

## 5. THE BENEFIT, WHICH IS LIBERATION

Before beginning his explanation of the benefit, which is liberation, Patrul Rinpoche pays homage to his root guru Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu and describes his qualities.

*Cared for by many sublime scholars and accomplished masters,  
He practiced and experienced the instructions of his lamas.  
Without error, he taught beings the supreme path of liberation.  
At the feet of my peerless guru, I bow down.*

When Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu was studying the Dharma, he received teachings from many scholars and accomplished masters. He pleased his gurus in three ways;<sup>1</sup> they were very happy with him and loved him greatly. They taught him the entire Dharma, from the sutra teachings with characteristics up to the Clear Light Dzogchen. The words of his gurus encompassed the oceanlike teachings, and he practiced all these teachings through meditation. The main part of Dharma is the practice through meditation. Without meditation, the fruit will not ripen in your mindstream. Not only did Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu receive teachings and practice himself, he also taught on what he had received and practiced to those who had a connection with him, according to their capacities. Such activity is similar to that of Lord Buddha, and Patrul Rinpoche pays homage at the feet of his unequalled root guru.

From this point, the benefit, meaning liberation, and the next chapter on how to follow a spiritual teacher are taught together. This is because we must achieve liberation, and without following a teacher profound enlightenment cannot be reached. Only Samantabhadra, the primordial Buddha of the Dzogpa Chenpo, was enlightened without a teacher. Otherwise, all past buddhas reached enlightenment by relying on a teacher.

All the past bodhisattvas, pratyekabuddhas, and sravakas achieved their respective levels with the help of a teacher. Pratyekabuddhas do not consult a teacher at the end their personal existence, and following this, they no longer take birth in samsara. However, the path of the pratyekabuddhas is practiced for one hundred kalpas, and during this time they receive teachings and practice them, accumulating merit. After that, at the end of their worldly existence they achieve the pratyekabuddha level. This is how pratyekabuddhas rely on teachers to achieve their level. In short, we must

<sup>1</sup> Making offerings to the lama, serving him, and practicing according to his instructions.

follow a spiritual teacher to achieve enlightenment.

We should follow a spiritual teacher who has the qualities of his or her own vehicle. If we receive a teaching of Secret Mantra, the teacher must have the qualities of Secret Mantra as explained in the Mantrayana texts. A teacher who has only the qualities of the lower vehicles cannot qualify to teach Mantrayana. Whatever vehicle we receive teachings in, we must determine whether the spiritual teacher has the specific qualities of that vehicle or not.

This teaching concerns the benefit of practicing the Dharma, which is liberation. Liberation means finding freedom from the ocean of suffering that is samsara, attaining the level of a sravaka or a pratyekabuddha, or attaining complete enlightenment. From what do we have to be liberated? We must be liberated from samsara, referring to the six realms. There is no samsara other than that. Liberation means going beyond the six realms. Liberation can be achieved by practicing the vehicle of the sravakas, the vehicle of the pratyekabuddhas, or practicing the complete buddhahood of the path of the bodhisattvas.

All these three can be considered liberation: the liberation of the sravaka, the liberation of the pratyekabuddha, and the full enlightenment of the bodhisattva. If we achieve arhathood, the fruition of the sravaka vehicle or the pratyekabuddha vehicle, this is liberation. No rebirth in samsara is necessary after that. After practicing the bodhisattva vehicle and achieving the level of the noble ones, there is no need to take rebirth in samsara or in any of the three realms<sup>2</sup> as an ordinary being with negative emotions. Bodhisattvas take birth in samsara without being overpowered by karma and negative emotions. They take birth in samsara of their own volition, not against their will but because they desire to do so. Bodhisattvas are also liberated from samsara. They do not take birth in samsara through the power of negative emotions and karma, but with great compassion and bodhicitta. They are working for the beings in samsara. The ultimate fruit of the bodhisattva vehicle is perfect buddhahood.

After achieving full enlightenment, a buddha is completely transformed into the three kayas so there are no phenomena that are not enlightened for him or her. In his own experience, everything is primordially enlightened and he emanates for the beings to be tamed until samsara is emptied. His benefit to the beings in samsara never ends.

2 The desire realm, the form realm and the formless realm.

Being beyond samsara, in his own experience everything is enlightened.

From the point of view of the beings to be tamed, the buddhas appear in samsara in different kinds of nirmanakaya forms to give different kinds of teachings. Through the power of wisdom they never fall into samsara, and through the power of compassion they never fall into nirvana. Being thus beyond the limits of existence and peace is called enlightenment.

## THE CAUSES OF LIBERATION

Concerning liberation, there are both the cause and the fruit. The causes of liberation are the three vehicles. We have already discussed the four mind trainings: the difficulties of achieving the freedoms and advantages, impermanence, the defects of samsara, and karma, cause and effect.<sup>3</sup> Training our mind with these four thoughts, we can practice any of the three vehicles. Without these four levels of mind training, we are unable to practice any of the three vehicles. Whatever vehicle we wish to practice, we must begin with the four mind trainings, and reach the level where the thought of renunciation arises automatically in our minds. We must give up attachment to this life and future lives. Lacking such renunciation, we cannot practice any of the three vehicles. Through the four mind trainings the mind becomes capable of practice.

Next, the foundation stone of all vehicles is refuge. Whatever greater or lower vehicle we practice, refuge is the basis. With refuge we can practice any vehicle; without refuge there is no vehicle we can practice. After that, the practice of bodhicitta; the practice of Vajrasattva; mandala offerings; guru yoga; cutting through to primordial purity, trekchod; and crossing over to spontaneous presence, togal, are all the main part of the practice leading to liberation.

## THE RESULTS OF LIBERATION

The benefits of each section, from refuge up to Dzogchen, are all main parts of the practice and are individually explained. All these are considered to be the extraordinary inner practice. Whether the fruition is that of a sravaka, a praketyabuddha, or complete buddhahood, the result is peaceful and cooling. Peaceful means the pacification of the karma and disturbing emotions of samsaric life. Cooling means, from the point of view of the cause, that the flames of all the disturbing emotions are extinguished. This

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3 See Parts 1, 2, and 3 of this commentary.

results in cooling. From the point of view of the fruit, the flames of all the lower realms are extinguished and cooled. There is liberation from the suffering of samsara; all karma and disturbing emotion becomes pacified and cooled down. The freedom from karma and disturbing emotion, and from the suffering of the lower realms is called liberation.

If we practice the path of the sravakas or pratyekabuddhas, the fruition is the arhat level. This level has two aspects, arhats with remainder and arhats without remainder. Those who achieve either of these levels have no emotion in their mindstreams. They remain peaceful and cool. Both rest in a state of analytical cessation. The difference is whether they have the aggregates or not.

Arhats with remainder have the aggregates, and experience the results of any past negative karma that remains from the time before they attained liberation. They do not accumulate any new negative emotion or karma.

According to the Hinayana, arhats without remainder do not have the aggregates. The continuum of the aggregates has ceased. This is called the state of complete cessation. According to the Mahayana, the arhat without remainder still has a subtle mental body. This is not a cause for rebirth in samsara, but is a subtle emotional habitual tendency which is classified as a cognitive obscuration. This subtle mental body is subject to momentary generation and cessation; it is born and dies in every instant. It is not uncompounded phenomena. In this view arhats without remainder have uncontaminated karma which is the cause of their perpetuation. They can remain in this state for many kalpas. Although the teachings of the Hinayana and the Mahayana differ on this point, both arhats with remainder and arhats without remainder are liberated from samsara.

The fruition according to the Mahayana is complete buddhahood, beyond both samsara and nirvana. Practitioners at this level do not remain in samsara because they have completely abandoned the causes for birth in samsara. Due to their great compassion, they do not pass into nirvana. They are not like the arhats of the Sravakayana who remain only in nirvana. They continue working for the beings in samsara until samsara is empty. This is the fruition of the Mahayana vehicle, both Sutrayana and Mantrayana. What happiness it is to attain that level!

Of the various paths, you have now met the Mahayana. All practices, including the ten virtuous actions, the four immeasurables, the six perfections, the four concentrations, the four formless states, calm abiding and extraordinary insight, and so on should be carried out with the sole aim

of attaining perfect buddhahood. Having entered the Mahayana vehicle, you must develop the Mahayana motivation. This means arousing bodhicitta, the mind of enlightenment. With this motivation, if you accumulate the ten virtuous actions, they become virtuous actions of the Mahayana; if you practice the four immeasurables with this motivation, this is also Mahayana practice. Likewise the six paramitas, the four concentrations, the four formless states, calm abiding and insight, will all become the practice of the Mahayana. Practicing in this way, whatever practice you do will become the path to perfect buddhahood.

You must think in this way: “I have met the Mahayana teaching, and am following that path so I will attain the level of perfect buddhahood.” From now on, whatever you practice must be embraced by the three supreme methods, arousing bodhicitta as the preparation, remaining in a nonconceptual state as the main part, and making prayers of dedication as the conclusion.

For example, if you make prostrations, you must give rise to bodhicitta as the preparation; during the actual practice you must have nonconceptual wisdom, remaining free from conceptualizing the three spheres of subject, object, and action. This is the highest form of prostration, and cannot actually happen until the level of the noble ones has been reached. As an ordinary being, perfect practice like this cannot be accomplished, but we should strive for a practice as close to that as possible. Finally, the merit of the practice should be dedicated, and we should make aspiration prayers. According to the Mahayana teachings, the merit is dedicated for perfect buddhahood. Offering whatever we have accumulated for the achievement of perfect buddhahood is called dedication. To make aspiration prayers for perfect buddhahood, the actual accumulation of merit is not necessary. Therefore dedication and aspiration prayers can be distinguished according to whether or not actual merit has been accumulated. We must practice like this.

## 6. HOW TO FOLLOW A SPIRITUAL TEACHER

No examples can be found of attaining buddhahood without following a spiritual teacher, either in the sutras, the sastras or the tantras. This is not seen in the Tripitika – the three baskets – or in the six tantras.

As already explained above, to attain the level of an arhat one must follow a spiritual teacher. The sravakayana teaches that the teacher must

be followed even at the point of attaining the fruition of the arhat level. Sravaka means “listener.” After they attain the arhat level, they explain their attainment to others. The pratyekabuddhas should follow a spiritual master until they reach the end of samsara.

On the path of the bodhisattvas as well, a spiritual teacher must always be followed. Even bodhisattvas on the tenth level receive teachings from the Buddha. When Lord Buddha was giving his Prajnaparamita teachings on Vulture Peak, many tenth-level bodhisattvas were among the audience, as were many arhat disciples. The introduction to the Prajnaparamita discusses this.

Concerning the Mantrayana, our guru is the most supreme refuge among the Three Jewels. The guru contains all the Three Jewels within him- or herself, and so is the most supreme refuge. The guru can be considered the fourth jewel. Buddha is not superior to the guru; the Dharma is not superior to the guru; nor is the Sangha superior to the guru. The guru is the most important. Among the Three Roots, the yidam and dakini are not separate from the guru; the guru is the highest. Thus we must follow a spiritual teacher when practicing the Mantrayana. As Patrul Rinpoche teaches:

We can see by ourselves that no one has ever attained the accomplishments of the stages and paths using only their own intelligence and strength.

Without following a spiritual teacher, no one in the past has attained buddhahood. Seeing this for ourselves, we can understand that without following a spiritual teacher, no one can become enlightened. We need not learn this from the sutras and sastras.

All sentient beings, including ourselves, can identify and remember wrong paths, but on the path to liberation and omniscience are as confused as a blind person alone on an empty plain.

Without following a spiritual teacher, if we teach others with our own ideas, we will lead both ourselves and them on the wrong path. This is like a blind person trying to find his way while wandering alone on an empty plain. Unless we follow a spiritual teacher, we are blind to the path of liberation. Likewise, we find no examples of anyone bringing back precious gems from an island of treasure without a guide. To locate the jewels one needs a companion with past experience. In the same way, the spiritual teacher is our guide to omniscience and liberation.

To achieve our desire for liberation, we need to understand the causes

and the path to liberation. Lacking this knowledge, we cannot achieve the fruition of liberation. The path and cause is the spiritual teacher. Our path to liberation depends upon knowing how to read, and even for this we must follow a teacher. But even knowing how to read, consider whether or not we can understand the path of liberation, whether or not we can understand the path of sutra, sastra and tantra. It is certain that we cannot, and without understanding the meaning we cannot practice ourselves.

Who has been liberated without following a spiritual teacher, either in India or in Tibet? We can find no one to point to. We need a qualified spiritual teacher who can teach us the correct path to liberation. The teacher should explain to us the paths of the sravaka, the pratyekabuddha and the bodhisattva correctly. If we are following the Mantrayana, they should teach about development stage, completion stage and Dzogchen, the great perfection stage.

Without following a spiritual teacher, we cannot attain any level in any of the spiritual traditions. People who think they can attain the levels on their own are mistaken. The spiritual teacher is the actual guide to liberation. If we desire to attain the liberation of the sravaka, we must first understand the meaning and the path of the sravaka. We must understand the four noble truths and the sixteen aspects of impermanence; we should know how to meditate and practice. If we desire to practice the path of the pratyekabuddha, we should understand the four noble truths and the sixteen aspects of impermanence, and also the twelve links in the chain of dependent origination. We must understand these clearly in order to follow the pratyekabuddha path.

If we want to follow the path of the bodhisattva, we must understand bodhicitta. This means arousing bodhicitta, and practicing the six paramitas, the four aspects of gathering disciples, and the four immeasurables. There are numberless aspects to the bodhisattva path. Without understanding all of them, simply wishing to practice the bodhisattva path has no meaning.

If we want to practice the Mantrayana path, we must understand view, meditation, and conduct. Many views are found. Kriya, upa, and yoga are the views of the lower tantras; mahayoga, anuyoga, and atiyoga are the views of the higher tantras. These views are different from one another. Considering the meditation, one must understand the yoga with characteristics and the yoga without characteristics, the development aspect, the completion aspect, and the great perfection aspect.

In the vehicles of the lower tantras, the fruition is the five Buddha

families. In mahayoga and so on, there are 25 kinds of fruition, so the fruitions also differ. These must all be understood one by one. Someone might think that he can practice only by reading them, without understanding, but this is not the correct practice. If one does not practice correctly, liberation will never be attained.

You should consider for yourself whether or not you can attain liberation by merely reading books. You can then decide whether or not you need a spiritual teacher. Your spiritual teacher is your personal guide to liberation, and should be followed with great devotion and faith. You cannot follow a spiritual teacher with the pride of thinking you are more learned or knowledgeable than he or she is. There are three stages to relying upon the spiritual teacher: examining him; following him; and copying his qualities, his realization and his actions.

## **EXAMINING THE TEACHER**

Before following a spiritual teacher, you must check him or her very well. Someone does not become a spiritual teacher by simply being a monk or merely holding the name of lama. You should examine the teacher in many ways. First you have to decide which path you want to follow. If you want to follow the sravaka path, you need to follow a teacher who can show that path. The qualities of the sravaka teacher are explained in books of the sravaka tradition. You should determine whether or not your prospective teacher has the qualities mentioned. To attain the level of a sravaka, you must follow someone with the qualities outlined in the sravaka texts. The same is true if you want to follow the path of the pratyekabuddas.

If you want to practice the path of the bodhisattvas, you should determine whether or not the teacher has the qualities described in the texts of the bodhisattva path. If you want to practice the Secret Mantrayana, you must examine whether the spiritual teacher has the qualities of a guru as explained in the tantras. If a teacher has those qualities, then you should follow him or her. These qualities are explained below.

This means that you must examine the guru first. The student checks the guru and the guru checks the student. Both must decide whether or not to accept the other. A student must examine the guru before receiving any teaching. If the guru lacks the proper qualities, even if he or she treats the student kindly by giving different kinds of help and support, he cannot be considered to be a qualified guru, and the student should not accept him as a guru. After examining the guru we should follow him with the

three ways of pleasing the guru. These are following the guru's teachings and instructions; offering service with body, speech and mind; and making material offerings.

Following a spiritual teacher means that from our side we should please the guru, and from the guru we should receive the instruction. Following a teacher doesn't mean just sitting together, eating together and walking together. With great devotion we should receive the instructions gradually. Through listening to the teacher and then contemplating and meditating on what we have heard, we should develop the wisdom of study, contemplation and meditation in our mindstreams. This is the meaning of following a spiritual teacher. The excellent aspect of following a teacher means that we should acquire all the qualities of the teacher's mind and actions.

Ordinary people like us are generally influenced by our surrounding situation, including the people around us. For that reason, we must rely on gurus, who are virtuous friends. Small circumstances can change us. For example, even though we had a feeling for the Dharma last year, something may have happened so that this year we do not. Some people who had no interest in Dharma last year may develop an interest this year because of a friend.

Since the minds of ordinary people are easily changed, it is difficult to have confidence in ourselves. Our thoughts are easily changed. Sometimes we may meet someone and become a close friend, but the situation might change so we become enemies and nearly kill each other. Considering this carefully, how can we readily have confidence in ourselves? Ordinary Dharma practitioners should always rely on a teacher, who is a virtuous friend. If we continuously rely upon our teacher, he or she will teach us continuously, and we can continuously rely on the Dharma, without any change. In this way we can follow the Dharma.

Since meeting a nonvirtuous friend could diminish our feeling for the Dharma, we must always rely on our teachers, our virtuous friends. Patrul Rinpoche mentions the popular example of how an ordinary tree growing in the famous sandalwood forest in the Malaya mountains will take on the sweet scent of sandalwood. If an log of ordinary wood falls there and remains for a long time, even it will begin to smell like sandalwood.

In the same way, an ordinary person who remains with a noble one will take on the characteristics of the noble one. This really happens. On the other hand, if we stay with someone who is always telling lies, then automatically we will also begin to lie. If we stay with a thief, we will begin

to enjoy stealing, and will incessantly take the property of others. Similarly, if we stay with someone who is always taking lives, we will become the same. For this reason, we must spend our time with excellent friends, those who are always studying, contemplating and meditating, and engaging in virtuous action, so that we will also take up these activities. Ordinary people like us naturally modify our behavior in accordance with the behavior of our companions, and therefore we should always seek to rely on teachers, who are our virtuous friends. As it is said:

*Just as an log of ordinary wood  
In the thick sandalwood forests of the Malaya mountains  
Absorbs the scent of sandal from the constant touch of the moist  
branches and leaves,  
Things take on the qualities of what they are in contact with.*

### **Qualities of an authentic guru**

During the present period of degeneration, encountering a teacher fully endowed with the characteristics described in the precious tantras is not easy. If you meet a teacher who has most of the qualities you should rely upon him, even if his qualities are not complete. In any case, the teacher you follow must have the following qualities: pure lineage, wide understanding, and great compassion.

An authentic lama must have a pure lineage, having never violated any of the commitments or prohibitions of the three vows: the outer Pratimoksha vows, the vows of individual liberation; the inner Bodhisattva vows, the vows of bodhicitta; or the secret vows, the vows of the Secret Mantrayana. One who wants to practice the lower vehicles must find a teacher with pure Pratimoksha vows because the entrance to this vehicle is the pure seven Pratimoksha vows.<sup>4</sup> One cannot rely on a *ngakpa*, a lay practitioner, if one wants to practice the lower vehicles. To practice the Bodhisattva vehicle, one may rely on a *ngakpa* — whether male or female — or an ordained monk, as long as they have the Bodhisattva vows. For the Secret Mantrayana, one must rely on practitioners holding the Secret Mantrayana vows. These may be ordained or lay practitioners.

To practice the lower vehicle, one must rely on a fully ordained monk. To practice the paths of bodhicitta and mantra, one need not rely only on

4 These are: fully ordained monk vows, fully ordained nun vows, novice monk vows, novice nun vows, layman vows, laywoman vows, probationary nun vows.

an ordained monk. In any case, to practice these three vehicles, the three respective vows should be purely upheld. This means that to practice the lower vehicle we cannot rely on someone who has committed the four main root transgressions.<sup>5</sup> To practice the bodhicitta path, one cannot rely on those who have violated the root Bodhisattva vows. To practice Secret Mantrayana, one cannot rely on someone who has received an initiation and then broken his Mantrayana samaya vows.

A guru should have a good knowledge of the tantras, sutras and sastras. We cannot depend on a teacher who simply has maintained pure vows, but who lacks learning and contemplation. We must learn from our teacher. If he hasn't studied, reflected on, and practiced what he has heard, how can we learn from him? This does not mean, however, that to practice the lower vehicle, one must find a teacher with an understanding of the higher vehicle; he need only be learned in the doctrines of the lower vehicle. A teacher of the Bodhisattva vehicle need not be learned in Mantrayana, but he should have clear understanding of the bodhisattva path. To practice the Mantrayana path, one needs a teacher who is learned in all aspects of the Mantrayana.

It is said that if the guru is highly realized and the student has a high level of faith, the blessing and realization of the guru can be automatically transferred to the student. If this happens, the student will have both knowledge and experience. This is extremely difficult, however. Generally, it is by studying continuously that we learn and slowly come to understanding, gaining experience and becoming knowledgable. Someone might claim that his guru's realization has been transferred to him, but if he has no understanding and knowledge, no result will be seen.

In the past, when the realization of Longchenpa's mindstream was transferred to Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa, he became a great scholar of sutra, sastra and tantra without study. If the teacher's realization is actually transferred to the student, he should obtain the teacher's knowledge as well, should automatically understand what to adopt and what to abandon, and so on. The teacher's realization does not come alone, without knowledge. Knowledge and realization are inseparable. The best circumstance is when the guru's realization is transferred to the student, and his knowledge is also transferred. But for those who do not have this experience, then being able to please the teacher in three ways<sup>6</sup> and to study with him, to come to

5 These are: killing a human being, taking what is not given, sexual misconduct, lying about one's attainment of extraordinary spiritual powers.

6 Making offerings to the lama, serving the lama, and practicing according

understand that the view according to the Mantrayana is the inseparability of the two truths, and to realize from within – and without any doubt – the union of development and completion stage, are all blessings coming from the teacher.

If we study, the teacher's learning will come to us; if we contemplate, the teacher's realization will come to us. We then also become learned and accomplished. For these reasons, the guru must be learned himself.

The lama's heart should be so full of compassion for infinite sentient beings that he regards each one as his only child. He should have the great compassion that wants to free all sentient beings from the causes and results of suffering. With such compassion the teacher will care for his students.

The teacher should be expert in ritual practice, both the outward rituals of the Tripitaka, the "three baskets of teachings," and the inner rituals of tantra. Since he has actually practiced the meaning of the teachings, he should have fully actualized abandonment and realization in his mindstream. This doesn't mean that his knowledge and qualities must equal those of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, but he should have more knowledge and qualities than his students.

A teacher gathers worthy students through the following four methods: generosity, pleasing speech, the ability to teach each student according to his own need, and acting in accordance with the Dharma. If the lama has sufficient property or wealth, he should attract students through his generosity. He should always speak pleasantly to the students. Everyone appreciates and will follow those who are generous, and who speak kindly. The lama should teach his disciples according to their individual capacities. After teaching them, he should ask the students to practice the meaning of the Dharma. He himself should also practice in accordance with what he has taught the students. A teacher who does not practice himself cannot teach students or ask them to practice. The guru should be an object for the students to emulate and imitate.

These days it is difficult to find a lama with all the qualities perfect and complete. Seeking this type of guru, a disciple may find it quite difficult to receive teachings in this lifetime. Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa himself said.

*One who has perfected all the modes of the noble Dharma*

*Is difficult to meet in these degenerate times.*

*But, drawn by the beautiful blossoms of the four means of gathering,*

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to his instructions.

*Fortunate disciples gather like bees to attend a teacher  
 Who is grounded in the pure practice of the discipline of the three vows,  
 Whose mindstream is moistened with learning and great compassion,  
 Who is learned in the rituals of the ocean-like collections of scriptures  
 and tantras, and  
 Who is rich in the fruit, the undefiled wisdom of abandonment and  
 realization.*

The four qualities of generosity, pleasing speech, teaching each person according to his or her needs, and acting in conformity with the teachings are like the blossoming of a flower, and students will gather like bees. Students have many different ways of relating to their gurus. Some students always see their guru as a buddha. Milarepa was like that. His attitude did not change no matter whether his teacher Marpa spoke to him kindly, or scolded him. This is a rare case. Most students like pleasant words, and if the lama speaks harshly from the beginning, the students will never come to see him. These four ways of attracting students are in accord with the Dharma.

*In particular, a lama who teaches the profound key points of the oral  
 instructions of the Vajrayana  
 Has a mindstream brought to maturity by the moisture of the unbroken  
 lineage of explanation of the ripening empowerments.  
 He has no infractions in maintaining the vows and samayas given at the  
 time of empowerment.  
 He is peaceful and disciplined, with few conceptual thoughts and  
 disturbing emotions,  
 And has entered into the tantric meaning of the entire ground, path and  
 fruition of the Secret Mantra Vajrayana.  
 He has perfected attainment of approach and accomplishment and has  
 seen the face of the yidam deity.  
 Through actualizing the meaning of the natural state, he has liberated  
 his own mind.  
 With a mind filled with compassion, the welfare of others is his only  
 concern.  
 Having given up attachment to this life, his activities are few;  
 Always considering the next life, he resolutely thinks only of the  
 Dharma.  
 Seeing the suffering of samsara, his heart is greatly weary and he leads  
 others in the same direction.*

*He is skilled in caring for his disciples, guiding each according to his need.*

*He has carried out the instructions of his own guru and has the blessings of his spiritual lineage.*

*You must follow a teacher such as this. He is a teacher of the oral instructions.*

To be a Vajrayana guru, a lama must have an unbroken lineage of initiation, like a river, as well as samaya that is unbroken and absolutely pure. Without these qualities, he cannot teach. During initiation he has received vows and samaya, which have not been broken. A lama with broken samaya lacks the qualities needed to lead students in a pure way. Moreover, if a lama is stained by broken samayas, this stain will be transferred to his students. Thus, lamas must have pure vows and samaya. They should have few afflictive emotions and conceptual thinking, and be more peaceful and disciplined than other people. Having strong emotions and many thoughts leads to coarse and rough behavior.

A guru should have mastered all the Vajrayana tantras of the ground, path and result. Especially if the guru is teaching Dzogchen, he should have perfect knowledge of Dzogchen's ground, path and fruit. According to the Vajrayana, lamas without these qualities cannot teach students. The guru should have attained the signs of successfully accomplishing the mantra recitation practice, such as seeing the face of the yidam and so on. For a lama who is practicing the Vajrayana, the best indicator of success is to have a vision of the yidam deity. If he cannot see the yidam deity directly, he should at least accomplish according to the signs explained in the practice texts. The lama should have actually realized the meaning of the natural state, and should have liberated his own mindstream.

A Dzogchen teacher should practice Trekchod and Tegal, and liberate his own mindstream. With a heart full of great compassion, his actions are solely for the benefit of others. Having abandoned attachment for this worldly life, he should have few activities. This means that lama should have few worldly activities, not that he should give up Dharma activities. If a lama is involved in business and agriculture and engages in the eight worldly concerns, he cannot escape from attachment to this world; he cannot abandon worldly activity. A lama who is not engaged in worldly activities will be eager to spend his time in hearing, contemplating, and meditating; and in the cycle of Dharma activities such as making representations of body, speech and mind, remaining within the wheel of concentration.

Those who do not abandon worldly concerns and are concerned about finding a better place to live, better food and better facilities, and the praise of others are not considered to have the qualities of a lama. Engaging in few activities does not mean simply sleeping, without working for the Dharma. Those who are eager to practice meditation and concentration, and to study and engage in making representations of body, speech and mind, are not considered to be “engaged in activities.” In this way, a guru should remain apart from worldly activity.

Always considering the next life, he will strongly focus upon the Dharma. What does considering the next life mean? This means always thinking about the Dharma, and being strongly engaged in Dharma activity. Seeing the suffering of samsara, he will strongly experience disenchantment and weariness of heart. Lamas who enjoy worldly entertainments like dance, music and so on are not qualified gurus according to this text. A lama should see worldly activities as a nauseous person sees food, with no interest whatsoever. Feeling aversion toward such activity, he should influence his students in the same way. This means he should not promote attachment to worldly activity.

By taming each student in the appropriate way, he is skilled at accepting and retaining disciples. As explained before, many methods are used with students. Some students appreciate sweet words, while others need to be scolded. Students cannot all be cared for in the same way. Many methods are required. That is why a guru must be skilled in methods.

By following the instructions of his own guru, he will have the blessings of his lineage. The guru has his own teacher, and must follow him. If he does not follow his own teacher and only tells his students to follow him, the lama has no qualities himself. By carrying out his lama’s instructions he will receive the blessings of his guru’s mindstream. In the same way, if his students follow his instructions, the blessings of his mindstream will be transferred to them.

Therefore, receiving blessings depends on whether or not you follow your guru’s instructions. If your lama says one thing, but you do something else – like travelling east when the lama says to go to the west, or reading texts when the lama tells you to meditate – you will never receive your guru’s blessing. Take Jetsun Milarepa, for example. His guru Marpa asked him to build houses, make hailstorms, perform black magic, and other activities which appeared to be only negative. Nevertheless, Milarepa followed these instructions and received the blessing of Marpa’s mindstream exactly as it

was, attaining the level of Dorje Chang in a single lifetime. If you think you will follow your guru's instructions if they match your own inclination, and not otherwise, this is not following your guru's instruction. Whether the instructions accord with Dharma or not, if you follow the instruction, you will receive your guru's blessing. This is how to act.

Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa gives the following advice:

*A teacher of the extraordinary oral instructions*

*Has received initiations, kept his samayas and is extremely peaceful.*

*He has internalized the tantric meaning of the ground, path and fruition;*

*Has perfected the signs of approach and accomplishment, and through realization has liberated his mind.*

*His compassion is limitless, and he cares only for others.*

*With few activities, he focuses intensely on the Dharma.*

*He has great weariness for this world and leads others in the same way.*

*Skilled in methods, he holds the blessings of his lineage.*

*Follow a teacher like this. Accomplishment will come swiftly.*

### **Lamas to avoid**

Students should avoid the following kinds of teachers. Some teachers who have no qualities of hearing, contemplating, and meditating in their mindstreams nonetheless think they are superior to others because they are the son of such and such a lama, or an important lama's relative, or because their family lineage is superior. Some people may follow them for these reasons. They consider their "caste" to be superior, just as brahmins do. Brahmins generally think their lineage is more pure than others, and that those born as brahmins in the future will also be pure. They think that their "superior" lineage is more important than their qualities of hearing, contemplating, and meditating. Such people cannot be considered as gurus.

Individuals without the qualities of hearing, contemplating, and meditating are not lamas, even if they are of the lineage of Buddha Shakyamuni. In Buddhism, family lineage is generally not a major factor. Practitioners who have qualities of hearing, contemplating, and meditating, even those who come from the lowest castes, like butchers, can be considered as gurus. Determining whether someone is a lama or not should depend only on their qualities of hearing, contemplating, and meditating, not on their families.

Some people acquire qualities of hearing, contemplating, and meditating in order to gain reputation and wealth, and not for the benefit of their future lives. Their motivation is thus impure and they cannot be taken as gurus. Others may practice hearing, contemplating, and meditating out of fear that their own guru's center, where they reside, will become unimportant. Lamas who act like this are likened to a wooden grinding wheel, which cannot produce flour. In the same way, they cannot transform their disciples' minds. People whose actions are done for the sake of this life only cannot be considered as gurus.

These "teachers" have no knowledge that sets them apart from any ordinary person, but since some foolish people have faith in them without examining them, they acquire a high position. Such lamas, being no different from other ordinary people, act like they do, and have the same defects. Their qualities are not superior. Foolish people have faith in them based on title alone, without subjecting them to any scrutiny. This raises them even higher, and they receive honors and gifts that increase their pride. They come to think that they really do have good qualities of abandoning and adopting. They cannot see the noble qualities of others. A person like this is called "a frog in a well."

People who do not receive a lot of honor and gifts have less pride and can see the qualities of others and respect them. If someone whose qualities of adopting and abandoning are limited receive considerable respect and gifts, they automatically become very proud, and cannot see other people's good qualities. This is like being a frog in a well.

Once in the past, an old frog who had always lived in a well was visited by a frog who lived by the sea.

"Where are you from?" the frog from the well asked.

"I come from the great ocean."

"How big is your ocean?"

"It is very big."

"Is it one-fourth the size of my well?"

"More than that..."

"Is it half the size?"

"More than that..."

"Is it the same size as this well?"

"More than that..."

“That’s not possible. I must go see it,” said the first frog, and the two of them set off together. It is said that when the frog from the well saw the ocean, he fainted. His head split open and he died.

Like this frog, a proud person can never see qualities beyond his own, and never thinks that others might have greater qualities. If he suddenly recognizes the great qualities of another, he might faint. Thus, those who have minor qualities but think they have great qualities are like the frog in the well.

Some “teachers” do not rely on learned masters and are not diligent in studying the sutras and tantras. Because of their coarse disturbing emotions and limited mindfulness and conscientiousness, their vows and samaya commitments are broken. Although their mental capacity is less than that of ordinary people, they act as though they were accomplished masters, with behavior as high as the sky. Through their hatred and insults, they cut the cord of love and compassion. Such so-called spiritual friends are called “mad guides” and they lead their followers down wrong paths.

A lama whose qualities are in not at superior to your own and who does not have the love and compassion of bodhicitta – enlightened mind – is called a “blind guide” and cannot open your eyes to what to adopt and what to abandon.

*Like brahmins, some protect their caste, or  
In pools of fear for their center’s decline,  
Bathe in learning and contemplation for an improper result,  
Such guides are like a grinding stone made of wood.*

*Although no different in nature from ordinary people  
Some are hastily put in place by misguided faith,  
Made arrogant by riches, offerings and honor.  
Such friends are like the frog in the well.*

*Some have little learning and broken vows and commitments,  
Low-minded, but with behavior high above the earth –  
They have cut the cord of love and compassion  
Such mad guides can only increase negativity.*

*In particular, some have qualities no greater than your own;  
With no bodhicitta, they rely on the power of reputation.  
To follow such a blind guide is a great mistake.*

*Deceitful companions like that lead to wandering in ever deeper darkness.*

### **The need for careful examination**

The Great Orgyen has also said:

*Not examining the teaching is like drinking poison;*

*Not examining the student is like jumping from a cliff.*

We practice Dharma to reach liberation, not for worldly concerns like gifts, honor, praise, status and so on. We practice for liberation and omniscience, and for this we must rely on a guru, someone who has perfect qualities and can show us the unmistakable path. We do not accept one as a guru because of a family relationship, or because of his high status. If someone can show the correct path of liberation, we should take him as a guru, even if he is connected with our enemy. We cannot accept a guru without this capacity, no matter how close the relationship, even if the guru is our own father or mother. Without a qualified lama who can show us the unmistakable path to liberation and omniscience, we cannot develop the qualities of the path ourselves, and can never attain the final result. Unless we achieve liberation and omniscience, there is no reason to practice Dharma, and no benefit from practicing.

From the very beginning our motivation should be to attain liberation and omniscience. A student's first job is to search for a qualified guru and examine him or her very carefully. Failing to check the guru can be dangerous. It is like taking poison. An unqualified guru can lead us to the lower realms.

The lama must also check the student to determine whether he or she has the capacity to practice Dharma. The lama must determine which among the many vehicles is suitable for the student, and especially whether the student is suitable for the higher vehicles. If the guru is a teacher of the Great Perfection, but the student lacks that capacity, the teaching will not yield benefit, but will cause harm. If a lama accepts a student without proper examination and gives higher teachings, both the lama and the student will suffer. A student without the qualities of Dharma cannot maintain the vows and samayas of the teaching he is given. By breaking the vows and commitments, he endangers the guru's life and Dharma activities. The guru examining the student and the student examining the guru are both in accordance with the Dharma.

We must rely upon the guru for many future lifetimes; he is the one who teaches what behavior to avoid and what to adopt. We do not follow a particular guru for the sake of food, clothing and wealth, but for the key points of what to adopt and what to avoid, and to develop the qualities of liberation and omniscience. Thus, we do not depend upon the guru for this life alone, or for only a few years, for only the beginning of our life, or for only the end of our life. We rely on the guru until we reach the state of liberation and omniscience, throughout life after life.

The guru in this life shows us what to adopt and what to abandon, and the perfect method of the path of liberation. We must pray continuously to meet this lama again in our future lives. Unless and until the state of buddhahood is achieved, we must maintain our connection with this lama. We depend upon our guru for life after life, until attaining buddhahood.

A teacher becomes our guru after we receive teachings from him. We should never doubt that this is the case. We distinguish the guru in this way: if we receive teaching, he or she is our guru; if we do not receive teaching, he or she is not our guru. A guru may have qualities equal to those of the Buddha himself, but if we do not receive teachings from him, he cannot be considered our guru. If we do receive a teaching from a lama, then whether he has good qualities or bad qualities, he becomes our guru, and we must take care of our samaya commitments. After receiving a teaching from a lama, if we see that he has no qualities of adopting and abandoning, we cannot think "I will no longer consider him as a guru."

The Omniscient Longchenpa, in the text "Clarifying the Darkness in the Ten Directions,"<sup>7</sup> explained that abandoning a lama who has no qualities after accepting him as a guru means that you are scorning all the gurus of other people as well, that you are abandoning the buddhas of the three times. In fact such nonvirtue cannot be measured. If, because of failing to examine him properly, you accept a false guru, you are throwing away the possibility that a disciple with faith has to accumulate virtuous merit for an entire lifetime.

You may be happy to practice and have faith and belief in the Dharma, but if you meet a false guru and he gives incorrect teachings and you practice them continuously, your faith and belief in the Dharma will deteriorate. You will become worse than an ordinary person. The freedoms and advantages of the human birth that you have obtained will be wasted. Following an unqualified guru, the freedoms and advantages of your precious human body

become useless. This is like being killed by a poisonous snake coiled at the foot of a tree that you approached in search of shade. Your precious life will become meaningless if you follow a lama because of his high status and the honor he receives from others, regardless of whether his teaching is in accord with the Dharma.

*Failing to examine a teacher carefully,  
Faithful disciples waste their virtuous merit.*

Not only is the merit of one lifetime wasted, but life after life the situation becomes worse. In the next life one is born in the lower realms and cannot practice for many lifetimes, unable to escape for uncountable lives. This happens from following an unqualified guru.

*One who has found this single opportunity for freedom  
Will be deceived by mistaking a poisonous snake for the shade of a tree.*

This freedom has been attained because of merit accumulated over many past lives. At this time you have found this very difficult to find precious human body. The essential meaning of finding this precious life is to practice pure Dharma, but you cannot practice it. The fact that you cannot practice the perfect Dharma is not a defect of the freedom you have found in this life, but is the result of meeting an improper guru. Thus, encountering a false guru is like meeting a poisonous snake under the shade of a tree. For this reason, you must examine the guru thoroughly and make an unmistakable judgment. From the time you find that he or she has the positive qualities mentioned, you should unfailingly consider him to be the actual Buddha.

### **The guru as Buddha**

After finding a guru with the qualities described according to Sutra and Mantra, we should consider him or her as the Buddha in person. Even if we could see the Buddha himself with the major and minor marks, he would only show us the way to liberation and buddhahood; he cannot place us in buddhahood as one can throw a stone up to a high ledge. Buddha Shakyamuni came to this world and taught the three turnings of the wheel of Dharma, as well as many ways to achieve liberation. Because he showed this path, those to be tamed can be liberated.

All the buddhas of the past and future only teach the disciples; they cannot do anything other than teach. As Buddha Shakyamuni said: "I am showing you the way to liberation, but you must understand that liberation

depends upon you.” The buddhas show the way to liberation, but whether liberation is attained or not depends entirely on the disciple. If the disciples follow the path correctly, they can achieve liberation. If they do not follow the path correctly, they will never have a chance for liberation. In the same way, qualified gurus show us the path to liberation; they cannot do other than this.

The teacher who has all of the qualities complete is the compassionate wisdom of all the buddhas of the ten directions. He is appearing in human form for the sole purpose of benefitting beings. Even if a guru is an ordinary person, we should see that he has the qualities of abandoning and realization that equal the Buddha's. As I have already explained, when passing away at Kushinagar, Shakyamuni Buddha said: “Do not worry, Ananda, do not weep. In the future, I will manifest in the form of a spiritual teacher and will work for you and others.” He did not say that he would appear as a buddha in the future to benefit beings. We may see our guru as an ordinary being, but in reality, our guru is the manifestation of the wisdom of the buddhas of the ten directions. The Buddha's wisdom appears as a human being to benefit others.

Our Buddha Shakyamuni manifested as the supreme Nirmanakaya to benefit beings. In the same way, in these days, the Buddha's wisdom manifests as a spiritual teacher in order to benefit beings. The highest texts of the Secret Mantrayana teach that the method aspect of mudra and mantra are also the manifestation of the Buddha's wisdom. Ordinary disciples should also see this wisdom benefitting the disciples as mudra and mantra.

The teacher who is manifesting the wisdom of the Buddha is the supreme Nirmanakaya, the actual Buddha, appearing in human form. Some teachers are not really manifested from the Buddha's wisdom, but when they are working for the benefit of beings, the blessings of the buddhas of the ten directions come to them. At that time, these blessings are manifesting as a teacher benefitting beings by showing the way to liberation and omniscience. Whatever way beings are shown the path to omniscience is the Buddha's activity, and nothing other than Buddha's activity.

In the Prajnaparamita teachings, the twenty-seven activities of the Buddha are explained. All the aspects of these activities are combined in the following three: giving disciples the support of the path; placing disciples on the path; and establishing the disciples on the level of the final fruit. Just as a deity might possess the body of an ordinary person, the blessings of the Buddha possess the guru.

In particular, when Secret Mantrayana teachings are being given, the form of the buddhas of the ten directions is Vajrasattva, and the blessings of his exalted body, speech and mind enter into the guru's mind. The guru is then benefitting beings as the Buddha Vajrasattva. The teaching is said to be the blessing of the buddhas of the ten directions, so the guru's activities are the activities of the Buddha. We should consider the guru as the form of the buddhas of the three times. Even if the guru does not have the same qualities as the Buddha, from the point of view of the disciple, he should consider his guru as the same as the Buddha. Then he will receive the blessings of his guru as the same as the blessings of the Buddha. This is the characteristic of auspicious connection (*ten drel*). The blessings are never deceptive. If the disciple sees his teacher as the Buddha, even if he is not, it is said that he will receive the blessings of the actual Buddha.

As will be explained in more detail later, there was once an old woman who had a strong belief that the tooth of a dog was the tooth of the Buddha. Eventually the tooth displayed miraculous qualities. On the other hand, even if the Buddha himself did come, and the disciple failed to see him as Buddha, no blessing or enlightened activities would result. Whether the blessing comes to the disciple depends entirely on the disciple's faith. It does not depend on whether the actual Buddha has appeared or not. The coming of the blessing represents the true nature of the auspicious connection. We should never fail to see the guru as the actual Buddha. When he is teaching and bestowing empowerment, the blessings of the buddhas of the ten directions come to the guru as he performs the enlightened activities.

*A teacher with unlimited qualities perfected  
Is the essence of the compassion and wisdom of all the buddhas.  
Appearing in human form for the sake of those to be tamed,  
He is the unsurpassed root of all accomplishments.*

Thus, the guru is the source of all accomplishments, if we have strong faith and belief in him or her. Without the strong belief that recognizes the guru as the Buddha, there will be no supreme accomplishment at all. In order to guide his disciples skillfully, the guru may appear as an ordinary person in his daily activities. Gurus use many kinds of skillful methods to tame and liberate their disciples, including acting and appearing as ordinary human beings. The Buddha cannot always benefit beings in the form of a buddha with the major and minor marks. People sometimes listen more closely to those whose qualities are similar to their own than to those whose qualities are more exalted. As I explained earlier, people often have more

faith in divination and the predictions of astrologers than in the words of the Buddha. For this reason, the Buddha will sometimes act to benefit beings in a form similar to theirs. This is an excellent method for taming disciples.

While the guru's actions may appear similar to those of other human beings, in actuality, his mind is equal to that of the Buddha, and thus he is completely different from an ordinary individual. When he acts in ways that conform to the nature of the disciples, these actions should be considered well-thought-out conduct that is superior to that of other people. With great skill in overcoming doubt, and patience with the negative actions, discouragement, and fatigue of his disciples, he is like the mother of an only child.

A lama should be knowledgeable so he can use his teachings and his awareness to clarify his disciples' doubts. Some students do not acknowledge the guru's efforts in giving teaching and providing whatever support his disciples need, and are not grateful. They may even harm the guru. When this happens, the guru must have great patience with his disciples. Taking care of his disciples, the guru must exercise patience with regard to whatever suffering he may himself experience, whether of mind or body, just like the mother of an only child. Whatever harm a child may cause its mother, she will never abandon her love for the child. It is the same for a guru and his disciples.

*From the standpoint of relative truth, he acts as all others do;*

*From the standpoint of absolute truth, he is completely different from all others;*

*Because of his realization, he is the noblest of all.*

*Skillfully cutting through our doubts, he patiently bears with our ingratitude and discouragement.*

A qualified guru endowed with all these virtues is like a great ship crossing the ocean of samsara. If the ship is large enough, many people can cross at one time. Following this example, a qualified guru can liberate many beings from samsara. He is like the navigator who unmistakably charts the way to liberation and omniscience. Only the guru can show the unmistakable path to liberation and the unmistakable path to the level of omniscience. Powerful worldly gods and demons, and even our most kind parents and relatives, can never point out to us this unmistakable path to liberation and omniscience. Since only the gurus can show this path, they are similar to navigators on great vessels.

The guru is like a rain of nectar that extinguishes the huge and blazing fire of negative karma and afflicting emotions. When a huge fire is burning we need a downpour. Only such powerful rain can immediately extinguish the fire. Likewise, the negative karma and afflicting emotions within our mindstreams are extremely powerful, and can be destroyed only by the guru. The teacher can reveal the antidotes that will overcome the negative karma and afflicting emotions. In this way, the guru is like a rain of nectar.

Like the sun and moon that dispel the dense darkness of ignorance, the guru radiates the light of Dharma. The disciple's mindstream is characterized by strong ignorance, meaning lacking in knowledge. We do not know what to adopt and what to avoid. We cannot even enumerate the ten virtuous actions and the ten nonvirtuous actions. This is called ignorance. Even stronger is our ignorance regarding the path of liberation and omniscience. Dharma teaching elucidates what we do not know. Since the pure Dharma emanates only from the guru, he is like the sun and moon. The sun and moon allow us to see the appearance of the world; the source that enables the Dharma to appear is the guru.

Like the earth, the guru can bear ingratitude and despondency through the vastness of his view and actions. The earth is the ground of both things that move and things that do not move. Beings are moving and trees and other natural features are non-moving. The earth holds both the moving and the non-moving without suffering. In the same way, through his vast view and conduct the guru can bear with patience both the ingratitude and despondency of his disciples. The guru's view is as vast as the sky, and from his point of view his conduct is beyond what to adopt and what to abandon. For the sake of his disciples the guru is very exacting about karma, the cause and effect of actions, even the smallest. Being able to act according to the needs of the disciples is the vastness of his conduct. That is like the ground.

The guru is like a wish-fulfilling tree, the source of benefit in this life and happiness in the next. A wish-fulfilling tree can provide whatever we need. Likewise, meeting a qualified guru and carrying out his instructions is beneficial for this life. All happiness of future lives also derives from the guru since from him flow all the qualities of the path of liberation and omniscience. Thus is he like a wish-fulfilling tree.

The guru is like an excellent vase that is a treasury of the inconceivably numerous vehicles and doctrines, all that one could need. This is the result of the merit of the gods and universal monarchs. A treasury is inexhaustible,

so that someone who puts his hand in such a vase will find whatever he needs. The guru has this quality. Relying upon him, we can study all vehicles and doctrines.

Like a wish-fulfilling gem that provides whatever we need, the guru is the ocean-like source of the four types of enlightened action. Some disciples need pacifying action, some need increasing action, some need magnetizing action, and some need subjugating action. Using these ocean-like four actions, the guru tames different disciples according to their needs, and is thus like a wish-fulfilling gem.

The guru is like a loving parent who treats the countless sentient beings equally, without distinctions of love and hatred between those who are close and those who are distant. Good parents never make distinctions among their children and descendants. They love and treat them equally. A qualified guru, in the same way, treats the limitless sentient beings without making distinctions among them; he benefits them all with his enlightened activity. The guru will never feel more attached to those who are close, and will never feel hatred towards his enemies.

Because of the great extent of his object of awareness – sentient beings as infinite as space – his compassion, like a river, is especially swift for those suffering beings who have no protector. “Suffering beings” refers to all of us sentient beings. Without a protector, we are like blind people trying to cross an open field without a guide. The guru’s compassion is greater and more swift for those who suffer. In this he is like a river.

The guru is like Mt. Meru because his sympathetic joy is unchanged by jealousy and unshaken by mistaken beliefs in the reality of appearances. A guru whose attitude could be changed by jealousy or shaken by mistaken beliefs is not qualified as a guru.

Like a cloud bringing rain impartially on all that is beneath it, the guru’s mind is never disturbed by attachment and hatred. His mind is never affected by attachment toward close relatives and friends, or by hatred toward enemies, so he treats all equally, just as rain falls evenly on both defective seeds and perfect seeds.

Considering his compassion and blessings, this kind of teacher is equal to all the buddhas. Having a positive connection with him ensures attainment of buddhahood in a single lifetime. A negative relationship leads to samsara, but ultimately liberation will occur. If we make offerings, prostrations and supplications to such a guru, this will cause us to reach buddhahood in a

single lifetime. If we harm or become angry with this buddha-like guru, we must for the time being suffer in the lower realms. In the “Way of the Bodhisattva,” Shantideva says:

*The Buddha has said: “Whoever bears an evil thought  
Against such a son of the victors, a benefactor,  
Will remain in hell for as many eons  
As the number of his evil thoughts.”*

Finally, however, we will escape from samsara. If we harm ordinary beings, we fall to the lower realms and will never be liberated. If we harm a spiritual teacher, on the other hand, we will suffer extremely but in the end this is a cause for liberation. Therefore both negative and positive relationships bring benefit. The teacher is thus equal to the Buddha.

*This kind of lama is equal to the Buddha.  
If even one who harms him is set on the path to happiness,  
On a person who follows him with sincere faith  
He will shower down the qualities of the higher realms and liberation.*

## FOLLOWING THE GURU

After correctly examining the guru, you should follow him or her correctly. The “Sutra Arranged like a Tree”<sup>8</sup> states: “Noble child, think of yourself as a sick person...” This is how to follow a teacher. There are many such examples.

One tormented by illness relies upon a skilled doctor; a traveller embarking on a dangerous road relies upon a heroic guide; those pained by fear of enemies, thieves, wild animals, and so on rely upon companions for protection; traders going to overseas countries rely upon the captain; people who wish to cross a river in a boat rely upon the boatman. Likewise to protect yourself from the dangers of birth, death, and negative emotions, you must rely upon a guru, who is a virtuous friend.

*As the sick rely upon their doctor, travellers upon their guides,  
The frightened upon their companions, merchants upon the  
captain, and  
Passengers upon the boatman,  
Those fearing the enemies of birth, death, and negative emotions  
Should rely upon a guru.*

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8 Gandhavyuha-sutra (Skt); Donpo kopa (Tib).

You should have a great commitment to never act against the wishes of your guru, even should it cost you your life. We need a strong determination to never violate our authentic guru's word, and to never cause him any harm. This should be true from the very beginning. Your mind should be so stable that immediate circumstances cannot shake you. Being shaken by immediate circumstances refers to a situation where you have faith in the guru when he gives teachings and speaks pleasantly, but lose your faith when he scolds you. Firm confidence is necessary so that faith in the guru does not waver.

You should serve your teacher with no concern for your own life and body. Follow his every command with no consideration for your own thoughts. Someone like this can be liberated by devotion alone. In general, whether practicing Sutra or Mantra, have the same devotion to your guru as to the Buddha. Practice view, meditation and conduct on this basis. Otherwise, liberation will not occur based solely on devotion.

In the final stage of Dzogchen practice one can be liberated simply through devotion and faith in the guru. This is a special feature of Dzogchen, but it does not mean that one can be liberated without studying the many stages of Dzogchen. Mipham Rinpoche said:

*Having the devotion of seeing the primordial protector, our glorious  
guru,  
As identical with the Dharmakaya,  
The transmission of actualizing the ultimate meaning, the awareness of  
the enlightened intention and blessing, enters the heart.  
The great initiation into the display of awareness is attained.*

Mipham Rinpoche said that if you have the devotion of seeing your guru as exactly the same as the Buddha, you can achieve realization without great effort. This special realization can lead to liberation, and other methods need not be sought. The transmission of the actualization of the ultimate meaning of the guru's enlightened realization is the initiation into the display of awareness (*rigpa'i rtsal dbang*), and is the main aspect of Dzogchen. After receiving this transmission, you need not seek any other method for liberation. In this case, liberation result from devotion alone.

*A person who, with strong armor and firm intelligence,  
Serves the guru without regard for body or life,  
Carrying out his instructions without protecting himself,*

*Will be liberated by devotion alone.*

Have the great faith of seeing your guru as a real buddha. Your great study of the teachings and your intelligence should enable you to recognize the basic intention of his skillful actions and to grasp whatever sacred Dharma he teaches you. Disciples need great faith, great intelligence, and great learning. The teacher uses many different kinds of methods and actions, and the student – through his or her intelligence – must understand the intention and the real meaning of these. The student can then grasp whatever teaching of Sutra and Tantra the guru has given. This is what “great intelligence” refers to; it is also called “great study” or “great learning.” In addition, students should automatically feel great affection and compassion for all who suffer with no one to protect them. Disciples should have these qualities.

Respect the vows and samayas your teacher has given and instructed you to keep. The guru’s instructions constitute both vows and samayas. Vows and samayas are explained in Sutra and Tantra, but any instruction given by the guru also becomes part of a student’s vows and samayas. Your body, speech and mind should be peaceful and controlled. When following a guru, the student’s body, speech and mind should become more and more peaceful and controlled. This should not be mere pretense. The power of internal study, reflection and meditation should lead to such serenity and control.

Your understanding should be vast enough to accommodate whatever activities your guru carries out without holding any negative attitudes. Your generosity should be so great that you can offer your guru whatever you possess. “Great generosity” means generosity that serves the guru and the Dharma. Spending your wealth in a meaningless way is not considered generosity. You should have pure rather than critical or tainted perception. This means not having many thoughts and doubts. Regardless of whatever apparently impure activity you might see, maintain pure perception. Avoid harmful and negative actions in order not to displease your guru. Always consider that the guru and deities can see any negative actions you carry out at any time and in any place, and commit yourself to avoiding all negative actions. These are the ways in which one should follow a guru.

*Have great faith, intelligence, learning and compassion.*

*Respect the vows and samayas and control your three doors.*

*Be broad-minded and magnanimous, with pure vision and self-restraint.*

At all times and in all situations, all the actions and activities of your three doors of body, speech and mind should be in accordance with your guru's mind. Your activities will then be completely virtuous. If you act otherwise, then even though your actions may appear to be virtuous, they could be nonvirtuous. Do not act according to your own desires. Not only the Mahayana sutras, but also the texts of the tradition of individual liberation teach that one should ask the teacher about all activities, except for going to the toilet and so on. In the tradition of the Secret Mantrayana as well, all activities should be undertaken in accord with the guru's instructions, and all should be considered as virtuous. You should become expert in never acting in a way that is contrary to the guru's thinking.

Even if the guru is restraining you by reprimanding you harshly, do not become angry or resentful. Sometimes the guru might scold you severely in order to subdue you. When this occurs do not take offense or feel antagonistic, but behave like a perfect horse, seeking only to carry out his wishes. When the lama asks you to perform different tasks, either inside or outside, like going here and there, do not become annoyed but be like a ferryboat. People go and come on the ferry, but the ferry never becomes irritated. Whether the lama asks you to carry out pleasant or unpleasant work, be like a bridge, which can carry everything. For a bridge, it makes no difference whether many or few people cross.

Like the anvil of a blacksmith, which can tolerate both molten iron and cold iron, tolerate all difficulties of cold, heat, and so on. In serving your teacher, bear whatever difficult situations you have to face. Just like a servant who obeys whatever his master tells him, follow whatever instructions you are given. Give up pride and keep to the lowest position, like a sweeper.<sup>9</sup> You must abandon the conceit of thinking that you are better than your guru. Take the lowest position at all times. Because sweepers have such low status, they never think they are better or more qualified than others. Likewise, when with their guru, students should never feel superior. Never discriminate among the tasks your teacher gives you, thinking there are some you can do, and others you cannot do. Be like a sweeper in this regard.

Like a bull that has lost his horns, abandon all arrogance, and be humble. An arrogant person cannot carry out everything that his guru asks. Give up arrogance and respect the guru and his entire retinue. A bull with horns feels superior to others and hits them. After his horns are cut, he must always keep his head lowered. All these examples teach us how we should

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9 The lowest position in the Indian caste system.

follow our guru. They are not simply Patrul Rinpoche's own ideas, but have been gleaned from the sutras and sastras, and are taken from the "Sutra Arranged Like a Tree." Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa spoke as follows:

*Be skilled in never displeasing the teacher;  
Like a perfect horse, feel no anger at his reprimands.  
Like a ferryboat, do not weary of going back and forth.  
Like a bridge, bear everything, whether good or bad.  
Like an anvil, tolerate both heat and cold.*

*Be obedient, like a servant.  
Abandon pride, like a sweeper.  
Abandon arrogance, like a fine bull whose horns have been cut.  
This is how to follow a guru, the pitakas teach.*

When serving your lama, undertake all his instructions, and give him the best of whatever you own. This teaching is not simply to raise the guru's status or fame. These days some foreigners say that we should not follow this kind of instruction from Tibetan lamas, because they are given only to elevate the lamas' status. In fact, these teachings are from the "Sutra Arranged Like a Tree," and are also found in the tantra teaching of Secret Mantrayana.

*Without pleasing your teacher, and  
Without receiving initiation,  
If you begin to study and so on  
There will be no result at all and the effort will be wasted.*

Before receiving an initiation, you should please your guru and show him respect. This is taught in the tantras of the Akanishta realm given by the Samboghakaya teacher. These tantras explain to their wisdom disciples how to listen to tantra teachings. In this realm as well, disciples must follow a guru in the proper way, by paying respect and so on in order to hear the teachings. The gurus of the Akanishta realm did not give this advice in order to obtain status and fame. In that realm, the minds of the guru and the disciples are one, so there is really no need for one to offer respect and honor to the other. There is no higher and lower. This teaching on pleasing and respecting the guru was not recently invented by Tibetan lamas, but is explained by Lord Buddha in the sutra and tantra teachings. In our world, it has been taught by the Nirmanakaya buddhas.

Without following the lama in this way, if the student considers the

lama as a musk deer, and himself as a hunter, not only will virtue not be accumulated, but great nonvirtue will result. That is why the teachings on how to follow the lama are given again and again. It is not for the sake of the lama's fame and respect.

To develop the qualities of abandonment and realization, students must follow teachers, and carry out all of their instructions. Because it is crucial to follow your guru unmistakably, these teachings are repeated frequently. For Dharma practitioners this is the most important aspect, and everyone must have this quality. There would otherwise be no reason for the repetition. If you take seriously all the instructions on how to follow a teacher, all the qualities of liberation will develop in your mindstream. If you do not, and disrespect develops between teacher and student then samaya is broken. Samaya breaking is also explained by the teacher in the Sambhogakaya realm. Without belief in this, there can be no positive result. With faith and belief, this teaching is easy to understand and does not require much explanation.

The nonvirtue of breaking samaya brings about many obstacles in this life, and in the next life the samaya breaker will fall to the vajra hell. This is explained directly. There is no question of understanding or not understanding. The negative results cannot be seen directly, so we must rely on teachings to learn them. This is all taught by the Buddha; believing in his teachings, we should act accordingly.

A disciple should primarily please his or her lama through three kinds of respect or service. The offering of practice is best. Regardless of the difficulties, you must practice whatever teaching your guru has given. The lama teaches for the purpose of the student's liberation, not in order to receive service and respect. He wants the student to practice unmistakably, thinking: "Why shouldn't the students become liberated and omniscient?" Accordingly, he feels that the students should practice diligently, facing any difficulties that may arise. An example from the past of the best way to please the guru and make offerings to him is Milarepa's practice. His was the supreme offering of practice.

The middling way of pleasing the guru is offering service with body and speech, doing whatever the guru needs, whether physically, verbally, or mentally. You should think that your body, speech, and mind are servants of the guru, and nothing more than that. The lesser way to please the guru is through material offerings. Someone who cannot practice the Dharma well, and who cannot offer body, speech, and mind to the guru, can please

the guru through the offering of material goods without a trace of grasping.

*If you have wealth, offer it to the fourth jewel, the lama;*

*Honor and serve him with body and speech.*

*These actions will never go to waste.*

*But among the three ways of pleasing him, practice is the best.*

Disciples who can please the guru in the supreme way, by practicing Dharma, can also serve him through body, speech and mind, and by offering material things. This is because of their great courage and diligence in regard to the Dharma. From this point of view, offering wealth and serving through body, speech, and mind are not so difficult. Those who can make the highest offering, can also do this. Those who cannot offer practice can offer their body, speech and mind, and also material goods. Some can offer only material wealth.

A lama may have all the characteristics of a fully qualified guru, but for a student who does not know how to follow such a guru, whether the lama is qualified or not makes no difference. Following a guru unmistakably refers to the fact that whatever Dharma of Sutra or Tantra one wants to practice has some rules that must be maintained. Thinking that we can practice by doing whatever we want is not the Dharma.

Gyalsey Chenpo, Ngulchu Togme Rinpoche, said: "All depends on learning the practice, so try to learn how the heirs of the victors practice." To practice like an heir of the Victorious One, we must learn how they are practicing. Following what we have learned leads to unmissaken practice. To practice the sravaka vehicles we must know the qualities and characteristics of a teacher of the sravaka vehicle and how to follow this teacher. We must know the entrance into that vehicle, its view, meditation, and conduct, and we should act as this doctrine explains. We will then gain the fruit of the remaining and non-remaining level of an arhat, as the doctrine explains. If we practice according to that doctrine and do not achieve the result, this would mean that the teacher had deceived us, but this will never happen. We should reflect on how the noble individuals acted in the past, and how so many were accordingly liberated.

We need to know how to practice the Dharma and how to follow a lama correctly. Otherwise, we could meet the Buddha himself, but if we followed him incorrectly, no benefit would result. Whether the guru is fully qualified or not does not make the difference; the student must follow him unmistakably. That is why we must always be careful of our actions

and thoughts. If we practice Dharma and remain in retreat for the sake of worldly goals, we are wasting our time. Consider well why you are practicing Dharma and staying in retreat; it is in order to achieve liberation and the state of omniscience.

We must understand the path of liberation and omniscience. We find no examples from the past of anyone attaining the result without understanding this path, and there will be none in the future. The qualities of the path should be developed within our minds. To achieve liberation, the path is the lower vehicle; to achieve omniscience, the path is Mahayana; to achieve the level of Vajradhara, the path is the highest Secret Mantrayana.

Can we develop the path of liberation and omniscience in our minds only through reading? Without relying upon a guru, can we understand the four thoughts that turn the mind to the Dharma, the eighteen factors of freedoms and favorable conditions, going for refuge, developing bodhicitta? Think about this carefully and you can understand yourself that relying on a guru is necessary. That is why the guru's kindness is so great for those who want to practice the Dharma. Reflect that previously you did not know about the path of liberation and omniscience, but that now you do understand something. You can reach your objective – liberation – through your lama's kindness.

Whether the guru is an ordinary person, a noble one, or a buddha makes no difference when it comes to learning the path of liberation. If our guru is an ordinary person, we need not worry about whether he is going to live in samsara continuously. What we need is the path to liberation. Our need is fulfilled if the guru can show this path. If the lama has the teaching and understanding of the vehicle we want to practice, it doesn't matter whether he himself has achieved the qualities of the levels and paths. A guru of the Mantrayana, however, must also have very pure and unbroken samaya.

The guru's level is not our concern; we simply need the path to liberation, and our objective is fulfilled by understanding this path. Whether or not we achieve liberation depends upon our own diligence, courage, and ability to bear hardship. If we practice correctly, we can become enlightened before our guru. No guru has ever prevented his disciple from becoming enlightened before he did.

The disciple should follow what the guru teaches without any discrimination, and in this way he can achieve enlightenment. He will not progress by following only those teachings that please him and rejecting others. If a student likes the teachings on precious human birth, but not

the teachings on impermanence, the path is not complete. Such a student will never achieve enlightenment. All of the guru's instructions must be obeyed.

Both Sutra and Tantra state that before receiving teachings, the student should please the guru, as already described. The "Secret Essence Tantra"<sup>10</sup> states:

*Without pleasing your teacher, and  
Without receiving initiation,  
If you begin to study and so on  
There will be no result at all and the effort will be wasted.*

### **Pure perception toward the guru**

Of all the offerings made to please the guru, the most important is carrying out all of the guru's instructions. As examples of this, the text describes many of the past accomplished masters, the siddhas. No matter how incomprehensible the guru's behavior may appear, the disciple should maintain pure perception, and recognize his way of acting as his skillful means. Consider all of the guru's actions to be enlightened activity.

Long ago, after the great pandita Naropa had already become learned and accomplished, his yidam deity told him that the lama of his previous lives was the supreme being Tilopa, and that he should go to eastern India. He immediately set off for the east, but he did not know where to find Tilopa. He asked people of that area but they said they had no idea.

"Is there no one called Tilopa in this area?" he asked.

"There is one called the outcaste Tilopa, or the beggar Tilopa."

Naropa thought, "Since the behavior of accomplished masters is unpredictable, that could be him." He asked where the beggar Tilopa lived.

"Over by the ruined wall where the smoke is coming from."

Going there, he found Tilopa sitting in front of a basin of fish, living and dead mixed together. Tilopa picked up a fish, cooked it on the fire, and put it in his mouth while snapping his fingers. Naropa prostrated and requested Tilopa to accept him as a disciple.

"What are you saying? I'm only a beggar!" Tilopa answered. But Naropa asked insistently, so Tilopa accepted him.

10 Guhyagarbha Tantra (Skt); Sangwa Nyingpo (Tib).

Tilopa did not behave like this because he was hungry and could find nothing to eat and so was killing fish. Fish are creatures with negative karma who are ignorant about what conduct to adopt and what to abandon. Tilopa had the power to guide them. By eating their flesh he made a connection with them so he could project their consciousness into a pure realm.

Fish are animals. All animals are ignorant, but fish are probably more ignorant than others. Tilopa had the power to liberate fish. Generally, a buddha has the power to liberate all beings at one time, but this liberation can occur only for those who have the particular karma and good fortune. Without a karmic connection, the buddha's power will not function. To maintain the connection and to receive the power, the Secret Essence Tantra teaches that we must visualize and meditate on the yidam deities, and recite their mantras. These practices are all done so that we can receive the power of the yidams. Although Tilopa had the power to liberate all the fish, in order to create a connection with each one, he ate their flesh. Through the power of this connection, he could transfer the consciousness of the fish to the pure realms.

Similarly, Saraha acted as a maker of arrows, and Shavaripa as a hunter. Most of the powerful accomplished masters of the noble land of India took on very lowly lifestyles, such as outcastes and so on. Therefore, whatever their behavior, it is important not to view your teachers in the wrong way and to train in having only pure perception.

The great accomplished masters act in many different ways, some of which appear virtuous and others which appear nonvirtuous. Ordinary people would think: "I will not take refuge someone who kills and eats fish." Neither would they prostrate to him nor rejoice in him. However, Naropa understood that a siddha's actions are unexpected, and thus he intensely supplicated Tilopa to accept him as a disciple. A lama's actions can be similarly unpredictable, and the disciples must not look at the teacher's conduct in a negative way.

*Whatever their behavior, do not see them negatively  
Most of the siddhas of the noble land lived  
As outcastes and ragpickers, ordinary evil-doers,  
Even lower than the lowest.*

Some siddhas' actions appear worse than the actions of ordinary samsaric people. They are completely unpredictable. A student who sees only the

negative aspects of the behavior of his teacher and spiritual companions could see faults even in the Buddha, if he stayed with him long enough. Ordinary people have the negative quality of seeing the faults of others without seeing their own. Because of having this kind of vision, they see the faults of the noble ones, and even the perfect buddhas who have the major and minor marks.

Sunaksatra<sup>11</sup> is another example from the past. He remained for twenty-four years with Shakyamuni Buddha, but saw only his faults, not his wisdom eye, his clairvoyance, his qualities of abandonment and realization, his enlightened activities and so on. This resulted from his individual obscuration. The Buddha was by nature pure, but because of their own obscurations not everyone could see this. One who is always looking for faults can see faults in those who have none.

The monk Sunaksatra was the Buddha's half-brother, and served him for twenty-four years. Although he knew the twelve sections of the pitakas by heart, he saw all of the Buddha's actions as deceiving. He developed the negative wrong view that, except for not having an aura six feet wide, he was the equal of the Buddha.

*For twenty-four years I have served you, and  
Other than the aura around your body six feet wide  
I have seen no special qualities, even as much as a sesame seed.  
Concerning Dharma, my learning equals yours. I will no longer  
serve you.*

Saying this, he left.

Sometimes people who have received teachings from a lama for many years lose their faith and see faults in him or her. If this happens, you must think as follows: "My guru doesn't have these faults, but I have been 'blessed' by the demon Mara.<sup>12</sup> That is why I have lost faith in my guru." This will eliminate the negative thoughts about the guru. This is the nature of things.

I have explained before that as human beings we cannot see beyond the way things appear to humans because of our karma. Likewise, hell beings and hungry ghosts see only the appearances of their realms. The appearances of each realm are due to the karma of the beings in that realm. If a human being and a hungry ghost together saw some water, the hungry ghost would

11 Lekpai Karma.

12 Mara is the demon that creates obstacles to Dharma practice, and to enlightenment.

see only pus and blood. The gods see water as amrita, and yogis see water as the deity Mamaki. Humans see water only, unable to see appearances that are beyond their capacity. Although water has the nature of amrita, we cannot see this. If a buddha with the thirty-two major marks and the eighty minor marks appeared before us, we would still only see a human being, and not all of the major and minor marks.

We lack the power to see pure appearances. That we see a buddha as an ordinary human being is not the fault of the buddha, but is our shortcoming. In the same way, we may see faults in our guru, thinking that he lacks some knowledge, or that his actions are incorrect, or that he should act differently. This indicates that we are losing our faith in him, which we can see for ourselves. Losing faith in the guru is a serious obstacle; there is no greater hindrance to Dharma practice. It is an obstacle caused by Mara. A demon is something that brings difficulties to practicing Dharma. There are no other demons. People consider death and sickness to be obstacles caused by demons, but these are natural occurrences and cannot be avoided. By nature, human beings suffer from birth, old age, sickness and death. Only someone who achieves the level of a noble one has the power to control illness and death.

As ordinary human beings, we may see faults in our gurus and lose faith in them, but at that point if we recognize that this is the obstacle of a demon, and not the fault of the guru, the obstacle will automatically be cleared away. If this does not happen, we must apply some antidote. The antidote is to see that the negative thinking toward the lama is our own fault. We should think that the lama has no fault at all, and has the same qualities as the Buddha. We can find no greater kindness in samsara than the kindness of our guru. Developing and increasing this kind of thinking the antidote and should eliminate all obstacles and demons. This is an extremely important point that we must put into action if we want to practice the Dharma. There is no other way to practice.

*Not having mastered your own perception  
Searching out the mistakes of others is an immeasurable fault.  
Despite knowing the twelve kinds of teachings by heart,  
The monk Sunaksatra, caught by the power of evil,  
Saw the Buddha's actions as dishonest.  
Consider this well and correct yourself.*

The first lines mean that unless we have mastered pure perception, we have only ordinary human perception, which is faulty. Looking for mistakes

means not seeing purely. Impure perception can lead to immeasurable nonvirtue. Sunaksastra, having been affected by Mara, saw Lord Buddha's actions as deceitful and impure. By carefully thinking about this, we will realize that from the very beginning the Buddha never deceived others and never acted incorrectly.

For us as well, seeing our guru's qualities as faulty results from Mara's "blessing." We must correct ourselves, realizing that such incorrect thinking is our own mistake, and that our lama does not have these negative features. We must recognize that the guru is full of positive qualities, is faultless and that all of his activities are enlightened. Buddha himself is appearing as our lama. His qualities of abandonment and realization equal the Buddha's, and his kindness to us is even greater than the Buddha's. Such thinking is an antidote. Incorrect thinking about the guru will no longer arise.

These thoughts also result from our own experience. When we feel our practice is progressing, our faith in the guru increases. When we think it is declining, many thoughts arise and we lose faith in the guru. At such times, we cannot remain in the practice of Trekchod, Togal, Mahamudra, or Mahamadhyamika. Our practice and our faith naturally go together. Practice never improves when faith is declining. When our practice is going well, simply hearing our guru's name brings tears to our eyes and causes the hair of our body to stand on end. Practice and faith accompany each other as friends. If our faith is declining and we think we are still practicing, this is neither practice nor an antidote to our disturbing emotions. That is why the text says you must correct yourself.

If the sublime lama appears to be particularly hostile towards you, do not become angry but sadly think that he must see some fault in you and believes that this is the time to correct you with harsh language. When he has calmed down, you must go to him, confess your mistakes, and retake your vows.

Our thoughts are so negative that we only respect our guru when he speaks to us pleasantly and cares for us. Our faith grows and we think he is greater than Lord Buddha. On the other hand, when he scolds us or speaks harshly, we think that he is not like the Buddha, but makes many mistakes and has great anger. We immediately lose faith in him. Considering this, we can see that our minds change very easily; we quickly become happy, and quickly become unhappy, like clouds in summer. A disciple who reacts to his lama in this way is the worst type of person.

When our lama scolds us, we should realize that he has seen the mistakes

we have made under the power of our karma and disturbing emotions, and that he is forcefully correcting us. Our faith and respect should actually increase. We should not approach our lama to apologize when he appears to be angry, but when he is once more calm, we should confess our mistakes to him and take our vows again. The next verse concerns this.

*If your guru appears to be angry,  
Realize that he has seen your faults  
And knows the time has come to correct you.  
Confess and retake your vows.  
An intelligent person will not fall under Mara's influence.*

Someone who immediately loses faith when his guru scolds him is under the power of Mara. Instead of this, if we see that the guru is correcting our mistakes and increase our faith in him, the demon cannot harm us.

### **Following the lama as guru yoga**

Patrul Rinpoche next teaches how to pay respect to the guru with body, speech and mind, and how to abandon disrespect.

When you are in the presence of your guru, do not remain seated when he stands up. Get up immediately. When he sits down ask about his health. When you think he might need something, at the proper time, offer whatever pleases him.

When you are accompanying him as his attendant, do not walk in front or you will be turning your back to him. Do not walk behind him or you will be stepping on his footprints. Do not walk on his right or you will be at the head of the line. With respect, walk to his left and slightly behind him. If the road is dangerous, it is not a mistake to ask permission to go ahead.

As for his seat and his mount, do not step on his cushion or get on or ride his horse. Do not open the doors of his house violently or shut them with force. Do it gently.

When in the presence of the lama, give up both flirtatiousness and scowling. Avoid lying, thoughtless and careless speech, joking and playful chatter, as well as meaningless, senseless, and irrelevant talk.

With respect and a sense of awe, abandon indifference. You must learn the way of gentle behavior.

These instructions teach us how to follow the guru. In Dzogchen people think they are practicing guru yoga by continuously reciting the Vajra Guru

mantra, but true guru yoga is following the lama correctly and supplicating him intensely. Simply reciting the Vajra Guru mantra in our rooms is not guru yoga. Guru yoga is the method of applying effort to increase our respect and faith in the guru.

Among the six ways of training your mind included in the outer preliminary practices, this chapter on “How to Follow the Guru” is the guru yoga. Following a guru correctly is correctly practicing guru yoga. Without following your lama correctly, reciting the Vajra Guru mantra may not qualify as guru yoga. Therefore, this chapter on following the guru and the later chapter on guru yoga should be practiced together. That is the fully qualified practice of guru yoga.

During the practice of guru yoga, intense supplication of the guru continuously increases the disciple’s faith and respect, and the guru’s qualities of abandonment and realization automatically arise within him. This is what guru yoga means. Without correctly following the guru, merely reciting the Vajra Guru mantra will not increase faith and respect, and abandonment and realization will not develop. Such practice is not Guru Yoga. Understand that properly following the teacher and Guru Yoga are the same, and must be practiced together. The methods for how to follow the teacher are explained here.

Do not count as friends people who criticize or are hostile toward your lama. If you can change the attitude of someone who lacks faith in him or speaks ill of him, you should do so. Otherwise, do not speak with them in a friendly and easy manner.

The following verse is from Jigme Lingpa’s Treasure of Qualities:

*Do not make a friend of someone who criticizes or dislikes your lama.  
Change them if you are able.*

*If you chat with them cheerfully, the influence of their negativity  
Has great power and will damage your samaya.*

If we talk in a friendly way with those who criticize and are hostile toward our lama, their negativity will be transferred to us, and we will also be breaking our samaya vows. Never maintain a relationship with such people.

Whatever time we spend with our lama’s family and followers, and with our vajra sisters and brothers, we should never become weary or annoyed with them. Staying together for a month, at first we are close friends, but after a while we begin to criticize and argue with one another, accumulating

strong negativity. We should be friendly and get along well until we reach enlightenment. Nonvirtuous friends, however, must be avoided.

*Like a belt, be a relaxed companion.*

*Like salt, mix in easily.*

*Like a pillar, have the power to endure.*

*In these ways, serve your lama's retinue and your vajra siblings.*

We should feel relaxed with our guru and our vajra friends, like wearing a comfortable belt. Traditionally, all Tibetans like to wear belts, and Patrul Rinpoche is referring to this. We should swallow our self-importance, and respond to immediate needs, mingling with others like salt in food. Salt can be mixed in any kind of food, and improves the taste. Like a pillar we should be able to bear anything, even when other people speak to us angrily and pick quarrels, or when our responsibilities seem too heavy. We should never think: "I cannot bear this." A pillar can bear both light and heavy loads.

## **LEARNING THE GURU'S ENLIGHTENED REALIZATION AND ACTIONS**

By following the guru properly, we must learn the realization of his or her mind. This refers to his qualities of understanding and realization of the teachings and his qualities of abandonment and realization. These qualities should come to us. The guru's outward behavior is in accordance with the realization of his inner mind, and we should learn that too. We first understand his realization and then we learn his actions.

When perfectly able to follow your teacher, you should be like a swan slowly swimming and enjoying a beautiful lake, without muddying the water; or like bees in a flower garden – taking nectar from the flowers without harming their color or scent.

Our guru is pleased when we act exactly as he says, without becoming discouraged or tired. This is the offering of pleasing the guru. If the guru is pleased, he will take care of us from his heart. Lamas teach according to the disciples' desire. They teach the lower vehicle to students who want those teachings, the middle vehicle to students who want the teachings of that vehicle, and the higher vehicle to students who want those teachings. They will teach Sutra to those who want Sutra, and Mantra to those who want Mantra. If we learn these teachings correctly, this is learning the guru's enlightened realization.

With faith and steadfastness, receive the teachings of the guru's mind, and absorb all his learning, contemplation, and meditation just as the contents of one perfect vase are transferred to another.

The knowledge should be something we can work with. Merely thinking we have learned something will not work. The qualities of the guru's abandoning and realization, and of his learning, contemplation, and meditation, should develop in our mindstream. All the guru's enlightened qualities should be born in our minds. "Water poured from one vase into another" means that the vases are equal, and the quantity and quality of the water are the same. As in this example, whatever qualities are in the guru's mind should come to the disciple.

*Like swans living on a most excellent pond,  
Like bees tasting the nectar of flowers,  
Always assist in a wonderful way.  
Without fatigue, be receptive to the lama's enlightened mind;  
With the devotion of such closeness, you will experience his qualities.*

Our teacher accumulates great merit and wisdom through bodhisattva activity. He carries out the Buddha's teaching and works for the benefit of sentient beings. When the lama is highly realized, his activity is that of "equal taste." In explaining the guru's activities according to the highest Secret Mantrayana teachings, the activity of equal taste is acting like a madman. Such behavior involves no discrimination between pure and impure, using the five meat and five nectars, and practicing union and liberation.<sup>13</sup> Because of the guru's high level of realization, he acts in this way, but as beginners we should not follow him in this. Doing so, we would accumulate considerable nonvirtue through exposing the secret teachings. Without realizing the self-secrecy, using the hidden secret behavior is not allowed.

When the guru's activity is teaching and benefitting beings, and constructing representations of enlightened body, speech, and mind, we should support and work together with him. This is what "learning the guru's activity" means. We should participate by making material offerings, however small, or with the efforts of our body or speech, or even just offering joy at the slightest thing that he does. There is no need to talk about the benefits of making huge offerings if we can do this, but if we cannot, small offerings, participating with body and speech, and even participating with our mind through rejoicing are enough. Through his activities, the guru is

continuously accumulating great merit and wisdom. Our offering will bring us as much merit as comes from his own unsurpassable intention. We will continuously accumulate merit and wisdom with the guru.

Patrul Rinpoche gives us an example for this:

Once two men were travelling to U Tsang in Central Tibet. One had nothing to eat but a small amount of dark tsampa made from lentils. He mixed it with the large amount of fine white tsampa belonging to his companion. After a few days, the wealthy man said to the other, "Your tsampa must be finished by now."

"Let's take a look," he suggested. When they looked, they saw that the lentil tsampa was not all gone. Although they checked many times, the lentil tsampa was never exhausted, and so they had to share all the tsampa equally.

This is one example. Another verse states:

*If we put a drop of water in the great ocean  
The drop will remain until the ocean is no more;  
In the same way, if we dedicate our merit for enlightenment  
That merit will not be exhausted until enlightenment is achieved.*

Patrul Rinpoche continues:

Similarly, if you add something of your own to another person's virtuous action, or if you contribute even in a small way with your body or speech, you will attain an equal amount of merit. In particular, providing immediate assistance for your guru, such as carrying messages or even sweeping the room where he stays, is an unmistakable way to gather merit, so you should do this as much as you can.

We think that we can accumulate great merit by prostrating in front of representations of enlightened body, speech, and mind, and that simply serving the guru by sweeping his room and so on has is less virtuous. In fact, we can accumulate equal or even more merit by serving our kind guru, even by sweeping up. Although representations of enlightened body, speech, and mind are like the Buddha, the guru is even more important because of his kindness. We don't say the guru is greater than the Buddha because of his qualities of abandonment and realization, but because of his kindness.

Comparing the merit of bowing down to representations of enlightened body, speech, and mind with the merit of serving the guru, serving the guru accumulates more merit because the guru is the field of qualities and the

field of kindness. We may not consider representations of enlightened body, speech, and mind to be the real Buddha, taking them to be non-living objects, however superior to other objects. Thus we bow down, but do not think these objects are the real Buddha. Serving the guru accumulates more merit than making prostrations unless we think we are prostrating to the actual Buddha.

*Making whatever efforts are appropriate to the goals of the sublime teacher*

*Who is actually engaged in bodhicitta activity*

*And is accumulating merit and wisdom,*

*Serving him, carrying his messages, and even sweeping his floor*

*Brings forth fruit, and is the supreme path of accumulation.*

Among all the highest fields of refuge or accumulations of merit, none is greater than the guru. Especially when he is giving an empowerment or teaching, the compassion and blessings and wisdom of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions flow into him, and he becomes indivisible with all the buddhas. At those times, therefore, offering even a bit of food is more powerful than making hundreds or thousands of offerings at other times.

If the guru is a real buddha, this is true whether or not he is not giving empowerments or teachings. But even if the teacher is not a real buddha, during the time of empowerment and teaching, the minds of all buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions enter into his mind. Their compassion, blessings and wisdom enter his mind. By bestowing empowerments, the guru is ripening the disciples, and by giving teachings he is liberating their mindstreams. Thus, the guru's qualities are greater during empowerments and teachings. Secret Mantrayana teaches that at the time of teaching, Vajrasattva actually enters into the guru and blesses all the disciples.

The deity practices of the development stage have many various forms of deities to meditate on, but by understanding that the essence of all of them is no different from our root guru the blessings will come swiftly.

Whatever deities we visualize during the development stage – whether peaceful or wrathful – the form is that of the deity, but the essence is our own root guru. Consider the root guru's mind as the same as the deities' minds. By visualizing the guru's wisdom mind as the peaceful and wrathful deities, the blessing will come swiftly. Feeling that our guru has fewer qualities of abandonment and realization than the deity, or that the deity is at the level

of the Buddha while the lama is not, hinders the flow of blessings. We should always visualize the yidam deities as the essence of the root guru's wisdom mind.

Practicing guru yoga according to this text, we visualize our guru's wisdom mind as Guru Rinpoche. Generally, Guru Rinpoche is the special guru of all Tibetans, and Chenrezig is their special deity. People say that visualizing your guru as Guru Rinpoche brings the blessings swiftly, so most people practice in that way. In fact, we can visualize our guru as Guru Rinpoche, Chenrezig or any other deity, but the important point is that we visualize the deity as the form of our guru's wisdom mind. This brings the blessing swiftly, and is the true practice of guru yoga.

All Longchen Nyingthig practices, the particular teachings being explained in this text, are nothing other than guru yoga practice. All practices revealed by Jigme Lingpa are considered to be guru yoga.

All the primordial wisdom of the completion stage that develops in our minds comes through the power of our faith and respect for our guru and his blessings, and is the birth in our mindstreams of the wisdom of the teacher's realization.

The essence of the accomplishments of all stages of practice, including the path of development and completion stage, is embodied in the guru himself.

The complete realization of the Great Middle Way, Mahamudra, and Dzogchen can be called the wisdom of the completion stage. This is born only from our faith and respect in the guru. We must rely on the guru's blessing both to give birth within ourselves to the completion stage wisdom which was not developed before, and also to increase the wisdom. Moreover, whatever obstacles and doubt we encounter during our practice must be cleared up through the blessing of the guru. Arousing the wisdom of realization in our mindstream, increasing the wisdom, and clearing up obstacles and doubts all depend entirely on the guru's blessing. Thus, by constantly supplicating our guru with faith, the realization of the practice will come quickly. Whatever development or completion practices we do are condensed into the guru.

All the sutras and tantras describe the guru as being the Buddha in person for these reasons.

Later in the text, it is taught that Jetsun Milarepa said to Dakpo Rinpoche: "When special realization is born in your mind, at the same

time you will see me – your old father – as the actual Buddha.” Achieving special realization depends upon the great faith and respect of seeing our guru as the Buddha. Lacking such supreme faith, simply thinking that we have attained realization is false, and is an obstacle caused by demons. The wisdom of realization will never occur without faith. We attain the wisdom of realization to the same degree that we have faith in our guru.

If we have the highest faith, the practice will be the highest. If the faith is middling, the practice will also be middling. If the faith is low, the practice will also be low. Even if such people show some signs of accomplishment, such as clairvoyance, their practice is low if their faith is low. Simply showing some signs of accomplishment does not mean that someone’s practice is good. Clairvoyance and signs of accomplishment can also be brought by the blessing of the demons or developed by the path of worldly practices. They are not important. Developing the wisdom of realization in the mindstream is important. For that, faith and respect for the guru are crucial.

*Why is he the place of refuge and the field of accumulating merit?*

*The outer and inner yogas of accomplishing the guru*

*Condense the essence of what is to be accomplished in the development and completion stages.*

*All the sutras and tantras declare that he is the Buddha himself.*

“Outer” refers to guru yoga, and “inner” refers to the development and completion stages. When the sutras and tantras teach the lama as the Buddha, this is from the disciple’s point of view. It doesn’t mean the lama must be the Buddha.

The wisdom mind of the noble teacher is inseparable from that of all the buddhas, but in order to lead impure disciples such as us, he has appeared in ordinary human form and lives among us. Now, when he is actually here, we should strive to practice according to his words and to make our minds inseparable from his through offering the three kinds of service.

Our ordinary guru is in reality the wisdom mind of the Buddha, appearing for us in a human form. While he is living with us, we must carry out whatever instructions he gives us, and offer whatever service we can. We must be always diligent to become inseparable from the guru’s mind, even after he passes away.

Some people do not serve, respect, and obey their teacher while he

is alive, but after he has passed away claim to be meditating on a picture of him that has been drawn.

Neglecting their teacher during his lifetime, after he passes away some students wonder if they should draw his picture, or construct a statue of him. They act as though they are practicing guru yoga, or remaining in the natural state of mind.

Some say they are absorbed in contemplating the natural state and seek the profound elsewhere, without praying with devotion and respect that the qualities of abandonment and realization of the guru's wisdom mind be transferred to them. This is called "practicing contrary to the actual practice."

To really practice the profound path, one should practice guru yoga, and thus arouse the realization of wisdom. Neglecting guru yoga and wanting to practice the "main part" – seeking something more profound than guru yoga – is mistaken. Receiving the wisdom realization of the guru's mind depends on devotion, respect, and supplication to the guru. This is guru yoga. We need to bring forth the special wisdom realization, but giving up guru yoga and seeking something more profound, practicing development and completion stage, primordially pure Trekchod and spontaneous Tegal, is a mistake.

The qualities of the guru's wisdom mind should be transferred to the disciple and the same qualities born in the disciple's mind. The methods for this are devotion, respect, and supplication, and perfectly following the guru's instructions. Without practicing these methods, the guru's wisdom realization will never come to the disciple in any other way. Looking for something other than this is "practicing contrary to the actual practice." The objective of wisdom realization and the action become contrary.

To see our guru and be guided by him in the intermediate state can only occur because of the connection already established by our boundless devotion and respect, and the force of our teacher's compassion and aspirations. As the guru does not physically manifest in the intermediate state, if we have no devotion, no matter how excellent the teacher is, he will not be there to guide us in the intermediate state.

A high level of faith, devotion, and respect for the guru in this life pleases him or her. When our faith, devotion, and respect connect with the guru's compassion and blessings, we will actually meet him in the intermediate state of the time of death and he will guide us. This meeting depends utterly

upon the connection between our faith, devotion, and respect and the guru's compassion and blessings in this lifetime. Thinking that our guru has no power to appear in the intermediate state is incorrect.

Some gurus have the power to actually come in the intermediate state and some do not. Maudgalyayana and Sariputra had the power even to go into the hell realms. They could actually visit the intermediate state. Even lacking that power, our guru can actually appear in the intermediate state due to the karmic vision created by our faith, devotion, and respect. This doesn't mean the lama himself comes in person. We must maintain a good connection to the guru in this life, so that he can appear as a pilot to guide us through the intermediate state.

Without such faith and devotion, even if our guru had Maudgalyayana and Sariputra's power, our karmic vision would prevent us from seeing him, and he could not guide us. Whether or not he comes to guide us depends not on the guru's good or bad qualities, but on the disciple's faith, devotion, and respect.

*Many foolish people meditate on a drawing or a likeness,  
Not venerating him when he is actually present.*

*They say they are training in the natural state, but they do not know  
their teacher's mind.*

*How disturbing when the practice and the object of practice are contrary  
to one another!*

*Lacking devotion, it would be a wonder to meet the lama in the  
intermediate state.*

Harboring no wrong views or complaints about the guru is somewhat positive, but simply visualizing the guru above one's head and reciting the Vajra Guru mantra without true faith and devotion is not actual guru yoga. Faith, devotion, and respect are absolutely crucial. The guru yoga practice is only as strong as the faith, devotion, and respect. Without them, guru yoga practice is not complete, and no matter what development and completion stage is practiced, no qualities of abandonment and realization will develop. The root cause is the disciple's faith, devotion, and respect.

## **FURTHER DETAILED TEACHINGS**

### **Examining the guru**

Initially, you should skillfully examine the teacher before receiving

any empowerments or teachings. If he has the qualities of a guru, follow him. If he does not have these characteristics, do not.

Examining the guru is appropriate in Dharma practice. The disciple must rely upon the guru. Before deciding to rely on a particular guru, we should determine whether he has the qualities of whatever vehicle we want to learn from him. Such investigation is not mistaken on the disciple's part, but should be done at the proper time, before receiving any empowerments or Dharma teachings. If a disciple examines a guru only after receiving empowerments and teachings, and then abandons him, he will accumulate all the nonvirtue of abandoning the guru, and all the broken samaya vows.

I have already taught that the Omniscient Longchenpa, in the text, "Clarifying the Darkness in the Ten Directions," explained that abandoning a lama who has no qualities after accepting him as a guru means that we are scorning all the gurus of other people as well, that we are abandoning the buddhas of the three times. We should not abandon a teacher from whom we have received empowerments, whether he has all the characteristics of a guru or not. Among all broken vows, breaking vows with the guru is the heaviest. The various samaya vows are generally not explained during the time of empowerment, but breaking samaya with the guru and disclosing the secret teachings to unsuitable people are mentioned because of their seriousness. This is taught as follows:

*Do not reveal to samaya breakers  
Or to those who lack qualities  
The secrecy of all the buddhas.  
Do not scorn and dishonor me,  
The one who discloses the Mahayana.*

Someone who commits these actions after receiving an empowerment or teachings is breaking his samaya vow, and thus committing the highest nonvirtue. Even if a person with broken samaya receives teachings from an actual buddha, he will not achieve the ordinary and supreme accomplishments because his mindstream harbors the nonvirtue of abandoning his previous guru.

Thus, examining the guru before receiving empowerment is crucial. If you cannot actually check on the guru yourself, you can ask others about the guru's positive and negative qualities, and whether he has the full characteristics of a guru. Divinations, astrology, and any other kind of method can be used to examine a guru. This is not at all improper, but

is in accordance with the Dharma. Without examining the lama, people sometimes act like dogs jumping for meat and receive any empowerments that are being given. If they later complain about the qualifications of the lama and abandon him, even if they find another, more fully qualified guru, the new guru will not be able to help them. Their broken samaya will prevent their mindstreams from achieving the ordinary and supreme accomplishments.

The negativity of this broken samaya is also explained in the Secret Essence Tantra, where it says:

*If the root samaya is broken  
The results of all ritual practices become reversed.*

If the root samaya is broken, whatever practices are done will be reversed. Ritual practices performed for one's own benefit will result in unhappiness. When all practices are thus reversed, even a fully qualified lama cannot do anything. Even the Buddha himself could not do anything. This happened in the case of Devadatta.<sup>14</sup> Right in front of the Buddha, the earth cracked open and Devadatta went to the hell realm. The Buddha himself could not help.

Examining the lama before receiving empowerment is crucial. Next, we must develop faith, devotion, and respect in whatever way we can. In case our first lama cannot give us the teachings that we seek, we can search for another guru without losing our faith, devotion, and respect, and without developing a wrong view toward the first lama. I am not telling you this on my own, but am taking the tantra texts as a witness.

Ordinary people might gossip that someone is not taking empowerments from one or another lama because of his pride and so on, and may scorn him, but this is not correct. Carefully examining a lama is correct practice. Without faith and a fully qualified guru, receiving or not receiving empowerment makes no difference. Not receiving is better, and the person should not be scorned. Those who receive empowerment and then abandon the guru are the ones to be scorned. Whether we receive teaching from a certain lama is up to us. While receiving teachings brings benefit, no negativity follows from not receiving teaching. Receiving teachings and later failing to properly follow the lama is a great negativity.

We should receive no teachings from a lama who is not fully qualified,

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<sup>14</sup> A cousin of the Buddha whose jealousy kept him from receiving any benefit from the teachings.

even if he is our parent. We can make an ordinary loving connection, but need not relate through the Dharma. On the other hand, if someone is fully qualified, we can take him as a guru, even if he is our enemy. The crucial point is to examine whether or not the lama is fully qualified.

Once you have accepted a guru, you should see his whatever he does as positive, and think only of his positive qualities. You should learn to see him with faith and pure perception.

It is never taught that one should abandon a lama who is unqualified. Even if the guru kills a hundred animals every day as a butcher, or sleeps with hundreds of women every day, we should keep our faith and devotion and respect him. Seeing such activities and thinking that the teacher is acting wrongly, and then losing faith, telling others and scorning him, accumulates the great nonvirtue of breaking samaya. Once we have accepted a lama, we should think only of his good qualities and his kindness, not his negative aspects. We must develop faith and devotion. Looking for flaws in the guru brings inconceivable negativity. Once you have accepted a lama, even if he is not fully qualified, do not focus on his faults.

Examining the teacher generally means checking to see whether he has the qualities described in the sutras and tantras. In particular, it is absolutely necessary that a guru has bodhicitta. This is the most important thing. If a teacher has bodhicitta but does not appear to be well-educated, or seems to be performing only ordinary activities, we can still rely on him as a guru. Although he may not be able to explain Sutra and Tantra in a vast way, we accept him as a guru because he has the noble bodhicitta in his mindstream. This means he is a bodhisattva. A connection with bodhicitta will never harm us and carries great benefit. If this teacher cannot give tantra teachings, we can seek another teacher for these explanations.

In general, the activities of the noble bodhisattvas are innumerable. Khen Rinpoche Jigme Phuntsok told us that when he was young he was naturally very proud because of his excellent education and intelligence. One day he went to visit the famous Mani Lama of Golok. Many treasure prophecies indicated that Mani Lama was an actual manifestation of Avalokiteshvara. Khen Rinpoche received teachings from him on "The Way of the Bodhisattva."

On one occasion, Mani Lama acted as though he could not explain the text properly, and Khen Rinpoche thought that because of his own intelligence, he could explain it easily. In the end Mani Lama could not even explain the individual words of the text. At this point Khen Rinpoche

realized that because Mani Lama was a manifestation of Avalokiteshvara and was prophesied in many treasure texts, his inability to explain could not really occur and must be one of the activities of a bodhisattva. This experience cut through Khen Rinpoche's pride, and it never recurred.

Because the activities of a bodhisattva are innumerable, they might sometimes pretend that they cannot explain Sutra and Tantra although they can. Even if a teacher really cannot explain these teachings, if he has bodhicitta, we can take him as a guru. As I already mentioned, if our guru cannot explain Sutra and Tantra, we can find another teacher for that, without abandoning the previous guru or losing faith in him. If a teacher has bodhicitta, he embodies all the characteristics of a guru. Without bodhicitta, learning and intelligence are only academic reasoning. People without bodhicitta can sometimes demonstrate clairvoyance and magic, or even fly in the sky. This may be the blessing of the demons, or it could be due to practices of the worldly path, but it does not fit with the meaning of the Dharma.

A teacher who has bodhicitta in his mind continuously helps his disciples both in this life and the next. For the disciple, following such a teacher can be only beneficial. The Dharma that such a guru teaches is connected with the Mahayana and can only lead along the most excellent path. Whatever he says will be the path of the Mahayana because he has natural or unfabricated bodhicitta and the motivation of bodhicitta.

The path of the Mahayana includes all the activities of body and speech, as long as the motivation is bodhicitta. At all times, and whatever method is being used, the motivation should be bodhicitta. If a teacher has the real bodhicitta, even if his outward behavior involves killing beings, this can be considered the Mahayana. For example, a story from the Jataka tales tells of the pilot of a ship who killed the evil Dunchung in order to save 500 traders that Dunchung intended to kill. In this way the pilot accumulated many kalpas of merit.<sup>15</sup> This is the path of the Mahayana.

If someone truly has bodhicitta, all actions of body and speech – even stealing, sexual misconduct, and so on – become the Mahayana, whether they appear virtuous, nonvirtuous, or neutral. Because there are innumerable activities of body and speech, the Mahayana includes innumerable paths, all of which can be condensed into the six paramitas and the four ways of gathering disciples. If there is bodhicitta, everything can be connected to the Mahayana, the excellent path.

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This refers to a story of one of the Buddha's past lives.

On the other hand, a teacher without bodhicitta still has selfish desires and cannot properly transform the attitudes of his disciples. Bodhicitta and selfishness are opposite in every aspect. Bodhicitta never arises within those who are selfish. For those with bodhicitta, selfishness is eliminated from the root. A teacher without bodhicitta will have conceptual thoughts and ego-clinging and will consider himself more important than others. No matter what aspects of Sutra or Tantra a teacher harboring selfish desires explains, the teaching will not benefit his disciples or transform their minds.

Whatever Dharma such a teacher gives, no matter how profound or wonderful, in the end it will only be useful for the concerns of this worldly life. The teaching may appear to be profound Prajnaparamita, Middle Way, Secret Mantra or Great Perfection; it may be explained well and easy to understand, but finally it ends in selfishness. These days many teachings are given in this way, for the teacher's ordinary livelihood. Teaching becomes a way to accumulate wealth and property, status, fame and reputation. It all becomes part of the eight worldly concerns. Therefore, in examining a teacher, whether he teaches Dharma is not important, but whether he has bodhicitta is.

The one question of whether the teacher has bodhicitta sums up everything else to be examined. If the teacher's heart is filled with bodhicitta, we should follow him, no matter how he appears outwardly. We can easily determine whether a teacher is acting selfishly, or is benefitting others. We may not be able to find this out in one day, but eventually we will understand. At some point he will become distracted and the pretense of benefitting others through his body and speech will fail. For a short time, a lama can pretend to be accomplished although he is not, or learned although he is not, but if we stay with him for a long time, since these qualities are not permanent, they will not last long. One day the pretense will be revealed.

To determine whether a teacher is an irreversible bodhisattva or not, we observe the activities of his body and speech. These must be completely stable, and by observing these activities we can determine the quality of his realization. If we see that the teacher is involved in selfish activities, we know that he has no bodhicitta and is not qualified for the path of the Great Vehicle. One with bodhicitta is always engaged in benefitting others, even through his speech. In this case, whether the teacher dresses as a monk, a lay practitioner, or an ordinary person, or even if he engages in killing, like Tilopa, this makes no difference.

Thus, according to the Mahayana, we should not follow a lama who lacks bodhicitta, no matter how excellent his renunciation and weariness with samsara, his assiduous practice and his conduct may appear at first. Simply having great renunciation does not qualify one as a teacher of the Mahayana, although it can qualify one to teach the Hinayana vehicles. For Mahayana, bodhicitta is needed on top of renunciation and weariness. On the other hand, as Patrul Rinpoche says:

Ordinary people like us cannot know the extraordinary qualities of those holy beings who keep their nature secret, no matter how carefully we examine them.

Whatever ocean-like qualities they have, the noble ones hide them. They do not hide their faults, however. No matter what faults they have, they expose them to others. Ordinary people show others their smallest positive qualities, and hide their mountain-like faults, thinking that others do not know of these faults. Noble ones, on the contrary, are never satisfied with their positive qualities and hide them, while exposing their faults. We have heard the story of Geshe Ben, who thought of taking tea from his sponsor's house and immediately proclaimed that he was a thief and that his hand should be cut off. Since noble ones hide their positive qualities and expose their smallest faults, people like us cannot understand them.

Common people deceive others by saying they are accomplished when they are not, saying they are learned when they are not. There are many such fakes, skilled in how to deceive. This makes it difficult to examine whether a lama is qualified or not. In this situation, the best lama is one with whom we are linked from our former lives, but this is not easy to determine. Speaking of myself, I am not certain whether I have a previous connection with any lama. This is a common dilemma.

Jetsun Milarepa and Patrul Rinpoche clearly had a connection with their teachers over many lifetimes, but ordinary people cannot readily say whether we have teachers from our previous lives. We only know our teachers from this life. However, even ordinary people can have a "karmic-connected teacher," a connection with a teacher from whom they received teaching in a past life. Patrul Rinpoche explains how to recognize our karmic-connected teacher.

Simply meeting him or hearing his voice, or even just hearing his name, can immediately change everything and bring about such faith that all the hair on our bodies stands on end. This kind of person is our past life guru, and need not be examined.

The text, "Entering the Middle Way," explains that when emptiness is explained to certain people, special signs will appear in their body, speech, and mind. They will become happier and happier, tears will spring from their eyes, and the hairs on their bodies will stand on end. Such people have the seed of the Buddha's mind, and are proper vessels for the teachings on emptiness. They can be exposed to the ultimate truth. Merely hearing the word "emptiness" arouses faith in their minds, so that tears come from their eyes and their hair stands on end.

This is similar to the experience of great faith arising in someone's mind on simply meeting a lama, hearing his voice, or even merely hearing his name. Nothing else is needed to generate faith. Tears come from the disciple's eyes, his hair stands on end, and for a while all appearances disappear. Everything is transformed. The great attachment normally felt for worldly things falls apart. A karmic-connected guru can thus be identified. It is very difficult to say that everyone has such a teacher, but neither can we say that someone does not. One ordinary person cannot measure the qualities of other ordinary people.

Rongton Lhaga told Jetsun Milarepa, "The lama of your past lives is living in the south, in the hermitage of Tropolung. He is known as a supreme being, the king of translators, Marpa Lotsawa. Go see him!"

Just hearing Marpa's name brought forth extraordinary faith from the depth of his being and he thought, "Even at the cost of my life, I must meet this lama and become his disciple." When the time came for them to meet, Marpa came onto the road to watch for his arrival but acted like he was ploughing a field. Milarepa said that although he didn't recognize Marpa as his teacher at first, as soon as he saw him, his tumbling ordinary appearances ceased, and he couldn't move.

Generally, the lama we meet is determined by how pure or impure our perceptions are, and by the power of our past actions. Regardless of his behavior, never fail to consider the lama who has with great kindness taught you the Dharma and given you oral instructions as the actual Buddha.

Without the influence of your past karmic actions you would not have had the good fortune to meet an excellent guru. What's more, if your perceptions were impure, you could meet Lord Buddha in person and still lack the power to see his qualities. The guru you have met through the force of past karma and whose kindness you have received, is the most important.

A disciple with pure perception will see his guru purely; if his perception is impure, he will see the guru in an impure manner. The guru one meets depends upon past karma. Meeting an excellent guru results from our past good karma or merit, meeting a mediocre guru results from our past mediocre karma or merit, and meeting a least qualified guru results from our lowest karma. Some people burdened by past negative karma meet totally unqualified gurus with broken samayas, who will guide them in the exact wrong direction. There are many such gurus who have many disciples.

During this eon, the four or seven<sup>16</sup> buddhas who came to guide sentient beings are identified as the most noble ones, and there are countless other buddhas and noble beings dwelling on the higher bodhisattva levels. We have not had the opportunity to receive teachings from them and thus remain in samsara. The quality of guru we meet in this lifetime and from whom we receive teachings and spiritual advice depends solely on our merit. This guru is kinder even than the Buddha himself. Innumerable buddhas have come in the past but we lacked the fortune to receive teachings from them. We should think: “Now I have met this guru and have the opportunity to receive teachings, to become a disciple he can tame. This great kindness is due to my merit.”

Fortunate merit or a past karmic connection are necessary to meet an excellent guru, as is pure perception. Without pure perception, the Buddha himself appears as full of faults. As I have already taught, hungry ghosts see water as blood and pus. Similarly, a being with pure perception will see the Buddha as Buddha, but we who have impure perception see the Buddha as an ordinary person with faults. This is our own error, our own impure perception, or lack of a past connection.

Jetsun Milarepa met Marpa Lotsawa and received all the teachings of the New Tradition (*sarma*). He diligently endeavored in them and reached the level of Vajradhara in one lifetime. That was all due to his past connection. Likewise, due to his past connection, the great Omniscient Longchenpa met Rigdzin Kumaradza and attained the level of the exhaustion of phenomena in dharmata, the highest of the four visions of the Great Perfection.

Encountering a less qualified guru who cannot transform our mindstream is also due to our own lack of fortune. It is not the fault of the guru, but is the fault of the disciple. We should not blame others. The guru whom we meet and from whom we receive teachings is the most kind. Even these days there are many highly qualified and accomplished gurus, because the

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16 Different schools of Buddhism identify different numbers of buddhas.

Buddha's activities never end. The continuity of excellent gurus will never end. Whether we meet an excellent guru or an ordinary guru depends solely on our own past karma. Even though there are excellent gurus living in this world, we will never meet them or receive teachings from them unless we have the fortune to do so. Not only that, but our impure perception leads us to look for faults even in accomplished and qualified gurus, and to criticize them in many ways. I am not just talking about others; I have had such bad thoughts myself. These thoughts are all our own internal mistakes. Instead, we should cultivate the thought that according to our merit, we have met our guru, received empowerments and teachings, and that therefore he is most kind.

### **Following the guru**

Next comes the middle phase of actually following the guru. This means obeying him in all things and ignoring hardships, heat, cold, hunger, thirst, and the like.

We must listen to whatever our teacher says. Ignoring what we don't like and only following what we like is not obeying the guru's instructions. When following our teacher, we may experience cold, heat, hunger, thirst, and other troubles. Think of the grave difficulties Marpa Lotsawa forced Jetsun Milarepa to undergo. The same is true of Tilopa and his disciple Naropa. Had Jetsun Milarepa attained the level of the noble ones right away, he would not have had to face so much suffering.

*Avoiding nonvirtue, there is no suffering;  
For those who are learned, there is no unhappiness.*

The noble ones may manifest birth, sickness, aging, and death, but actually they do not suffer. Milarepa personally insisted that he was not an incarnation, but was an ordinary person. He was not like our Buddha Shakyamuni, who was enlightened many infinite kalpas ago. When Shakyamuni manifested in this world, he displayed illness, was pricked by sandalwood thorns, had headaches, and so on, but actually he experienced no pain at all. These events were simply designed to teach cause and effect to those to be tamed.

Milarepa was not the manifestation of an enlightened one, but was an ordinary person. When Marpa Lotsawa put him in difficult circumstances, he suffered intensely. Milarepa faced tremendous hardship following Marpa, and through his diligence in practice, he attained the level of a knowledge holder in this life.

On the other hand, if a guru asks his disciple to perform minor tasks, and the disciple refuses, being only concerned with getting the teaching that he wants, the disciple is like a hunter pursuing a musk deer for its musk. Ignoring the teacher after obtaining the teachings, as a hunter ignores the deer after getting the musk, means he is not properly following his guru. After accepting a guru, we must ignore all the difficulties and whatever other problems we may encounter in order to follow him. Patrul Rinpoche continues:

We must always supplicate the guru with faith and respect. We should consult the guru about whatever activities we are currently engaged in.

If the guru approves of our activities, his approval will make the work easier and the accomplishment greater. Without the guru's approval, even work to support the Dharma will bring no benefit. We should discuss with our guru whatever we want to do, including recitation and retreat.

We should put into practice whatever the guru tells us, and rely on him with the faith of total trust.

The "faith of total trust" means that we should feel that our guru knows everything, and that we will follow his advice even if we die, or if we suffer, whether the guru puts us in a high place or a low place. We should think, "In this life and the next, in happiness and in suffering, I will rely on nothing other than you." Supplicating the guru with this kind of faith is called the faith of total trust.

Believing that if the guru does not protect us in the next life, a yidam deity will protect us, or asking certain protector deities to protect and support us in our activities, is considering the yidams and protectors as more important than the guru, and is not the faith of total trust. Total trust means that whatever happiness or suffering arises, we will take refuge in and rely only on the guru.

### **Learning the guru's realization and conduct**

Finally, learning the guru's realization and actions means to carefully examine how the noble guru acts, and to practice acting in the same way.

Learning the actions of the guru's body, speech, and mind is what is meant by learning the guru's realization and actions. This includes learning both his or her outward actions and inner practice. We should learn to practice

retreat and recitation as the guru does. We should follow the guru's Dharma activity and his actions to benefit beings. This is the meaning of learning the guru's realization and actions. We should closely follow the guru's behavior that involves adopting and abandoning. This is like the worldly saying, "All actions are imitations, and the one who imitates best acts best."

Khenpo Ngaga taught that some of the actions of lamas who are realized masters are beyond adopting and abandoning, and if we follow these actions from the very beginning we will be performing higher activities without having the realization. For this reason, we must first learn the teacher's inner realization, and try to actualize such realization within ourselves. Only then can we learn the guru's actions that are beyond adopting and abandoning.

Observing the actions of others and doing the same is called imitation. We should imitate our lama's activities. The Bodhisattva vow prayer states:

*Just as the sugatas of former ages  
Aroused bodhicitta  
And followed the bodhisattva training,  
Gradually continuing in that way...*

These lines mean that the past buddhas first aroused the bodhicitta of aspiration and the bodhicitta of application. After that, they trained in action and behavior. The person taking the vow then says, "I too take this sacred vow," meaning that he or she will imitate the buddhas' actions and behavior.

Generally Dharma practice means imitating the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the past. Following the teacher means learning how to be like the teacher, taking into one's stream of being the teacher's realization and behavior. For example, following the lama should be like removing a tsa tsa from its mold. Just as the tsa tsa takes on all the patterns of the mold, the disciple should exactly copy the qualities of the guru's mental continuum. If this is not possible, it is definitely necessary to be moving in that direction.

As the design on a tsa tsa is precisely the same as the design on the mold, the disciple should be sure to develop qualities that are exactly the same as those of his teacher. In the best case, the qualities of abandonment and realization should equal those of the guru. Otherwise, the qualities should be as similar to the guru's as possible.

A person who begins by skillfully examining his guru, who then

follows him skillfully, and finally skillfully copies his realization and actions will always be on the authentic path, in any situation.

Those with this quality will be on the authentic path, the path to liberation, the path to omniscience, the path to attaining enlightenment in this life, the path to achieving the level of unification with Dorje Chang.

*At first, skillfully examine the guru;*

*Next, follow him skillfully;*

*Finally skillfully copy his realization and actions.*

*A person who acts in this way is on the authentic path.*

Having met a noble virtuous friend who has the qualities complete, follow him with no regard for your body or life, like the Bodhisattva Sadaprarudita<sup>17</sup> followed Bodhisattva Dharmodgata,<sup>18</sup> like the great pandit Naropa followed the supreme being Tilopa, and like Jetsun Mila followed Marpa of Lhodrak.

### ***Bodhisattva Sadaprarudita***

The story of how Bodhisattva Sadaprarudita followed Dharmodgata is as follows. Sadaprarudita was searching for the teachings on transcendent wisdom, the Prajnaparamita. He went to a wild forest and heard a voice from the sky, saying, “Noble son, go toward the east and you will hear the Prajnaparamita. Have no concern for the fatigue of your body, sleep or dullness, heat or cold, day or night. Go without looking to the left or the right. Before too long, you will receive the Prajnaparamita, either written in a book or from a monk who teaches and embodies the Dharma. At that time, noble son, follow and stay with whoever teaches you the Prajnaparamita. Consider him to be your teacher, and respect his Dharma. Even if you see him enjoying the five sense pleasures, realize that bodhisattvas are skilled in methods and do not lose your faith.”

Hearing this, Sadaprarudita began travelling east, but he had not gone far when he remembered that he had not asked the voice how far he should go, so he did not know where to find his Prajnaparamita teacher. Weeping and wailing, he vowed to ignore exhaustion, hunger, thirst, and sleep, night and day until he received the teaching. He became transfixed, like a mother who has lost her only child, thinking of nothing but when he would hear the Prajnaparamita.

17 Sadaprarudita (Skt); rtag tu nu (Tib); “Ever Weeping.”

18 Dharmodgata (Skt); chos ‘phags (Tib); “Sublime Dharma.”

Just then, the form of a Buddha appeared to him and praised his search for the Dharma, telling him: "Five hundred leagues from here is a city called the City of Scented Breezes. Made up of the seven precious substances and possessing all perfect qualities, it is surrounded by five hundred parks. The palace of the Bodhisattva Darmodgata is in the center of the city, at a crossroad of four avenues. It is also constructed of the seven precious substances and is about a league in circumference. The bodhisattva, Mahasattva Dharmodgata lives there, among gardens and other delightful places, with his entourage, which includes sixty-eight thousand women. He enjoys the five sense pleasures, and has total mastery over them, serenely doing whatever he likes. Throughout past, present and future, he teaches the Prajnaparamita to those living there. Go to him and you can hear the Prajnaparamita teachings."

Sadaprurudita could think of nothing but what he had heard, and he could hear Bodhisattva Dharmodgata teaching the Prajnaparamita from where he was. He experienced various states of concentration, perceived different worlds in the ten directions of the universe, and saw unnumbered buddhas teaching the Prajnaparamita and praising Dharmodgata before they disappeared. With happiness, faith and devotion for Bodhisattva Dharmodgata, Sadaprurudita considered how he could meet him.

"I am so poor that I don't have anything with which to honor a virtuous friend, no clothes or jewels, no scents or garlands, nothing. I will sell the flesh of my body, and will honor Bodhisattva Dharmodgata with what I gain from that. From beginningless samsara, I have sold my flesh countless times, and countless times have I been chopped in pieces and destroyed in hell realms where I was dragged by my desires, but never like this for the sake of the Dharma, never in order to honor a noble person." Going to the center of the marketplace, he called out, "Who wants to buy a man?"

However, evil spirits, envious of Sadaprurudita for undergoing such difficulties for the sake of Dharma, kept anyone from hearing him. Finding no one to buy him, Sadaprurudita went off to one side and wept, streaming tears. Indra, king of the gods, decided to test the firmness of his intention. He approached in the guise of a young brahmin, and said, "I do not need a complete man, but I need some human flesh, some fat and some bone marrow. I will pay you if you can sell me that."

Sadaprurudita was delighted and with a sharp knife cut his right arm

until the blood spurted out. Then he cut the flesh from his right thigh. He was about to smash his bones against a wall when the daughter of a rich merchant saw him from the top story of her house and came down to him, and asked, "Noble son, why are you hurting yourself like this?"

"Because I want to make an offering to Bodhisattva Dharmodgata," he answered.

"What benefit will you get from honoring him in that way?" she asked.

"He will teach me the skillful methods of the bodhisattvas and the special teaching of the Prajnaparamita. After I train, I will achieve omniscience, possess the qualities of buddhahood, and share the precious Dharma with all sentient beings."

The girl replied, "For even one of those qualities, it is worth sacrificing bodies as numerous as the grains of sand in the River Ganga, but don't hurt yourself as you have been doing. Whatever you need to offer to the Bodhisattva Dharmodgata I will give you, and I will also go with you to see the bodhisattva. That way I will also create the root of merit for attaining the same qualities."

After that, Lord Indra reassumed his own form and said to Sadaprarudita, "I am Indra, the king of the gods. I came so I could test your resolve. I can give you whatever you desire. Just ask."

"Bestow upon me the qualities of unsurpassed buddhahood."

"That kind of thing I do not have the power to grant," Indra answered.

"Well then, you don't need to restore my body. I call on the blessings of truth. By the truth of the Buddha's prediction that I will not return to samsara, by the truth of my superior and unwavering determination, and by the truth of my words, may my body become as it was before." Saying this, his body returned to its earlier condition, and Indra disappeared.

Sadaprarudita and the merchant's daughter together went to her parents' house, and told them his story. They gave him what he needed for his offering, and he mounted a carriage accompanied by the merchant's daughter and five hundred maidservants. Together with the girl's father and mother and their retinue, they travelled to the east. In the City of Scented Breezes they saw the Bodhisattva Dharmodgata preaching the Dharma to thousands of disciples.

Seeing this, the Bodhisattva Sadaprarudita achieved the blissful state of an ordained monk absorbed in contemplation. The entire retinue of five hundred alighted from their carriages in front of Bodhisattva Dharmodgata.

At that time Bodhisattva Dharmodgata had built a temple to the Prajnaparamita that was made of the seven precious substances, decorated with red sandalwood and covered with a net of pearls. In the four directions, four wish-fulfilling gems had been placed as lamps, and from four silver incense burners came offerings of black aloewood incense. In the center were four jewelled boxes containing the volumes of the Prajnaparamita, made of gold and written in lapis lazuli ink. Many gods and humans were making offerings. Asking about this, Bodhisattva Sadaprarudita, the daughter, and the entire retinue of five hundred also made excellent offerings. Then they approached the Bodhisattva Dharmodgata, who was teaching the Dharma to his disciples.

Going near, Bodhisattva Sadaprarudita, the daughter, and the entire retinue of five hundred honored Bodhisattva Dharmodgata with their offerings. The merchant, his daughter and retinue took the vow to develop the enlightened mind of bodhicitta.

Sadaprarudita asked where the buddhas he had seen before had come from and where they had gone. Bodhisattva Dharmodgata taught the section of the text explaining that the buddhas neither come nor go. Then, leaving his seat, he went to his room and for seven years remained in a state of meditative concentration.

During this time Bodhisattva Sadaprarudita, the daughter, and her entire retinue of five hundred gave up lying down and sitting and followed the behavior of always remaining on their feet and walking. They thought only of when Bodhisattva Dharmodgata would rise from his meditation and again teach the Dharma.

When the seven years were nearly complete, Sadaprarudita heard from the gods that after seven days Bodhisattva Dharmodgata would rise from his meditation and teach the Dharma. Along with the daughter and her retinue of five hundred they swept the entire area where Bodhisattva Dharmodgata was going to teach for one league in every direction.

They dropped water to settle the dust and harden the ground, but Mara and other evil doers made all the water vanish. Bodhisattva Sadaprarudita then opened all the veins of his body and sprinkled his

blood on the ground, as did the merchant's daughter and her entire retinue of five hundred. Indra, king of the gods, then changed all the blood into the red sandalwood of the god realm.

Bodhisattva Dharmodgata came and seated himself upon the lion throne that Sadaparudita and his retinue had so perfectly arranged. He taught the Prajnaparamita. Bodhisattva Sadaparudita experienced six million states of meditative concentration, and saw the faces of uncountable buddhas. Apprehending this, the vision never left him, even in his dreams. Even now it is said that he remains in the presence of the perfect buddha called "He Who Roars with an Inexhaustible Melodious Voice."

### *Pandita Naropa*

In a similar fashion, when the great scholar Naropa was following Tilopa, he underwent incalculable difficulties. As was explained above, Naropa met Tilopa, who was living like a beggar, and asked to be accepted as a disciple. Tilopa had Naropa follow along close behind him, but never taught him any Dharma.

One day Tilopa took Naropa to the top of a nine-storied tower and asked whether there was anyone who could follow his lama's instructions to jump from the pinnacle. "No one else is here, so he must be talking to me," Naropa thought. He leaped from the tower and smashed his entire body, causing immeasurable pain and agony.

His guru approached him and asked, "Are you in pain?"

"I can't measure the pain. I'm like a corpse," Naropa answered. Tilopa blessed him; his body recovered its former health, and they resumed their journey.

Another time, Tilopa ordered, "Naropa, make a fire!" When the fire was blazing, he took many long pointed splinters, oiled them and put them in the fire to heat up and harden. Saying, "If you are going to follow your guru's instructions, you must also face difficulties," he pushed the bamboo splinters under Naropa's fingernails and toenails. All the joints of his body became rigid, inflamed and unbearably painful. Tilopa went away somewhere.

When he returned a few days later, he pulled out the splinters, bringing forth a lot of blood and pus. Once more he blessed Naropa and they continued on their way.

One day Tilopa said, "Naropa, I'm hungry. Go beg some food for me." Naropa went to a place where many farmworkers were eating. Begging for food, he was given a skullcup full of noodle soup. He returned to his lama, who ate it as though it were delicious and seemed to be pleased.

Naropa thought, "How many times I have already served my lama, but he hasn't been as happy as he is today. Maybe I can go back and get him some more." So he returned, but the laborers had gone back to work, leaving behind the remaining soup. "I must steal it," he thought and ran off with it. The workers saw him. They ran after him, caught him and beat him until he was nearly dead. He was in such pain that he couldn't move and he lay there several days. Again his guru came and blessed him, and they continued their travels.

Another time, Tilopa said, "Naropa, I need a great deal of valuable wealth. Go steal some for me." Naropa went to steal from a rich man, but someone noticed and he was caught, and again beaten nearly to death. His guru arrived after several days. "Are you in pain?" he asked, and Naropa answered as he had before. Tilopa blessed him and they again continued their journey.

Like this, Naropa had to undergo twelve major difficulties and twelve minor difficulties, enduring altogether twenty-four hardships during one lifetime. Finally, all of these troubles had been completed.

One day Tilopa said, "You go and get some water and I'll stay here and make a fire." When Naropa came back carrying the water, Tilopa jumped up from the fire and with his left hand grabbed the top of Naropa's head. "Show me your forehead, Naropa," he shouted. With his right hand, he took off his sandal and hit Naropa on the forehead. Naropa fainted into total unconsciousness.

When he awoke from his faint, all of the qualities of his guru's mindstream had been born in Naropa's mindstream. Guru and disciple had become inseparable in their understanding.

Both Sutra and Mantra teach that the beneficial circumstance for achieving special wisdom realization is the accumulation of great merit. The main harmful circumstance, which always blocks wisdom realization and thus must be purified, is the obscuration of negativity. Likewise, the "Way of the Bodhisattva" explains that Lord Buddha taught all the branches of practice for the sake of wisdom. Among the six perfections, the first five gather the accumulation of merit and the sixth accumulates the wisdom of the Prajnaparamita. Without accumulating great merit in this way, the special

wisdom realization will never arise.

Accumulating merit and purifying negativity are not only done through the four supports, or through practicing the seven branches. Secret Mantrayana teaches us to accumulate merit and purify negativity by obeying all of our guru's instructions. Our root guru, the "fourth jewel," is the essence of all the buddhas, and thus there is no greater way to accumulate merit and purify negativity than by doing what he tells us. People often tend to obey their teacher's commands when they accord with the Dharma, but not other instructions, like doing physical labor, engaging in worldly activities, and so on. This keeps us from accumulating merit and purifying negativity. Failing to follow all of our guru's commands, thinking we will purify negativity by reciting the 100-Syllable Mantra with the four supports, and accumulate merit by making mandala offerings is mistaken, and is an obstruction created by demons.

The actual accumulation of merit and purification of negativity results from obeying the guru. Thus, when Naropa was following Tilopa, the method to develop the special wisdom realization in his mind was for him to do what Tilopa said. Naropa both accumulated merit and purified his negativity through undergoing great suffering. Finally, he achieved realization simply from being struck on the head with a slipper.

Tilopa hitting Naropa was a method to transmit wisdom realization through a sign. Some disciples can experience special wisdom realization simply through mind to mind transmission from the guru, without other circumstances. This is the fastest method of transmission. Those who cannot realize through mind transmission or sign transmission can realize through word transmission. These three kinds of transmission: wisdom mind transmission, sign transmission, and word transmission, are explained in the "Secret Essence Tantra."

Naropa's realization occurred when Tilopa slapped him with his slipper. This is an example of sign transmission, since the slap led Naropa to achieve special realization. Reflecting on this, we understand that for realization to occur, Naropa's mindstream had to be purified of the hindering circumstance of negative obscurations. He also had to accumulate the conducive circumstance of merit. In general, this accumulation of merit and purification of negativity can be done through recitation with the four supports, mandala offering, and practicing the seven branches. However, the supreme method to accumulate merit and purify obscurations is obeying the guru's instruction.

Patrul Rinpoche will go on to explain that Jetsun Milarepa accumulated merit, purified obscurations, and achieved wisdom realization solely by fulfilling all of Marpa's difficult orders. We have no indication that Milarepa accumulated merit and purified obscurations by practicing recitation with the four supports, making mandala offerings, and so on. He did not achieve realization through those methods.

From the standpoint of the disciple, obeying the guru's instruction is more important than following the words of the Buddha. Whether the guru's commands accord with the Dharma or not, they lead to accumulating merit and purifying obscurations. Obeying the guru is supreme; there is no superior path to achieve special wisdom realization. A disciple who can follow this advice has the complete method for accumulating merit and purifying obscurations. For those who cannot, there is no other method. We do not realize this, however. We think that if we cannot follow all of our guru's instructions, we should accumulate merit through recitation and retreat practice, offering mandalas, and performing prostrations. This is not correct.

People practice recitation and make prostrations and mandala offerings for years without achieving wisdom realization. Those with faith and devotion might even find these qualities diminishing rather than increasing. Unless a disciple is following his guru's instructions, recitation with the four supports, mandala offerings, and so on are not the cause for achieving realization. Even if the guru gives orders that contradict the Dharma, as when Marpa ordered Milarepa to practice black magic and cause hailstorms, following these instructions accumulates merit and purifies negativity, becoming the cause for reaching special wisdom realization.

Therefore, following the guru's instruction is the most important method. We must always remember this. We all desire to achieve liberation and omniscience, but we don't know what we need to do to achieve it. To make this clear, Patrul Rinpoche explains this point repeatedly and provides many examples. We should do our best to practice in this way, and without doubt, the special wisdom realization will arise in our minds before long. This teaching was undecieving in the past, is undecieving in the present, and will be undecieving in the future as well.

Tilopa did not use the method of Dharma teaching to bring forth the wisdom realization in Naropa's mind. His method was to make Naropa experience extreme hardships and suffering.

The texts on logic explain that no results will manifest unless all causes

and conditions are complete. When causes and conditions are complete, however, the results will manifest automatically. Likewise, if we have the conducive circumstance of the accumulation of merit, and if we have purified the hindering circumstance of negative obscuration, then whether we receive teaching or not, wisdom realization will automatically be achieved. No one can prevent such a disciple from achieving realization.

Thus, although the great scholar Naropa underwent twenty-four hardships, they were actually the instructions of his teacher, the skillful means for purifying his obscurations. They appeared to be merely fatiguing and pointless in nature, events that no one would consider to be Dharma. The lama taught not a single word of Dharma and the disciple performed no Dharma practice, not even a single prostration.

Naropa had met a most accomplished master, however, and had carried out his orders, regardless of their difficulty. The power of thus purifying his obscurations had awakened realization in his mindstream.

No Dharma practice is superior to following one's guru's commands. That alone brings vast benefit. Similarly, disobeying even a small aspect of his instructions is a heavy misdeed.

There are two sources of immense benefit. One is the field of qualities, and the other is the field of kindness. The guru is the manifestation of the Buddha, the field of qualities, and his qualities equal those of the Buddha. The siddha Tilopa had realization equal to the Buddha's. Therefore, obeying his instruction brought great results.

In addition, vast benefit results from the guru's kindness because the guru is a special field of kindness. He is more kind than Lord Buddha, and more kind than our parents. Serving our parents brings great benefit, but only because of their kindness. Our parents have given us our life, and have raised us in a worldly way. They have not shown us the path to liberation and omniscience, not at all. Their kindness consists simply of giving us birth, feeding and clothing us. The guru gives the Dharma teachings, showing us the way to liberation and omniscience, and for this reason is even kinder than our parents. Nothing in this world is greater than liberation and omniscience. Thus the guru's kindness is greater than the kindness of our parents and the Buddha. As he represents both the field of qualities and the field of kindness, we must always obey the guru's instructions.

The qualities of abandonment and realization of all gurus may not

equal the Buddha's. But the guru's kindness is greater than the Buddha's. Whether or not the guru has attained buddhahood, the disciple needs the teachings on the path of liberation and omniscience, and if he or she can practice correctly, liberation and omniscience will be reached. Even if Lord Buddha came himself, he could not be more kind than this.

Among the various types of nonvirtue, killing one's father or mother, and taking blood from a buddha with a negative intention are the most serious, since the parents are the field of kindness, and the Buddha is the field of qualities. These two acts are of equal negativity, indicating that the kindness of the teacher is considered to be greater than the kindness of our parents. Even if the qualities of the guru do not equal those of the Buddha, since his kindness is greater than the kindness of our parents, obeying his instructions brings immense benefit, and acting contrary to his instruction is great negativity.

When our lama teaches according to the Dharma, we will follow his instructions, but if he teaches something different, we fear that we may commit great negativity by following him, that our accumulated merit may decrease, and we may fall into the lower realms. This mistaken thinking occurs to us. We will never achieve wisdom realization if we maintain such a wrong attitude. We must abandon this idea, and follow the guru's instructions to the best of our ability. Some people think that although this is written in the texts, they will not put it into action. They will never change.

Karma Chagme Rinpoche's "Aspiration Prayer for Rebirth in Sukhavati" teaches:

*The benefits of merit and the faults of nonvirtue,  
The suffering of the hell realms and their lifespans, and so on –  
If we hear this and think it is only a teaching,  
The result is negativity heavier even than the five sins with immediate  
retribution.  
I confess this inescapable negative action.*

To believe that some teachings are simply explanations, that all teachings may not be true and need not acted upon, is mistaken. The result is more serious than the five sins with immediate retribution. At best, we should follow all the instructions Patrul Rinpoche gives in this text; even if we cannot abide by all, we should believe they are true and undecieving, and that an inability to follow them is our own failure and weakness. We should

feel remorse and deep regret that we cannot act according to the teachings, and commit to do our best in the future. Our resolve will gradually become stronger so that we can carry out all of Patrul Rinpoche's advice. We may be unable to act like this at the beginning, but we must strive to do so gradually. This is extremely important. Failing to obey the guru's instructions that accord with the Dharma is a serious fault, and failing to obey the guru's instructions do not accord with Dharma is also a serious fault.

On one occasion Tilopa said to Naropa, "Do not take up the position of scholar-gatekeeper at Vikramashila." But when he later returned to Magadha, the Vikramashila scholar-gatekeeper had passed away. People said no one else could debate the heretics and they insisted that Naropa become the scholar guarding the northern gate.

A heretic came to the gate looking for a debate. They argued for many days but Naropa was unable to defeat him. He supplicated his teacher, until one day Tilopa arrived, glaring at him fiercely.

"You have so little compassion! Why didn't you come before?" asked Naropa.

"I told you not to become the scholar-guardian of the northern gate," Tilopa answered. "But, anyway, when you are debating, visualize me above the crown of your head and point at the heretic with a threatening gesture." After Naropa did this he defeated all the heretics and ended the arguments.

In those days, the most learned scholars of Vikramashila stayed as gatekeepers in the four directions to defeat the heretics at the very entrance. Naropa was the most renowned scholar of the day. Due to his learning, he should have defeated the heretics, but because he had not followed his guru's instruction, he could not. Even though serving as a gatekeeper to debate the heretics was also Dharma work, the fault of not obeying his guru kept him from winning the debate.

### ***Jetsun Milarepa***

Similarly, we can see how Jetsun Milarepa followed Lhodrag Marpa. In an area called Ngari Gungthang lived Mila Sherab Gyaltsen, a wealthy man who had a son and a daughter. The son, called Mila Thogawa, "a joy to hear," became Jetsun Milarepa. When the children were small, their father died, and their uncle, Yungdrung Gyaltsen, took all their wealth and property, leaving the two children and their mother with no food or material wealth, so that they suffered many

difficulties.

From Yungton Throgyal of Tsang and Lharje Nubchung, Mila learned how to cast spells and create hailstorms. He killed thirty-five people, including his uncle's son and daughter-in-law by causing their house to collapse. When the local residents reacted with hostility, he brought hail as deep as three levels of a clay wall.<sup>19</sup>

Later regretting his evil deeds, the thought of practicing Dharma grew in his mind. Following Lama Yungton's advice, he went to see a Dzogchen master named Rongton Lhaga, and asked him for teaching.

"I teach Dzogpa Chenpo," the lama replied. "Its root is the conquest of the beginning; its peak is the conquest of attainment; and its fruit is the conquest of yoga. If you meditate on it during the day, you can become enlightened that day; if you meditate on it during the night, you can become enlightened that night. Fortunate beings with suitable karma need not even meditate; by hearing alone they can be liberated. It is the Dharma for those of the highest faculties. I will bestow it upon you."

After he received empowerments and instructions, Mila thought to himself, "When I was first learning to cast spells, it took fourteen days to produce the major signs. For making hail it took seven days. This Dharma is even easier than casting spells and making hail. If you meditate during the day, you become enlightened that day; if you meditate at night you become enlightened that night. Fortunate beings with suitable karma do not even need to meditate. Because of how I met this, I must be someone with the suitable karma." Thinking like this he didn't practice meditation, but lay down to sleep, and the Dharma and the individual went separate ways.

After some days had passed, the lama spoke to him. "You told me you were a great evil-doer and this is true. I praised my Dharma a little too much. I will not guide you now. You should go to the retreat place of Trowolung in Lhodrak. There lives a student of the great Indian master Naropa himself, a great being known as Marpa Lotsawa, the king of translators. He is an accomplished master of the New Mantra tradition, and is unrivalled throughout the three realms. You and he have a connection due to actions from your past lives, so you should go to him."

Merely hearing the sound of Marpa the Translator's name brought

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About three meters.

inexpressible joy to Mila's mind. All the hairs on his body stood on end from bliss, and tears welled forth from the immeasurable feeling of devotion that was born. Thinking about when he would meet his guru and see his face, Mila left.

Both the guru and his wife and his wife had had many special dreams and knew that the Jetsun was coming. Marpa, pretending to be plowing a field, went down the valley and waited by the road for him to come. Mila first met Marpa's son Dharma Dode, who was looking after the cattle. Continuing a little further on the way, he saw his guru Marpa, who was plowing.

As soon as he saw Marpa's face, Mila experienced a tremendous, inexpressible happiness and joy, and for a moment his ordinary thoughts stopped. He did not realize that this was the guru himself, however, and he explained that the reason he had come was to meet Marpa.

"I will introduce you to Marpa," the guru answered. "You plow my field." Leaving him a jug of barley beer, he left. When Mila had drunk the last drop of beer and had finished plowing, the guru's son came to get him and together they went to meet the guru.

Touching the guru's feet with the crown of his head, Mila said, "O Lama! I am a great evil-doer from the west. I offer you my body, speech, and mind. Please give me food, clothing, and the Dharma. Teach me how to reach enlightenment in this life."

"It's not my fault that you think you're such a big sinner," Marpa replied. "You didn't commit your evil deeds on my account. What bad things did you do?"

Mila answered with a detailed account of his story.

Marpa said, "Whatever it may be, offering your body, speech, and mind is a good thing. But I cannot give you all three of food, clothing, and Dharma. Either I can give you food and clothing, and you seek the Dharma elsewhere, or I can give you the Dharma, and you look for food and clothing somewhere else. Choose between these two. If you choose to receive Dharma from me, whether or not you become enlightened in one lifetime will depend on your own determination."

"Well," Mila answered, "since I came to the guru for the purpose of Dharma, I will look for food and clothing elsewhere."

We should offer our guru our body, speech, and mind. This is easy to say

with sweet words, but very difficult to do. In practice, disciples stay for a few weeks or months with a lama and then think about the different places they have to go and the different work they have to do. Consider whether you are actually offering body, speech, and mind or not. Having made this offering, you no longer need think about your body, speech, and mind yourself. You must carry out whatever order your lama gives. Thinking that you will follow some commands, but not others, means that you are not really offering your body, speech, and mind. You are keeping yourself, not offering yourself. The way to follow a guru is to completely and honestly offer your body, speech, and mind.

Marpa said that he could not provide Milarepa with all three of food, clothing, and Dharma. The Abhidharma Kosha teaches that ordained people argue about conceptual discrimination – the aggregate of perception, and ordinary people argue about their feelings – the aggregate of feeling. Thus, discrimination and feelings are the causes of arguments. The ordained quarrel about conceptual discrimination in how they perceive the view, about whether or not their views are in accord with one another. This is called a “Dharma argument.” Ordinary people argue about getting better places to live, better food, better clothing, and so on. This is called arguing about feeling. Among the five aggregates, perception and feeling considered separately.

These days, the two kinds of arguments have become mixed up. Ordained people also quarrel about feelings. Ordained people, both those who are studying and those who are practicing, are looking for better food, clothing and places to live. They also claim, “This is my food and my place, and that is his food and his place.”

Only in shedra do some students argue about the Dharma, because the rule is that they must spend one hour every day practicing debate. Other than that, they quarrel over food, clothing, and rooms. They argue because of their feelings, accumulating considerable nonvirtue by breaking samaya with each other. The eighteen different philosophical schools of the Sravakas are the result of arguments about conceptual discrimination concerning the Dharma, the aggregate of perception. The aggregate of feeling can also bring discord between guru and disciple. Considerable negativity is accumulated through broken samaya as a result of this.

For this reason Marpa said that one who gives the Dharma cannot also provide food and clothing. And it is better that those who give food and clothing not teach Dharma. If one person gives everything, even if there is

no breaking of samaya due to Dharma, there will be broken samaya due to food and clothing. Previously, I did not understand the reasoning behind this statement of Marpa's, but now I do. Reflecting deeply, I understand why Marpa said this to such a noble wisdom disciple as Milarepa, one who could undertake everything. Marpa had to think carefully about even a superior person like this, and therefore he told Milarepa he could not provide all three. If the teacher gives only teachings, the disciple is like a bee taking nectar from the flower. In the end, he goes his own way and there is no breaking of samaya. Probably this is the reason that food, clothing, and Dharma should not be given together.

Mila stayed for a few days and then went begging throughout all of upper and lower Lhodrak. He gathered twenty-one bushels of barley, and used fourteen of them to buy a four-handled copper pot. Packing six bushels in a sack, he returned to offer it to his lama, along with the pot. When he put the barley down, the room shook.

Marpa got up and said, "You're a strong little monk! Do you want to kill us by bringing down the house with your powerful hands? Take the barley out!" He pushed it hard with his foot, and Mila had to take it outside. Later, he offered Marpa the empty pot.

One day the guru told him, "I have many devoted disciples from U and Tsang. When they come, the men of Yamdrog Taklung and Lingpa attack them, stealing their provisions and offerings. Bring hailstorms on both places. That is also Dharma, and then I will give you instructions."

Mila sent great hailstorms to both places and requested teachings. Marpa answered, "For the three lumps of hail that you sent, do you expect the teachings that I brought back with such difficulty from India? If you want the Dharma no matter what, cast a spell on the hill people of Lhodrak. They not only attack my disciples who come from Nyaloro, but they treat me with great contempt. When signs of the spell's success appear, I will give you the great pandita Naropa's instructions on reaching buddahood in a single lifetime and a single body."

Signs of the spell's success appeared and Mila again asked for the Dharma. Marpa responded, "Ha ha! As a reward for the evil you have accumulated, are you saying you need these teachings that I searched for, regardless of my body and life, oral instructions warm with the breath of the dakinis? It must be a joke; I feel like laughing. Someone other than me would kill you. Now restore the harvest

of the people from Yamdrok, and bring the hill folk back to life. If you do this, I'll give you teachings; if not, don't stay around me anymore." Overwhelmed by this scolding, Mila wept many tears.

In the morning, the guru came to him, and said, "I was hard on you last night. Don't be unhappy. Slowly, I'll give you the teachings. Be patient. Since you put great effort into working, build me a house I can give to Dharma Dode. When it is finished I will bestow the teachings. I will also give you food and clothing."

"What if I die without the Dharma in the meantime?" Mila asked.

"I will take responsibility that you do not die," Marpa said. "My Dharma is not mere boasting. Since you have the highest degree of perseverance, if you can practice my teachings we will see whether you can attain buddhahood in this lifetime."

After more such encouragement, Marpa had Mila build three houses one after another: a circular one on the spur of the eastern mountain, a semicircular one in the west, and a triangular one in the north. Each time Mila half completed one of the houses, Marpa would scold him, make him tear it down and return the earth and stones to the place where he found them.

A wound appeared on Mila's back, but he thought, "If I show this to the guru, it will lead to more scolding. If I show it to his wife, it seems like making a fuss." Without showing the wound, but weeping, he asked Marpa's wife to help him request Dharma teaching. She asked that Marpa give him teaching, and he replied, "Feed him well and bring him here to me."

Giving Mila the transmission and vows of refuge, he said, "All of this is called the ordinary Dharma. If you want the oral instructions of the Secret Mantrayana, you must experience something like I will describe." He briefly recounted the life story of Naropa and the difficult hardships he went through, concluding, "You will have a hard time doing this."

Bursting into tears, intense devotion arose in Mila. He made a powerful vow to do whatever his lama asked of him.

A few days after this Marpa went for a walk, with Mila as his attendant. They went south-east and at a well-placed piece of land Marpa said, "Build me a nine-storey, square, gray tower, with a pinnacle on top, making ten. You won't have to tear it down, and when it is complete I will give you the instructions. I will also give you food when you

stay in retreat practice.”

After Mila had dug the foundation and started building, three of the guru's senior heart sons came by and for fun rolled up a large boulder which he placed in the foundation. When two storeys were finished, Marpa came to take a look. He asked where that boulder had come from, and Mila explained.

“My disciples practicing the two stages of yoga cannot be your servants! Take that boulder out and put it back where it came from!” Marpa shouted. From the top, Mila took down the tower, removed the boulder and returned it to its original place.

“Now bring it back and put it in again by yourself,” Marpa said, so Mila brought the boulder back and placed it as it was before. He continued building, and by the time he had completed the seventh storey he had a wound on his waist.

“Now stop building the tower, and build instead a temple with a twelve-pillared assembly hall and a raised sanctuary,” Marpa said. Mila built the temple, developing a wound on his lower back by the time it was finished.

At that time, Meton Tsonpo of Tsangrong asked for the empowerment of Samvara and Tsurton Wangde of Dol asked for the empowerment of Guhyasamaja. Both times, Mila hoped that he could receive the empowerments since he had finished his building work. But when he sat in the line for the empowerment, he received only scoldings and beatings from Marpa, and was thrown out of the line.

His entire back was covered in sores, with pus and blood running from three places. Despite the pain, however, he continued his building work, carrying baskets of earth in front of him.

Ngokton Chodor of Shung came to request the Hevajra empowerment, and Marpa's wife gave Mila a large turquoise from her personal wealth which he used as his empowerment offering. But, sitting in line for the empowerment, he was scolded and beaten as before, and did not receive the empowerment.

“I'm definitely not going to receive any Dharma,” he thought, and wandered off. A family in Lhodrag Khog hired him to read the “Transcendent Wisdom in Eight Thousand Verses,” and there he saw the story of Sadaprarudita. Thinking that for the sake of the Dharma, he had to accept all difficulties and please his guru by doing whatever he demanded, Mila returned.

Once again, Marpa only scolded and beat him. He fell into despair and Marpa's wife sent him to Lama Ngogpa, who gave him some instructions. Although he practiced, because he did not have his teacher's permission, not even the slightest positive quality developed. Marpa ordered him to serve Lama Ngogpa, and then to return.

During a feast offering one day, Marpa severely criticized Lama Ngogpa and others, and was about to beat them. Mila thought to himself, "Not only do I suffer from the great evil and obscurity of my negative karmic actions, but I am also causing trouble for Lama Ngogpa and my guru's consort. Since I am not receiving any Dharma, but am just accumulating more negativity, it would be better to kill myself."

He was getting ready to commit suicide and Lama Ngogpa was trying to stop him when Marpa calmed down again and called them to him. Accepting Mila as a disciple, he gave him much excellent advice and bestowed the name Mila Dorje Gyaltsen, "Adamantine Victory Banner."

When Marpa conferred on him the empowerment of Samvara, he made the mandala of sixty-two deities appear clearly, and Mila received the secret name Shepa Dorje, "Adamantine Laughter." Like the contents of one vase being poured into another, Marpa gave him all the empowerments and oral instructions. Later, practicing extreme austerities, Mila attained all the supreme and ordinary accomplishments.

This is how all the past scholars, accomplished masters, and knowledge holders of both India and Tibet relied upon authentic teachers as their virtuous friends. By doing whatever their teachers commanded, they achieved realization inseparable from their teachers.

Do not perceive any of the teacher's behavior in a negative way. In addition, if you do not follow him with a mind that is completely straightforward, free of deceit and pretence, if you tell him even the slightest lie, the fault is extremely heavy.

One time the disciple of a great accomplished master assembled many followers for a Dharma teaching. His teacher came dressed as a beggar, and, too embarrassed to prostrate to him in public, he pretended not to see him. In the evening, after the crowd was gone, he went to see his teacher and bowed down. The teacher asked why he didn't prostrate earlier.

"I didn't see you," the disciple lied, and both his eyes immediately fell

to the ground. Begging forgiveness, he spoke honestly. The master blessed him and restored his eyes.

Likewise, once the Indian mahasiddha Krishnacarya<sup>20</sup> was travelling in a ship on the sea together with many disciples, when he thought, “My lama is a truly accomplished master, but from the worldly standpoint of followers and wealth I am greater.” As soon as this thought arose, the ship sank into the ocean, and he was struggling in the water. He supplicated his teacher, who appeared in person and rescued him.

“This is the repayment for the great pride you developed,” the teacher said. “If I had tried to accumulate wealth and attendants, I would have had them just like you, but I decided not to do that.”

A fully qualified guru with all characteristics has the qualities of abandonment and realization. Since the quality of realization surpasses worldly qualities, realized masters can understand and carry out all worldly activities with no difficulty at all. There is nothing they cannot understand.

As they are diligently engaged in Dharma activities, however, they see no meaning in worldly activities, and therefore neglect them. Past accomplished masters like Jetsun Milarepa and the Omniscient Longchenpa did not take on the hardships of doing without food and clothing because they could not function in a worldly way. They saw that worldly activities were meaningless and thus ignored them, as the master in Patrul Rinpoche’s example said, “If I had tried to accumulate wealth and attendants, I would have had them just like you, but I decided not to do that.”

## CONCLUSION

Although inexpressibly many buddhas have appeared in the past, their compassion has not been able to save us and we still remain in the great ocean of samsaric suffering. Since ancient times inconceivable numbers of highly accomplished great beings have come but we have not been the objects of their compassionate regard, nor have we even had the good fortune of seeing their faces.

Now is the time when the teachings of the Buddha are coming to an end while the five degenerations are increasing. Although we have obtained the basic support of a human body, we are completely in the powerful grip of nonvirtue, confused about what to adopt and what

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20 Krishnacarya (Skt); nagpo spyod pa (Tib): one of the 84 mahasiddhas of India.

to abandon.

As we wander like the blind abandoned on an empty plain, our teachers, our excellent virtuous friends, consider us with immeasurable compassion, and appear in ordinary form according to our individual fortune. Although they are buddhas in their realization, their actions and behavior accord with our minds.

Through their skillful means they accept us as disciples, introduce us to the perfectly pure and sacred Dharma, open our eyes to what to adopt and what to abandon, and without mistake or confusion show us the supreme path to liberation and omniscience.

Truly no different from the actual Buddha, their kindness in caring for us surpasses the Buddha's. Therefore in all times and all situations strive to follow your teachers properly, with the three kinds of faith.

The three kinds of faith are clear faith, aspiring faith and confident faith. While practicing guru yoga, we visualize our lama in the form of Guru Rinpoche or a yidam deity like Manjushri. In reality "guru" means the lama from whom we receive empowerment, Dharma teaching and pith instructions. This is who we must supplicate in guru yoga. Abandoning our actual guru and supplicating Manjushri or Guru Rinpoche is not guru yoga. The text explains how to visualize Guru Rinpoche, Manjushri, or other deities, but thinking that we should supplicate them and not our own lama is not guru yoga. Guru yoga is supplicating those from whom we receive empowerment, teaching, and oral instructions.

Practicing without faith in our guru will never become true guru yoga. To give rise to the faith of seeing our lama – who may be ordained or a lay practitioner – as an actual buddha, we visualize him or her as Guru Rinpoche or Manjushri. We are actually supplicating the guru who gives us empowerment, teaching, and instructions.

We need not visualize the lama as Guru Rinpoche or Manjushri. With the faith that the lama is an actual buddha, we can visualize him as an ordained monk if he is ordained, or as a lay practitioner if he is not. If his complexion is dark, we can visualize him as dark; if he is fair, we can visualize him as fair; if young, as young; if old, as old, and so on. We can visualize him however he appears. This makes no difference at all. What is important is to have the faith of seeing the lama as an actual buddha. We visualize our lama in the form of a yidam deity simply to arouse the faith of seeing him as an actual buddha.

In this way, the teachings on How to Follow a Spiritual Teacher, and

guru yoga should be practiced together. Guru yoga is not simply sitting in a room and reciting the Vajra Guru mantra. Accepting whatever the lama says, whether it accords with the Dharma or not, is guru yoga. Naropa and Jetsun Milarepa practiced guru yoga in this way. Milarepa practiced guru yoga by building houses; house building was his guru yoga. For us as well, guru yoga is accepting and following the guru's instructions. We cannot say no benefit will arise from ignoring the lama's instructions and sitting in a room reciting mantra, but it is not guru yoga.

No one has taught that wisdom realization can develop in the mindstream without the true practice of guru yoga. Patrul Rinpoche does not teach this in the "Kunzang Lama'i Zhalung," and if you read texts of Sutra and Mantra in the future, they will also not teach this. Only Buddha Samantabhadra, the primordial buddha, achieved the wisdom realization without practicing guru yoga. He was the first buddha, and he showed all subsequent buddhas the path. No examples are found of anyone achieving realization without guru yoga practice and without following the guru. Nor can anyone prove through intellectual examination that realization can be achieved without following a guru and practicing guru yoga.

That is why we practice together the teachings on the extraordinary inner preliminary practice of guru yoga and this common outer preliminary practice on How to Follow a Spiritual Teacher. These practices are inseparable and must be combined. If we separate them, the practice is not authentic guru yoga.

Correctly following a spiritual teacher is the most important aspect of Dharma practice. Without following our spiritual teachers correctly, we will never achieve even the tiniest aspect of wisdom realization. That is why I have explained this over and over again. I am not saying that I have practiced this in a completely authentic way, and you have not. I encourage myself in the same way as I encourage others.

*Even though I have met a sublime being, I am deceived by my inferior behavior;*

*Even though I have encountered the supreme way, I wander onto the precipice of a wrong path.*

*May I and other beings of bad character like myself*

*Be blessed so that our mindstreams are tamed by the Dharma.*

This instruction on how to follow a spiritual teacher concludes the common preliminary practices.

