

Teaching: Kagyud Lineage
Occasion: On the anniversary of Marpa
Teacher: Shangpa Rinpoche
Date & Time: 8 March 2012 8pm-10pm
Venue: Karma Kagyud Buddhist Centre

Good evening, so tonight I am suppose to tell you a little bit about our lineage masters and also related to that, our way of practice. Our method of practice has been transmitted to us from our lineage. It comes all the way from Tilopa and it also has links to Buddha Shakyamuni. In tantric version of Shakyamuni, it has to be described as Vajradhara who transmitted the entire four transmission of teaching from Tilopa, and from through human master to human disciple. So in this way, it was transmitted until now.

If we go into the source of the lineage, then Tilopa is the human source. But there were many occasions described by Tilopa that he does not have a human master but Vajradhara (non-human). So how does the lineage transmission come about? From the historical Buddha all the way to Tilopa, did that sort of transmission truly exist or not? If yes, then it seems contradictory for Tilopa to say he did not have a human master for surely he must have received the transmission from a human master at some point. What do you think?

This can be explained in such a way that Tilopa does indeed have a human master. That master and teachings are linked all the way from the Buddha under Mahayana tradition, all the way to tantra. If you read the life story of Tilopa, you will know that he had also learnt from many masters. Then why does he say he does not have a human master? This is because after going through all academic (intellectual) learning, ultimate realization did not take place. Then Tilopa went into retreat in a small hut. At that moment, his mind stream started to ripen and began to have the vision of Vajradhara. Then Vajradhara gave some kind of transmission that was very unique. From there, Tilopa attained realization or enlightenment took place. So since then, Tilopa mentioned that he does not have a human master but only Vajradhara. That realization was not a result of human master. But how one normally progresses, one has to go through many masters and basic studies and so on. So this is how it is explained.

From there, Vajradhara transmitted four transmissions or four different groups of teachings to Tilopa. These comprises of the following: -

1. Guhya Samaja (father tantra) - 6 yoga (physic yoga and transmigration yoga, i.e. phowa)
2. Mahamaya (mother tantra) e.g. dream yoga
3. Chakrasamvara related teachings (also mother tantra) – together with clear light yoga, the completion stage.
4. Hevajra – many of the 6 yogas especially heat yoga (tumo, chandrili)

These were transmitted to Tilopa directly from Vajradhara and other masters. These are the four types of commands transmitted – “Ka” (command which comprises of four); “Gyud” – lineage (from Tilopa).

In that way, the lineage is very unique and precious, from Tilopa to Naropa to Marpa. The Kagyudpa name came about when Naropa established the system of the whole teachings in

Tibet. That is the formation origins of Kagyudpa. It is more than 1,000 years from now. Anniversary of Marpa is already 1,000 until today.

So this is a very unique explanation of Kagyudpa from the four commands that were transmitted from Tilopa and so on.

Another general explanation on Kagyudpa is that when you refer to the command, you refer to the entire Buddha's teaching Sutra (Abhidharma etc.) and Tantra (Kiriya, Charya, Yoga and Annutarayoga). The essence that was transmitted continuously unbroken is called Kagyudpa. That is general explanation.

Yet another explanation that originated from Drukpa Kagyud is that Kagyud is the white sect. They explained 'Kar' which means white colour. Why white sect? This is because most practitioners and disciples following Marpa to Milarepa wore white clothing. Rechungpa and his disciples, most of them are referred to as "Repa". "Re" means cotton, they are cotton clad. Today Chinese use the term "Bai Jiao" (white sect). Drukpa Kagyud gives this explanation only. Others explain the origins of Kagyud in terms of the four commands.

So some how, the four transmissions actually reached Tilopa and flowed to Naropa and several other siddhas who sustained the teaching and obtained realization.

Marpa Lotsawa who hailed from Tibet went to India to acquire teachings. Through his Nepalese master friend, he was introduced to Naropa. That was how Marpa received teachings. Under Naropa's advice, Marpa also went in search of other masters to receive transmissions. Marpa himself said in his song that Naropa and Maitrepa were even kinder than his own mother. Other than these two masters, Marpa has other 108 masters. Also the duration for him to receive teachings and practice was about 40 years. He did not waste time, and kept on studying and contemplating. He was with his master Naropa for 16 years and 7 months. Marpa managed to collect all the important tantras and general Buddhist practices. His aim was to collect the important tantras. When he returned to Tibet, he started the new versions of translations.

When I use the terms 'new' and 'old' translations, I refer to the translated works of the dharma in Tibet. The old version was during Santarakshita's time when Buddhism flourished in Tibet due to patronage by kings. Of course Buddhism flourished even more when Guru Rinpoche came to Tibet.

After King Langtama, the evil king who destroyed Buddhism in Tibet, Buddhism diminished greatly. He did not allow ordination of sangha and any form of Buddhist practices. Buddhism was in bad form. When Buddhism was revived, it was referred to as new Buddhism. Lochen Rinchen Zangpo and subsequently Atisha enhanced the sutras. Tantra side was revived by Marpa (one of the main persons who brought back pure tantric teachings into Tibet). Marpa and our tradition of Kagyudpa are under new tradition of tantra.

The old or original school of teachings that survived despite so many problems is Nyingma. 'Nying' means old. So Kagyudpa, Sakyapa and Geulpa are under the new traditions.

Marpa's tradition is not new, but through Marpa, some Gelupa teaching also originated from it. Some of Marpa's teaching also flowed into Sakya and other traditions. So Marpa is not only for Kagyudpa, he also contributed his teachings to other traditions. I won't be sharing

the life story of Marpa tonight. You can search for his life stories easily on the Internet. His life, where he has been, which year he was born etc. are common knowledge. Rather than these, I will explain about our own lineage.

This precious transmission of practice under the new tradition, started from Marpa Lotsawa. It evolved into three different things.

1. transmission or empowerment (Marpa was the holder of all empowerment of tantra)
2. Theoretical explanation through logical ways
3. Instructions – not theoretical but the experience through practice or special methods that are common to everybody but are more individualized.

Marpa has given these to all disciples, particularly each master became specialist on this.

The main disciple of Marpa is Milarepa – Mila received all teachings from Marpa. It was as if the whole container of essence was poured from one into another. Whatever Marpa has, he transmitted in totality to Milarepa. And from Mila to Gampopa and so on and so forth.

In that way, many great masters came about including first Karmapa, Palmo Drugpa. Through Palmo Druga, many sub-sects came about.

Marpa prophesized that this lineage will flourish, and that the disciples will flourish the lineage more efficiently than the masters. This was true, as the scale of the disciples increased with each master. It is said half of Tibet are Drukpa Kagyud, and that half of this Drukpa Kagyud are beggars (for practitioners do not keep wealth), and half of the beggars are yogis. There is an exaggerated Tibetan saying that eagles flying 18 days cover Drukpa Kagyud's teachings. Eagle can fly many kilometres per day. This shows the ability to propagate the tradition more efficiently through generations.

Now what are the special qualities of this lineage? When we refer to both Mila and also Marpa's life stories, both show, especially from Mila, the strong determination to achieve the goal. That determination is associated with one-pointed devotion and confidence. This is very special in this lineage. If Mila does not have devotion to his guru, today Mila will not be a popular master. Supposing I am Mila, and I meet Marpa, and Marpa did the same thing to me, immediately I will run away. Perhaps I may just bear with the hardships for one or two weeks before escaping from Marpa. That shows our weak determination and devotion towards our master. But Mila having all the great qualities so despite all the difficulties and hardships, he endured and received all that he wanted and made it within a single lifetime. That approach by Mila, he taught to his disciples. Because Mila's teachings are so profound and the development of his qualities of devotion and confidence were so strong, many disciples wore cotton and entered into caves. During that time, so many practitioners followed the footsteps of Mila and they became known as the sons of the mountains, with the mist as the clothing (little clothing, cotton clad, mountain has lots of mist, other than that, they do not possess much).

They left food and most possessions behind. Desire of food, warm clothing and fame were left behind. In this way, they followed the instructions of the guru and most of them achieved liberation. At the ending part of their lives, they die in meditation posture. After a week or ten days, they still remain in straight meditative posture and show no signs of death. Other phenomena like rainbows are signs of enlightenment.

Thousands of them achieved that state. That continues until now in Tibet, many practitioners are still following the same ways in Lapchi, Nepal etc. Compared to them, we are not good practitioners. We are not determined enough to leave everything. Yet we have the inspiration to follow this lineage and master. This is still not bad as somehow we have lots of opportunities to get sparks of wisdom for liberation.

In one of Mila's song, it is said that as long as you enter into this lineage, naturally meditative concentration will arise, as it is actually the qualities of the lineage. So if you sincerely enter into this lineage, without much effort, if you switch your mind towards meditation, you can have a bit of calm and concentration. In a way, if you belong to a certain category, you naturally inherit its qualities. Personally, I feel that once you are in Karma Kagyud, somehow the mentality of that person is not too strong craving towards the worldly aspect. The craving towards worldly aspect somehow will naturally subside to a certain level. That is my personal experience. If you are a systematic person, you become more easy-going without craving and feel all these are not so important. After saying this, I hope you don't run away! (Laughters)

These are some qualities of this lineage. Once one enters into this lineage, these lineage qualities can be inherited. That is the greatness of the transmission and teachings. Since we come into this lineage, whichever way, mostly due to karma, past lives, created certain connections with this lineage. Somehow in this lifetime we aspire to come into this lineage again. Without karma, even the leaves of trees cannot move. There must be a cause. It can be either good or bad connections. Regardless of good or bad connections, aspirations of masters are that they will still liberate us. Bad connections – e.g. beat, scold masters, may have negative results, but the end of fruition of the consequences is such that the masters will still help us to liberate. With good connections, then perhaps we can obtain faster liberation through the guidance from lineage masters.

We must have good connections in order to have good precious human body, aspire and even enter into the teachings. When we enter the teachings, there many things we are suppose to do but these maybe problematic. E.g. method path is the practice of Six Naroga practice that is associated with father, mother yidams in high tantras (e.g. Anutarayoga tantra).

Liberation towards the path is the Mahamudra.

All these are based on general Buddhist principle as well as Mahayana Buddhist's views and teachings. Method specialized is tantra which is based on Marpa's transmission that is direct from Naropa and Tilopa.

Usually explained and taught in retreat centres of Kagyudpa, not openly taught in public places or individuals. But who knows, perhaps in the next few years, some retreat centres may open and allow laypersons to practice for 3.5 years of the Six Naroga yoga. Or perhaps the foundation practice and other kagyud practice. Sooner or later, all will lead to the Vajradhara enlightened stated. In short, when we enter into this lineage, whether diligently or lazily, we can be liberated sooner or later into the state of Vajradhara, unless that person has done heinous acts or extreme things. The five heinous crimes are patricide, matricide, killing an arhant, wounding a Buddha and schism (sowing discord in the sangha).

I will tell you one short story before we end tonight's session. During Buddha's time, one group of people wished to learn about dharma. Sariputta, through his wisdom eyes saw that they can realize the truth if he taught them personally. So Sariputta assumed that only he

could make this group of people realize. At the same time, Manjushri also through his psychic vision, saw this group of people who went to Sariputta for teachings and obtained realizations of truth, though not to the stage of enlightenment. Manjushri also saw that if he himself gave teachings to them, they would have wrong views and go to hell. Despite this vision, Manjushri still went ahead to teach this group of people. Sariputta knew Manjushri did all these and felt bad. He went to inform Buddha accordingly. Buddha asked both before him for clarification. Manjushri calmly explained that he knew all these consequences but if Sariputta gave the teachings to these people, they would need three countless kalpas before enlightenment is obtain. However, if Manjushri taught them, they only need to suffer 6,000 hell years before they aspire towards Vajrayana and attain enlightenment within one lifetime. Thus, the Buddha praised Manjushri's incomparable skillful methods. So even if we go to hell temporarily due to bad connections, we can still be enlightened after the temporal hell state is over. In future when we progress into the practice, with more diligence and effort, our future can be very bright with good spiritual prospects. So we should all cheer up. That is very true. I am not just trying to promote this lineage to get more disciples. But these are my personal experiences. So we should treasure the masters who transmitted the teachings to us. So we don't waste time and put effort into practice. The results should then happen as soon as possible. We should recollect ourselves towards devotion towards lineage masters and treasure moments of practice.

Today's Marpa's anniversary started and ended meaningfully. This is unlike other events or festivals. It is purely spiritual and our own lineage source so we should make offerings and payhomage. This is a special occasion not for mourning or feeling sad that Marpa had passed away. He entered parinirvana where complete enlightenment took place. That should be a joyful moment. We as followers should be inspired towards it. With all these understanding, we try to celebrate or observe this event every year, making it grander each year. Keep and increase this interest year by year. Thank you.