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UNION BOUDDHISTE
DE FRANCE

UNION BOUDDHISTE DE FRANCE - U.B.F

Fédération nationale des associations bouddhistes de France

Interfaith Conference on August 4, 2024
on the occasion of the Olympic Games
"How does sport mobilize the best
for man and humanity?"
Address by Lama Jigmé Thrinlé Gyatso
UBF Co-President

Mr. President of the International Olympic Committee, thank you for inviting us to speak this morning, and thank you to the Diocese of Paris for organizing this conference, echoing the interfaith ceremony of 1924, in this powerful and symbolic venue.

I hope that our speech will go beyond the symbolic, so that it will be full of meaning and inspire true and profound fraternity between all human beings and all peoples.

The existence of a multi-faith center in the Olympic Village, with chaplains on hand to welcome any athletes who so wish, brings us together and enables us to experience a wonderful adventure of human and fraternal sharing.

According to Buddhist philosophy, there is nothing in this world that is absolutely good or bad. This is true not only of sport, but also of religion itself. It's what people do with it that makes sport positive or negative; the same goes for religion and all areas of life.

But what makes a woman's or man's sporting activity positive or negative? First and foremost, it's motivation. So, before embarking on a sporting activity, it might be a good idea to take a look at our motivation and improve it if necessary...

For the Buddhist tradition, the ideal that makes a sporting activity truly positive is when, beyond the fact of winning or losing, the motivation is to accomplish our activity to the best of our ability, and thus fulfill ourselves while being a source of joy and happiness for all beings. This is a source of complete satisfaction. On the contrary, selfishly striving to achieve a goal only leads to dissatisfaction, disappointment and bitterness.

Sport, whether professional or amateur, has a universal scope, notably through its playful aspect which is its origin and which helps social cohesion within a family, a tribe, a people, and nowadays at an international and even global level thanks to media coverage.

Even within a monastery, sport as a game can play a beneficial role in relaxing and relieving physical, psychological or interpersonal tensions. But it can also be a source of tension in its own right. That's why it's so important to be vigilant about our own motivation.

Grande Pagode - Route de ceinture du Lac Daumesnil - 75012 PARIS

Téléphone : 06 19 14 25 52 - courriel : info@bouddhisme-france.org - www.bouddhisme-france.org - n°

SIRET : 52976836800019

Sporting activity also often involves the notion of competition, which is sometimes disparaged, but which, as in nature or in the spiritual realm, implies a certain surpassing of oneself or invites us to surpass ourselves by pushing back our physical and mental limits.

To achieve this, sport requires a great deal of physical and mental discipline, which we learn to dose with precision, so that it is neither too hard nor too lax, in line with the correctness so dear to Buddhism's Middle Way.

Sport is also sometimes practised in support of altruistic or ecological causes, which is a credit to the athletes who do it, and an inspiring example of generosity and mutual aid.

Another dimension of sport is beauty (even if this notion is relative). The beauty of the body, of movement or of group cohesion, brings strong feelings of harmony and communion to those who do the sport and to those who watch it. This invites us to develop two important qualities: appreciation and enjoyment.

Less well known, sport can also be the source of profound spiritual experiences when, for example, subject, object and act become one in the moment or in the effort or absence of effort...

By practising a sport, we can learn a great deal about ourselves, and thus get to know and understand others better, which in turn increases our benevolence. And benevolence means peace.

But we all know how fragile external peace is. There's no doubt that sport can be a vehicle for peace, but for that to happen, every sportsman and woman needs to be at peace with themselves and within themselves. The most beautiful emotions and the greatest admiration are born when we see true respect and fraternity between sportsmen and women!

So let's not remain on the surface of sport, or of our religions, or of our very being. Let's not stay on the surface of appearances or winning or losing. To stay on the surface is to remain ignorant and deluded, and to put ourselves in the peril described by Blaise Pascal: "he who wishes to be an angel, becomes a beast". We see this all too clearly in all areas of society today, with all kinds of excesses and abuses...

When sportsmen and women and their supporters behave as truly fraternal competitors and not as adversaries, they become a source of inspiration for all humanity.