

# Week 4 – Dharma as Truth Teaching

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

“Our worldviews affect how we experience the world, and closely linked to our emotional stances. The Dharma as doctrine help us to see the world in a way that eliminates suffering. Going for Refuge to Dharma (as doctrine) is increasingly seeing our experience in terms of Dharmic terms”

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

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Recognise the provisional distinction between Dharma as truth teaching and method

Recognise the effect that our worldview has on our experience of the world, and the way that this has changed since coming across Buddhism

### REVIEW OF LAST WEEK

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Plenary comments

Looked at Enlightenment as way of understanding GFR to Buddha

Said that any verbal descriptions are fingers pointing at moon

So metaphor is as useful as concepts (posh metaphors)

Metaphors (review board) of enlightenment – chuck in lucid dreaming?

Concepts / qualities of the Buddha, divided into skandhas

### BUDDHAVACANA

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Story of Brahamasahumpati, initial reluctance to try to communicate Dharma

But he did

*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”

What did he speak?

Usually call it the Dharma

## DHARMA AS TRUTH TEACHING

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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

Buddha is unusual among spiritual teachers in paying much more attention to the method aspect, and providing a bare skeleton of truth teachings

“metaphysically reticent”

isn’t drawn on many issues of metaphysics – eg. beginning & end of universe, nature of buddha after death

but he does give teachings that relate to descriptions of “how things really are”.

Help us in our search for truth

Views – even worldviews - that are trying to bring us closer to the bare reality.

### Exercise: Brainstorm Dharmic doctrines

Eg. Impermanence, conditioned co-production, Noble Truths 1-3, actions have consequences, rebirth, “Not by hatred is hatred ever pacified in the world. It is pacified by love. This is the eternal law” – law = Dharma

Like refuges – to which they’re closely related – some views are better than others – more conducive to happiness because they’re more in tune with reality.

Buddha’s Dharma – teachings – in this sense, are suggestions of ways of seeing things that help.

### Exercise: in 3s:

Has my perspective changed in any way since learning about Buddhism / starting a spiritual journey?

### Attitude to doctrine / views

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 a map

Some work better than others

Sometimes you need one pair of glasses or map for one purpose and a different one for another. None serves all purposes – can’t take ultimate truth in words.

Like the finger pointing at the moon, the glasses or map are instrumental. As such, even doctrinal dharma is really methodological

Buddha described it in parable of the raft.

*The Blessed One said: "Suppose a man were traveling along a path. He would see a great expanse of water, with the near shore dubious & risky, the further shore secure & free from risk, but with neither a ferryboat nor a bridge going from this shore to the other. The thought would occur to him, 'Here is this great expanse of water, with the near shore dubious & risky, the further shore secure & free from risk, but with neither a ferryboat nor a bridge going from this shore to the other. What if I were to gather grass, twigs, branches, & leaves and, having bound them together to make a raft, were to cross over to safety on the other shore in dependence on the raft, making an effort with my hands & feet?' Then the man, having gathered grass, twigs, branches, & leaves, having bound them together to make a raft, would cross over to safety on the other shore in dependence on the raft, making an effort with his hands & feet. Having crossed over to the further shore, he might think, 'How useful this raft has been to me! For it was in dependence on this raft that, making an effort with my hands & feet, I have crossed over to safety on the further shore. Why don't I, having hoisted it on my head or carrying on my back, go wherever I like?' What do you think, monks: Would the man, in doing that, be doing what should be done with the raft?"*

*"No, lord."*

*"And what should the man do in order to be doing what should be done with the raft? There is the case where the man, having crossed over, would think, 'How useful this raft has been to me! For it was in dependence on this raft that, making an effort with my hands & feet, I have crossed over to safety on the further shore. Why don't I, having dragged it on dry land or sinking it in the water, go wherever I like?' In doing this, he would be doing what should be done with the raft. In the same way, monks, I have taught the Dhamma compared to a raft, for the purpose of crossing over, not for the purpose of holding onto. Understanding the Dhamma as taught compared to a raft, you should let go even of Dhammas, to say nothing of non-Dhammas."*

Majjhima Nikaya 22

## **Why are our views important?**

They are active forces in our life that shape us and our response to the world.  
They're not passive opinions.

## **Connection of views with emotions**

Deep emotional roots to views.

Maybe think of "attitude" as being midway between view & emotion

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

Do people roughly know the Noble Truths

Fact & origin of suffering (mental, not immediate physical). Last week covered the 3<sup>rd</sup> – removal of suffering is possible in state of Enlightenment

*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

Or Sangharakshita:

*The essential cause of suffering, the Buddha says, is craving, the natural but painful desire for things to be other than they are. If we can let go of that desire, if we can accept the rise and fall of experience as it is – not just in our heads, but in our heart of hearts – the problem of suffering will be solved.*

*Living with Kindness*

## **Exercise**

In groups discuss:

What are your main causes of suffering?

Does this doctrinal framework clarify any of the main ways you experience suffering?

## **Going for refuge to the Dharma**

Studying, reflecting, meditating

Reflecting on our experience in more Dharmic terms

B Allan Wallace, it's about "developing fresh attitudes that align our mind with reality"

## **Personal Talk:**

Remember a moment when realised "I'm thinking predominantly in Buddhist terms"

Recognising my mode of being as being less solid, less "me", and more a collection of habits – samskaras. Made it easier to engage with them, change them, not so invested with them

Remember starting to really take notice of my mental states & recognise whether they were skilful or unskilful, recognise the types of samskaras I was involved in

Remember having my mind blown by Kulananda, overturning my assumptions about the nature of 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" 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 some of these observations and bring them next week to discuss.

## FURTHER READING

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"What is the Dharma?", Sangharakshita, Introduction

Parable of raft & watersnake in Majjhima Nikaya 22,

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/canon/sutta/majjhima/mn-022-tb0.html>

The second noble truth by Robert Thurman

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/buddhism/beliefs/fournobletruths\\_prog2.html](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/buddhism/beliefs/fournobletruths_prog2.html)