

Dear Dharma Friends,

Below are parts of the teaching excerpted from H.E. IX Kyabje Drukpa Choegon Rinpoche's Dharma Book – Cloudless Clarity, Volume I.

The full contents of the book are as the Table of Contents stated as follow:

- I) *Understanding the Foundation of Tibetan Buddhism*
 - a) *On Dharma – the Teachings of Buddha*
 - b) *On Vajrayana - the Secret Mantrayana*
 - c) *On Vajrayana Lineages – the different schools of Vajrayana*
 - d) *On some common “title” - the salutation in Vajrayana*
 - e) *On some common terms in Vajrayana - Boddhisattva, Daka, Dakini and Dharma Protector*
 - f) *On Refuge - the doorway to Buddhism*
 - g) *On Guru - the master*
 - h) *On Samaya - the vows of Vajrayana:*

 - II) *On Proper Conduct – the right attitudes during Dharma related activities*

 - III) *On Buddhist practices – The 6 Paramitas*
 - a) *Transcendent Generosity (dana)*
 - b) *Transcendent Discipline/Morality (shila)*
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Choegon Rinpoche's Dharma Q&A – Part 7

On Guru - the Guide to Your Vajrayana Practices

- 1) **Rinpoche. I often hear people talking about their Root Guru. What is the real meaning of Root Guru? A friend of mine says Root Guru is your master in your past life, is that true?**

A: Root guru means someone who gives you instructions on the true nature of mind, thus awakening you and guiding you to attain enlightenment. That's your root guru. He is the one who opens up your heart, by which you get enlightened.

But this does not mean that until you get enlightened you don't have a root guru. The master who gives you empowerment, oral instruction on how to practice and transmission is your very important guru. Empowerment ripens your body, speech and mind; through oral instruction you understand your mind as you learn to meditate on the true nature of mind; transmission confers the blessing. The master who gives you all these three can also be called your kind root guru.

Yes, sometimes your root guru is related to you in many previous lifetimes. However, this is not always necessarily so because it may happen that you are entering into Vajrayana practice probably for the very first time.

The master who gave you refuge is also your guru, but not your root guru. Refuge is very basic in Buddhism. This guru is called your refuge guru. He is kind because he introduced you to Buddhism and brought you into the path; he opened up the door to the practice of the Dharma.

Root guru is linked to your Vajrayana practices, particularly those on the true nature of mind. That's what we call root guru.

2) Rinpoche. Can one have more than one Root Guru?

A: I would say if you have received or wish to receive oral instructions from several masters, then those masters also become your root guru.

I have Khamtrul Rinpoche as my root guru, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche is my root guru, and Adeu Rinpoche is my root guru. These masters have given me so many oral instructions, empowerments and meditation pointing out instructions that they all are my root gurus. So if people received oral instructions from many masters, they would also have many root gurus.

But when you become enlightened, although you may have many important gurus, you will consider only one of them as your root guru. This is because you don't get enlightened again and again. You get enlightened only once. So, basically when you attain enlightenment you have only one root guru, the one that made you enlightened.

Until you attain enlightenment, of course you can have many root gurus. There is no problem with this. If you just depend on one, maybe your karmically connected guru is still somewhere else. But do not go to everybody and anybody. You have previously asked why there are so many lineages or sects. So once again here, before you receive oral instruction, you have to find the proper lineage for yourself, the master who has meditated, who has the lineage, who has the kindness, who can instruct you. Then you can go to him.

But don't go just because he is a very high lama or carry a big title, or he has a very large following, or he is very successful. That doesn't serve any useful purpose. Why is this so? Because you may not be able to receive teachings from him, or maybe he will not treat you as his heart son. Some fully enlightened masters are capable of picking up the flower from the mud, so to speak, and identify an exceptional disciple within the crowd. In that case, there is no problem. Otherwise, a lot of people suffer. They just go because the master has a big following or is very renowned. When they don't get connected, they suffer. They complain, "I don't get the opportunity to see the master, it is so difficult, I cannot see him." Then, it's too late.

Some masters like Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche are truly very capable. He could pick out from among the monks the exceptional one and dearly give him important teachings. Later that person would become a great yogi.

In our lineage, Shakya Shri was just someone who was looking after the monastery's horses. The 6th Khamtrul Rinpoche Tenpai Nyima (1849-1907) said, "Don't treat him like cow dung! One day you all will need to get blessings from him. He will be like Dorje Chang."

Khamtrul Rinpoche said this about Shakya Shri, an ordinary person who was just taking care of horses. He instructed him, and later Shakya Shri became one of the highest and greatest yogis in Tibetan history. In his early life, he was just a shepherd, looking after cows, sheep and horses. When in his twenties, he started practicing, and he became the greatest Dzogchen and Mahamudra yogi, respected by Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, Jamgon Khongtrul and all great masters. He received direct teachings from Milarepa. That kind of master is very rare.

So, you have to find a real master. Not just by looking here and there.

3) Rinpoche. How do we find one Root Guru?

A: Kindness and Lineage are the most important aspects to look for in finding one's root guru—his kindness, his connectivity and his understanding of you. It's important that he can give instructions, has the lineage, and has meditation experiences. If someone has that, then you can just learn under him and practice.

4) Rinpoche. Why does Vajrayana emphasize so much on the Guru or one's master? Didn't the Buddha say that one should follow His teachings and not a specific person?

A: Not really. Buddha never says not to follow a specific person. Buddha in fact did say that one should follow very closely the "gewe shenyen," the master who gives you teachings. It's very important to follow him and treat him like your soul. Through the master you will understand the ultimate meaning of the teachings, particular in Vajrayana, Tantrayana and Sutrayana. In Theravada probably this is less stressed, but it's still important. When you come to Mahayana, it is more important. And, when you come to Vajrayana, it's very very important.

And why? Because in Vajrayana the master must be enlightened and must have a lot of experience to guide you. Through such guidance we have to practice. Particularly in Vajrayana, the master is very important because many of the Mahamudra and Dzogchen experiences arise through his blessings—the transformative power of his blessings. That's why the master is very important.

But if you practice just the common Sutrayana, maybe it's not as important as in Vajrayana. In Vajrayana, it's very important because blessings have to come from the pure and unbroken lineage and from one's realized guru of the lineage. Therefore, the master should not be treated as an ordinary person, but as an enlightened being.

5) **Rinpoche. Let us say that I have attended a Dharma teaching, a retreat or received an empowerment or initiation conducted by a Rinpoche, can I then regard him as my Guru?**

A: By attending a Dharma teaching given by a master, or doing a retreat under his guidance, you may consider that master your guru, although it would not necessarily mean that he would be your root teacher.

In the case of an empowerment, we must consider the type of transmission being given. If it's just an authorization (je nang) to do some practice, the master would become an important teacher of yours. If, however, he gives you an empowerment of the highest Anuttara Tantra order, which includes the third empowerment where the wisdom of example is shown and the fourth empowerment where the ultimate wisdom is revealed, and he gives you as well the instructions for practice and the oral blessing transmission, you can consider him one of your main gurus or your kind root guru.
