
The Quick Path to Enlightenment

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As usual, we will start with a couple of minutes of meditation.

We're up to the topic on how to listen to and teach the Dharma. In the last teaching, we finished the way we should listen to the Dharma.

How to teach the Dharma

Now we'll continue with the teaching on how to teach the Dharma. This concerns what kind of motivation or mental attitude the teacher or the person who gives the Dharma discourse should have. A teacher's motivation for giving the Dharma should be to benefit other beings, the listeners, and to ensure it is not corrupted by any of the eight worldly concerns. When listening to the Dharma, we should recognise ourselves as a patient, the teacher as a doctor and the Dharma as the medicine. The teacher should also recognise this. Most importantly, the teacher must ensure that their motivation is solely to benefit others. When teaching the Dharma, we don't necessarily have to sit on a formal throne or chair. Teaching the Dharma can also occur in our daily life, like when we are interacting with our family members or friends. Talking about the Dharma in an informal manner means we are also teaching other beings.

As to whom we teach the Dharma? One sutra says, 'Do not give Dharma without being first requested to teach'. The implication is that the Dharma should not be given openly to everyone you come across. So, it should only be taught on request. This sutra however makes some exceptions to the teaching of others without any request. For example, it is appropriate to teach the Dharma if we think it will benefit other beings. In addition, His Holiness the Dalai Lama emphasised that when teaching the Dharma, the teacher's motivation should not be to propagate their own beliefs. If someone is motivated by propagating their own belief system, it may encourage others to propagate their belief systems which can result in conflict and confusion. In terms of the six perfections, giving the Dharma is the perfection of giving. Of the three types of giving, the giving of material objects, the Dharma and protection from fear, giving the Dharma is supreme.

Coping with difficulties

During this pandemic, people have so much time at home due to lockdowns and curfews. I hear some people are finding it very difficult to cope with social isolation and other problems during these times. So, one way we can help support others is by comforting them with our Dharma knowledge and experience. As well as helping others, we can also find the Dharma beneficial during this difficult time. So, we must make the best use of our time by the Dharma practice to our own life. This will be very beneficial.

If we examine the cause of unhappiness and stress, then we find that ninety percent of our problems are directly related to our thoughts. I have been talking with my monk friends in monasteries in India. Like everyone here, they have been isolated in their rooms during the COVID-19 pandemic for nearly two years now. But they don't seem to be unhappy or complaining. In fact, some of them said that being locked in the house has given them a wonderful opportunity to catch up with studying and practising the Dharma. They have been saying the time in lockdown has given them added time to catch up on certain practices and learn an area of the Dharma which they were not able to do before. So, my friends don't seem to be bothered by lockdowns, rather they are saying positive things about being in lockdown. What I am trying to say here is that it's not the situation but how we think and feel about the situation, whether it is positive or negative, that affects our experience. Whether we are happy or not, tense or relaxed, has more to do with our own state of mind than the situation we are in.

Mind can be a real problem

If our mind is not brought under control, it can bring about a great deal of suffering and problems. The Buddha says in a sutra:

Conceptual thoughts are a hindrance, and they arise from our mind but when we realise that the mind lacks intrinsic nature, there is no hindrance as such.

So, this quotation is saying that when we think of the cause of the harm, we may relate it to some other person or a harmful spirit etc., but the real cause is our own unsubdued mind and disturbing thoughts. Where do these disturbing thoughts come from? As it says in that sutra, 'it arises from our own mind' and they are simply an extension of our own mental elaborations. In other words, they are just imputed by our mind. Therefore, they don't exist from their own side or have an intrinsic existence themselves. By realising the reality of our mind as lacking intrinsic existence, all these disturbing thoughts and emotions which directly bring us problems will come to an end.

Let me share a story about a monk who, in 1959, following the Chinese occupation of Tibet, left Tibet and reached India via Nepal. In India, he joined the Indian military service. After serving in the army for several years, he went back to Nepal to pursue a meditation retreat in a remote area.

When he was doing his retreat, he could hear, not far from where he was, the Nepalese border police talking about arresting Tibetan refugees who crossed the border and sending them back into the hands of the Chinese border officers. He heard the same conversations for a few days in a row.

He then began to worry about being arrested by the Nepalese police and being handed over to the Chinese authorities. He started to think about what would happen after being handed over to the Chinese authorities and being imprisoned and tortured. So, he kept worrying and stressing himself over this again and again and, in the end, took his own life because he couldn't cope.

But what he went through was all created by his mind. There were no Nepalese police near where he was doing his retreat and even if there had been police there, they wouldn't have spoken Tibetan. All this happened because, even before he began the retreat, he had serious concerns that the border police might find him. As he arrived in that place and began his retreat, his concern and suspicion kept haunting him, and it became so real to him that he committed suicide rather than falling into the hands of the Chinese authorities.

This story shows us how our own thoughts can become a cause of harm and suffering for us. If we don't take care of and control our mind then we can become a victim of our own mind and suffer a lot because of that.

Is the Dharma beneficial to us?

The master Dharmakirti's text, *Commentary to Valid Cognition* says, 'When all the causes are present, how can the result be prevented?' In other words, we must recognise that a problem arises because all the causes for it have come together. When we face difficulties, we should recognise that the reason we face difficulties is because all the causes and conditions are present. Because the causes are there, the result is inevitable. We should also reflect on Shantideva's well-known verse which says:

If it can be remedied, why be unhappy about it and if it cannot be remedied, what is the benefit of being unhappy.

If we do not find this teaching beneficial or relevant, then it is of no value to us. The time we need help and guidance is when we face difficulties. So again, in difficult times, we must make use of our Dharma knowledge by applying it to our situation.

For example, reflecting on our knowledge of the law of cause and effect and the suffering nature of cyclic existence will give us hope and direction. We need to think over Dharma topics frequently to become habituated with them. In that way, we will gain benefit from our Dharma knowledge.

There is also a verse from the *Thirty-seven Practices of Bodhisattvas* which says, 'To a bodhisattva who wants a wealth of virtue, all harms are like precious treasure'. This line is giving us instructions about how we can transform unfavourable situations into favourable situations. Like the pandemic we are facing now. It may look like an unfavourable situation, but we can turn it into a favourable situation by making the best of use of our spare time to further our knowledge and practice of the Dharma.

So, as I said before, some of my monk friends in lockdown in the monastery in India are taking great joy in being able to memorise *The Essence of Eloquence Speech* by Tsongkhapa and reciting it numerous times. Because of the bulky size of the text, it is not easy to accomplish this during the normal busy schedule in the monastery.

Some things to think over

Over the last few weeks we have been talking about the three main headings of the lamrim teaching – the greatness of the author, the greatness of the Dharma and how to listen to and teach the Dharma. The lamrim text states that for more details about those headings we should refer to

Tsongkhapa's Great and Middle Treatises. In relation to this, there are a couple of questions I have raised.

Relating to the heading, The Greatness of the Author, a question relating to the interpretation arises from a line in Tsongkhapa's *Great Treatise* where it states, 'The author of that is also the author of this'. If you recall, one scholar posited that Atisha and Tsongkhapa were the same person. However, the author of the *Quick Path*, which we are currently studying, claimed that that is not the right interpretation because it is unlikely that such a great master and humble practitioner as Tsongkhapa would claim to be Atisha. Have you come up with any explanation?

The author of *Quick Path* says that Tsongkhapa would not claim to be on the same continuum as Atisha, though we can say Tsongkhapa shares the same continuum with Atisha. So why did Tsongkhapa make that statement, 'The author of that is also the author of this'? It is to give credit for his *Great Treatise* to Atisha, the author of *The Lamp for the Path of Enlightenment*. This is because, as far as Tsongkhapa is concerned, his *Great Treatise* explains Atisha's *The Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*. So, everything that is mentioned in the *Great Treatise* is related to what is mentioned in *The Lamp for the Path*.

One travel guidebook records that Atisha spent thirteen years in Tibet. However, here the text clarifies that Atisha spent seventeen years in Tibet as explained in Tsongkhapa's *Great Treatise*. The source for this is the biography of Atisha composed by translator Nagtso where in it is stated Nagtso studied under Atisha for nineteen years – two years in India and seventeen years in Tibet. *The Long Biography of Atisha* composed by Nagtso says: 'Even though I have been associated with you in service for nineteen years, I have never seen any stain of flaws from errors in your body, speech and mind. From the time you were in Somapuri, (in India) teaching *Blazing Logic*, you said, "After twenty years I will give up life activities." Then two years later, when you were coming to Tibet from Vikramasila you said, "After eighteen years, I will give up my life activities then leave this body in Tibet." Whatever you said has happened, without error. It is wonderful.'

We don't have much time left for tonight's teaching, so we won't go any further. After this, there is one part in the teaching where it talks about the bodhicitta mind and bodhicitta being the door to Sutrayana as well as tantra. For those of us familiar with the teachings on bodhicitta, we know why bodhicitta is the door to the Mahayana path and the sutra path because, upon cultivation of bodhicitta, we commence the first Mahayana path of accumulation, and hence enter the Mahayana path. But here it says that bodhicitta is also the door to tantra. So, I just want you to think about that. What does it mean? Does it mean that when we cultivate bodhicitta we are also entering into the tantric path? Do we have to have bodhicitta to engage in the tantric path? So, I want you to think on this.

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