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The Lonely Journey: Devotion in the Kagyü Lineage
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VAJRA REGENT:

So that we don't fall into any kind of spiritual materialistic trap, it is necessary to continually lay the groundwork for the path of devotion by examining our intention. We have already discussed the fact of pain and suffering as a sense of separation, me and myself, me and my world, me and the object of desire. And we have also discussed the cause of that suffering, being belief in an individual, continuous self, or ego. So it is only fitting that we should talk about the goal at this point, which is the attainment of enlightenment.

And since we're extremely simple-minded people, we could simply say that enlightenment means the discovery of the obvious. I don't think it would do at this point to talk about enlightenment in terms of a philosophical language, but rather by simply saying that enlightenment is the discovery of what's been there all along. But as we have noticed, that particular statement does not alleviate our sense of struggle or our journey. If that were the case, we could instantly attain the state of awakened mind on the spot, right now. But somehow we don't believe that. There must be something more to it than that. So we think. And since we think that way, we have path and practice. We have journey. Journey in this case, in terms of devotion, is getting what we want, getting what I want from that, her him, world, whatever – "other." So from our ordinary neurotic point of view, we feel that there is a distance between myself and the attainment of my desire, which is "other."

We live in a world of experts. This is the world we have created out of a sense of poverty, that we ourselves are not capable of understanding the fine points, and perhaps somebody else is. Specialist. We have to see a specialist because we have a very special problem, individual problem. Expert. And if we see that specialist, most likely it's going to take visit after visit after visit to cure ourselves of our disease. In this case our disease is confusion, and the expert is someone who has transcended confusion. We could say that the highest, most sublime expert is the spiritual teacher. Our poverty mentality taken to its ultimate height is the desire to achieve enlightenment, freedom from confusion. So therefore we seek out the expert, the one who has done so, the one who can actually show us the way to do so ourselves.

The Kagyü lineage is full of experts, and its special teaching is the path of devotion, and its special treatment is the relationship between the guru and the disciple. The point here, from the Buddhist approach, is using the disease to cure the disease. So we say that there are a whole lineage of experts and specialists, which means simply that we use neurosis, confusion, as the fuel to undermine confusion. The

fact that we have a particular longing to be “there” instead of “here,” the fact that we have great desire to accomplish supreme happiness and peace, is the very fuel we use to undermine that notion.

So the Kagyü guru, from Tilopa to the present day, is the expert who uses the fuel of confusion, and that particular fuel is expectation. Expectation is the fabric of our whole search, our whole journey. That just around the corner is enlightenment, just maybe my next sitting practice, something’s going to happen. Just as [in] the stories we’ve read, I myself am going to sit down myself, tomorrow maybe, and achieve unsurpassable, perfect great enlightenment, between five and six. [Laughter] Expectation is the very heart’s blood of the journey, and the guru is the expert in manipulating your expectation. He is the perfect master, or she, the perfect master at manipulating your expectations, undermining continually a sense that you finally got it. When you think you’ve finally got it, as we’ve heard to so many times, you haven’t got it. Well, that’s quite true, I think.

In terms of the Kagyü lineage, we have the history of expectation, and also history of transmission of awakened mind from guru to disciple up to the present day. And this expectation is based on the path of devotion. This path of devotion is very special and hard to follow. It involves our complete emotional life. Devoted to whom? Devoted to the teacher, to the guru who understands. Devoted to the one who can actually give us the key, the secret to unlock the doors of confusion and let free, fresh air come in. We march into this relationship fully expecting that on our first meeting with the teacher, it will be resolved. If we meet the wise man, on our first meeting all the doubts will disperse, and clear sunlight will come through. And this is our expectation from the beginning to the end, as we have seen in the lives of the lineage holders. Naropa, the disciple of Tilopa, spent twelve years, day after day, with expectation, and Tilopa would time and time again pull the rug out, and Naropa would say, “Aha! Now I’ve got it. He must mean this. This must be what he means.” And Tilopa would say, “What are you doing down there? How come you’re doing that.” Naropa would feel completely dejected, terrible, and try again.

In the path of devotion, there is no particular set formula of how the teacher works with the student, but there is underlying principle all the time, which is working with expectation. This is a microcosm of our whole world, of our whole planet and people on it and how we live – with continual expectation. Tomorrow will be better, tomorrow will be better. Better world, better society, better life, more money, great success, scholarship, whatever. In the one-to-one relationship with the teacher, this expectation and sense of always projecting always laying our version onto the world, becomes very apparent. We have so many stories of these gurus and teachers, and how they did those mean things, outrageous things, and playful, kind, hard, soft. The point is that each of us brings our own neurosis, our own baggage alone in our relationship with the teacher, and in doing so, it has a particular twist, personal kind of idea of who we are, what we are, and what we expect could be slightly different from everybody else.

So the accomplished teacher knows how to work with the student’s particular slant on what he wants to be, what she wants to accomplish, what our idea of enlightenment is. So we can tell from the lineage holders of this Kagyü lineage, each one is different. Same principle underneath, same complete commitment, but a different manifestation, according to our own projections, according to our own expectations of what we should be. Naropa is a great scholar. Marpa is a farmer and householder. Mila is a recluse. Gampopa is a renowned monk, and so on. So the point is that the object of devotion is not to actually take on the guru as your image and then reproduce yourself, but actually to discover the enlightened quality of your own expectation, your own neurosis. And the major point here is that we don’t leave our baggage behind, but we bring it with us, we bring our expectation with us continually.

When it comes down to the wire, there is a necessity for absolute obedience to the guru's word, but coming down to the wire might take a very long time. Absolute obedience is simply because that the sense of preservation of our own identity as a singular ego is so strong and intense that there is only one possibility in the long run – “yes” or “no.” But getting down to the wire, as I said, might take a long time. But we feel, in terms of the teaching, that it should be thoroughly explained, should be thoroughly presented, so there's no hocus-pocus, and we should not encourage expectation, there will be enough of that by itself, but rather we should tell the story straight out. Surrender, commitment, devotion – all these words come down to absolute yes and absolute no, come down to actually letting go of any personal sense of ongoing survival as to who you think you are.

So having cleared the ground, it is necessary to proceed. Not only is it necessary, but we are drawn to the object of devotion, we are magnetized, and we struggle with our own sense of intelligence, that how could I possibly not know all the obvious? But some little doubt creeps in, and as long as we have such doubt, we have journey.

If you have any questions, we could have a discussion.

QUESTION: You said that drop the self-identity –

VAJRA REGENT: Drop self-identity?

Q: Yes, to surrender –

VR: Surrender?

Q: Yes, and at the same time to bring along your garbage with you, to use it somehow. I don't understand how you use your garbage at the same time.

VR: Well, you don't. The teacher uses it on you. You bring it along no matter what. If you try to think about bringing along your garbage, it's impossible. This is simply a message, you know, like a news broadcast. [Laughter]

Q: It still seems dangerous just to state –

VR: Extremely dangerous. Ego might actually lose its grip. [Laughter]

Q: You said that when it comes down to the wire, it's a question of yes or no. Does that mean it's so simplified that there's no other – I don't understand, yes or no what?

VR: Well, it's like the story of Naropa and Tilopa, very much that way. Do this, okay, that must be right. So he jumped off the roof. Actually, at that point Tilopa wasn't even saying yes or not. But that's our expectation, comes down to the wire.

Q: Yes, I'll do it, or no, I won't?

VR: Yes.

Q: No is hanging on, yes is letting go?

VR: I wouldn't say that. You could switch it any way you want.

Q: Okay, thanks.

QUESTION: Ösel, could you say something about not creating expectations, but working with expectations? When you were talking, I saw, you know, the aspect of working with it, but then also there seems to be a dimension where there is no expectation, and that seems to be something that – just the relationship between those two aspects of expectation.

VR: Well, the point is that what we would like is to completely merge our own mind with that of the teacher, or the one who knows what needs to be known, so therefore we know exactly the same. Meeting of two minds, transmission. That's what we would like to do. But the teacher is saying that as long as you persist in believing in your own deficiency, then we have to struggle and go on a journey. Even so, we hear the message so many times in different ways, still we're not quite certain, so we keep on going.

Q: Thank you.

QUESTION: What's the difference between blind faith and complete devotion to the guru?

VR: I suppose pain, perception of pain. Intelligence, same thing.

Q: Would you say more about that?

VR: Sure. We could have this kind of devotion where we have a picture in our mind of who the guru is, and recreate that constantly, so that we actually begin to feel that we're the walking picture ourselves. And generally what happens is a sense of total joy, like we talked about last time, doesn't matter what – somebody says something aggressive, if there's something aggressive in the environment or something depressing or something exciting – oh, it's all just joy. It's all his doing. In other words, create such a thought, strong thought pattern, that it blurs, everything blurs, becomes heavenly.

QUESTION: Ösel Tendzin, is not our neurosis our expectation, but we don't realize it until it comes up as such, as expectation?

VR: Sure.

Q: Then it's only through finding the guru that can mirror you and show you your expectation that you find out that you actually have neurosis? Is that right?

VR: No.

Q: No?

VR: Still we feel uncomfortable without any idea of a guru or teacher or anything.

Q: Still what?

VR: We feel uncomfortable anyway.

Q: You're talking about getting what we want? Devotion is getting what we want?

VR: That's what we think, yes.

Q: This is the motivation?

VR: Motivation, fulfillment of desire. In this case, when you have the spiritual, getting what you want means to be completely awake.

Q: So you're talking about examining our intention, so it's just seeing that desire to attain enlightenment. But I'm wondering what do you do with that? Do you just see it, or just let it sit there?

VR: Yes. You can't let it sit for too long. Eventually you have to do something. That's what people think. That's why this particular path of devotion, as practiced by the Kagyü lineage, is a very potent one, rather than we say, "We see the fallacy of expectation. It's completely hollow, and we know we can never get exactly what we want, so therefore just let me sit here, and keep it over there." But eventually we can't hold it, and it breaks, and we get off the cushion and immediately, like a robot, go to the object of desire. So in terms of the path of devotion, it's bringing that expectation with you. In other words, clearly from the beginning knowing that expectation is a delusion, deception, but the possibility of working with that in terms of the object of devotion is quite real.

Q: When I tend to look at that, there's just a tremendous urge to shove it aside.

VR: Which?

Q: The urge to get out of this mess. I see that, and my immediate reaction is "drop that."

VR: I think that's what people do, for a long time. Side cupboard. Eventually it begins to stink.

[Laughter]

Q: Thank you.

VR: The bald guy in the back.

QUESTION: It seems that at a certain point people tend to find that what they want in their relationship to the spiritual journey is to be left alone and get out of it.

VR: Not yet. But anyway –

Q: Well, occasionally you hear that sentiment expressed [laughter], and I wish that the buddhas and bodhisattvas and gurus of the lineage would leave me alone [laughter]. And I was wondering how you work with that, or how one would work with it, or –

VR: Well, I think that we're going to try to walk through the mud in the next seven talks together, and part of that is some sense of resentment, or some sense of being hassled by the teacher, which we'll get into in more detail. But basically how you work with it, I suppose. Is just to let yourself be hassled, which means, I guess, trying to escape.

Q: So people should go ahead and try, so to speak?

VR: What? What, what? [Laughter]

Q: That's, thank you very much.

QUESTION: It seems like the world does a good enough job of pulling the rug out from under you. How – there must be a difference between what the guru does and what the world does, but it seems the world –

VR: That's what we think, yes.

Q: Is there a difference, or is it the same?

VR: I don't think there's any difference. Just that we have such aversion, such a conceptualization of the world, that it becomes centralized in the figure of the teacher. In other words, the teacher becomes our monumental projection, our monolith of expectation, all centered in one dot, in one person, the one who can actually show us how to get out of this.

Q: So you end up expecting more of the teacher than you do of the world? Is that – it seems to me that from my experience, the world is falling apart as much as or more so than my relationship with the teacher.

VR: Yes.

Q: Well, does it – what you're just saying is that you centralize your expectations on the guru. Is that –

VR: Yes, just like you said. The world is falling apart, but not the teacher. [Laughter] The teacher's dying, too.

Q: I guess what I'm saying is that it doesn't seem, like right now it's necessary for the guru to manipulate the world so it feels like it's falling apart –

VR: The guru doesn't manipulate the world at all.

Q: Well, I mean, you said that the guru manipulates your expectations so that –

VR: Your expectations, not the world. World is what it is.

Q: Well, excuse me. Yes. But it doesn't even seem that that's necessary at this point. Is that possible?

VR: That's a good one. Sure. As long as it lasts.

Q: Okay. thank you.

QUESTION: I'll try to ask what I think the last question was, which is, why is it necessary to have devotion to the guru rather than devotion to some other projection on the world? Therapists offer themselves of many schools, and be disappointed in that, or come to that realization, and not have to have a particular guru of the Kagyü lineage.

VR: Well, it's whatever looks best, you know.

Q: But people are being disappointed in their obsessions all the time, and they don't get enlightened.

VR: People are being what?

Q: Disappointed in their obsessions and their projections all the time, and they don't get enlightened.

VR: That's true, they don't. So? Why the guru?

Q: But they could be.

VR: Any time. Try now.

Somebody [inaudible words] there.

QUESTION: Is there a point where you decide to go to see the guru, or does it just happen? Do you just – it overwhelms you to the point where you have to –

VR: Well, I think basically, to begin with, it's a matter of feeling in need of particular teaching and the particular medicine, like going to see a doctor, to begin with.

Q: So you have to feel real sick.

VR: I think so. Confused. Doesn't mean that you vomit all the time or anything like that. Just a kind of general sense of not being with it.

Q: Well, when do you give in to that urge to go get yourself cured, or there's doubts that maybe you're just causing more sickness or something?

VR: When do you do that?

Q: Yes. Is there any – there's no – when, huh?

VR: No, no "when." Not that I know of. Just purely coincidence. I guess they call it force of karma in the Buddhist teachings. In other words, your particular thought patterns are so strong that they make your mouth move and words come out, [laughter] and then your legs [laughter] –

Q: With respect. How do YOU feel?

VR: Fine. [Laughter]

Q: And then, about the problems of getting clear teachings, it would be nice to know, you know, how you felt personally, you felt –

VR: You act as if you think I don't.

Q: No, I don't. I'm asking you, how do you feel –

VR: About the teachings?

Q: About giving good teachings, clear teachings.

VR: Teachings are good.

Q: And how do YOU feel, because one reason you're very inspiring to me and a lot of other people is because you're just like me [inaudible words] like a lot of other people. [Laughter]

VR: Yes. How I feel. Teachings are so good, so true.

Q: You feel good. [Laughter]

VR: I feel fine. Teachings are very good and true.

Q: I did not suspect that you felt bad.

VR: [Laughs] The teachings are very good and true.

Q: I mean, because you are like me or like us, is a very inspiring situation.

VR: Well, that's what I feel, you know, that the teachings are so true, they strike right to the core.

Q: Could you say anything more intimate than that? [Laughter]

VR: Well, let's see. [Laughter] Sometimes I'm depressed, sometimes I'm happy. Sometimes I'm tired, sometimes I'm sad, but the teachings are really true. [Laughter]

QUESTION: This rug of expectation that is being pulled out from under you through your instructions from the guru, from what I heard from the man before, anticipation of this rug being pulled out from under you would tend to make you want to put that aside, you know. Not "I know I'm being set up, he's told me to do this, he's going to pull it out from under me again," you said that's being – all right, he said that he wants to put that aside. You said that starts to smell. So it's still there, it's coming out. [Laughter] What do you do with it at that point? It smells. [Laughter]

VR: Well, you try to clean it up.

Q: It's still an intellectual understanding that –

VR: No, you try to clean it up.

Q: How?

VR: Well, you get washcloths and this and that. You go back to the teacher and you sa, “Look, what did you mean by that.” [Laughter]

Q: Yes?

VR: So he tells you something else. And then you say, “Aha!” And then you go back again and put it in the closet. But you don’t have to do it that way. I mean, it’s not necessary to do it that way, but it happens that way. [Laughter]

Q: Yes. It seems that there would be a point where you would give up that intellectual rug altogether and just jump.

VR: There seems to be that point, according to the histories.

Q: Where intellect has to be worked through completely to the end, you give up –

VR: Completely to the end, yes. You see, we say there seems to be a point when that should happen. Somewhere out there. Tell you what. [Laughter] Every time you get caught, it’s a big surprise, right?

Q: Yes, sure.

VR: You never thought you’d be caught on that one again. [Laughter] There’s something –

Q: But you start anticipating being caught.

VR: Yes, but even so, you get caught.

Q: You get caught anticipating getting caught, yes.

VR: Somebody wants to play an April Fool’s joke on you, and they’ve done it for five years in a row [laughter], and the sixth year you say, “This time I’m going to set up everything so that I don’t get caught,” and then that person plays an April Fool’s joke on your friend, and you say, you start to believe it, what your friend is going through, so it’s also on you at the same time. So you get caught, even though it’s not played on you, your sort of – your defense is fine. It comes out over here. [Laughter]

Q: Thank you.

VR: That’s expectation.

QUESTION: You said if there’s no doubt, there’s no need for the journey, or it wouldn’t – any need –

VR: There wouldn’t be any need for the journey at all.

Q: But it seems that the path encourages the doubts or encourages you to look at the deficiencies or – like in everyday life, people don’t doubt ego, but the path encourages you to doubt, you know, whether things are really so. So –

VR: Well, that’s the reason I said the teachings are good and true, because they don’t let it rest in a slumber, Forest Lawn of Ego, Slumberland, waiting for the next shock. Somebody died, and suddenly, “Eeh, it might happen to me,” then back to sleep again. So the teachings turn on the light all over the place. “Hey, wake up. You can’t sleep. Don’t have time.”

Q: So is there a function to doubt in the teachings?

VR: Function to doubt?

Q: I mean, is there a necessity for doubt?

VR: Well, I don’t think there’s an necessity for doubt at all. It just happens to be there, and from that point of view we don’t look at it in terms of, “Well, let’s look back to see what my mother did to me and my father did to me and how come I have this doubt and so neurotic because the dog bit me when I was three,” and that kind of thing. The point is, we have this doubt, you know, right here. Doesn’t matter about history at all. Has nothing to do with history. At that point, it’s just a matter of uncertainty on the spot. So these good and true teachings decide to make sue of the opportunity and trick you into waking up.

Q: Thank you.

QUESTION: I stopped meditating at around this time last year because I found that as my meditation got deeper, it began to precipitate such extreme experiences of the discontinuity or the irreality [sic] of my

normally solid self, that they're experiences of real terror for me. I mean, such deep fear that I really thought I couldn't pursue it at the time. And I've just begun meditating again within the last couple of weeks coming here. But I guess my understanding of Buddhism always was that if I were to engage in relationship with a guru, he would push me further down that road, and I think my own sense of path has always been a feeling that I have to take that gradually, that I can't abandon that fiction instantaneously. I really – maybe it's not feeling that I have the strength for that, or also it's feeling that I don't know what's on the other side of that.

VR: Yes?

Q: So I think many people probably share this problem, feeling that that's –

VR: Raise your hands. [Laughter]

Q: I'm vindicated.

VR: Good. Whew. [Laughter]

Q: This is what I mean. I don't feel like I can abandon that self-justification game.

VR: That's why we have journey.

Q: Right.

VR: Yes.

Q: Now I'm not asking for reassurance, but [laughter] –

VR: That's good. [Laughter]

Q: – but do you feel your technique really is one of pushing a person through the other side of that?

VR: I beg your pardon?

Q: Would you – is there – is your technique pushing a person through the other side of that experience?

VR: Mine, particularly?

Q: Well, okay, yes.

VR: Mmm.

Q: Would you encourage that experience even though it entailed that fear? Would you say that normally this fear is increased as a person begins to experience more and more?

VR: I wouldn't give away my secrets. [Laughter] You'd have to try it and see.

Q: Is this a common experience for people to turn away as I did, for that reason, do you think?

VR: I don't know. Oh, I suppose it's common experience to turn away, yes. Sounds like it.

Q: Here again. For myself, I would have to say that that leap would have to be an act of total faith, and I felt in my own experience perhaps that that wasn't justified at the time. There wasn't the intelligence to justify –

VR: I think the point here is that you come to a narrow passage maybe, and it appears to be narrow, so our first thought – well, it's not our first, might be our fifteenth or twentieth – is like, "That's too narrow for me to get through, so I'll just rest here."

Q: But I think there really is the fear of madness, too, rather than having a state of greater clarity, that'll be a state of greater disorganization.

VR: Well, in this particular case, the fear of madness is delightful.

Q: I'm sorry, I missed –

VR: Delightful. Fear of madness is delightful. Anything for a change. [Laughter]

Q: I wonder how many people that's true for in their actual experience.

VR: Well, I think it's true that people feel that if I take one more step, I'm bound to fall off the edge of this cliff, and that would be the end of me.

Q: It would be.

VR: Well, that would be delightful. [Laughter] Think of all the things you wouldn't have to maintain.

Q: But it's giving up everything for the prospect of something unknown.

VR: Well, in this case, everything isn't even known. [Laughter]

Q: It's partially known.

VR: It's hinted at. It's not even partially known, it's simply hinted at, that there is a real world.

Q: Maybe – [laughter] – there's the appearance of a real world, there's the appearance of a self.

VR: Yes. So that's what we're talking about. Appearance.

Q: Yes, but having only that appearance to go on, it's understandable why a person would cling to it.

VR: Well, from the point of view of the teachings, that's not all you have to go on. You have intelligence.

Q: But intelligence seems to be also linked to that fear mechanism – that at the point the fear becomes really critical, intelligence goes into the service of the fear.

VR: Intelligence goes into perception, period.

Q: But don't you think the perception is twisted by the fear?

VR: No. The perception may be the fear in this case, perceiving danger, but the intelligence is just the actual act of perceiving. So in other words, the drop off the cliff is right in the perception itself, and we miss it.

Q: Miss it? [VR laughs; laughter] I missed the drop.

VR: In other words, in the actual perceiving, there's non-ego already.

Q: If there's no perceiver, then would you say the situation perceives itself, or there's no perception?

VR: I'm just saying the act of perceiving is non-ego already. Just look.

Well, time to go to bed and dream and sleep and wake up. [Laughter] Again. We've done it so many times. Begin to dream, fall asleep and wake up. Well, have a pleasant journey. See you on Thursday, maybe.