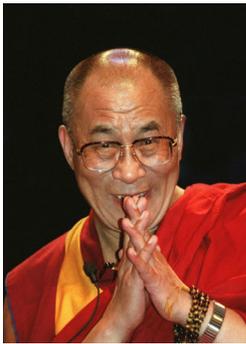


More Frequently Asked Questions about Tibetan Buddhism and the Dharma

- The Dalai Lama said that the real temple is in the mind and the real philosophy is kindness. If that is true, why are you building so many temples and holy objects?
 - Is a mantra an act of faith? I understand mantra can help me, but can it help others as well?
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The Dalai Lama said that the real temple is in the mind and the real philosophy is kindness. If that is true, why are you building so many temples and holy objects?



You have a really good question! I think we have to take context in which His Holiness the Dalai Lama was speaking, and also remember that great teachers like His Holiness always teach to the students at hand. Therefore, they may say or do things that look contradictory on the surface, but with deeper analysis, we can see there is actually no contradiction.

His Holiness was speaking to an organization that is dedicated to bringing the principles of Buddhism into the larger society, without its religious trappings (Universal Compassion and Wisdom for Peace <http://www.essential-education.org>). We all understand what

Buddhism teaches on compassion, loving-kindness, peace is very much needed in the larger world. Because the Dharma is so flexible, it can be taught in an entirely non-religious context. For some people, this is very much needed and this is the only way they can relate to these ideas. This is not to say that this presentation is inferior in any way – it's not at all! It's just that Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche (who founded UCWP) and also His Holiness are using their skillful means to help sentient beings in the best way.

Then there are people who respond very much to temples and beautiful holy objects like prayer wheels and statues. Even a lot of people who are non-Buddhist respond well to these things, and certainly a lot of people who are practicing Buddhists really find inspiration in these things. They uplift the mind and help us remember what we are trying to do. They offer support for our practice. And it is said in the teachings that even seeing a Buddha statue or a stupa plants the seed in the mind for future liberation and enlightenment. Even if you don't have faith, this is true. Lama Zopa Rinpoche says it is like electricity – you don't have to believe in it for it to work. Turning on a switch and having an electric light come on is not dependent on your faith in electricity. This is just how it works. Holy objects have a similar power to create enlightenment.

Therefore, it is also really important to have holy objects. His Holiness is very supportive of such things, and has actively endorsed FPMT's Maitreya Project, which will build a 500-foot statue of Maitreya and also provide top rate education and medical help for the people in that part of India. You can see a short video about this project and His Holiness's explanation for why it is important here. <http://www.fpmt.org/streaming/>

So we have these two ideas that seem contradictory – no need for temples and complicated philosophy, and then lots of temples and things like that being built. But when you examine closely, you will see that there is no contradiction. His Holiness is completely correct – the real practice is in the mind and as one other teacher said, all you really need is kindness. But for many people, the temples and holy objects help move the mind in the right ways and inspire us to practice kindness. They support the inner temple of the mind and the outer practice of kindness. That said, they are just supports. In this way, there is no contradiction between what His Holiness said and building actual physical temples.

Is a mantra an act of faith? I understand mantra can help me, but can it help others as well?

A mantra is an example of speech that can be directly experienced. Many attributes of mantras cannot be verified by ordinary persons' direct perception or inference. Such attributes are relied on by virtue of scriptural authority. Scriptural authority is verified by examining documentation, lineages, and tradition, as well as reasoning. Reasoning is used to determine if there is consistency of what was said (i.e. a scriptural statement is not contradicted by other scriptural statements), and is not contradicted by direct perception or logic. There are functions of mantra that may be initially relied on by the power of faith that are later relied on by one's own experience. For example, a person may recite a mantra initially because his or her teacher recommended it. Later, during or after recitation, the practitioner discovers that mantra recitation was an effective method for concentrating the mind. In the future, the practitioner recites the mantra to concentrate the mind, because of appreciating this particular value directly experienced. The same can be said of other positive experiences obtained through the recitation of mantra.

According to scripture and commentaries, as provided to me by my teachers, the recitation of mantras, such as "manis" actually benefits other beings. As I have no reason to doubt my teachers, I recite those mantras with the intention of benefiting others. There are practitioners who testified with their personal experience the effectiveness of reciting mantras for the welfare of others. As one person succeeded, and others applied the method and succeeded as well, I'd say the effectiveness of mantras was scientifically proven. However, to satisfy your concern, I believe the only recourse is for you to find out how to recite mantras as those successful practitioners did, and apply the method assiduously, just as they did. This is the scientific method.