

## **Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Shugden**

Recently I sent a letter to the abbots of the large monasteries of Sera, Ganden and Drepung to inspire the older geshe and other lamas who had a strong connection with the previous life of my root guru, His Holiness Trijang Rinpoche, to request his incarnation to show the aspect of following His Holiness Dalai Lama's holy wishes and return to India to study in his monastery and follow the normal way of life of such high lamas. In this way, the incarnation will benefit the world greatly, in the West and especially the Tibetan people in the East. I'm not going to read the whole thing from top to bottom to you, just a few parts.

His Holiness Trijang Rinpoche has been in Switzerland away from his monastery, under the control of other people, for a long time. Some time ago, I felt that because he was my root guru, I must do something about it. I felt it unbearable to leave things as they were; I felt I had to try to resolve this issue. Therefore I wrote this letter, which expresses my own thoughts, hoping to inspire the abbots and older geshe to add their views and request the incarnation and his entourage to return to India.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has taken unbelievable responsibility for the peace and happiness of this world. He has worked for world peace in general and, in particular, for the preservation of Buddhism, the holy Dharma, in its entirety—the teachings of the Lesser Vehicle and both Mahayana Paramitayana and tantra. On top of that, there's the issue of Tibet, which is unbelievably hard and such a difficult situation. Despite the many problems, His Holiness has taken responsibility for the welfare of all Tibetan people, especially those in the monasteries—the monks' means of living and their education. That in itself is an unbelievable task, but in addition, he has taken responsibility for the freedom of Tibet.

If Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche's incarnation were to follow His Holiness's holy wishes and go back to study in the monastery like His Holiness Ling Rinpoche and other lamas do, it would reduce the burden in His Holiness's heart and relieve the discomfort of this situation. So that's one aspect of this.

There are many contemporary and ancient stories about His Holiness Dalai Lama that, together with valid quotations from the scriptures, prove that His Holiness the Dalai Lama is Chenrezig; the Buddha of Compassion. The qualities of his holy body, speech and mind, his great compassion and his holy actions are as limitless as the sky and benefit not only the East but also the West; in fact, every country in the world.

His Holiness has even managed to spread the Dharma to far-flung countries where normally you'd never hear any Buddhadharma at all. Like the rising sun, he has shed the light of Dharma upon the sentient beings who live in those countries, leading them along the pure path to peace and happiness, to liberation and enlightenment. Because of such incredible, extensive work throughout the world, His Holiness's kindness is beyond measure.

What proves that the founder of the Buddhadharma, Shakyamuni Buddha, is a pure founder, a valid founder? This is proven by his teaching being pure and valid. Similarly, the fact that even ordinary beings like us can see the extensive qualities of His Holiness's holy body, speech and mind proves that he is the Buddha of Compassion.

Further proof that His Holiness is the Buddha of Compassion comes from Guru Shakyamuni Buddha in India, when he predicted to the bodhisattva Eliminating Defilements (Dribpa Namsäl), "The sentient beings in the Snowland of Tibet will be subdued by the Buddha of Compassion."

Guru Shakyamuni Buddha also predicted to the bodhisattva Thayä Rigchog, "The Chenrezig who is going to work for the transmigratory beings of the Snowland of Tibet is you."

Furthermore, the teachings say, "The guide of all the sentient beings in the Snowland of Tibet will hold the position of a king. The savior of Tibet, Phurgyal Yül, is my heart disciple. His holy mind is completely clear, without obscuration, but he will work for sentient beings in a hidden manner by acting as an ordinary being."

When we meet this Chenrezig that the Buddha predicted, hear his holy speech and are guided by him with compassion, if His Holiness Dalai Lama is not that Chenrezig, who else can Chenrezig be? If His Holiness is not Chenrezig, then nobody can be Chenrezig; even those great yogis who are said to be incarnations of this buddha or that are suspect. You can't trust any other incarnation.

So, that proof relates to the ancient stories from the time of the Buddha, when he predicted that Chenrezig would be the Dharma king of Tibet and preserve Dharma and guide sentient beings in Tibet by revealing the Dharma.

However, there are also recent stories that prove the ancient stories true. When His Holiness was giving teachings at Geshe Sopa Rinpoche's center, Deer Park, in Madison, Wisconsin, recently, he said, "I have no experience, no realization of bodhicitta and no realization of emptiness." His Holiness often says that, but later, during an interview with the staff of Deer Park, somebody raised the question, "If you don't have those realizations, as you say, there must be no hope for people like us."

When His Holiness heard this, he felt incredible compassion and had to say something, so he told the people that he remembered being around Guru Shakyamuni Buddha in India. This means that he was one of the bodhisattvas who were part of the Buddha's entourage. It slipped out that he remembered being in the presence of the Buddha.

This story is connected to the previous stories about the predictions the Buddha made to those bodhisattvas and that Chenrezig would guide sentient beings in Tibet and that the bodhisattva Thayä Rigchog was in actuality Chenrezig and would be the one who would do that work in Tibet.

There are many Buddhist leaders in the world, not only those from Tibet. But amongst all these Buddhist leaders, His Holiness's deeds are beyond compare. Because of His Holiness, the Buddhadharma, the precious teaching of the Buddha, the only medicine that can eliminate the suffering of all transmigrator beings, is flourishing. His Holiness's holy actions have prevented the Buddhadharma from degenerating.

Besides His Holiness having taken complete responsibility for preserving the stainless teaching of the Buddha, he has also taken full responsibility for the freedom of the six million Tibetan people in the world. His Holiness has borne great hardship to ensure that Tibetans everywhere have both Dharma and temporal freedom.

Because of all this, we must not only completely abandon any thought of giving harm to His Holiness's activities but also put every effort into helping him. The time has come for all of us together to offer His Holiness every possible service. Therefore, each of us should generate the most extensive thought of benefiting others and ourselves. In this way, please follow His Holiness's advice and wishes as much as you possibly can.

Whereas above I am asking everyone to follow His Holiness's advice, in a later paragraph I quote the sutra that says, "Bhikshus and the wise should examine my teachings like goldsmiths analyze gold, by cutting, rubbing and scorching it. Examine my teachings in the same way and then put them into practice. Do not practice Dharma on the strength of blind faith alone."

So, the Buddha himself said that we should first analyze his teachings and once we are convinced of their validity then put them into practice. We should not just blindly follow what he said simply because he said it.

We have many gurus; many virtuous friends with whom we have made a Dharma connection. You often find that, when you ask your various teachers for advice on your practice, you receive different instructions. That's quite common.

It also says in the teachings that you should not simply rely on the person giving Dharma teachings but on the Dharma itself. In other words, you should base your practice on valid teachings of the Buddha and the previous pundits' and yogis' commentaries on those teachings. Moreover, you should practice according to your own capacity. Just because something is called Buddhism or Buddhist meditation doesn't mean that you should necessarily put it into practice. Of course, your practice *should* be based on valid teachings of the Buddha and the ancient Indian pundits' and yogis' commentaries, but even then you should just practice according to your own capacity.

You have to use your own wisdom; you have to analyze. One guru tells you not to do a certain thing; another tells you to do it. Which one are you going to follow? You have to use your own wisdom. So here, in my letter to the abbots, I'm talking about the practice of this particular protector, Shugden.

Some of you may be familiar with this issue, others may not. However, whereas so far I've just been talking about general advice, where one guru tells you not to do something and another says to do it, what I'm doing is leading up to the specific issue of the practice of Shugden. One guru tells you "Don't practice this protector"; another says, "Practice this protector." You find yourself getting conflicting instructions from different gurus. How are you supposed to know what to do?

What you have to do is use your wisdom. Analyze the various instructions you have received to determine which course of action is the most beneficial for sentient beings, which creates fewest problems. Once you have reached a conclusion, practice that.

The teachings also explain what to do if your guru tells you to do something that you can't do, that is beyond your capacity; something that you cannot transform into the path to enlightenment and would create heavy negative karma if you did it. For example, if your guru tells you to do something very heavy, like killing a human being, but from your side you feel that you don't have the capacity to do it, how do you handle that situation?

It is said in the teachings, "Like an actor, the one Dharmakaya, the great bliss, the ultimate guru, manifests in many different forms."

Therefore, from your side, you must look at the holy minds of all the gurus with whom you have made a Dharma connection as the great, blissful Dharmakaya. You must see them as being completely free of error and in possession of all good qualities. Your mind must look at all of them as Buddha. By keeping your mind in that view, you don't lose your guru devotion. If continuously you keep in mind that your gurus are Buddha, non-devotional thoughts, such as disbelief, anger and so forth, do not arise. It is extremely important to avoid generating negative thoughts towards your gurus because such minds create enormous obstacles not only to gaining realizations but even to temporary success. However, the Vinaya teachings say, "If your guru tells you to do something that is not Dharma, do not do it."

Also, the *Fifty Verses of Guru Devotion* says, "If you cannot do what your guru suggests, you can request permission not to do it by explaining why you can't." <sup>1</sup> Humbly, without arrogance, without thinking, "Oh, my guru doesn't know this, he doesn't know that," by looking with devotion at your guru as Buddha, humbly explain how you are incapable of doing what he asks. As skillfully as you can, try to get permission from your guru not to do what he has asked you to do.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said, "Special disciples and special gurus, like Milarepa and Marpa or Naropa and Tilopa, are different. In such cases, every single word that the guru says to the disciple, even if it involves killing, stealing and so forth, has to be followed exactly."

In this part of my letter, then, I am offering His Holiness Trijang Rinpoche my suggestions for dealing with various questions that arise, such as, "Perhaps His Holiness says this, but what about other lamas, who say something different?" Here I try to answer those various points. Of course, this approach can help with many things, but the particular issue here is that of Shugden.

Then I request His Holiness Trijang Rinpoche to go back to India to study in his monastery. It is extremely important that he return to his monastery to undertake deep, extensive study. The people who are preventing the incarnation from doing this are not considering the extensive benefit that he could offer sentient beings if he were allowed to develop in the normal way. They are not thinking of his future benefit to sentient beings.

At the Gelugpa meeting in Delhi in March 1999, which we, the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition, helped organize, all the abbots agreed that if His Holiness Trijang Rinpoche's incarnation's holy activities were not developed in one of the great monasteries, if they were developed outside, they wouldn't count.

Another thing is that the way things are, the Tibetan people see the incarnation as being against His Holiness the Dalai Lama. In that way, Tibetan people and others generate wrong views towards him and thus create the extremely heavy negative karma of criticizing a holy being.

Also, other people's misuse of the incarnation damages his samaya with His Holiness, which severely hinders the incarnation's ability to develop his holy actions to benefit sentient beings. Moreover, if a bad connection is made with His Holiness this time, there will be bad connections in all future lives. This hinders his ability to benefit sentient beings in future lives. Therefore, it's extremely harmful. Many sentient beings collect negative karma. Most people can understand all this. Even someone with just a little lam-rim knowledge can understand these problems.

Some people say that if you don't practice Shugden, Lama Tsongkhapa's teaching cannot be developed. The next point answers this view.

Some people think that the practice of Shugden prevents Lama Tsongkhapa's teachings from degenerating and promotes their development. But there have been many Gelug lamas who without practicing Shugden, spread Buddhadharma, spread the stainless teaching of Lama Tsongkhapa like the sky. Lamas like Their Holinesses the Thirteenth and the Fourteenth Dalai Lamas, Ling Rinpoche and Kachen Yeshe Gyaltsen—a great, well-known Tibetan lama who wrote many, many teachings and not only didn't practice Shugden but also advised against the practice.

Purchog Jampa Rinpoche, a very high lama of Sera Je Monastery and an incarnation of Maitreya Buddha, wrote against the practice of Shugden in the Monastery's constitution. Jangkya Rölpa'i Dorje and Jangkyang Ngawang Chödrön, who wrote many excellent texts, also advised against this practice, as did Tenpa'i Wangchuk, the Eighth Panchen Lama, and Losang Chökyi Gyaltsen, the Fourth Panchen Lama, who composed the *Guru Puja* and wrote many other teachings, and Ngulchu Dharmabhadra. All these great lamas, and many other highly accomplished scholars and yogis who preserved and spread the stainless teaching of Lama Tsongkhapa, recommended that Shugden not be practiced.

This point is very important, because people think that His Holiness the Dalai Lama is the only one trying to stop the practice of Shugden. Therefore, the people who are practicing it get negative towards His Holiness. But His Holiness is not the only one. There are many other high lamas who, in monastery constitutions, have advised their monasteries not to practice, or, if they are practicing, to stop. There are many, many lamas who have done this.

No other protector has become such a big issue, but this has become important because not only His Holiness the Dalai Lama has advised against it but so have many other great lamas. Therefore it is something that we have to think about.

Even though this specific issue does not concern most of you—only a few old students—everybody has to understand what I mentioned at the beginning and again in the middle: how to remain devoted to lamas who give you conflicting advice and how to get permission not to do something you have been asked to do without generating wrong views, arrogance or anger.

My root guru, His Holiness Trijang Rinpoche; Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo, His Holiness the Dalai Lama's guru's root guru; His Holiness Song Rinpoche, from whom many of the older students received the initiation of Shugden; and the previous incarnation of Gomo Rinpoche, who has a strong connection with Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa, here in Italy, all promoted the practice of Shugden. They were all aspects of the Dharmakaya.

I myself took the initiation of Shugden from His Holiness Trijang Rinpoche. There were four of us—Lama Yeshe, Claudio Cipullo, Piero Cerri and myself. However, this initiation can be given to only three people at a time; there cannot be four. Kyabje Rinpoche had set up the altar and made all the preparations perfectly—of course, everything he did was always perfect—and was there, waiting for us. After the four of us sat down, he said, “You cannot be four; only three. Whoever has bodhicitta, who has let go of the I and cherishes others, should leave.” Lama shot up immediately. I just sat there like a donkey, as if I were made of stone. So then the three of us, Claudio, Piero and I, took the initiation.

Of course, Lama and I practiced Shugden for many years. That was always the *main* thing that Lama did whenever there were problems to overcome. At the beginning of every Kopan course, Lama always did Shugden puja to eliminate hindrances. Of course, this was not Lama's principal practice. His principal practice was bodhicitta, emptiness, clear light, illusory body and so forth. The protector puja was done simply to overcome obstacles.

However, all these lamas giving different kinds of advice are all manifestations of the Dharmakaya. The point is that many great lamas who had incredible qualities and were of unbelievable benefit in Tibet, preserving and spreading the stainless teaching of Lama Tsongkhapa, advised against the practice of Shugden.

Similarly, His Holiness is of enormous benefit to sentient beings and, furthermore, has taken on the incredible burdens of his position. Therefore, it has become crucial that we support him, especially in his efforts on behalf of Tibet. This is very important and the main reason we changed—why Kopan changed; why I changed [i.e., stopped practicing Shugden]. As I understood how hard His Holiness works and what heavy burdens he has assumed, I changed. How could I be against His Holiness? There was no way. The only thing to do was to support, serve and help him. That's the main thing.

The next question—and here, I'm just posing hypothetical questions and giving the answers, like the debate texts do—that comes up for some people is that if the incarnation of His Holiness Trijang Rinpoche doesn't practice, the lineage of Shugden will degenerate and die out. Some people might think this because in his previous life, His Holiness Trijang Rinpoche was the main lama preserving this lineage, which had come down through his root guru, Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo. To that, I say there's no need to worry because many other people do the practice, so the lineage will not get lost.

Then, some people say that this practice should continue because it promotes wealth and prosperity in the world. In response, I say that the practice of Shugden is not necessary for wealth. There are many rich and powerful countries in the world, like Saudi Arabia and the USA, that don't practice Shugden. They haven't taken the initiation; they haven't made a commitment to

practice. As everybody knows, wealth and prosperity comes from merit and virtue; from the creation of good karma.

After Guru Shakyamuni Buddha left his father's palace but before he began to practice Buddhism, he practiced Hinduism. That's not because he didn't know that Hinduism was not the way. It was to show sentient beings that his first choice was wrong and that Buddhism was the right path.

At one point, when things in Tibet became very difficult politically, His Holiness came to Dromo Geshe Rinpoche's monastery in southern Tibet. At that time the Tibetan government could not decide whether His Holiness should go on to India or back to Lhasa. So His Holiness and his ministers consulted Dromo Geshe Rinpoche's monastery's protector, the one in question. Through the oracle, Shugden said that His Holiness should not go to India. This protected Tibet for another year or for so. What I have heard is that after that experience, His Holiness would recite prayers to Shugden regularly. However, after many years of analysis, when His Holiness was about to take the initiation of Shugden, he received signs in a dream that he should not. As a result, he didn't take the initiation.

This is the same as what Guru Shakyamuni Buddha did. He first became enlightened inconceivably long ago, not, as history tells us, two-and-a-half thousand years ago in India. According to the Theravada tradition, that's what happened, but the Mahayana does not accept this—we believe he became enlightened inconceivably long ago. Therefore, as an enlightened being, how can the Buddha make a mistake? He simply practiced Hinduism to show sentient beings that it was the wrong path. This is just what His Holiness did; he practiced Shugden to show us it was wrong.

Because of His Holiness's special capacity to benefit people extensively by revealing the entire Buddhadharma in a very short time, in two or three days or even one or two hours, it is very important that he have a long, healthy life. Since His Holiness can introduce the Dharma to people in such a short time, leading them to the peace and happiness of liberation and enlightenment, the longer and healthier His Holiness's life, the more he can benefit us sentient beings. Therefore, we need to support him. That's the main point.

For example, if something were to happen to His Holiness's life, what would happen to Buddhism, especially Tibetan Buddhism? Imagine how much suffering there would be. We'd have no guide; all those monasteries would also be guideless. Everything depends on His Holiness. Like a father and mother, His Holiness is everything; not only to Dharma students but especially to Tibetans. Who would we listen to if His Holiness were not there? You can see how much suffering there'd be without him.

If Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism is lost, the complete teaching of the Buddha is lost. If there's no Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism there's no complete teaching of the Buddha. Even though there might be Chinese Mahayana and other traditions, it's only Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism that has everything—the Lesser Vehicle teachings, Mahayana sutra and Mahayana tantra; especially the complete teaching on tantra. You see how much suffering and confusion there'd be in the world. This is particularly true for Tibetans.

Therefore, it's extremely important that you understand this. His Holiness's advice is to not practice Shugden, therefore, we have to support His Holiness and fulfill his wishes on this point. That's the essence of what I'm trying to say. I don't know whether any of you are practicing Shugden, but this is just to inform those who do not know and to clarify the situation for those who do.

Another thing is that some Tibetans and others severely criticize Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo because he practiced Shugden, making him out to be some kind of demon. However, Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo wrote incredible teachings on sutra and tantra; on Heruka, Tara Cittamani and many other topics. All these amazing teachings were written purely from his experience. So it's impossible that he can really be some kind of evil being, as those extremists accuse him of being. There's no way he could have done the negative things they say he did.

The great translator Ra Lotsawa, one of the main Yamantaka lineage holders, is supposed to have killed many people through his tantric power, but nobody regards Ra Lotsawa as bad. Tantric powers are attained on the basis of bodhicitta, the realization of emptiness and the generation and completion stages of Highest Yoga Tantra, and when you gain the powers that come with the clear light and the illusory body and do wrathful actions—for example, separating evil beings' consciousness from their body—the main point is to transfer their consciousness to the pure land. That's the end result of wrathful tantric actions. Wrathful actions like that are done to benefit other sentient beings. When dealing with evil beings through peaceful actions doesn't benefit them the only way left to benefit them is through wrathful actions. If you possess the necessary powers and qualities you can benefit others in that way with no danger to yourself. Not only *can* you but you are *supposed* to. It's part of your samaya.

There are many stories about the great yogis and living beings. For example, one great yogi called Lobpön Jampel Shenyen made soup with live worms. And when Naropa first met his guru, Tilopa, he was down by the river cooking live fish and eating them, which made him think, "This can't be Tilopa." So when he asked, "Are you Tilopa?" Tilopa said, "No." Later on, when Naropa had generated faith and again asked, "Are you Tilopa?" Tilopa said, "Yes." Anyway, great yogis can assume such aspects.

The incarnation of Kyabje Dorje Chang, His Holiness Trijang Rinpoche, is His Holiness the Dalai Lama's guru and the lama of all the Tibetan people, so it's terrible if he's hidden away in some corner as if there's something wrong with him. That's absolutely shameful. Therefore, the people around him have to think very extensively. In his previous life he performed incredibly holy actions; therefore, his present incarnation has the potential to spread Dharma in both the East and the West like the rising sun spreads light. Even just within the FPMT there are more than 120 centers in which he could spread the teaching of Lama Tsongkhapa when he finished his geshe degree. But the extent to which he can practice guru devotion and develop his holy actions depends almost entirely on his attendant.

Then in my letter to His Holiness Trijang Rinpoche I also request the incarnation that whatever sutra and tantra teachings he offered His Holiness Dalai Lama in his previous life, to please take those complete lineages from His Holiness Dalai Lama. So I request this from my heart.



However, this does not apply only to His Holiness Trijang Rinpoche. It applies to all of you as well. The main point in telling you all this is that if you read the letter, it might give you an idea of how to practice in general and particularly what to do with respect to the issue of the protector, Shugden. The other point is to let know something about this issue itself.

*Colophon: Lama Zopa Rinpoche gave this talk to students of the FPMT's Masters Program at Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa, 22 October 2000. Edited by Nicholas Ribush.*

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<sup>1</sup> See verse 24: [http://www.lamayashe.com/otherteachers/dhargyey/50verses\\_long.PDF](http://www.lamayashe.com/otherteachers/dhargyey/50verses_long.PDF)