

# Heart Advice *for* Practicing Dharma *in* Daily Life

This interview with Venerable Khenpo Tsewang Rinpoche was conducted by Pema Dragpa and Amanda Lewis at Padma Samye Ling on April 12, 2014.

Nowadays, everyone seems so busy and over-loaded, and there are so many distractions. Why do you think this is happening?

If we look at history, we can see that samsara is always really busy. I don't think there's such a big difference now. In recent times, however, because of technology and modern conveniences, we can communicate with others more freely and easily. Even when you're sitting in your room, you can see and talk to other people around the world. In this way, it's definitely more active and busy nowadays. There's also a lot more abundance, luxury, and richness opportunities, and in order to do all those things everyone has to work a lot. Everyone wants to fulfill the American Dream, the European Dream, or the Asian Dream; they'd really like to achieve the very best of everything, and they look around at each other thinking, "How can I get the best?"

**What is the best response we can have to being too busy? What is the worst response?**

When we become so busy with all these modern conveniences, of course the mind also becomes busier. We have so much different information coming at us from every direction. The mind really can become overwhelmed with so much information—the brain office is very active! This is all in addition to the general functioning busyness that we all have in daily life. All these things combined together can be very stressful. It can also affect the different systems of our physical and mental health and our family and friendships, because it's just too much—we're overloaded. When this happens, we need to apply the teachings, which always say to maintain balance. Balance is really important. Instead of craving and looking for something more all the time, enjoy what you already have, what you're surrounded by, and feel the joy of that. This will definitely bring more balance and give you a little more free time.

**If we only have 10 or 15 minutes for formal practice everyday, what should we practice?**

If you only have a little time for practice, the teachings always say to bring more joy and appreciation to your situation and circumstances. Being able to practice and having an abundance of supportive conditions is not a coincidence. So feel more joy and appreciation, and activate your devotion to the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and enlightened beings that you're connected to, honoring their words of wisdom and compassion. We're igniting these good qualities within *ourselves*. Devotion isn't a favor we're doing for the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, or anyone else; devotion brings out and glorifies the richness qualities of ourselves because it intensifies *our* love, *our* compassion, and *our* wisdom. Remember the skills, methods, and knowledge that you've learned, and feel grateful for that.

Together with that, bring up more bodhichitta thoughts for all sentient beings, wishing them every good thing, and chant the four boundless prayers of boundless love, boundless compassion, boundless joy, and boundless equanimity. Feel the strong presence of Buddha Shakyamuni, Guru Padmasambhava, and all the enlightened beings.

If you have time for a little more formal practice, you can also chant a few lines. Chanting is a reminder of our meditation and practice. It isn't something separate—chanting is directly connected to what we're practicing. It restrengthens and reactivates our meditation; like pushing a button—if we'd like to light up our house, even if there's already electricity, we still have to push the "on" button. Chanting is

like pushing a button to turn on our inherent nature. It sizzles our natural qualities, and at the same time, brings more abundance. So if you can, do a little chanting, even if it's just for a short time.

Then meditate silently, freeing all the busy conceptual thoughts of this and that, all the thoughts of the day's activities, and all past, present, and future thoughts. Give yourself a break, a little spare time. Just relax in a calm, peaceful state as long as you can—even if it's just a short time. Then conclude by wishing the best to everyone. That's one way you can do a complete practice in 10 or 15 minutes.

### **What's the main thing we have to give up if we really want to turn our mind towards the Dharma?**

The teachings always say that we should try to give up attachment. It doesn't mean that we have to give up everything, but try to give up grasping and clinging to everything so much. If we can do that, the teachings say that everything will become practice. So with mindfulness, give up as much attachment as we can.

### **If we want to practice the Dharma for our entire life – and not just start strong and fizzle out – what are the main things we need to make this happen?**

Starting out strong with Dharma practice and then losing momentum happened to practitioners in ancient times as well as now. As the great master H.H. Dudjom Rinpoche said, if we'd like to keep our practice strong for our entire lives, we should practice what are known as the "Four Wealths of a Dharma Practitioner." (1) First, we should always have strong devotion to the lineage and the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. (2) Second is a very strong understanding of purity, or some degree of pure perception. (3) Third, we should feel love and compassion for all beings and help them as much as we can. (4) Fourth, we should understand that everything in samsara is impermanent—it's changing all the time, and having a life with the 18 endowments is very precious. If we keep these four wealths close to our hearts—devotion, pure perception, bodhichitta, and appreciation of our life and situation—we'll continue to keep our practice as strong as when we started. They will be a fuel that always re-energizes, reactivates, and restrengthens our motivation. Not only that, but they'll make our motivation deeper and stronger, and will bring more joy, appreciation, bodhichitta, and a greater feeling of preciousness.

In addition to the Four Wealths, we should remember the "Four Mind Turnings." These are very similar to what H.H. Dudjom Rinpoche and many other great masters have said: (1) precious human life, (2) impermanence, (3) samsara has a lot of difficulties and troubles, and (4) causes and their results are inevitable. If we can keep up the Four Wealths and Four Mind Turnings, we are definitely on track, and will continue on the beautiful path of enlightenment and compassion, giving a beautiful reward to ourselves and sharing a lot of good things with others.

### **What are the main points to remember to practice Dzogchen in daily life?**

A practical way we can practice Dzogchen in daily life is in two ways: (1) during meditation and (2) in post-meditation. In meditation, just relax and follow the Dzogchen instructions you've received exactly. At the beginning of your meditation practice, bring up more joy, appreciation, devotion, and bodhichitta thoughts for all sentient beings, then meditate in the Dzogchen state. Then with very heartfelt joy and appreciation, dedicate the merit wishing the best for everyone and for their enlightenment.

In post-meditation, try to see everything as a display of rigpa, or like a dream, a mirage, or a magic show—see everything like that, including yourself. Think that we are in a dream world, and at the same time, release all of your thoughts within their own natural state of rigpa. The teachings always say to keep up that realization with mindfulness, alertness, and thoughtfulness. If you have those three—particularly thoughtfulness, or *bagyö* in Tibetan—it's almost as though the Buddha, Guru Padmasambhava, or a great teacher is always with you. Thoughtfulness, along with mindfulness and alertness, are a great teacher that will help you all the time. To maintain your Dzogchen practice all the time, both in meditation and post-meditation, always try to have thoughtfulness and mindfulness.

**If you were stranded on a deserted island and could have only one Dharma book, what would it be?**  
Shantideva's *The Way of the Bodhisattva*.

### **What would you recommend for your students on a deserted island?**

I would recommend the same book, *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, or *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*.

### **How can we use a very demanding work environment as practice?**

See all the difficulties as a reminder of your courage, commitment, and openness. Openness means, when it comes, let it come and let it go. Apply the Dzogchen techniques. Keep all of your vents open so it doesn't become too congested. Just do your best. If you can't do everything, be happy with whatever you can do. You know your own mind—if you're doing the best you can do, feel joy, and then keep an open mind. Keep the ventilation open.

### **What should we do if our family and friends don't support our Dharma practice?**

It's true, that can happen—both in the past in Buddhist countries, as well as now in the West. I don't think we should try to seek acknowledgement from our family or friends. As long as our Dharma practice is not a big disturbance to them, we should definitely keep up our courage and commitment with an open mind. We can also dedicate our merit to them, wishing them all the best. We aren't hurting anyone physically, mentally, or emotionally by practicing the Dharma. Our family may disagree a little bit—maybe it has something to do with their tradition or way of thinking, but in reality, we're not hurting anyone in any way. So just do your best and try to help, but don't wait for their acknowledgement or expect that they will do something. If they do support you, that's great. Maybe their principles are slightly different from our principles, but our Dharma practice will never hurt anyone at all, not now or in the future.

### **How can we use raising children as a Dharma practice?**

Parents can show or teach the Dharma to their children slowly by example. If their children are ready, excited, and they'd like to learn, then definitely they can show all the Dharma according to their child's capabilities and readiness. But the most important thing is to be a good example of love, kindness, and compassion, full of respect and appreciation for one another. Parents should be kind and nice to each other, and they can show their children how to live with courage, confidence, and commitment. It's also important that parents don't fall into unhealthy habitual patterns or activities. Demonstrating these qualities is one's own practice too. If they can show this and really *be* that, I think it will be a very good lesson or teaching for their children.

The Buddha and many great masters often said that no matter which Dharma teachers you're going to have, parents are actually the first teachers you have in the world. They show you traditions, the systems of the world, and all sorts of good things. Being a good example for your children is very special and it will really go deep down into their hearts and minds. Even if they don't show it immediately or respond at the time, when your children grow up, I think they will remember that.

### **We'd like to ask for specific practice advice to help with a few common emotional challenges. First, if we feel overwhelmed and burnt out, what is the best practice to do?**

Feeling the presence of Guru Padmasambhava, Tara, and the Buddha and practicing on them is definitely excellent. You can also free all those overwhelmed attitudes and thoughts with a deep exhalation and feel them instantly release into space. I think doing that a few times followed by Dzogchen meditation will really help.

If your work is something connected with the Dharma or benefitting beings, you have very excellent principles. So even if it's overwhelming at times, it's just really so beautiful and special. It has beautiful consequences, and not just now—the beneficial effects will continually ripple out to all sentient beings for many years to come and throughout time. Remember that you're doing good bodhisattva activities and the benefits will continue long into the future.

When we read the life stories of the Buddha and great bodhisattvas, they did so many beneficial activities and endeavored with such courage, commitment, and willingness, even when they were surrounded by challenges in every direction. They continued doing their best, even if they weren't acknowledged or people didn't approve. They kept their principles and their view, and didn't shake for a moment. Think about these stories and keep them as examples of how to continually move forward and

fulfill all of your good, beautiful goals and wishes, and then do your best. Even if no one acknowledges you, you should feel happy. If you're doing something good, with principles of love and compassion, be happy and joyful, and offer that to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and dedicate the merit to all sentient beings. Join your activity together with the activities of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, Chenrezig, Manjushri, Vajrapani, and Guru Padmasambhava like waves joining together. Connect your attitude and thoughts with theirs, and let it swing through the whole universe of the six realms. Really wish that sincerely and think, "I'm doing good in the eyes of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas."

### **If we feel depressed or hopeless, what is the best practice to do?**

Depression can be very difficult to deal with, and we should do everything we can to really try to lift ourselves up. We are human beings, which is so special. And not only are we human beings, but we have intelligence and all our senses are alert and intact. We can really feel joyful and happy about that. Feeling depressed means we're dragging our mind down; we push ourselves into a corner and cover ourselves up with so many habitual patterns and conceptions, and it becomes darker and darker. Why do we have to do that? Even if some degree of difficulty or trouble comes, we have to lighten ourselves up with joy, appreciation, and goodness. There are always troubles in life—no one is an exception. From the president all the way to the big city streets, everyone has troubles. The president has president troubles, senators have senator troubles, governors have governor troubles, business people have business troubles, street people have street troubles. Everyone has their different level of troubles. Who doesn't experience any troubles? Really think about this: "Who doesn't have any troubles? I have troubles just like everyone, so why should I feel this way? Why keep hitting myself on the head? I'm a good person. This is going to pass." This is just a cloud in the sky; it will pass. Thunderstorms don't last for 24 hours a day and 365 days a year. Everything changes. Think of how things have changed in the past, and of all the ways that you're fortunate now. Look ahead to the future and move forward.

### **If we feel anxious and out of control, what is the best practice to do?**

I think it's good to meditate. Come to Padma Samye Ling and do retreat! Relax—look to the sky, the birds singing, the wind and the grass. The deer are moving so slowly and beautifully, the hummingbirds are flying— why do we have to be so anxious? Really, come out of the nest of your house or apartment, and come to the retreat land to relax and meditate for a little while. If you can't, then just do a short meditation wherever you are. Apply the same techniques that I mentioned earlier: feel joy, lift yourself up and think, "Why am I so worried? I'm spoiling myself, I'm punishing myself—why should I keep doing this to myself?" Really, you have every freedom and right to do good things. You don't have to keep banging against yourself, overloaded with worries all the time. Of course we have some worries, but worries come and worries go. Happiness comes and happiness goes. Let your mind stay in a free and open state.

### **If we feel insignificant or alone, what is the best practice to do?**

We should bring up more joy and appreciation. Why do we have to feel lonely? We're not alone—we're joined by all sentient beings. We all have so many friends everywhere. Even if we're alone sometimes, that's fine. Many times it's like that. We came into this world alone, and we'll leave this world alone. We are like great lions that travel alone. But lions aren't burdened by all these emotions, hoping for this and that. You have to uplift yourself. Think, "I have every good quality. I'm going to be happy, stay relaxed, and increase my capabilities." Even you if don't succeed in this or that way, that happens all the time. Don't put your hand in front of your face and only look at your palm. Look to the horizon and out to the world. Many people are having various successes, and others are having difficulties. But if we have courage and commitment, with a big vision and perspective, we can definitely fulfill our goals according to what our situation allows. And for that we should be happy.

I think the key point is that it's the responsibility of human beings to be happy. Whether you have billions of dollars or not a lot of money, everybody's goal is to be happy. So try to be happy. According to the Buddha's teaching, everyone has the capability to be happy because everyone has buddha-nature. *Everyone.* No one is an exception. Since we all have buddha-nature, we also have every opportunity to activate it and allow it to shine and reflect out beautifully—not clashing and mixing it with our ego and a lot of excitement and attachment, wishing things were different. Our buddha-nature is always ready. Let it shine gently with joyful effort, courage, and commitment.

**Many things in the fast-paced modern world are being streamlined and condensed into essential**

points, including the Dharma. What are the main things we need to be careful *not* to lose in the Dharma lineage so that it remains fully intact?

In order to uphold the essential core of the Dharma we have to summarize all the teachings. In the Nyingma school they are summarized into nine yanas, or levels, which can then be further condensed into the three principle vehicles of Basic Buddhism, Sutra Mahayana, and Vajrayana. The essence of these three yanas is known as the Three Trainings of conduct, concentration, and wisdom. So try to keep up the essential practices of the Three Trainings with good conduct, bodhichitta, and the Vajrayana meditation practices of the Creation and Completion Stages.

Externally we should try to maintain the Three Vows of conduct of Basic Buddhism, Sutra Mahayana, and Vajrayana. The conduct of Basic Buddhism is really trying to avoid all negative actions, directly or indirectly to self and others. Every great master said that this is the essential meaning of the Buddha's foundational teachings, or the Hinayana. In addition to that, Mahayana conduct is performing all the beneficial activities for oneself and all beings, both directly and indirectly. Then in addition to the conduct of Basic Buddhism and Mahayana as the foundation, bring more purity understanding of the true nature of every phenomena, both subject and object, which is often called the Three Vajras of pure form, pure sound, and pure space, or pure body, speech, and mind. If your conduct follows the Three Vows, and your mind is always with the Three Vajras in Dzogchen meditation, filled with joy and appreciation, loving-kindness and compassion, this will keep the essence of the lineage teachings even if you haven't received all the different empowerments and instructions.

**What are the benefits and drawbacks of people using computers and smartphones all the time?**

Without those technologies, it's more difficult to communicate—you have to make a big effort to contact and see others. But with them, you can communicate with others so easily, and fulfill a lot of good things. But you can also get involved in many unnecessary and unhealthy things as well. All kinds of instant messages appear unexpectedly from many different places.

It's also true that when many people are with their friends or family members—particularly young people—almost everyone is looking at their smartphones, their fingers are very busy, and they're almost ignoring the people they're with. In the long term, I don't think this is very good. We'll become strangers to one another even when we're in the same room or sitting at the same table. If we're always trying to create relationships somewhere else, we'll lose the presence of human contact with whoever is right in front of us—the love, kindness, and compassion, and the laughing, joking, and sharing with our family and friends. We're really losing that, which means that the ground we're standing on is almost spoiled. Maybe in the moment we're gaining a little bit externally—something far away through technology—but I think deep down in the long term, it won't be good.

**How often should we try to do personal or group retreat?**

Group retreat and practice is very important because you get the sangha together. As we all know, in Buddhism there are the Three Jewels of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, which are the three precious ones. In a way, one person can be considered sangha, but really sangha means community. The teachings always say that four people is the minimum to make a sangha. If sangha comes together with the same beautiful intentions and meditation practice, it makes a strong bond and energy to support one another in defeating our habitual patterns and negativities. For example, if you only have one stick it might be somewhat strong, but if you bundle many sticks together they become much stronger than when they're alone. Therefore the teachings always say that it's very special to get together. It makes a lot of good reverberations and energy to support one another, and for other beings as well. Of course in both modern and ancient times, there are difficulties or different family situations, and we aren't always able to practice with other sangha members. If that's the case, do your practice at home for however long you can.

In general, going to a hermitage to practice will make you more quiet and peaceful, because for a little while you're giving up your homeland. The Buddha and all the great lineage masters often said that if you're able to give up your homeland, you've already accomplished half the practice of Dharma. When you're sitting at home, so many memories and habitual patterns come up, so even if you really want to practice, the mind won't settle because it keeps moving to those different points. That's why those great masters always said, "Give up your home and go to the mountains in the company of deer and birds." You accomplish a big practice just by doing that. Many times in Buddha's teachings it says that even thinking of going to a hermitage for retreat—even if you couldn't get there, but just thinking of that and making

preparations to go—will purify a lot of obscurations.

In Tibetan, hermitage is *wenpa*, which means “free from busy discursive activities connected with habitual patterns.” There are three hermitages: body hermitage, speech hermitage, and mind hermitage. Leaving your home to do retreat means you already have the body hermitage—you already freed that package of physical habitual patterns. The second hermitage of speech is to be quiet or silent, calm and peaceful, which means you are freed from all the habitual patterns of mundane chit-chat. The most important is mind hermitage, which is freeing all the habits of negative emotions, thoughts, and conceptions. Try to let those go and just stay in the present. With these three hermitages we’ll have more opportunities to experience the result of our practice more easily than if we stay in our usual surroundings.

**Recently more teachers have been making certain empowerments and transmissions publically available over the internet, such as H.H. Dalai Lama and H.H. Karmapa. What do you think about this?**

I really can’t tell. Khenchen Palden Sherab Rinpoche always said that transmissions and empowerments should not be done through electronic technology. It’s something that is very personal between a teacher and student, and their personal connection and contact is very important. You go through many things to meet a teacher in person, contacting them with strong devotion. There is a strong bond between teacher and student. According to the Buddhadharma, it’s not just a one-time relationship, or a one-time show. They’re always connected. In Tibet, it’s said that a teacher and student accompany one another like the oil, wick, and fire of a butter lamp. They stay together until the end. The teacher-student relationship is not just for one or two lives. In Buddhism we believe in so many lifetimes. This relationship lasts until they reach enlightenment and become buddhas.

Over the years, a few students have asked for empowerments and transmissions over the internet or telephone, but Khenchen Rinpoche always said that we could not do that. However, great teachers like H.H. Dalai Lama and H.H. Karmapa are definitely in a different category. According to Tibetan beliefs, they are both great, enlightened beings. Mostly it’s good to follow the lineage instructions and stay more simple and humble, following a very systematic and gradual way. That is what so many great masters have taught.

When Guru Padmasambhava gave empowerments to his 25 disciples or 9 heart students, he didn’t say, “You don’t have to come to me. I will give you the empowerment by transmitting it through the air.” I’m sure Guru Padmasambhava could have done that, but he didn’t. And the Buddha also didn’t say, “Stay home or wherever you are and I will give you the empowerment, transmission, and teaching. You don’t have to show up in person.” The Buddha and Guru Padmasambhava didn’t do that. There are also so many examples of great masters in ancient times that made such a big effort to contact their teachers. Both the teacher and the student made a big joyful effort to make this connection. For these reasons, I am going to stay like the old 500 BCE style of the Buddha and the 8th century style of Guru Padmasambhava.

**What do you think about how widely spread and easily available the Dharma is now on the internet, television, and in publications, including material that was traditionally restricted?**

That’s definitely happening now. One time H.H. Dudjom Rinpoche said, “Of course the secret Vajrayana teachings are secret. However, for those fortunate ones who are interested and come to receive the teaching, sometimes making a big effort, it’s okay to share it with them. If people don’t really have devotion and interest, even if you ask them to come they won’t. It’s also the degenerate age, and sharing the teachings is more important at this time than keeping them secret.” For these reasons given by H.H. Dudjom Rinpoche, who gave a lot of secret Vajrayana teachings and empowerments to people who made the effort to receive them, I think it’s good to share these teachings now.

In one way it’s great that modern technology can protect the Dharma by helping it remain for a long time with more translations and publications. Yet in another way, if so many secret teachings are available on the internet, there’s a danger that they will be seen as just another regular thing like everything else. The internet has everything—all of samsara is there! But maybe it’s good that the beautiful Dharma is also available among all of samsara. I can’t really make too much commentary about this. It has good benefits, and I guess the Dharma should be with samsara where it can help beings.

**In the modern scientific world, sometimes people think that praying to deities and buddhas is**

**childish—like we are asking for some other powerful being to come and take care of our problems for us. What is your response to this?**

I think it's a matter of perspective. Scientists are very smart. They look for evidence for everything, which is very good. Yet they always think that something has to be proven tangibly right in front of them by using their technology—otherwise they won't accept it.

Praying is very popular for religious groups around the world—and not just now—this has been going on for centuries and centuries. Praying has a long-lasting history and people commonly believe that it's beneficial, both in ancient times, as well as now. According to Buddhism, we shouldn't consider anything beneficial to be insignificant because it's helping beings, regardless of what level the help is coming from or whether we can see it or not. It's helping and benefitting others, and that's what we want. No matter what style, philosophy, or school you believe in, I think it's wise to accept something that helps someone. I'm not saying that people should just accept prayer. But if something is benefitting others, it's good.

In Buddhism, we're not praying to the Buddha to come take care of our problems for us. That's not a Buddhist view. We're only asking the Buddha to help support us to become buddhas ourselves. We're not putting it in someone else's hands, asking him or her to do it for us. We're asking enlightened beings to help us become self-sufficient and well-equipped to take care of things ourselves. We do this by developing our reasoning and with meditation and prayer. We all have the same potential—buddha-nature—and we're working to reveal and fully actualize our nature. If we count percentages, we're doing about 80% of the work, and the buddhas' help is about 20% of the supportive conditions to make this happen.

**As Dharma practitioners, what are some of the best ways we can help protect the natural environment, which many people believe is one of the main problems humanity has to address?**

The environment is facing many big, difficult, and dangerous problems now. We're using the environment a lot without thinking about the consequences. Many times Khenchen Palden Sherab Rinpoche said that it seemed like there have been more natural disasters in the past 15 to 20 years. He thought that this might be happening because we're disturbing the earth so much, and using all of its resources. I think this must be true. As a result, nature has become unbalanced, and natural disasters keep coming one after another.

Particularly in the Nyingma school, Guru Padmasambhava's teachings are very careful about protecting the environment. The great tertons have always been concerned about the environment and what's going to happen to Tibet. They always do a lot of ceremonies and prayers to protect the environment. If you read the life stories of all the great tertons, almost everyone did that. That is because of Guru Padmasambhava. Even when tertons would reveal termas, they always put something back so that the earth energy was not lost. Even if the terma was only a small object or vase, they wouldn't like to just take the terma out, leaving an empty space. They always put something back according to the instructions of Guru Padmasambhava.

These days we're continually drilling and mining for oil, gold, and other things. According to the teachings of Guru Padmasambhava and the great Nyingma masters and teachers, we're definitely making a big disturbance to the environment.

Of course it's an enormous job to solve these environmental problems. But we should do whatever we can to protect and support the environment according to our best capabilities. The problem is so big and involves so much that it's beyond any one person or one group. It's too big. We have to work together. But individually we can act according to our capacities as we, "Think globally and act locally." I think we should really follow that. And then we should pray, which will also help, even if scientists don't think it's correct. We're adding our good thoughts and intentions towards that. Activating good intentions and thoughts changes the mind, which will be reflected in our activities. Therefore we should pray and act with our best capabilities, thinking globally and acting locally.

**In Tibet, on many occasions women were not encouraged or even allowed to receive teachings and study the Dharma. Have you noticed any beneficial changes that have happened by more actively including women's perspectives and participation in the study and practice of the Dharma in modern society?**

In Tibet, I think this has to do with cultural tradition. Every country has a lot of traditions. In most ancient traditions, women were considered almost secondary, even if they were playing an equal role to help everything progress. This happened in many countries, and in Tibet to some degree as well. Yet women have definitely always helped equally, if not even more, standing at the front.

When it comes to the Buddha's actual teaching, I don't think there is any difference between men and women, especially according to the Vajrayana. I don't remember reading or hearing about anything that women can't do. They can equally receive all the teachings and practices, including all the secret teachings. According to the Dharma, I've never heard that women are not allowed to receive those teachings. There are also many great female practitioners who reached the highest realization and became renowned teachers with many male and female students, including many high lamas. So on the Dharma level, I don't think there is any difference. On the traditional level, there was some, but I think that is going away now.

I think that women are generally more active and quick than men. That's why I always thought that in the Vajrayana teachings, among the Three Roots, the root of activity is always the dakini. Khenchen Rinpoche also always said that women are more active, and that men are usually a little slower and take longer, and that they maybe have to think more. But women come to the front and play a more active role. Also, many times when we gave teachings, we noticed that women were more spiritually oriented than men. In Tibet, I don't really remember if it was this way, but in the West, including places like Europe, more women are practicing than men.

**What do you think is a healthy balance between Buddhist practice and social and political activism? Do we have certain responsibilities as engaged Buddhist citizens?**

According to Buddhism, practicing the Dharma is the most important thing. The Dharma is not about just trying to improve oneself. The Dharma is really working for other beings. A bodhisattva is like a social worker, free from all expectations—a pure social worker. Practicing the Buddhadharma is about benefitting and helping others. That is the intention, that is what we do, and the destination and goal is only to benefit other beings. Therefore, when we're practicing, we're not completely isolated and not doing anything for other beings. We're definitely helping others, maybe even more than ever.

Along with practicing the Dharma, it's good to support and help others by participating in the world and politics in whatever ways you can—as long as it's without violence and without becoming too emotional. Then I think it's good. If you don't yet have the capacity to change something without having strong emotions, but there is a very big, meaningful reason, then maybe it's okay.

But if there's not a big benefit, and you just become emotionally involved, it may be more damaging to our social worker bodhichitta for enlightenment. Then instead of benefitting anything, you create so many headaches, stress, and anxiety for yourself, so that even if you began with a good intention, it ends up being something different, which is impractical.

**What is your response to someone who is very pessimistic?**

I don't think you can change much if you only see the negative side of things. Many things can't be changed immediately. Therefore recharge your Dharma battery, and pray. Pray and practice and relax. Make yourself strong so that maybe later you can help. In the meantime, try to save your energy. If you only see the negative side of everything, you have no choice—even if you try to do something, you won't go very far. You have to be practical and recharge yourself until you're in a good state again.

**Many people think that religion is outdated—in the past and even now, it has been the cause of so much oppression, war, and suffering. What can we do so that religion brings people together rather than pushing them apart?**

What is H.H. Dalai Lama always teaching and encouraging? Compassion. What is religion in general? Religion is not a title. According to Buddhism, religion is fundamentally the basic goodness of all beings. It's love, kindness, compassion, and consideration. It's openness, respect, and appreciation. It's sharing, supporting, and helping each other, being accepting and understanding of one another. That is religion. Religion is the basic nature of everyone. It's not something from the outside that we try to apply with force. It's our own goodness. So I definitely don't think that religion is outdated. It could be that we're



outdating our own goodness, and that's why we're getting so many consequences we don't want. When we really look at the Buddhadharma, what is true religion? What is the Dharma? The Dharma is nonviolence, truth, appreciation, respect, and kindness. That's it.

Of course in ancient times as well as now, wars have been fought in the name of religion. This also happened in Buddhism, but that is not the Dharma. No one calls that Dharma. That is emotion—regular samsara stuff. Even if someone uses the name “Dharma,” that's not really Dharma. As H.H. Dalai Lama says, we should have respect, appreciation, and compassion for one another.

Compassion is not outdated. Loving-kindness is not outdated. They're not outdated according to any standard—not since the beginning of time, and I don't think they'll become outdated in the future. Love and compassion are the *sole* cause of peace and harmony. I'm not talking about religious titles or names—true religion shines from the heart. True heart religion is about exploring our inner goodness and sharing it with others. Then peace comes. Peace is religion, peace is spiritual. If we want to call it something, we can say that religion is goodness.

**Contemporary Western culture tends to be very individualistic and independent. How can this support or harm our Dharma practice?**

In general I think this is the same everywhere, but maybe Westerners believe in independence slightly more, which is really wonderful. In general it's good to have determination and be your own person. But holding onto our opinions too strongly can cause families and couples to have difficulties. We have to be willing to compromise with respect and appreciation, and continue practicing Dharma with courage, commitment, and determination. But at the same time, we have to respect and appreciate other peoples' opinions, advice, and thoughts—see how they work and consider how they might help. It's not that we have to immediately agree to their opinion and apply it, but we should really look at it and think about it.

**Was it easier to achieve realization in the past?**

The time of the Buddha was known as the “period of result,” when people achieved a lot of realization, followed by a “period of mostly studying,” and then a “period of degeneration” when people don't practice or study as much. During the Buddha's time, it was easier because the Buddha was such a great teacher, and his students were also highly ready to receive and practice those teachings. As a result, they immediately became arhats, or achieved big realization. In those cases, it was faster to get realization in ancient times.

Yet the Vajrayana teachings always say that as the degeneration age worsens, the power of the Vajrayana teachings will intensify. Therefore I don't really see a big difference between then and now.

Maybe what has always been lacking is when practitioners have a shortage of devotion and compassion, joyful effort, courage, and commitment. That definitely slows down anyone's achievement. That happened in the past, it's happening now, and I'm sure it will happen in the future.

**What's the best thing we can do for the Dharma? What's the worst thing we can do for the Dharma?**  
Practicing the Dharma is the best, and not practicing is the worst.

**Do you have any final comments about integrating the Dharma with daily life?**

(1) Have devotion to the lineage, (2) pure perception and affection for Vajrayana brothers and sisters and for everyone, (3) bodhichitta for all living beings, and (4) see everything as a magical, dream-like, impermanent display. With this attitude, maintain mindfulness, alertness, and thoughtfulness as much as you can. Many teachings say that mindfulness and alertness are contained within thoughtfulness. So always be thoughtful about the activities of your body, speech, and mind, both when you're by yourself and with others. Always do your best as much as possible. And at the end of every day dedicate your merit by reflecting back on the day, and make an offering of all your good activities to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, Guru Padmasambhava, and all the gurus, devas, and dakinis. By their blessings and your merit, wish for all sentient beings to be happy and joyful, and that everyone wakes up to the original qualities of their buddha-nature. ❀

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