

## THE CENTRALITY OF THE BUDDHIST TEACHER GURU-YOGA IN THE TIBETAN TRADITIONS

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### ABSTRACT

The centrality of having a ‘spiritual teacher, or friend’ (Pāli *kalyanamitta*; Skt. *kalyānamitra* Tib. *dge ba’i bshes gnyen*) has been emphasized in Buddhism since the times of Buddha Śākyamuni himself. In the *Meghiya Sutta* of the Pāli canon the Buddha stressed the necessity and advantages of having a spiritual friend to “ensure success in the Buddhist path.” Throughout the history of Buddhism, the requirements of a spiritual friend shifted to reflect the concerns of the tradition without their being any doubt as to the importance of a qualified teacher to guide disciples in the path of meditation and ensure an unbroken continuity of the lineage. In Vajrayāna Buddhism, the centrality of the guru (Tib. *bla ma*) takes the form of a particular type of meditation known as ‘guru-yoga’ (Tib. *lha ma rnal ’byor*), or the practice of uniting one’s awareness with that of the teacher. In this paper, I will introduce this meditation practice shared by all schools of Tibetan Buddhism, discuss some of the techniques and stages of visualization whose ultimate aim is to identify with the inner teacher, our buddha-nature that is the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice.

### KEYWORDS

Buddhist Teacher, Spiritual Friend, *Kalyānamitra*, Lama, Guru-yoga