



Letter from Lama Tenzin Samphel, to the Sangha, about coronavirus

As I write this, the coronavirus is threatening everyone's life and fear is rampant. No matter whether you touch someone or even something, there is a danger of getting deathly ill. Everybody is staying home, and no one can go out freely. Even the law is threatening repercussions.

It is a very sad moment and the first I have ever seen like this in my life. I remember hearing about how during the world wars, people suffered, fearing arrest, starvation, torture, and being killed. These things I have only heard about. I have never lived in that state of panic myself. We are all human beings on this same planet experiencing this together, and so I want to talk a little bit about this situation.

Generally speaking, I think there is not one single living being who wishes for suffering and who would abandon happiness. Everybody from morning to night is running busily and working hard in order to find happiness. They are not doing this to find suffering.

In our world, there is nothing more precious than our own life. Similarly, there is no one who is not scared at the thought of death. When everything is going well in life, it is possible that we will have many friends around us, but when it is a difficult time, often we feel alone and sad without anyone around.

During those times, it is very important to help others and to share with others. Don't suffer alone, or let others suffer alone. During hard times, spending even a little time conversing with others is a big relief.

When we think about ourselves and what we possess, all we really have is our body and mind. If the body is in good health, and you have food and shelter, that is enough for the body. But, for the mind, even if you have food to eat, clothes to wear, wealth in your pockets, and everything is abundant, still you are not satisfied, and you have more and more desire and less and less contentment.

You already possess everything you need, and yet when you see what someone else has, you feel like you need more. Being addicted to more in that way, all your life becomes filled with anger, jealousy, competitiveness, and arrogance. You become mad from morning to night. Even when asleep your mind is still disturbed.

You cannot drink even one single cup of tea without your mind spinning off into hatred and greed, or even just attachment and aversion. This is the real cause of the problems and suffering in our life.

Indeed, we could say that the ultimate cause of this very serious pandemic of the coronavirus is this negative mind that makes the body and speech do and say all the wrong things.

It is also the result of the collective karma of all sentient beings. We cannot say that it is only the result of samaya breakages in the Vajrayana, as some have suggested, because if you look at the majority of the population, Vajrayana practitioners don't even make up 1%. And among them, how many have broken their samaya seriously enough?

Why would the entire world suffer because of such a small amount of Vajrayana practitioners? This is not valid logic whether we speak from the point of view of Vajrayana practitioners or just secular people.

It is said in the sutras by Buddha himself that whatever action one does, it will ripen only on oneself, it will not ripen on anyone or anything else. The Buddha said it is not possible any other way.

As I am a Tibetan, now I want to talk from the point of view of a Tibetan. There is a proverb that says, "Even if you are coming from heaven, your attitude must adapt to this world." That type of morality or attitude in our society is called law or rules. For this there are two types: worldly law and moral law. When we talk about the worldly law, generally it is to respect the law and order of the country where you live. For example, Western countries are very advanced and developed materialistically, and so they have a good health care system and live long. The main reason for this, I can say, is because they generally respect their laws and rules.

Furthermore, most Western people are educated and brought up to be very honest. The majority don't know how to lie and cheat, despite not really believing in religion. In Tibetan society, we say that all the worldly laws are included in sixteen codes. All these sixteen are included in honesty and truthfulness. This means that the one whose words and thoughts match have a long and fulfilling life, which we see among Westerners.

The second type of law is moral law. This is how to behave virtuously. When we follow the moral law, our body, speech, and mind are not empowered by negativity, but rather cultivate positivity.

To be clear, the wrong actions of the body are stealing—from one single needle up to robbing another's land and country, harming others, killing others, raping others, bestiality, and pedophilia.

The faults of speech are lying, sowing discord, harsh words, gossiping, and idle speech. Negativity of the mind includes anger, harmful thoughts, jealousy, and violent thoughts. All these we must avoid. Moreover, you break the law of morality when you eat what is not edible, when you do actions that are not to be done, and simply when the base of morality is no longer respected.

When moral law is broken, these kinds of epidemics arise. A very simple example of this is from a few years ago with the mad cow disease. If you feed a plant-eating animal meat or meat products, it will go crazy; this makes sense. All these kinds of illnesses are human produced.

As Dudjom Rinpoche explained, "It is said that our age is a degenerate age because of each one indulging in wrong action." It is called a bad age because of people doing bad actions. This means that the law and rules of the society have been broken and in the religious context, the vows and proper conduct have been disrespected.

When people forget truth and good morality or behavior and engage in bad behavior and wrong morality or even just extreme selfishness, these critical situations arise. In contrast, if everybody respects the law by themselves and if they try to abandon negative behavior and adopt good behavior, it is sure we will all have a happy life.

Moreover, we must also understand that we are living within the five elements and our well-being is directly dependent on the five elements. These five elements are earth, fire, water, wind, and space, which we can also understand as solidity, heat, liquid, movement, and consciousness.

Our body is made up of these five elements and life and death is a question of whether or not the elements are in harmony. If the five outer elements are not in harmony, then there are all sorts of natural catastrophes, which causes the destruction of all the favorable conditions of our life and livelihood and can bring death. If the five inner elements are not in harmony, physical and mental illness is the result.

For one single flower to grow, each of the five elements has their own role to make the flower possible. For example, the earth gathers all the solid substances for the flower; water distributes the roots, leaves, stem, and petals; fire makes it grow and blossom; and wind keeps the flower alive and fresh. If even one of these elements is missing, it is sure that the flower will not grow or grow properly.

Because of the five elements in our body, when we eat one mouthful of food, for example, that food gets crushed and digested in our stomach. It is then filtered into the pure essence of nourishment for the blood through the intestines so that all the other organs function. All the impure remains are transformed into excrement that our body can reject.

If these elements are out of balance, then we become ill or die. Because the five outer and inner elements are so vital, Tibetan people consider and respect each element as a goddess. In their normal life, they don't dig the soil for no reason; they don't remove rocks for no reason; they don't pollute the water; and they don't burn toxic products. They think that if they don't respect the five elements, then outwardly it will cause natural disasters and inwardly, it will cause sickness and difficult circumstances.

In our age, which I call the age of chemicals, chemicals have contaminated all the five elements. They are in the food, in the medicines, in all the crops; almost everything is contaminated.

Especially, when people mine for minerals and move water from where it is naturally to where it is not and vice versa, make hills on flatlands and flatten hills and mountains, and for petrol, do fracking and digging, then they are destroying the vitality of the land and elements, bringing all sorts of natural disasters. To have a bigger harvest, people use many poisons and pesticides, which we then eat and bring upon ourselves cancer and many incurable diseases.

Humans have built nuclear warheads and power stations everywhere.

It is said that this is in order to protect the country, though in reality it is just for money. What this does, sooner or later, is to cause everybody to die. It is an enormously criminal action. Not only for our generation, but for many generations, nuclear waste and radiation will cause many handicaps, incurable diseases, and death. For this, not one country is really

trying to stop this and take care of this. This is very sad. Instead, if a country has developed this capacity, they say they are a superpower.

The danger of nuclear radiation is terrible. Wherever these nuclear toxins have polluted the air, it will cause handicap and cancer. Wherever these toxins have polluted the water, it will kill all the life in the water and if we ingest or touch this water, it will destroy the organs and cause myriads of skin diseases. When these toxins pollute the soil, it kills all the plants and the land becomes barren. Even the scientists talk about all this very clearly.

Everybody must protect the environment. Even if it is a small piece of plastic, don't just throw it anywhere, but try to reuse it or recycle it, or at least put it in the right trash can. It is important to avoid all the chemical foods and also all the products that are made with toxic chemicals. Don't use them yourselves and encourage others not to use them either.

It is true that there are many prophecies talking about the five degenerate ages: their signs and the mentality of the people. It talks about sickness, famine, war, and natural disasters coming, but I don't want to talk about all these things here.

According to the Vajrayana tradition, it is said that from the beginning, the nature of the five elements are the five wisdom goddesses.

When practitioners come to a certain level of realization, they can see directly the elements as goddesses. These goddesses are sometimes also called "mamos". According to the tantras, at the beginning, a practitioner will not see the elements as goddesses, but if you consider and meditate on it, then slowly, according to your progress, you will see each element appear as a goddess.

If, instead of seeing the elements as goddesses and respecting them, you destroy the elements, then the mamos get angry and they send elemental disturbances and sicknesses and all the unfavorable circumstances.

To avoid that, we all must protect the elements, and especially we must avoid cutting down forests. This is our last chance to stop the destruction of nature and protect the environment. If everybody does that, then our planet earth will continue to survive, and all sentient beings can live happily. This is our last hope. So please everyone take responsibility and be careful.

Generally, Western life is very busy. Getting up early for work and coming back late, there is no time to spend with one's own family or even see your own children. This is how life is in the West, but at this moment, when you have time, don't waste it with internet, TV, telephone, and so on. Instead this is a very important and precious time to spend with your loved ones and share family life together.

If you are single, then now is the time to learn how to feel comfortable and relaxed at home alone. Normally, as soon as you are bored, you immediately think to do something or go somewhere. This means your happiness depends on distractions and external circumstances. This is not real inner happiness. Usually, you go out saying it is for your job or friends. Now there is no way to go out. There is no choice, you have to stay home. The joy you had with many people, now you must find that joy even when you are by yourself.

If you are a dharma practitioner, at home, dedicate half your time to your family and half your time for dharma practice. This is the best way. Like this you can make the best use of these new circumstances.

If you are a Vajrayana practitioner, to avoid and protect yourself from this epidemic, you can do the Buddha Medicine Sadhana, the Tara of Parnashavari mantras, the prayer of Thangtong Gyalpo, called,

“The Verses that Saved Sakya from Sickness,” the Orgyen Menla Sadhana, or you can do the fulfillment ritual of the mamos. There are also several prayers written especially for our age by Dudjom Rinpoche.

If you are a serious daily practitioner, then there is the Troma practice of the Dudjom Tersar tradition, which has been revealed for our times and circumstances. If you practice this thoroughly then surely in this very life you will attain the rainbow body. Recently there have been a few practitioners who attained the rainbow body through this practice, which is proof of its efficacy. So if you are able to do this practice, it is sure that the teaching and transmission of Troma will not delude you. That is the vajra promise of Guru Rinpoche.

Nonetheless, for this virus, we must take proper precautions and follow seriously the advice of the doctors. This is very important, but we don't have to be completely freaked out by the virus either.

We are supposed to be Buddhists. Our main refuge and protectors are the Buddha and our masters. Invoke them. Pray to them. Supplicate them by saying, “May this sickness disappear forever, and may all sentient beings live happily.”

In your daily life, try to maintain a kind heart and keep the contentment or satisfaction mind. Whatever virtue you do, don't forget to dedicate it for all sentient beings. Engage in good conduct based on honesty.

Cultivate a virtuous body, speech, and mind and encourage others to do the same. Whenever negative thoughts arise that may lead to negative actions, try to avoid them and encourage others to do likewise.

Meditate all the time on impermanence: remember that our life and all our activities are impermanent. When life comes to an end, pray to the Buddha and the masters. Rest your mind in peace and stay calm and confident. That is very important.

Guru Rinpoche, Padmasambhava, who was prophesied by Buddha Shakyamuni himself, is the only buddha particularly connected to our generation. As such, his blessings and protection are very swift and effective for us. If we have full faith and trust in him and do the seven-line prayer with the Guru Rinpoche mantra whenever we have time, it is certain that he will protect us from all the fears of this life, and in the next life, we will be reborn in the paradise of Guru Rinpoche, called Lotus Light.

At this very sad moment in time, where everybody is scared of the virus, with the intention to help, I wrote these few words. Please keep them in mind. May all beings respect the truth and live happily according to the dharma.

This was written by Lama Tenzin Samphel, March 27, 2020 at Shedup Kunsang Choling in Septvaux, France.

