



Venerable Ringu Tulku Rinpoche

Buddhist Wisdom Today

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Hosted by Karma Sherab Ling,
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We all have the very tragic and senseless killing of innocent people on our mind nowadays and fear war of some kind in the near future. I am sure you are praying for the people who suffered on September 11th and for the survivors. Let us dedicate this talk for peace in the future.

Just like all of you, I was terribly shocked and deeply saddened when I heard about the destruction of the Twin Towers. But I wasn't totally surprised, because I know many people who belong to the Muslim community in India and I know the amount of hatred and hurt that they have against America. I think this shows how important it is to try to generate understanding and love for one another, instead of hatred and suspicion and only being concentrated on self-interests. It also shows how much we need to think about and invest more in generating trust and loving kindness as a means of security and not just in weapons and technologies.

I think that the most important teaching of the Buddha is that hatred begets hatred and love begets love. If one wants peace and harmony, one has to try to generate love, kindness, and understanding within oneself. This can't be done by the governments, by organizations, or by the United Nations – it has to be done by each and every individual. It might be a difficult task, but it's the only way to create friendship, harmony, trust, and a peaceful atmosphere in the Lands.

I heard that His Holiness the Dalai Lama visited Münster a few years ago. I'm sure that many of you were able to see and hear him and I'm sure that I cannot say something that he hasn't said. Concerning different societies, different religions, different ways of thinking, as I understand it, I'm sure that when someone chooses or follows a particular philosophy, has a particular way of thinking or religion, then this person has no doubts that the path he is following is the best. If he didn't think this, why would he follow it? Followers must think that the path they belong to is the best, which I think is okay. From the Buddhist point of view, the understanding is that whatever path someone follows might be the best for that person, but this doesn't mean that everyone else is totally wrong and what they follow isn't good, positive, and beneficial for them. If their belief system didn't bring them any good, then why would they follow it? Therefore, it's most important to let what is good for oneself be and to accept and respect what others consider good for themselves.

In accordance with what the Buddha said, one of the main philosophies of Buddhism is that different kinds of people need different teachings and ways to follow, because they are different in their nature, in their mentality, in their attitude, and have different personalities. Therefore, the Buddha said that in his lifetime he taught 84,000 different kinds of ways. I don't know how to count that, but that is what he said. He was not referring to 84,000 different thoughts but spoke about the different means that he presented to different people. When one understands and respects this, then there's no ground to be disrespectful of other people's ways of thinking and seeing things. This is the basis of Buddhist philosophy, I think.

It's important to know that Buddhism is not a religion. It's a philosophy, a way of living. Calling Buddhism a religion depends on how one defines it. The loose translation of the Sanskrit term for 'religion' is *dharma*, but maybe it isn't the correct translation. *Dharma* is an interesting word that has many meanings. The root of the word *dharma* is *dhar-*, which denotes 'to hold one,' e.g., to hold one from falling down and from having problems. In the East, *dharma* is understood to mean a method through which one tries to see things very clearly, as they are, and thus it is that which provides guidance in such a way that one is able to do the right thing. It is therefore that which saves one from falling into more suffering and problems. Furthermore, it is the help one has in finding a way to get rid of the sources of suffering, pain, and problems. Basically, *dharma* is a way to find one's way out of suffering and to solve problems. I think this is the basis and aim of all philosophies and religions. Basically, there is nobody who does not want to get rid of suffering, problems, and pain and who does not want to find a way to attain lasting peace and happiness. That is the main aim of everyone's endeavours and the main thing people are busy trying to achieve.

One way to solve one's problems is to turn one's attention outwards, e.g., one builds a house when one has no place to live, one turns on the heater when it is cold, one builds schools for educational purposes and hospitals for medical treatment, and things like that. These are necessary and most important things. But most spiritual traditions, like Buddhism, teach how to deal with inner experiences, e.g., becoming old, losing persons one loves very much, facing catastrophes, problems, and sufferings. Is there anything one can do about the suffering one experiences or does one have to suffer, become sad, and just wait? Is there a way to do something so that one doesn't suffer anymore? What we call "a spiritual path" is trying to find a way to deal with problems and painful situations by working on one's way of seeing things, on one's

reactions, on one's attitude. By working on one's own way of seeing and feeling, one changes and transforms one's situation. That's why the spiritual path is called "an inner science," because it doesn't have to do with working on outer things but with working more inside.

From the Buddhist point of view, everybody can change, can become better, can improve, and can bring out their positive qualities. However dull, negative, or problematic one is presently, the main point is that the most cruel person can become the most loving person and, if they try and work on it, the most ignorant people can become the most wise. Every living being has the Buddha nature. Every living being has the potential to become enlightened. Becoming enlightened doesn't mean becoming inhumane, rather it means developing one's wisdom and compassion for others. Therefore the Buddha said that if we can generate and develop that, then anybody can.

There's a story of an incident that took place during the Buddha's life, while he was staying in Benares in India and teaching. A businessman attended his teachings for many years. One day he said to the Buddha, "You know, Buddha, I've been coming to your teachings for a long, long time and I like them very much. Lots of people come to your teachings and I see that some of them transform, change completely, and become really good. I also see that some people become a little bit better. But I also see that lots of us don't change but remain as we are, if not becoming worse. What is this?"

The Buddha said to the businessman, "Your dialect doesn't sound like you come from here. Where do you come from?"

The man replied, "I come from Bodhgaya. I do business here."

The Buddha then said, "In that case, you will probably return to Bodhgaya some time."

"Yes," the man said. "Of course, I go to Bodhgaya very often, because that's my home."

Then the Buddha said, "In that case, you must know the way to Bodhgaya very well."

The man replied, "Of course. I know it very well."

Then the Buddha said, "In that case, the people who know that you come from Bodhgaya might ask you the way."

The man said, "Yes, lots of people ask me the way."

Then the Buddha asked, "In that case, do you tell them?"

The man answered, "Why not? I tell them everything. It's no secret."

Then the Buddha asked the man, "Do all the people who ask you the way to Bodhgaya get there?"

The man replied, "Well, it depends on whether they go. If they follow my instructions and go, they can get there, otherwise not."

Then the Buddha said, "That's exactly the same thing with me. People know that I have found the way and therefore they ask me the way. Why shouldn't I tell them? It's no secret. I tell them everything, but only those who actually go reach the goal, otherwise not. So, that's the same problem."

Put in a nutshell, the main thing to work on in Buddhism is said to be compassion and wisdom. Compassion in Buddhism is based on understanding and being mindful. One knows: "Just as I do not want to suffer and do not want to have problems and pain, I know that nobody else wants to suffer, either. Therefore I wish that nobody experiences suffering, problems, and pain. I know that just as I want to experience happiness, peace, and well-being in a lasting way, all living beings

want to experience the same, too. Therefore I wish that everybody experiences happiness, peace, and well-being.” Compassion begins with oneself. It is based on one’s own experience, but it is not exclusive to oneself.

Sometimes people misunderstand what it means to have compassion. They think that it is too difficult, or they fear that people will take advantage of them if they are compassionate and then they will become like their doormat. From the Buddhist point of view, this isn’t compassion. Compassion means trying to do something that is good for oneself and for everyone else. It means not wishing anything bad for anybody, but wishing everyone the best – including oneself. It is thinking, “I wish myself the best. I wish everybody the best. If I can do something that is good for me and good for others, I will try to do it. If there is something that is bad for me and bad for others, I will try to avoid it.” One knows that one is related to others and isn’t happy when one thinks that one is the only person. For example, somebody says, “You will be saved. You are the only one. You are the best person and the rest are problematic.” Can one be totally happy when one hears this and when one thinks, “What about my parents? What about my family? What about my friends? Maybe I’m too worried about them, but I can’t be happy if I’m put aside.” That’s the main point: Nobody can really be happy or become liberated by feeling separate from others and only thinking of themselves. One has love, compassion, closeness to people, at least to some people.

One of the main understandings of Buddhism is that each and every living being can become compassionate, because there is hardly anybody who in a small corner of the heart doesn’t have compassion for someone. There can be love for somebody, even in a most hidden corner of the most evil person’s heart. Since this is so, love can be developed and strengthened and therefore compassion can also be developed and strengthened. In the same way, even the most dull person among us has a slight understanding of what is right and what is wrong, which can also be developed and can grow. This is the aspect of wisdom that every living being has and can cultivate. Compassion means wanting what is good for oneself and everybody else, too.

One cannot like and cannot change negative and bad people, but one can have compassion for them and realize that they are not different – they are only misguided. They have been overpowered by their negative emotions – maybe hatred, maybe greed, maybe ignorance. When people are so overpowered by their hatred, ignorance, or greed, then they harm and even kill themselves. Thinking like that, they see no reason not to harm others. A person whose mind is so negative is not an object of one’s hatred but of one’s compassion. One cannot hate anybody who is caught in such a strong and senseless state of suffering, but one wishes them well, one wishes that they change. One’s compassion extends to people who do bad things and who harm us. That’s why one has no problems if one has compassion, tolerance, and patience, not only for those who are nice and pleasant. Why not like those people who say, “Oh, you are so nice and kind. You are always smiling”? Unless one is totally crazy, why be angry with people who tell one nice things? But one is really kind of rocked when people are not nice. So, that’s what one needs to work on - trying to generate compassion, tolerance, and patience for people who are not nice.

Hatred helps nobody. One can’t be happy - and nobody can - as long as one has hatred. One can’t sleep, feels unhappy, and burns inside as long as one has hatred in one’s heart and of course then one harms others as much as one can. Not only that, but one harms everyone in one’s

vicinity when one is angry, because it is very destructive. One does something bad against a person one hates and then that person does something bad in return. As a result, one does something even worse to hurt that person and then all his friends help him to hurt one. All one's friends get together to take revenge and then all one's children also become involved in a war. One has to stop. The sooner one stops, the better it is. Otherwise, when will conflicts end? So, generating compassion isn't only for other people's sake but for oneself and for one's own people.

Hatred is neither good for oneself or for anybody else. It's very dangerous and has to stop somewhere. When someone says something not nice or does something wrong, it would be good to say to oneself, "Okay, it doesn't matter. He's not at his best and I don't mind." When one understands that somebody who is angry or does something wrong has a problem, is unhappy, or is bothered, then one knows that there's no need to be angry and that one needs to have more sympathy for this person. Even if one cannot help him, not getting angry is already very helpful. So, that's what I want to say about generating compassion. Of course, one has to work on it. Not everybody can become completely compassionate. Things become easier and better for oneself and others the more one can generate compassion.

I think that it's also very important to understand that people throughout the world have many problems, have lots of anger, have many negative emotions, and have many weaknesses, so they can't all be really nice and compassionate. They do negative things because they have lots of weaknesses and that's why one needs to be compassionate. People want to do something good for themselves but can't, so they even harm themselves and others. When one sees this clearly, one doesn't expect everybody to be totally kind and nice. It shouldn't be like that, but unfortunately it is. If one understands and accepts that people aren't always nice – sometimes they can be nice and sometimes they can cause difficulties -, then one can experience many more pleasant surprises when people are nice. One will be much easier-going and will be much happier if one has less expectations of people. One will also be easier to get along with for one's family members, friends, and neighbours. So, one tries to work on having compassion and wisdom.

In Buddhism, it is said that most problems are based upon not seeing clearly, not really knowing what and who one is, i.e., ignorance. Therefore Buddhism places much emphasis on trying to see things clearly and leaves little space for beliefs. It is seeing things clearly, not only intellectually, but having insight on a deeper level. The Buddha taught:

*"Do not accept any of my words on faith,
believing them just because I said them.
Be like an analyst buying gold, who cuts, burns,
and critically examines his product for authenticity.
Only accept what passes the test
by proving useful and beneficial in your life."*

Especially followers of Mahayana Buddhism examine and categorize the provisional and definitive teachings. The Buddha presented the provisional teachings to help someone for a specific purpose, whereas the ultimate teachings really teach people. Even if they are an elucidation of the truth, believing in the ultimate teachings and accepting them blindly will not help one to transform or to act in a certain way. Therefore, one needs to examine the teachings.

Tibetans love to debate. Maybe you have seen the medium of instructing by debating in monastic schools. They are always debating, sometimes quite violently. They jump when they debate. Have you seen this? They break lots of floors. You know, one person is standing while the other person is seated on the ground. The person who asks questions jumps when he asks and lands on the ground again, clapping his hands in the face of the person he asked.

There are three ways: to study, to reflect, and to meditate. A beginner is not involved in debates, because he first has to understand the teachings by listening carefully to what the teachers say. Then a student analyses and reflects the teachings and finds that there are no contradictions. Then a student meditates so that the teachings become experiential. Wisdom isn't just an intellectual understanding, but it's an inner experience that is much deeper. It's an inner transformation, therefore meditate. One generates wisdom through these three things. One can transform one's emotions through wisdom, and that's the most important aspect of the path. It's a finding. Maybe that is one of the reasons why Einstein said that scientific research, which is not based on beliefs, might be quite close to Buddhism in the future. Buddhism isn't based on beliefs, but is an approach to understand and experience one's self. So, from that point of view, there are lots of similarities between science and Buddhism.

Maybe that's all I should say at the moment. If you have any questions regarding what I have said or anything else, I will be most happy to discuss them with you.

Questions & Answers

Question: "Let's stay in the present. After what has been said this evening, what should the President of the United States do? Should he strike back or accept the situation? What would you tell him to do?"

RTR: I don't know. He's in a very difficult situation. If I were there, I wouldn't know what to do. I think television is a very bad thing. I can understand the way people fought with each other while having conflicts in olden days. But nowadays it's very strange. If one has a fight with somebody, one strikes at people who have nothing to do with it, who are totally innocent. It's a very sad way of doing things. I think it's very important to prevent what happened a few days ago from happening, of course. But there are always two things. There are always people who are really senselessly negative and it's very important to be compassionate by trying to prevent them from doing negative and destructive things. But at the same time, everyone is connected. One hurts all people who are connected with the person one harms. So there are many things to do to reduce hatred and tension and to develop understanding. As I said in the beginning, when one has lots of power, is the super power in the world, there is a certain kind of pride in that. Sometimes one doesn't know the effect of one's decisions and actions, whether one hurts people and generates uneasiness and different kinds of things. This applies to everybody, at a national level, at an international level, and at a personal level. I think it's very important to try to understand the effect of one's actions and to try to make that less heavy. If one has lots of power, can do lots of things, and sits on everybody, then one needs to do as the saying goes: "The higher I become, the humbler I should become." Then it's easier for people to relate with one and nobody feels suppressed. I don't know, but I hope there will be no war. The President of America said, "This is a mean kind of war." I don't know what that means. But, of course, I'm not a

politician and don't know anything about what a president should do or not. If the president meditated, then I could say something.

Next question: "Referring to what you said about the escalation of violence and hatred, I understand that each and everyone is responsible not to become involved in situations like that. But what can we do in order to influence the growing atmosphere of hatred and violence? Of course, we cannot influence politics, but how can we develop having some influence? Maybe through meditation or practice?"

RTR: I think people's attitude and views must have some impact on politicians, especially in democratic countries. That's why I think each and every individual's thoughts and views are important. Therefore, we try to work in our Land by first working on ourselves. There's a story that illustrates my view. There was a priest, I think from Edinburgh. He had an inscription engraved on his tombstone that's written not exactly but something like this: "When I was young, I wanted to change the world, so I prayed to God: 'Lord God, please give me the power and blessings to change the whole world.' I tried my best, but when I got older, I came to understand that nothing had changed. I understood that I must first change my near and dear ones so that they become better members and then maybe the world would change. Then I prayed to my Lord God: 'Please give me the blessings and power to change my near and dear ones,' and I did my best. When I became very old, I came to understand that nothing had changed. Then I came to know that I must first change myself and if I change myself, my near and dear ones might take me as an example and will change. Taking them as examples, then others might change.' But now it's too late."

You can't change others unless you change yourself. So, that's the understanding: First I work on myself, you work on yourself, and everyone works on themselves. The more people become compassionate, that much others change, and that much the world changes. Meditating on compassion might not stop wars, but maybe it has an effect in the long run. I mean, the world has changed through small ideas. One person's ideas or discoveries have changed the whole world. So, if I can really transform myself, maybe it has an effect.

Next question: "If someone has a tragic accident, does Buddhism say it is due to an individual's process of development or due to a higher force?"

RTR: Buddhism does not speak about a creator, one being who is responsible for everything. Buddhists believe in interdependence, that everything that happens happens because of many causes and conditions, not because of one reason.

Thank you very much.

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!

H.H. the XVIIth Gyalwa Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje,
Long Life Prayer for Ringu Tulku

The most peaceful essence of clear light,
arisen as the changeless form of illusion,
free from any sign of age and decay,
may he live forever as the Buddha of long life.



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