

His Holiness Gyalwa Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje

Healing the Earth through Awakening

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- Notes from a Participant-

Morning teaching

There is a strong connection between the outer world and the inner world. It is a connection of interdependence. Caring for the external world promotes a sense of inner purity. As an example of how the outer world affects our thoughts and actions, His Holiness noted that at his teachings in metropolitan New York, the bright lights around the stage obscured his vision of those who had come to hear him teach. However, at Macky Auditorium, he could see all of us clearly and this would affect what he said to us. Another example of how the outer and inner worlds interact is that when we practice meditation it is important to create proper conditions for practice. For shamata practice, the foundation of all practice, the first thing we must do is to create a peaceful environment. This demonstrates the connection between outer environment and our state of mind. This principle of the outer environment being important to peace in our mind is something we should think about.

So much in the modern environment poses a challenge to inner peace. For example, we see devastation wrought by natural calamities; when affected by natural calamity, many people lose their basic emotional stability. It is important to train our minds to connect with peace before calamities or other natural disasters occur.

When His Holiness was eight years old, the area of his monastery, not far from Lhasa, had earthquakes every day. In this part of Tibet, all the structures were wood and rattled noisily. But at that age, he said he did not know how to be scared, so he slept through many earthquakes. Even when people carried him from his three-story home to a single-story building that was considered safer, he woke briefly, but then went right back to sleep. Though His Holiness was relaxed through all this, people came to him, saying, „You are the Karmapa. You should stop these earthquakes.“ His Holiness said he didn't even know enough to fear earthquakes, so it seemed odd that he would be expected to stop them. At the time, there was a belief that earthquakes were caused by a giant tortoise stirring beneath the earth. People told him to talk to the tortoise and persuade it to stop causing earthquakes. But if this giant tortoise was under the earth, the very young Karmapa wondered, where would his ears be? He was not sure, so he simply started talking to the earth, saying, „If you stop moving, I will give you something good, perhaps some milk. But if you don't stop moving, things will not be easy for you.“ After that, the earth settled down. When His Holiness was fourteen, his escape to India was being planned. The afternoon that plans about their route and other particulars were finalized, there was a small earthquake. His Holiness, smiling, noted, „It was as if he knew I was leaving and he did not have to be still anymore.“ He also said he thought that the earth tremor was a sign of good luck.

There is an intimate connection between the outer and inner world. The essential nature of both is the same, so they are like water being poured into water. We can come to realize this.

Our minds do not rest in the essential nature very often. We are, rather, in a conceptual state in which we label things „outer“ and „inner.“ Sometimes we can influence the environment through prayer and aspiration, but such matters as violent warfare in other parts of the world are very difficult to reverse. Humans are capable of creating situations in the world, such as intense warfare, that are very difficult to reverse.

We are talking about healing the environment through the mind of awakening. It is difficult to stop warfare because those involved are motivated by strong anger and hatred, potently negative mental states. It would be very difficult to influence these with our minds alone. We should nonetheless seek to make our environment peaceful and gentle. Aspirations for this are important, but not sufficient.

People always come to see His Holiness when they are troubled; he said they don't come to tell him that things are going well. When people come to him with their problems, he tries to think about what changes can be introduced to improve their situation. Much of the time, a strong sense of burden in our minds determines our experience of difficult circumstances. The most skilful approach to improving our situation is to work with our minds rather than external circumstances. Our suffering has a lot to do with where we place our mind. When we face difficult circumstances, the degree of suffering depends on how we relate to the circumstance, where we place it in our hearts and minds. Be mindful of how we process difficult situations, where in our hearts and minds we place our circumstances. We can become skilful at this; we can be at peace with difficult external situations, and eventually the difficult external circumstances can be pacified.

There are many problems we cannot address directly and immediately in the world today. It is, however, possible to make things change indirectly. This is not merely a hope - His Holiness has had a vision that this is possible. As an illustration of his vision of how this works, in his early life, His Holiness lived a very restricted life in Tibet and later in India. Over time, people began to pay attention to his situation. It became their concern. As others became concerned, the situation became more vast and things became more workable. And now His Holiness has been able to come to America, to be here in Boulder, sharing his thoughts. This demonstrates how we can affect change - by making others' concerns our own.

Afternoon teaching

His Holiness expressed a deep sense of joy and familiarity in being with us. Even though he has not had the opportunity to converse with each of us, we seem familiar to him.

In the earlier teaching, His Holiness talked about the interconnectedness of the outer environment and our minds, and how to work with that interconnectedness to bring about change in the world. Everything we do leaves an imprint on the world. Now is the time to consider our imprint on the world, in particular how we can contribute. The world has given us much, an environment in which we live and practice. Now we should consider how to give back. Sometimes it seems we can approach this relationship with the world as if the world's citizens are artists creating a vision of their environment, everyone in the world offering an ideal representation of the world in which we live, creating together a beautiful vision of the world. The world is getting smaller, a global village whose members are interconnected. There is great opportunity for the East to share its wisdom with the West and for the West to share its resources with the East.

His Holiness feels that because of a greater sense of interconnectedness due to technological advances, this is a wonderful time to be alive. However, this is also a time of widespread conflict. We must choose what to do and what not to do. We must select positive, virtuous opportunities, even if they seem difficult. We must think deeply about what we want and how to get there. This is a way to connect deeply with virtuous actions.

What we think we want depends on our disposition. When we think deeply rather than superficially about what we want, there are discoveries to be made. There is a nice story about His Holiness the Dalai Lama regarding the distinction between being attracted to things and taking only what we need. Gyalwa Rinpoche, i.e., His Holiness the Dalai Lama, loves watches. He repairs them and likes new watches. When he needed a new watch, he enjoyed looking at many watches and was attracted to many fine watches, but purchased only the simple, functional watch that he needed. Merchants try to sell us many things, but we should be selective and take only what we need. Unless controlled in this way, craving is endless.

His Holiness mentioned how Jetsün Milarepa attained enlightenment in one body, in one lifetime, and suggested what might happen if Milarepa lived today. If His Holiness offered Milarepa a laptop computer and showed him the features of a mobile phone and offered that to Milarepa as well, it might delay Milarepa's enlightenment. Engaging too extensively with possessions and possible possessions can divert one from the path.

The advantage of living in a technically advanced society is convenience - the ability to be effective and get quick results. It is an advantage as long as we are producing positive results. One can, these days, also quickly and conveniently produce negative results. As one of many possible examples of the negative effects of modern technical efficiency, His Holiness told a story of the village in which he spent his early years. There were hunters who hunted animals near the village. Their tools were simple

and because the tools were simple, there was no threat of extinction, no major disruption of the animal population. In modern times, hunters equipped with guns, binoculars and other tools have hunted animals to the brink of extinction. We have a notion that this world will be around for a long time. However, if we accumulate powerful negative karma through how we use technology, this becomes less likely.

Technology and material advancement are neutral. Humans create positive and negative karma through positive and negative actions. To give rise to a strong desire to positively affect the world, we need to think deeply. Rather than think of the world as inanimate, consider all that the world gives to us and to all sentient beings. This world is like a loving mother, giving us life. The world can be an object for compassion and loving kindness. Through practicing loving kindness and compassion, we can bring peace to our world.

In Tibet, there are many stories about highly accomplished masters who left handprints on stones and performed other feats that seem miraculous. They do this to teach us about the powerful connection between our mind and the world. A heart full of love can transform something as hard as rock into something malleable. This ends the main teaching, which was followed by a question-answer session.

Question: Some Karma Kagyu teachers say we are on the verge of a dark era of rampant desire, false teachers, etc. What can you say about this?

Answer: In technical terminology, this is the kali yuga, the „age of pollution.“ What is meant by „pollution“ here is what remains when what is good has been overpowered by negative forces. In the kali yuga, it is difficult to find a Lama free of faults. Even if we did find one, our mental state is such that we would project faults onto a teacher who is without flaw. Thus, we should simply rely on a Guru who has more positive than negative traits. Teachers in this age will have a combination of positive and negative qualities, but they can still benefit us. It might be difficult to rely on the teacher in the traditional way. We can approach our Buddhist training in the beginning as a kind of education. During this phase, we can gain understanding of the qualities of both a genuine teacher and a capable student.

(Question about how to be a good Dharma student.)

Answer: Dharma is about training our own mind, so first consider what keeps us from taming our minds. There are three phases to proper practice of Dharma: (1) preparation, (2) main practice, and (3) follow-up. Preparation is forming a strong resolve, a strong motivation that suffuses our being. Main practice: The capable student applies diligence, patience, exertion and long-term vision to taming the mind. Follow-up: After practice, go out and help others. Don't wait to attain Buddhahood - consider how to benefit others right now. View others, their joys and sorrows, as extensions of your own being.

(Question about whether it is better to invest effort in environmentalism or to invest completely in Buddhist practice.)

Answer: How many people focus one-pointedly on practice now? We don't know what will happen in the future. The situation we are in now is that resources are scarce and the population is growing, but to over-focus on the future can be detrimental to our efforts to have a positive effect on the world. We have a responsibility to leave a habitable world for today's children.

Inter-sangha audience (evening)

(Question about shamata and vipashana.)

Answer: Generally, we say that we practice shamata to reverse the tendency of our mind to be distracted. In vipashana, we investigate. The mere accomplishment of shamata does not in itself engender vipashana. Vipashana is practiced in other religions, including Hindu religions. Teachings on selflessness, investigated in vipashana, are unique to Buddhism. This requires intention. It will not arise naturally.

(Question on importance of study on the Buddhist path.)

Answer: One traditional way of discussing this is hearing, contemplating and meditating. If we do not incorporate all three of these in our practice, then our practice is incomplete. It is possible to hear teachings, contemplate them and meditate simultaneously. However, for beginners, this is not possible; so it is possible for us to hear one-pointedly, contemplate one-pointedly and meditate. The cause for meditative accomplishment is vast hearing and extensive contemplation. Without these, there is no true meditative experience.

(Question about the origin of the Bardo teachings and whether the duration of the bardo state is necessarily 49 days.)

Answer: The Bardo teachings originated with the Buddha, in the Tantras, particularly in the Nyingma Tantras. There are examples of periods in the bardo that are greater than 49 days. Some classes of sentient beings have no bardo at all; they go directly to their next rebirth. When beings enter the bardo, there is suffering, e.g., fear and terror due to negative acts on the path. When one dies and enters the bardo, the most subtle form of mind, luminosity, becomes accessible and we can become enlightened. Bardo teachings are intended to help us make good use of this opportunity.

(Question asking His Holiness to comment on the condition of Dharma practice in the East and West.)

Answer: Westerners, who are trustworthy, are being entrusted with secret teachings. There are differences in the ways people think, their inclinations and approaches. The Dharma is taught consistent with the disposition of various students. The Kagyu Lineage originated in India, and Indians as well as Tibetans are held in high regard. All Gurus in the Lineage are to be revered. There is no particular reason for concern about cross-cultural issues in spreading the Dharma.

Conclusion

His Holiness said that he would write in his journal about his visit to Boulder and recollect his time here again and again. There were obstacles to His Holiness' coming here, but his resolve was so strong that these obstacles were overcome. His love for us is so strong that nothing can get in the way of his coming here and spending time with us. His Holiness said he would return to Boulder.

Dedication

Through this goodness, may omniscience be attained
And thereby may every enemy (mental defilement) be overcome.
May beings be liberated from the ocean of samsara
That is troubled by waves of birth, old age, sickness, and death.

By this virtue may I quickly attain the state of Guru Buddha, and then
Lead every being without exception to that very state!
May precious and supreme Bodhicitta that has not been generated now be so,
And may precious Bodhicitta that has already been never decline, but continuously increase!

May the life of the Glorious Lama remain steadfast and firm.
May peace and happiness fully arise for beings as limitless in number as space is vast in its extent.
Having accumulated merit and purified negativities, may I and all living beings without exception swiftly establish the levels and grounds of Buddhahood.