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VAJRA REGENT ÖSEL TENDZIN

The Lonely Journey: Devotion in the Kagyü Lineage

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Retyped by Tina Brandt
Checked against audio by

VAJRA REGENT:

I feel so informal. I can't remember anything to say. [Laughter] That's what happens, you know. The Hinayana emergency has been dealt with and the Mahayana confidence has been accomplished. We responded to the emergency situation by finding the good medicine, and furthermore, we responded to the loneliness by finding a companion and a friend. In the process of relating to the teacher, the spiritual friend, there is a point where we feel very strong and secure, not in the sense of feeling better than we did before, but feeling some innate intelligence and being able to practice with a sense of dedication and effort, without feeling too hung up about that. But again, we have the subtle danger of spiritual materialism creeping in, that our world, and our relationship with the spiritual friend, seems rather predictable at a certain point. We feel that we have accomplished a sense of discipline, a sense of openness. We feel that we have actually dropped our ego clinging. We've actually dropped our own personal trip. And then suddenly, without warning, our relationship with the spiritual friend begins to change and we are introduced to the guru of the Vajrayana. When I say "without warning," what I mean is that we have discovered another nest, another sense of complacency, and the guru begins to appear unreasonable and not so friendly. Not particularly hostile, but unreasonable. We felt that we have actually made a great step forward. We feel that we have accomplished a sense of egolessness in dealing with others, our situation. We've made the right donations. We've joined the proper committees. We've given all we possibly can. And then, the guru appears in the form of an unreasonable spiritual friend.

In continuing the path of devotion, it is necessary to understand that whatever hideaway we choose is bound to be exposed. Most often we don't even realize we have chosen a particular niche, and that is why the path of devotion is so powerful. It continually exposes any sense of hiding. Entrance in to the Vajrayana is complete humiliation. It is beyond anything we thought we could do. It is irrational, criminal by conventional standard, totally unworkable. Our nice peaceful delightful world of compassion and skillful means is erupted, eroded, exploded in connection with the guru and the Vajrayana teachings. How can we possibly do any more? It's completely unreasonable for this guru to ask us to do this ridiculous thing. That's what's happening, that's what will happen, as we progress on the path. There's no doubt that our familiar relationship suddenly becomes desolate, that our love-affair loses its steam and we are faced with something much more real, nitty-gritty, one to one, nuts and bolts, pain and pleasure- relationship without apologies. The point is that we have given up quite a bit in terms of ego-tendencies as we pass along, walk along the path of the Hinayana and Mahayana, but at the same time, we also accumulate

some sense of credential, some distinguishing marks as being bodhisattvas, and we begin in a subtle way to use those practices, those experiences of pain, those experiences of having accomplished, as credential. And the only way to cut through, the only way to actually have the rug pulled out from under us, is a relationship with the guru, because the guru is not particularly concerned with being the object of devotion or love. The guru is not particularly concerned with the aesthetic of being appreciated. The guru is not concerned with how many pints can be accumulated by doing good deeds. In fact, the guru seems rude, unnecessarily so, ill mannered, not predictable, and unconventional. We are still working with our subtle sense of reference point always. As we talked about at the very beginning, this, meaning myself, and that, meaning what I would like to achieve, what I would like to get. And as we go along, we refine that sense of reference point of other, of object of devotion. We continually create a further, more intricate, more delicate reference point. Now we have the guru emerging as absolute reference point. It's no longer a matter of brilliance and compassion, but it's a matter of practicality. The guru becomes a businessman, an administrator, a hatchet man, becomes functional in terms of cutting any thread of holding onto reference point, by being the guru. If we have not had the training, if we have not practiced Hinayana and Mahayana disciplines, relating to the guru as superman would produce tremendous fakery, charlatanism, and cheap junk. But, since we have had that training and since we are going along on this path, then we already have some sense of openness and letting go. We don't have that sense of really holding tight to our own point of view. Therefore, the unreasonable indestructible guru can weave his magic spell. And it is a magic spell, in the sense of coming down to brass tacks and ordinariness, so ordinary that we hadn't thought of it.

In the Vajrayana, the relationship between the guru and disciple is of the first importance, and the path of devotion only comes to fruition in the Vajrayana. Before that we are actually working with some sense of appetizer, teaser, but the teacher and the spiritual friend are simply helping us along to the point where we can practice real devotion. In the Vajrayana there is the experience of and taking of an unbreakable vow between the teacher and the student, which is called the samaya vow. This vow is bondage; it's a complete imprisonment and binds the two people together, teacher and student, guru and disciple. It's not simply a bond in one way from the disciple to the guru, but it's a two-way bond. In terms of taking samaya vow, it's not in any sense eloping or having a free-style marriage. It is an absolutely ritualistic, one hundred percent ceremonial vow, which has a lot of fanfare and a lot of consequences. Taking a vow, and binding your-self to the vajra master- the guru- has a sense of promise, and a sense of destruction. When the student connects himself, herself, to the vajra master, they do so with full warning that this particular path has no possible cop-outs and no way to finesse a relationship. When the student takes samaya vow, he has been taught, has been told, that once taking that vow, any sort of violation will prove to be deadly. Any kind of approach, it is necessary to understand what we mean by vow and what we mean by destruction, or, on the other hand, what we mean by fruition. Otherwise, we might fall into interpretations of some kind of demonic presence, waiting to catch the students every time they make a mistake, in the lightning coming through the window or something like that. But, what it has to do with is precisely our state of mind as it arises moment to moment. What we are vowing to do is not to leave the present moment, not to fantasize, not to create further illusion. What we are vowing is absolute discipline and absolute openness. We've been thinking a long time about getting to what we want and suddenly we are presented with exactly that. If you really want to fulfill your prophecy, then the guru says: "Do this." There are no little corners to say: "Well, you could do this," as the spiritual friend would say, "Possibly you could do this, leave it up to you to interpret what to do." In the Vajrayana, the guru, through the samaya vow is able to say to the student: "You must do this." Real sense of samaya is never leaving that discipline of being with the moment. There are all sorts of deceptions and we have been talking about them for the past three weeks, whatever it is, and as the student progresses along the path, he or she tries

to work out those fine points. But, when it comes right down to it, it's a matter of what you want is right here.

What have we left to deceive ourselves with? What have we left to transgress, to cop out? Primarily, we have our actual physical body. Somewhere we feel that even if we freak out, become psychotic, whatever, we still, at least, are alive. If we lose everything, we still have this body we can continue with. In the Vajrayana, the guru demands your body, one hundred percent. Your first and last reference point has to be surrendered to the guru. Secondly, speech, in this case, emotions, which we have become so familiar with, is the bodhisattva path. The guru demands your emotional life as payment. This means, in this case, that any sense of security is irrelevant, has no place whatsoever in the relationship. The third is mind. In this case any kind of manipulative game, any kind of mental gymnastics that you could do is demanded. The obvious thought is, "Well, if we give up body, speech and mind to the guru, then we're going to be idiots, just a bl-bl-bl coming along." But, the point here is that what we're actually talking about is the ultimate watcher, the final commentator, and the precious sense of awareness that we have developed. In the Vajrayana, real discipline is to be spontaneously what you are. When we have a sense of accumulated benefits that we've done through all those practices and this path of devotion, we still have subtle reference point, a subtle expectation of "If everything goes wrong I can still fall back on my awareness." The aim of the Vajrayana is complete realization of spontaneous wisdom, spontaneous intelligence, which has no reference point whatsoever. So in order to allow ourselves to be what we are naturally, real sense of surrender is necessary, bottom line surrender, ultimate surrender, giving up the primary reference-points, giving up our last hold on theistic notions that there is some subtle sense of savior quality somewhere.

As it was with Naropa, who had achieved tremendous recognition as a great Mahayanist, great scholar, president of Nalanda, chancellor of Nalanda University, renowned throughout India, the foremost scholar, compassionate, wise, as it was with Naropa, he also had to surrender his credentials, and his life is considered the example of a worthy vessel, of a great disciple. Also considered to be a very tough case in the sense that it took him twelve years of constantly being with his guru, Tilopa, before he could actually let go of the most fine little hair of himself and achieve spontaneously-born wisdom, spontaneously-arising intelligence.

So this is our entrance into the fantastic world of the Vajrayana. This is the end of a cute love affair and the beginning of business. The student who walks on the path and practices with great devotion will be available to the task, will be readily willing to do as Naropa did, willing to expose any last sense of survival to reach the goal, to achieve complete enlightenment.

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

QUESTION: How do you give up awareness?

VAJRA REGENT: Probably you can't. What you do is make a relationship with the vajra master, who takes awareness from you.

QUESTION: Yes. I'm confused about what the first and last reference point is. At one point you seemed to say it was the body, but then you talked about the ultimate watcher, which seemed to imply awareness of mind.

VR: That's correct, yes. First reference point, last reference point is body, which is the ultimate watcher, which is, in this case, our dream of mind, what we think our mind is, ultimately.

Q: I don't understand. Is there some merging of mind and body, that the last aspect of mind is your body? Is that what you mean?

VR: Um-hum. It is the last aspect of your conception of mind. Here, you know.

Q: Is the reference point of pain also surrendered?

VR: Must be, because pain becomes a credential at that point, how much I have gone through, how much I've given up, how can I possibly give any more? "Oy, vas I toisty!" [Laughter]

QUESTION: How are we to give up wanting security in our relationship with the guru? It seems like that would be- you said that in, I think it was in relationship to body or speech, or something, I don't know.

VR: Speech, emotion, security, yes...

Q: It would seem that that would be survival in relationship that I don't know how you could give that up.

VR: Yes. That's where we come to when we meet the guru. Exactly that point of view, "I don't know how I could possibly do that." And the guru says, "You must give me that."

Q: Well, just do it? I still don't see how. It is something that occurs, or...

VR: Well, you could say that you just do it, yes, like Naropa did. You know the story?

Q: Yes.

VR: Same story. It's still the same old story. If you try and fish around anywhere for the reference point, "How can I do it," then you missed the point, in terms of Vajrayana.

QUESTION: Would you say a little bit more about the destruction, which results from violating the samaya vow?

VR: The destruction is simply that once you take such a vow, the vow itself implies destruction. In other words, you do it with full eyes open. It's a, what do you call it, a collision between the guru and the disciple. It's an agreement.

Q: But I'm still not very clear what actually happens if there is a breaking of that agreement.

VR: Well, I think it's quite simple. What actually happens is that you begin to drive yourself crazy because you broke your only possibility. Don't get too frightened about that, because by the time you progress along the path, it's quite clear that's what's going to happen. On the other hand, you should get quite frightened about that. [Laughter]

QUESTION: After we've given up everything to the guru, he sounds like he becomes a final absolute reference point. Do we give up that reference point? Do we give up the guru?

VR: No, I don't think we ever give up the guru. The reference point becomes one with our own intelligence. In other words, the guru, who speaks for the lineage and who is the teachings personified, is united with us as our own intelligence.

Q: Is that a point where he doesn't need to tell you what to do any more?

VR: I think there must be such a point. [VR laughs] The point there is that we always have this feeling that the messages are coming from somewhere else, so the guru becomes the last somewhere else, the last messenger. We will talk about that further.

QUESTION: Could you explain a little about how one doesn't violate the vajra samaya?

VR: Yes. There are two aspects of that. The first is the actual rules of the samaya vows, which I don't think we could go into at this point. The other is not leaving the present. In other words, complete, total trust, complete devotion.

Q: If you take an initiation, an abhisheka from a Rinpoche, does that automatically imply that there is a vajra samaya there, if you receive...

VR: It certainly should. [VR laughs] In these days, it's been quite common for people to file through abhishekas and get their little blessings, but if we're talking about the path as we have been exposed to it through Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, when you make a samaya connection with the root guru, it is as we have said. In other words, you have to have the foundation of the Hinayana and Mahayana in order to

actually appreciate samaya, in order to have some connection with samaya. Otherwise it's simply just another pat on the head.

QUESTION: I'm kind of interested in the idea of the guru as the ultimate watcher. It sounds like maybe there's some kind of progression for – maybe a refinement of a reference point if you move along in the Hinayana and Mahayana to the Vajrayana?

VR: I don't think I said that the guru is the ultimate watcher.

Q: Oh, maybe I got that wrong.

VR: Our relationship with the guru in the Vajrayana has to do with the ultimate watcher, but the guru is simply a human being.

Q: So what is the ultimate watcher?

VR: Our own subtle expectation of meeting the guru face to face, of combining our heart with his heart, her heart, our mind with the guru's mind. That's the ultimate watcher. We're watching right down to the funeral pyre, if we're going to be burned or not. The only way to get out of that is to have somebody to throw you right on the fire, you see. There's no other way to get out of that, because we're always checking out, 360 degrees all the time, and the guru's the only one who can give you a push while you're not looking, you know. You're trying to look the other way, and he pushes you into the fire.

Q: Is that way of looking at the watcher, that last relationship to watcher in the Vajrayana, is that the end development of some kind of process? I mean, what is watcher before that, in the Mahayana for instance?

VR: Well, it's a companionship that comes out of loneliness and a sense of wholesomeness, a sense of potential intelligence, a sense of companionship and generosity, blah-blah-blah, blah-blah-blah. All the Mahayana teaching still has a subtle sense of watcher, you see. There is a subtle pat on the back, congratulations.

QUESTION: You discussed previously a sense of Buddha nature that exists within everyone, and now you are saying that everything is totally taken away. What happens to the open palm?

VR: The point is that unless everything is totally taken away, full-blown expression of Buddha-hood is not possible.

Q: You presented it in the past as simply a matter of being aware that you already possess the awareness.

VR: Still the same. Now we have to get rid of the possessor.

Q: But you were discussing getting rid of the awareness too. Do you mean just getting rid of the possessing of the awareness, or that the awareness itself disappears?

VR: You try and figure that out. Who is who? Are you awareness, or do you possess awareness? There's some big gap there. [VR laughs]

QUESTION: Is what we're giving up at this point the hesitation to be what we are? I mean, when it comes down to it, there seems to be some sort of fear that we couldn't really be that, we're still neurotic, even though we sense some accomplishment that there still – we couldn't really expose it, so is it a hesitation, to just do it and the hang-ups drop off, sort of, in that way, in that form of devotion, by surrendering that?

VR: I don't think it's a question of surrendering neurosis. It is surrendering sanity. [Laughter] It's extremely mean.

QUESTION: I would like to get more of a sense of you personally, and so I'll ask you the question, are you an awakened being?

VR: [Laughs] What do you think?

Q: Very close.

VR: [Laughs; laughter] Well, we'll leave it at that. I have the *chutzpa* to say these things. [Laughter]

QUESTION: Is the guru risking anything by allowing the student to take the samaya vow? What I'm saying –

VR: Yes.

Q: In other words, if the student breaks the samaya vow, the guru's life is also at stake?

VR: That's right. Probably not as much [laughter] but there's some sense of that, yes.

Q: Could you... What sort of screening process takes place before... [Laughter]

VR: Quite a bit, quite a bit, actually, quite a bit. Tremendous. Well, we've gone through it for quite a while now, Hinayana, Mahayana, refuge, bodhisattva and then, primary to actually entering the Vajrayana, a series of warnings, such as this one. [Laughter]

QUESTION: You said that the spiritual friend, his primary way of relating with the student is as a mirror, is that correct?

VR: That's correct.

Q: Does he have any other styles, or is that basically...

VR: Well, you know, warmth, compassion, kind of joyously unconventional, outlandish, you know.

Q: So you wouldn't necessarily always just... if the student was sullen, he wouldn't have to be particularly sullen?

VR: No, not at all. He could actually mirror that sullenness as a delight.

Q: And then the vajra master...

VR: Couldn't care less. [Laughter]

Q: Yes, I think I got it. [Laughter]

QUESTION: Could you say something about the way the process of humiliation, insult works?

VR: [Laughs] How it works?

Q: Yes. You might think that it would cause more self-consciousness and more hesitation, less than...

VR: That's correct, that's correct. It does. You see, when the vise begins to tighten, everything gets very direct, so more of self-consciousness, more hesitation, more humiliation, is more enlightenment.

Q: What is enlightening about that?

VR: Nothing.

Q: Why do you say that's more enlightenment as opposed to –

VR: Just what I said. Flip-flop. Who are you? Who am I? What's good and what's bad? It's primary reference point, you know. We're going to die.

Q: Do you mean more groundlessness?

VR: Dying must be extremely humiliating. Groundlessness is a very silly idea at that point. But, we don't want to jump the gun.

QUESTION: Is the vajra samaya between the disciple and the guru something that, for example, one moment was not there and the next moment is there in full, or is it something that gradually develops between the disciple and the guru?

VR: [Laughs] I think both, yes, definitely. You can't say, you know, "If I weren't born, I wouldn't be here." It's that kind of thing.

Q: For example, one can have a relationship with a Rinpoche where there is no vajra samaya, and then does there come a sudden moment when there is?

VR: Oh, I see. I see your point.

Q: Or is it something that one kind of feels – gradually you feel more and more is there?

VR: Well, as far as my own experience goes, I've seen both approaches. Some people extremely sudden, all at once, and then there's no turning back, and some people inching along, step-by-step, until there's no turning back.

QUESTION: It seems like we take samaya or make relationship with staying in the moment through meditation practice, and so how does the formal commitment differ?

VR: Quite a bit.

Q: In the relationship with the guru?

VR: Yes, it has already gone through several changes before that. Practice means practicing on one's own neurosis and one's own trip, you know, and then further practice is allowing that to exist in the world with other people. So it's not simply "my practice." By the time you reach the guru, it's much more than my practice. It is life or death.

QUESTION: The previous vows that practitioners take, like refuge and bodhisattva, seem more like a rehearsal for samaya vow, some kind of watered-down thing, but still sowing the seed for samaya vow.

VR: Well, I wouldn't say watered down particularly. It's a matter of wondering if you're in the right place, you know, like you're in a railway station and the sign is behind you, and sort of taking different looks around, see if you're there, you know. Then suddenly, the sign might fall down, crack, and then you say, "Ha! I'm here at the place where I expected to be." I mean, we've been expecting this all along. Total claustrophobia. We've been waiting for it, [VR laughs] dream come true. [Laughter]

QUESTION: In the bodhisattva vow, you take that before you're really a bodhisattva. It seems like you said that the samaya vow was being in the present moment. It seems like – well, it doesn't seem like the people I know that have taken the samaya vow can do that all the time, so is that also –

VR: Things are not always as they seem.

Q: Well, maybe so. Well, what I was wondering was if you take that before you can actually do the whole thing.

VR: Absolutely not. That is from the absolute point of view. [Laughter]

Q: If one were not, say, consciously aware of exactly what was going on, however, clearly received this sort of a transmission, this commitment still exists by virtue of the transmission?

VR: Somewhat. There's an inkling of it, rather than eyes open. Lots of people have been flirting, eh? Flirting with the Vajrayana. [VR laughs]

QUESTION: You said that Naropa was a very stubborn fellow, and that it took twelve years for him to shed himself of the last hair of self-clinging. Let's say that a person could arrive at the place of a hair or several hairs. How would you go further? How do you get rid of the hairs?

VR: [Laughs; laughter] Well, you try very hard, as Naropa did, and continually petition Tilopa, "Teach me about this. Teach me about this. Teach me this." Tilopa said, "Get out of here, kid. I don't have anything to tell you. Lie down on this stream, and I'll walk over you," and Naropa thought, "That must mean I can get something if I lie down on this stream," so he lay down and Tilopa walked over him, and he's full of leeches and he's hurting, and Tilopa said, "What are you doing there, full of leeches?"

Q: But he still got the hairs.

VR: Sure. [VR laughs] That's why Tilopa says, "What are you doing there, full of leeches? This body believing in and I deserve to be stung, Naropa," whatever it says there, you read it, the book. It's got a nice thin hair, stands straight up, says, "I." [Laughter]

Q: I sort of understand what you said, but I –

VR: Practically speaking? You just go ahead on the path. You see, once you engage, it's bound to happen if you keep on walking forward. It's our dream come true. Ultimate claustrophobia. [VR laughs] As I said, it is bound to happen.

Q: You mean that finally you trick yourself, or you're tricked?

VR: [Laughs] Whatever you say. That's too hypothetical.

QUESTION: If the vajra master is not particularly motivated by compassion, why does he choose to teach, or for that matter, choose a particular student?

VR: Who says he chooses to teach?

Q: Is it his own history, then, that is propelling him as far as teaching goes?

VR: Who knows? From his point of view, it is for me to know and for you to find out. [VR laughs] Really? Okay.

QUESTION: It's much the same subject. If one has broken the vajra samaya, what can one do about that?

VR: There are things to do.

Q: Could you say –

VR: Not now. If you have a certain situation like that, we should talk. Oh, it's so mysterious.

Well, we shouldn't prolong our agony at this point, by saying goodnight and see you next Tuesday.