is I met a great teacher, and what he taught me works.

Q: I'm very confused.

VR: Well, just forget all that stuff, history stuff. You're supposed to be here in the vajrayana teaching.

Q: When you were talking about the offering of wealth, good fortune, and fame, why did you mention spiritual ego? I believe you said, "Do not hold on to any spiritual ego at all."

VR: That's right, yes. Even when you offer, there might be some sense of. "Look what a good thing I'm giving you. I surrendered my body, speech, and mind. Isn't it great that I could give you something?" So forget about that. If you offer some thing-whatever wealth there is in your life, whatever practice you have, whatever ability you have to practice, whatever tremendous energy you might have for practice-offer it up completely. Whatever your body is made of, however much life you have left in your body, offer it up completely. In other words, you are not waiting for the response to your offering.

Q: Sir, what I would like to talk about is fear.

VR: Beer, did you say? [Laughter.]

Q: No, fear. [More laughter. Questioner laughs.] This is very serious, so please don't make a joke.

VR: Yes, yes. Well, what about it?

Q: In relating to the vajra master, if we are dealing with a living Buddha, it's a very terrifying situation.

VR: Why?

Q: I'm terrified to be up in the Vajracarya's suite.

VR: What is the nature of the Buddha?

Q: Compassion.

VR: That's right. So what are you talking about? Why should you be afraid, if the Buddha is compassionate—

Q: It's true. [Laughter.]

VR: Are you afraid you might see something? Are you afraid you might see that it doesn't actually exist?

Q: That the fear doesn't exist?

VR: Yes.

Q: Okay. So there's no sense of—

VR: That's right. [Laughter.]

Q: Okay. [Laughter.]

Q: Sir, when you were talking about following the guru's instructions, it seems to me that you were actually talking about two different things. You were talking about following instructions, and also about following the guru's example, and I think they're two different things.

VR: No. They're the same thing.

Q: I don't understand why.

VR: Well, if your guru tells you one thing and does another, then you had better be careful; you might be involved with a charlatan.

Q: Well, my understanding is that if he asks me to do something, then it's up to me to do it.

VR: Not unless he does it. You see, I think that is a little bit of timidity on the part of all of you. So please, you had better wake up to that. The vajra master is not hiding behind any kind of curtain. You should ask him questions.

Q: Well, my question is specifically about following his example. Do we actually follow his example? I mean: how he wears his coat, how he eats, or what he eats?

VR: There is more example than that, hopefully. You have the basic example of a solid, stable person. And passion, aggression, and ignorance do not come into play with him. No matter who he encounters in his life, he is not biased. He is not particularly moved by the winds of the kleshas-absolutely not. That's number one, okay? He is completely stable. His body, speech, and mind are direct. Okay? The second quality here is that whatever he says, whatever he does, is completely pure and straightforward, without deception. Number three: he is elegant, and he serves to enrich the world and all sentient beings.

Q: So he is our basic example of sanity.

VR: Yes, as far as I know. You have to find out for yourself. Don't be timid, please, ladies and gentlemen. If you are about to enter this teaching of the vajrayana, and the vajra master comes into this room, please sit up and make your prostration, make your offering. But at that point, offer your mind as well. Make some gesture of communication. You don't have to sorry so much about aggression at that point.

If you're afraid to ask a question, that's too bad. Don't be so timid; he would be delighted to hear your questions. if you'd like to hear about dharma, that would be delightful. If you'd like to hear about underwear and socks-well, that could be good, you know. [Laughter.] Byfords—is that it? English, part wool, part polyester—whatever it is. But seriously, be inquisitive, please. Please be inquisitive. You have another month to go; we'll get there. I will be seeing you, and we'll get there. You have more teaching to go.

The whole idea, first of all, is environment: you are here in a vajrayana space. Ceiling, floor, shrine, lights, bodies-everything is real. Taking that as your point of view , join your hands, make your prostration, open up the space to ask questions.

All right, ladies and gentlemen, I think we should conclude our session together. Thank you, vajra brothers and sisters, for your attention. There is a slight koan I'd like to give to you: the knife has to have a handle, and sometimes the handle is soft and the blade is sharp. If you intend to follow this teaching, you should have a gentle heart and a sharp intellect. Thank you very much.