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

Tonight we're going to talk about being embarrassed and how important that is to us. As we discussed previously, the emergency operation, devotion to the practice of buddhadharma, is without consideration of who's on top, who's on the bottom, but simply the fact that confusion is so thick that we seek the antidote, and having found that, we practice diligently and we achieve some sense of sanity. That achievement is not particularly a big deal at this point, but some sense that all our garbage, in terms of the continual thought process, blah-blah-blah, blah-blah-blah, is somewhat settled down. Devotion has been intense in the sense of practice, the sense of getting down to it, and we achieve a sense of sanity. At that point there is a gap. And those of us who are students of the path and have taken this particular course and would like to experience real devotion should be mindful right now of what goes on in the practitioner's mind. Emotional security is the goal of the hinayana, and it is accomplished by rigorous discipline and unflinching commitment to the practice. Having done so, there is a gap in the experience of devotion. What do we do next?

And this is where the sense of embarrassment and resentment come in. Resentment is a very key emotion here. Embarrassment and resentment go hand-in-hand. When you go to the doctor and you're ailing, you don't care what he looks at particularly. Take off your clothes, lie down on the table, let me look at you. Sure. Anything. Look at the whole thing. We're so spaced out, so confused. We take the medicine and we feel better. Once we feel better, then the old story begins to creep back, even stronger. Spiritual materialism, which is simply that we knew it all along. It's so obvious. Passion, aggression and ignorance. It's so obvious. And a little bit of resentment builds up toward the teacher because he saw us, she saw us, in that state of disease. But the physician, the teacher, is still interested in us, still asking about our health. "How are you? How are you feeling these days?" And we resent that tremendously. "Why are you asking that? I'm better. I'm fine. [Laughter] I did what you said, and I'm fine." We have been seen with our clothes off by the teacher and we don't like it, because the medicine was so obvious and the disease was also obvious, and we realize after we've practiced and been with ourselves and our disease that we actually knew all along what the problem was, that that it is completely embarrassing to meet the physician again, to meet the teacher again.

At this point, the student should be mindful of two things: arrogance and depression. Arrogance is the fact that we feel healthy, and therefore we begin to believe in homemade versions of things. "This buddhadharma which has been taught for 2500 years is simply self-improvement, I realize that. I realize

that it is not necessary to go on with this neurosis. I can do it myself. I can handle the whole thing by myself. I don't need to see anybody else. I don't have to talk to anybody." The point here is some sense of embarrassment, that we would like to hold on to sanity, cling to sanity, some new-found confidence, cling to it. Well, it is true that Buddhism is do-it-yourself. But do-it-yourself has nothing to do with the embarrassment or clinging to sanity. Do-it-yourself implies openness, implies that there are tremendous possibilities, rather than some set formula. So the student at this point has a certain hesitation, a certain feeling of resentment, a tendency to close up, fill up the gap between himself, herself, and the teacher. Depression at this point means that the student feels, "Even though I have achieved a certain sense of sanity, I am not perfect. I should be absolutely perfect and receive the teachings, and I can't quite be perfect." So therefore the same kind of feeling of shying away from the teacher, because of that imperfection.

Depression, arrogance come up. These are signposts of progressing along the path, should not be interpreted as relapse, but rather the actual depression and arrogance is a spark to relate to the teacher again. The teacher in this case is no longer the physician. The teacher has to be a friend, simply because in continuing our practice we feel like we have some sense of sanity, but what do we do with that? I have some sense of making myself healthy, sane, basically. The storm is over. There is some sense of calm, some sense of clear water. But there is continual expectation at this point of, "What am I going to do with that? Can I lose it? Is it possible to lose it?" Expectation again. "If I don't hold it tightly, the whole thing might come back. I might be crazy all over again."

There is a need for a friend. Physician as physician is no longer necessary, but physician as friend is very necessary. Physician calls you up and says: "Why don't you come over and we can have a chat?" You say: "He wants to give me some more of those nasty things." [Laughter] But this particular friend is a human being. In the lineage of devotion, he's called kalyanamitra, spiritual friend, the best friend you could possibly ever have. He is the friend who doesn't particularly care if you have bandages and if you have scars and if the healing process is not completely finished. This spiritual friend does not particularly care about that.

How can we make some transition in terms of devotion? How can we fill that gap which naturally happens, in terms of a human being, as our friend? Devotion in the mahayana path is some sense of trust, some sense of trust in oneself that that basic sanity that we have experienced is real. That trust in oneself is only stabilized in contact with the spiritual friend, because the spiritual friend is the actual mirror of our own confidence, of our own trust. This spiritual friend does not particularly worry about the past, but is genuinely interested in who we are right now. This spiritual friend is the actual manifestation of trust, real faith. This spiritual friend is the person who shows us a lonely journey as it should be taken.

How can we have a friend and be lonely at the same time? Being lonely, being alone, means that we have given up expectation, and our spiritual friend is the one who demonstrates that in human form, physically, in a body, in a life, that it is possible to drop the whole thing. We are intimidated. We feel frightened, small, but at the same time we have this sense of confidence that we already experienced from practice. So our resentment, our embarrassment, is somehow undercut by our own experience. Without a spiritual friend it is impossible to continue on the path of devotion. The spiritual friend is the one who points out, the one who exhibits the sense of potential, the sense of real confidence and trust. The spiritual friend seems to like us, which is astounding, and we don't trust it, and we can't get away from it. So we are drawn like a moth to a flame, we are drawn to the light of our own confidence, we are drawn to the light of our own sanity. The spiritual friend is the mirror of true devotion. In this case we could say that we have begun to step in the mud of devotion when we begin to recognize that the spiritual friend is a human

being, and being human like ourselves and experiencing what we have experienced, it immediately short-circuits our sense of preservation. In fact if we continue, there is no possible way to avoid contact with the spiritual friend because it is basically water seeking its own level. The fulfillment, achievement and realization manifest in the sense of other.

We could have a discussion.

QUESTION: Up until this point in the other talks you've given I've had some feeling of understanding at least part of what's been going on. To be quite honest, I really don't – I don't think I've grasped much of anything this evening, and I can't think of anything to ask you, except I'd like to know what it is that you've talking about.

VAJRA REGENT: That's quite to the point. That's the attitude of the student who would like to come in contact with the spiritual friend.

Q: That's true.

VR: That's very heroic.

Q: I missed your last statement. Could you repeat it or clarify?

VR: Not a chance [laughter].

Q: Neither way?

VR: What was it?

Q: You were talking about achievement –

VR: Achievement, yes.

Q: – manifests in a sense of other and – I missed, that's all I got, and it –

VR: Achievement manifests in a sense of other, the spiritual friend. Some sense of achievement.

Q: So your confidence and achievement are manifest, is that what you meant?

VR: What?

Q: That your confidence and achievements are manifesting in the spiritual friend as he reflects them back to you? Is that – I really missed what you said.

VR: The spiritual friend is brilliant, has a good time, is delighted with life, is serious, strong, all the rest of it. That's your, you know, your particular vision of yourself.

QUESTION: I didn't quite understand when you said that the goal of the hinayana was emotional security because I thought it was the opposite, groundlessness, and –

VR: Yes [Laughs] Joke's on us [Laughter].

Q: Guess so.

VR: That's what we're looking for, emotional security, at that point. And we feel that we got it, after we sit and we feel, practice for a while – I'm not talking about the few weeks at Naropa Institute – could happen, but I have my doubts. People practice and then they feel somewhat sane. They look around and they say: "What was I complaining about?" Things are this way, but that becomes very tight. They want to let go of that, feeling some sense of sanity, and then the spiritual friend looks like a giant, a monster, but a monster of sanity, and not only sanity but a monster of brilliance, which is enticing and at the same time slightly repelling.

QUESTION: At this point is the relationship with the spiritual friend carried over into the everyday world by thoughts of the spiritual friend?

VR: Definitely. See, the point is, there's a sense of expansion which naturally happens, a sense of beginning to feel extremely vulnerable and the kind of cloud cover of the whole thing is the spiritual friend, which mirrors back our vulnerability, which is the same thing as our expansiveness.

Q: We often hear of this analogy of the desperate situation of the hinayana student that he originally faces with the guru in the emergency ward, but most people experience entering into the teachings more from terms of a click to the teachings. They think it's right, they go along, they get sucked in, that kind of thing. Could you say something about those two analogies?

VR: Sure. That's emergency situation. It's only later on that you think of click. When somebody asks you later on, "Well, how did it happen?" you say, "Well, I was there and suddenly it made sense." That's not really what happened. What happened was you were shocked by your own disease, therefore you grabbed the medicine chest. It's true. Everybody likes to feel stronger later on, you see. You say, "Well, I just fell into it, like a cherry blossom in a flowing stream." Peter? In back.

QUESTION: Hi. Ösel, is it possible to have more than one spiritual friend, or is that a contradiction in terms?

VR: More than one spiritual friend? No. In the Kagyü lineage, the hinayana physician, the spiritual friend and the guru are all the same, in the Kagyü tradition, because the Kagyü tradition is completely saturated in devotion. I would say from that point of view it's always the same, but from other points of view, you could have spiritual friends, yes.

Q: So that there isn't necessarily a sense of exclusivity there.

VR: In the spiritual friend?

Q: Yes, in other words, different spiritual friends reflect different things.

VR: Oh yes, definitely. But you see, in the Kagyü thing it's very hard to get out of that, different spiritual friends, you know, what not, because it's like those science fiction things with the walls closing in on each side. If you have, at that point of entering the Mahayana, a sense of being open to teachers as manifestation of spiritual friend, that certainly does happen. Gampopa had his spiritual friends, but he had his guru, Milarepa.

QUESTION: Ösel, tonight you talk about being alone means having given up all expectation, and in a previous lecture you were talking about devotion and you were saying, I guess we were talking about Milarepa, and that devotion is that constant feeling of expectation. Could you talk about those two things?

VR: Well, in terms of the giving up expectation in the sense of – we're talking about path here, we're not talking about some sort of absolute thing in the sky, but giving up expectation becomes active, in terms of the spiritual friend, that your resentment and hesitation and embarrassment are all based on some sort of expectation, but you actually come along with those things to the spiritual friend and you notice the spiritual friend doesn't mind. So it's a continual sense of exposing expectation.

Q: But you're alone all along.

VR: Well, you're the only one that can do it. The spiritual friend doesn't pull you out of the pond and say, "Oh, you're the best fish. Come over here." It's a matter of you jumping out and saying, "Hello, [laughter] I'm in the pond!" [Laughter]

QUESTION: I'm wondering in what sense is it possible to merge with the spiritual friend and what sense do you maintain some kind of uniqueness?

VR: Uniqueness, merge. Well, tell me what you mean by uniqueness.

Q: Some sense of having your own little bit of something. [Laughter]

VR: That's how you merge with the spiritual friend, by having your own little bit of something. That's what spiritual friend is actually interested in, your own little bit of something [Laughter]. That's why he's a friend, instead of a vacuum cleaner. [Laughter]

Q: So in a sense you merge by being alone.

VR: Yes, you are alone, and the spiritual friend just mirrors back to you, points it right out to you by appreciating the possibilities of whoever you are. Spiritual friend doesn't like to possess, doesn't have any need to possess you, if you're forty percent gold and sixty percent silver, whatever.

Q: But there's still some you there to be appreciated?

VR: By whom?

Q: I don't know.

VR: Well, what do you say?

Q: I'm trying to find out. I mean, there's this sense that ego doesn't exist, at least that's what I hear.

VR: Sure.

Q: But at the same time something exists.

VR: Yes. What is that?

Q: I don't know.

VR: That's what the spiritual friend appreciates. He appreciates that sense of "Well, something is here, I don't know what it is, but –"

Q: And when you share that mutual appreciation, that's in a sense part of the merger or possibilities of it?

VR: Merger? [Laughs] Well, let's say that's a working relationship. Merger, I think, is a bit later on, but there is some sense of working relationship, that you don't actually go to the spiritual friend and say, "Would you dispose of this stuff?" But actually you feel some sense of inspiration that somebody recognizes something, which is delightful. We don't exactly know at this point what that something is. But it seems to be active, vibrant and full of potential. We're not sure about it ourselves, as you say. But spiritual friend says, "That's very interesting. What else do you think?" And you come up with something else.

Q: Could you maybe talk about your personal relationship to Rinpoche?

VR: That's what I'm doing.

QUESTION: I panic a lot, and I'm trying to feel the difference between confidence and devotion. I'm starting to wonder if they're not the same.

VR: Very much the same, very much the same. There's no difference at all. Panic and confidence are also the same. [Laughter]

Q: Panic and confidence?

VR: Yes, chew on that. [Laughter]

QUESTION: Getting back to the subject we're into tonight about the gap that happens, you said then that the guru seems to have confidence in you still, and you seem to have a sense of confidence in yourself somehow. Then what happens with that gap?

VR: Well, you either fall into the pits of arrogance or depression, or you approach the spiritual friend.

Q: And you just keep on going?

VR: Well, you bring your embarrassment and resentment along with you and say, "Listen, I didn't want to talk to you, but – I really don't have anything to say, but – they tell me that I'm supposed to be here, but –" Things like that, you know. Spiritual friend doesn't mind all that stuff. Whatever little toot you bring along with you; you know, you come in with "toot-toot-ta-toot! [Laughter] Here comes sane me." [Laughter] It's okay.

QUESTION: Hello. How does the spiritual friend mind the business of so many people?

VR: Well, it's a kind of sense of wide-open possibilities since there's no ego factor. So many and so little, so what. [Laughter] Spiritual friend has nothing else to do.

QUESTION: Yes. I'm wondering in the case where the medicine isn't administered directly by the person of the guru but comes from meditation instructor, where there's a contact with the sangha, where you can practice for a long time hard, achieve some sense of sanity, say, without anyone actually having seen you naked and in terrible shape, whether that sense of embarrassment still works the same way, whether it gets directed at the person of the guru later on, or whether what—

VR: What do you think?

Q: Well, I don't know. It seems that it might be avoided a little, I mean, if you actually haven't had contact with him, in your desperate state, having that feeling of someone seeing you naked —

VR: Someone seeing you naked is the Buddha, dharma, sangha, as we talked about.

Q: So there's kind of a wide sense of that, not so much the person—

VR: Not so much the person. We're actually not really up to it. It wouldn't go very far if you walked into the spiritual friend as a hinayana student, wouldn't go very far, would only be the hinayana teacher, and that teacher would say: "Sit, practice meditation." Same as the meditation instructor says. That's the mentality that we come in with. It's only when we feel some sense of sanity, courage, that we come in with our junk. So it's straightforward. "Hey, how come you did this to me the other night?" or, "I love you very much." Same thing. Oh ho!

QUESTION: Is there any way of relating to the sense of confidence not as a prize or an achievement? I'm talking about, like in sitting practice when you feel that sense of confidence or whatever like, "I've cracked it. I've mastered it," and then you laugh at that, and then you say, "Well, that was the right thing to do too, laughing at it," so you claim that as a prize as well. There doesn't seem to be any way out of it.

VR: Um-hm. Yes.

Q: Is there any way of relating to that sense of confidence apart from it being an award or a prize or a victory or achievement?

VR: Yes. Contact with the spiritual friend is the only way of relating with that. Otherwise it just goes back and forth—ping-ping, ping-ping. I did it, I did it, I did it again, I did it again. [Laughter] Cocoon. Then when you go to see the spiritual friend you say, "Do you know that I did it?" [Laughter] And he says, "Oh, did you?" [Laughter]

QUESTION: I'm interested in the space between the arrogance and the depression. For me there seems to be a grief that doesn't feel like depression and it doesn't feel like arrogance. It is in the gap between.

VR: A grief?

Q: A grief. I distinguish it somehow from depression. It doesn't feel like depression, it doesn't feel depressed and it doesn't feel — oh, I haven't — I know the feeling of — I see things I feel confident and I

haven't done it, I haven't been brave or whatever, whatever. But there's a grief in between it all, between the swing, that's always there, at least for me—I don't—

VR: Yes, what about it?

Q: I guess maybe I'm asking you, is that different, because I'm maybe asking for confirmation or something, is that different from the depression?

VR: Sure. Depression and arrogance are the same thing as passion and aggression, and the grief is ignorance. Grief is the sense of being separate always.

Q: Um-hm. That's what it feels like.

VR: Isn't it, though. Grief is being alone.

So on that cheery note, we continue our journey. Those of you who are studying this path of devotion in the various groups that we have provided for you should read carefully and study carefully the lives of the teachers of the lineage, and take these particular talks in that context, these particular discussions that we have. Use your own intellect. Check out. We should be saying the same thing. In terms of the Kagyü lineage, all of us who practice this path have the same journey as Marpa, Milarepa, Gampopa, Tilopa, Naropa, same journey. So you should study it. Last time we talked about practice and the sense of intuition, sense of actually feeling what we're talking about. Now we should mention intellect, we should talk about how actually to discriminate, that words, lectures, talks together are not simply haphazard samsaric experience, but have definite connection to the continuing transmission of the path of devotion through the Kagyü lineage. So you should endeavor to study, read those stories, check it out with your own experience and what you've heard, what's been taught. Also you should fill out your pledge forms [laughter] which are at the table, the fund-raising table, you remember that table. It has been said that between the fund-raising speech at the beginning and the space of time during the talk and the discussion that people forget about filling out their pledge forms. Good night.