



His Eminence Khentin Tai Situ Rinpoche

Confidence & Devotion

I would like to speak about one of the most important teachings and practices, the fundamental, basic practice in the Vajrayana - devotion. In the Vajrayana, devotion is the most important quality a disciple can have. Since it isn't politically correct, it's a little difficult speaking about this topic in public. Speaking about compassion is more politically correct. I can talk about compassion to anybody, but I have to be very clear and quite sure about who I am talking to when it comes to the subject of devotion. I consider all of you very serious about the Dharma, not just experimenting, so I can talk to you about devotion.

The foundation of devotion is confidence in your essence. If you don't have confidence in your essence, you can't have devotion; then confidence becomes more like fear rather than devotion. In the Mahayana, Buddha taught bodhicitta - your essence. The thought, "I want to become a buddha to help all sentient beings become buddhas" is *bodhicitta*, 'the mind of awakening.' While practicing the path, we might want to help other beings become free of suffering, but the ultimate goal is to become a buddha. We need a lot of confidence in ourselves to be able to say this. Each of us, no matter what kind of façade we put on, has thousands of problems and shortcomings. We don't have to exhibit them to others; that's not necessary, but we have to know about them ourselves. We have to know that we have attachment, anger, jealousy, pride, ignorance – all of them – and that each one of us has more than enough defilements.

Not only do we have many defilements, but the karma that each of us has accumulated because of the defilements is enormous. Each one of us has lived countless lives trying to fulfil our big or little dreams and have done very many things to succeed. Sometimes we have experienced a little tweak of conscience about what we have done and became a little more careful, but at other times, with no conscience, we were ruthless and caused others a lot of harm. I'm sure each of us has behaved like this a countless number of times. We can see the results now. We have to work very hard at it if we want to do good things now. If we are not careful, without even realizing it,

we do not-so-good things. For example, if a mosquito lands on my arm and was about to bite me, I could very easily swat it. That's very easy – it's even automatic. What we have done, we did. All the mosquito did before I swat it was try to take a little blood from me. Maybe it would even have been good for me. In fact, it would definitely have been good for me because I have high blood pressure. I have too much blood, so a hundred mosquito bites at the same time would be good for me, unless, of course, they had malaria. Then it would be good for my doctors. I would give my doctors work by consulting them. They would send me to a clinic and I would buy medicine. Then I would get well and many people would have made money.

Fortunately – or unfortunately – my doctor refuses taking money from me. I buy medicine from pharmacists, but my doctor will not take money from me for his help. It doesn't really benefit me if I get sick, but it benefits him because then he has the opportunity to be generous. He considers me a follower of the Buddha, as someone special, so he treats me for free. This is a good habit for him, but it's a little difficult for me to digest. I need a good stomach to digest my doctor's generosity. My stomach has to be strong, healthy, and pure, otherwise digesting other people's service and generous support isn't easy. If you don't have the stomach for it, it could short-circuit your merit.

In Mahayana, Lord Buddha taught about motivation, specifically the motivation to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings. To have this motivation, you need to have total confidence in yourself - you need to believe that you can become a buddha. You can develop this kind of confidence in yourself by knowing what "buddha" means. If you don't know, your motivation will turn into ambitious egotism. The motivation, "I want to become a buddha" is not egotistic or ambitious - it is a truth and addresses quality of being.

My essence and the essence of Crown Prince Siddhartha who became the Buddha are the same. The Buddha called the essence "Buddha nature," *de-bzhin-gshegs-pa'i-snying-po* in Tibetan, *tathagatagarbha* in Sanskrit, *fao-shing* in Chinese. It is 'the Buddha essence' that everyone without exception has within. It is our essence, and appreciating and acknowledging our essence is the basis of devotion. If you don't have faith in this truth but try to be devoted, your devotion might be fear.

Sometimes devotion is described as "law-abiding," or "god-fearing." When people say this, I don't really know what they mean. I'm not saying it's wrong, but I just don't know what it means. In Buddhism, we don't fear the Buddha. We know that we might go to hell or somewhere not so good if we do something bad, but we know that the Buddha doesn't send us there. The Buddha doesn't punish anyone. Buddhas don't have torture chambers or gruelling implements with which they threaten and hurt others. They are the embodiment of wisdom and compassion.

Yet, this doesn't mean that we can hide anything from the Buddha. If we do something that nobody knows about, we might think that the Buddhas do not know about it either, but they are in front of us all the time. Some devotees set up little shrines in their homes and behave very, very good when they are in front of it. They change their clothes before they enter the shrine room, walk on their knees, and try to think of something becoming. Doing all of this is certainly good, is a wonderful gesture, is very meritorious, and we should do this. But if we do these things thinking that the Buddha is only present in the shrine room and nowhere else, then we don't

understand the Buddha. The Buddha is everywhere. We should have a shrine, keep it clean, and not engage in worldly activities in front of it, i.e., we shouldn't keep our business desk or refrigerator, for example, in front of it or in the same room. But we do these things because we are dualistic - we do our best to respect the Buddha in our dualistic manner. It's like taking your shoes off but not your socks. In India, we take our shoes off and leave them outside every place that we respect and are about to enter – our parents' home, religious places, and our teacher's room. We take our shoes off and leave them outside the entrance, but we don't take off our socks. Sometimes it may even be better to go into a room you respect with your shoes on. If, for example, on a very hot day you go shopping, then to lunch, then for a nice walk in the very nice park near here, Loti Gardens, and then came back here, I would prefer if you left your shoes on. That would be more polite and meritorious.

Anyway, we do our best and that is fine. We take off our shoes when we enter a place we respect. We behave very nicely there and are super-duper good in front of our shrine. This is wonderful, but it doesn't mean the Buddha is only there. The Buddha is in the park, in the restaurant, in your office, in your car. The Buddha is everywhere. In the same way as your shadow goes wherever you go, the Buddha is everywhere. The Buddha is omniscient – you can't hide from the Buddha. We need to know this well. If we know this and keep a nice shrine room, then that is good.

Without knowing this, we may develop strange ideas about the Buddha and become afraid. If we fear the Buddha, we will lose any confidence that we might have. For example, someone like the Greek hero Hercules might be happy that a lion is on the loose, but the rest of us will hide under the table when that happens because we have no confidence. I don't know if it would be helpful to hide under the table, but we would leave it up to Hercules to deal with the lion. The point is that lacking confidence, we have fear. Bodhicitta entails confidence and with this confidence comes devotion.

When I say “devotion,” I mean the devotion we have for our Dharma masters. For example, I could have respect but not devotion for a music teacher. Not that I am learning to play the piano, but if I were and a music teacher I paid came to my house every week, I would learn from him or her and would respect him or her because he or she would be teaching me something that I didn't know. However, even though I had the wish to learn to play the piano, I would not be devoted to this teacher or want to become like him or her. My ultimate devotion is for the Buddha, because I want to become like Buddha. Thus I have devotion for my Dharma master because, in the process of becoming like the Buddha, I want to become like my Dharma master. This is the difference between respect and devotion.

I don't know how worldly people outside the Dharma community think about devotion and respect, but in the context of Dharma, devotion is based on our potential. I have the potential to become a buddha and since Prince Siddhartha achieved this, I want to become like him. Hence, my ultimate devotion is to the Buddha. This devotion continues down through the Lineage. I am devoted to my Guru, because my Guru transmitted the blessings of the Buddha's Lineage to me. For me, my Guru is Lord Buddha's substitute. He may have the body of the Sangha, but his teachings are the Buddha's teachings. His mind is a treasure trove of the Buddha's teachings, because he or she – it doesn't matter which gender – received the teachings from his spiritual

master due to having deep devotion. In this way, devotion is very important. – Thank you very much.

Dedication Prayers

Through this goodness may omniscience be attained
And thereby may every enemy (mental defilement) be overcome.
May beings be liberated from the ocean of samsara
That is troubled by waves of birth, old age, sickness, and death.

By this virtue may I quickly attain the state of Guru Buddha and then
Lead every being without exception to that very state!
May precious and supreme Bodhicitta that has not been generated now be so,
And may precious Bodhicitta that has already been never decline, but continuously increase!

A Long Life Prayer for His Eminence Khentin Tai Situ Rinpoche

The Regent of the Future Buddha, the Undefeatable,
The Regent of the Lotus, the protector of all beings and the teachings,
Tai Situ Pema Dönyo,
May your life be long and your activities be extensive.

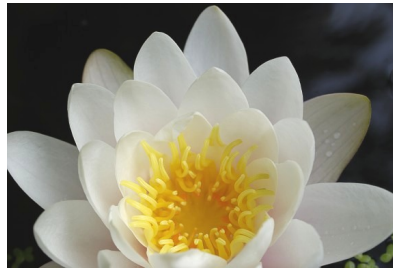


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