



What to say! Gendun Rinpoche

## ***Awakening to Sanity (letter 10)***

### ***Impartiality***

*Dear friend,*

*In my last letters I talked about a non-sectarian attitude and the thirst to find a unified spiritual approach which goes to the essentials and enables an understanding of the multiplicity of spiritual traditions that exist in the world. Such a non-sectarian attitude will be accompanied necessarily by an attitude of impartiality. One of the straightforward implications is that we will not get involved in politics. You might say that this is not possible; and in some way you are right because wherever people live together we have to find skilful ways to see to the needs of all those concerned. Seen from that angle politics is the art of living harmoniously within any larger community. But this ideal is not what we're experiencing today as being "politics" – which is rather a struggle of various lobbies and politicians to get financial advantages and power. Such politics have nothing to do with spiritual practice; they should stay out of it.*

*Why does one need to emphasize "no politics" in relation to spiritual practice? Well, because for as long as mankind remembers it has always spoiled the path to liberation. We are aware of how disastrous the power politics and self-serving interests of religious institutions have been in the past centuries in Europe and elsewhere. But for many people Buddhism seemed to be an exception to this rule. When the Buddha's teaching came to the West, most students were unaware of any politics involved. All teachers profess to teaching a "pure dharma", free of any political involvement, nevertheless for some of them a lot is going on in the background.*

*Now, some decades later, Western students have become aware of splits in lineages, the striving for expansion and occasional emotional criticisms of other teachers and traditions. We see the hidden influence of the search for power or money with the wish to expand the*

*number of centres belonging to one's own tradition. Some teachers have not abandoned the tendency to belittle the dharma activities of others or simply make us understand that "we are the best". In some dharma centres individuals, families or clans have taken advantage of donations and we must admit that some of the so-called "servants of the dharma" quite obviously came to the West motivated by self-serving interests.*

*Fortunately, in the midst of all of this hidden and open politics, we can always find teachers who are 'beyond politics' who've shown an example of how not to get involved in power games and of how to remain impartial even when surrounded by many people with sectarian inclinations, including of course the Western students. These masters show us how to live without identification even towards one's own status and tradition. They show us the authentic dharma that truly liberates.*

*But even these highly respected masters do not seem to be capable of resolving the political issues that have split lineages and separated traditions – at least not within a few years. Overcoming such problems seem to take a long time; and for as long as they last they drain a lot of energy. Most of those political issues were imported from the East and some of them are centuries old. Dharma has nothing to do with them and we should leave them behind.*

*One could say that true spiritual practice is actually the art of "finding skilful ways of taking care of the deepest needs of everyone". This definition is similar to the one given above as a definition of politics. But the emphasis here is on "deepest needs" and "everyone". As soon as our attitude becomes partial our practice and activities will serve less and less people.*

*Impartiality is the key to a non-sectarian spiritual activity and it will automatically keep us out of biased politics. However, to remain impartial does not mean that one does not see differences in attitude and behaviour; to be impartial is not to be a fool, and it does not mean that one agrees with everybody. Impartiality is the end of fighting, the end of striving for personal advantages. It is simply not becoming emotional when faced with conflicting views and arguments.*

*Our capacity to remain impartial in any given situation largely depends on our inner and outer freedom, our independence. When we do not depend on status, institutions, income, possessions or on the opinions of people, then we are free to say and do what really feels the best. If we want to practice in a non-sectarian, impartial way we have to cultivate our independence, our freedom.*

*With the best wishes for today, Tilmann Lhundrup*

*(corrected by Andy)*