

**How to rely on a spiritual mentor as the root for developing the path:
The Eight Advantages of Relying on a Teacher
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Introduction

So far we've been setting the stage for the specific topics of the main meditations that we are going to do the analytical meditation on. So, let's start the big section here, which is the teaching on properly relying on a spiritual master. This is the first step on the whole path. I have to say here that Lama Tsong Khapa set up the Lamrim with the idea that people who are following it will eventually enter into the Vajrayana practice. So from the very beginning of the first meditation on how to cultivate a good relationship with the spiritual teacher, you get the Vajrayana influence and emphasis and the way of thinking, so it comes up very much in this meditation.

Difficulties With Relying on a Teacher

When the Tibetans teach the Lamrim, they don't begin with teaching the subject of how to rely on a spiritual teacher, because Westerners often have difficulty with it. It is very easy to misunderstand, so often they just skip over it. When we get into the thick of this subject about seeing our teacher as the Buddha, it's really difficult to understand, in fact even more difficult to understand than realizing emptiness. So, very often they skip over it or, if they do teach it, they do so in a very traditional way where you hear all these stories of the ways that

past practitioners relied on their teachers. Again, I feel that we often misunderstand those stories and develop wrong conceptions about them.

So this is a real sticky subject and I am kind of jumping in with both feet with the idea that we will have a lot of discussion and will try and work through some of these things together because this is a very important subject and I've found, as I traveled and taught, that people have a lot of confusion about what it means to have a spiritual teacher and how to have a good relationship with him or her. People often get extremely confused.

And you can see in situations such as what happened at the centers, when people don't understand properly how to rely on a spiritual teacher, people's minds get quite confused which is the cause for a lot of unfortunate things to happen. So this is a subject that I think is worth our while to look at really closely.

Reasons for Relying on a Teacher

The basis or reason for wanting to cultivate a proper reliance on our spiritual teacher is that it's only through learning the teachings that we are going to be able to practice. And it is through practice that we get realizations. If having a teacher is indispensable for learning worldly subjects such as typing and carpentry, it follows that we need a teacher for things that are even more important, such as our spiritual path. For this we definitely need a teacher. Progressing spiritually is not something we can do on our own, making up our own path along the way. It's true that eventually we have to become our own guides and do our own practice--nobody else can do it for us. But, we definitely need the guidance, example and counsel of people who know more than we do. If you want to fly a jet you have to take lessons--so also in spiritual training.

Having a teacher is often translated as "guru devotion" and that translation, next to the word "sin," is one of the translations that makes my skin crawl because in English, the word "devotion" gives us the connotation that you are just a worm and completely subservient, with blind faith devotion to the guru who is on his throne next to God. This is a very wrong conception. In Tibetan language, *lama tenpa* describes the teacher: *lama* is guru or spiritual master, and *tenpa* means to depend and rely upon, and to associate with. This has a very different English connotation than devotion. So what we want to learn is how to have a good relationship with our teacher so that we will benefit. This relationship is an important one in our life and that's why this subject is taught here: so that we can benefit.

Choosing a Qualified Teacher

There are eight advantages of properly relying on a teacher. Before we go into the section on advantages remember what I said about the qualifications of a teacher, and how to teach and how to listen to teachings. I am assuming that you have meditated on those qualifications and that you have checked up on different people and selected teachers who you consider as having those qualifications. The eight advantages involve how to rely on a spiritual teacher that you have selected as your own teacher. It doesn't mean how to rely on any teacher that you see advertised in the new-age publications. Are we communicating about this? The advantages refer specifically to people who you have checked up. You've checked their qualifications, you've checked to ensure you have a good feeling toward them, you've checked your ability to maintain a good relationship, and then you've deliberately made the decision that this person is going to be your spiritual teacher.

So we are talking about how to cultivate a good relationship with that person, not just anybody with a mouth who is giving some teaching that you happened to hear. This is very important and many people don't realize it. Rather, they think, "Ok, well, Joe Schmoe just came in and he's giving Dharma teachings, he must be a Buddha!" Jim Jones' disciples

probably thought, "This guy is omniscient," and look what they did to themselves because of it. So we have to be very clear here who we are talking about and what's going on.

The Eight Advantages of Relying on a Teacher

#1: We Become Closer to Enlightenment

The first advantage is that we become closer to enlightenment. Why is this? Because if we rely on a teacher, we will practice what they teach. And secondly, by making offerings and offering service to our teacher, we also accumulate a lot of positive potential.

#2: We Please All the Buddhas

The second benefit we receive when we rely on our teacher is that we please all the buddhas. I know it sounds a little funny to our western ears because we don't think so much in terms of pleasing the buddhas, but what this is referring to is that our spiritual teacher is like a representative of the buddhas.

A Teacher As a Representative of the Buddhas

In other words, the buddhas have omniscient mind and we can't connect to them directly because we don't have clairvoyant power to connect with their omniscient mind. So they manifest in our world and they send representatives in physical forms who we can communicate with. Our teachers are like the representatives of the Buddha who provide that link with us to the Buddha's wisdom. It's just as if there is an ambassador of a country who is sent somewhere and if the people treat the ambassador well, then the whole country is happy. Similarly, if we have a good relationship with our teacher, then all the buddhas who are represented by our teacher are pleased. Is this making some sense?

I know I personally have difficulty with the idea of pleasing the buddhas, because it sounds to me like pleasing God--it sounds very Christian. The conclusion I came to--I'm speaking personally here--is that we have to understand this within its particular context and not bring our Christian projections on to it. For instance, we need to understand that, for people who have a lot of deep faith in the buddhas, pleasing the Buddha is very important to them because those people really believe that buddhas exist. Part of our problem, to start with, is that maybe we are not completely certain buddhas exist, so we are not so sure about pleasing them. But for somebody who really believes that buddhas exist, then having a good relationship with the buddhas is important to them.

Also, one thing that might clarify this is to understand a little bit about how the buddhas work. Shakyamuni Buddha, for example, lived 2500 years ago, and he left his physical body when he died. But he didn't go out of existence altogether. The Buddha's consciousness still exists, but his body as seen 2500 years ago doesn't exist on this Earth, so we don't have a means of direct communication with the Buddha. But, the whole reason he became enlightened was to be able to help us so just because he left his body doesn't mean that he ceases to help us. The buddhas are still trying to help us and one way they make that bridge between the purity of their mind which, due to our obscurations, we can't contact directly, is by sending out emanations. Or, another way is by having representatives who help us make that jump, because we can't just sit here and get direct communication with the Buddha. We need someone in physical form whose voice we can hear and who we can ask questions to and relate to directly.

It's not as if the Buddha is pulling strings and things like that, but it is more that part of a Buddha's realization is the ability to make many different emanation bodies for the benefit of others. So a Buddha can appear in any form. They say Buddhas can appear as beggars, they can appear as our boss at work, or they can appear as our child. Buddhas can appear in whatever form is beneficial for guiding sentient beings to enlightenment.

So one way to look at it is that the Buddha appears in the form of a spiritual teacher because this is something that is within the capacity of a fully enlightened being to do. And the idea is that if we see our spiritual teacher in that way, it is beneficial for our mind, because by thinking of our teacher as an emanation of the Buddha then, when we hear the teachings, we think, "I am hearing the teachings just like the Buddha would teach them." So then, because we really respect the teachers and see their good qualities, we listen more closely to what they say, and we practice more carefully what they say.

Revering Our Teacher But Not Putting Him/Her on a Pedestal

It is said that the whole purpose of understanding spiritual teachers as having this kind of relationship with the Buddha is so that we can benefit from it. And we benefit from it because it makes us listen more closely and it also makes us put into practice better the teachings we hear. Whereas if we just think the spiritual teacher is exactly like us--Joe Schmoe--who doesn't know very much, then we listen to the teaching and think, "Oh, what does this guy know?" And we don't take the time to really think deeply about what is being said.

It's the same as when you are in school. If you have a professor whom you really have a tremendous respect for, then you really think about whatever that person says and, even though you might not initially agree with it, you're going to think about it and weigh it. Whereas if you think the professor is just an idiot, even when he says something correct, because you think he is an idiot, you don't listen at all. So what we are getting at here, is that the purpose of this meditation is to help us receive benefit from having a relationship with a teacher.

Now this is a very difficult subject to teach because it sounds like the teacher is saying, "Ok, people, you're supposed to see me as the Buddha. I am an emanation of" That's not what is being said here at all. No personal glorification is going on at all. The reason this is taught is that it gives us a way to think that might actually help us in our practice. And there are difficulties. I have gone through some similar things and I am still questioning a lot of it too. So I'm just trying to share with you some of the things my teachers have told me and some of my conclusions about these as well.

[Response to a question:] Exactly. [laughter] The way the prayers are written, it is so easy for us to put our whole Judeo-Christian thing up there, and there is Buddha up there like God, ten million miles away who we have to please; otherwise who knows what is going to happen to us. And whenever my mind gets into that, then I have to come back to, "Ok, the words are talking like that, but I have to remember that it is coming from a completely philosophical background so it is not talking about the Christian way."

Not Believing In Our Perceptions

[Response to a question:] We have a lot of karma obscurations and preconceptions and our own way of viewing things, so the big thing is to try and observe all of that and then let go of it. And the other big thing is to realize that our perceptions aren't always correct. See, the big thing that comes up over and over and over again in the practice, is that we think we are perceiving reality. Every time we are angry, we think we are perceiving the situation realistically. But when you learn something about anger, you realize that every time you're angry, you are hallucinating. And similarly, when we see people, we think we know exactly

where they are at and we know who everybody is and what is going on. And maybe that is not the case and maybe we just need to do some purification.

The Story of Asanga Meeting Maitreya Buddha

I'll just tell a story along this line to help us get over the idea that what we are perceiving is always right. Asanga was a great Indian scholar and practitioner who went to do meditation on Maitreya Buddha. He wanted to have a vision of Maitreya and he went up to this cave on a mountain and meditated for three years. Maitreya didn't appear and he got really fed up and as he marched down to town he came across some guy who was wiping a metal pole with a silk scarf. And he said, "What are you doing?" And the guy said, "I am making a needle." Asanga thought that if this guy has the perseverance to make a needle by rubbing it with a silk scarf, he'll go back up to the mountain and try some more.

So he went back up to the mountain and he meditated for another three years to get the vision of Maitreya and there was no vision and he got fed up, so down he came once more. This time, he saw a guy with a little container carrying dirt from one side of the valley to the other and he asked him, "What are you doing?" The guy said, "I am moving this mountain." So again, Asanga thought, "Well, I'd better go up the mountain and try some more." And he went up and he meditated another three years--still no Maitreya--and he came back down.

I forgot what he saw this time. [Audience speaks] ...a bird. What was the bird doing? Yeah, right. So Asanga thought, "I'm going up the mountain." After twelve years, again, still no Maitreya. He was completely fed up, so he marched down to the town and said, "I've had it!" And on his way going down to town, he saw this dog that was completely filled with maggots.

Something in his heart just couldn't bear the anguish the dog was going through. So he said, "I've got to take the maggots out of this dog." This was tremendous compassion. But he realized that if he pulled the maggots up and out, that he would squash them with his hands, and if he left them on the ground, they would die. So he cut off a piece of his own thigh and then he closed his eyes and was going to lift the maggots out with his tongue so he wouldn't hurt them and put them on his thigh.

He was closing his eyes and sticking out his tongue to pull the maggots out and he couldn't get to the maggots so he opened his eyes and there was Maitreya and he said, "Where have you been this whole time? How come you show up now? I have been meditating for twelve years and you haven't shown up!" Maitreya said, "Actually I was there the whole time. It is just because of your karmic obscurations that you couldn't see me. And Maitreya showed him his clothes which Asanga had unknowingly spat on when they had been in the cave. Of course, Asanga didn't know this at the time.

And so, you see, by the power of Asanga's very strong compassion, it purified so much of his negative karma and his obscuration that he was able to have this direct perception of Maitreya. Of course, Maitreya had been there the whole time beforehand. Asanga was so happy he finally saw Maitreya, that he put him on his shoulder and ran through the streets saying, "Here's Maitreya, here's Maitreya!" All the people in the village thought he was completely nuts because they didn't see anything, except for an old lady who saw a dog because her karma was a little bit better. This story clearly illustrates how what we perceive is related to our karma.

Our Perceptions Are Tainted: We'd Mistake the Buddha For a Donkey

It is said that even if Shakyamuni Buddha appeared in front of us, with his radiating body made of golden light and the thirty-two signs and the eighty marks of an enlightened being, we would probably see him as a donkey, because of our negative karma and obscuration in

our minds. Knowing this gets us to question if we really see things as they are, and acknowledge that maybe we don't completely have a hand on what reality is. This is an important thing to think about when we are on the path: to have the space in our mind that maybe we aren't perceiving everything correctly, because if we are so entrenched in our own perceptions, and think we know everything already, how can we ever improve? How can we ever see anything differently if we are convinced that what we see now is true? So, we have to loosen some of these things in our mind.

Progressing on the Path

[Response to a question:] Yeah. In other words, what you are saying is that we all have the Buddha potential. In this way, we are all equal. The only difference between those beings who are enlightened and us is that they have developed their potential and removed the obstacles and we just kind of keep doing our same old trip. So it is not as if the Buddha is out there like God on a throne. Rather, for us to become an enlightened being, it's just a matter of progressing along the path, there is this continuity. And the spiritual teacher, who has developed more qualities than we have, is further along on the way towards becoming a fully enlightened being.

It's not that we are already Buddhas. The Zen tradition says we are, but that is a little bit sticky in the sense that you would then have an ignorant Buddha. So we usually say that we have the Buddha potential; we have that thing that can become the Buddha's mind. Sometimes we feel we can't even get in touch with that potential in ourselves because we think we are hopeless and helpless and catastrophic. So the whole purpose of forming a good, constructive relationship with the spiritual teacher is so that the teacher can help us get in touch with what is inside us and help us remove the garbage so that we can become a Buddha.

#3: Harmful Forces and Misleading Friends Cannot Affect Us

Should I continue? Are you ready? Another advantage of having a good relationship with our teacher is that harmful forces and misleading friends can't affect us. Harmful forces could be external beings, i.e., any kind of spirit interference or misleading friends. This term, "misleading friends" is a tricky one. A misleading friend isn't somebody who tries to steal your things or cheat you. A misleading friend is one who says, "You have been practicing the Dharma so long, why don't you relax, let's go out and watch a movie." Or, a misleading friend might say, "Why are you going on that meditation retreat anyway? Let's go for a vacation," or, "You're not spending enough money on clothes. Why don't you buy more, you'd look better." So a misleading friend is somebody who very often appears as a regular friend but, because they don't understand the Dharma, the effect of their good intention actually pulls us away from the path.

If we have a good relationship with a teacher, we won't be affected so much by these misleading friends or by any kind of harmful energy. Why? Because if we have a good relationship with a teacher, then we practice what our teacher says, and we purify the karma that causes us to have obstacles plus we create a lot of positive potential so that we don't run into these kinds of difficulties. So you see, it comes down to the point where the whole purpose of having a good relationship with the teacher, by relying properly on the teacher, is for helping us to practice; and if we practice, then we get all these different benefits. So it keeps getting down to that point, over and over again.

#4: Our Disturbing Attitudes and Faulty Behavior Decrease

Another benefit that comes from having a good relationship with our teacher is that our disturbing attitudes and faulty behavior decrease. And this is clear. Again, if you have a good

teacher, he or she will teach you properly what to practice and what to abandon; so, bad behavior is going to decrease and good behavior will increase--it follows automatically. Also, if we follow the example that our teacher sets for us, we will watch how the teacher reacts in different situations with different people. From doing this, we will get a good idea of how to practice the dharma ourselves and, in following this model by example, our own disturbing attitudes and bad behavior will decrease.

I remember one time being with Lama Yeshe and we were trying to get some work done. Many people came into the room, disturbing Lama with this, that or the other thing. And Lama just remained completely calm through the whole thing. All of these disturbances, all of this *yack...yack...yack...* and different people complaining, and Lama just dealt with each person and then he came back when they left and we continued our work. That was an example where he showed me that we don't need to get involved in a crisis every time something happens. It's possible just to deal with situations and let them go. So if you have that kind of example from your teacher, then it gives you an idea of what behavior to cultivate in yourself and that's a really positive influence.

#5: We Gain Meditative Experiences and Stable Realizations

The fifth benefit is that we gain meditative experiences and stable realizations. This is something that we definitely want. The teacher shows us the steps on the path and the teacher gets us to follow those steps. Again, I remember with my own teachers, especially Lama Zopa who gives you a teaching and then you meditate on it, right there. As I was telling you before, you might be in the middle of a prayer, and he'll stop, and for fifteen minutes you will meditate. So, a teacher can lead us very explicitly in the meditation practice which gives us a way to have some experience of the path right then and there. Otherwise, we listen and we go home and don't do it. But a teacher really meditates with us or encourages us to meditate and keeps tabs on what's going on, and in that way we gain experience.

#6: We Won't Lack Spiritual Teachers in Future Lives

Another benefit is that we won't lack spiritual teachers in future lives. This is actually quite an important point, because once you begin to understand how important it is to have good teachers, then you become really concerned with wanting to have good teachers in future lives. To speak once again from my own experience, one thing that helped me to see how important it is to have a good teacher is that I thought if I hadn't met my teachers, what would I be doing now? What kind of life would I be leading? What kind of person would I be and what kind of karma would I be accumulating? When I think of where I was before I met my teachers and the direction I was going in, I hate to think of what I would be doing right now if I hadn't met them.

In thinking this way, I see very clearly the benefits that the teacher gives, because everything has completely changed in my life. I didn't know anything about karma before and I thought the more I could get for my own personal self, the better. So if I could lie and get away with it, it was okay. If I could do this or that and get away with it, it was okay. Meeting a teacher who straightened me out on a lot of these things, gave me the possibility not only to progress along the path to enlightenment, but to avoid a horrendous rebirth in the next life, and also to avoid hurting many people in this lifetime. Because, again, looking at the direction I was going in, if I hadn't met the Dharma I would have really hurt a lot of people in my life. I am sure of it.

Seeing how much it has transformed my life and knowing that having a good teacher has opened doors for me, causes me to really want to make prayers to always meet very good

teachers in the future. Because if we don't meet a teacher, we've really had it. Or, if we meet a bad teacher, again, we've really had it.

We have such a spiritual supermarket here; maybe you have friends who have started following some weird path or weird teacher and look where they wind up. Look where Jim Jones' disciples wound up. So you can really see how important it is to meet good teachers. And by having a good relationship with a good teacher this lifetime and really cultivating it, creates the karma to continually meet good teachers in future lifetimes. This is such an essential thing to do, because our teacher is the one who awakens so many things in us. We might have some spiritual interest beforehand but we don't know what to do or where to go, and the teacher is the one who says, 'Ok, here is how to do it.'

#7: We Won't Take a Lower Rebirth

Similarly, another advantage of properly relying on a teacher is so that we won't take a lower rebirth. Again, because the teacher shows us how to purify our negative karma, and teaches us what is good karma and what is bad karma and by us putting that knowledge into action, then we won't take a lower rebirth. And, also, it is said that at the time of death, when we are in the transition time of leaving this body, if you think of your teacher or the Buddha, the power of that good connection and the confidence and virtue that thinking about them inspires in your mind, makes it impossible for negative karma to ripen. The time of death is the crucial moment when you want to make certain that negative karma does not ripen, so thinking of your teacher at that time is extremely important.

#8: All Our Temporary and Ultimate Goals Will Be Realized

The last advantage of relying on a teacher is that all of our temporary and ultimate goals will be realized. Actually, this last one is a summary of the preceding seven. In other words, if you have a good relationship with your teacher which means that you practice the Dharma well, then, in the least, you will reap all of the temporary advantages, i.e., advantages gained while we're still in cyclic existence. These include a good rebirth, enough comfort to practice the Dharma, and having the ultimate aim for liberation and enlightenment.

So let me just stop here for now and open it up for questions.

Questions and Answers

Audience: How do we appreciate the necessity of having a teacher without getting attached to the idea of having one, or without getting attached to the teacher?

Venerable: The key here, first of all, is to always be very aware of our own mind and be honest with ourselves. Secondly, we need to really be very clear about the purpose of having a teacher. The purpose of having a teacher is for that person to show us how to practice the path so that by practicing, we can gain the result. The purpose of having a teacher is not to pat us on the back and give us chocolate cake and tell us how wonderful we are. Sometimes our teacher puts us in very difficult situations where you're sitting there thinking, "Why am I doing this? Why did my teacher tell me to do this?" And you finally come to realize, "Well, it's because I am supposed to learn something, so what in the world am I supposed to learn here?!" And you come face to face with your own garbage and your own projections. So sometimes, the process of relying on a teacher can be incredibly painful, because we are really trying to cultivate the relationship in a good way. So we need to keep it very clear in the mind that the purpose of a teacher is to guide us on the path, not give us all the love we never had and tell us how great we are.

Audience: Could you say more about being honest with ourselves in our relationship with the teacher?

Venerable: I mean that our mind can make a trick out of everything: "My teacher gave me something so difficult. Look how I am growing from it!" Our mind can do anything. So, it's important to be really honest with ourselves continuously and watch our emotions, feelings and thoughts: am I on-line, or am I going off-line? And sometimes we will go off-line. We will check up sometimes and say, "I am completely attached to my teacher."

Here is a real good story. In Singapore there was a young woman I've had a very good connection with for some years. Right before I was leaving last time to come to America, during a festival for Lama Tsong Khapa Day, we were all lighting candles. The young woman wanted to take a picture of me and other people lighting the candles and I said, "Let's put the camera down and think of Lama Tsong Khapa instead. And let's just offer the candles to Lama Tsong Khapa." So we did that. Some months later, I got a letter from her saying, "I feel like you were really unhappy with me because I wanted to take a picture and after I put the camera down, you didn't look at me." I didn't do that deliberately, I was concentrating on saying the prayers! But her mind had gone on this whole big trip because I hadn't looked at her.

Very often, our minds do this. We go on big trips over things that have absolutely no relevance to reality. And you'll see this comes out a lot in relationship to your teacher: "My teacher didn't look at me, so I must be doing something wrong, I must be worthless!" Or, you just begin to see all of your hallucinations. So it's always a matter of being very mindful and very aware.

I remember another personal story--I'll be telling you all of them! The really great masters tell all the stories of how Naropa relied on Tilopa, so you get all the stories of how the really great gurus do it, and I am just telling you all my painful experiences and mental distortions. [laughter] I remember another time when Lama Zopa was doing retreat in his room and he asked (we were all at Tushita) a couple of monks and nuns to come and do retreat with him. So they were doing retreat. The rest of us were burning with jealousy, because it's so wonderful to meditate in the room with Rinpoche. "How come he asked them to go and do retreat? Why didn't he ask me? How come he's always choosing them? He never chooses me. Why does he favor them? They are the creepiest disciples he has anyway. Why doesn't he like me because I try harder than anybody else!" Everybody else at that time was going through this contortion too.

So we really have to look at all this stuff. And I remember at that time going in (I had to ask Rinpoche a question about some thing or another) and he said, "Are other people upset because I asked these people to...?" [laughter] I said, "Yes, Rinpoche." "Oh, That's interesting." [laughter] So we really need to keep looking.

Whenever I get into this thing about, how come everybody else gets so much attention and I don't, I think about one line that Lama Yeshe said. I cling on to this line: Lama said that sometimes the people who are the most catastrophic are the ones the teacher keeps closer to them, because those people need more help. So I always cling on to that, thinking, "Maybe I am not that bad. That's why he doesn't pay so much attention to me." [laughter] But it is always a matter of being aware of what's going on, and questioning if there is a basis for reality in your thoughts and feelings.

Remember, the teacher is someone you have really checked up and you have confidence in and you really trust this person. So, you see, once you have a close relationship with your

teacher you get bumped up against all of your projections and then you have to really start checking up what's true and what's not true.

So this is like a training ground for us to practice on, because we are doing the same thing with other sentient beings, but we don't notice it. But with your teacher, sometimes it becomes even more apparent. For some people, maybe their mind is doing just as much garbage but they don't become aware of it, and that's when they go into all sorts of weird trips such as competition trips around the teacher: "I am going to cook his dinner." "No, I am!" "I am going to drive him here." "No, I am! You got to be near him last time." And everybody is tip-toeing around, trying to act like perfect little angels to please the teacher. But if people are really aware, then they look at their own minds and see very clearly what's going on. If they are not aware, then they just get into a big competition trip.

More questions? Am I scaring you, telling you all of these stories? [laughter]

Audience: What's the difference between Vajrayana and Tantra?

Venerable: Actually they are synonymous. This is the whole set of teachings that involve what is known as deity yoga: imagining different Buddha figures, and imagining you can transform yourself into the Buddha you are going to become. The set of texts in which these are taught are called the Tantras so this whole system is sometimes called Tantrayana or Vajrayana.

So, let's just sit and digest for a few minutes. Try and think about the different things you've heard, especially the advantages of relying on a teacher and some of the things about how to stretch your conceptual boundary, and let it all sink in.