

Lama Yeshe Jinpa 7-15-18 Sunday Talk

Good morning! It is good to see everyone. Very good. Thank you for coming.

Speaking Up About Buddhist Scandals

This morning I am going to talk about Buddhist scandals. It may be disturbing or it may be inspiring, hopefully both. Recently it came to my attention that Sakyong Rinpoche, who is the son of Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche and head of the Shambhala's 200+ centers, was accused of sexual misconduct. Apparently the whole Kalapa counsel, his whole board has resigned. And then last year 2017, Sogyal Rinpoche, author of the famous book, "Tibetan Book of Living and Dying." was disgraced. I guess they are both retired or on retreat. Recently another controversy surrounding, Noah Levine of Refuge Recovery has had troubles.

As a leader myself, at some point, you have to speak up because if we remain silent, that means we are condoning or we are pushing it under the rug. I don't want to do that. On top of that, I want to ask, "What could cause this?" There are many contributing causes. They are men. (Laughter) Or they are Asian or they are not Asian, they are in American or they are not in American. Or they have a bad board of directors or bad students or something. These are all perhaps contributing causes. But I want to look at possible root causes, other than people's natural stupidity, natural grasping, natural pride and natural envy. These are the three poisons. I am going to offer some suggestions and then we are going to have some discussions.

A Foundation of No Harm

I have been following the careers of some of these teachers particularly Sakyong, whom I first met when he was like 15-16 years old. And then of course I met Sogyal Rinpoche. Also it is not just the Tibetan tradition that has gotten into trouble. Sasaki Roshi, a famous Zen teacher who died a couple of years ago at 105, also a huge problem. I believe that many of these teachers started out not only themselves but perhaps with their students being upside down. Upside down in the sense that they tried to start out with prajna or with some wisdom experience first but traditionally, in the Dalai Lama Tradition, Nyingma tradition, Theravada tradition, Zen

tradition, Ancient Indian tradition, and Buddhist tradition, we always start with motivation and ethics. We always start with that as a foundation, doing no harm developing the discipline or what we call shila and developing the bodhisattva vow. Do good. Avoid evil. Tame the mind. This is the teaching of the Buddha. We say this every time we come together. When we develop a strong ethical base, we have the right foundation.

For my generation, there was not so much of an emphasis on ethics when we started out in the 60s and 70s but we did want to change the world. We did want to make an impact. The discipline, the non-harm and the hierarchy was not emphasized enough. Myself, I was kind of passively rebellious as a kid. I did not get into any particular kind of trouble but I probably would not have started getting into dharma with someone who was kind of stuffy. (Laughter)

I did not want to do something my parents would approve of. When I met Trungpa Rinpoche, I was 18 years old and he met the model of a teacher my parents would not approve of. (Laughter) Probably I wanted someone who was very charismatic and powerful like that and could speak good English. I was not as attracted to monastic lifestyle at that point. But later, after I was around the scene, as we used to call it and had taken refuge with Rinpoche, even though I deeply respected him, I was not up for that lifestyle. I just saw too many people being harmed. When you see drug and alcohol abuse, children being harmed and families breaking up, I understood that it was not just one long British country estate party.

Ethics and Meditation, the Foundation

The ethical part in our tradition is like the foundation of a pyramid. The second part that we skipped in those days that I try to emphasize here is called samadhi, the meditation part where we try to stabilize the mind through shamatha and sitting meditation. And we develop strong equanimity. We must absolutely have some mastery of samadhi meditation, the ability to hold our seat and not get rocked by every little emotion and drama that comes along. This is the mind that does not believe everything we are thinking, that does not act on everything we are thinking, that would keep most of us out of trouble. And last of all, does not say everything we are thinking. (Laughter)

This is still shamatha, focused, balanced, spacious meditation. You can go very, very deep where we are just doing shamatha. Actually doing Mahamudra Shamatha on nature of mind but it is not lotong, let alone Mahamudra or Dzogchen. The higher teachings depend on bodhicitta, wishing that all beings be happy or free of suffering, wishing us to respect all beings and be friends, the ability to stabilize and focus the mind and develop equanimity. Then when we start searching for the nature of mind, nature of self and nature of phenomena, we are not swept away. If we immediately try to go after the nature of self or the nature of mind, it is stepping into a swiftly flowing river and people get carried away. It is very subtle. When we develop a little bit of shamatha meditation, it might look like things are very calm because the surface is very calm but underneath is a riptide.

Interdependence

So when I look at sanghas and teachers who have gotten into trouble, I have a feeling that there has been some surface calm. But as people wade in, they get carried away by the riptide. Even the prajna part, saying I see nature of mind, nature of self, nature of phenomena. They forget that the fundamental nature of all three is interdependence. Isn't that so? Some of you have taken the Foundations Course. When we act from harmful ways, when we act from egocentric ways, when we forget bodhicitta (not discernable)... Buddha's fundamental realization So must first start from a strong ethical background of no harm before we start seeing nature of mind.

Misguided Motivation

In some sanghas in the West, maybe in Asia too, the overall motivation is one of being a big success. We like to be prosperous. We like to have a lot of students or as students; we like to be with a famous teacher. What books have you published? What movies have you done? We want to be winners. We want somebody to go, "Oh (so and so) is a really good teacher. Or, "Gosh you got to study with so and so." (Laughter)

This is a little bit about me. Some of you are fairly lucky because when you go around Sacramento and say, "I study with Lama Jinpa," You may have heard, "I don't know about him." (Laughter) If you are still practicing, inspired by dharma and your teacher is not famous, that is a good thing. Of

course, many teachers now and long ago were famous and they had highest realization, Dalai Lama, Karmapa and Dudjom Rinpoche. And past teachers like Patrul Rinpoche and Dudjom Lingpa were constantly saying that it is not about success or having a big sangha.

Importance of Service

Sanghas that are based upon service survive. When you see sanghas, giving back to the community, who are involved with non-Buddhists and with the community at large, these sanghas survive. Why? Because you are relating with people you can't bullshit. If you are only talking with yourselves, it is really easy to believe everything you think. (Laughter.)

It is important, particularly in temple, we want to create a strong energy of ethics, samadhi and insight but also we have to relate with our community and do things. That is why I have been interested in how our rummage sale went. Some community people came here that we had not met before. And I am also interested in our garden project because people will see our gardens and be able to appreciate dharma that way. And people will see our website and they don't have to come.

Our Goal

Our goal is to Wake Up. That is the goal, seeing nature of mind, nature of self, nature of phenomena but the goal is not the end. I believe that sanghas who have gotten in trouble have forgotten the mission.

Our Mission

For me, the mission is the Middle Way. Particularly, the Middle Way is to help with reconciliation among opposing groups. The Buddha would put himself between opposing political groups The princes and other royalty were always fighting and the sangha was always fighting too by the way. (Laughter) Sometimes he had to go on retreat. (Laughter). He stayed with it and he put himself in the middle. He worked to reconcile opposing groups. In our tradition, we work with the polarities. We work with the middle. We don't put ourselves on one side or the other.

People always say, "I don't want to be in the middle of this." Well guess what? You are in the middle of it. So work with it. When sanghas and

teachers forget the mission, which is to help reconcile arguments, help reconcile rich and poor, gain and loss, then they forget what they're doing.

Our Vision

And then finally, the vision is Shambhala. Shambhala occurs on many levels but basically what is happening in a Shambhala situation is we have the correct balance of challenge and support. There is a sense of aliveness. It is like you are surfing. Some teachers and sanghas just love challenge. If you want challenge, you can find this. Other people want too much support. They just want safety and cocoon. Just leave me alone. But in a vibrant sangha, you have just the right amount of challenge and just the right amount of support. We are doing interesting things but we are not harming people.

The Lion's Roar

If I sat down with sanghas who have experienced troubles, this is what I would say to them. I have been through it all, from Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche's sangha and then when I lived at the Zen monastery; I had trouble with Sasaki Roshi's sangha. I am calling people out, which is one reason we call it the Lion's Roar. Too many times people are silent. Silence is condoning. My wife at the time Ann was Sasaki Roshi's attendant. When Ann became pregnant, she one day came up to me and said, "We are leaving." And I asked why? She said, "Rinpoche gropes me. I don't want that while i am pregnant. We are leaving." It took me a week or so to come around. I was a stupid guy. "Can't we just stay? I don't know." And she said again. "I don't want to be his attendant anymore. I don't want to be around that. I am done with that shit." Quote unquote. So we moved up to Oakhurst which was up near Yosemite which was great. I have really been in the middle of it and I can't stand it.

An Open Transparent Sangha

On the website, I had Rob but on a vision and values statement. We really want to run a sangha without money, sex and power trips. Of course, there are struggles. We are not telling people to shut up about their problems. I know I am a little bit more open and you will see struggles. Sometimes people say things like, "I wish I would not see that person arguing with that person or that person is annoying. Can't they go away and don't invite them back. Yes, I struggle too but I have seen the result when you try to flatten

everyone's voice out. You try to silence people and everything is Disneyland Dharma. I am interested in dialogue and I am interested in answering the question, "How do things go so wrong?"

First Rate Dharma Center

Basically, I am too tired for it. (Laughter) You people in Sacramento deserve the best, no second rate dharma. We can do it. We are doing it. We have a wonderful group of teachers who are willing to come here. Have we ever heard any silliness about Jhado Rinpoche? You won't. Or Choden Rinpoche? You won't.

I really do believe that we are building a sangha where we are doing highest level teachings, Anuttara yoga teachings, Mahamudra and Dzogchen. We can maintain that kind of confidence. I have also tried to write up something on the website about the teacher /student relationship. It is really a first draft. It is difficult to have that balance with a respectful, Vajrayana approach to the Lama while at same time, keeping common sense. Actually we should have people read Alexander Berzin's book.

Realistic View of Teacher

It is actually important to be realistic about the teacher. A teacher can have fully realized Buddha qualities which mean they are Awake. But Awake does not just mean in an absolute sense. Awake doesn't mean personality styles and faults go away. That is kind of silly. I know it is annoying and perplexing of course. I do express Vajra anger which comes from my protector practice but also you are going to get ordinary anger and ordinary silliness sometimes. If you don't get ordinary silliness, ordinary anger and ordinary stuff from a teacher, you will really start going crazy because you will think you can't have ordinary emotions either. When we are Awake, we will still have situational anger, situational stupidity, situational grasping and situational envy. It turns into suffering when you are holding onto it, when you make it solid, when you start taking revenge or make a fixed narrative about it. How many people think the Dalai Lama never gets angry? (no hands raised) Good, because he has talked about it. Right?

The Dalai Lama gets ordinarily perplexed. He likes to tell stories about himself. One of the stories I like is He was in Japan because he goes there a lot and an entourage with a bouquet of flowers was walking up to the

altar. And Dalai Lama thought, “Wow, these are for me.” And they walked right past him. (Laughter) They put them on the altar. (Laughter)

Rime Tradition

Also in sanghas that seem to have gone south, there is some kind of overt or covert sectarianism. There is a little bit of dharma football club, FC. We really do want to have a Rime, unbiased tradition here. That does not mean we mix and match here. That means that there are many wonderful teachings and there are many wonderful teachers and we can, with guidance combine and work with them in a realistic way. We are not just going that is not our..., so we don't do that. Of course my transmission lineage primarily through Ganden Tsong Khapa but I also have permission to teach in Nyingma lineage too.

We used to have a large prayer book. Some things from Ganden lineage, some things from Tsongkhapa Gampopa, Milarepa and we have some Padmasambhava teachings. I even threw in some teachings from my old Zen teacher Aitken Roshi but are they all fitting together? Do they weave together or is it just a patch work? We don't want things going crosswise. You don't want to sew with two needles or two heads of two needles..

Weaving things Together

We are already weaving things anyway. We already have a little bit of science in our lives. Everyone in California talks psych language all the time. Actually because it is traditional in Asia, at least in the monastery, they don't talk psychology. You are immediately talking psychology if someone goes on a retreat and then you ask, “How did you feel about the retreat?” That is psychology. You are going to the personal self to ask about the retreat. Traditionally, you would not even talk that way. There is no psychological self. You cannot get by in this country, on a certain level without being able to talk psychologically. So we have that.

Then we have our scientific world. Everyone is interested in Neural Buddhism. How does that work? And we have our own political ideas. We are already doing very integral dharma. Is it leading to realization? Is it developing our bodhicitta? Are we establishing our ethics, our shila, our samadhi, and prajna? Are we working on our goal, mission and vision? Does it all work together? I am presenting things kind of structured.

Challenges

I started practicing formally at 15 years old. Now I am 65. I have seen a lot. I know teachers and sanghas much more intimately than most people. Much of it has sent me into real grief where I have thought, "I am done with this." One time, Mike Hatfield, who is not here today, attended a meeting with me about bringing the Dalai Lama here. After the meeting, I came home and I said, "I am done with this "F"ing s..." (Laughter) Sabrina took me really seriously. So when I went to the next meeting, she asked me, "Why are you going to that meeting?" I was not done with it but I truly understand why people get totally disillusioned.

Questions and Discussion

LL: If anybody would like to say something or discuss something, I will give some space and then we will take a break. I hope that it has been somewhat disturbing and somewhat inspiring that we can talk about these things that I am not afraid to talk about them, that I put myself on the line and that my life is transparent. Really, if someone has something to contribute, I am open.

Person: When I first read about that, I had just left the seat of ethical which is Sravasti Abbey. And I read the story and what struck me as precepts. Why was everybody drinking? It was like totally ignoring precepts It just blew me away. I had not words for it.

LL: Yes, where did they go.

Person: I am curious and Tibetan version of Indian Bhakti...

LL: It is called Lama Nalgor, but Guru Yoga is very advanced practice that has to be built on the Shila and Samadhi and also takes some insight into shunyata or emptiness, right. The Guru Yoga becomes theistic, that you are worshipping and you are just an insect and the Lama is way up on a mountaintop. Then it is a big problem. All of the yogas coming out of India are very Bhakti even if they say they are a Jana tradition. It is a very strong tradition. The English word devotion is actually a translation of.. my memory is bad I think it isthe Tibetan word which means curious investigation, with humility. Devotion is kind of loaded word which has religious terminology. The Guru Yoga of our tradition is you are equalizing

with the teacher and you want to identify with the enlightened qualities of the teacher. That is a big topic but lots of times it is misused.

Somebody asked me to watch the documentary “Wild Country” about Rajneesh. It was interesting because they interviewed key people and the townspeople. So it was not a “Sixty Minutes” style format. The movie just let people speak and I could see that the Bhakti or Guru Devotion was unbalanced. Most of the people had a pretty primitive idea of Devotion. I have been around so I had a lot of Rajneesh friends. They would invite me. “Oh, come up and see..” I didn’t take them up on it. That is an important topic, how to be devoted with insight and how to be curious and ask questions. You should be asking me questions. I put examples of student /teacher questions on the website. “Why are you doing that? And what do you think of that? What is with that?”

Person: I was going to mention the devastation and heartbreak that comes with the breaking of samaya with a teacher. I don’t hold the Tibetan Lamas to a different standard then I hold priests with the decades of abuse that went on within the Catholic Church. To me, I look at the similarity about what goes on in world religions. It happens when there is unbalanced power and when people don’t speak up. That is when misbehavior increases..

LL: Thinking is allowed and questions are allowed. The important thing about Lama Naljor / Guru Yoga is the way we treat the Lama is the way we should be treating everybody. What is the point of doing prostrations or standing up when the Lama comes in? We are doing that so that when anybody walks in, we see them as a precious guest. That is the idea. We get used to the idea that when people walk into our mandala, we are just thrilled. “Wow here you are!” And the people go, “It’s just me.” (Laughter) So when you get up in the morning, you are not saying to your pet or your partner, “Well it is you again.” (Laughter)

The point of doing Guru yoga is it is training us on how to relate to the world. So we take this one person and we say, “I am going to train by being nice to you”. And then we extend that out to everybody. Of course, what happens in sangha is you find students who are really nice to the teachers or the authority figures but when they deal with sangha friends, they are just bleh. That is not doing the Guru Yoga.

When I was in Santa Fe, on my last visit to my daughter, I went to a Tibetan shop and I bought a mala. The proprietor said, "Oh that is a good idea. You are my lama." He did not mean Lama with a capital L. He meant you taught me something. Thanks a lot. You shared something of yourself with me. Thank you. We are willing to receive teachings from anybody and we are willing to show respect for everybody. That is when you really take it out into the mandala. It is not one person.

Person: Hypothetically if you do find yourself with a (problem or dispute) how do you approach it....

LL: That is a really good question. It is important to do everything at once. People get in trouble when they do things in a serial fashion. You take it to one person and then they might just say, "Well work on that." You should bring it to the attention of a number of different people. One thing I have tried to build here is not just one charismatic teacher. Everyone has met Geshe Damchoe la who is a really accomplished teacher. You could go to him and ask, "Why is Lama Jinpa doing...?" We have really tried to build a middle management of practice leaders and board members. We have many accomplished people and board members. There is a wide base. Hopefully it has a horizontal structure in addition to a vertical structure.

You could put an anonymous post on the bulletin board. To have an open sangha, sometimes you need to read disturbing news once in a while. You cannot always be completely polite. Sometimes you have to go to people and put stories together or leave and post something on Facebook. There is no completely nifty way to do it. I have been around. You can set up grievance committees but then those committees are corrupt. I am sure all these Sanghas who we have been reading about lately have somewhere on their corporate bylaws, "There will be no discrimination based on this..This is a free and open environment...." But it goes nowhere. I am for having things posted etc... . We do have all that but sometimes. We need to find people we can trust and work with.

It is not easy in either case but the Buddha always said, "Check things out." We cannot be stupid about dharma practice. We have to study and practice, read the proper books and read the Sutras because if we are kind of clueless and we don't know what is happening, it is on us. Dharma is not a salvation religion. That is the other thing. Sometimes they will say, "I don't know what is going but the Dalai Lama does." Or "I don't know what is

going on but I will put my trust in Bhagwan.” That is not correct dharma. Buddha said over and over again, “I give you dharma. Now you work it.”

Besides, what is the ultimate refuge? Ultimate refuge is the dharma. It has to be the truth. We have to become aware of the truth. We need a Lama of course to point out the truth. What else could it be? That is why the Buddha said, “I am not leaving a successor. The leaders of the sangha are obvious. I am leaving you with the dharma.” If you don’t know the basics, you must study. “I never heard of shila, samadhi and prajna... I never heard of higher ethics, higher concentration, and higher wisdom. I don’t know anything. I just show up and do what is told.” No! We need to take responsibility.

Person: What book are you suggesting?

LL: There is a book by Alexander Berzin, “How to Relate with a Spiritual Teacher.” It is a little bit formulaic. Like, “Here’s the meditations.” It is not street, the way I am talking here. I really want to present the Middle Way where you relate to things intelligently. There is a lot more written about how to relate with therapists. There needs to be intelligent talk about how to relate with groups, with sanghas.

Should we stretch a little bit? Then short meditation. Then we will have break. If Morris is up to it, if people are interested he was not here for my birthday because of family obligations but maybe do a reading back in the Dojo community room after the sitting. I would like to hear the poem again myself.