**Modern Education and the Future of Buddhism: An Interview with Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche**

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A new interview (January 2015) with Rinpoche.  For more, please go to:

<http://newlotus.buddhistdoor.com/en/news/d/43773>

By Frances McDonald

*Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche is a well-known teacher in the Vajrayana tradition of Buddhism. Born in Bhutan and now based in Bir in Himachal Pradesh, India, he gives teachings all over the world. His projects include Siddhartha’s Intent, which organizes, distributes, and archives his teachings; Khyentse Foundation, which provides the financial support necessary to fulfill his aspirations; 84000, which oversees the translation of the Word of the Buddha into modern languages; Lotus Outreach, which directs a wide range of projects to help refugees; and most recently The Lhomon Society, which promotes sustainable development in Bhutan through education. Frances McDonald recently caught up with him in Bali.*

**Frances McDonald**: You recently gave a talk in Malaysia on modern education. Could you recap your views here?

**Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche**: 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.

**FM**: In the previous talk, you mentioned that it’s important to teach children that they have a mind. Could you say more about how to do that and what you mean by mind in that context?

**DKR**: Well, I think just tell the kids, “Hey, look, there’s something called ‘mind’—we are not like a machine. What you think, others don’t think; what you think, others can’t control; what others think, you can’t control. In fact, what you think, *you* can’t control most of the time. Mind gets jealous, mind gets angry, others also get jealous, others also get angry.” I think this is very important for kids to know.

**FM**: Is it correct that you’re planning to start an experimental school in Bir? What kind of things do you plan to teach there?

**DKR**: I was, but I’ve so many other things to do that it just never materializes. But the idea is to have these principles. Anyone who goes to that school may not necessarily get a good job! The idea is to promote the value of being human, which can be through teaching kids how to share, where the water comes from, the definition of profit . . . that profit can be lots of things—walking in a forest could be considered as profit, it’s not necessarily money in the pocket. Having good fun, profit. I think the definition of profit, basically.

**FM**: And that would be at primary and secondary level?

**DKR**: All, in principle, but 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.

**FM**: How about teaching children that everything is just a “label”?

**DKR**: Yes, like that.

**FM**: What about the Dharma school you were planning to start in Australia?

**DKR**: It didn’t materialize. It’s so difficult because non-traditional Buddhists are scarce and scattered about. Traditional Buddhists are more into doing traditional things, like building temples. They still are not really managing to see the importance of building a children’s school.

**FM**: What do you think about teaching mindfulness to children?

**DKR**: Very good.

**FM**: How about teaching mindfulness as divorced from religion, as in the recent trend of teaching mindfulness to help with depression and stress?

**DKR**: I think it’s okay because your aim is to be sober and sane from the worldly point of view. To a certain extent it’s very good. You can begin with that.

**FM**: How do you see the trajectory of Buddhism in the future? In particular, how do you see Vajrayana progressing? There are so many students now and so few gurus to go around—what do you do when you have a question? I think this is an issue for a lot of people because Vajrayana traditionally relies on the guru-student relationship.

**DKR**: I’m both hopeful and pessimistic. I’m optimistic because of our information age, which is also a critical age. I think we will have really smart Vajrayana students, really smart ones, so that’s good. And also, things like, when suddenly you realize America doesn’t have the moral authority because they’ve been torturing people, this pokes holes in young people’s minds—they start to question morality. All of this can be good. It can also be bad, it can be really shattering with no direction. But, if driven in the right way, then some sort of compassion can arise to understand this kind of obsession towards morality, ethics, and righteousness. And amidst this, tantric wisdom can be taught. But then again, it can also be depressing due to a lack of good teachers, I mean generally speaking, and because people are very critical—what is good for Vajrayana is also what is bad for Vajrayana. They are very critical, and don’t so much value trust. One of the reasons why Bali is beautiful is because there’s so much superstition, and superstition makes it so magical. Sometimes it’s so good, this belief. The critical world destroys this, and it doesn’t get replaced by anything else.

**FM**: Yet, recently in a short video in which you met someone at the University of Sydney to whom you had presented a Khyentse Foundation Award for Excellence in Buddhist Studies, you said that because we find it difficult to maintain inspiration, academic study is the way to go—but this is necessarily a critical approach.

**DKR**: Yes, but they can do it with a very open mind. Academics should not be stuck with their own reason. They can be critical from one side and be critical towards the very reason why they are critical. Then I think it’s good.

**FM**: In East Asia, people often think that Buddhism is dying out because of the lack of monks and nuns these days—there’s an emphasis on the importance of taking monastic vows. What do you think?

**DKR**: Yes, why not? But I don’t believe that the monks and nuns are the only people responsible for upholding the Dharma for this long. I always say this. Yes, Shariputra, Ananda, they were great, without them we wouldn’t have many teachings. But Ashoka, Trisong Detsen, many of the great Chinese emperors, Genghis Khan, they are responsible for us having all this. Merchants, warlords, princesses, patrons, lay practitioners—so important. It’s the lay practitioners who get married and produce children. These children will grow up in a home where there’s a Buddha statue.

**FM**: Is there anything you’d like to add? Any advice you’d like to give people about how to maintain their practice, or anything else?

**DKR**: In the degenerated time, the Buddha-Dharma is even more potent, so the degenerated time should not be used as an excuse for discouraging oneself. It should be encouraging. That’s it.