



## **Advice from the Tradition**

### **October 22-24, 2013**

### **Bodh Gaya**

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#### **Day One: Advice from Venerable Professor Samdhong Rinpoche**

*(Speech in Tibetan, Translated into English)*

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Kyabgon Dungse Rinpoche, Venerable Khyentse Rinpoche, Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche, Khenchen Pema Sherab, my old colleagues Reverend Sempa Dorji and Jamspal, and all the scholars.

The reason why I am attending this conference is because I have received an invitation. In the invitation it is clearly written that Khyentse Rinpoche has personally instructed the organizers to invite me to this conference, so they are sending me an invitation. Therefore, I am here just to avoid disobeying Rinpoche's command. I have no comments or suggestions that would help the scholars gathered here.

#### ***Samdhong Rinpoche's Impressions of Khyentse Rinpoche***

In this life, apart from brief meetings on a few occasions, I don't have a close connection with Khyentse Rinpoche. When I was young, I had a precious holy tutor in Tibet. He taught me right from the alphabet. He had immense devotion to Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche. I heard many life stories of Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche from that tutor when I was young. When I was a child, three slokas of explanatory tantra - which appeared in Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche's dream - became stuck in my memory. I can still remember two slokas of the text. I heard these when I was around seven years old. In Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche's dream, Khenchen Jampa Kunga [Tenzin] spoke these verses scattering flowers:

The king of gods enjoys the great wealth of the gods,  
The Naga king enjoys the gems of nagas,  
The king of the humans enjoys the great wealth of the humans,  
May the three sovereigns of the universe grant auspiciousness!

King Gesar, incomparable in strength and miracles,  
Trotung, unrivalled in wrath and valor,  
*Gyatsha*, peerless in courage and bravery,  
May the three forefathers of the world bring auspiciousness!

There was another sloka, but I couldn't find the text. So, since childhood I have had the feeling that Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche was such an incredible being.

Later, after I enrolled in one of the monastic universities, one day while we young tulkus - there were about 10 or 12 young tulkus - were receiving teachings from Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche in his residence, Khyentse Rinpoche [Chokyi Lodro] suddenly came to Trijang Rinpoche's room. Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche's room was on the second floor of the house, if it was in India. In Tibet, it was on the third floor. When Trijang Rinpoche saw Khyentse Rinpoche coming to his residence, he immediately prostrated to him and asked all of us to stay in one corner. He then walked down the ladder to receive Khyentse Rinpoche. When we looked at Khyentse Rinpoche from the corner, he was taller than Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche. Trijang Rinpoche was very tall, but Khyentse Rinpoche was even taller. Previous Khyentse Rinpoche's body was huge and on top of that he was wearing a ceremonial hat, so while they were walking up Trijang Rinpoche looked smaller. Khyentse Rinpoche probably must have stayed for two hours in Trijang Rinpoche's residence. After Khyentse Rinpoche had left, when we went back, Trijang Rinpoche spoke on the life of Khyentse Rinpoche. He particularly said Khyentse Rinpoche had special karmic connections and enormous aspirations for Tibet during that era. Since I had this imprint in my mind from childhood days, when people said Rinpoche has asked me to come, I could not resist coming here without any preparation, irrespective of whether I have anything beneficial to say or not.

### ***Tibetans Have An Immense Legacy of Literary Works***

Now, to say a few words related to this project, I need not explain the fact that 84000 is a great historical mission that would bring two benefits. Generally, Tibetans are considered stubborn people who are quite difficult to tame. However, if we look at the Tibetan history of the past 1,300 or 1,400 years, among the many different races of people living on this planet, Tibetans have the greatest legacy of composition and literary works. It's a fact, not like a son bragging that his father's bowl is the cleanest. If we look at the magnitude and preciseness of texts translated from other languages, such as Sanskrit, Chinese, Zhangzhung language, Tajiks and so on into its own language, it is enormous. Likewise, as explained earlier, there is no substitute for Tibetan translation.

So I always say that on earth, although the population of Tibet does not exceed six million, no other races of people have produced the quantity and quality of literary works as the Tibetans. Nobody can compete with the Tibetans in the field of composition and translation. I believe I am telling facts because we can see the works with our own eyes. The project of translating the texts from Indian languages into Tibetan continued from the 7<sup>th</sup> century to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. As a result, we now have the Kangyur and Tengyur. There seem to be great many other literary works that are not included in the Kangyur and Tengyur. If we add these works together, it would be hundreds of volumes. Tibetans have worked on these projects for a very long time.

### ***Previously Thought Impossible to Translate Kangyur and Tengyur into English***

Both Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche and Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche spoke on the need for translating the teachings of Buddha that exist in Tibetan into other languages in this age when many people around the globe are becoming interested in the Buddha's teachings. I need not say that it is our

responsibility, therefore I would like to offer my heartfelt appreciation, respect, and joy to Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche and Khyentse Rinpoche and all other people who are directly involved in this translation project. I don't have both courage and right to comment on this project, because I was one of those who said that it is impossible to translate the Kangyur and Tengyur into English and other Western languages for a long time. For about 15 years after I arrived in India, I had this misconception and expressed it to everyone.

As Sanskrit and Tibetan have the same standards, it was possible to translate texts from Sanskrit into Tibetan. When the texts were translated from Sanskrit into Chinese, as Tom explained earlier, since they are linguistically quite different, and as Chinese was a fully developed language, the Chinese translation could not retain the Sanskrit expressions as clearly and precisely as Tibetan. Similarly, it is a fundamentally proven fact that translators will face difficulties when translating texts from Tibetan into Western languages. I used to say it is almost impossible to translate texts into Western languages. I had two or three friends who worked on translation from the 1960's to 70's. I also had two or three friends in Varanasi when I was there. They tried very hard with their logical explanations to dispel my misconceptions.

Later, they translated many texts. Moreover, they translated *Mūlamadhyamaka* and *drang nges legs bshad snying po* and showed them to me saying, "It is possible to translate the Kangyur and Tengyur into English. Your thinking is completely wrong. We have translated a few texts. What is defective in these translations?" When we edited those translations, one or two defects were unavoidable, but most of the texts were precisely translated.

Then I realized that saying "It is impossible to translate the Kangyur and Tengyur into Western languages" is untrue and what I thought was a misconception. However, I realized that we must take extra care while translating texts from one language to the other, and I still cherish this belief.

My belief is that 84000 will face many challenges while translating the treasuries of teachings, and you people have already seen it. I have sensed this from the presentations you made this morning. So I am just going to make a brief review of what you have already explained.

### ***Finalizing Standard Terminologies***

I think it's very important to finalize the terminologies. I have had this thought since a long time ago. This morning, Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche spoke on the importance of standardized terminologies. He clearly explained about this problem. Unlike in the past, the Tibetan language is progressing today. We can almost play with the language. In general, Sanskrit and Tibetan languages are completely different in nature. However, the expressions of these languages are very similar. However much we can express in Sanskrit, in the same way we can express in Tibetan. Whatever number of synonyms and homonyms exist in Sanskrit, an equal number of such words exist in Tibetan – both including those that already exist and those that are newly formed.

An example for synonyms is *Amarakoṣa*, '*chi med mdzod* in Tibetan. Since this text was translated very early, all the different words in Sanskrit have been precisely translated into Tibetan. The reason why Sanskrit and Tibetan are different in nature is, in Tibetan the meaning of the word is

expressed by the power of the suffix while in Sanskrit the meaning of the word is expressed through the vowel. Moreover, the length of syllables and the method of joining the letters are completely different. Although the nature of Sanskrit and Tibetan is different for these reasons, I believe it is possible to translate the words and names precisely because these languages have similar expressions.

I need not explain the fact that the nature of the English language is completely different from both Sanskrit and Tibetan. If asked whether we can make the English expressions similar to Sanskrit and Tibetan, we have to say that we can. Otherwise, saying “we can’t” would almost be surrendering. So we must say and decide we can make the expressions of these languages equal. Hence, I am sure we would really need to create and transform many new words into Western languages. I think it is possible to create new words.

I have a friend named Professor A.K. Saran, he passed away. He was actually a sociologist. He wrote many books, and “The Traditional Thought” is the most popular one. In that book, the author created many new English words, which English speakers don’t know. He brought the words over from many languages such as Greek, Latin and Sanskrit. When these words are slightly Westernized or Anglicized and written in the book, they seem to become popular English words over the course of time.

As Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche just said, I understand how difficult it is to work with Western scholars to make universally accepted terminologies. Even the three scholars I just mentioned, who stirred my brain to believe that it is possible to translate sacred texts into Western languages, have never succeeded in standardizing the terminologies. They have strong persistence for their individual terminologies. They bring reasons for supporting their own terminologies. So I sometimes feel that academic stubbornness is a difficult habit to deal with and, in one sense, it’s a kind of unique characteristic these scholars have.

I believe the good quality of Tibetan translations is attributed to *sgra sbyor bam gnyis* and the three kinds of *bye brag rtogs byed* in the early translation of *Amarakoṣa*. These texts must have helped immensely. Hence, irrespective of whether people accept it or not, if everyone involved in this project could come up with uniform terminologies that could be used in any context or situation, I believe it would serve as a standard criteria for translation.

### ***Multi-lingual Dictionary of Dharma Terms***

To this effect, if you could compile a dictionary containing Dharma words in Western languages, Tibetan and Sanskrit, it would certainly be of benefit to all future translators. At present, a computer expert in Dharamsala named Lobsang Monlam is compiling a huge dictionary called Monlam Dictionary. For this purpose, all the four Tibetan Buddhist schools including Yungdrung Bon tradition have been requested to collect Dharma words and terminologies used in each tradition and they are helping to gather these resources for this intended dictionary. With this dictionary, if you could come up with a dictionary to be compiled with Dharma words in Western languages, it would certainly serve as a basis for analysis and source of reference. It may not be the same as *bye brag rtogs byed che chung* or *sgra sbyor bam gnyis*, which were formulated under the king’s command. Some of you may disagree with this idea, but I can’t force you to do so. In any case, I am certain that having this kind of source of

reference will help everyone to think about and to bring uniformity in translations.

Similarly, it would be good to have all the Sanskrit and Tibetan synonyms in Western languages. For instance, in Tibetan, “sun” has a number of synonymous names, such as “bringer of daylight,” “illuminating lamp,” “jewel of the sky,” “seven horses” and so on. When these euphemisms are translated into Western languages, we only have a single name. Moreover, if we want to portray the elegance of compositions, we must have all the different synonyms. Omitting any of these terminologies would ruin the literary flavor of the work. Therefore, I feel it would be good if we could make efforts to have all these terminologies in Western languages even if it means to create new terminologies. Both Sanskrit and Tibetan have great many associated words. I don’t know whether or not it is possible to have these associated words translated into Western languages. I wonder how translators would go about this. Let us take *dag* for example. When this word is joined with many associated words, such as *yang dag pa*, *rnam par dag pa*, *yongs su dag pa*, in Sanskrit: *vishudh*, *samshudh*, *parishudh* and so on. The meaning of the same word goes through a process of change. So I bet that along with the synonyms, finalizing means to deal with these types of issues, and it would really help in bringing quality translations.

To sum up, my first point is that it is important to finalize standard terminologies to bring uniformity; second, as part of this process, to have a dictionary of Dharma terms in Tibetan, Sanskrit, and as many Western languages you could include. I think this would serve a resource for all the translators and academics. In fact, I feel it is imperative to have the equipment to work on these translations.

### ***Close Collaboration of Pandita and Lotsawa***

Concerning the actual translation, I believe the fact that Tibetan translations are clearer and more precise than Chinese and other translations can be attributed to the close collaboration of lotsawas and panditas. It was under the command of Tibetan kings that they had to work together. No matter how learned an Indian scholar was, he was not allowed to translate texts by himself. Likewise, however an expert a Tibetan lotsawa might be in Sanskrit, he was not permitted to translate texts without relying on an Indian lotsawa. Judging from this, I am sure there is a big difference between knowing one’s own language or mother tongue and other languages through learning. There must be a difference between the depth of understanding of one’s own local language or mother tongue and a foreign language. Therefore, I feel that the collaboration of pandita and lotsawa has been a very skillful approach of the early scholars.

### ***Translation Plays a Role in Establishing Authentic Buddhism***

For example, if we look at our history, the great abbot Śāntarakṣita had been incredibly kind to us. Gracious Khenchen Bodhisattva told the Dharma kings that if a Sangha were not established by ordaining the local Tibetans and if the Buddhist canons were not translated into their own language, Buddhism would not have a firm footing in Tibet. Khenchen Śāntarakṣita’s advice

provoked the scholars and panditas who accompanied him to warn him that translating everything into Tibetan might make the teachings faulty. Khenchen told them it was their responsibility to make sure this did not happen, and if the teachings were not translated, authentic Buddhism could not be established in Tibet. Because of this advice, Tibetans were able to translate great deal of teachings.

Because of Śāntarakṣita's vision, today, we have many sūtras and śāstras in Tibetan whose originals in Sanskrit and other Indian languages have completely disappeared. These books not only benefit Tibetans, they are also assets of Buddhism in the world. These texts exist solely because they have been translated into Tibetan. If these texts were not translated and were left in Sanskrit and other Indian languages, there would be very few who know these teachings in this age, plus the texts would have even disappeared.

### ***If We Don't Translate for Fear of Mistakes, the Situation would be Worse!***

When we look at the history, I think the question of whether our translations are good or bad doesn't arise today. If we ask: Is it possible to make mistakes? Yes, it is possible. However, if we don't translate the texts out of fear of making mistakes, then the situation would become extremely worse. So we must do everything possible to avoid mistakes, and for that purpose we must do all the necessary reviews and editing again and again, just as how scholars and translators were invited to *sgra sgrur* and made decisions on terminologies. Even if we have fear of making mistakes, or have doubts on whether the translations will be good or not, or are concerned that translating the texts might dilute and corrupt the teachings, I think it's important to start working despite these doubts and pessimisms.

With this, we must explore how we can improve on the tools for translation, find means to have sufficient terminologies, what can we do to substitute associated terminologies, whether it is possible to have *lotsawa-pandita* collaboration or not, and if we are in a position to make the dictionaries. If we look into the above matters, we can definitely straighten it out and find ways to solve our problems.

### ***How the Tibetans Created New Terminologies***

Tibetan scholars have gone through great hardships while creating new terminologies in the Tibetan language. They read great many sūtras, śāstras and commentaries, and then tried to find a way to create a new word. Let's take *dkon mchog*, "Three Jewels" as an example. In Sanskrit there was no independent term for "Three Jewels" that could be easily translated as *dkon mchog*. They created the term *dkon mchog* based on a verse in the *Uttaratantra*: "It is rare (*dkon*) to appear and be free from stains; is supremely (*mchog*) endowed with power and an ornament of the world, and so on." Likewise, the word *sangs rgyas* was created based on the meaning of the words *sangs* and *rgyas* as explained in the *Praise to the World Transcendent*. That is how new words and terminologies were being created in Tibetan.

Then for those words that were not created new, the old words that already existed in Tibetan were fully standardized, saying this word is the substitute for this, and that word is the equivalent for

that and so on. I think *equivalent*, *representing* and *substitute* are three different things.

*Equivalent* means the verbal root in Sanskrit is synthesized and the Tibetan word is formed according to the words and meaning of the synthesized base, and this Tibetan word and the Sanskrit are equivalent in word and meaning.

Further, when an existing Tibetan word is placed with a different Sanskrit word, for instance, the word *gtsug lag* probably does not exist in Sanskrit. The words that have the exact meaning are *ishvarchen* and *vangama* and there was this Tibetan word *gtsug lag* that has the same meaning. When this word is used as a *substitute* to give this meaning, it gives the exact meaning. This kind of word is called compound word – words that are not translated precisely are more or less compound words.

Similarly, another example is translating *shashvat* as *g.yung drung*. *g.yung drung* sounds like a Bon terminology, doesn't it? Although *shashvat* and *g.yung drung* don't have the same meaning, when *g.yung drung* is kept as substitute for *shashvat*, over a period of time, it becomes a kind of traditional principle and remains as the precise meaning of *shashvat*. For example, the word *sangs rgyas* can be constructed as Buddha in its original language, but some words cannot be constructed in their own language. So if we follow the same pattern as in Tibetan while constructing words and terminologies in Western languages, I am sure we can create new terminologies.

Constructed words already exist in Western languages and it is possible to create new words. The best thing I have seen in the texts translated by 84000 and distributed yesterday is you have used many Sanskrit terminologies. The Sanskrit words used for writing the names of beings and texts tend to become English words after some time. Aren't there many Indian words and words of other countries written in general books that have become English words? I am sure if we use our terminologies again and again, they would become popular English terms that everybody can accept.

### ***Importance of Referencing Sanskrit Texts***

The difficulties you mentioned that translators face while translating texts from Tibetan into Western languages are genuine. If the sūtra you are translating is available in Sanskrit, you must compare it with the Tibetan version and see which parts are the same or different. The translation would be the best if you could translate from this kind of edited text. Generally, scholars reconstruct the lost original Sanskrit text from the Tibetan texts. They do reconstruction and restoration of the texts. They say it is possible to reconstruct the Sanskrit texts from Tibetan. However, all the academics agree that they can only retranslate the Sanskrit texts from Tibetan translations. They cannot restore the text into original version from Chinese.

Whether it is possible to reconstruct the original text or not, if we could come up with a standard Sanskrit-Tibetan dictionary which we can rely on. In other words, if we can look at the Sanskrit originals of the terms while translating Tibetan texts into Western languages, it would help us make the translation less rigid or imposing.

If I give an example, one of your translations is *dpang skong phyag rgya pa*. Is the English translation of the title: "Invitation to Witness?" In the Tibetan version of *dpang skong phyag rgya pa* there is no such thing as "In the Indian language..." is there? There is also no mention of who translated

it at the bottom. In the story it says this sūtra has fallen from the sky. Hence, if we translate the meaning of the Tibetan word *dpang skong* into English without researching it in Sanskrit, I think we must debate on the meaning of the word whether it is precisely correct or not. We must really try to find the Sanskrit for these types of words and phrases.

The similar case is with *klu yi rgyal po rgya mtshos zhus pa'i mdo, dri ma med par grags pas zhus pa'i mdo* etc. The first title is translated into English as *Questions by Nāgarāja*. In Tibetan, it's been translated as "request," not as "question." Sempa-ji would be able to explain this. Is there difference between *Sūtra Requested by Vimalakīrti* and *Questions by Vimalakīrti*? Is *paripṛcchā* Question or Request? (Professor Sempa Dorji discussing with Samdhong Rinpoche) If that's the case, then the translation is correct. It is necessary to examine the source of the original Sanskrit word before it is translated into English from Tibetan. Otherwise, I think, sometimes there would be mistakes if we translate the words directly from Tibetan.

Moreover, while translating tantras and mantras, if we don't collate Tibetan texts with the original Sanskrit version, there seem to be many errors in the Tibetan version. My reason for saying this is, a few years ago, one *Mañjuśrīnāmasamgīti* text was published in Dharmasala. When they printed the *Mañjuśrīnāmasamgīti* text, they used the text from the most popular version of the Kangyur, Derge Kangyur, as the manuscript. When they read this text they found many words that don't match with the words in Sanskrit. For instance, *dga' bzhin du* is mistaken with *bka' bzhin du*; *sgra* (sound) is mistaken with *dgra* (enemy) and so on. So we found 14 to 15 such errors in one *Mañjuśrīnāmasamgīti* text. We need to either look in the commentaries or consult the Sanskrit version. Otherwise, there are so many things we don't understand.

There is a verse in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, "*lcags sreg sa gzhi su yis byas||mo tshogs de dag ci las byung||*" Here, the word *mo* is written as *me* in most of the Tibetan versions of the text, as "*me tshogs de dag ci las byung||*" The word corresponds to the Sanskrit word *Savitri*, which means *mo*. It is *mo tshogs de dag ci las byung*, referring to the host of seductive girls among the minions of the hell realm. It is probably an explanation about *shalmali* tree. In such situations, we must consult the original Sanskrit texts. Otherwise, things could become problematic and confusing.

## **Conclusion**

Considering all these factors, until now, the series of projects lined up by 84000 have been very good. In the same manner, if you could compile a dictionary similar to *bye brag rtogs byed che chung*, or add Western languages to *bye brag rtogs byed che chung* without making it look like a new form of *bye brag rtogs byed*, to facilitate standardized terminologies for everybody, I feel it would serve as a timely reminder for all the readers, commentators, researchers and so on.

Due to time limit, I would wrap up my talk here. I'll speak again in the afternoon if there is an opportunity or if it is helpful. I am glad to attend this conference although I lack beneficial comments and experience in translation. I would like to thank you for inviting me to this conference.