



2. Dharma Study & Practices



Q: Why do we talk about the 3 root poisons – and why not only 1 i.e. ignorance?

Ans: We need to understand all 3 because ignorance requires anger and attachment to act itself out. Ignorance is like the king but anger and attachment are the home minister and foreign minister. These 3 are the most potent combination within the entire set of delusions because these 3 manage all other afflictions. Ignorance initiates anger and attachment, which in turn activate other afflictive emotions. If ignorance didn't have the strong support of anger and attachment, it cannot do much. Similarly with anger and attachment, without ignorance, they are directionless. Ignorance stays unseen whereas anger and attachment are visible and manage the rest of the delusions. Anger is there because attachment is there; attachment is there because anger is there and both are under control of ignorance. Hence these 3 are the root poisons.

Q: What happens to practitioners who only meditate on one's breath or on the Buddha's form but not on teachings

Ans: Meditators only focusing on the breath will enable them to train to a certain level of concentration but it will not be as beneficial as meditating on Buddha's holy image because Buddha's image itself will bring strong positive imprints. However, merely meditating on the



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breath and Buddha's form are also not sufficient because although they bring some element of concentration and merit, they won't bring the full effect of subduing one's afflictions. Therefore, the best is to meditate on the teachings and advice of the Buddhas which offer training in concentration, merit and knowledge to overcome afflictions and gain enlightenment. That would be the best.

Q: Prince Siddhartha left the palace for his spiritual pursuits, without getting permission from his parents and wife. We know he did the right thing. But what made Siddhartha think that he would do it right and succeed? Is it right for anyone now in these modern times, to emulate him/follow his example?

Ans: It would be perfect to follow Prince Siddhartha if one were like him. In the Mahayanic assertions, he was already a Buddha and chose rebirth as Prince Siddhartha to display the deeds of how to become a Buddha to guide living beings to liberation and enlightenment. Therefore, he already knew exactly the advantages and disadvantages of his actions and the outcome. If we don't accept this assertion, we then have to study the life of the Buddha, infer and learn from it. In Buddha's own teachings, it is stated that when an ordinary person wants to be ordained, one of the requirements is obtaining permission from parents.



Q: Does all good karma lead to enlightenment? For example the god-realms said to be luxurious. A person who has done much good deeds could get born here and yet, the god-realms are one of the 6 suffering realms in samsara. This indicates that good karma does not always lead to enlightenment and can keep us in samsara!

Ans: Not all good karma leads to enlightenment. The karma that leads to enlightenment has to be motivated by renunciation, be infused with bodhicitta and based on an understanding of dependent arising. Otherwise, good karma only results in actual suffering, contaminated pervasive suffering and the suffering of change. Even where there is pleasure, it is “contaminated” pleasure because it is not lasting nor contains the truth of happiness. Hence whilst all the fortune of the god realms is due to good karma, it is good karma that was done without full understanding and application of renunciation, bodhicitta and understanding dependent arising/emptiness. This results in those beings still experiencing suffering in the god-realms in the form of pervasive suffering and the suffering of changes. Then there is karma that only leads to liberation and not to full enlightenment. One needs to learn about karma thoroughly.



Q: In natural disasters and accidents, many people die together and yet some survive. Would it be correct to say that the victims have the collective karma to be involved together in such calamities?

Ans: For a group of people to be in the same accident shows there is collective karma amongst them. However, how each person in the group experiences the accident will be different, depending on the different karmic causes of each individual. Remember a portion of that experience is determined by the “20%” collective karma; the rest of the experience is determined by individual karma.

Q: The concept of beginningless time is hard to understand. At which point did humans come into being?

Ans: It is very true that for ordinary beings like us without omniscient wisdom, there being no beginning of life is difficult to accept. But there is a being who does have omniscient wisdom which is Buddha. In the beginning, he too had no answer. Out of the wish to know, he cultivated, he developed wisdom, he evolved into the Buddha and he saw that there is the existence of humans but no beginning. But this doesn't mean that there is no starting point; it is simply immeasurable in terms of numbers of years or aeons; immeasurable within human understanding. By researching Buddha's philosophy and applying



analysis, there are a 100 reasons to accept this principle and perhaps only 1 reason not to accept.

Q: Although the Mahayana teachings sound noble in asking everyone to think of others but realistically speaking, shouldn't we take care of ourselves and our families first before taking care of others?

Ans: The Mahayana teachings do encourage us to start by taking care of our parents and the family and once one is able to successfully do this within the family, one will have the foundation to move on to include other beings. Otherwise, the idea of "helping all living beings" doesn't move your heart. Therefore, there is benefit in starting from a real person and then progress from there.

Q: Is it possible to be wealthy and be good Dharma practitioner at same time? Are there any examples in scriptures of this?

Ans: It is possible for the two to exist in one person. Being good practitioner is not about being poor or being rich but about



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developing inner qualities – selflessness, contentment, renunciation, compassion. All these can develop in all beings if they wish to, as all have the same potential. Dharma practice is not an external activity or phenomena. Tsongbun Norbu Sangpo (one of the Buddha's previous lives) is one of the great successful businessman who was a bodhisattva and greatly benefited Dharma by being honest and subdued the negativities of others using his talent in business.

Q: I would like to know more about how to dispel the two extremes of eternalism and nihilism.

Ans: To dispel the 2 extremes of eternalism (that things exist inherently) and nihilism (nothing exists), one needs to learn about interdependent existence or dependent arising. With this, one will then be able to understand emptiness. To understand the Prasangika's view on emptiness, one should put effort to study and contemplate on how self/phenomena come about and dependent arising. To be able to grasp the full and subtle meanings, we need to put effort to gain merit and purify negativities which are the obstacles to understanding emptiness. Without this, although one may know the theory, one's understanding will be shallow and you will not be convinced nor gain realizations.



Q: The Sangha Jewel is one who has realized emptiness directly. At the same time, we know that realizing emptiness is not an exclusive Buddhist thing. Anyone can attain this with right effort and conditions. That would imply that a person who has released emptiness could be from any religion or even an atheist. Does it mean that such persons should also be venerated as our Sangha Jewel?

Ans: If one has direct realization emptiness, then it doesn't matter what background that person has. That person is part of the Sangha Jewel.

Q: I have a thangka of Dzambala and Shri Vaishravana Shambala, the one that sits on a white lion with a wheel prayer on his right. I'd like to know which mantra corresponds to this deity in order to change its place and put it in my Shrine to do prayers and make offerings to?

Ans: When you place the thangka on your shrine, first you light up a candle. If you have incense then offer that. If not, sprinkle perfume on your shrine and with a joyful mind, think that you are hosting not just a thangka of Dzambala and Vaishravana as a display of art but rather, one should motivate and visualize that oneself is hosting the real

Dzambala and Vaishravana surrounded by their entourage and all ten directions Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. After you hang the thangka, you make three prostrations, then recite Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer three times, then recite the consecration mantra three times:

Om Ye Dharma Hetu Trabhava Hetun Teken Tathagato Hyavadatta
Tekan Tsa Yo Nirodha Evam Badi Maha Shramana Ye Svaha

While reciting this mantra, you can throw flower petals as a gesture of offering to the holy objects. If you know any auspicious prayer, then recite the auspicious prayer, if not, just wish auspiciousness by hosting this holy object. Then make strong dedication for your wish and for ultimate happiness of all beings.

This practice is not just for this thangka. Whenever you are hosting any kind of holy object in your house or anywhere, this is one of the most simplest consecration practices that you and anybody can do.

Answer to your question re: the mantra, if it is White Dzambala, then you can practice reciting Om Pema Drodha Arya Dzambala Hrih Daya Hum Phet. If it is yellow Dzambala, then recite Om Dzambala Dzalen Daya Soha. The Vaishravana mantra is Om Vayshavani Soha. Recite these mantras at least 7 times.



Q: I wish to know if I buy a certain deities statue, do I need to get initiation to do the practice, such as Medicine Buddha or Green Tara ?

Ans: It is not necessary to get initiation to recite the prayers of Medicine Buddha or Green Tara, although of course, if you have received the initiations, it has greater benefit as it strengthens one's prayers.

Q: It is said that when you achieve the state of calm abiding, a wall can come crashing down next to you and you will still not be disturbed. Is this because at this advanced stage, your senses are no longer receptive to external stimuli at all; or is it because your mind remains undisturbed even though your senses were receptive to this stimuli?

Ans: One's senses remain receptive. In fact, they not only remain receptive, they become enhanced during calm abiding meditation but whatever is being received by the senses is being transformed by the mind during that meditation, such that mental stability is not disturbed. As for crashing walls, the great yogis are able to overcome environmental elements through such concentration meditation, which have the effect being able to fly away!!



Q: Why are the “16 Arhats” objects of veneration when they are only Arhats? Arhats don’t even need to have bodhicitta right? They are not fully enlightened beings. Similarly, why is Avalokitesvara referred to as “only” Arya Avalokitesvara and not Buddha?

Ans: Arhats are said to be emanated from the Buddhas, to appear as assistants to the Buddhas to protect the Dharma and inspire practitioners and are themselves objects of refuge because they are Arya Beings and Foe Destroyers (those who have overcome samsara) and hence worthy of veneration. Arhats are Dharma Protectors in Sangha aspect and secure Buddha's teachings by providing conducive conditions for the 3 activities of Sangha community, namely:

- (a) monthly confession gatherings;
- (b) summer retreat; and
- (c) resumption of fellowship (after the retreat).

Without these 3 activities, there will be no Sangha community and thus no Buddhadharma.

In order to have Sangha community, there needs to be 4 fully ordained Sangha with 253 vows and it is believed that when there is a grouping of 4 Sangha, at least 1 of the 4 will be an emanation of the Arhats. Hence, the importance and role of Arhats as a noble object of veneration.

As for why Avalokitesvara is referred to as seemingly "lower" level than a Buddha – note that Avalokitesvara is in bodhisattva aspect and thus "different" from a Buddha.

Q: Where do the "sensual nerves" belong - are they part of the sense organs OR part of the consciousness (main mind)?

Ans: Sensual nerves are not part of consciousness (main mind). It is not consciousness at all. Nerves are physical. However, sensual consciousness is needed to perceive any object.

Q: How does one reconcile the necessity to have compassion for oneself (as well as others), with the teachings on cherishing others more than oneself? They seem to be slightly contradictory.

Ans: By practicing compassion, both self and others benefit. When compassion is in relation to oneself, it is called renunciation; when the object of compassion is others, it is called compassion. So both teachings are important. However, as compassion to self is renunciation and this only benefits only oneself, whereas cherishing others more than oneself means more beings derive benefit, there is the emphasis on cherishing others more than oneself.



Q: If nothing exists from its own side, then what is it that actually exists?

Ans: What actually exists is that which is merely-labeled by mind. To convince you of this, first of all, search from the tip of your hair to the tip of your toes, every single cell in your body, every moment of your thought and look for the self. And you will see that nothing exists from its own side but exists merely in label. And after this search, if you find yourself on even one single atom, come to see me and I will reward you with a rabbit with horns.

Q: What is space? It is “permanent” but also empty of inherent existence?

Ans: Space is permanent (it didn't come from causes and conditions) but also merely labeled i.e. empty of inherent existence. Space comes about because of obstructive phenomena, which in turn gives rise to the perception of “space” and this perception is imputed by mind.



Q: It has been said before that “climate is not sentient beings karma, just as flooding is not sentient beings karma. But if due to the flooding, a sentient being suffers, then karma starts to play a role. As soon as sentient beings consciousness is involved, karma starts to play a role, otherwise it is natural law” – what does this mean?

Ans: The environment such as climate, is a result of the collective karma of living beings. In the specific case of flooding, it is the collective karma of living beings to experience it together. However, in that flood, different levels of sufferings are experienced according to the individual karmas of being within that group. As for the term “natural law”, there is no self-existent natural law which is not in relation to living beings and karma. People might think that as long as we are born, we must die but that is “natural law” only in relation to life in samsara and not an absolute truth because Buddhas, for example, don’t die.