

**SAMDHONG RINPOCHE,
UNCOMPROMISING TRUTH
FOR A COMPROMISED
WORLD: Tibetan Buddhism
and Today's World**

EDITED BY DONOVAN ROBERT

FOREWORD BY H. H. THE 14TH DALAI
LAMA

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*... The Truth of Selflessness ...
emerges as the real remedy for all the
crises of our time.*

— Samdhong Rinpoche

This book is an uncommon compilation of extraordinarily relevant themes regarding the current state of the contemporary world, presented in a question-and-answer format to the Venerable Professor Samdhong Rinpoche. The themes explored within the text are rarely accessible to audiences outside the Tibetan community or those not practicing Vajrayana (the “Diamond Vehicle”) Buddhism, let alone from someone who holds a unique position of both spiritual authority and temporal power within an orthodox Tibetan Buddhist orientation as Samdhong Rinpoche. Another informing aspect of this book is its lack of interest in superfluous details pertaining to biographical information, which is so exhausted in today’s world. The editor notes, “He [Samdhong Rinpoche] conveyed to me his belief that it is the truth itself, and not the individual who speaks it” (p. xiv) that holds ultimate importance.

With this said, Samdhong Rinpoche was born on November 5, 1939, with the Tibetan name Lobsang Tenzin, in Nagduk village of Kham, in Eastern Tibet before the Chinese invasion took place. He was recognized at the age of

five to be the reincarnation of the Fourth Samdhong Rinpoche and was elected to be the Kalon Tripa or Prime Minister of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile. Following the invasion of Tibet in 1959 by the communist-inspired Chinese Army, Samdhong Rinpoche escaped into exile due to the impending threat on his life, and has since resided in India where the seat of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile resides. His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama, has contributed an insightful foreword to this book conveying his confidence and blessing in Samdhong Rinpoche to speak on behalf of the Tibetan people and the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

It will also interest readers and practitioners of humanistic and transpersonal psychology to know or recall that Samdhong Rinpoche recently gave the Inaugural Address at the World Congress on Psychology & Spirituality, held in New Delhi, India. The purpose of this congress was the “Furthering Their Integration”—regarding psychology and spirituality. The topic of Samdhong Rinpoche’s Inaugural Address was: “The Dharma of Cultural Preservation”.

This book is divided into six parts, each chapter containing its selected topics and dialogues:

PART I: THE LONG ROAD TO NOW. The editor summarizes this chapter in the following manner: “I wanted Rinpoche’s views on how we have arrived at our present state. I wanted to address subjects concerning the central aspects of human history” (p. 5). Thus this chapter covers a copious spectrum of topics that will draw the interest of readers, such as: Origins, Biological Evolution, Societies, Culture, Governance, Economies, Industry and Commerce, Law, Philosophy, Religion, Morality, Spirituality, Science, Art, Complexity and Escapism, Civilization and Decline, and the Future in Prospect.

Origins: How did the physical world come into existence according to Buddhist cosmology?

In Buddhist doctrine mind has existed from beginningless time, whereas matter has a finite beginning. This also means that matter can come to an end but mind cannot; mind will always exist... This is somewhat different from the majority of religions in our world, which believe in some form of Creator, either personal or impersonal, say, a creative force. Only the Buddhists believe in a collective karmic force rather than in some absolute Creator principle. But in my view these things only represent a difference in language, a different way of saying the same thing (p. 8).

Biological Evolution: Does Buddhism accept evolutionary theory?

Evolution is basically a Western viewpoint (p. 31).

Societies: What is the Buddhist point of view on the individual and his or her role in society?

What can any individual do to make the world a more compassionate place? Firstly, we must consider others as more important than ourselves! I think that is basic Truth (p. 15).

Culture: What is the Buddhist idea of culture, and how are issues of “cultural diversity” and “multiculturalism” viewed?

Any confluence of culture should not become combined with domination or influence over each other: cultures should meet, but cultures should remain within their own identity or within their own nature. ... So first we should know what culture is, and secondly we should know how to converge these different cultures, and thirdly how to keep these different cultures from dominating each other, yet sharing the goodness (p. 17).

Governance: What is the Buddhist theory of government?

I have always believed in Thoreau’s saying that “that government is best which governs the least (p. 19).

Economics: Are globalization and spiritual life compatible?

So-called free trade and ... globalization is very dangerous for human inner spiritual growth, human intelligence, and diversity of cultures. Cultures are being completely destroyed by the pro-

cess of globalization (p. 22).

Industry and Commerce: What was life like in earlier times before the Industrial Revolution and modernity?

Before the Industrial Revolution, humanity was never deprived of their needs; all of them lived with their needs being provided by nature and by themselves, and it was good (p. 24).

Law: What are the pitfalls of the majority rule?

The greatest demerit of today's social and democratic systems is that the representation of people is a one-way traffic, and the ideas and the rights of the minority are always superseded by the majority (p. 28).

Philosophy: What is real knowledge (gnosis)?

The real knowledge of the thing is not subject to development; it is fully there from the time of its revelation, and it might be transmitted down to a certain point in the lineage, then it begins to deteriorate (p. 32).

Religion: What constitutes an authentic spiritual tradition?

But coming to the tradition of spirituality and the tradition of Dhárma, these are again not an evolution. They are revelations of teachings coming from a Higher One. Therefore, I always carefully define the word tradition. An authentic tradition must have three attributes or qualities. First, it is taught or revealed by an authentic source or, we can loosely say, by a divine source. Second, it must be transmitted by means of an unbroken lineage from person to person. And third, it must be verifiable through common sense and self-knowledge. So if these three factors are present, then it is an authentic tradition. Otherwise a long-perpetuated custom need not necessarily be a tradition (p. 36).

Morality: What is ethical conduct from a Buddhist perspective?

The seed of virtuous conduct (Shila) is required for one's own development and also for the establishment of social harmony (p. 39).

Spirituality: Have spiritual tra-

ditions evolved through time?

Spirituality is not evolved through the social and biological evolution of humankind. Spirituality is always there . . . There is no evolution of spirituality (p. 41).

Science: What is the Buddhist perspective on science?

Scientists can learn a great deal from spirituality. Mainly they can learn that they should know the limitations of the ordinary mind . . . the ordinary mind cannot attain to Absolute Truth (p. 44).

Art: How has sacred art in the Buddhist tradition developed?

Buddhist religious art has not undergone a process of evolution. . . For example, the mandala, the very complicated mandala, both mandala painting and the construction of the most complex kind: neither is the result of the gradual

evolution of art. These were revealed by the Enlightened One: how to make it, how to measure it, and how to color it; all this was revealed at the moment of beginning and has its own significance (p. 47).

Complexity and Escapism: Can one escape worldly problems by engaging in spiritual life or spiritual practices?

There can be no spiritual practice which is motivated by the desire to escape from complexity. . . In fact, we have never tried to identify correctly the crisis of our time (pp. 51-52).

Civilization and Decline: What is progress and what are the achievements of the West?

And what we have achieved is the amplification and enlargement of our vices (p. 54).

The Future in Prospect: How will globalization affect the future of the world?

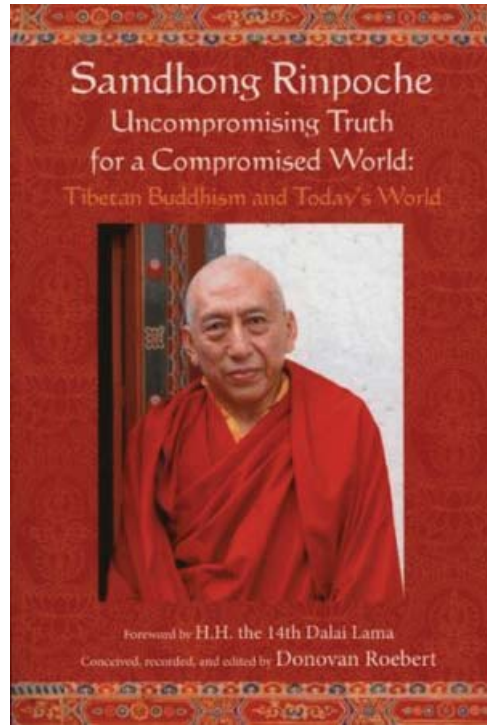
. . . we cannot accommodate a collective Karma to make everyone uniform. Diversity is a law of nature, and therefore diversity will always be there (pp. 57-58).

Part II. THE MODERN INDIVIDUAL. This chapter examines how the human individual, by identifying with a false or fictitious "I", participates in the collective pathology or fragmentation that is rampant everywhere in the modern and postmodern world. Although Buddhism affirms the idea of *Anatman* or not-self versus the Hindu (*sanatana dhárma*) idea of *Atman* or self—both perspectives are complementary (pertaining to the "coincidence of

opposites" or *coincidentia oppositorum*) rather than opposites and are thus still central to the perennial inquiry of "who am I?" If we look more closely at the Indian tradition, we find different schools of thought saying the same things in differ-

ent language. The Vedic schools say that you cannot attain Enlightenment without recognizing the *Atman* (self), and the Buddhist schools say that you cannot attain Enlightenment without recognizing the *Anatman* (not-self) (p. 69).

PART III: HUMANKIND IN SAMBARA, ON EARTH, AND IN THE UNIVERSE. This chapter



covers subjects such as Environmental Destruction, Violence and War, America and the Superpower Principle, etc. The editor describes this section: "I wanted Rinpoche to comment on some of the most pertinent collective ills that hold us back from achieving a present world order which might be more conformed to the truest yearnings of the whole of humanity (p. 79).

The Gap between Governments and the Governed: Are there blind spots in democracy?

Democracy for the most part is not real democracy. It is mostly hypocrisy. Democracy ordinarily assumes that, while the minority may have their say, the decisions are made by the majority according to the wisdom of the majority. But this is not what is actually happening today. In fact, the will of a small minority leads the majority through domination over the will of the majority and by simply ignoring the majority (p. 81).

Environmental Destruction: Is there something inherently destructive about the modern and post-modern outlook? Is there a correlation between the ecosystem and its effects upon mental health? What is the relationship between the inner and outer dimensions of the human individual?

The tendency of self-destruction and the tendency of suicide is, I think, in-built in postmodern civilization. And it is part of the ultramodern or postmodern way of thinking (p. 86). Madness is the inability to discriminate between what is harmful and what is not. And I think that, in this regard, modern people have gone insane (p. 86). One final thing I want to add here is that the outer environment is prevented from preservation due to the degradation of our inner environment. Unless we are able to improve our inner environment, our efforts will not be very fruitful. Therefore, each individual should try to improve their inner environment and at the same time to act to preserve/improve the outer environment. Both

should go hand in hand, otherwise we care only about improving our outer environment, and this will carry us only so far (p. 88).

PART IV: TIBET—THE MODERN WORLD'S HIDDEN TRAGEDY.

In this chapter the reader can learn in more detail about the atrocities that have taken place and continue to be inflicted upon the Tibetan people under the Chinese occupation and how these atrocities were and are still being ignored by the majority of the international community.

The Tibetan race has as its responsibility to preserve, promote, and disseminate a certain spiritual heritage, and this has been the case for the last 1500 years at least. Its particular responsibility or job has been to preserve a Buddhist-related spiritual heritage and Buddhist culture, for their own people and for the neighboring peoples: Mongolian, Manchuria, Chinese, Indian. These neighbors were being benefitted by the Tibetan people, and the Tibetan people were not meant to build up economic power or military power or political power. Their main responsibility was to the Buddhist spiritual and cultural heritage (p. 138).

PART V: SATYAGRAHA AND AHIMSA (TRUTH-INSISTENCE AND NON-HARMFULNESS).

It is here where one can learn more about Samdhong Rinpoche's efforts to promote a nonviolent approach, as did Mahatma Gandhi for the Indian people. Samdhong Rinpoche has taken a similar stand toward the cruelty and violence that the Tibetan people continue to experience in present day Tibet. Samdhong Rinpoche relates the principles of Satyagraha and Ahimsa in a universal context as they apply to the religions of the world.

So I would say that Satyagraha is an inviolable principle of all religious traditions—as far as my knowledge goes—no spiritual teaching would say that you can or should compromise the Truth. It cannot be given up to the convenience of worldly life. No teacher

of Truth would teach against this principle. The explanation of Truth may differ from religion to religion, but the importance of Truth and of remaining with that Truth—in this regard all religions are the same. And particularly when coming to Buddhism, we have more to consider. Buddhist teaching is unlike most of the other religious traditions in that it speaks of two different truths: the Absolute Truth and the relative or conventional truth (p. 169).

PART VI: THE FOUNDATIONAL VIEW—BUDDHADHARM.

This last chapter provides more extensive and specific details about the Buddhist teachings. These teachings are presented in a manner that is accurate, clear, and concise, benefitting readers who are non-Buddhist, to those who know very little, and to those who have a firm footing on the Buddhist path.

Today when we talk about the Buddha's teaching of selflessness or the not-self or Shunyata [emptiness], people mostly cannot comprehend the real connotations of these teachings. And they always fall into the error of negating the relative self. When you speak of selflessness, they take it to mean that they are completely devoid of self, that self does not exist at all (p. 202).

And finally we will end this review on an important note that is often taken out of context and confused in the West amongst spiritual seekers:

You cannot be deceived by your inner teacher. . . . [However it should be understood that] For very beginners, I don't think that without external guidance or without the transmission of an outer teacher, you can simply rely on books or your "inner teacher" (p. 227).

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