



Studying Buddhism in Bouddhanath

Feature

Part 1: How I arrived at the feet of the Master

WORDS SUSAN M. GRIFFITH-JONES

When it comes to studying with the High Masters of Tibet, one should never expect anything at all to be mundane! This too is not an ordinary story... I mean, it wasn't like I heard about a course on Buddhism or looked it up online and then came to a certain

place to attend classes. Not at all! In fact, I literally fell into it so completely organically that one could hardly say that I'd even intended it to happen.

Well, that's not entirely true, as I had been calling out for 'someone' to guide me through the strange new vision of the world I'd found myself experiencing,

after newly found states of consciousness had been simply pouring out of my being for some years prior to that. In a sense, I'd also stumbled upon these too without necessarily really meaning or trying to. Looking back on it later, I see that just as every honest intention planted like a fertile seed must, in time, produce the



intended result, this very sincere request to find a teacher was now simply being answered. As the old saying goes, “When the disciple is ready, the Guru appears!”

Receiving tantric teachings from a Great Master is not the same as ‘studying the teachings’ from an intellectual point of view, where one learns facts, analyses and digests them, and then comments on them in a way that is refined and eloquent. To actually go through the process of changing and refining one’s consciousness is a completely different story, and requires a lot of strength to modify one’s already solid understanding of what life is all about. Like, for example, ‘BEING PATIENT’ doesn’t mean understanding what ‘patience’ is intellectually, it means, BEING PA-

TIENT! And it requires a whole change of consciousness to automatically and authentically exude this quality from one’s being in everyday life.

We can easily see the faults of others, but to recognize how one is actually behaving and to repair our own harmful ways, one needs to be really brave. To a certain extent, it’s possible to do this alone, or with guidance from a book, or like-minded friends, but to really look at yourself honestly, especially when it comes to one’s more subtle aspects, it’s necessary to come into the energy range of an authentic Master, who acts as a mirror for you to be able to see and experience them firsthand. And, this can sometimes be so terrifying that only a true Master can detect which level you

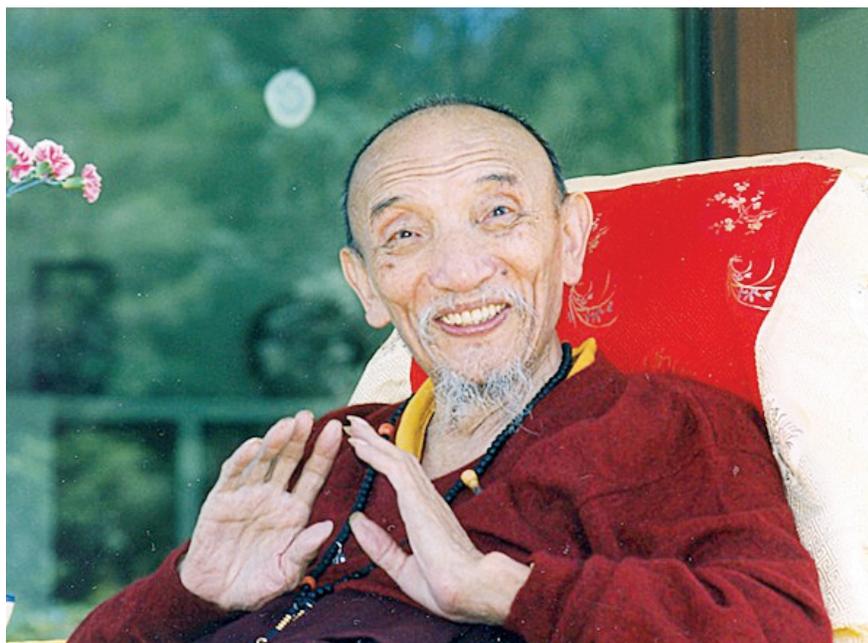
require at what time; not too much to scare you off, not too little to make you bored, and how to resolve the situation if things get out of hand.

What I’m really trying to stress here is that everything that happened in the run up to me actually arriving at the feet of the Master, who would take me through this process in the guise of the vast collection of teachings of the Vajrayana tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, was as intricate a part of the process as the actual studying with him that came later, like going through the preparatory stages of sowing that would eventually ripen later when I came to Bouddhanath to study under him. When I look back on it now, I see how all this occurred with such a natural flow that I didn’t

really have to 'do' anything as such, but just 'follow the road' of events that were happening along the way and keep on processing them. This sounds super easy, but in actual fact, much of what I had to do required incredible courage, sweat, pain, confusion, doubt, anxiety, and all sorts of other strenuous emotions to get through each step of the way and come out the other side, one tiny pace closer to reaching the Master.

And, following this sequence of events not only requires seeing things from a lateral perspective, but is also key to understanding the whole process, as in a kind of subliminal way, I was already receiving teachings before even having met my teacher! I told you it was going to be a different kind of approach! I'll explain... at the moment that my perspective on life had started shifting and I was becoming more in tune with my feelings, emotions, and sensations, as well as actually aware of how I was experiencing these aspects and their connection to the world appearing around me, like an interlocking system of cogs and wheels, my whole life was also rapidly changing shape, automatically and with tremendous synchronicity. Along with others, who have equally fantastic stories on how they ended up in his cradle of teachings, I too believe that he's constantly emitting a type of signal, like a radio wave, and if the transistor of your consciousness can pick up on this vibration, it will kind of reel you in. So, from the moment that my consciousness had actually started changing, I was entering into his frequency range, so to speak, but would then have to bear the ensuing tests to see if I could find my way through the labyrinth of appearance without getting stuck here or there, to reach the moment when I would actually sit at his physical feet to receive his direct teachings.

In short, I would have to prove my authenticity, not to anyone else, but to myself. The Guru was already there, but could I reach him? There is no guide book that dictates what route this takes exactly and how the path will unfold, because at this level of teaching, the process is full proof and so absolutely honest to one's individual state, totally relying on the actual level of refinement of one's consciousness and not how much one intellectually 'knows' about Buddhism. This, I see, happened to me through letting what was really happen-



His Eminence Chogye Trichen Rinpoche

ing to me, happen, and being honest to my heartfelt aspirations.

There is no definite starting point to this process, but I'll backtrack to a watershed moment in my life when I exited a relationship that was no longer fitting the framework of who I had become, and I was in a vulnerable enough position to lose a kind of stubbornness that was keeping me on the treadmill of habitual ways that were not really helping me in life any more. This was synonymous to the process of releasing attachment to perspectives I'd been imitating through the culture and society I'd grown up in and those I'd created for myself until now in my life, and going beyond these, into another state of mind.

Immediately after splitting with my ex, I was staring up at the ceiling before going to sleep that night and asking the blank, dark space in a fervent and sincere manner, where I should go next and what I should do. Looking back on this moment now, I see that I was sending out the vibe of 'readiness' to follow that desire to find a guide on the spiritual path that I'd already sent out some years prior to this. I had come a long way to arrive at this moment, and my questions were answered immediately when I exuded the requisite sincerity. This simply cannot be faked or cheated into occurring, as it's a real emission of energy, a wave form of subtle movement sending out its vibe.

I awoke the next morning with a mantra-like sound still rolling off my tongue,

"Annapurna, Annapurna, Annapurna." I knew that I needed to follow this up immediately, and at a time when using the internet for absolutely everything was not yet set in stone (2001), decided to check out where this 'Annapurna' place was at the local library the next morning. Finding out that it was in Nepal was not a surprise, as I'd been having a pull to go there for many years, but had obviously not been quite 'in the zone' yet, as I'd never followed up this aspiration.

The next test followed immediately, as I could have simply stopped the whole process there and then, but I KNEW I had to follow this through to the end. So I got onto the internet in the library itself, simply writing the word, 'Nepal' into the search box, hit the button and went through all the sites that came up, sending out a short synopsis about myself to each and every one that looked interesting; teaching English, working in NGO's or other charitable projects, etc.... I knew I would probably have to work for free for starters, with food and board included, and figure out the rest later. In any case, what more did I need than to get to Nepal as soon as possible and start this new chapter in my life, whatever that may mean.

Remember, at this stage I didn't know I was going to meet a great Master and receive teachings from him. I was simply following a kind of knowingness that I needed to get to Nepal. My first question had been answered. Now, I needed to answer the second, what was it that I was actually going to do there?

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