

The Precious Dharma

We should reflect on how precious the Dharma is. Even though we are in samsara, where there are endless sufferings and infinite causes of suffering, the Dharma that we study and practice is a complete method to dispel it all. If we apply our time, energy, and dedication, then it is just a matter of time before we completely realize the path. Because Dharma explains the complete nature of samsara and enlightenment, we should appreciate how precious it is to us.

The Dharma that the Buddha taught is not just a belief system, but is based on reason. Because it is based on reason, we can investigate it, practice it, and apply it in our meditations – anyone can. “Investigate” does not mean to look for mistakes in the teachings. Here, investigate means to personally understand, to really know the Dharma, and to practice it. Sometimes you may hear someone say that even the Buddha’s words should be investigated. You may take this to mean that you should dig out or search for mistakes in the Buddha’s teachings. But what it actually means here is to scrutinize the teachings yourself with an open mind. Go through them and understand what is right and what is wrong, what is suffering and what is the cause of suffering, and then apply that understanding in practice. That is how the Dharma can be seen to be so precious.

As long as there is delusion in the mind of a sentient being – it doesn’t matter what path a person follows, what they believe or don’t believe – there is suffering. As long as there is wisdom and compassion in a sentient being’s mind, there is harmony. That is what I mentioned many times before: Dharma explains the whole constitution of samsara and nirvana. This is why I usually say that Buddhism is not only for Buddhists; Buddhism is for every sentient being. When we say prayers, we don’t say, “May all Buddhists have peace and happiness.” We say, “all mother sentient beings.” This is a very important point. The Buddha taught the teachings based on the wish to have happiness and to be free from suffering, to have the cause of happiness, and to be free the cause of suffering. Sometimes we think Buddhism is the Buddha’s creation, just Buddha’s tradition. But basically, it is the “tradition” of the whole universe. We all – every sentient being – want to be free from suffering and wish for happiness. On that level, there is no difference. But sometimes we fail to recognize what suffering is and what causes suffering, what real happiness is, and what causes such happiness. To dispel that kind of delusion, we need to study and investigate.

Take anger, for example. Anyone who has anger experiences some feelings of suffering. Everyone – Buddhists, non-Buddhists, even dogs. Because anger is there, the dog’s face changes, doesn’t it? This shows there is some pain. This type of understanding is very important. When we know this kind of universal law, how the whole universe is constituted, we will know how to be sincere to ourselves. Otherwise, we will want to have happiness, we will want to be free from suffering, but we won’t know how to do it. Shantideva once said, “We desire joy and happiness, but we destroy them as if there were our enemies.” But with proper understanding, we won’t destroy our happiness and we won’t chase after suffering. Usually, we make so much effort only to end up with more suffering. Milarepa observed, “to free ourselves from suffering, we make more suffering.” So Dharma teachings help us to have this awareness, this wisdom.

Based on that, we can develop devotion to Dharma. We can feel fortunate about meeting the Dharma. “Even though samsara is the state of suffering, I am so fortunate to have this precious human life and to have met the Dharma teachings. If I make effort, there is a definite way out of suffering.” So I think this understanding is also very important. The Dharma is not just one kind of culture, one tradition. Understand how Dharma is the law of the universe, the method to know what all suffering is, what the cause of suffering is, what all happiness is, and what the path to achieve happiness is.

Otherwise, Dharma teachings can become another cause of suffering. Without knowing how to practice Dharma, we have such high expectations. Or we misuse Dharma teachings, then after some time there is a danger to give them up. After practicing five years, ten years, then you give up Dharma teachings. Have you seen that? I have met many people like that. It is kind of unfortunate, isn't it? So I think we need this kind of basic foundation. It is very important at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end. Otherwise we are building castles on sand or ice.

*This is an excerpt from a teaching given by Khenchen Konchog Gyaltshe
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