

173: The Message of Dhardo Rimpoche

Today, this afternoon, this evening, as we know very well, we're observing the first anniversary of Dhardo Rimpoche's death. But a question which may have arisen in the minds of some of you at least is: why are we observing that anniversary? In fact, one may even wonder further why we observe the anniversary of anybody's death at all. And we could say paradoxically that we observe the anniversary of somebody's death on account of their life. We observe the anniversary of their death because of the quality of their life, because it has permanent value for us, because their life was worth remembering. Dhardo Rimpoche's life certainly has value for us. As I'm sure you have already gathered, his life is certainly worth remembering. And for that reason we're celebrating - and I think celebrating is really the word - the anniversary of his death today. Perhaps we'll be celebrating it in the future too.

To reminisce just a little, I myself met Dhardo Rimpoche for the first time in 1953, and yes - I met him in Kalimpong. I did subsequently learn that it was not the first time that he had seen me. He apparently had seen me some four years earlier in Buddha Gaya, as you learned from Suvajra's reading of an extract from his book. Now at that time I did not see Rimpoche, and I did not know at that time that Rimpoche was seeing me - and not only seeing me but having some quite definite thoughts on the strange figure of the yellow-robed Western, English, monk.

I saw Dhardo Rimpoche for the last time in 1967, also in Kalimpong. Thus I was in personal contact with Dhardo Rimpoche for a period of altogether fourteen years. And that contact, I may say, was particularly close, particularly intense, during the years 1956 to 1964. And it was in the course of that period that I received from Rimpoche the Bodhisattva ordination. So yes, spanning as it did a period of so many years, I have very very many memories of Rimpoche - memories especially of his mindfulness, memories of his compassion, and of his so many other qualities.

But this evening I am not going to give you much in the way of personal reminiscences. I have done that from time to time on other occasions. In any case, this afternoon we have heard the reminiscences of quite a number of people - eight people, in fact - who actually met Rimpoche at various times, and had personal contact and communication with him. I'm not even going to say anything this evening about Rimpoche's life. As you know, a detailed account of that life was given in Suvajra's book, which was launched this afternoon. This evening I want to say something about what I've called Rimpoche's message - hence the title of the talk: The Message of Dhardo Rimpoche.

Now of course it may be news to some of you that Dhardo Rimpoche did have a message - that is, a message other than the message communicated by his life itself. After all, Dhardo Rimpoche didn't write anything, he didn't write any books. He didn't give any lectures, not lectures in our formal Western sense. He gave some discourses in Tibetan, some of which I heard, but they weren't tape-recorded, they weren't written down, so in a sense they have disappeared.

But Rimpoche, though he didn't write any books, though he didn't give any lectures, and though his discourses in Tibetan have not been preserved, he did found a school. He did found in 1954 what he always used to call in full the Indo Tibet Buddhist Cultural Institute school. And I do remember - this is a reminiscence - that he liked very much to pronounce these words, almost I might say on every possible occasion, in English. He was very proud of his Indo Tibet Buddhist Cultural Institute school, as he used to call it. And of course as you know that school, very very fortunately, does still exist, thanks in no small part to help given by quite a number of people who are actually present in this hall on this occasion.

So we may say that for 36 years Rimpoche's life revolved, practically speaking, round his beloved school. And he overcame on more than one occasion tremendous obstacles in order to keep his school going. His school was really very very dear to him. I think I can hardly express how dear it was to him. And I do know, because I was there at the time, that on one occasion he had even to sell some of his very, very precious and beautiful thangkas in order to pay the wages of his teaching staff. So we can see from this how much Rimpoche really did love his school.

He didn't love his school as an institution. He didn't love the bricks and stones of the school, or perhaps I should say the wooden boards of the school, because originally it did function in a big old wooden building. When I say that Rimpoche loved his school, what I mean is that he loved his pupils, thousands of whom must have passed through the school, passed under his care over the years.

And because Rimpoche loved his pupils, loved his students, both old and young, big and small, so much, he wanted them, he dearly wanted them, to grow up under the benign influence of the Dharma. He wanted them to grow up as real Buddhists. And that is why the day began in his school for everybody, as I witnessed myself on more than one occasion, with the chanting of the praises of the Buddha, the praises also of Manjusri, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, and the praises of Sarasvati, the female Bodhisattva of learning and culture, invocation of whom is believed by the Tibetans, as by Indian Buddhists before them, to assist in the preservation of a good memory.

So it's because Rimpoche wanted his students, wanted the pupils of his school, to grow up as real Buddhists that they not only recited but they also studied - in addition to various modern subjects - the Tibetan language, and Tibetan literature, Tibetan Buddhist texts and even Tibetan historical texts. Not only that. It's as though Rimpoche wanted to reinforce a point. Rimpoche actually gave his school a message. He gave his pupils, his beloved pupils, a message - a message of just seven words in English. And it's about that message that I want to speak a few words this evening: the message of Dhardo Rimpoche.

But before I go on to speak about the message itself, I want to clear up a possible misunderstanding. People might think - you might even think - that Dhardo Rimpoche's message was addressed to, was intended for, Tibetan children, in some cases Tibetan tiny tots. So what relevance has that to us, we sophisticated people of the West? So one might

say, yes, it's true, Rimpoche's message was addressed to children. But how, we may ask, did Rimpoche see those children? Rimpoche saw those children as potential adults. He saw them as potential real Buddhists. He saw them perhaps as potential Bodhisattvas. And therefore he wanted to give them a message that would hold good for them throughout their lives, a message that they would never forget, a message of universal applicability, a message that would be true wherever they went, whether, as many of them hoped would be the case, they returned to Tibet, or whether they stayed on in India, as very few of them really wanted to do, or whether they even travelled to the West, as some were in fact very anxious to do.

In other words, Rimpoche gave them a message that would be true, that would hold good, at all times and in all places. He gave them in fact a message that would be true for all people, especially for all Buddhists, a message that would be as true for European and American adults as for Tibetan children. After all, we could say that we in the FWBO are also Rimpoche's children, his spiritual children. We might even say that we're his spiritual grandchildren. And of course we do still have a lot to learn. We've a lot of spiritual growing up to do.

So what is Dharpo Rimpoche's message, his message to us on this, the first anniversary of his death? What form, we may wonder, did that message take? Well, Rimpoche's message is to be found in the motto he gave his school, in the motto he caused in fact to be inscribed on the school flag - a motto in just seven words in English. So what were those words, those seven words in English? They were - they are - 'Cherish the doctrine. Live united. Radiate love.' That was, that is, Dharpo Rimpoche's message, the message about which I want to say a few words this evening.

'Cherish the doctrine.' The doctrine is of course the Dharma, or in Tibetan chur. And the word Dharma, chur, has two principal meanings, as many of you know. In the first place, very briefly, it means law, principle, truth, reality - as in the term dharmakaya, the third and highest of the Buddha's three bodies, as they're usually called in English. And secondly the word Dharma means the teaching or the doctrine as enunciated. In other words, it means the teaching of the Buddha. And this teaching or doctrine represents the systematic expression in terms of concepts and symbols of the Buddha's experience, his Transcendental experience of the ultimate reality of things, his vision of things as they really are. And this expression, this communication as we may call it, is for our benefit, it's intended to help us realize what he, the Buddha, realized before us. It's - we may say - a raft, helping us across the stormy waters of samsara to the other shore.

Now obviously there's no question of our cherishing the Dharma in the first sense, cherishing it in the sense of law, principle, truth, reality. The Dharma in this sense doesn't need to be cherished or protected by us. We can only worship it. We can only take refuge in it. It's the Dharma in the second sense that Rimpoche is asking us to cherish - that is to say, the Dharma in the sense of the teaching or doctrine of the Buddha. How then do we, how then are we to cherish the doctrine?

We cherish it, we may say, in three ways. In the first place we cherish it by studying it,

by studying the sutras and shastras. The sutras contain the word of the Buddha, or what tradition regards as such. The shastras contain the explanations of the word of the Buddha given by Enlightened masters who lived at a later date. The sutras and the shastras constitute a very vast literature, and we don't of course have to study the whole of this literature. In any case, it hasn't all been translated into English. But we should have a thorough knowledge of a reasonable number of key texts. These texts may of course be of Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese or Tibetan origin, because in the FWBO we seek to draw freely from the riches of the entire Buddhist tradition. We do not seek, we do not wish to confine ourselves exclusively to any one tradition, however ancient.

If we don't have a knowledge of at least a few key texts - sutras or shastras - we shall really be unable to understand the Buddha's teaching. Not only that. In the absence of such knowledge our thinking about Buddhism, our reflection on Buddhism, will be muddled and confused, and we may even in extreme cases fall victim to wrong views. And falling victim to wrong views is something that in the Buddhist tradition, in the Buddha's teaching, is taken very seriously indeed. When we speak of studying the sutras and shastras, it doesn't mean just reading them. It means also reflecting on them, turning them over and over in our minds. It means also discussing them with our teachers and with our fellow students.

In the second place, we cherish the doctrine by practising it. Of course, we can practise it if we have at least some knowledge of it. We practise the doctrine by going for refuge, and by trying continually to deepen our going for refuge, our going for refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. We practise the doctrine by observing the precepts - five, or ten, or more. We practise it by engaging in right livelihood, something about which we hear so much from time to time. We practise it by cultivating spiritual friendship, of the supreme importance of which we are sufficiently apprised. We practise it by meditating and performing puja. We practise it by living in a spiritual community. We practise it by helping to run a Buddhist centre. We practise it by going on solitary retreat. In all these, and a hundred other ways, we practise, we can practise, we should practise the Dharma. And to the extent that we practise the Dharma, we cherish it, we help to keep it alive.

Of course, we know very well it is not easy to practise the Dharma. In order to practise the Dharma we have to go against the stream. We have to go ultimately against the whole weight, the whole superincumbent weight, of our mundane conditioning. But if we don't practise the Dharma, it will not be cherished. And if it isn't cherished, it won't really live, and we shall have in its place only ideas, only concepts, only words.

In the third place we cherish the doctrine by propagating it. Obviously we can propagate the doctrine only if we understand it and practise it, or only to the extent that we understand it and practise it, only if we experience it ourselves and realize it. And of course there are many ways in which we can propagate the Dharma. We can propagate it by ourselves actually teaching the Dharma, by giving lectures or taking meditation classes, by writing books. But not everybody is in a position to do this. Most people, even most people in the FWBO in fact, will have to help propagate the Dharma indirectly, by

for instance transcribing and editing the tapes of lectures, by publishing books, by providing facilities for the giving of lectures and the taking of classes, and by donating money.

I need hardly tell you that people in the world nowadays need the Dharma. Many of them know that they need it, but they don't always know that what they need is what we call the Dharma - hence, very often, their surprise and delight when they happen to come at last in contact with it, perhaps after many years of searching enquiry. And sometimes when they come in contact with it in this way, they really feel quite overwhelmed. And I must say here that nowadays I get quite a number of letters, from people not only all over the UK, but from many different parts of the world, people who have recently made contact with the FWBO. And invariably their letters express relief, joy, thankfulness, gratitude, and kindred emotions.

We should therefore do all we can to propagate the Dharma in every possible way - because if we propagate the Dharma people will come to know it, will come to understand it. And if they understand it, they'll be able to practise it. If they practise it, it will be cherished by them too. And if it is cherished, it will survive. Nowadays there are many obstacles to the survival of the Dharma. The Dharma is, in fact, we may say, threatened on every side. It's threatened by materialism. It's threatened by pseudo-religious fundamentalism. The Dharma therefore needs to be propagated more vigorously than ever.

But - and this is very important - it is the Dharma and only the Dharma that must be propagated. We mustn't mix the Dharma with isms and ologies which are in reality quite foreign to the spirit of the Dharma, even quite inimical to it. And this means that in our work of propagating the Dharma we need to watch our language. So far as possible we should use traditional Buddhist language. The message of the Buddha, we may say, cannot be delivered in the language - or in one of the languages, because he has many languages - of Mara, not even by Bodhisattvas. Though we may also say, we have to admit, that Mara himself can on occasion use, or appear to use, the language of Buddhism. But that is another story.

So we should cherish the doctrine: cherish it by studying it, cherish it by practising it, and cherish it by propagating it.

And we should live united. Obviously people do live united in a sense. Without unity social life itself would not be possible at all. But what constitutes that unity which people usually do experience? What are its underlying factors? There are a number of these. Language, a common language, is a unifying factor. Nationality, common nationality, or citizenship, is a unifying factor. Race is a unifying factor, and then of course there's culture, also religion. But these are unifying factors for certain groups of people. They bind those people together. They contribute, as we say, to the unity of the group.

But when Rimpoche exhorts us to live united, it's not this kind of unity he has in mind. After all, we're already living united more or less, in that sort of mundane way. We're

already bound together with other people by language, nationality and so on. So we don't need any exhortation in this respect. So what kind of unity does Rinpoche have in mind? We mustn't forget here that Rinpoche's exhortation is addressed to potential real Buddhists. It's addressed to us. So what constitutes our unity? What are the unifying factors in our collective existence? What is it that binds us together as Buddhists? What is it that contributes to, that in fact constitutes, the unity of the spiritual community, the Sangha?

Obviously, the principal unifying factors are the three jewels themselves. We're united primarily by virtue of the fact that we all go for refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. We're all united by the fact that we observe the same precepts, practise the same meditations, perform the same pujas, study the same sutras and shastras and so on. These are the things that in principle unite us. But do we in fact live united? Do we put that unity into practice? Is it actually effective in our actual relations with one another? That is only too often another matter. So what is Rinpoche actually saying when he says 'Live united.' He is saying, 'You are united as Buddhists in principle, but you must also be united in practice.'

So we may ask, we may wonder, what prevents us from being united in practice? What prevents us from living united, what prevents us from being a spiritual community in the fullest sense? Well, I am afraid there are quite a number of things. Things like personal conflict - that is to say, conflict with other members of one and the same spiritual community. And then, competitiveness, jealousy, factionalism, the cherishing of ill-will, the harbouring of grudges, unwillingness to forgive, reluctance to clear up misunderstandings: all these things prevent us as a spiritual community from living united, prevent us from putting into practice our unity in principle.

In a word, we may say, that what prevents us from living united is egotism, or if you dislike the old-fashioned word egotism, what prevents us from living united is our individualism. Only too often we think that we are acting as individuals when we are really only being individualistic. So when Rinpoche says, 'Live united', he is also saying, on a deeper level, in a deeper sense, 'Live egolessly. Live in a non-individualistic manner.' He is saying, 'Realize that there is in the ultimate sense no separate self, no separate unchanging self, to defend or to assert.' He is saying, 'Realize nairatma, realize sunyata.' That is what he is really saying.

Which brings us to the third and last part of Rinpoche's message: radiate love. By love Rinpoche means metta, or if you like metta and karuna. The English word love unfortunately is ambiguous, it's grotesquely ambiguous. It can mean lust, in the sense of sexual craving, as when we speak of making love. It can mean a sort of greedy liking, as when a teenage girl says, 'Oh, I love chocolate.' It can also mean natural affection, as when we speak of a mother's love for her child, or when we speak of brotherly love. Then there's love in the sense of romantic infatuation, which we can also call projected love, because in this case, in this kind of love, we project onto the loved person qualities which he or she does not really possess, or certainly not in the degree that we think they possess them. This is what we call, in case you haven't tumbled to it, being in love. Finally there

is altruistic or sacrificial love. We don't, I'm afraid, have a proper word for this in English, though the authorized version of the Bible does refer to this when it says, 'Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend.' So it's important to distinguish the different meanings of the word love, otherwise there will be confusion in our thinking and probably confusion in our personal life as well.

As I've said, by love Rimpoche means metta, or maitri in Sanskrit. So when he says, 'Radiate love', he means radiate metta, or radiate metta and karuna. And of course this word metta, love, friendly love, in Pali, is cognate with mitta, or mitra in Sanskrit; and mitta, or mitra, means simply 'a friend' or 'friend', as I think almost everybody knows. Metta is thus the intense, non-sexual, altruistic, delighted affection that you feel for a friend. And it's love in this sense that Rimpoche is asking us to radiate. In other words, Rimpoche is asking us to radiate friendliness. He's asking us to develop an attitude of spiritual friendship.

The importance of friendship, especially spiritual friendship, is, I'm sure you will agree, well understood in the FWBO. It constitutes one of the cornerstones of our movement. Just a few months ago I was in the United States. And in the course of my visit there I had talks, personal talks, with about fifty different people connected with the movement there, connected with the FWBO there. And I was naturally interested to know what it was that had drawn them to the FWBO, especially as some of them at least had been connected with other Buddhist groups, in some cases for a number of years. Not surprisingly, there were several things that had drawn them to the FWBO, but there was one thing, I found, that everybody mentioned. In fact two thirds of the people I spoke with put it at the very top of their list - two thirds of them. What had drawn them to the FWBO, they said, was its friendliness, its sense of Sangha, its sense of community, of spiritual community. It wasn't just that members of the FWBO happened to be friendly sort of people, friendly sort of men and women. It was more that the FWBO actually believed in friendship, it had faith in friendship, it valued friendship. It actually encouraged people to become, to be, friends. And in some other Buddhist groups, I gathered, apparently friendship was not exactly encouraged. In a few cases it even seemed to be discouraged. What was encouraged was faith in the guru, even I'm afraid blind faith in the guru.

So yes, the importance of friendship is well understood in the FWBO. People do make an effort to practise it, to be friends, real friends, true friends, good friends, to one another. But obviously our practice of friendship is not perfect. There's a lot of room, a great deal of room, for improvement. It's not easy to be a real friend to anybody. There are so many obstacles to friendship, perhaps now more than ever. In his talk on going for refuge and friendship, Subhuti some time ago enumerated certain obstacles to friendship; and in case you've forgotten, these were 1) passivity 2) impatience 3) a romantic view of friendship 4) lack of commitment 5) sexual relationships 6) faction 7) lack of forgiveness.

And again, in his talk 'Have we friendship in the Order?' Subhuti speaks of four areas to which we need to pay positive attention if there is to be depth in friendship. What are these four areas? He enumerates them as 1) immaturity 2) lack of trust and

competitiveness 3) superficiality in our conception of friendship and 4) sexual relationships. I don't have time to discuss these obstacles and these areas this evening, so I'll just refer you to Subhuti's two lectures, as well as to Subhuti's other lectures on the theme of friendship. I hope in fact that one day, in the not too far distant future, will be able to write a book on friendship.

I want to make just one comment. Subhuti has spoken of depth of friendship. I don't remember whether he spoke of what he meant by depth in this connection. I want to give my own interpretation, with which I hope Subhuti won't disagree too much. Friendship, I would say, is deep to the extent to which it incorporates the transcendental; or perhaps I should say it is deep to the extent that it is itself incorporated in the transcendental. It is deep to the extent that it is altruistic. It is deep to the extent that it is egoless. Somewhere or other, I do seem to remember, I've spoken of communication as mutual awareness leading to mutual self-transcendence. Deep friendship can be spoken of in similar terms. We can really radiate love only to the extent that we live united. True friendship, we may say, is the efflorescence of egolessness.

One more word. Rimpoche speaks of radiating love. But what does 'radiate' mean? To radiate means, according to the dictionary, 'to emit from a centre'. But what is the centre? I won't get too philosophical here, but the centre is the middle point. I'm sorry I have to ask another question, but what is a point? I'm afraid this is just one of my little habits - but what is a point? A point is defined as that which has position without magnitude. We can radiate love only from the middle point of our being. We can radiate love only from egolessness, from sunyata. We can radiate love only from that point within ourselves - single inverted commas - which has position without magnitude.

So, 'Cherish the doctrine, live united, radiate love' is Rimpoche's message. This is the message he gave in the school motto to his students. This is the message that he gave, that he still gives, to each and every one, to all of us. It's the message, moreover, that he gave not just in words but in deeds, a message that he gave through the medium of his own life. Rimpoche himself indeed cherished the doctrine. The doctrine was very dear to him. He studied it intensively, especially during the earlier part of his life. Rimpoche practised the doctrine. He observed the ethics of a Bodhisattva. He cultivated the paramitas. Moreover, for practically seventy years he lived the life of a monk.

Rimpoche also propagated the doctrine, especially towards the end of his life. He taught the students of his own school. He cooperated with visiting Buddhist scholars, especially those from the West. He gave advice, he gave inspiration, to visiting members of the Western Buddhist Order, as well as to visiting Mitras and Friends. Indeed, he once said that he regarded Sangharakshita's disciples as his own disciples. And Rimpoche could say this because he himself lived united. He lived united with other real Buddhists. He was free, totally free, from competitiveness and jealousy. On more than one occasion, as I knew myself, as I saw myself during my time in Kalimpong, he had to suffer, really suffer, at the hands of bigots. But he didn't bear a grudge. He was always willing to forgive. And he could do this because he was not the victim of egotism.

And finally, Rimpoche radiated love, radiated metta and karuna, radiated friendliness. All those who came in contact with Rimpoche, even for a short time, as we heard this afternoon, could see, could experience this for themselves. This is why we remember Rimpoche today, and this is why we're celebrating the anniversary of his death. We're celebrating it because Rimpoche was the embodiment of his own message, because he himself cherished the doctrine, he lived united and radiated love. In other words, we are celebrating the anniversary of Rimpoche's death because of the quality, the supreme quality, of his life. We are celebrating the anniversary of his death because his life is worth remembering, worth bearing in mind, reflecting upon, deriving and gaining inspiration from. We're celebrating the anniversary of his death because we want to make his life a permanent part of the heritage of the FWBO.