



Advice from the Tradition

October 22-24, 2013

Bodh Gaya

Day One: Advice from Khenchen Pema Sherab

(Speech in Tibetan, Translated into English)

I offer my greetings to the great scholars, translators and all the members of the project team for having obtained this opportunity to express my views on the given subject at this extraordinary holy place. I am not sure if my comments would have any beneficial effects, but I am happy to be able to attend this conference upon the command of Kyabje Khyentse Rinpoche. Having been here, it is inappropriate not to express one's conceptual thoughts, so I wish to speak whatever comes into my mind. I don't have a prepared speech. Since we have two days, I think I would get the opportunity to give my comments gradually.

Many of you have already spoken on the subject we are contemplating. We have a great opportunity in this fortunate age where the two kinds of teachings of scripture and realization of the fourth guide (Shakyamuni) exist. This is attributed to the collective merit of the beings of Jambudvipa and other realms of existence. Otherwise, it is not easy for any one or two accomplished beings to manipulate the circumstances through their miraculous powers. If we think in the context of the teachings of scripture and realization of the peerless Buddha being the universal gem of all of us, the great project initiated by Kyabje Rinpoches (Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche and Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche) and stakeholders has been meaningful.

Different Meanings Expressed in the Buddhas Teachings

I haven't heard of English having been a Dharma language, even though it is a language widely used by people in modern times. I must apologize if English has been a Dharma language. Since Buddha has given the teachings according to the capacity of beings, although the word is same, the meaning is different depending on the subject and context. The meaning is related to the philosophical viewpoints and faculties of beings. If we wonder where the meaning is, it is said in the teachings that for a person who has perfectly understood the meaning of all forms of teachings, whether he/she expresses his/her analysis or assertion, however he/she interprets the meaning, whatever words he writes, if the meaning is present in the metaphor, there is no fault or mistake. I think it is one of the most important points.

In Europe, there are people who are labeled as translators. Most of them are translators. They seem to merely translate the words without giving much thought to the meaning or understanding of the subject matter. They may be thinking about the meaning to a small extent. They rely on dictionaries and other resources such as vocabulary and grammar texts, but the reliability of these resources is doubtful.

Because of such a situation we face one problem. We have one adversity. I think we can overcome most of the challenges if we can follow a person who thoroughly understands the meaning of the expressive words if any.

I see an incredible vision within the Kangyur translation project you are working on – you have set a vision to translate all the Buddhist literary works. It is a matter of great joy. Both sūtras and tantras are included in the entire Buddhist literary works you are planning to translate. At the moment, you have translated a few sūtras. Since Buddha has given the teachings to suit different beings, different sūtras express different meanings: expedient, definitive, and ultimate. If we don't understand these meanings, our translation will give so many erroneous meanings. The subject matter differs with respect to having either provisional or definite meaning, and because of the philosophical viewpoints of different schools.

We need to find out the basis of our challenge – whether it is based on the general yāna or Mahāyāna or Vajrayāna. Tantra has two sections: outer and inner. Generally, the inner tantra is of three kinds: father, mother, and non-dual tantras. In the Nyingma tradition, the inner tantra is divided into Maha, Anu and Ati yogas. So tantra is vast. We must know these different categories of the Buddha's teachings and translate them accordingly.

Many Texts are Now Only Available in Tibetan

In the past, these texts were available only in Tibetan. This morning's speakers made a point to base our translation on Sanskrit texts, but I think there are very few texts available in Sanskrit. There might not be many. The source text itself seems difficult to find. So, today, we have around 300 volumes of Kangyur and Tengyur in Tibetan. The entire Buddhist literary works in Tibetan would exceed that number. Since we have no other options than to base the root of our translation in these texts, I think we must have confidence in these versions.

Three Kinds of Lotsawas in Tibet

In Tibet there were three kinds of *lotsawas* – editor, translator, and annotator. The editor *lotsawa* was the one who translated and edited the text by himself. If the translator does not thoroughly understand the meaning of the text, the translator would face great difficulty. The translator could only translate the texts and could not edit them. He would edit the translations with the help of learned Indian *pandita*. The annotator could only make annotations. He would not be able to translate wholly. I wonder which category our modern translators belong to. As the Rinpoches have mentioned, we would need learned people to rely on.

Dictionary of Dharma Terminologies in English

I think the biggest challenge we face while translating the texts into English is the shortage of terminologies in the target language. I wonder if it is impossible or improper to make new words in

English. So if responsible people could take initiative to discuss and create English words that give the precise meaning and compile them in a dictionary, it would serve as a great source of reference for all in the future. This is one point I would like to express.

Concerning another big challenge, this morning Kyabje Samdhong Rinpoche mentioned about making a trilingual Buddhist dictionary. There is a translation group in Dharamsala established with the support of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. They have finalized a plan to make a dictionary for the Dharma terms of all the teachings of the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism and Yungdrung Bon.

As for the Nyingmapas, we made plans at the beginning of last year, but the discussion could not happen until the Monlam. We decided to make the dictionary during the Monlam, and most of the members of the Monlam committee gave the responsibility to Namdrolling. So four people from Namdrolling have already begun working on the project. Due to the vastness of the subject, I think it would take time to complete the project. I have mentioned this as it is related to a dictionary, but I am not sure if it is related to the subject we are discussing here.

A few years ago, I heard that Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro of Serta Larung Gar and his team were compiling a dictionary, but I don't know the details. They seem to be including the existing English, Chinese, and Tibetan terminologies that fulfill the criteria in the dictionary after careful discussion. If you could make a dictionary by consulting them, we might be able to overcome the challenges we face while translating the texts into English and other modern languages to a certain extent. This is another thing we need to keep in mind.

Concerning the Sanskrit-Tibetan dictionary for us to use, there is a Sanskrit-Tibetan dictionary taken from the collected works of Jamgon Mipham Rinpoche. I believe it is volume 38 of the set of books published by Serta Larung Chogar. This bilingual dictionary has enough clarity about Sanskrit-Tibetan equivalents that would benefit us to a certain extent. However, it would be difficult to find everything in there. This might solve some problems with regard to Sanskrit and Tibetan terminologies. Perhaps you might know this.

The Old and New Translation Schools in Tibet

In Tibet, there is something called *Nyingma* - the Old Translation school and *Sarma* - the New Translation school. The teachings translated from Thonmi Sambhota until the great translator Rinchen Zangpo, before Jowo Je Atisa came to Tibet is called "Old Translation." About 80% of Kangyur and Tengyur were translated during this period. I can say all, but majority of the translations of this period are *meaning translations*. Since the translators of that period had understood the meaning of the subject, they had the great ability to bring all the meanings of words expressed in Sanskrit into Tibetan. Is it that the translators of the latter period mainly did the *literal translations* of the texts? Since the translators of the latter translation period concentrated mainly on word-to-word translation similar to ours, there are instances where the words are rigid and difficult to understand. In any case, a vast majority of Kangyur, about 80% was translated in the Old Translation period.

In addition, Vajrayāna teachings are so vast. In the Nyingma, there is *kama* and *terma* and the latter is also vast. If we need to make English equivalents for all these texts, it would take many years.

It is a big trouble for us. If you could make a dictionary of all these terms, it would be of great benefit to your translation project. And this is one thing I would earnestly expect from you.

Conclusion

In short, it is the responsibility of all Buddhists, both lay and the robed, to preserve the Kangyur and Tengyur. Since they are the priceless source of happiness and wellbeing of all beings, striving to preserve and disseminate them would accumulate immense merit. Hence, I rejoice in the activities of all those involved in this project.

This project is not something you can accomplish in a few years. You must consistently work for many years. In order to have a good quality translation in the future, it is very important to edit and revise the texts thoroughly. In Tibet, there was a group of translators whose translation was used as the reference to edit all the translations of Old Translation period. I think this is the reason why texts translated by Kawa Paltsek, Chogro Lui Gyaltzen, and Zhang Nanam Yeshe De could stand in their own language. Since the texts you are translating only have English and Tibetan, you should be able to make them reliable. I have already spoken on the challenges we will face while making a reliable source of reference and I can explain this gradually.

If there is no committee to revise and finalize the translations, just translating the texts is not enough. As much as possible, we must make our translations free of mistakes. I never expect our translations to be without mistakes. Since we are ordinary deluded beings and not sublime beings, we certainly have defilements. So we need to preserve Kangyur and Tengyur with incredible pure intention.

It has nothing much to do with Buddhism being special. Since the subject in the Kangyur and Tengyur is related to the temporary and ultimate wellbeing of all migrant beings, it is not just the responsibility of Buddhists to preserve this heritage. Knowing this we must strive with all our means and wisdom to make this available to all beings. Whether we have this abundance of means and wisdom or not probably depends on the merit of beings. This is something that can be achieved through merit and it is difficult to accomplish whatever we intend to do. Thank you. I only have this much to say.