

Day 2 – Morning – Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche

Good morning everyone: Rinpoches, respected translators, great scholars, and everyone gathered here this morning.

Over the last century, many key texts of the Buddhist literature of all traditions, not only Tibetan, have been translated into many world languages. Translators in the past have done amazing work with limited resources and tools. Their dedication and passion for translating the words of the dharma is a great beginning to share the wisdom of enlightenment with this world. First of all, I'd like to rejoice in their work, the work of the great translators and their great teachers, and aspire to bring the remaining wisdom still in the source languages to our target languages.

As followers of the Buddha, "Buddhists," as we are called, we must have come to understand and appreciate the words of the Buddha. They must have resonated with our basic view of life and spirituality, and for that reason we became his followers. It would be quite ironic to claim to be a Buddhist but have no idea what the Buddha taught. But we know what our lama taught. The only way to genuinely follow the footsteps of the Buddha depends on whether or not we have access to his wisdom and his journey of awakening. That is why it is crucial to access the words of the Buddha for western Buddhists. The fundamental gateway to understand the wisdom of the enlightened one is through the words of the Buddha, which have been translated for many centuries in Asia. It's not an exception in the west – you translators will be the medium through which the words of the Buddha will echo in the west.

The Buddhist canon exists in many languages, such as Pali, Chinese, and Tibetan. They complement each other by making a full and complete collection of his words. For example, some sutras in Pali don't exist in Chinese. Most tantras from the Tibetan canon don't exist in either the Pali or Chinese canons. All of these texts are the source of the commentarial traditions, from which have sprung many different lineages of Buddhism in world – Tibetan, Japanese, Chinese, and so on. But what is common to all of us is this canon, which as Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche said, is equivalent to Christian Bible. The Buddhist canon is our most precious treasury of wisdom. This is true not only for Buddhists, but it is also a great source of wisdom for the world. Hearing the wisdom of the Buddha through translation will be a great contribution to world society, now and in future.

In the west, there is a movement to create a western lineage of Buddhism. In America we lobby for American Buddhism. This is an excellent and inevitable evolution. This vision cannot be complete without having the totality of the canon translated into western languages. So having the Kangyur in western languages, starting with English, is crucial to establishing a genuine lineage of western Buddhism.

I often explain this with an analogy. The Buddhadharma is like genuine water, which has no color or shape. It is pure and natural. This is genuine wisdom. All the world's different languages and cultures are like the container for this water. Without the container, the water cannot be preserved. Without water, there's not much use for the container. The container may change from language to language and from culture to culture, but the essence of the water is always the same, something we share universally. That essence is the words of wisdom, the words of the Buddha. The container is only a support to allow us to receive and enjoy the contents, the authentic

Buddhadharma. As translators, you are creating a new container for the water of Buddhism to be translated to new culture.

The Pali Text Society in England has done an excellent job translating Pali texts into English. Chinese Buddhist traditions are also translating their canon into English. But the Tibetan Buddhist tradition has not yet started the project of translating their entire canon, even though sporadic translations of some sutras and tantras have been translated into English. However, under the vision of Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche, we're here to witness the dawning of translating the Kangyur, the Tibetan Buddhist canon. At this point my aim is to raise awareness and leave it to the Tibetan scholars and translators to assess how to approach the translation of the Kangyur. I've had some discussions also with Tulku Pema Wangyal Rinpoche and he told me he has had this vision for 20 years or longer himself. Talking with other great masters about it, there seems to be a common passion or vision about translating the Kangyur. But due to the magnitude of his project, nobody has even dared to speak about it in a conference. So I'm happy to be the target of your arrows—shoot away!

There is much wisdom in the sutras that is not found in the commentarial traditions, like the Buddhist view of organisational science and the organisation of sangha. For example, the *Dharshachakra Sutra*, the *Ten Wheel Sutra*, discusses how a bodhisattva should rule a country. In this sutra, some vital topics are discussed, such as the view and function of military science – isn't that important today? It's a big question for all Buddhist practitioners. We have questions about the military, commerce, and so on, and all these topics are discussed in this sutra. The answers are right here in this discourse. Whoever translates this will not only know the answer, but will answer questions of all Buddhists who share similar questions. In similar ways, there are numerous sutras and tantras that will be of great interest to modern society.

Another category of sutras important for modern times is the vinaya literature, which is commonly misunderstood as the “dos” and “don'ts” of monasticism. I have neither a romantic relationship with vinaya, nor am I personally passionate about it. But this pitaka is important for understanding Buddhist views on sociology.

On one hand, we could say that the language of the sutras and tantras is somewhat challenging and difficult. A lot of people think that the sutras are very difficult to understand. But on the other hand, the sutras are simply discourses between the Buddha and his disciples, or amongst his great disciples. So in some ways, the sutras are easier than shastras and Buddhist commentaries, which sometimes have thirty levels of outline to discuss a simple statement of the Buddha. When I studied madhyamaka, there were even forty levels in some sections. I think there is a way to maintain the language or feel of the original sutra in the style of a discourse. Keeping the language universally accessible will be very beneficial.

It would also be beneficial for individual sutras not to be translated by just one person, as each translator has his or her own distinctive style. I'd like to propose that each sutra be translated by a small group, as small as two, working together if at all possible. Two translators working together is already quite a noble achievement—you've reached at least the first bhumi in order to do that! It is important to work together to ensure that the language and feeling invoked by the text match the original intention. Each translation could be the product of small groups working together with a scholar or lineage teacher, or experts on the source text, as was done in Tibet. I feel this would be best way to attain goal of universal accessibility. It may be that the first generation of translation will be more literal. Eventually, through editing and refining, it will become more readable. In the final translation, pidgin English would be eliminated.

In the old translation system in Tibet, translators of succeeding generations would improve upon the work of the previous translators. But in the west, there's no such room because of copyright law and intellectual property. So if you're working on Kangyur or Tengyur, I think if there's a way to open the door to such a process in the future – not like Wikipedia where anyone can change what they like – but a procedure to refine and improve earlier translations, this would be quite important to contemplate. I feel one group cannot make every translation perfect. Even great Tibetan translators, those we think of as emanations of great beings, couldn't do it perfectly. There was a refining process by later translators, and even now Sanskrit scholars find mistakes. The 17th Karmapa did research and said that not all Tibetan Buddhist texts were translated from Sanskrit. Right now, scholars judge translations of Tibetan texts based on Sanskrit translations alone, but not on languages such as Prakrit. We cannot fully say that this wrong or right, but there's definitely room for improvement. If there are ways for later translators to improve English translations, this would be very important in terms of perfecting the translations of the Kangyur, Tengyur, and Tibetan commentarial texts. Copyright and intellectual property are important. I'm not against them, but we must find a way to work together.

Another challenge here is that certain terminology in sutras and tantras is archaic, and much is very particular to certain topics. We need good resources to aid translation, such as great scholars, lineage teachers and good dictionaries. We also need to consider the training and nurturing of future translators. Currently it is very hard for a young westerner to learn Tibetan and find a good tutor and resources. On the one hand, it is good for them to have challenges to test their commitment and to allow them to glimpse what previous translators had to go through. On the other hand, this wastes a lot of time and resources. So we must create situations in which we can help produce quality translators with the limited resources we have today. There are many small translator training programs, but there is a need for reflection on how we can improve and have a fully equipped language school for Tibetan and western students.

The last thing we want to do is make translations that are objects of reverence but are not used. We must use our translations in study and practice. It is utterly delightful to have had this opportunity to dream of translating the words of the Buddha together with such wonderful friends gathered in Bir today.

Thank you.