



Advice from the Tradition

October 22-24, 2013

Bodh Gaya

Day One: Opening Speech by Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche, Seminar Advisor

(Speech in Tibetan, Translated into English)

Attended by Rinpoches, this meeting is an occasion for accomplished Tibetan scholars and foreign translators to come together. The meeting is also held at the sacred site of Bodhgaya. I believe this is a highly fortunate event.

The Importance of Kangyur extends to the World

The Kangyur, the precious words of our compassionate guide, Lord Buddha, is in the Tibetan language. To be honest, we Tibetans don't really possess anything else of value. As you all know, we Tibetans are poor in terms of material wealth and conventional education. However, we have the words of Lord Buddha as our universal gem.

In fact, this is not only the gem of Tibetans, but also that of people in the Himalayan region – Bhutan, Sikkim, Ladakh, Lahoul, and Spiti. Despite having their own languages, all these people will hardly study and practice Dharma without relying on the Tibetan language and script.

Moreover, these days the teaching of Buddha is spreading all over the world. If people want to practice Buddhadharma in general and Mahayana in particular, and especially Vajrayana, the empowerments, transmissions and oral instructions are still perfectly available in the Tibetan traditions. It seems that nowadays this is hardly the case anywhere else. Many people from foreign countries have developed interest and confidence in the teachings of Lord Buddha. Not only do they have faith and interest, they actually adopt and practice the teachings. For example, many people take monks' and nuns' ordination, do retreats for six years, nine years and so on. Similarly, I have a few translators who have spent two or three decades in the monasteries, like the monks, studying Tibetan grammar, poetry, philosophy, and have accomplished their studies to a certain extent.

Considerations in Translating the Kangyur

If we ask whether or not it is good to translate the precious Kangyur into Western languages, I would say it is beneficial, but also a very risky affair. Differing perceptions and opinions are quite possible. In Tibet, when the Kangyur was printed, there were criticism and disagreement about words that were thought to be missing, altered, and so on. Those issues about simply the printed form of the Kangyur have remained within our Tibetan society. Here, however, we are talking about much more than

that, namely, translating the Kangyur into a foreign language. This is not an easy task at all. It's very risky.

Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche just mentioned this. Since his early days, Khyentse Rinpoche has had great courage and merit. One day, while conversing, he asked me what texts we are translating. I told him we are in the process of translating a number of classical texts - among them most of the thirteen great treatises - as well as the collected works of certain learned and accomplished Tibetan masters, and a number of practice manuals and instructions. I told him that we haven't been able to work on much apart from this type of subject matter, but that I thought it would be good if also a couple of texts from the Kangyur could be translated. Rinpoche said, "Hey! That's a good idea! It would be great if the Kangyur would be translated." I agreed, but remarked that this would not be easy.

Then Rinpoche said, "You think about it. You have many students and translators. If you are interested we could talk more about how to do this." And since Rinpoche has great merit and connection with people, there have appeared patrons and sponsors to support this project. But just having sponsors is not enough. Unless the translations are of a high quality it will be a question whether this project is a service or an embarrassment to the Buddhadharma.

Early Translators and Panditas were Learned and Accomplished

When in the past century Tibetans began to arrive in India, there were many highly accomplished scholars among them. An example is Khunu Lama Tenzin Gyaltsen, whom I was able to meet and receive teachings from myself. He was a remarkably great scholar, and also learned in Sanskrit. Likewise, Dezhung Rinpoche had a perfect understanding of the tantras. Another such recent master was my maternal uncle, Chogye Trichen Rinpoche. In his mind blossomed all the words and meanings of tantras. Most of the masters of their caliber have now passed beyond. These days, although we claim that we translate texts, most of the translations are done by foreign translators. They are not just intellectuals; they are all committed Dharma practitioners, and they are doing their very best to translate the texts. If we look in our history books, we read that all the early translators were emanated beings. The present ones might also be emanated beings. If they aren't, it will be hard to translate the Kangyur.

Once, Rinpoche convened a meeting of translators in Bir. I could not attend the conference, but Rinpoche called me from there. On the phone he said, "You are not present at our meeting. Don't you have anything to say? If you have, speak now, via the Internet. We are having the meeting now." At that time, I then said a few words. First and foremost, I told the gathering that it would be crucial to proceed under the auspices of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and so establish a close working relationship with the lineage holders and great scholars of Tibetan Buddhism. We need to continuously seek their guidance and advice. Today I would like to repeat that.

Let me also repeat that the precious Kangyur is not the property of a few individuals. It is the jewel of all Tibetans. And not only Tibetans depend on the Kangyur. Many here today have knowledge of the current situation in the Himalayan mountain region. In Ladak, Spiti, Lahoul, or Nepal - when we wish to gain some experience with Dharma practice, or when we want to chant the verses for refuge and bodhicitta, we rely on the Tibetan language. The Tibetan Kangyur is also the most extensive canon that

exists. Very few people are able to read the Chinese canon, and while some canonical teachings exist in Mongolian, there are not that many. The same is the case with the canonical texts available in Pali and Sanskrit; there are not that many available. So, having taken all this into account, I would like to point out three things.

Translating the Kangyur is both Beneficial and Risky

First, if you ask whether translating the Kangyur is good or bad, I would say that it is potentially very beneficial but also very risky. Why are then people like us taking on this task, if it is both possibly very beneficial but also very risky? Because if we do not translate now, it will become too late to ever do so. Why would it become too late? Because only very few of the learned and accomplished Tibetan masters remain in this world today.

Lineage Holders and Scholars should Take Responsibility to Translate

As for my second point, we have the saying, “The Dharma has no owner but belongs to the diligent. If the poor man’s son has what it takes, the throne at Ganden does not belong to anyone else.” We must assume responsibility and translate. There certainly won’t be anyone deciding who may and may not translate the buddhadharma, or who may and may not practice it.

The teachings of the Buddha have been translated many times and will continue to be translated. The tantras in particular carry an extremely profound meaning, and much of it needs to be resolved through the four modes, the six limits, etc. Translating the teachings without understanding the meaning correctly would be a disaster. In one sense, buddhadharma is spreading well in the world. However, in another sense, it is not really spreading in an authentic and pure manner. There is little regard for precepts, little sincerity in the way people study, and only few pursue the practices of approach and accomplishment in a retreat situation. People print many books, read them randomly, and superficially decide that “this one is good and that one is bad.” Sometimes they enjoy what they read, and sometimes they criticize it. Sometimes they just read for fun. Buddhadharma becomes entertainment. In that way everything becomes superficial and Buddhism does not spread in a genuine form.

Now, who is responsible for facing this challenge? The lineage holders of Tibetan Buddhism led by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the scholars, and all of you gathered here share a big responsibility. Let us live up to that responsibility.

The precious Kangyur of Lord Buddha is Tibet’s greatest and most fundamental treasure. It’s like the heart of a person. Not translating it properly would have severe consequences for the entire Earth. So, under the noble leadership of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, I request all the great lamas and accomplished scholars of Tibetan Buddhism to by all means offer their guidance. Please give honest comments and advice from the heart, not just flowery praises. This is a public project, and if it turns out well it will benefit all. If it doesn’t, it will bring harm on us all. We talk about serving the buddhadharma. This surely must be it.

Moreover, unless asked to do so, nobody is going to come forth to tell us that they want to give us guidance. Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche asked me, “How shall we go about doing this? We have already intimated the heads of the different lineages. We have been communicating with the great masters and scholars.” But conversation alone is not enough. Tibetan customs can be quite complex, and sometimes one needs to be very careful, sometimes very respectful, and sometimes one even needs to act as if one were nervous. Frankly put, we need to explain very clearly what we are doing, and then explicitly ask for advice and correction. I find it extremely important that we receive blunt and clear directions.

If we don’t translate, others will do so. And we won’t have the authority to determine the translation quality and make the necessary corrections. Therefore, we must make sure that the translation project that has already begun will yield texts of high quality. And to ensure that we need to work under the guidance of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the heads of the various lineages.

Compiling a Dharma Dictionary for Translators

Third, we can’t do without a standardized terminology. When we study the history of Buddhism in Tibet, it becomes clear that the term *Dharma* was for a long time left untranslated. The translators simply used the Sanskrit word *Dharma* and did not apply the Tibetan term *chos*. In our case, we have not been able to translate *Dharma* into English. It is not proper to translate *Dharma* as *religion*, and no other English term seems to work either. So we leave it as *Dharma*. But it is important to develop standard Dharma terms in English, and as such terms become established, we should quickly try to compile a dictionary of Buddhism, I believe this would go a long way toward quality translations.

So, in short, I would like to suggest the following:

- (1) Headed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the lineage masters and accomplished scholars must be involved in and guide this project.
- (2) The translators should bring whatever unresolved issues of word and meaning they may have before accomplished scholars, making sure to discuss and resolve them.
- (3) Wouldn’t it be quite necessary to create a Dharma dictionary as soon as possible?

The Tibetan lostawas must have given a lot of thought to their work. When for example nowadays we hold a ritual practice we might say, “Please arrange the medicine, rakta, and offering cake.” Keeping the word *rakta* in Sanskrit has a nice effect. Likewise, consider the term *bsod snyoms*, as we have it in, “the thus-gone one went on *bsod snyoms*,” or “the monks went on *bsod snyoms*.” These days that tends to be translated as, “the thus-gone one went begging,” and “the monks went begging.” But as we know, *bsod snyoms* literally means “equalizing merit,” in the sense that the merit of the one who receives the offering is shared by the one who makes it.

There are many examples of this sort, where the standard English translation tends to undermine the Dharma’s greatness. So, there is something to think about here.

Request for More of Such Meetings In Future

Just as he has done with this conference, I request Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche to also in the future convene meetings and workshops for Tibetan scholars and foreign professors and translators. We all have responsibility in this important project. In accordance with this responsibility, I request all to take active interest and give support to this initiative. This is the essential point I would like to make here. Tashi Delek! I have spoken a little too long for which I beg your pardon. Thank you!