

# Week 4 – Dharma as Truth Teaching

## *Buddhism level 2 – What makes you a Buddhist?*

Our worldviews affect how we experience the world. The truth teaching aspect of the Dharma helps us to see the world in a way that eliminates suffering. Going for Refuge to Dharma (in this way) is increasingly seeing our experience in Dharmic terms.

### **BUDDHAVACANA – THE WORD OF THE BUDDHA**

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When the Buddha was freshly Enlightened, pondered whether to try to teach. He knew it would be very hard, but decided to do so. What he taught is known as Dharma.

*The word of a Buddha (Buddhavacana) is not like that of an ordinary person. The Buddhavacana is the expression in terms of human speech of an Enlightened state of consciousness... We tend, perhaps unconsciously, to think of the Buddha as speaking in much the same way as an ordinary person speaks, because, after all, he uses much the same words... but behind the Buddha's words there stands the Enlightened consciousness.*

*Sangharakshita, CD 113 "The New Man speaks"*

There's a crude but useful split between Dharma as practical path / method & Dharma as truth teachings.

Eg meditation, ethics, ritual, friendship are methodological – confidence in these teachings is gained by doing it, seeing what happens, pragmatic

First 3 noble truths, 3 lakshanas, conditioned coproduction are truth teachings. They help align us with reality.

The Buddha is maybe unusual as a spiritual teacher in paying so much attention to the methodological aspect, and being comparatively "metaphysically reticent".

### **DHARMA AS TRUTH TEACHINGS**

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Truth teachings of the Buddha relate to descriptions of "how things really are". eg. Actions have consequences, life is woven through with unsatisfactoriness, all things arise in dependence upon conditions, no fixed self.

But they're all provisional – none are final, complete descriptions of reality. They're more like a pair of glasses that you put on to see more clearly. Or like a map; remember that the map isn't the same as the terrain it describes. Some maps / glasses work better than others.

Like the finger pointing at the moon, the teachings are instrumental, as demonstrated in the parable of the raft. If you want to cross the river, you need the raft. But once across, you don't go on carrying it around – it was only a tool for the job. But equally, you do need to jump aboard the raft and paddle across "with hands and feet". No point just admiring it.

### **Right View**

We develop right view – ie more correct maps – by listening to and reflecting on Dharma. But not just a little polish to our views here & there: according to

the Buddha, in some ways we've got things completely upside down. We're a bit mad!

### **Example: the second noble truth**

The origin of suffering (mental, not immediate physical) is craving (emotionally) or egocentricity (cognitively).

*What the Buddha discovered was that the reason that beings suffer is that they do not know their own real condition. They think that reality is one way, when actually, it is another, and the key element of that distorted understanding and perception of reality is that each of us perceives ourselves to be the centre of our reality. Each of us thinks that we are some sort of fixed, independent, real entity... Once we perceive ourselves as a separate, real being ... we come into disagreement with the universe; when we are in disagreement with the universe, we fight with the universe. When we fight with the universe, we lose. The only way we can get out of that is not just by believing that we are one with the world or something, or going against our habitual perception of ourselves as separate from the world, but it is by investigating our habitual perception, analysing it, and experiencing its falsity, which we can empirically do.*

Robert Thurman, BBC radio talk

### **How do we go for refuge to the Dharma (as truth teaching)?**

Understand the Dharma through study. Reflect on it, and reflect on our experience in more Dharmic terms. Or in the words of B Allan Wallace, it about "developing fresh attitudes that align our mind with reality"

### **HOME PRACTICE**

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During the week, be sensitive to moments when things don't go as you'd like them to. For example, car/computer not working properly, someone's behaving in a way you don't like, someone says something you don't like.

You will probably recognise them by your emotional response; notice your response: is it aversive, blaming, disapproving, angry, frustrated etc?

Can you see a "worldview" or attitude that is being threatened? Eg. I'm right, people should look out for me, cars should work properly etc.

Is there another worldview that seems closer to reality, and therefore that produces less suffering? Does it link into the Dharmic worldview that egocentricity is the cause of suffering?

Try to note down these observations and bring them next time to discuss.

### **FURTHER READING**

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"What is the Dharma?", Sangharakshita, Introduction

"The New Man Speaks", Sangharakshita, CD 113

Parable of raft & watersnake in Majjhima Nikaya 22, & The second noble truth by Robert Thurman: links on Yahoo group website