

KHENPO'S
TALKS

FAITH, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

LIMKOKWING UNIVERSITY
OF CREATIVE TECHNOLOGY



KHENPO
SODARGYE

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Faith, Science and Technology

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Khenpo Sodargye

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Hold fast to the valuable traditions and cultural heritage that have been passed down to you. On this foundation, you can confidently embrace new knowledge and technology.



Linkokwing University of Creative Technology

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Host

Good afternoon, everyone. Today we have a very special occasion for Limkokwing University of Creative Technology, as we have the distinct honor of welcoming Khenpo Sodargye for a special talk.

I have a little secret to share with you: the very first place Khenpo visited upon arriving today was my office. So, I suppose my office is now the most blessed place on campus!

Now, without further ado, I invite Khenpo Sodargye to speak to you. Thank you very much.

KHENPO SODARGYE RINPOCHE

I am a Tibetan from the Himalayas and I am a Tibetan monk. Many of you may have only seen Tibetan monks on TV before, and until now I had only seen Africa on TV. This is my first time in Africa.

Many Tibetans have a cheerful disposition and are naturally gifted singers and dancers, which is why the Tibetan plateau often echoes with our melodious songs. Recently, I have discovered that Africans share a similarly exuberant spirit. Yesterday, as I was flying from South Africa to Lesotho, the plane encountered severe turbulence. Seated ahead of me were several British and other European passengers, all of whom remained silent, perhaps unsettled by the rough ride. I, too, felt a bit anxious. But just in front of me sat a group of Africans, who, despite the turbulence, began to sing and laugh together. Their laughter was so warm and melodious that I found myself thinking, "Perhaps nothing bad will happen, because their joy is so infectious." Sometimes, the sound of genuine laughter can bring a deep sense of comfort.

AFRICA'S LEGACY

Today, I would like to speak to you about the relationship between faith and technology, and how the two interact.

I used to hear that Africa was a place marked by war and disease. Before coming here, that was the impression I had. But after arriving, I discovered that many places are not at all as I had imagined. More importantly, I found that people here possess a remarkable simplicity and kindness of heart—qualities that even the most technologically advanced countries may not have.

After spending time here, I have come to realize that, whether we look at the natural environment or at human genetics, Africa has had a profound impact on the entire world.

Some time ago, while in Cape Town, I met a professor of archaeology at the University of Cape Town who explained that people all over the world carry genetic lineages that can be traced back to the San people, also known as the African Bushmen. There are about 100,000 Bushmen in the world. He told me that the San possess some of the most ancient DNA found in living humans, and that, regardless of where we come from, all of us share this deep genetic heritage. A considerable number

of archaeologists, geneticists, and anthropologists share this view. As a result, the widely accepted hypothesis that humanity originated in Africa is strongly supported by both genetic and archaeological evidence.

It is well established that the origins of modern humans are connected to this land. In addition, Africa has played a significant role in the geological history of the Earth. According to geological research, the world's continents were once joined together in a supercontinent known as Pangaea, which gradually broke apart due to the movement of tectonic plates. Over millions of years, these plates drifted to form the continents as we know them today—Asia, the Americas, and others. The African plate, particularly its ancient cratons, has remained relatively stable over geological time. While it is not strictly accurate to call Africa the “anchor” of continental drift, it is true that the continent has preserved some of the oldest and most stable landmasses on Earth. The continents as we know them today gradually separated from the supercontinent Pangaea, with Africa remaining near the center of these tectonic movements.

From the perspectives of genetics, geology, and anthropology, it is clear that Africa is the origin of modern humans and home

to some of the oldest and most stable landmasses on Earth. In this sense, it is not an exaggeration to say that Africa is the cradle of humankind and a central part of the world's geological history.

However, if we look at the current reality, it is clear that, in terms of scientific and technological development, many countries in Asia, the Americas, Oceania, and Europe have advanced much further than Africa. This makes it all the more important for the teachers and students present today—for you are the future innovators, leaders, and stewards of your nation's culture, politics, and economy. With this in mind, it is both necessary and your responsibility to reflect deeply on these challenges and opportunities.



BETWEEN FAITH AND TECHNOLOGY

1 The Culture That Is Disappearing

We are living in an extraordinary era, one in which traditional cultures across the globe are experiencing unprecedented challenges. At the same time, we are witnessing rapid advancements in science and technology, which require our ongoing acceptance and adaptation. This is a time of profound tension and even collision between tradition and modern civilization.

Many young people today have grown up in the age of the Internet, and their perspectives have been shaped by this digital revolution. As a result, they may not share the same traditional values or religious beliefs as previous generations. Instead, they are often more influenced by modern technology and contemporary culture. For instance, many of them can sing popular Western songs but may no longer know the traditional songs that have been passed down through their own cultures for thousands of years. Likewise, the customs and wisdom inherited within families are at risk of being lost among the younger generation.

In our current era, it is increasingly common for people to have no religious or cultural faith at all. Instead, many place

their trust solely in what might be called the “religion of science.” For people everywhere—whether African, Asian, or otherwise—science may become the only belief system.

If we place our faith solely in science while neglecting the wisdom of our civilization, there are both benefits and drawbacks. We must recognize that science, while powerful, is a form of knowledge—it is not a source of morality. If scientific knowledge is guided by those with integrity and compassion, it can bring great benefit to humanity. However, if it is wielded by those with harmful intentions, it can bring suffering and disaster on a global scale.

2 Reflections and Regrets of Pioneering Scientists

As many of you may know, Alfred Nobel, the Swedish inventor, lived in the nineteenth century. In the 1860s, he observed how arduous and dangerous mining work was and sought to make it easier by developing dynamite. Although his intention was to benefit society, his invention was adapted for use in warfare, causing immense destruction and loss of life. As the destructive potential of his invention became clear, Nobel was filled with deep regret. Despite amassing great wealth from it, he was troubled by the harm it had caused humanity.

It is widely believed that, in an effort to atone for the destructive uses of his invention, Nobel dedicated the majority of his fortune to establishing the Nobel Prizes, which have, for over a century, honored individuals whose work has brought significant benefit to humankind. Through this, Nobel hoped both to make amends for the unintended consequences of his invention and to use his resources to promote the welfare of humanity.

Similarly, Albert Einstein initially sought to benefit humanity through his scientific work. However, his theories were later applied to the development of the atomic bomb, which the United States dropped on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Einstein was deeply troubled by this outcome.

This serves as a reminder that new technologies can bring both great benefits and significant risks. In recent years, I have observed that many leading global companies—such as Microsoft and Google from the United States, and Huawei from China—are investing heavily in Africa, seeking new markets and opportunities. As a result, young people across the continent are being introduced to innovative products like smartphones and computers, often for the first time. While these advances can open up new worlds, there is also the risk that, in embracing

modern technology, young people may lose touch with their traditional cultures and beliefs.

Therefore, my advice to the young people of Africa is this: hold fast to the valuable traditions and cultural heritage that have been passed down to you. On this foundation, you can confidently embrace new knowledge and technology. Above all, do not lose sight of your original beliefs and values, for they are the roots that will sustain you in a rapidly changing world.



FAITH: A SPIRITUAL HOME

Today, it is deeply alarming to see that an increasing number of people identify as having no religious affiliation, though many do hold personal beliefs or values. There is a saying, often attributed to the French writer Victor Hugo, that faith is essential for human beings and that those who believe in nothing suffer from a kind of spiritual poverty. Perhaps some younger people may not fully grasp the significance of these words, but it is true that every person needs a spiritual home—a sense of belonging for the heart and mind. Whether this comes from your own traditional religion or another path, such as Buddhism or Christianity, the importance of faith remains.

In recent years, Buddhist practices—particularly meditation—have gained increasing attention in universities across the globe. On my recent visit to the United Kingdom, I had the opportunity to visit institutions such as University College London, Oxford, and Cambridge. At each of these universities, there are Buddhist societies and meditation groups where both faculty and students engage in mindfulness practice.

Meditation has come to be widely regarded as highly beneficial for mental well-being. In today's fast-paced world, many

people find themselves overwhelmed by anxiety and stress. For example, in the United Kingdom, where the population exceeds sixty million, it is estimated that millions of people experience depression or anxiety each year. As a result, it is not uncommon to see people who rarely smile, or whose smiles do not reach their hearts. To cope with these challenges, many turn to meditation as a way to calm their minds and find solace.

I am not sure whether depression is common in Lesotho. From what I have observed, people here seem cheerful and content, and I imagine that cases of depression are relatively rare. Would you say that you are happy?

In these turbulent times, faith—especially in moments of moral crisis—can offer profound benefits. Buddhist teachings, for example, can help us cultivate inner peace and resilience. I encourage both teachers and students to take time to explore Buddhism and other spiritual traditions, and to use their wisdom to nurture a healthy and joyful mind.

With that, I will conclude my talk. If you have any questions, I will be happy to answer them.



QUESTION AND ANSWER

QUESTION 1 How can we integrate these Buddhist teachings with our existing religious beliefs? From your lecture, I understand that balance is essential. Given our fast-paced modern lifestyle, how can we trust that these newly introduced practices will effectively address the challenges we currently face?

KHENPO SODARGYE Our faith should embrace openness. We can maintain our primary religious tradition while understanding and learning from other spiritual paths.

For example, I am a Buddhist, but I also deeply respect the concept of charity in Christianity. I visit Christian churches to pray and light candles, and I engage in dialogue about the Bible with many people. If I were narrow-minded and only accepted my own tradition, I would not be able to have these enriching experiences.

We now live in an age of multiculturalism, where we can learn about other religions, cultures, and scientific advances without violating our own spiritual principles. If we insist that only our

own religion is valid and reject all others, we might also close ourselves off to modern science—something that benefits us all.

QUESTION 2 Could you briefly tell us how to meditate when we face challenges that may lead to depression?

KHENPO SODARGYE Meditation is not something to begin only when difficulties arise; rather, it is a practice to cultivate regularly, even before challenges appear. Much of our suffering and desire stem from an unsettled mind. Often, a seemingly minor issue becomes magnified simply because our mental state is unstable. What could be a small problem grows larger and feels insurmountable. Sometimes, wisdom alone could resolve these issues, but when the mind is unsettled, even relationships with family or colleagues become strained.

That is why it is beneficial to spend a few minutes each morning—whether five, ten, thirty, or even sixty minutes—calming and relaxing the mind. This daily practice helps to stabilize our mental state.

Some may feel that meditation is inherently religious—perhaps Buddhist or Christian—and therefore not suitable for them. However, institutions like Oxford University now promote a

secular form of meditation, free from any religious affiliation. This nonsectarian approach focuses simply on calming and centering the mind, making it accessible and relevant to many people, especially in today's fast-paced world.

By incorporating such practices into our morning and evening routines, we become better equipped to handle life's challenges with greater ease and clarity.

QUESTION 3 I would like to know how what you taught us today is relevant to our lives. Are there any practical steps or advice that can help us apply these teachings in our daily lives once we leave here? What can we take with us to help us overcome the difficulties we may face?
Thank you.

KHENPO SODARGYE I would like to emphasize two main points from my talk today.

First, it is essential to honor and preserve one's own culture and beliefs. Many young people today are drawn to new trends and the allure of the modern world, often at the expense of their own traditions. This tendency, I believe, is not beneficial for the future. I sincerely hope that young people in Africa will cherish

and carry forward their traditional cultures and beliefs, rather than abandoning them.

Second, it is equally important to embrace the advancements of modern science and technology. In our era, it is vital for the people of Africa to actively seek out and learn about scientific and technological developments, for the benefit of their countries and for humanity as a whole.

In summary, my two suggestions are these: do not lose sight of your traditional cultures and beliefs, and at the same time, seize the opportunity to learn from and integrate modern technology. By balancing these two aspects, you will be better equipped to overcome the challenges that lie ahead.

QUESTION 4 Can the practice of Buddhist teachings help us manage our everyday emotions? If so, how?

KHENPO SODARGYE Yes, Buddhist teachings can indeed help us manage our emotions in daily life. Buddhism provides us with a kind of map for understanding our emotions—a map not only of our feelings but also of our inner world. Through Buddhist practice, we can clearly identify the presence of destructive, negative emotions, as well as recognize positive and healthy states of mind.

This is one reason why many leading universities today incorporate Buddhist meditation into their programs. Meditation and other Buddhist methods allow us to analyze and understand our mental states. Often, people are not fully aware of their own negative emotions—such as intense desire, jealousy, pride, or anger. But Buddhism offers tools to recognize these emotions. Once we become aware of them, it is like identifying a thief: when you know who the thief is, you can keep watch and prevent harm. In the same way, by recognizing and understanding our negative emotions, we can prevent them from disrupting our daily lives.

Therefore, if we wish to live a happy and fulfilling life, it is essential to understand our own minds.

Host

I would like to thank everyone for taking the time to join us today and for your willingness to learn together. I hope that what you have learned today will prove to be meaningful and valuable in your lives. Thank you all for your presence and your engagement. We look forward to staying in touch.

Dedication

May the merit resulting from this piece of work contribute
in the greatest possible measure to the long life of all great
masters, to the flourishing of the Buddhadharma,
and to the welfare of all sentient beings.

It is always our wish to present a work of the highest quality to the readers so that anyone who reads this text would find inspiration. So we would very much appreciate your comments, feedback or suggestions for how this text might be improved and made more valuable. You are also greatly welcomed if you want to make a contribution to any of our other projects of translation. Please email us at: *translation@khenposodargye.org*



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