

TALK GIVEN BY HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA IN ZURICH, 12th August 2005

His Holiness would like to clarify something before the initiations tomorrow.

An initiation is not like a Dharma lecture. One can attend a Dharma lecture without regarding the one giving the talk as one's personal teacher or Guru. Therefore it doesn't necessarily establish a teacher-student relationship. This is also true even when an oral transmission of a text is given. This depends on one's own view/ attitude. But at an initiation it is something different: there a teacher-student relationship is established through the initiation.

In the case of the people here who are non-Buddhists it is another matter. They can attend the initiation as if they are watching a performance in which they themselves are not personally involved. But as a Buddhist you are personally involved because the teacher-disciple relationship is established through the initiation. And in this case it is important to keep the connection and commitments pure, and this means it [the teacher-disciple relationship] has to be based on the same ideas, opinions etc.

Some of you might know, some not, that in the Tibetan tradition there is a practice of a deity who is called Dorje Shugden, that some are following this practice, practising veneration of this deity, and that His Holiness is against this practice because it goes against the principles of His Holiness and the Dalai Lamas.

His Holiness is asking people who want to take initiation from him to let go of this practice and this deity.

The ones who want to keep their practice of Shugden should not attend any further events or ceremonies in which a teacher-disciple relationship is established with His Holiness. This is something each person has to decide for him/herself. Each person has to take care of this themselves. From the side of His Holiness, He doesn't want this relationship to be established if it is the case that the person is keeping up the Shugden practice. His Holiness Himself would engage in contradiction to the commitments He has towards the previous Dalai Lamas, especially toward the 5th Dalai Lama, and therefore His Holiness requests if any of you are practicing Shugden for you to not attend the initiations.

His Holiness has explained the reasons why He is against the veneration of Shugden and given His sources in a very detailed manner. His Holiness has quoted from the texts of the 5th Dalai Lama, from his autobiography as well as his entire works, in which the 5th Dalai Lama expresses his critique of this practice. His Holiness says it would be good for this to be translated but we cannot do that here now. But some of it is surely translated and published and can be looked at. So, His Holiness is saying

He is against the veneration and practice of Shugden for reasons including historical reasons going back to the previous Dalai Lamas, especially to the 5th Dalai Lama, who described Shugden as some kind of bad spirit who in some way is carrying the weight of bad wishes.

There are other reasons mentioned - they are all written down. His Holiness has explained why He regards this practice as harmful. In short: for 360 years difficulties and problems with this practice already existed in the Tibetan tradition. His Holiness has studied and investigated these problems very thoroughly and has come to a very exact judgement about it based on His studies.

He has also made it very clear to both of his tutors, Ling Rinpoche and Trijang Rinpoche that He doesn't approve of this practice. Both teachers - Ling Rinpoche, who was not directly involved with it anyway and Trijang Rinpoche, even if he was involved with this practice, both have made it very clear that they understand His Holiness' reasons and accept it and do not in any way protest against the fact that His Holiness doesn't approve of it. Also even though Trijang Rinpoche was involved with the practice, his main life's work and why he is such a great teacher is not because of Dorje Shugden but because of his realizations and practice of the lam-rim and lojong. Similarly with Pabonka Rinpoche, who was also involved with the practice of Shugden. These are great teachers not because of this practice but because of their other perfections and virtues which they attained because of the lam-rim and lojong.

Then there are the historical factors why the 5th Dalai Lama regarded the practice as harmful. One can maybe think whatever about the 5th Dalai Lama but it is a fact that he took upon himself a great responsibility for all of Tibet and for the preservation of the Buddhadharma in all of Tibet, and that therefore he has done a great service to the country of Tibet. The same can be said for the 13th Dalai Lama. There one may also criticise in terms of the success of his actions but the fact remains that these Dalai Lamas had great engagement with and great readiness to take responsibility for all of Tibet and that they influenced the entire Buddhadharma, and His Holiness regards himself in the lineage of these Dalai Lamas and responsible to continue their work and therefore he cannot put Himself against their views and principles.

A further reason is that His Holiness feels wholeheartedly committed to a non-sectarian approach in Buddhism. This Rimé approach - not to be thinking in a sectarian manner, belonging to a tradition, this is completely against the ideas of the followers of Shugden. For instance in a text of these followers it states that one should not even look at the texts of the Nyingma tradition, much less practice or teach them. How does that go together with having a non-sectarian approach? His Holiness feels Himself responsible for the entire Tibetan tradition, so how can He be expected to

approve of a practice which does not allow the study, practice or preservation of other traditions, especially the Nyingma tradition.

Another reason is that His Holiness is mainly concerned about the actual contents of Buddhism and He sees a certain danger to over-ritualize in the Tibetan tradition. If we look at texts such as the *Bodhicaryavatara* and the *Gom-Rim* there is nothing mentioned there about any rituals, especially rituals such as protector practices. Those who venerate Dorje Shugden regard him as a protector of the teachings. However there is nothing mentioned in these texts about this, but rather these texts are concerned with the actual contents of the Dharma. In a certain way the danger in the Tibetan tradition is that things such as protector rituals are taken too seriously. In Tibet there is a unique and complete Buddhist tradition. Intensive study and practice is being done including tantric practices. If this practice is mainly regarded as the recitation of mantras or the playing of instruments or other rituals or especially the form of such protector practices then it does not go with the actual contents, the actual worth/wealth of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. This tradition is based on the great works of the great Indian masters such as the 17 masters of Nalanda, and these works are being studied and taught and very intensively practiced and this is the speciality and the profundity of this tradition.

Even if one is looking at what is our real refuge, it is the Buddha himself who has given all these teachings. However, quite often it may be that one recites refuge to the Buddha quickly on the side and then goes to some protector room to engage in elaborate and long rituals of such protector practices which may be depicted in images that would really shock people who might see them. In this way there is a danger that a ritualization is spreading which takes attention away from the actual meaning of the Dharma. So that is another reason why His Holiness is not approving of such practices. He doesn't like to see monasteries being built with such protector rooms since this is not the main aim, the essence is the study and practice of the actual meaning and contents of Buddhism.

So these are in short the reasons why His Holiness is against the veneration and practice of Shugden. And he is not doing this out of personal reasons because He has no gain from it, rather He is solely concerned to preserve the teachings of the Buddha, in the best way possible to preserve the actual teachings.

Furthermore when His Holiness says that He does not want people who practice or venerate Shugden to come to His teachings or especially not to receive initiation, then it is not that He doesn't allow them to practice Shugden -that is their own personal matter and they are free to do so. But it is His responsibility and freedom to show the disadvantages of this practice. His Holiness can, as a teacher, very well decide that when He is giving transmissions which establish or require a teacher-disciple

relationship and He makes the situation very clear in order not to harm the commitments between teacher and disciple – that then He is asking those who are engaged in the practice of Shugden not to attend these events.

Colophon: Translated into German by Christoph Spitz; the German translated into English by Silvia Fiscalini, lightly edited by Claire Isitt in November 2005, with apologies for any mistakes.