

Principles of Tantra

His Holiness the Sakya Trizin

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Tsechen Kunchab Ling
Temple of All-Encompassing Great Compassion
Seat of His Holiness the Sakya Trizin in the United States

12 Edmunds Lane
Walden, New York 12586

www.sakyatemple.org

+1-301-906-3378
sakya@sakyatemple.org

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Finding the Spiritual Master

Two kinds of beings inhabit this universe: inanimate beings and animate ones. “Inanimate” refers to beings that have no mental feelings, like rivers and mountains and so forth, while “animate” refers to humans and all other beings that have mental feelings. We humans belong to the animate class of beings, and our mental feelings are very powerful. There are many different kinds of human beings in numerous races and various cultures, each with their own views and beliefs, but there is one thing common to all: the wish to be free from suffering and to experience happiness. Furthermore, there is no disagreement to be found on this; everyone agrees on this aim. Regardless of our race, or whether we are believers or nonbelievers, everyone strives to be free from suffering and to attain happiness. Every individual, society, government, and country aims for this.

For the sake of human happiness, humankind has made enormous progress in science and technology. We have gained great benefit from these advances. However, it is quite clear that material progress alone cannot secure for us the true peace and happiness we seek. In order to attain true happiness, it is important that we undergo internal or

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spiritual development. To attain happiness, it is important that we make both material and spiritual progress.

How then can we progress in the spiritual field? The basis for our spiritual development is our buddha nature. The Buddha said that every sentient being possesses buddha nature. This means that the true nature of our minds is pure—naturally pure—right from the beginning. However, at the moment, we do not see the true nature of our minds, which is covered with delusions and obscurations. These obscurations are not in the nature of the mind. They are only temporary, and we can free ourselves from them. If they were in the nature of the mind, then we would not be able to eliminate them. No matter how much we try to wash coal, for example, it will never become white. Yet with the right remedies, we can remove our mental obscurations. For example, a white cloth covered with dirt will not reveal that it is white until the proper method of washing it with soap and water is applied and all of the dirt is washed away. That is to say, our minds are naturally pure and the obscurations are only temporary. Fortunately, there are methods for eliminating the defilements permanently.

Therefore, if we apply the correct methods and efforts, even as ordinary people, we can eliminate our obscurations and thus realize the true nature of our minds. We can attain the absolute goal, which is real peace and happiness. Even if we do not reach the ultimate realization of our goal, our ongoing efforts to progress spiritually will bring us many benefits, and can give us experiences of deep peace and happiness.

The very first condition that will allow us to grow

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spiritually is faith; specifically, faith in the teachings. By faith, we do not mean blind faith. Faith means that through our own careful investigations, we come to the irrefutable conclusion that the teachings are genuine. Without this first condition, it is impossible for us to develop any virtuous qualities or to accomplish any virtuous deeds. We are like a roasted seed, unable to sprout even when placed in soil. So too we cannot develop any virtuous qualities without faith.

According to the teachings, there are three kinds of faith: clear faith, aspiration, and trust. The first is called clear faith. When we perceive the great qualities of the Buddha, his teachings, and the community, all of our confusion is cleared and our mind is refreshed. Clear faith is similar in nature to that of a person who, suffering from heat, remembers mountain snow or a cold landscape and so experiences refreshment.

The second kind of faith is called aspiration. This refers to one's aspiration to achieve spiritual attainment and to acquire virtuous qualities for one's own sake as well as that of others. Just as the only goal of a thirsty elephant in a hot climate is to find water, so our only aspiration is to attain spiritual realization.

Finally, the third kind of faith is called trust. This refers to trust in the teachings of the Buddha, particularly in the law of cause and effect, and in the good qualities of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. This is like a mother and child who meet after a long separation, and still instinctively trust each other.

A human being endowed with these three kinds of faith has developed unshakable faith in the teachings thorough investigation and analysis, and will not be tempted to forsake the teachings of the Bud-

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dha due to the usual causes of abandoning the spiritual path.

There are four causes of abandoning the spiritual path. First, the desire for worldly attainments like wealth or fame can lead us to leave the spiritual path. The second cause is hatred: the rise of anger in one's mind toward someone can move us to abandon the path. Fear is the third cause of leaving the spiritual path. For example, if remaining on the spiritual path might give rise to an undesirable circumstance like the loss of our life, this could instigate us to abandon the path. The fourth and last cause is ignorance. By this we mean the ignorance of not knowing what to adopt and what to abandon. This lack of clarity takes us away from the spiritual path.

In order to eliminate these four causes of abandoning the spiritual path, we need to fully realize their futility and the harm that they cause us. In the case of the first cause, desire, we need to remember that no matter how much we attain in our worldly lives, or how high a position we reach, this is only temporary and is not really beneficial. There is no comparison to be made between material benefit and spiritual benefit. As for the second cause, hatred, this is the worst defilement that we can harbor. Even the merits that have been accumulated over thousands of eons can be lost by giving way to anger even for a single moment. By always remembering the terrible harm that anger can cause, we can eliminate it. Fear, the third cause, can be eradicated by realizing that no matter what harm we face by remaining on the spiritual path—even if it results in the loss of our own life—it can never be as dire as the fall into the lower realms caused by abandonment of the spiritual path. To eliminate the fourth cause,

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ignorance, we need to always be conscious of what keeps us on the path, and what takes us away from it, and to abide by these criteria. Therefore, the very first thing that we must do on the spiritual path is to establish faith, unshakable faith that will utterly subdue these four causes. This immovable faith will become the basis for all our virtuous qualities.

If we are to embark on the spiritual path, it is equally important and crucial to find a teacher or a spiritual master who can guide us along the way. Even when we undertake an ordinary task, such as acquiring a new skill or going on a journey, the assistance of an experienced guide or teacher is essential. Without this, one can easily learn wrong methods and even go astray. This is particularly relevant in the spiritual field. Knowledge of the spiritual path is not within the reach of ordinary people; it is beyond our comprehension. Therefore, it is imperative that we find the right kind of spiritual guidance when we embark on the spiritual path.

There are different classes of spiritual masters, endowed with varying characteristics and qualifications. We can qualify the masters according to the level of vows that they have taken. There are three such levels of vows. First is the prātimokṣa vow, according to which we pledge to abstain from negative deeds. This vow is taken with a view to our own personal liberation. The bodhisattva vow entails not only abstaining from negative deeds but also striving toward liberation for the sake of other beings. Finally the Vajrayāna or tantric vow is the highest level of vow, and this is where the supreme methods are used to gain liberation for the sake of others.

The master who has taken all three of these vows is the highest kind of master that one can find. Find-

ing the spiritual master is the source of all qualities, but it is not enough to find this master. We also need to follow his instructions, much like we would a doctor's. In order to recover from an illness, we need to find a good doctor, and we need to follow his advice. Otherwise, even if we have the best doctor possible, we will never recover from our illness. So not only is it vital to find the right spiritual master, but it is equally important that we follow his or her instructions.

When we choose a spiritual master, it is essential that we be very careful. We need to evaluate him or her thoroughly before taking them as our guide. Even in worldly life, when we undertake something new, we need to evaluate the different ways to proceed. If we are thinking about buying a house, we have to compare different houses, look at the positive and negative attributes of each, and see which one is more advantageous financially, and so forth. Only after such careful investigation can we decide which house to buy. We must utilize the same tools of evaluation when finding a spiritual master.

Compared to this, of course, decisions regarding our spiritual life are far more important. Buying a new house, or any new thing is something that will be part of our life for a hundred years at best. So if we make a mistake, it will not be harmful for too long a time. But in the spiritual path, if we make a mistake, then not only are we hampered during this lifetime, but also for many subsequent lives. Hence, finding the right spiritual path and the right spiritual guide is the most important thing that we can do.

In ancient times, there were many teachings in place to guide disciples on ways to evaluate teachers and for teachers to evaluate disciples. Only when

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both teacher and disciple were satisfied with each other's qualities did they establish a teacher-disciple relationship. This preliminary evaluation is essential, as it can be very dangerous for a teacher and a disciple to establish a relationship before a proper evaluation has been carried out. This is especially important for the disciple, for whom falling into the wrong hands can be a great detriment. Finding the right spiritual master is extremely important.

The teachings state that there are several levels of spiritual masters: superior, inferior, mediocre, and so forth. They classify these levels according to their qualifications. But whatever level a master belongs to, the minimum requirement that he or she should satisfy is that of good discipline or right moral conduct, because moral conduct is the foundation of all qualities. This moral conduct should not limit itself to appearances, but must be genuine.

The second requirement that a teacher should fulfill is that of wisdom acquired from knowledge and from meditation. If a teacher is not endowed with deep rooted knowledge and understanding of the sūtras and tantras, then he cannot pass them on to his or her disciples.

The third requirement is compassion. The teacher must be motivated by compassion for his disciples. He or she must feel genuine desire for them to become free from ignorance, to abstain from negative deeds, and to practice virtuous deeds. In this dark-age, it is difficult to find the perfect teacher. However, a teacher who does actualize these three requirements, whose moral qualities are highly developed and whose faults are minimal, qualifies as suitable.

Especially in the Vajrayāna teachings, the teach-

er is absolutely essential. If we try to learn tantra on our own or through books, can actually cause more harm than benefit. Vajrayāna is the most advanced teaching of the Buddha, and can only be received through the direct transmission of an unbroken lineage that originated with Buddha Vajradhara and has been passed on from one master to another until the present. It is not only the words and their meanings that are conveyed in the teachings. More importantly, it is the blessing that is transmitted from one person to another. Without this blessing, it is impossible to practice any of the tantric teachings or to attain any of its results. It can, in fact, be very harmful. This is why the Vajrayāna teachings place so much importance on the spiritual master.

The sun shines brightly in the sky every day, but if we want to channel and maximize its energy, we need certain instruments. Similarly, the blessings of the Buddha shower on sentient beings all the time. But, without proper instruments, we cannot receive these blessings. Due to our lack of merit brought about by our negative deeds, we cannot see the Buddha in person. The guru is the instrument that helps channel and maximize the Buddha's blessings. The guru appears to us in ordinary form, and through him or her, we can hear the teachings of the Buddha and thereby receive his blessings.

Again, it is extremely important in Vajrayāna to find a teacher and to thoroughly investigate his qualities. Once we are convinced that he is a genuine spiritual master, then we can take him as our teacher and receive Vajrayāna teachings and initiations from him. Once we have established a master-disciple relationship with a teacher, we should never break our bond with our teacher and we should nev-

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er abandon our faith in him no matter what circumstances may arise. Even if we see faults in our master, we should never see these as faults. Whatever faults we see in the guru, we should see as our own faults. It is much like the moon's reflection on water: if the water is clear, the reflection of the moon is also clear. If the water is muddy, then the moon's reflection is blurred. If, due to our obscurations, we find fault with the master, we should always remember to look at this as our own shortcoming, our own fault, not that of the guru.

There are many wonderful stories about ancient Indian masters. These great mahāsiddhas often displayed outlandish behavior and did weird things—very weird things. The disciples who lost faith in their master did not progress on the spiritual path, while those who did not lose their faith in their master experienced spiritual attainment.

There is much talk about root lamas. According to the Vajrayāna teachings, a root lama or guru is someone who bestows the major initiations on us, as well as the tantric teachings and pith instructions. This is our root guru. In actuality, we can have several root gurus. Then, among these, we can also have a very special root guru, for instance, our karmic link guru. This is our most important guru, someone with whom we have a karmic connection or who has been our guide through the course of many lifetimes. If we have such a guru, it is essential that we never cease to feel intense devotion for him and that we never lose faith in him, whatever happens. Even if our root guru is just an ordinary person and not a realized being, if we as a disciple see him as the Buddha, then we can receive the blessings of the Buddha, because both he and we are endowed with

buddha nature.

As explained, it is very important in the Vajrayāna or tantric teachings, to find the right guru and, after finding him or her, to establish a strong karmic connection. Without this, it is impossible to make any spiritual progress. It is clearly mentioned in the teachings that it can be very dangerous to practice tantra on our own without depending on a spiritual master who can bestow upon us the unbroken transmission of blessings. Lack of a teacher can cause us to fall into the lower realms. In every tradition, Hinayana, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna, finding the spiritual master and following him in the right way is the source of all good qualities. This is particularly true in the Vajrayāna path, where the unbroken lineage of transmission from the Buddha Vajradhara to us is an essential practice. The spiritual master who gives us this transmission is the one who clears away all of our obscurations and confusion and who leads us on the path to liberation. I pray that everyone finds the right spiritual master and successfully establishes the karmic links with him or her that allow them to receive all the blessings of the Buddha.



The Essence of Tantra

In his infinite compassion, wisdom and power, the Lord Buddha Shakyamuni gave innumerable teachings aimed at helping countless beings with their infinitely diverse dispositions. These teachings can be classified according to two approaches: the Śrāvākayāna, and the Mahāyāna. The former is concerned with individual salvation, while the latter stresses the universal ideal of the bodhisattva, a being intent on attaining enlightenment for the sake of all beings and who has vowed to remain in samsara until liberation is won for all beings.

Mahāyāna itself may be further divided into the Paramitayāna, or Perfection Vehicle, also known as Cause Vehicle—according to which the bodhisattva cultivates moral perfection as a cause for future buddhahood. Also, the Mantrayāna, or Mantra Vehicle, also known as Result Vehicle, whereby one realizes wisdom or gnosis through following certain practices. While both vehicles were practiced widely in Tibet, Mantrayāna and its four classes of tantra—kriya, charya, yoga and anuttarayoga—were especially prized. They were seen as a precious jewel whose purity was preserved through the development of a cohesive monastic tradition and isolated from the

external world.

The word tantra is seldom used in Tibetan Buddhism, and usually refers to the body of tantric scriptures. The terms *Mantrayāna* or *Vajrayāna* are more commonly used in reference to a doctrinal system. The term *Vajrayāna* refers to the spiritual path that is immutable—the Diamond Vehicle that leads to the realization of the enlightenment mind, and that is ever present, although currently obscured by our ignorance. Etymologically, the word tantra may be understood as a continuum, a thread or lineage that gives continuity to the teachings, much like the genetic code that determines the form insects, birds, and all sentient creatures take at birth. So tantra, in the Buddhist sense, may be understood as that genetic code that links our buddha nature through successive incarnations until enlightenment is attained. And so a *Vajrayāna* initiation in one lifetime may result in a rebirth as a Buddhist or as one who embarks on the bodhisattva path.

The tantras are sacred texts that have no temporal beginning. They do not originate in the human realm. Buddhist and Hindu tantras share many similarities but also have many differences. The tantras propounded by Shakyamuni Buddha, such as the *Hevajra Tantra*, the *Kalachakra Tantra* and the *Guhyasamaja Tantra*, find their origin in his very words as revealed to him by AdiBuddha Vajradhara. It is through the practice of these tantras that the Buddha attained enlightenment.

Although tantrism is a method common to both Hinduism and Buddhism, there are many differences in substance and detail between the two. The complementary character of Buddhist and Hindu tantras developed as alternative ways to seek release

from the bondage of samsara. There is some speculation that tantrism goes back to the pre-Aryan era, to the earliest known phase of Indian civilization. Scholars believe that it originated in northwest India, and that it spread through the Himalayan foothills to the entire Indian subcontinent. Many of the tantric deities began as local gods and goddesses that were incorporated into the tantric system. The system was widely practiced by both religions in the 4th and 5th centuries A.D. and reached its peak in India in the 10th and 11th centuries.

According to some Tibetan and Indian scholars, several of the eighty-four Buddhist mahāsiddha were actually Hindu mahāsiddha. A case in hand would be the great Buddhist Mahasiddha Luipa, whom some sources quote as being the Hindu Mahasiddha Matsyendra. These “perfected ones” were collectively known in Indian and Tibetan histories as the eighty-four siddhas. It is to their biographies that we must turn if we are to understand the oral transmission of the earliest tantras. Tantra is a method, a technique. Its earliest practitioners were not interested in labels, any more that a nuclear physicist cares about his nationality when he compares notes with a foreign colleague. They were concerned with method and debated the efficacy of their respective techniques. Many Hindu practitioners were eventually persuaded to adopt the Mahāyāna view.

There were many schools of Hindu tantrism in ancient India, wherein philosophical views differed widely, ranging all the way from nihilism to materialism. Here, however, the word tantra may be understood in the Hindu sense of interwovenness, much as the threads of a fabric are metaphors for the complementary union of the male and female

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principles of cosmic passivity and power.

We are not well-versed in Hindu tantrism and can only speak with authority about our own tradition. Buddhist and Hindu tantras share a similar technology in which there is an orderly structure that is in keeping with the esoteric connective tissue of macrocosm and microcosm. But although they share a methodology, Hindu and Buddhist tantras differ radically in their philosophies.

In Hindu tantra, the focus is placed on the female Shakti as the spiritual basis of our world, which is her manifestation. Liberation means casting off the limitations set by human birth. The self's ultimate union with God or Brahman may be obtained during one's mortal life by means of the body, when the internal Shakti reaches union with the internal Shiva. Liberation arises from the merging of the inner universal principle (*atman*) with the external principle (*brahman*). The identity of the self or the individual soul (*jiva*) with the absolute is a tenet of Vedic and Hindu belief. Brahman is considered to be a self-existent entity, an eternal unchanging essence of reality.

On the other hand, we find that in the Buddhist tantras, the consort is referred to as *prajñā* or insight or wisdom. The terms *yogini* or female yogic practitioner, *vidyā* or knowledge, *mudra* or seal, and *devī* or goddess refer to the female principle. The goddess as the Perfection of Wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*) appears as the final truth of emptiness (*śūnyatā*). Omniscient knowledge has compassion (*karunā*) as its root. It has the enlightenment mind as its nature. It has the vow of the bodhisattva as its motivation, and it contains the means for the result. The two: wisdom and compassion, are identified with the per-

fections of the bodhisattva and the intermingling of nirvana and samsara, so that when this wisdom is combined with means or method, it is no longer passive but appears in its fully active form. As the Lord Buddha Shakyamuni was a kshatriya, some of the rituals of the Buddhist tantras may be traced back to the old Vedic rituals, such as the fire ritual, and to the Upanishads.

But again, while the practices may be similar in form, the philosophies behind them vary radically. Buddhists see reality as having no ultimate self-existence and no true self-nature. The three kayas of a buddha are associated with the spiritual and external spheres of the cosmological map and also with certain places in the human body. At the vertical body of the mandala, mind is preeminent among the five skandhas, while the other four are visualized at the cardinal compass points. We meditate on the heavenly and earthly divinities within the body, but the most important thing is that we take the generation of the enlightenment mind as the very foundation of our practice.

In all the Mahāyāna schools, enlightenment mind is the root cause for the spiritual path. The human body contains the nature of the dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, and the nirmanakaya as the three bodies of our enlightened buddha nature, but without the generation of enlightenment thought, no result can arise. These are some of the essential differences between the Buddhist and Hindu views.

In the Buddhist tantras, the union of prajñā and karuṇā, insight and compassion, produces the fullness of cosmic awareness through the meeting of opposites. It is central to the notion of sacred and profane when these are viewed in the mirror of the

clear light of mind itself.

The mind has many facets. Its foundation is the all-base consciousness, which is called in Tibetan *kunshi* or *ālaya* in Sanskrit. This is the basis upon which both *samsara* and *nirvana* are built. It is the clear aspect of mind itself. It does not focus on other things but rests in perception of itself, as it has done from beginning-less time and will do until enlightenment is reached.

Mahayanists believe that we should enter neither *samsara* nor *nirvana*, but that we should follow the middle path. Through the power of our wisdom, we do not remain in *samsara*, and through the power of our compassion, we do not remain in *nirvana*. When we attain enlightenment, which we call non-abiding *nirvana*, we are free from suffering but we remain in *samsara* out of compassion for beings who are trapped in it, and we help them.

In Buddhist metaphysics, the philosophical view of emptiness, or *śūnyatā*, is paramount to achieving liberation. If we realize that reality has no ultimate self-existence and that all appearances arise from the mind, we attain the view of the nonduality of *samsara* and *nirvana*. We clearly see that *samsara* is *nirvana*, and we enter into direct contact with our buddha nature, and enlightenment becomes within reach in this very lifetime.

Vajrayāna is a method. Its primary intention and its final goal are the same as those of the Mahāyāna, but it provides a methodology of far greater efficacy in that it calls for us to use both our mind and body in its practice. It is the most sophisticated technology available for attaining liberation. It is a bit like traveling by airplane rather than by train. For as an airplane needs many conditions in order to fly:

fuel, air, a reliable engine, an efficient design and so forth; likewise, when we seek realization through Vajrayāna we need to exert ourselves assiduously to fulfill all of the necessary requisites for the attainment of the result. Preeminent among these requisites is our personal, daily meditation on the two stages of creation and completion and the visualization of the mandala and the deity. The recitation of mantras, the practice of physical yogas such as the breathing yoga, the yoga of inner heat, the dream yoga and meditative postures, the nurturing of the enlightenment mind, and the cultivation of ethical conduct are also crucial factors.

After we receive a vajrayāna initiation, there are many vows that we need to keep, in addition to both the monastic prātimokṣa vows and the Mahāyāna vows. There are also tantric vows, without which no practice can be effective. It is much like a farmer looking after his crops. If he is to have the right conditions for a good harvest, he must protect his crop from adverse elements like hailstorms or floods. He must ensure that the soil is properly fertilized and he must provide it with sufficient sunlight and water, and so forth. In the same way, when we seek spiritual results, we need to set the right conditions. If we practice correctly, then the attainment of the view of the nondifferentiation of samsara and nirvana will naturally arise, and with it the mundane and supramundane siddhis that enable us to help other beings.

The tantric method used in Tibet was very sophisticated and carefully systematized so that sincere and able practitioners were guaranteed results, provided they had the enlightenment mind as their root motivation. As was mentioned earlier, gener-

ation of the enlightenment mind is central to both Mahāyāna and vajrayāna practice. The three foundations are love, compassion and the generation of enlightenment mind or bodhicitta. All practice must arise from selflessness. Love means that we want all beings in all realms of existence to be happy; compassion is the wish that sentient beings should be free from suffering; and the generation of the enlightenment mind is the pursuit of enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Without love and compassion, the enlightenment mind will not arise. Without the enlightenment mind, liberation cannot be attained. If the enlightenment mind is like a seed that we plant, love and compassion are like the water that we pour on it while it grows to fruition.

Chandrakīrti wrote in the Madhyamakāvātāra that the śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas are born of the Buddha, while the Buddha is born of the bodhisattva, and the bodhisattva is born of love and compassion—especially from compassion. And so he paid special homage to compassion, without which the root cause of enlightenment cannot arise. This then, is why we meditate on some father and mother tantras, wherein the deities are in union, the union of wisdom and compassion.

During the period of Buddhism's greatest flowering in ancient India, there was a vast tantric tradition related to the practice of the mandala. The term *mantra* may be defined as a method for protecting the mind against conceptualization, or concepts that possess certain marks or characteristics. The efficacy of Vajrayāna rests upon many factors, the most important one of which is the line of direct transmission of initiation or abhiseka which has been unbroken since the Lord Shakyamuni Buddha set into mo-

tion the wheel of Dharma. The term *mandala* may be briefly defined as a method by which one can reach and maintain the spontaneous coemergent wisdom of great bliss that is always present within the mind. In order to enter into the practice of the mandala, one must receive an initiation, a consecration.

Transmission is particularly important in Vajrayāna as the guru is part of a lineage of teachers who have received direct transmission originating from the Adi-Buddha Vajradhara, the Buddha under whom all the five Buddha families can be subsumed. This direct unbroken blessing must be received before the special ripening can occur. It is said in the tantras that, if we wish to receive a transmission, we need to find the guru with whom we have a special karmic connection, and who has all the qualifications to teach the tantras. When we find this guru, we should receive transmissions and explanations from him.

The guru is seen as a priest who confers upon us initiation into the mysteries of religion. The efficacy of initiation is that it purifies appearances relating to the defilements that hinder the essential nature of great bliss that resides in the mind. It has the capacity for that awakening that makes one a fitting vessel for contemplating the clear light. The continuity of the Vajrayāna initiation has been maintained through an unbroken transmission that serves to mature the practitioner and lead him or her to liberation.

We must receive the teaching on the five Buddha families in the form of a wang kur (dbang bskur ba, or empowerment), the transmission or permission to practice tantra. After receiving the transmission, we must fulfill its obligations and learn to see ourselves

very clearly as the result. Then, because of the special connection between cause and result, the result will naturally arise. A major empowerment is never given to a person who does not have the capacity to generate the enlightenment mind.

If, in Mahāyāna, one must not practice without a teacher, this is all the more true of Vajrayāna. In this day and age, most teachings are written down; nevertheless, they must always be taught orally. One cannot obtain any result by merely studying a text. In Vajrayāna, it is necessary to receive the wang kur, which is the door to tantra, and without which one cannot undertake its practice. In many cases, a clear sign appears when we find the guru with whom we have a karmic link. The moment the great Sakya teacher Tsarchen heard of the Sakya teacher Doringpa, he felt an immediate and compelling urge to meet him then and there.. Vajrayogini, the female deity, appeared to him and gave him a book saying "This book was sent to you by Doringpa." Tsarchen then asked around to find where Doringpa was and made the effort to meet him. When he received the consecration and instructions from him, he achieved far greater results than ever before. Generally speaking, there is an unmistakable sign that indicates when we have found our guru.

Mahāyāna is referred to as the causal path or yāna, because within it we strive to practice moral conduct in order to create the right causes for liberation. Vajrayāna is called the result yāna because from the beginning we visualize ourselves as the Buddha in one form or another. By practicing visualization in this way, the immense qualities of the Buddha will automatically arise in our being. Our entire organism actually is the pure Buddha and al-

ways has been, but because we are wrapped in illusion, we are not able to see it.

This is not an arbitrary conclusion. We have the example of countless others who have purified their obscurations and achieved enlightenment using these methods. There are many tendencies or predispositions that need to be transformed because they are the cause of much suffering. These have no base in the ālaya or base consciousness—consequently they can be the cause of much suffering. We can take as an example the transformation of sexual energies. As such, these are conventionally regarded as hindrances to the spiritual path, but if correctly used, they can help us immensely. In fact, there is no such thing as impurity. Impurities appear because we have not realized the true nature of our minds and we are still thinking in terms of subject and object.

There are infinite numbers of Buddhas of all types, but they can be divided into five categories, which represent the five qualities of the Buddha. Although these five can be included in the single one, the teachings of the five different types of buddhas provide a basis from which to begin. We imagine a mandala that contains the five Dhyani Buddhas, all of whom have attained enlightenment as Buddha Shakyamuni did, in one eon or another. Four of them are placed at the four cardinal points and one is placed at the center of the mandala. The Buddha at the center is dark blue and is called *Abṣobhya*, or the Unmoving One. In the east is the white Buddha Vairocana, the One Who Creates Appearances. In the south is yellow Ratnasambhava, the One Who has the Nature of a Gem, and in the west is red Amītabha which means Limitless Light. In the north

is green Amoghasiddhi, the One Who is Skilled in Accomplishing All Possible Acts.

They are all in the form of Buddha Shakyamuni, except that they have different hand gestures. Akṣobhya touches the earth in the bhumispara mudra, while Vairocana's hands are in the gesture of teaching. Ratnasambhava displays the gesture of giving; Amitābha, the gesture of meditation; and Amoghasiddhi holds up his right hand to show the crossed Vajra on his palm, the gesture of fearlessness. These five deities and their colors are related to the five most common defilements that we are afflicted with as a result of the obscurations of our human condition: blue Akṣobhya is related to anger, white Vairocana to ignorance, yellow Ratnasambhava to pride and miserliness, red Amitābha to desire and green Amoghasiddhi to envy. There are also marks of the five Buddha races on the bodies of beings. Persons who are often angry will have a mark similar to a vajra on their body, and they can clearly be recognized as belonging to the Vajra family of Akṣobhya. Since the Buddha Akṣobhya represents the complete transformation of anger, these persons will succeed with particular ease and swiftness in purifying their defilements if they practice the path related to Akṣobhya. In the Vajrayāna, we never regard any particular defilement such as anger or desire as something to be repressed, but rather we see the energies tied up in the defilements as material to be purified and transformed into the five Buddhas, each of whom is the embodiment of a particular aspect of wisdom.

This is another reason why we call Vajrayāna the result path. There are limitless beings with different tastes and predispositions. In order to suit beings

of different temperaments, the transcendental wisdom of the Buddha has taken different forms. People with strong desire meditate on deities in a passionate form, embracing consorts surrounded by many goddesses. For people with much hatred, there are meditations on deities in very wrathful forms. Those with much ignorance can meditate on very elaborate deities with many jewels and ornaments. Actually, these are all different aspects of the same transcendental wisdom.

Transcendental wisdom is divine wisdom, the power and energy of the Buddha. Many of the tantras were given by Lord Buddha Shakyamuni, including the *Hevajra Tantra*, upon which the main Sakya practice of Lamdre is founded. This is an extensive teaching incorporating all the practices of Theravada, Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna. In our tradition, it was transmitted directly by Hevajra's consort Nairatmya to Virupa, the great Indian mahasiddha and sage from Nalanda, and was later brought to Tibet by the translator Drogmi, who lived between 978 and 1072 CE.

The Lamdre or Path as Result, is a vast teaching based on the empowerment and practice of the *Hevajra Tantra*. It includes the philosophy of tantra as well as all of the tantric practices such as the yoga of inner heat, the yoga of dreams, breathing practices, and so forth. Many other traditions of tantra practiced by the mahāsiddha and pandits of ancient India have specific transmissions that were introduced into Tibet by the translators and have been upheld to the present day.

One such transmission is the Vajramala, or Vajra Rosary, which came from the great Indian master Avayakara Gupta, who was blessed by a vision of

the deity Vajrayogini on three occasions. Avayakara Gupta was a great pandit endowed with the highest capabilities. He had seen the nature of reality, he had received direct inspiration from the deity, and he was immensely learned. It is on the basis of these criteria that he composed the collection of scriptures known as the Vajramala. Avalokiteshvara conferred many outer, inner, and secret teachings upon him. These teachings served as the basis on which Avayakara Gupta composed treatises relating to nearly two hundred different mandalas. These have come down to us to the present day without any break in their transmission.

There are also many special esoteric teachings, such as those of Naropa on vajrayogini and the eleven yogas, those of Mahakala, and especially those of Vajrakilaya from the old Nyingmapa tradition, which our family still upholds. There is also sarvavidya, which is used for the dying and the dead, Vajrabhairava, the wrathful form of Manjushri from the Golden Dharmas and many others. But most of the basic Sakya teachings from the preparation stage to the attainment of enlightenment are included in the Lamdre. Other transmissions including the collections of Avayakara Gupta and Mindra Yogin can be found in the Collection of Tantras (rgyud sde kun btus) which, in addition to those already mentioned, includes collections from other traditions.

As the tantras were in danger of being lost, the publication of the compendium of the Collection of Tantras was initiated in the nineteenth century by Jamyang Loter Wangpo. He supervised the preparation of thirty-two volumes, which were the result of centuries of meticulous collecting by encyclopedists. He himself was considered to be an emanation of Va-

jrapani, the Lord of Secrets, who held and protected the teachings of Shakyamuni, and he is said to have been the one who gathered and preserved essential teachings in this degenerate age. Jamyang Loter Wangpo's qualities and learning were inconceivably vast.

Why do we find liberation through the practice of Vajrayāna? The motivation with which Lord Buddha taught us to pursue the bodhisattva ideal is the cause that actually takes us to liberation, and the continuity of its blessing has never been interrupted since the Adi-Buddha Vajradhara until the present day. A succession of teachers have scrupulously maintained the purity of the Lord Buddha's essential teaching on the nondifferentiation of samsara and nirvana and have made available to others an immense variety of methods to help beings with different personalities gain realization. As they were themselves intent on enlightenment, their blessings have resulted in a rain of wisdom for those who pursue the bodhisattva ideal.



Embarking on the Tantric Path

The tantric path begins as the Buddhist path. There is no important philosophical difference between tantric Buddhism and Mahāyāna Buddhism—the difference is one of emphasis and method. Let us first look at the practical beginning of the tantric path. It is said that the tantric path begins as the Buddhist path, so it is not surprising that the first step on the tantric path is the taking of refuge. In the Tibetan tantric tradition, refuge is taken with a qualified guru who represents a recognized spiritual lineage. In a sense, the act of taking refuge is an initiation. First and foremost it represents an initiation into the Buddhist religion and it is the first step that we take on the Buddhist path to liberation.

The reasons for taking refuge in the Triple Gem are three: fear, faith and compassion. Fear, in the sense that we take refuge in the Triple Gem out of fear of the suffering of samsara; faith, meaning that we believe that only the Triple Gem has the power to relieve us from the suffering of samsara; compassion, because, just as we fear the suffering of samsara, so do all other living beings. And so we take refuge in the Triple Gem for the sake of all living beings.

The next step on the tantric path is the production of the enlightenment thought (*bodhicitta*). The

creation of the enlightenment thought is closely connected to the vows of the bodhisattva. In brief, the essence of the bodhisattva's practice is the altruistic wish to benefit all living beings. Like the taking of refuge, the creation of the enlightenment thought is a necessary preliminary to the practice of the tantric path.

The following step is to reflect on death, impermanence and the human condition. We should recognize that the happiness and favorable circumstances that we enjoy at the present moment are not permanent. These will all disappear at the time of death and, moreover, there is no certainty as to when death will occur. Reflecting on death and impermanence encourages us to practice the Dharma without delay.

Next, we should understand the law of karma, or the law of cause and effect, and its relation to our actions. We should come to realize that good actions such as generosity and compassion are the cause of happiness, while unwholesome actions like selfishness and hatred are the cause of suffering. As there is no way of avoiding the good or bad results of actions, we should strive to do only good actions and to avoid unwholesome ones.

In the Tibetan tantric tradition, certain preliminary practices are usually performed before entering the tantric path itself. There are four main preliminary practices. The first is the recitation of the refuge prayer one hundred thousand times. The second is the recitation of the one-hundred syllable Vajrasattva mantra one hundred thousand times. The third is the recitation of a prayer to the guru one hundred thousand times. The last is performing one hundred thousand mandala offerings, by which one

symbolically offers the entire universe for the sake of one's spiritual progress.

The first part of the preliminary practices serves to set us firmly on the Buddhist path. The second is meant to purify us of past and present negative tendencies. The third establishes a strong bond between ourselves and our guru, while the last helps to rid us of selfish tendencies through the symbolic act of giving, while enabling us to accumulate the merit necessary to be successful on the path. After completing all these preliminaries, we may ask the guru for initiation into the meditational practices associated with one of the tantric tutelary deities, which are emanations of the Buddha. Initiation into these practices must be given by a qualified guru who represents a recognized spiritual lineage. Tantric initiation enables us to visualize and identify ourselves with the purified universe of the tutelary deity, the symbolic representation of the enlightened experience.

The similarity that is seen to exist between Hindu and Buddhist tantra has occasionally led some to assume that what originally distinguished Buddhist philosophy from its Hindu counterpart was forsaken with the development of tantra. This, however, is not true, because tantra is concerned with the means of achieving spiritual progress, not with philosophy. So the similarity between Hindu and Buddhist tantric practices is not an indication of Hindu and Buddhist philosophies merging. The fact, for example, that a number of terms and deities are shared by Hindu and Buddhist tantra, does not mean that tantric Buddhism has strayed from the essence of Buddhist thought. For instance, although a number of terms like *svabhāva* and *ātman* that are commonly found

in Hinduism also occur in Buddhist tantric writings, they do not have the same meaning. The term *svabhāva* which in Hinduism means “the existence of an independent nature”, is used in Buddhist tantra to emphasize the emptiness of all things. Thus it is said that the nature of all things is emptiness. Similarly, the term *ātman* or “self”, is merely used to identify one with emptiness.

The fact that several deities are worshiped by both Hindus and Buddhists does not mean that Buddhist philosophy has lost its distinctive character. In the first place, the Hindu deities included in the Buddhist tantric pantheon are deities of lesser importance. Secondly, since both Buddhism and Hinduism developed within the Indian cultural context, it is not surprising that a number of deities should be adopted by both traditions. Such deities are in themselves neither Buddhist nor Hindu, but belong to Indian culture. In short, tantra is concerned with methodology more than with philosophy. Not only Buddhist and Hindu, but Jain and even Islamic tantric practices show many similarities. Despite the similarities between Buddhist and Hindu tantric practices, tantric Buddhism has always retained its own philosophical view.

It was mentioned above that there is no important philosophical difference between tantric Buddhism and Mahāyāna Buddhism. Mahāyāna Buddhism contains two principal philosophical schools—that of mind and that of emptiness. These schools were explained at length by Asanga and Nāgārjuna, who are recognized by the Tibetan tantric tradition as the fathers of Buddhist tantra as we know it. And hence, there are two chief elements in Buddhist tantric philosophy—mind and emptiness. The focus on

the importance of mind is the starting point of tantric Buddhist philosophy. Mind is the first step in the process of gaining freedom, not the last, because in order to gain freedom, one must also understand emptiness.

The process of gaining freedom by understanding emptiness is explained in the Tibetan tantric tradition by means of four steps illustrated by examples. The first step expresses the idea that our situation is dependent upon our mind. When, for instance, someone has taken alcohol, he may feel that the ground is moving or that he has great strength. Again, one who is suffering from jaundice perceives white objects as yellow. These examples show that our perceptions are conditioned by the state of our mind. The second stage is illustrated by the example of a magical illusion. The point here is that although perceptions depend upon mind, mind itself is illusory. Mind, in fact, is nothing in itself. It is neither within nor without, neither long nor short. Just as when a magical apparatus is assembled, the magical illusion appears, and when the apparatus is not assembled, the illusion does not appear, so all experience is like a magical illusion.

The third step is to understand all things as interdependently originated. This is also illustrated by means of examples. For instance, if a number of vessels filled with clear water are placed outside on a moonlit and cloudless night, the moon's reflection will appear in the vessels of water. If any of the conditions such as cloudlessness are missing, the moon's reflection will not appear. In the same way, all things appear as the result of a combination of conditions—that is, they are interdependently originated.

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Finally, all things are understood to be inexpressible. This is shown by means of examples like the following: although a sprout is produced from a seed, it cannot be said either that the sprout and the seed are identical or that they are different. So the relationship between the seed and the sprout is inexpressible. So it is that all things that are interdependently originated are inexpressible in the ultimate sense.

These four steps of Buddhist tantric theory, illustrated in the foregoing examples, show how the ideas of mind and emptiness work together. The first step calls for seeing all things as dependent upon mind, and the next three steps call for seeing all things as similar to a magical illusion: interdependently originated and inexpressible—in other words, empty. So here, mind is the key to changing our way of seeing things. Mind is responsible for the experience of samsara and nirvana. But mind is nothing in itself, it is empty. If mind had a nature of its own, it would always create either samsara or nirvana according to its nature, but mind is like a crystal or a white cloth. If we place a crystal next to a blue or red object, the crystal will appear blue or red accordingly. If we dye a cloth red or blue, it will turn red or blue accordingly. So too with the mind. If it is conditioned by attachment, aversion and ignorance, it appears as samsara, but if it is conditioned by enlightenment, it appears as nirvana, the experience of a Buddha.

It is said that the practice of tantra can speed up the process of gaining liberation or enlightenment, but why should this be so? It is because tantra provides more efficient means of changing ordinary experience into enlightened experience. The key to the accelerating effect of tantric practices is the fact that

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tantra employs a variety of powerful psychophysical forces which it deliberately manipulates in order to achieve more rapid results. This enables one who practices tantra to achieve quickly—even in a single lifetime—a level of spiritual maturity which it would otherwise take many lifetimes to realize.

Whoever practices tantra is concerned with the control and manipulation of psychological and physical energy. He or she seeks to direct that energy toward attaining the goal of enlightenment. The energy is in itself pure since it shares the nature of all things, which is emptiness. Quantitatively, the energy produced from powerful emotions like desire and anger far outweighs that produced from milder emotions. If properly used, these powerful forces may be transformed in such a way as to contribute to our progress toward the goal of attaining enlightenment.

Tantra turns the energy of the defilements—desire and hatred—into the means of liberation. Tantra is a kind of spiritual judo in which the strength of one's enemy is used to gain victory over him. Although it is said that tantra provides a means of achieving rapid spiritual progress, this does not mean that tantra is an easy path. It requires strict adherence to the rules of good conduct and a sincere and dedicated approach to the practice of the spiritual path. If you bring these qualities to the practice of tantra, only then is your swift progress toward the goal of enlightenment assured.



Comparison of Tantra to Other Buddhist Schools

There is a common misconception among many non-Buddhists (and even among certain Buddhists) that the tantras are late and corrupt additions to the Buddha's teachings. This is false. The tantras are the genuine teachings of Lord Buddha, and they occupy a paramount position within the overall framework of the Buddhist doctrine. Some of the misconceptions about the tantras stem from their esoteric nature. Since the time of the Buddha, the tantras were always taught secretly and selectively. For their correct understanding, they have always required the oral instructions of a qualified master; without such explanations, they can easily be misunderstood in wrong and harmful ways. As a follower of this tradition, I too am prevented from discussing most aspects of tantra here. But it is perhaps permissible in these circumstances to say a few general things about Buddhist thought and practice. For this, I shall base myself on the teachings of our tradition, such as in the *General System of the Tantras* by Loppon Sonam Tsemo.

In the Tibetan tradition, the word tantra (rgyud) normally refers to a special class of the Buddha's teachings, and to the scriptures that embody it. But

contrary to its English usage, the word does not usually refer to the whole system of tantric practice and theory. For the doctrinal system of tantra, the terms Mantrayāna and Vajrayāna (the Vajra or Adamantine Vehicle) are used instead. In its technical sense, the word tantra means continuum. In particular, tantra refers to one's own mind as nondual wisdom. There exists a continuum in that there is an unbroken continuation of mind from beginning-less time until the attainment of buddhahood.

This mental continuum, moreover, has three aspects or stages. These are the causal continuum, the continuum involved in applied method, and the resultant continuum. Sentient creatures in ordinary cyclic existence are the causal continuum. Those who have engaged in the methods of gaining liberation are the method continuum. And those who have achieved the ultimate spiritual fruit, the body of wisdom, are the result continuum. The causal continuum is so called because there exists in it the potential for producing a fruit if the right conditions are met, even though at present that fruit is not actually manifested. It is like a seed kept in a container. Method is so called because there exist means or methods by which the result, which is latent in the cause, can be produced. Method is like the water and fertilizer needed for growing a plant. The fruit, or result, refers to the actualization of the result that was latent in the cause. This is like the ripened flower that blooms when one has planted the seed and properly cultivated the plant.

In his infinite compassion, wisdom and power, the Lord Buddha gave innumerable different teachings aimed at helping countless beings of differing mentalities. These teachings can be divided into two main

classes: the Śrāvākayāna (which includes the present Theravāda), and the Mahāyāna. The Śrāvākayāna is sometimes also called Hīnayāna, and is mainly aimed at individual salvation, while the Mahāyāna stresses the universal ideal of the bodhisattva. The bodhisattva is the being intent upon enlightenment who selflessly strives for the liberation of all beings and who vows to remain in cyclic existence until all others are liberated.

The Mahāyāna or Great Vehicle can also be divided into two: the Paramitayāna, or Perfection Vehicle, which we also call the Cause Vehicle because in it the bodhisattva's moral perfections are cultivated as the causes of future Buddhahood. And secondly, the Mantrayāna, or Secret Mantra Vehicle, which is also known as the Result Vehicle because through its special practices one realizes the wisdom of enlightenment as actually present.

The spiritual fruit or goal of both branches of Mahāyāna practice is the perfect awakening or enlightenment of buddhahood. A perfectly awakened Buddha is one who has correctly understood the status of all knowable things in ultimate reality, who possesses consummate bliss that is free from the impurities, and who has eliminated all stains of obscurations. The latter characteristic, freedom from obscurations, is a cause for other features of buddhahood. It consists of the elimination of the three types of defilements: defilements such as hatred and desire, defilements that obstruct one's knowledge of reality as it is in its multiplicity, and defilements that pertain to the meditative attainments.

We speak of a method of spiritual practice as a path because it is a means by which one reaches the spiritual goal one is aiming for. There are two

types of paths. One is the common path that leads to inferior results, and the other is the extraordinary path that leads to the highest goal. Some religious or philosophical traditions, while claiming to yield good results, actually lead their practitioners to undesirable destinations. For instance, the inferior tirthikas (of certain non-Buddhist Indian schools), as well as those who propound nihilism, only lead their followers to rebirths in the miserable realms of existence. The higher tirthikas can lead to the acquisition of a rebirth in the higher realms, but not to liberation. And even the paths of the Śrāvākayāna and Pratyekabuddha are inferior, for they lead only to simple liberation and not to complete buddhahood.

The Mahāyāna itself has two major divisions. As mentioned above, these are the Perfection Vehicle and the Secret Mantra Vehicle. The first of these is also termed the general Mahāyāna because it is held in common with both Mahāyāna divisions, whereas the second is termed the particular one because its profound and vast doctrine is not found within the general tradition. The two vehicles derive their names from the practice predominating within them. In the Perfection Vehicle, the practice of the bodhisattva's perfections (*paramitas*) predominates, and in the Secret Mantra Vehicle, the practice of tantra is the main element.

One essential difference between the two Mahāyāna approaches can be explained by way of their approach to the sensory objects that are the basis for both cyclic existence and nirvana. In the Perfection Vehicle, one tries to banish the five classes of sensory objects outright. One first restrains oneself physically and verbally from overt misdeeds related to the objects of sense desire, and then by studying

and reasoning, one learns about their nature. Afterwards, through meditative realization, one removes all attachment to them. This is done both on a relative level, through meditatively cultivating the antidote to the defilements, such as by cultivating love as the antidote to anger, and a view of the repulsiveness of the sense objects as the antidote to desire. And on the ultimate level, one removes one's attachment through understanding and meditatively realizing that all of these objects in fact are without any independent self-nature.

In the Mantra Vehicle too, one begins by restraining oneself outwardly (the essential basis for one's conduct is the morality of the *prātimokṣa* and *bodhisattva* vows), however in one's attitude toward the sense objects, one does not try to eliminate them directly. Some will of course argue that such objects of sensory desire can only act as fetters that prevent one's liberation, and that they must be eliminated. Though this is true for the ordinary individual who lacks skillful methods, for the practitioner who possesses skillful means, those very sense objects will help in the attainment of liberation. It is like fire which, when out of control, can cause great damage, but when used properly and skillfully is very beneficial. While for the lower schools sensory objects are considered as the enemies of religious practice, here they arise as teachers. Moreover, sensory objects are not fetters to realization by their own nature; rather, one is fettered by the erroneous conceptual thoughts that surround them.

The Secret Mantra Vehicle is superior to the Perfection Vehicle from several points of view, but its superiority primarily rests on the greater efficacy and skillfulness of its methods. Through *Mantrayā-*

na practices, a person of superior faculties can attain awakening in a single lifetime. One of middling faculties who observes the commitments will attain enlightenment within seven to sixteen lifetimes. These are much shorter periods than the three immeasurable eons required through the Perfection Vehicle practices. But even though the Mantra Vehicle is superior in skillful methods, its view of ultimate reality is identical with the Madhyamaka view of the general Mahāyāna. For both schools, ultimate reality is devoid of all discursive developments or elaborations. One view cannot be higher than the other since higher and lower are themselves but discursive developments or conceptualizations.

The foregoing explanation has provided a general introduction to a few of the basic ideas of Buddhist tantra. The real question is how to apply these theoretical considerations in a useful way, that is, how to practice them. The practice of Mantrayāna and further in-depth study of its philosophy require first of all a special initiation from a qualified master. Before you can be initiated, you will first be examined by the teacher, who will ascertain whether you are a fit receptacle for the teachings. Your master may require that you purify and prepare yourself through specific preparatory practices. Finally, after you have been led into the glorious mandala by the master, you begin your practice, carefully observing the various vows and commitments of the Vajrayāna. These vows are primarily mental, and as such, they can be even more challenging than those of the prātimokṣa and bodhisattva systems. You must also devote yourself to further study, and to practicing specialized visualizations and yogas according to the master's instructions.

Comparison

Buddhist tantra is thus distinguished from the other branches of Mahāyāna by its special methods. It is, however, identical to the Mahāyāna Madhyamaka in its ultimate view, and it is the same as all Mahāyāna schools in terms of its aim and motivation. Hindu tantra, by contrast, has a different philosophical basis and motivation, even though it shares some of the same practical methodology. Some persons have suggested that Buddhist tantra must not belong to pure Buddhism because it shares many elements of practice with the Hindus. This is specious reasoning, because certain methods are bound to be shared by different religious traditions. Suppose we had to abandon each and every element of practice shared with Hindu traditions. In that case, we would have to give up generosity, morality, and much more.

There are, of course, many further differences between Buddhist and Hindu tantras in their terminologies, their philosophies, the details of their meditative practices, and so forth. But I shall not attempt to explicate them since my own firsthand knowledge is limited to the Buddhist tradition. Here it will suffice to stress that Buddhist Vajrayāna presupposes the taking of refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha (and the guru as the embodiment of these three), the understanding of emptiness, and the cultivation of love, compassion and bodhicitta which is the firm resolve to attain perfect buddhahood in order to benefit all sentient creatures, through the great wish that they be happy and free from sorrow. These distinguishing features are not found in the non-Buddhist tantras.

The study of tantra can only be fruitful if you apply it practice, and to do this you must find, serve,

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and carefully follow a qualified master. If you find your true teacher and are graced by his blessings, you can make swift progress towards the goal—perfect awakening for the benefit of all creatures. In composing this account, I am mindful of my own immeasurable debt of gratitude to my own kind masters. Here I have tried to be true to their teachings and to those of the great masters of our lineage without divulging that which is forbidden to be taught publicly. I shall consider my efforts to be worthwhile if some harmful misunderstandings are dispelled.

