

Child Education

Excerpts from 25 October 1981 meeting with Lama Thubten Yeshe

(some explanation and discussion on the 1982 child education conference)

LY: If I am here I am very happy to talk. I talked about children's education a little something with Max Mathews. I told to her. She doesn't have her notes? Why don't you ask if she has her papers from that time, also for her suggestions. She has a lot of experience.

CM: Last year, after she read a proposal I was writing at that time, she had one main recommendation. She thinks that the most important aspect on which we should focus is the training of teachers. You see, if we train teachers so that within their hearts they have deep understanding, then schools will come together with no problems. She recommended that a full year-long teacher training programme be organized that would include teachings and retreat in alternation on a full-time basis. Teachings from you, from H.H. the Dalai Lama, teachings from appropriate educators, psychologists, et c., all of these put together with periods of group work and discussion as well as periods of retreat and meditation. In this way, teachers would receive necessary information and also have the time to meditate and discuss and integrate everything into their minds. 'How do I use this when I am in the classroom, with children?'

LY: Right, actually she is right. That is the only way to organize thought and put together so that it becomes substantial education. Good. I think that is a very good idea. And also I think that some people like our old students who have much experience, philosophical background of Buddhism, these people can help put things together. At the same time, from the practical point of view, we can just make something like the Lam Rim. We make the story of Lam Rim, A, B, C, D; but not Lam Rim actually, but the essential character of the Lam Rim teachings. A presentation of dharma without religion and a scientific way of presentation.

We should present Buddhist wisdom scientifically. I think that should be. Otherwise you present education as religion, which is not good. But there is a religious aspect, and at the same time, it is very logical, very scientific, very psychologically feasible in the modern world. Then all right.

If you have some idea, for example, of how to express karma scientifically for children. There are many things concerning karma. For example, stories and histories. Make a situation like this young boy this, then this happened, he thought this, and he is this old... you just make up. Somehow change mind -- wow!

CM: There is one particular psychologist, Jean Piaget. His entire system concerns the intellectual development of children from birth through adulthood. His theories are very useful in a dharma context.

LY: Right, yes. That is why we should not call religion or something like that. Maybe somehow ... sort of...

JK: Maybe it is good for Buddhists to have schools and be identified. We can do that. But maybe what we are talking about now is something that does not have to stop at our schools. It is something that can be integrated into all Western education systems.

CM: My vision and my understanding that has come from talking to Lama is that we need to create learning environments in which you never have to say 'Buddhist' or 'Buddhism' or any of that terminology. However, the total foundation of the education offered is based completely on Buddha's wisdom.

LY: Right, exactly. That is what I think; exactly.

JK: So then it is serviceable.

CM: Yes, practical.

LY: Why don't we call ... our name is universal education? We call universal education, that's all. What do you think?

In Hawaii, they have Buddhist schools. And also in Australia, at Chenrezig, they have a good teacher now. They have, I think, 12 children, something like that. They have made one school already.

I think you understand what I want. Subjects: mental factors, prajna paramita subject, abhidharma and madhyamika, also life, death, bardo, rebirth, entire should be, all Lam Rim, all Buddha's wisdom should be put into children's education. Quite a big subject. But then all is accomplished. If you have the education put together then school is (snap) like that. Schools are nothing to worry about. School will happen, of course. The world is hungry for good education.

Now in Australia, they are using some Italian system there

JK: Montessori, Lama.

LY: Really, you like her?

CM: Like any system it depends on the teacher; sometimes it works very well with children, sometimes it is too loose.

JK: Permissive, then.

CM: It can appear to be very permissive, but it allows enormous creativity to arise. Extraordinary creativity. That is its objective.

JK: Then what to do with creativity? I mean, is that the goal? I mean, I had a very disciplined education and I have much gratitude for the discipline because I can function now. And I see other people who cannot function

LY: No, I think that it can be two ways. Because many children cannot take discipline. But by letting go with their creativity, they get hooked because of their interest there.

LY: My opinion is children need both discipline and letting go. Creativity and letting go are needed and at the same time also some discipline to put energy into the right channel. For example, I let you play with these things. That is discipline. I am giving time and space and letting you go. That is discipline. Creativity does not mean no discipline. Creativity has discipline. You have to put these things in their right place. You see? I think so.