

THE IMPORTANCE OF FINDING AN EXCELLENT TEACHER AND LAMA

Back in the early 1990's, I began longing for spiritual awareness and growth. I started my journey by studying Hinduism and practicing meditation. Through daily meditation, my stress was reduced, my self-talk lessened and often I could be in a non-conceptual state which felt blissful. This left me content for some time following meditation. However, I was still left with questioning who I really was, the purpose of life, and why life was such a roller coaster ride with highs and lows. Why couldn't I maintain the contentment I felt following meditation?

Then around 1997, I started reading books on Buddhism. I must have read forty or fifty books, mainly on Tibetan Buddhism. It was a very exciting time. Intellectually I found answers to my questions. I embraced the idea that all beings have Buddha Potential. The Four Noble Truths made perfect sense to me. The view of Karma (cause and effect) was like an old friend that I was getting reacquainted with. The truth of Impermanence made sense and was supported by scientific study. I learned about the suffering of samsara and the remedies to such suffering. I reread the books many, many times. My intellect said "This is the way to Liberation". My heart said "Yes, this is the way to Enlightenment". My meditations were helpful, but otherwise I saw little change in myself, and came to the conclusion that I cannot advance on the Path alone. I needed a Teacher! But where could I find a Teacher in Calgary? This was in 2004. I went into a Buddhist store to browse, and found myself asking the store owner if he knew of any Buddhist teachers in Calgary. I firmly believe that it was the Buddha's Blessings that inspired the question. As on my own, the question would not have been asked. The store owner smiled and gave me my teacher's name and phone number. This was a turning point for me, although I did not realize it at the time.

I phoned the Marpa Gompa Meditation Society and learned that every Thursday night teachings and meditation were held and it was open to all interested persons. I started attending regularly. The teaching was both informative and thought-provoking. There was both sitting and walking meditations. My teacher was kind and compassionate and demonstrated unending patience for questions asked and comments made. I became aware that she had all the qualities of a liberated person. She manifested generosity, wisdom regarding the Dharma, and wisdom in general. She had patience, a heart filled with loving kindness and compassion for all beings. Her speech and actions reflected these most positive feelings. Now these were the qualities to which I aspired. My teacher spoke regularly about our Lama (Karma Thinley Rinpoche) with great love and devotion. Gradually, I read and learned more about Rinpoche's life and past incarnations. I learned of the Kagyu lineage from the Buddha to Guru Rinpoche to Tilopa and the Karmapas who have headed our lineage for the past 900 years. I developed great confidence, trust and devotion for both my teacher and Rinpoche. I knew that it was time to take Refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. I aspired to increase my kindness and compassion for all sentient beings and be peaceful and controlled in all my thoughts, words and actions. I took Refuge in August 2005.

Since taking refuge, in my daily life, I train in being present. This means opening myself to both pleasure and pain from moment to moment. With my teacher's help, I am learning to recognize when I am blocked by old habits and prejudices. Consciousness of these habits (ego-clinging, etc.) must be recognized in order to be released. I am learning to trust that I can let go and remain open to all experiences without condemning or justifying. This is a process – rather hit and miss at the moment. My teacher knows me well, and because she is kind and patient, she gives me a soft nudge when needed. I sometimes stubbornly refuse to face unpleasantness or confusion, and eventually, she will give me the suggestion I need. Feeling gratitude for all Blessings and opportunities to grow (particularly

unpleasant experiences) is imperative. Being mindful and open creates the spaciousness necessary to move forward on the Path.

My teacher has instructed me in a number of practices which are meaningful. These are ones that help increase my loving kindness and compassion for all sentient beings and those that assist in purifying my defilements and obscurations. Also, very important, are practices to share merit with all sentient beings. The Sangha, with whom I meditate and study, have become my spiritual family. When I am surrounded by their caring and compassion, it assists my spiritual development. In turn, I hope that I reciprocate both at the Sangha and in the broader community. My following the Path is not just for my liberation but for the enlightenment of all sentient beings. It is not merely an intellectual study but an experiential process that manifests as awareness, spaciousness and fluidity.

My Path presently, is one of striving for consistent awareness, mindfulness and openness. It is also one of prayer, practice and meditation. Most importantly, it is one of great devotion and gratitude to my root Guru, Lama Karma Thinley Rinpoche and my teacher, Jetsun Rigdzin Khandro, whose Blessings guide me along the Path.

Karma Jangchub Lhamo