

February 10, 2023

**Thaye Dorje, the 17th Gyalwa Karmapa shares this message of condolence after the earthquake on the border of Syria and Turkey.**

Dear Dharma friends,

It is with deep sorrow that I have been following the developments after the devastating earthquake that hit the border area between Turkey and Syria last Monday.

As I write these lines, the death toll has risen to over twenty-one thousand, and tens of thousands more have been injured, not to speak of all those who have become homeless and have lost the very basis of their material existence.

Words don't do justice to how one feels for those who are experiencing such calamity and even prayers seem to feel weak in the face of such suffering. The only thing that one can recall is that life is truly fragile; it's sad that only such potent tragedies seem to be able to wake us up to a genuine sense of impermanence.

However, this may be an opportunity to realize that impermanence is the reality and that in a curious way, this impermanence is also the place where we can find solace: impermanence shows us that none of us were ever here in the first place and therefore no one truly perishes, as there is no one really here to perish.

We can't help but feel that the loved ones we have lost are 'gone' to an unknown place and that we are 'alive' on a different plane and therefore we feel separated, apart and stranded.

I feel that impermanence is one of the aspects of life that indicate to us—and in a way through us that it is futile to attempt to bring back what we have lost and that we must live with the pain of loss.

I feel that life is calling to us through impermanence, indicating that the word 'lost' or the thought of 'separation' is only that—a word, a thought and nothing else.

So please try to find a way to not only know but feel that we are only separated by words, thoughts and concepts. Concepts do symbolize being together, being alive, being connected. That is their beauty.

However, no one is truly living, alive, lingering 'here'. No one is truly dead and lost, gone 'there'.

Being 'here' and 'there' are concepts only expressed by us humans. And there is nothing wrong with expressing ourselves the human way. That's what we do.

Nevertheless, being human also means having the courage to understand that we can't ask our concepts to bring back our loved ones, to rewind or to dwell on 'what-ifs'.

We have to let go of the concepts of the loved ones and the concept of them being lost.

Instead of crying and begging our concepts to bring back things to the way they were, we must find a way to let the concepts go and cherish what they gave us, all the beautiful memories they have provided us.

In this way we can come to realize that if we feel apart it's only an expression: an expression of how we never want to be separate and how we wish to never be apart.

But we don't have to believe that we are truly apart, because without concepts we were never apart to begin with.

Yet, it is our luxury as human beings that we have opportunities to say "I love you" still. We have the luxury of saying "I don't want to be apart from you", even though we have never been apart.

For example, when we ask somebody to pray for us, it is already a given that there will never be a shortage of prayer—nevertheless, we still formulate the wish. And in a way, that's the beauty of it.

In this way, concepts have done so much for us, since without concepts we will never know how much we love each other. The reality is that we have always loved each other, way before we knew concepts, but it's concepts that have helped us understand that very fact.

It's the same for all aspects of life and it's unfortunate that we come to this realization only when shaken by great tragedies and that the small things, the small details in life didn't manage to shake us or wake us.

And so therefore, the experience of being separated that we are getting now is yet another help from our concepts: the opportunity to realize that we are never truly apart.

In short, what I'm trying to convey is this: appreciate your concepts, but don't beg them to bring back things to the way they were, don't ask them to rewind. And don't misuse concepts by trying to find who is responsible for your pain, don't use them to cast blame.

If we misuse concepts in this way, by trying to bring back things to the way they were or by casting blame, we will not find any sense of solace or control, because concepts were never meant to do that.

It is natural for thoughts like "How will I live now?" and for feelings of being alone, afraid, lost and apart to arise at times like this. When these thoughts and emotions arise, we can allow them because they are just unique ways of really saying, "I wish I was never apart and I miss you dearly".

Therefore, the only solace or comfort we can find is in the understanding that we never were apart.

If you remember the looks from your loved ones' eyes, if you remember their touches, especially during moments when no words were being said, then these memories can give us a glimpse of the truth: that we never really needed concepts to know that love was always there.

And in this way, we might come to realize that concepts were just decorating the already beautiful flowers.

And so, I'm not trying to say that you must be strong, you must live, you must be brave, as if the tragedy were real, as if you and your loved ones were truly apart and you were truly left behind and lost.

We don't have to try to be strong as if we were weak. We don't have to try to live as though we were dying. We don't have to be brave as if we lacked courage. We were never meant for any of that.

Instead, we can simply cherish and appreciate all the beautiful memories that our concepts have given us.

And say a heartfelt 'fare well' to the concepts for letting us realize that we were never apart in the first place.

With prayers,

—Thaye Dorje, the 17th Gyalwa Karmapa