

Appendix 4

Extracts from Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche's talks on education

“Education is an unfortunate phenomenon in many ways, because education is a form of brainwashing, and whenever we brainwash, we have an agenda. In our agendas, we always think that whatever we value is the best — a particular system, religion, political ideology, economic structure, whatever. Somebody, somewhere, a long time ago decided that gold is good, so that’s why everybody values and searches for gold.”

“At the end of the day, education is brainwashing. Brainwashing is inevitable. We human beings love doing that. We are already brainwashed—we don’t know otherwise. So since we are going to brainwash anyway, it’s good to brainwash with good motivation and so that we can be kind, harmonious, and also decent. Becoming decent human beings seems to be not so much in the modern education agenda because, as we all know, modern education seems to be so much about what we can have. Human beings are defined by what we have, like cars and houses. And then modern education is also so much geared towards getting a job. There are very few schools that teach you anything other than what will benefit you in getting a job.”

“But even though education is a very unfortunate phenomenon, it is inevitable and is going to go on whether it is fortunate or not. With that in mind, the best thing we can do is really to have a big picture, long vision, and kind heart.”

“Do kids know we have something called mind? That’s a very big question and we keep missing it. Do the American schools teach that? Do the Chinese schools teach that? Kids study biology and anatomy and are taught that most people have two feet, one nose, and two hands and that each hand has five fingers. But there is something called mind that’s actually the most important and most powerful.”

“We can teach kids there are always consequences in doing whatever they do. The toilet paper that we wipe out bottoms with has the consequence of chopping down trees, and the car you drive may cause lung cancer in your grand children . . . Then we can teach them about dependent

arising. We can teach them about love and compassion. Then we can teach them that morality is so important, and eventually we can teach them that we should not be stuck with morality.”

“If I ever have the opportunity to create a school for children, I want them to learn what it is to be human. The way things are manifesting now in the world, our children are forgetting that we are human beings, not only metaphorically but literally. Our children are beginning to act like robots and to think that others are like robots, so they have no qualms and don’t care about pulling a trigger to shoot someone.”

“I want to teach children how to make a fire, and that the source of water does not come from the tap. The aim of this education is to refine ourselves so that we will see the world in a different way, so that we can help others, and through helping others make ourselves happy and content. Therefore, what we are learning is not to get jobs, but to refine and make ourselves elegant both outwardly and inwardly...Our children can learn not to be boring and to take pride in thinking that not everybody has to wear a pair of Prada shoes. To do that, I would like to create an atmosphere at the school, so that classes can be taught under a big tree, by the bank of a river, or in the paddy field, and so that lessons could involve getting up at three in the morning and watching the colour of the sky and listening to the sound of silence. The uniform of this school can be variety of different costumes in the world. But this is me being romantic — it is never going to be realized.”

“I have seen a lot of kids of my generation, kids who have so much to talk about when they grew up in the woods, swimming in the river, and not in school, and often what they are saying is very humane. And then, when I travel to a place like Hong Kong or Singapore, most of the kids have nothing to share except the newest application and software — nothing personal.”

“So, when I think of Buddhist education I am not talking about a school where we teach Buddhist sutras, make children recite Buddhist shlokas. I am talking about a school or education or brainwashing system that values self-contemplation...emphasizing more on to be a good decent human being rather than rich or well-equipped human being... In Buddhism we can also contribute by offering hundreds and hundreds of years experience to teach how everything is

interdependent, dependent. That nothing is independent, and this is very important information that the modern people have to have.”

“I am not talking about being Buddhist. I am not talking about Buddhist education for becoming Buddhist. That is very limited view. That is for someone like me, or probably some of you, Buddhist fanatics. But I am talking about Buddhist education for decency, to have a life.”

[Response to question on grading] “The most important quality of a teacher is actually kindness. Really it should not be treated as a job...This is big responsibility, you are actually responsible for somebody’s life, especially kids if there are so many kids at school. You are responsible for few hundred...So the grade. How do you grade? Kindness, compassionate ways of grading...Bhutan has one of the worst education system. It is sort of leftover of the leftover of the British 1940s system, you understand. British left [it] for Indians and the Indians give it to Bhutanese. I met a kid in Bhutan. He was expelled from this class because he had to help his own [family]...he is the only kid, very poor. His mother is not well. He is always late to join the class...[because] he has to help to do the chores, like household chores, which is helping his mother...there, we can give him extra grade. Maybe he does not know how to read and write properly, but A+, because he is helping the mother, which sets an example to other kids; hey, this is what to do. This is what we need to do. So you keep setting that kind of trend all the way to university.”

“At the beginning, I told you that it’s not good at all to live off what others give us. This is what the SJI is trying to educate you all about, and it’s very much like how our Fourth King always said that we need to be able to live off ourselves. We need to learn to be independent and live on our own. We should not just talk about it, but we need to get down and do it. To grow your own vegetables on your own soil, and live off that is so important.”

“Do we want our next generation to be happy and successful? Then let us teach them a different meaning of ambition, wealth, and goals...Let us not spoil our kids, because if we do, they will grow up feeling so alienated and depressed. Let us not push them to grow up so fast. Let us not make our kids think that winning a competition is so important. Let us try to eat at home at least

once a week. And let us not over shop and fill our houses with things we will never use for years and eventually discard.”

“We will of course have to adapt to the world. And I think the attitude of learning things like mathematics, politics, economics, will be to help the world. In other words, it’s like when you get trained to be a children’s teacher, you have to learn children’s mind. You have to learn how to play. It’s a useless thing, but if you want to be a children’s teacher, you have to learn that. We have to learn economics because that’s the game we have to play. Our mission is to save the earth, save the world, and to do that we need to play these games, so yeah, you can say it’s different kinds of arrogance, but we have to have that kind of strategy.”

[From 2010 meeting with monastic teachers about LME and its relationship to monastic studies]

“After 30 years, not so many people want to become monks and nuns. Already Tibetan society is suffering from that, and now it is starting to happen in Bhutan. Materialism is growing and monastic education is not so attractive. While monastic education is geared to wanting enlightenment, it doesn’t help someone get a job by knowing how to make *torma*. Requests for admissions here are down whereas before we had to turn away people.

Now, everyone wants their kids to go to school. So my plan is to make this monastery have a rigorous normal Bhutanese school curriculum with science, math, English language, and computer science. Fifty percent of the students’ studies should be Dharma, including both philosophy and pujas...

...We should change the *way* the curriculum is taught, because the current system wastes too many years. What students learn can be taught and learned much more quickly. In seven years, we should be able to achieve the same outcomes in science, math, computer science, and English language that currently take regular schools 12 years to teach (including ability to perform well at the grades 10 and 12 standardized exams), while at the same time the Deothang students will still keep their regular 17 years of the Chokyi Gyatso curriculum.

In bringing together modern education with traditional values, this monastery will be a laboratory for GNH-based education. It will be the first Bhutanese monastery with a modern education to Grade 12, and it will be the first Green Monastery, with a green school. Rinpoche

would like to nurture and foster good relations with Deothang villages, including having them plant vegetables that the monastery will buy.”

**DzongsarKhyentse Rinpoche Address to the
SamdrupJongkhar Initiative Launch**

Chokyi Gyatso Institute, Dewathang, SamdrupJongkhar. 3-5 November, 2011

Excerpt Translated from Tshangla-Lo by TshewangDendup

I have been thinking about an initiative like this for some time. In general, in Bhutan, lots of changes are taking place. Some of these could be good changes, but it is difficult to comment because what we think is a positive change this year could be considered a negative next year. Following the wishes of our monarchs, we now have democracy in place, and in line with these developments, it is important for the people to shoulder responsibilities and start fulfilling roles properly. Based on that, we have started the SamdrupJongkhar Initiative and see what it can bring forth.

Although religion is deeply woven into our lives in Bhutan, I want to make it very clear that the SamdrupJongkhar Initiative is not a religious entity. I also want to emphasize the apolitical nature of the SamdrupJongkhar Initiative.

So what, then, is the SamdrupJongkhar Initiative?

Bhutan has seen good progress which is due to the collective merit of the people of Bhutan, the blessings of the Three Jewels, and the far-sighted vision of our Kings who have guarded the wellbeing of Bhutanese people for generations. While Bhutan continues to embrace the offerings of the modern world and learns the ways of the modern world, it has done so without losing the essence of our unique culture, our unique thinking and mentality, even the way we sit and eat. All these have not diminished, and the credit for this goes to our monarchs.

Bhutan is a democracy now. So far things have gone well. So why then are we forming the SamdrupJongkhar Initiative? The English word "initiative" is hard to translate but its meaning

includes carrying or shouldering responsibility. It is about carrying our responsibility without the prodding of a cowherd. It is for us and it is for our children. The government has looked after us like a mother after a child. The government has looked after us even beyond the stage that it should, even after the child is now able to ingest solid foods. The government has taken care of us thus far. We are now like 15 and 16 year old teenagers. With democracy in place, Bhutan and her culture, education, environmental preservation and protection, our unique philosophy and psyche, our thinking the caretaker and the custodian of these should not be just the government and the work of a department alone.

Once a child grows up, it should not expect its parents to take care of it further. When the child reaches the age of 15 or 16 or 20 and still expects the parents to look after it, then that is not good. Likewise, the people of Bhutan should now work sincerely in tandem to fulfil the aims of the government and the vision of our King. In doing so, we have to think not only of the present but of the generations to come in the future.

We should not only engage in talk about Gross National Happiness, but also translate it into action, to “walk the talk.” All of us, each one of us, on our own, should start working in line with the philosophy of the government.

The government is doing its job and the hope is that it will continue to do so. But we have to do our bit and not just leave it to the government. After all, it is for us that these actions are being done. We have become so dependent on foreign aid, a mentality like that means that we can never mature and grow up. So being self-reliant and realizing our potential, I think these issues will arise in discussions in the upcoming meetings, but I am mentioning this here just to highlight its importance.

In our villages, even though we have enough to feed our children, the trend has set in where our youth want to go to Thimphu and to the urban areas. These days you can no longer say things like “you cannot go” and “you should not go.” Why are our young ones wanting to go to the urban areas? Once they reach the urban areas, if they have no problems living a decent life, it is not a problem at all. But often they end up having no jobs, or if they get jobs, those jobs are not

up to their expectations, and then they get exasperated and land up in a situation where they feel ashamed to go back to their homes and end up abusing drugs or drinking alcohol.

How can we stem this flow of our youth to the urban areas? We cannot use force and threat. Within SamdrupJongkhar and Dewathang, what are the things that we can do to create the enabling environment and conditions that will keep our young men and women here? As I say these words, I am reminded of this way of thinking that many of us have a tendency amongst us to think: "We cannot do this. This is un-doable." We should do away with such thinking and abandon such thoughts.

Even if something does not work this year, next year, or in five or six years, if we start our project now, we will have a long-term plan, because we have to think long term. We have to think long term. If we start now, if we begin our activities now and start now, then even if we are not able to accomplish our aims during our lifetimes, it is not a problem. If we start this plan and establish it now, then it will bear fruit in our children's lifetime. If we don't do this now, it will be too late later.

In Bhutan, when we build a house, we face labour shortages. We cannot get labourers. There is a lack of skilled workers. Even if we get labourers, we have to contend with the shame factor because such vocations are looked down in our society with the common aspiration to land a white-collar job. How can we change this attitude, this thinking? Dewathang and SamdrupJongkhar are fertile areas and receive abundant rainfall. Yet we get our food and vegetables from outside. How can we be self-sufficient and feed ourselves? How to inculcate such thinking?

How do we make our people think in those terms and in terms of environmental conservation and ecological awareness and prevention?

Education is the key.

With the SamdrupJongkhar Initiative, the thinking is to go beyond the common and established view, the prevalent view that chanting mantras and counting malas constitutes practice and

instead take it beyond those rituals and really integrate spiritual practice. So, the SamdrupJongkhar Initiative will look at how to integrate religious practice and go beyond the chanting and counting of malas. And with this kind of initiative, we will work with all of us united in such thoughts.

Notes from Tashi Colman:

Rinpoche's directions on past workshops and on Bhutan's education:

1. English vs Dzongkha, because English equips students for the world while Dzongkha is useless. Plus if Bhutanese educational system is to be a model beyond Bhutan's borders, it must be in English. [language]
2. Grow tomatoes (vegetables). [science]
3. Wednesday of every week = no school. Instead students do community service (cleaning latrines Rinpoche said). [extra-curricular]
4. There should be 7-8 months of national service as part of high school, including marching, etc.
5. Students should learn bookkeeping, personal finances, and financial management. [math]
6. No one should fail. If someone doesn't succeed in something, they should move to something else. [grading/assessment]
7. Children learn most from atmosphere – where they are.
8. General strategy: Suggestions must come from experts/academics, and not from Prime Minister (too political)
9. Students should only go to school to learn how to learn.
10. One of Rinpoche's expressed passions in this curriculum is to pry loose our tendency just to consume 'objects' and instead to see life as a 'process' in which things come together and fall apart through a wide range of interconnected and interdependent conditions. As we discussed way back then, this is naturally a GNH-based view of reality – i.e. it takes account the ecological, social, and economic conditions under which things are produced (local or multinational ownership, organic or chemical, exploitative or fairly traded, etc.) and what the health, ecological, social, and economic effects are, including where our spending goes and how it's used, waste and climate impacts, etc.