

the guru as buddha or like buddha?



Photo Peg Michie

HIS HOLINESS SAKYA TRIZIN had some surprising answers to JULIA HENGST'S questions about devotion to one's teacher. She traveled to Pullawari, India to meet with him in February.

You commented in the March 2000 issue of Mandala that in the Vajrayana tradition the guru is seen as the Buddha, whereas in the Mahayana tradition the guru is seen as being like the Buddha, not that he is the Buddha. Can you expand on this so that students can understand the difference?

In every school, Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana, the guru is very important. Even in an ordinary sense, without a teacher you can't learn things. Every level in each of the schools emphasizes how important the master is. But in the lower vehicles, Hinayana and especially in the Mahayana, although the teacher is very important, the teacher is not the Buddha. He is as important as Buddha, but not a real Buddha.

But in Vajrayana, in order to realize the nature of the mind, you need the blessings of the guru and accumulations of the merits. Without these, you cannot realize the nature of the mind, even through studies, logic, reasoning or examples. You can get an idea about it, but you can't realize it without the guru's blessings. For example, the sun is shining everyday, all the time. But without specific instruments, you can't use the energy of the sun. Like that, the Buddha's blessings are shining all over sentient beings all the time without any interruption.

Though the Buddha's blessings are showering all over the place to all sentient beings without any discrimination, due to our own lack of merits, we can't see the Buddha. We don't have

the fortune to see the Buddha or to hear the Buddha, and therefore we can't receive his blessings directly.

The guru, who appears like an ordinary person, acts like the instrument between the sun and the earth so that, through the guru, you can hear the teachings of the Buddha, and you can also receive the blessings of the guru directly. So therefore, in the Vajrayana, the one who gives you the major empowerments, teachings, tantric teachings and the pith instructions, even though he does not appear like a Buddha, he is to be seen by the disciples as the Buddha. Even though your guru is not perfect, and has faults, if you consider your guru as the real Buddha, you can receive the blessings of the Buddha. Because after all, everything is mind, and every sentient being possesses the Buddha nature. So even if your guru is in the hell realm, but if from the disciples' point of view you consider him as the guru, you can receive the blessings of the guru. Isn't it?

The level of blessing in the Vajrayana path is more powerful. That's why, through the general Mahayana path, there is no possibility to attain enlightenment within one lifetime. Even for those who have the best wisdom and best endeavour, it takes three countless eons. But in Vajrayana, those who are superior persons and have very superior merits can attain enlightenment within this lifetime.

Guru devotion, expressed in tantric terms, is the most difficult for Westerners; and while we don't want to get angry with the guru, on the other hand we sometimes have doubts about their actions. It is common for Westerners to see the guru sometimes as less than perfect because we come from a rational scientific background. How do we make the leap forward and really see the guru as Buddha?

Actually, nobody can force you to believe this – nobody can force you to accept the guru. The Buddha himself said his teachings should be examined thoroughly and only after convincing yourself that they're genuine teachings then should one take them – not just by mere faith. Similarly, according to the teachings, one should not start the master-disciple relationship straightaway.

First the guru should examine the disciples – their sincerity and their qualities and so on, and the disciples should examine the guru. One should accept the guru very carefully. There are specific texts, like the *Fifty Verses of Guru Devotion*, which clearly mentions how important it is to examine each other. So only after you convince yourself that this guru is acceptable, then once you have received the teachings and empowerments, then I think one should try to – at least try your best – to see the guru as Buddha.

Of course nowadays it is almost impossible to find the perfect guru. If you find the guru who has lesser qualities and more faults, that kind of course right from the beginning one should avoid! But if you see the person who has more qualities and lesser faults, then one should accept them as your guru. And once you've accepted them and once you have received the teachings, then even though there are certain actions that you don't like or don't agree with, you should try to see that it is due to one's own impure vision, impure karma

that sees the guru like this. But in reality one should see the guru as the Buddha.

For example, if you see the reflection of the moon in muddy water, you see the moon as not clear, too. But it is not the moon's fault, it is the muddy water's fault. If the water is clear, the moon is also clear. If the water is muddy, then you don't see the moon. So in this way, even though you have negative thoughts, one should try to change it and see the guru like in ancient times like many great masters like Shavaripa who was a hunter and Luipa who was a fisherman. They were very great high *mahasiddhas*, but in the eyes of the ordinary people they did many wrong things. But it is all due to the eyes of the common impure vision. But in reality, whatever they did, they were beyond the bounds of karma.

If we have negative thoughts towards the guru, you said we should try to change them. Should we use ordinary antidotes, like loving-kindness to overcome anger, or something like meditation on emptiness?

Whatever method you use, it doesn't matter as long as you can change your thoughts. And mostly you should change through reading the biographies of the lineage gurus – how people like the *mahasiddhas* in ancient times seemingly did very wrong things, but the disciples who lost the faith did not have the realizations. Those disciples that stick to faith and continuously develop the devotions, even though the gurus did many strange things, got the realizations. But for this I think the best antidote, especially for the Westerners, is that they should not accept the guru straight away. First they should study the basic teachings, especially how to examine the guru and disciple – how to establish the link between the guru and disciple, and very carefully go through this. Once you're convinced that this teacher is acceptable and he has more qualities and less faults, and once you have taken the Vajrayana empowerments and teachings, then I think it is very important to continuously develop the devotion.

Your Holiness, in the West many people get excited about wanting to take tantric initiations.

Yes, and I think this is not so healthy because tantric initiation is not very easy. Not only that but tantric initiations have many *samayas*, many vows, many rules one is taking, so one has to be very careful to be capable of keeping all these *samayas* and guru devotions. I think the best solution is that one should know about all these and examine from both sides.

How does it affect the guru's life if we take all these vows but don't know what they are and therefore break them?

If you do not keep the vows and break the *samaya*, it affects many things but in particular the guru. The guru is here particularly to help the sentient beings, so if the sentient beings do not get the benefit – if the disciples do not keep the vows and do the wrong things – then there is no purpose for the guru to remain in this world, so therefore it affects the guru's life.

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE TEACHER

His Holiness the Dalai Lama is said to advise Tibetans to spend as long as 13 years (complete Tibetan calendar cycle and an extra year) studying the lama's teaching and testing the prospective vajra master. Is this appropriate or necessary for a Westerner?

Yes I think so. As I said, this is very important to examine very carefully. The students can receive the ordinary teachings, the basic teachings, without receiving high tantric teachings, and start the virtuous friend relationship – you can have the friend. So on the basis of that you can receive many teachings. With that you should study very carefully how to find the Vajrayana gurus – what are the qualifications of the Vajrayana guru and so on? With that I don't think there is a specific time set because for some people even thirteen years is too short and for other people thirteen years is not necessary. But basically it is until you know exactly what you are going to do, what you are going to receive, and how you are going to accept the guru and so on. Until then you should study – I think this is very important.

If one studies this carefully, takes it slowly, and feels great devotion but has no guru, is there a way to find the guru quickly? Through prayers, or certain practices?

Yes, I think according to the ancient masters' biographies, they prayed and searched for the gurus. Certain people who were very superior, they have certain indications, like for example in your dreams you may see your teacher before you meet them. Or you may see what is called your karmic link guru. Once you see the karmic link guru, just by the sight you get some very special feelings. The best thing is to accumulate the merits. Without the merits I think you will not find the karmic link guru, but if you have the merits, then you can find the guru very easily. There are many ways to accumulate merit, but the best way to accumulate merits within a short time is to generate compassion and loving-kindness and on that basis develop bodhichitta.

Sometimes the guru seems to make a wrong decision, even make a divination that comes out apparently wrong. How can we learn to deal with the guru making a decision which may have (seemingly) bad results. E.g., a lama once told parents not to get a rabies shot for their child who had been bitten by a dog, and the boy died. How do we reach an understanding of this apparent contradiction?

Even my divination usually says not to get rabies shots, but I always advise to get the rabies shots to be safe! In any case, this question deals with many things. According to the Madhyamika school, everything is interdependent origination. Everything is dependent – the time, circumstances, persons involved, and so on. And so, sometimes this happens perhaps due to the students' lack of faith, lack of belief, and also sometimes, if you have very strong unchangeable karmas, then the divinations can be wrong. Also, it depends on the lamas – all lamas are not perfect! There are superior, inferior and mediocre lamas too, so some lamas also make mistakes.

Every guru is not Buddha. As I said, nowadays it's almost impossible to find a perfect guru, but we should try to compromise with the lamas who have more qualities and lesser faults.

The gurus appear as physical beings, but one of the jobs of the outer guru is to introduce us to the inner guru. How do we know it's our inner guru speaking to us instead of our delusions? And does the inner guru manifest as something tangible – a certain inner voice, a synchronistic event, a sound in the environment?

I don't think the inner guru just speaks. The inner guru means experience. Inner guru means that, basically, every sentient being possesses Buddha nature – the true nature of our mind is never stained with obscurations. But at the moment we do not see the nature of the mind. Instead we are completely covered with illusions and it is very difficult to see this. But through the blessings of the outer gurus, you can have a glimpse, through meditations and through accumulation of merits and through receiving blessings of the guru, you can have a glimpse of one's nature of the mind. Through this, with continuous practice, you can eventually get the realization of the true nature of the mind. That is the inner guru.

Otherwise the inner guru is not something inside that tells you things and gives you instructions – it doesn't mean that. It means finding the nature of the mind.

What is the secret guru?

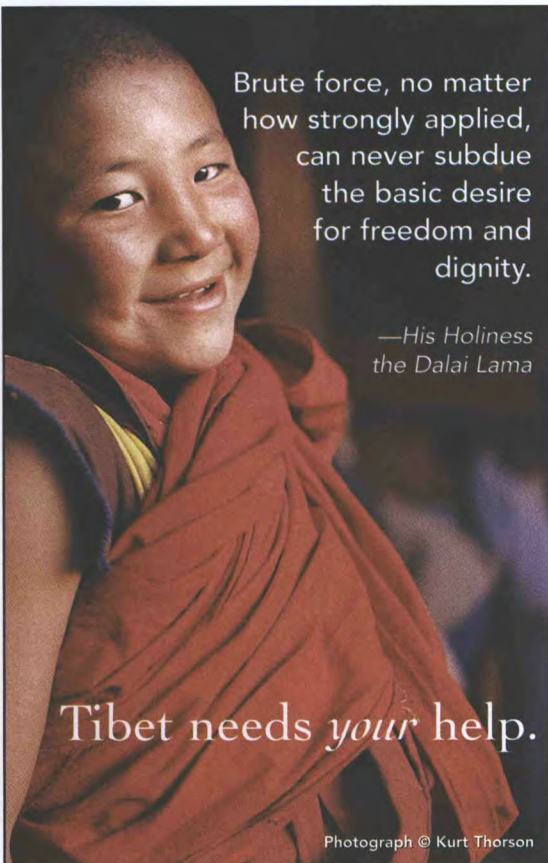
Outer guru is the combination of all the Buddhas, inner guru is actually the clear light – one's own nature of the mind is the inner guru, and secret guru is the nature of that mind which is away from all extremes, the *Dharmakaya*. It's a different aspect of clear light, you could say. That is the secret guru.

If we are away from our teachers but feel strongly that we are being guided by them, what is this if it's not the inner guru? Is it a psychic connection?

Yes, of course. But it's not called the inner guru. That's because of devotion – strong devotion. It's based on a close connection with your outer guru. The inner guru means that the closer you get to the nature of your mind, the closer you are to your inner guru. If you have a strong feeling that you are being guided by your outer guru, that is the blessings of the outer guru.

There's a saying that the guru is like a fire. If you're too close you get burned, too far away, you get cold. What is the proper balance?

For ordinary people, if you are too close to the guru, it is difficult to see the qualities and it is easy to see the faults. So therefore, of course, to be very close to the guru is not ideal. But at the same time, you need the connection so you can receive the teachings, empowerments or whatever, and once you've got everything, keep a little distance. Even at that little distance, though, make a constant connection through the practice of guru yoga or blessings and so on.



Brute force, no matter how strongly applied, can never subdue the basic desire for freedom and dignity.

—His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Tibet needs *your* help.

Photograph © Kurt Thorson

PLEASE ACT TODAY.

Of the six million Tibetans, more than a million have died from the Chinese occupation —of torture, starvation, and execution.



More than 6,000 monasteries and their contents, irreplaceable jewels of Tibetan culture, were destroyed.



Tibetans are routinely imprisoned and tortured for non-violently expressing their views.

The movement to help the people of Tibet is growing as public awareness and outrage build. The Tibetan people depend on grassroots support in America, Canada and elsewhere to be a voice for freedom.

Please do your part. For a free Action Kit call us at 1-888 TIBETNOW, or e-mail us at info@savetibet.org.



1825 K St., NW, Suite 520, Washington, DC 20006

www.savetibet.org



Photograph © Galen Rowell

Some people are capable of staying close to their guru and others are not. It's individual. But if you find you have difficulties, there are various ways of dealing with it, like reading the biographies of past masters.

Is it ever wise or appropriate to give all one's power to one's guru?

After accepting the guru as your root guru who gives you the major empowerments, and particularly the guru who points out to you the nature of the mind, of course to him you have to give everything!

If our main teacher is increasingly busy with more and more students, and has less time to meet with students personally, how can we avoid feeling resentful, jealous or too emotional about it? How can we be sure we'll get the guidance we need?

Jealousy and negative thoughts are very harmful. Not only in the future but also in this life, they ruin your life. So by remembering the consequences that you will face indulging with these defilements, one should try to avoid having them.

As for receiving the guidance, whenever the opportunity arises you should try to seek your teacher's guidance. Basically, whatever the guru instructs you, whatever the guru advises you, it is very important to follow it. Many people tend to receive many teachings, but then they don't follow it. That is no use.

Whatever teachings you receive – even if you receive very little – you should try to practice them physically, verbally and mentally. If there are repeated obstacles to seeing your teacher,

you should try to do more *mandala* offerings and *Vajrasattva* mantras to purify the negative deeds and accumulate more merits. Once you have the merits then you can get everything. ☸

His Holiness Sakya Trizin, who was born in Tibet in 1945, is currently the 41st spiritual head of the Sakya tradition, and is recognised as an emanation of Manjushri, the enlightened principle of wisdom. Sakya

Trizin speaks excellent English and travels and teaches widely. He lives, when not engaged on his many commitments, at the Dolma Phodrang in Rajpur, Northern India, together with his wife and two sons, Ratna Vajra and Gyana Vajra, both of whom have themselves received an extensive education in the Buddhadharmā – this in the interests of preserving unbroken the traditions of the Khön lineage.



Photo Christina Lundberg