

Setting the Record Straight: Buddhist Imposters

March 21, 1989

Editor:

To set the record straight, Mr. Osel Tendzin (Thomas Rich) has been wrongly portrayed as a Buddhist leader. His immoral behavior as heralded in the press has cast aspersions on the integrity of Buddhism. Because Buddhism is comparatively new in the West, many people are unclear as to what it means to be Buddhist. The odious publicity surrounding Mr. Tendzin further confuses the issue. Buddhism has a very clear basic moral framework. I wish to point out that Mr. Tendzin's immoral conduct and the "sexual freedom" promulgated by Vajradhatu, the group that Mr. Tendzin leads, violates the most fundamental Buddhist rules and principles .

The way of enlightenment in Buddhism is open to all because it teaches living beings how to realize their inherent wisdom. But such realization requires careful moral preparation and purification of the mind. One need only look at the canons of every Buddhist tradition to see that they share a common ground rooted in moral precepts. Furthermore, the Buddha instructed his disciples that, after his leaving the world, they should take the moral precepts as their Teacher. These are the very foundation of all Buddhist beliefs and the sine qua non for spiritual progress. Neither Mr. Tendzin nor his equally misguided mentor Chogyam Trungpa showed any understanding of, or respect for, this most basic and essential of the Buddha's teaching: moral purity.

Buddhist monks and nuns take vows of complete celibacy. Buddhist laymen and laywomen take vows that prohibit improper sexual conduct. This means that a layperson has sexual relations only with his or her lawful spouse. Homosexuality is an extreme deviation from the Buddhist moral code. Since the primary purpose of sexual activity is the continuation of the human species, homosexuality completely opposes the laws of nature, and, taken to its logical conclusion, would lead to the extinction of the human race.

Therefore, moral conduct becomes a litmus test for any person or group claiming itself to be "Buddhist." Any group that does not openly accept and adhere to the basic Buddhist moral code simply cannot be considered Buddhist. Thus, not only do Mr. Tendzin and Vajradhatu fail the test, but so do imposters such as Rajneesh, Rama, and others who practice and advocate promiscuous sexual behavior.

As described in the San Francisco Chronicle of 18 February 1989, and the New York Times of 21 February 1989, Mr. Tendzin is a homosexual and so violates the fundamental precept concerning sexual behavior. Furthermore, by knowingly infecting others with the AIDS virus he has committed the gravest offense towards humankind: taking the life of other human beings. Thinking that he was somehow magically immune and protected (a notion he suggests came from his equally confused "teacher") demonstrates both severe mental disturbance and an outright denial of the law of moral causation, which is a central pillar of the Buddha's teaching. Thus, he really does not measure up to being a decent person, how much the less a "Buddhist leader." Moreover, the status of Vajradhatu as a Buddhist group must be seriously questioned. The same articles report how within Vajradhatu there is no regard for the Buddhist rules governing sexual conduct, Therefore, how can such an organization be

considered Buddhist? They should not deceive the public by using the name "Buddhist" to describe themselves.

True Buddhists try to be free of contention and greed, not to be self-seeking or out for personal gain, to be unselfish and truthful; virtues that are all sorely lacking in Mr. Tendzin. By using the respectability of Buddhism to advance his selfish and deluded aims, he has tarnished the name of one of the major religions of the world and led many sincere, but naive, Westerners down a deviant road.

I believe many Westerners like myself have had enough of these imposters like Tendzin, Rajneesh, Rama and their ilk. More people should speak out against these charlatans so as to protect innocent and naive young people from being cheated by them. It is so tragic, as mentioned in the press, that Mr. Tendzin has very likely transmitted his lethal poison to a great many unsuspecting youths. He really is not worthy of being a follower (or member) of any of the major religions. Before Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed, and the founders of all the other major religions of the world, he should apologize for the grave wrong he has brought upon humankind.

Sincerely,

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