



The 17th Karmapa Trinley Thaye Dorje

New Delhi, 14 May 2022

Dear dharma friends,

On the occasion of the 40th anniversary of Karma Kagyü Center Vienna, I would like to share a few thoughts on the nature of the Buddha dharma and the way it is shared and communicated.

What I have always found most inspiring about Buddhism is that it was never meant to be institutionalised. From the time of our historical Buddha Shakyamuni, and all the way till the first Karmapa Düsum Khyenpa, the beauty of the conditions was such that there was no real requirement for Buddhism to create institutions.

And from time to time I like to reflect on the beauty of those days when there was no need for the lineage to have any institutions. Most likely, the reason why I'm fond of reminiscing about those times is that they marked the beginning of the Buddhist era, and beginnings always have their own charm.

Now, having started by saying this, you will most likely expect me to continue along the lines of: "Unfortunately, thereafter things changed...", but that's not the point I'm trying to make. What I want to convey is simply that over time the karma of people changed (which is normal for karma), and as a result, slowly but surely the Buddha's teaching became embedded in institutions.

This process started mainly from the time of the second Karmapa, Karma Pakshi, onwards – the transmission of the Buddha dharma became increasingly structured and organised, and this structure and organisation took the form of institutions.

It's important to keep in mind that all of our dharma institutions were created and exist solely for the purpose of accomplishing the benefit of others. Should we lose sight of this purpose, it is inevitable that challenges will begin to arise.

An example that comes to mind when I think about the Buddha dharma and the institutions it has engendered is the packaging of agricultural produce. The produce itself first grows in a natural way, but then, in order to distribute it to others, in order to make it reach the end consumer, it needs to be packaged. So packaging is important, but at the end of the day the package will have to be opened and the content – not the package – is what will be consumed.



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In the beginning, there was no real need to package the Buddha dharma – it was more like a discovery: Buddha Shakyamuni had discovered the truth, and the early practitioners just embraced the truth 'as is'. But as the Buddha's teaching began to reach more and more people, it couldn't simply continue to be distributed 'as is': rather, it needed to be packaged according to various geographical and social conditions, cultures and mentalities, in order to make it manageable and practicable. And it was for that purpose that institutions – centres, teachers, administrators, curricula; in short, all the factors needed to package the Buddha dharma – evolved around it.

So therefore, institutions are beneficial, because they make it practical for us as practitioners to receive the Buddha dharma.

But once the dharma reaches us, packaged in these institutions, as it were, we are not supposed to put it on a shelf, decorate it nicely and keep it there: the package needs to be opened, and its content chewed and digested. The Buddha dharma needs to be used; it needs to be studied, contemplated, discussed and practiced.

And so this is what I wish for all of you on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the Karma Kagyü Center Vienna. As long as this happens there is every reason to rejoice in the existence of this institution.

I would like to conclude with a few words on the value of enjoyment:

Ever since the establishment of the Karma Kagyü Center Vienna and to this date, there have been so many individuals who have come and gone, so many teachings you have received, so many people you have encountered, so many memories you have made. And I'm sure that through the wealth of experience you have gathered you must have gained great insight into what it is like to live as a human being.

You must have enjoyed the discoveries made through the various encounters, teachings and practices that have taken place until now. I wish that you may continue to enjoy any future discoveries as well, not for the sake of any mission, but simply for the enjoyment itself.

We will always be connected – no matter how brief the moments we have shared – because we have met on the ground of enjoying the Buddha dharma. Thanks to this, wherever we may go, we will always carry with us a part of each other that we can cherish.

With prayers

Thaye Dorje, His Holiness the 17th Gyalwa Karmapa