

Frequently Asked Questions on Tibetan Buddhism

Questions / Answers on controversial discussed topics

1. DORJE SHUGDEN

Can you give a short summary of the Dorje Shugden Controversy, its main players and the present situation?

Is there a general ban on Shugden and are people who practice it persecuted? Is it illegal, undemocratic or a violation of human rights to put restrictions or a ban on a practice like Dorje Shugden?

Do Tibetan people living in India under the Tibetan Government in Exile have a free democratic society? Do they have freedom of speech and vote for their government?

2. KARMAPA CONTROVERSY

Can you give a short summary of the Karmapa Controversy, its main players and present state? What is the role of Kaygupas and the Dalai Lama in this controversy?

3. HIS HOLINESS THE XIV. DALAI LAMA

Is it correct to say that in general the Dalai Lama is highly esteemed among Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike? Why?

There are some critics (e.g. Western Shugden Society) who claim or who try give the impression that the Dalai Lama has “close ties with the Nazis”. They often mention that there was a Nazi-Tibet-Connection for example, according to Stern Magazine (Nbr. 32 07/2009) “*The royal household in the past cultivated close connections with the National Socialist Regime. SS expeditions were welcomed in Lhasa with all marks of respect. His Holiness has never distanced himself clearly from these inglorious relationships.*”

In the same context some critics say it was a fault that the Dalai Lama never distanced himself from Heinrich Harrer who was, according to Stern, a “spirited Nazi”. Stern also reported that when the Dalai Lama was in Nürnberg 2009 he said that when he was a child, he was impressed to see all those images of “generals and their weapons” with “Adolf Hitler and Hermann Göring”. This line of arguments tries to give the impression or tries to give evidence that the Dalai Lama has sympathy with the Nazis. Do you can comment on this?

Another argument by Stern and other critics is that the Dalai Lama had meetings with, or was a friend of Nazis like Bruno Beger, Miguel Serrano, and some right wing people such as George Bush, Jörg Haider; and that “*the Dalai Lama has met different times with the chief of the terror sect Shoko Asahara.*” Can you comment on this?

The Western Shugden Society accuses the Dalai Lama to be a Buddhist dictator, Stern spoke of a “*Dalai Lama Regime*” and said he would “*govern in the Himalaya like a medieval potentate.*” Can you comment on this?

Can you say something on the CIA-Tibet-Tibetan Guerilla relationship and the role of the Dalai Lama in this?

Journalist Michael Backman said in The Age [Selling Tibet to the world](#) with respect to the Dalai Lama:

"To enhance his authority, he has sought to merge the four traditions into one and place himself at its head. But Dorje Shugden presents a roadblock. One aspect of Shugden worship is to protect the Gelugpa tradition from adulteration, particularly by the Nyingma tradition. Nyingma followers respond by not wanting anything to do with Gelugpa followers sympathetic to Dorje Shugden. So to allow a proper merger of the four traditions, the Dalai Lama needs to get rid of the Shugden movement. If the Dalai Lama can claim to represent all Tibetans, it will increase his political prestige and clout with overseas Tibetans and with governments."

In relation to the above Kelsang Gyatso, founder of the New Kadampa Tradition, and the Western Shugden Society, claims that the Dalai Lama's intention is to merge all four Tibetan Buddhist schools, aiming to place himself as their head. What do you think about this?

In 1997 Kelsang Gyatso said in a reply to the Newsweek article [Cult Mystery](#) that "Within the exile Tibetan community, it is HH the Dalai Lama alone who has power. He controls every aspect of Tibetan society." and "all the present problems regarding Dorje Shugden within the Mahayana Buddhist world have no creator other than HH the Dalai Lama." He also says that "His (the Dalai Lama's) words are causing disharmony between Shugden practitioners and Nyingma practitioners. Why is HH the Dalai Lama creating this new problem? Until now there have been no problems between Gelugpas and Nyingmapas, and there has been no arguing or criticism." Can you comment on these claims?

How strong is the power of the Dalai Lama in the exile community, is he an autocrat who can do as he likes to do, does he order and Tibetans obey?

Some feel there is a discrepancy between the Dalai Lama's statement of being a "simple monk" and then when he comes to the West being accommodated in very expensive hotels and having bodyguards. Can you comment on this?

4. TIBET AND THE POWER IN TIBET BEFORE THE CHINESE INVASION

How pervasive was the power of the Dalai Lamas in Tibet? Often the Dalai Lamas and Tibet are seen as synonymous giving the impression that since the 5th Dalai Lama a single figure, the Dalai Lama, had omnipotent power over Tibet and people had to obey. Can you give in a nutshell an overview regarding the power situation in Tibet since the 5th Dalai Lama? Was the power divided between monasteries, regional rulers or the four schools of Tibet, or did some person or group have total control?

There are competing Western images over Tibet and the Dalai Lamas. There are either romantic Shangri-la projections or simplified theocracy / feudal system portrays. There are reports about death penalty, torture, murder, conspiracy, slaves, mutilation, bond-slaves etc. What would be a middle way or accurate view on these possible extremes of Tibet and the former Dalai Lamas from the 7th century to 1956 (in a nutshell)?

What was the role of women in Tibetan society before China's invasion, were they emancipated? How important is the role of women in the Tibetan exile community now?

5. FULL ORDINATION FOR WOMEN

The Dalai Lama is a full supporter of nuns full ordination and said of himself that he was a feminist. Although the Theravada tradition were recently able to revive full nun ordination for women (under Ven. Ajahn Brahm), in the Tibetan tradition there is still no full ordination for women possible. Do you know what the real hindrances are for the revival of the Bhikshuni (full nun) ordination?

6. STUDENT TEACHER RELATIONSHIP AND TIBETAN BUDDHISM IN THE WEST

The Dalai Lama has said at different times in the beginning one would not need a teacher and that people should be careful if they change their religion, or even better continue to practice in their own native religion. Do you know why he gives such advice? Shouldn't people rely on a teacher and follow his advice and isn't it the task of the Dalai Lama to encourage people to become Buddhists?

Do you think the tulku system will survive? There is an increasing number of tulkus, there are also Western tulkus. Though one may assume that most of the tulkus are genuine people, is there a danger that this system degenerates?

There are Buddhist teachers who use Buddhist concepts to exploit their students sexually, financially or emotionally. E.g. there is one known male Buddhist teacher who taught that his male students should have sex with him to “overcome their aversion for homosexuality”. There are Buddhist teachers who encourage to engage in sexual activity with them or in ambiguous activities with each other, e.g. massage on secret places of the body, and if students feel shame, they may say: ‘this is because you have not yet realized emptiness.’ What should one think or do in such cases? Maybe better to follow what the teacher says, he may know better because he is a master and one’s ego is the real problem?

There are teachers who bind students to themselves in a way that their students feel fear or guilt to go to other teachers and to receive teachings from them. They may claim that too many teachers confuse the student and it is best to rely on only one teacher (themselves). What to do in such cases where it is either directly or indirectly said, that one should not go to other Buddhist teachers?

There seems to be also a lot of sectarianism in the West; people strongly clinging to their own Buddhist school, identifying strongly with “I am a Kagyüpa!” or “I am Gelugpa!” etc. regarding their own school as the best and finding fault in other schools with aversion or competitiveness. Tibetan lamas or their Western followers may claim that their own school is the “quickest path to enlightenment”, or they claim their school founder’s view “was the most profound in Tibet” etc. What do you think about this and what would be a good approach for a Westerner to not get caught in sectarianism?

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How does one approach a Tibetan Buddhist teacher in the West?

What do you do if you relied to quickly on a Vajrayana teacher having received “commitments” from him, without having had the time and ability/knowledge to judge his qualities and faults. If later, one finds out that objectively the teacher has too many faults or has degenerated, misleading their students, what should one do in such cases? Stay with the teacher, or go away? Will it lead to hell if one leaves one’s teacher and follows another?

When one has a ‘root guru’ or ‘tantric commitments’ does this mean one cannot go to other teachers and must do what the teacher says? Some lamas encourage Westerners to follow the example of Milarepa and Marpa or Naropa and Tilopa, those who gave

incredible examples of devotion or obedience. Should we emulate them and do what the teacher says, even jumping out of the window, when one's own teacher orders it?

- Can one have many root gurus? What is a root guru?
- How does one discriminate a genuine teacher from a misleading teacher?
- Are there institutions or impartial organisations where one can check if the teacher one finds sympathetic or genuine is a good teacher or is it completely the responsibility of the student to judge?
- How can I find out which of the four Tibetan traditions is the best for me?
- How can I discriminate if a Buddhist group is rather healthy or rather cultish?
- Is practicing Buddhism and having therapy contradictory? Can Buddhism help to heal emotional or personal problems?

Beginners FAQ's

- Is all Buddhism the same?
- Is all Tibetan Buddhism the same?
- Is the Dalai Lama like the pope of Buddhism? What is his role?
- Can we say Buddhism = pacifism?
- Are all 'Rinpoches' enlightened?
- What is a geshe? What is a rinpoché, a tulku, a Lama? - Can you give a brief guide to Tibetan titles?
- What is the best book or article I can read to get an accurate and objective view of:
Tibetan Buddhism
the current Dalai Lama,
the past Dalai Lamas,
Tibet
the Tibetan versus Chinese situation?
- Can you trust anyone with robes on?
- Is tantric sex with a Tibetan Buddhist a rare opportunity and if you have a chance to participate is it a great honour which you can't turn down?
- Is it true that powerful Buddhists can curse you to reincarnate in hell realms/appear in your dreams/make you ill?
- Do you have to believe in reincarnation to be a Buddhist?
- Are the teachings on former and future births (or incarnation) general teachings of Buddha shared by all Buddhist schools?
- What is the role of women in Tibetan Buddhism? Can they be ordained? Are they all dakinis? What does it mean if someone calls you their dakini/daka?
- Do you have to do whatever your dharma teacher says otherwise 1. you'll never get enlightened or 2. it's your ego getting in the way?
- Can unordained Buddhist teachers have sex with whomever they want including their students; and no matter if they are married or not?
- What are the traditional vows of an ordained monk/nun? (in a nutshell) How can you expect one to behave?
- Traditionally, how could one disrobe and is it negative? How frequent is this in Tibetan culture (now and in the past)?
- Can someone be kicked out from a monastery if they are ordained? In what circumstances and how?
- What should a westerner think about before they consider becoming an ordained Buddhist?
- Can great lamas fly/read minds/preserve their bodies indefinitely, etc.? What if one does not manifest such signs?
- How can you know if a teacher is enlightened?
- Will I know when and if I am ever to become enlightened?



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