

Class 4 Handout: Understanding Lineage

The word “lineage” refers to a **line of individuals** who have passed down the teachings from the time of Shakyamuni Buddha. The way this works is that the teacher **orally transmits** the teachings to the student.

- the outer teacher: **human teacher**
- the inner teacher: **our own internalization and adoption of the teachings.**
- the most inner teacher: **own Buddha Nature**

This **transmission of living wisdom** is said to be the essential quality of **Tibetan Buddhism**.

A **metaphor** for lineage is an *electrical wire*.

****These enable us to manifest our innate qualities of compassion and wisdom****

The key point here is: the lineage and the teachers are the conduits for the teachings and blessings that originated with Shakyamuni Buddha.

Kagyu lineage

Buddhism came to Tibet in the 8th century, when Buddhist teachers traveled from India to Tibet.

The Kagyu lineage is **one of the four major lineages of Tibetan Buddhism**.

(The other lineages are the Nyingma, Gelugpa, and Sakya.)

The Tibetan syllable **Ka** means the **oral teachings** of the Buddha and the guru.

The syllable **gyu** means **lineage**.

So, the Kagyu lineage is known as “the lineage of transmission” or the lineage of oral instructions.”

The lineage is also called the “practice” lineage, because of the emphasis on meditation practice.

The lineage began in India with **Tilopa** (988-1089), a wandering yogi and mahasiddha.

The Sanskrit word mahasiddha means “great power.” This title refers to great meditative accomplishment.

Tilopa transmitted the teachings to **Naropa** (1016-1100), a great scholar at Nalanda University, the Buddhist center of learning.

Naropa taught **Marpa** (1012-1097), a Tibetan farmer and yogi.

Marpa is the beginning of the Kagyu lineage in Tibet.

He is known as The Great Translator, because he made three trips from Tibet to India to study with Naropa and bring back the teachings.

Marpa's most important student was **Milarepa** (1052-1135), who is considered Tibet's **greatest yogi**.

Milarepa passed the teachings on to **Gampopa**, a physician, scholar, and monk.

Gampopa transmitted the teachings to **Dusum Khyenpa, the first Karmapa** (1110-1193).

He was followed by a **succession of reincarnate lamas that extends to the 17th Karmapa of today**.

The Karmapa is considered the *embodiment of all the blessings of the lineage*.

A Qualified Teacher

According to the teachings, we come to Buddhism as a patient comes to a doctor.

We're like a patient with an illness.

Our illness is our fixation on an illusory self, and the afflictive emotions and negative karma that result from this fixation.

The **teacher is seen as the physician, and the dharma as the medicine.**

Because Shakyamuni Buddha is no longer alive, we rely on the qualified teacher.

How do we relate to the teacher?

Over time, we might see the teacher **as a spiritual friend or mentor** – someone who can offer us valuable personal advice and spiritual guidance.

At the highest level of engagement, we view the teacher as an enlightened being.

And we view the *instructions as significant commitments*.

The Path

The way we approach the teachings of the Buddha is through something known as “The Threefold Training,” or “The Threefold Discipline.”

1. *Listening* to the teachings
2. *Contemplating* them, and
3. *Meditating*, so that we integrate the teachings into our lives.

The ultimate goal is enlightenment or realization, in order to liberate all beings from suffering.

Spread of Buddhism

- India: -623 to -543 BC (life of Buddha)
- Sri Lanka/Thailand: 5-1 century BC
- China/Korea Mahayana: 1-4 century AD
- Tibet: Vajrayana – 8th century AD
- Japan: Zen – 12th century AD
- Europe & the Americas: 19 and 20th century AD