

Why We Need Dharma and Dharma Centers

Regarding the world situation there are three questions.

Firstly, someone in Delhi told me recently that a big question in the world is that more and more people don't trust their government any more.

Without Dharma, without compassion, there is self-cherishing thought and no compassion for other sentient beings' suffering and happiness. Working in government with self-cherishing thoughts, ignorance grasping at the 'I', the mind is selfish so the motivation is selfish. Ultimately you are working for yourself and your own happiness, but with a selfish mind there is not even the success of the happiness of this life.

As the great saint Shantideva said in the *Bodhicaryavatara*: if one doesn't exchange oneself for others, full enlightenment cannot be achieved; even in samsara there is no happiness.

To stop problems people need Dharma education. Buddhism is differentiated from other religions by compassion to all living beings: hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, humans, asuras and suras, every single being. As well, in Buddhist practice you develop wisdom, knowing what is right or wrong, what is the right or wrong decision, what is the right or wrong lifestyle.

What is wrong and what is right? That is a huge question. In the world, what people believe is right is wrong and what they believe is wrong is right. So we need *right* wisdom. The more Dharma you learn the more and more wisdom you develop. That becomes complete when you achieve full enlightenment. It is not endless, you can complete it. That brings more and more peace and happiness in the world.

That is why you need a Dharma center, which offers the opportunity to learn Dharma. You can see establishing more and more Dharma centers is the most important help for sentient beings, for this world, for this country. It is of the utmost need.

Then the second question: global warming and lots of disasters, which are called "natural." International global warming experts understand and some people explain it scientifically, such as former US vice president Al Gore in his movie. Yes, they happen, but whether good or bad things happen they come from the mind, as the delusions come from unsubdued mind. Many disasters of the elements of fire, water, earth and air are happening, which are called natural. That is the Western way of talking by those who don't believe in karma and delusions as the main cause. They don't understand inner and outer causes.

Since it is causative phenomena, it is born, it exists and it ceases. Everything, all these phenomena have to happen from causes, karma and delusion. So all these so-called "natural" disasters happen due to no or little understanding of karma. To understand things, one has to understand Dharma, and karma: action and results. Then there is more possibility for somebody to have inner knowledge of why disasters are happening and what method to apply to stop those disasters.

Let me give you an example. There is a young lady from Tibet who is believed to be a dakini, a sky-goer. When she was going around Tashi Lhunpo, Panchen Rinpoche's monastery, Milarepa appeared to her and she found she had a connection with Milarepa

from some thousand years ago. Milarepa gave her a bunch of money and advised her to go to India to serve His Holiness the Dalai Lama. That is how she was able to come to India. Now she has been in Dharamsala for many years. She serves and protects His Holiness the Dalai Lama in a most amazing way. She saw thousands or millions of people dying due to a big volcanic eruption and earthquake in the Himalayan regions, not only in Dharamsala but the whole region. She saw very clearly the danger, from inside her heart or mind, which is beyond ordinary peoples' mind. So she built many stupas around His Holiness the Dalai Lama's palace and also at Nechung Monastery and Norbulinka, close to Dharamsala. Due to these, the huge volcano and earthquake did not happen but a small earthquake happened, in which nobody died except one cow. Also, we asked what should be done to prevent a big earthquake in California and she advised to build a completely different stupa. She predicted like a waterfall, nothing false, no doubt.

She is like a star in the daytime, so rare. Somebody like that can help a hundred percent to stop such disasters, but due to karma some disasters have to be experienced, cannot be stopped completely.

So again, the more you develop wisdom and compassion, the fundamentals of Buddhism, by putting it into practice, the better the world can become, including economically.

Now, the third question: when there are more and more demonstrations against the government, usually they are against dictatorships, which don't help people because of selfish thought, seeking their own happiness. It is intelligent, wise and clever to cherish others, serve others. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama always says, if you want to be selfish be intelligently selfish. For that you must know Dharma, you must know karma and how to practice.

So even for this the best answer is to learn Dharma, meditate, especially how to develop wisdom and compassion towards other sentient beings. Therefore, we need a place where there is a teacher, the Dharma and facilities to practice.

The center is able to offer these facilities to everyone, as much as it can do.

The most important purpose is Dharma, it is more important than food, clothing or having a job; understanding, practicing Dharma, understanding karma and developing wisdom and compassion for numberless sentient beings.

The reason is there is no one in the world who has discovered only one life, no past or future lives. Of course, there are theories about one life. Due to not understanding, they may believe and teach such. Devas know when they are going to die and they see where they will be born, so they have lots of suffering, more than physical suffering. This is due to karma, seeing past and future, but there are numberless beings who, through meditation and Six Yogas of Naropa, can see your and others' past and future.

Like murky water, we can't see through the heavily obscured mind. A fully awakened, completely purified mind like Buddha's omniscient mind of course directly sees all the numberless sentient beings, knows their every single action of past and future. Even a bodhisattva abiding in the pure grounds, such as the eighth and tenth bhumis, having purified the gross obscurations but not the subtle, can see. The bodhisattvas who dwell

in the first bhumi see a hundred eons past and a hundred eons in the future. The second bhumi bodhisattvas see a thousand past and a thousand future eons; on the third, fourth, fifth and sixth bhumis they see more and more. Generally, on the paths of merit and preparation it also might be possible to see past and future. So there are numberless beings who discovered and realized past lives. There are also old and young children, not only Tibetan but in the West, who remember their past life.

So definitely now you have to make preparation for the happiness of the next life and the life after that and so forth. The cause of happiness and good rebirth is through Dharma, and good karma, pure morality. Therefore, you have to practice Dharma and for this you have to learn Dharma.

By taking refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, by renouncing the ten non-virtues and practicing the ten virtues, living in five (or less) upasaka(lay) vows, you can receive higher rebirth. There are also eight upasaka lay vows, 36 vows and intermediate ordination, renouncing the householder life. Then there are the 253 bhikshu vows and the bhikshuni with 364 vows. Then there are also the bodhisattava and tantra vows.

The happiness of higher rebirth and rebirth in a pure land comes by the way, it's not the main goal. You need to achieve ultimate happiness and liberation from samsara's suffering. For this you have to achieve realization of the four noble truths. For this you have to know true suffering and the true cause of suffering. In other words, you have to actualize the five paths, the path of merit, path of preparation, right seeing path, path of meditation, path of no more learning. Free from samsara's suffering and the cause of suffering, delusions and karma, you will have everlasting happiness, a blissful state of peace in oneself. Then you actualize great compassion for all sentient beings, the great bodhicitta, to free sentient beings from oceans of suffering.

In order to bring the numberless sentient beings to full enlightenment one has to achieve enlightenment. For this one has to enter the Mahayana path, of which there are five paths as I mentioned, and ten bhumis, starting from the right-seeing path, to remove gross and subtle defilements.

Of course, it takes three great eons to achieve enlightenment but by practicing the lower tantric path one can achieve complete enlightenment in one lifetime. If you practice highest yoga tantra you will be able to complete the merit quicker and achieve full enlightenment in a brief lifetime in the degenerate age. For that, one has to have all the realizations that depend on meditation, reflecting and listening, the foundation sutra, and uncommon tantra, the secret mantra. One cannot achieve enlightenment with only the practice of sutra, without practicing uncommon tantra.

We each have full responsibility to free all sentient beings from suffering and bring them to full enlightenment. Therefore, we need to achieve full enlightenment, and so we need to practice Dharma.

Therefore you need someone to teach you and so you can see the need for Dharma centers. We need as many centers as possible, to offer the education and practice that are necessary for happiness. Now we can see how important the Dharma center is. We should know how fortunate and lucky we are having different Dharma centers with teachers.

Colophon: Advice given by Lama Zopa Rinpoche on the occasion of a center's 10th anniversary; Scribe Ven.Trisha, Kopan Monastery, Nepal; 4 November 2011. Edited by Claire Isitt, April 2012.