

Bodhi Path Sutra and Tantra

by Shamar Rinpoche

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Why the Bodhi Path Centers I organized are not Vajrayana

After observing this movement [in the minds of modern people] for 30 years, my conclusion is that Vajrayana is not really suitable for most people in both the West and in Asia, including Tibet. You cannot generalize, of course. There are certainly exceptions, but in most cases it [Tantra] is not suitable. Since sex is taught as the main core of Tantric practice in the West and this does not benefit anyone, what is generally practiced as Tantra in the West is based on a big misunderstanding.



I have paid close attention to the kinds of qualities required to ensure the suitability of Tantric practice for particular people. It depends on the three factors of cause, condition and effect. **The cause:** people who have some karmic connection to it. Though one may be in a lower human life, some deep karma is the cause of one's connection to Vajrayana practice. **The condition:** the conditions conducive to Tantric practice are, generally, that one belongs to a society that is in nature quite aggressive and one must be filled with emotions. **The effect:** though one lives in bad conditions, in other words the afflictions are stronger, at the same time one has strong willpower to struggle against hardships. Therefore tantra was very suitable during the middle ages in Asia. For example, it flourished at a time in India when people became more aggressive and suffered from more afflictions. It also remained suitable until around the 14th century in Tibet and the Himalayas.

I think that nowadays the Bodhisattvayana with a high level of meditation is most suitable for the majority of people. That is why I organized Bodhi Path Centers to combine Atisha's *Kadampa* lineage with *Mahamudra* meditation in Gampopa's tradition. There are actually two uses of the term Mahamudra within Gampopa's work: one is Tantric and the other is his explanation of the meditation that Buddha taught in the *Samadhiraja Sutra*. We see the latter in the titles of texts he wrote about meditation that are based on the Samadhiraja Sutra. When I use the term Mahamudra here, I am referring to the Mahamudra of the Samadhiraja meditation tradition, not to the Tantric Mahamudra.

Bodhi Path Centers are established as learning centers. They are places where you can learn Dharma, learn and practice meditation, and continue to lead a normal life. Bodhi Path is not an organization that enforces compulsory rules of behaviour. The moral conduct that we encourage is simply the avoidance of the **10 non-virtues**: avoid the physical non-virtues of **killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct**; the verbal non-virtues of **lying, slander, harsh speech and divisive speech**; and the mental non-virtues of **hatred, desire, and ignorance**. In addition to that, practitioners should avoid **intoxication and blind faith**. Keeping these guidelines of moral conduct is your **protection**, not a set of laws to be followed for their own sake. You should learn what these non-virtues are and learn to avoid them. The Buddhist view of moral conduct is that it will shield you like strong armour.

In addition to avoiding the 10 non-virtuous actions, intoxication and blind faith, you should learn and implement the attitude of a Bodhisattva: *bodhicitta* [the enlightened attitude of compassion and the wish of happiness for others]. This will help you to accumulate vast amounts of merit. Combine this with learning how to meditate according to the teachings on mindfulness and you will achieve the best results.

In the Buddha's time, becoming a monk or a nun meant full renunciation. Monastics renounced everything. They spent their days and nights in meditation, begged for food from villages and towns, and didn't have so much as a penny. It was especially important for them to keep strict discipline since they had to show themselves to be different from ordinary beggars through their conduct. They had to keep their dignity. In all developed countries these days, both in the West and in Asia, becoming a monk or a nun is no longer the only or best possibility to really implement the teachings. On the one hand, where people pay lots of taxes, insurance, etc. it is not practical to live as a monastic; and on the other hand, in the Tibetan tradition monks and nuns do not in any case keep the full Vinaya discipline. It's not that it is impossible to become a monk or nun any more, but I think it is unnecessary unless you can keep the discipline of full ordination which means keeping the 253 vows, etc..

The suitability of particular practices and lifestyles is dependent on the era we live in and the nature of the society we live in. Whatever is the most suitable method for transforming people is the highest Yana (**vehicle**). Likewise, what is suitable for fewer people is the middle yana, and what is suitable for very few people is the lowest or so-called Hinayana. All methods for attaining enlightenment were given by the Buddha, but the one most suitable for your development as it is taught to you by a master, (**that**) is the supreme Yana. Therefore the curriculum in my Bodhi Path Centers is based on the suitability for people today. While some Vajrayana practice is of course alright, like Chenrezig practice, for example, for the most part I recommend that practitioners concentrate on avoiding the ten non-virtuous actions, keeping the bodhisattva attitude, and learning the levels of mindfulness.

- Shamarpa

www.shamarpa.org

A note about this paper

This paper was published in the first half of the month of July 2010 on Shamar Rinpoche's homepage. Shortly after it vanished from the website; but on the 10th of October it reappeared. In January 2011, it was finally removed.

The exchange of views between Shamarpa and Lama Ole Nydahl can be found here:

www.tilogaard.dk/html/gamle_nyheder_2010.html

Shamar Rinpoche's paper might be misunderstood as misrepresenting Lama Ole Nydahl, who often lectures on the subject of "Love and relationships", though he does not instruct his students in the art of erotic Tantra as such. Because of the significance of this apparent conflict and the official history of Karma Kagyü tradition in all of this, the paper is still here on Tilogaard's website. The revised statement simply lacks the first part of this paper.

You cannot find this information on neither Shamar Rinpoche's website or any of the Diamondway Buddhist center's homepages. In fact, Tilogaard seem to be the only formal Karma Kagyü institution to report about this matter. In this particular case, it is done in order to protect the legacy of Shamar Rinpoche. There were many ups and downs in his last life, and also this story shows, how remarkable he was.

It might be, that Lama Ole Nydahl is somewhat excused in his rather harsh words towards Shamar Rinpoche in their communications in connection with this paper, because Lama Ole Nydahl's Alzheimer dementia was just beginning to get a hold of him in those years. He obviously did not want to start a fight with Shamar Rinpoche, as the end to this story shows.

But then again, Lama Ole Nydahl is known to instruct particularly married couples to visualize themselves as certain Yidam forms in union, even they have not received proper initiations for that, nor have they been instructed how to do this according to tradition. It would seem, that Lama Ole Nydahl thought, that this kind of thing was in fact quite harmless, just a play thing. This is most likely the reason, that Shamar Rinpoche was led to think, that Lama Ole Nydahl was indeed instructing people into the arts of true Tantric eroticism.

(Lama Tendar Olaf Hoeyer, June 2023.)