



About Doubt

Featuring *Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche*

The Rimé master Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche spoke to us back in July 2006 at his center in the U.S. – Rangjung Yeshe Gomde U.S.A., in Leggett, California, where he was teaching on Lojong and leading a Dzogchen retreat. He was assisted in the interview by his translator Erik Pema Kunsang.

Question: How do we know the difference between productive inquiry of the Dharma and unproductive doubt?

The traditional way of approaching the Buddha's teachings has two styles: One is to use analytical inquiry – taking support of the statements made by the buddhas and great masters, and using one's own intelligence to gain some certainty about the true view, about the real position of what reality is; that's one way to gain certainty. The other style is the more simple meditation style where, through practical experience, we also gain certainty about the true position of reality.

The main difference between the skeptical or critical approach compared to analytical inquiry is that you haven't got true certainty. Analytical investigation should lead you to find out the end result, but if you're just skeptical and doubtful, that means you'll never get there. Here is a quote from the great Lord Tsongkhapa:

Appearance, the unfeeling dependent origination,
And emptiness, understanding beyond statements –
As long as these two seem to be separate,
You have still not realized the intent of Shakyamuni.
When all at once and without fluctuation
Your conviction and your notion of an object fall apart,
That is the moment of having completed the analysis of
the view.

So, the whole issue is contained in just these two verses by Tsongkhapa. That's very short, but that's enough! [laughter]

Question: If we can only eliminate negative emotions from the root by directly realizing emptiness, and this can take many lifetimes, how do we keep from being disillusioned?

There are many ways to deal with this. The best method is to train in the equanimity of knowing emptiness. The second best is to learn and to reflect upon what that is – profound emptiness – again and again. Why is theoretical

understanding of emptiness really important? It is important because it's true. It's a real position: profound emptiness. And the more clearly we understand that, the closer we get to being able to experience it in actuality.

And about the result that eliminates being frustrated, it is the best, of course, to realize in actuality the profound emptiness, but if that doesn't happen immediately, rather than being frustrated, there is another way: that is, to relate to everything we experience, both inside and outside as "This is not real. It's all insubstantial. It's impermanent. It *is* that way." That kind of attitude will lessen the intensity of negative emotions and will also help to prevent one becoming frustrated.

Why is that? The way the Buddha taught is very practical, very realistic. Whoever studies the Buddha's teachings and reflects upon them will gain an understanding that is in harmony with reality and, therefore, is able to be more and more certain, more and more clear because it all fits. And no matter how much one questions and investigates, one only discovers that it's completely how things are. People are already frustrated, downcast, and dispirited, no matter whether they understand or not. But the understanding of the Buddha's teachings allows us to come closer and closer to realization, so it avoids being frustrated about the teachings in that way.

Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche is a teacher in the non-sectarian Rimé movement. He holds both Kagyu and Nyingma lineages. He is a Khenpo and Abbott of Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling Monastery, one of the largest in Nepal. Rinpoche is the eldest son of the renowned master Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche, teacher of the 16th Karmapa among many others. He is the author of several books, including Union of Mahamudra and Dzogchen, Song of Karmapa, Bardo Guidebook, Indisputable Truth, and Present Fresh Wakefulness. ☸

Erik Pema Kunsang was formerly Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche's translator. Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche's memoir, Blazing Splendor, is among Erik's many publications.

To submit a question for the "Ask a Lama" series, write to Associate Editor Sara Blumenthal at: sara@fpmt.org.