Statements From the Dalai Lama on the Protests and the Dolgyal (Shugden) Controversy

Statements to the press, 10 May, 2014:

<http://uspolitics.einnews.com/pr_news/204237127/his-holiness-the-dalai-lama-travels-from-oslo-to-rotterdam>

HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA TRAVELS FROM OSLO TO ROTTERDAM

Rotterdam, Holland, 10 May 2014 - The streets of Oslo were quiet and sun shone as His Holiness the Dalai Lama left to drive to the airport to fly to Rotterdam. In contrast, the weather in Rotterdam when he arrived was cold and wet. However, his Tibetan and Dutch hosts were warm in their welcome and accompanied him to a short meeting with the media.

The first question was about how things have been in Tibet since His Holiness was last in Holland. He replied that hardline officials continue to target Tibetan language and religion as posing a threat of separatism and have continued to restrict them. The second question enquired how long Tibetans could be expected to remain non-violent and His Holiness answered that if Tibetan Buddhist culture is damaged in Tibet, who knows what will happen.

“We’re Buddhists and the Buddha advised us not to take refuge in ordinary deities and spirits. This is a basic Buddhist principle. The Shugden followers as good as take refuge in that spirit. The spirit arose in the 17th century at the time of the 5th Dalai Lama. He wrote that it was a harmful, evil spirit. One of its harmful aspects is a strident sectarianism, whereas I am committed to an inclusive non-sectarianism. Because of this spirit, people have destroyed the images and scriptures of other traditions, particularly the Nyingmapas.

“I started to propitiate it out of ignorance in 1951 and did so until 1970 when I realised there were complications with it which prompted me to investigate it. I have 20 teachers from various traditions and all but one opposed this practice. After I stopped doing it in the early 70s people gradually got to know about it and I explained why.

“Normally we would expect the spirit to be protecting people, but in this case there are people trying to protect the spirit. They shout: “Stop lying,” but I don’t know what they think anyone is lying about. It’s my duty to let people know about this. The demonstrators say I’ve banned this practice, but that’s not so, I haven’t and the monasteries associated with Shugden in South India are evidence of this…”

His Holiness also mentioned that some years ago, supporters of the practice of Shugden had staged demonstrations against him, following him wherever he went. Later, some Chinese did this too for a while. The Shugden followers have resumed their demonstrations. They call on the Dalai Lama to stop lying, but, he said, they are the ones who are not telling the truth.

“When one of them raised a question during my public talk, I told him that this is not a new issue. It began at the time of the 5th Dalai Lama. Shugden is said to be a manifestation of Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen, but the 5th Dalai Lama wrote that he had arisen as a result of distorted prayers as a perfidious spirit. He said as much to a Sakya master from whom he sought help.

“Ling Rinpoche objected to the practice, but Trijang Rinpoche propitiated Shugden. I did so too until 1970 when I began to have doubts about it. I did research into it as a result of which I stopped. When Ganden Jangtse Monastery faced a series of unusual obstacles they consulted Trijang Rinpoche, who told them it was because of the displeasure of the protectors. They asked me how this could be and I investigated and established that the problems related to Shugden. I told the Abbot of Namgyal Monastery who came from Jangtse.

“Shugden supporters set up their own group.

“The 13th Dalai Lama told Phabongka Rinpoche that propitiating Shugden too eagerly risked breaching the precepts for taking refuge in the Three Jewels. This is recorded in Phabongka’s biography. I feel I too have a responsibility to inform people about this, but whether they pay heed is up to them. I’ve never said I banned the practice; I have said it isn’t helpful.

“That’s it. I’m well; be happy.”

Statement to Mongolian students at a recent teaching from his residence in Dharamsala, Dec. 3, 2014. (As translated orally, without edit)

“Now, these Dolgyal groups are calling me a fake Dalai Lama. They are doing protests wherever I go and making many allegations against me. Recently in one of the placards [protest banners], they have shown a picture of me wearing a Muslim … cap. I did that because wherever I go I try to promote inter-faith harmony. If I go to Christian churches or Muslim religious institutions I wear the traditional hats. So now some of these people are … showing these pictures saying I am a Muslim. I personally don’t mind because I can’t please everybody…

“So the main point is the Dalai Lama lineage cannot practice Dolgyal and those who come to receive teachings from [me should] not practice Dolgyal because if they do, they break their samaya…”

Extract from the Dalai Lama’s commentary on Tsonkhapa’s *Lamrim Chenmo,* responding to a question from a student regarding the protests.

“Question: Your Holiness, I feel agitated to see and hear the Shugden protestors outside the building here. How do I help myself? Please address this issue as many are uninformed about this.

“Answer [from His Holiness]: We have had this problem for 370 years. It started during the time of the Fifth Dalai Lama.   And from 1951 until the 1970’s, I myself worshipped this spirit. I used to be one of the practitioners!

“One of my reasons for abandoning Shugden worship is that much of my efforts are directed toward promoting nonsectarianism—especially *within* Tibetan Buddhism.   I always encourage people to receive teachings from the teachers of diverse traditions. This is like the Fifth Dalai Lama and many other great lamas, who received teachings within many traditions. Since the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, down to today, I have been practicing this way myself.

“A Nyingma teacher, Kunu Lama Rinpoche, initially gave me teachings on Shantideva’s texts. This lama was very nonsectarian, having received innumerable teachings from many different traditions. After this, I wanted to receive from this great lama a certain teaching distinct to the Nyingma tradition. I asked my tutor, Ling Rinpoche, pointing out that I had already received some teachings from this lama, but I now wanted to receive teachings on an important Nyingma tantric text.

“Ling Rinpoche was a little bit cautious about this because of Shugden. He never worshipped the spirit but he was cautious about it. (My other tutor, Trijang Rinpoche, was very close to this spirit practice.)  The rumor that was circulating was that if a Geluk lama takes teachings in the Nyingma tradition, Shugden would destroy him. Ling Rinpoche was a bit frightened for me and he really warned me to be careful. The Shugden worshippers have a tradition that one must be extremely strict about one’s own distinctive Geluk tradition.

“Actually, I think this standpoint deprives people of religious freedom, preventing them from taking other teachings. In practice, discouraging a standpoint that deprives people of the freedom to choose is actually an affirmation of religious freedom. A double negation is an affirmation.

“Around 1970, I was reading the life stories of many great lamas, mainly of the Geluk tradition. I had the idea that if Shugden is truly reliable, then most of the great lamas who tutored the Dalai Lamas must have practiced Shugden worship. It turns out that this is not the case. So I developed some doubt and the more I investigated, the clearer it became.

“For example, the Fifth Dalai Lama very explicitly explains his position vis-à-vis the worship of this spirit [Two sources are cited here, from autobiographical works of the Fifth Dalai Lama—see below]. He explains what it is and he explains the causes and conditions that gave rise to it. He describes the destructive functions of this particular spirit. He says that it arose from misguided motivation and that as a spirit it manifests as a violator of a pledge. According to the Fifth Dalai Lama, its function is to harm both the Buddhist doctrine and living beings.

“Once I realized these things, it was my moral responsibility to make the facts clear. Whether you listen to me is entirely up to you as an individual. From the outset, I told both Tibetans and some of our other friends what I had come to understand. They are free to listen to my advice or not. It is an individual right to accept religion or not to accept it. Accepting this religion or that religion is entirely up to the individual.

“My opinion is that Shugden worship is actually not a genuine practice of Dharma; it is simply worship of a worldly spirit. This is another aspect of the problem: from what I have taught, I think you can see that Tibetan Buddhism is a continuation of the pure lineage of the Nalanda tradition, which relies on reasoning, not blind belief. So it is very sad that certain Tibetan practices could cause this profound and rich tradition to become a sort of spirit worship.

“Both the Fifth Dalai Lama and the Thirteenth Dalai Lama were gravely critical toward this spirit. Since I am considered the reincarnation of these Dalai Lamas, it is only logical that my life should follow theirs. One could say that it proves that I am a true reincarnation!

“It seems that these people outside are really fond of worshipping this spirit. OK, it is their life; I have no problem if that is what they want to do. When I taught in Germany a group of Shugden followers shouted for at least three or four hours. Eventually I felt great concern about how their throats would be affected by so much shouting.” (pp. 24-26)

Sources:

Dalai Lama, (Translated and edited by Guy Newland); 2012; *From Here to Enlightenment: An Introduction to Tsong-kha-pa’s Classic Text, The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment;* Snowlion Publications; Boston, MA.

Fifth Dalai Lama, *Collected Works,* vol. Ha, pp. 423-424, as well as the Fifth’s autobiography.

Tsong-kha-pa, (Translated by The Lamrim Chenmo Translation Committee) 2000; *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment: Lamrim Chenmo;* Snowlion Publications, Ithaca, NY.