

On the Importance of Having a Non-Sectarian View in Tibetan Buddhism
by The Dalai Lama & Tai Situ Rinpoche
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At the present time it is extremely important to not have divisive sectarian views: deprecating other lineages and thinking that one's own lineage is the only valid one. All of the great lineages of Tibetan Buddhism engage in both study and practice leading to full enlightenment. All of the lineages have great tantric masters.

It's natural to have pride in one's lineage but it should not be forgotten that all the lineages are teaching and practicing the Buddha's words and helping innumerable sentient beings. Just as all lineages study the Buddha's words, all lineages are also *practice lineages*. We must all work together and respect one another. Spirituality is not like a competitive sports event where it is hoped that one's lineage or teacher wins out over all others.

TO BE CLOSE-MINDED TOWARDS A SCRIPTURE OR LINEAGE OF DHARMA OUT OF SECTARIAN BIGOTRY IS TO TURN WHOLESOME MEDICINE INTO POISON. THIS RELIGIOUS SUPERIORITY COMPLEX JUST MAKES ONE INTO A FOOL.

These great lamas respected all sects equally and studied with masters holding lineages that interested them, regardless of sect. To be close-minded towards a scripture or lineage of Dharma out of sectarian bigotry is to turn wholesome medicine into poison. This religious superiority complex just makes one into a fool.

In the Sutras, it is said that sectarianism is a more severe evil than killing a thousand Buddhas. Saying, "This sect is good and that bad, etc." is considered the greatest of sins.

Furthermore, the Buddhas themselves respect all the traditions of the teachings, so for us not to do so is to despise all the Buddhas. Because of the varying capacities and inclinations of beings, the Buddhas have taught various philosophies and methods of practice. If we follow one of these and yet belittle others, we abandon the Dharma and consequently the Buddhas as well.

I have Geluk-pa ordination and training, but Tibetan lineages are very interrelated, and one of the main Gelukpa meditations is a lineage brought to Tibet by the Kagyu teacher Marpa. Thirty percent of the remainder of my practice centers upon a Nyingma lineage. I have also met and exchanged ideas with many Japanese, Theravadin, and other masters. Most Tibetan lamas practice this way.

When one understands the nature of the spiritual path there is never a need to see a contradiction in the types of Buddhist trainings. Buddha did not impart his vast array of teachings merely in order to

confuse the people as to what is pure Buddhism and what is not, what is high and what is low. Anyone who has gained a fundamental understanding of the intent of the Enlightened Ones can see the pure Dharma reflected in every word of every master, regardless of tradition or lineage.

Just as a man traveling through different countries will adopt different clothing in order to adjust to the climate of the country that he is in, every lineage of the Dharma takes on a slightly unique character in accordance with the times and culture of its development. Yet when we check on the source of the lineage we will find it comes in an unbroken line from Buddha Shakyamuni. A trainee who has gained an appreciation for the breadth and depth of Buddhist doctrines will immediately be able to respect every lineage of Dharma on its own ground.

We ourselves should attempt to follow this eclectic approach that so many of the past masters have taken. This does not mean we should mix our practices and make a big soup out of them. Rather, we should be open to all teachings as valid transmissions of the thought of the Enlightened Ones and as sources of knowledge that can support and strengthen whatever specific lineage we may be pursuing.

What the Chinese did to us was bad, but not as bad as the effects we would create by taking Dharma and using it for sectarian purposes or to exploit people. This rots the foundation. In this context the great yogi Milarepa said, 'When Dharma practitioners do not abide within their practices, all they do is harm the teachings.' Just as intestinal worms can kill a lion, using the teachings for sectarianism and exploitation can easily destroy the Dharma.

If you really take an interest in Buddhism, then the most important thing is implementation - practice. To study Buddhism and then use it as a weapon in order to criticize others' theories or ideologies is wrong.

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As Buddhists, while we practice our own teaching, we must respect other faiths, Christianity, Judaism, and so forth. We must recognize and appreciate their contributions over many past centuries to human society, and at this time we must strive to make common effort to serve humankind. The adopting of a right attitude toward other faiths is particularly important for new Buddhists to keep in mind.

Also among Buddhists, there are different schools, different systems of practice, and we should not feel that one teaching is better, another teaching is worse, and so on. Sectarian feeling and criticism of other teachings or other sects is very bad, poisonous, and should be avoided.

The most important thing is practice in daily life. Doctrine is not meant for mere knowledge but for the improvement of our minds. In order to do that, it must be part of our life.

-His Holiness the Dalai Lama

(quotes taken from *Essence of Refined Gold* and *Kindness, Clarity, and Insight*)

I visited a large number of monasteries because most of them invited me - Kagyu, Nyingma, Sakya, Gelug and even Bonpo. For example, in one place there were 15 monasteries of all sects. It was very interesting, with everyone wearing different colors, different hats, all sorts of things. But over there different sects only mean different traditions, different history, nothing more than that. They don't say, "My sect is better than yours." They don't have that. They think, "We are all Buddhists" and everyone tries to help each other. It was really encouraging and uplifting. When I see very sectarian things going on it is really depressing. I feel, if it is that sort of Buddhism, then I want to give it up.

- H.H. T'ai Situ Rinpoche.