

Learning to learn

(Three steps educational models in Buddhism)

by Zoltan Cser

director of Dharma Gate Buddhist Church, vice rector of Dharma Gate Buddhist College (Hungary)
and PhD student of MCU International Buddhist Studies College (Thailand)

Introduction

If we consider the most relevant issues of our time, one of the most important points is education. With proper education, we could put an end to many problems, starting from polluting our environment, the imbalance of human rights, health problems, and we could continue the list of problems, today there are many, many problematic topics on our globe.

There exist several educational systems in different periods of our life. Primary school, secondary school, university, post-gradual studies. They are preparing us to widen our skills, to get higher role in society and also to develop further education.

From the viewpoint of Buddhism, we can call the above systems “*samsāric education*” because it is considering mainly worldly values, secular ethics, worldly targets, and lay livelihood and so on, and it is based on the view of materialism. Obviously measuring the success is also based on material outcome. As we see from the time of Descartes,¹ when the famous slogan became widespread (“Cogito ergo sum - I think; therefore I am.”) and the Cartesian dualism or Substance dualism became the main philosophical background of science and education, we are in a trap where interdependence (how it is described in the teaching of the Buddha) is hardly could be discovered. According to Cartesian dualism mind and body are two absolutely separate phenomena that is why Physical sciences that focus to investigate material world are clearly separated from Social sciences where the focus is mainly human behaviour and mind. This is a real problem for example for some particular sciences that exist somewhere in between Physical and Social sciences. Like economics, where macroeconomics investigate the broader financial factors hence microeconomics the financial factors of a family or an individual is mainly in focus. Macroeconomics is based on microeconomics, microeconomics is based on psychology but that is beyond or outside the

¹ René Descartes (31 March 1596 – 11 February 1650) in his works *Meditations on First Philosophy* and *Principles of Philosophy* laid down the foundation of his philosophy distinguishing mind, matter and God.

economics. The sentence that is the starting point of any economic study is that economy is based on the interest of the individual or an “I”. But the question of who is the so-called “I” is not defined in the field of economics. If we turn to the Buddhist consideration that the “I” in the absolute sense does not exist, this questions greatly (from the Buddhist viewpoint) the scientific value of the above starting point of economic research.²

Nevertheless today, there are many fields in science where this idea of mind-body duality is questioned and new horizons are starting to open day by day and a new paradigm about reality is forming.

There are countless articles that are dealing with the parallels between science and Buddhism, but in our article we are focusing on another aspect. We can say - based on the above-mentioned examples - that worldly sciences differ from the science that is indicated in the teaching of the Buddha. Both of them are searching, investigating reality but science is measuring mainly with material tools, and called objective consideration while in Buddhism, we are investigating reality by ourselves, by way of hearing, thinking and meditation (Three Wisdom) and we can call it subjective consideration based on living experience. According to sources like *Garland of Views* (Tib: *man ngag lta ba'i phreng ba*³) written by Guru Rinpoche, Padmasambhava the view of materialism has three groups, one of them is the scientific view.⁴ This approach to reality is lacking the knowledge of karma, lacking the knowledge of real cause and effect and also lacking the knowledge of mind and matter interdependence. On the other hand, Buddhism is based on the proper knowledge of karma. As a conclusion, we could say science is investigating reality objective way but without knowing the law of karma. Buddhism on the other hand approaching reality in a subjective way but with the proper knowledge of karma (according to Buddhism: one is “*samsāric science*” and the other is

² Today there are some alternative ways in Micro- and Macroeconomics, for example there are researchers who are dealing with Buddhist Economics, sustainable economics, green economics and so on. (Clair Brown 2017. *Buddhist Economics: An Enlightened Approach to the Dismal Science*, Bloomsbury Press or we can mention Prayudh Payuttho 1992. *Buddhist Economics*, MCU, Thailand)

³ *Man ngag lta ba'i phreng ba*, by Padmasambhava (VIII c.) A: in SNGA 'GYUR BKA' MAT SCHOS SDE, vol. 'a, published by Si khron bod kyi rig gnas zhib 'jug khang; B: in GDAMS NGAG MDZOD, vol. ka, published at Paro in Bhutan, 1979. (One of the rare texts of the oral tradition ascribed to Padmasambhava; translated in Dowman, *Flight of the Garuda*, Ithaca 1992; Karmay, *The Great Perfection*, Leiden 1988; Italian translation in Baroetto, *L'insegnamento esoterico di Padmasambhava*, Arcidosso 1990.)

⁴ There are four mundane views according to the Garland of Views: **phyal pa** (literally; flat) those, who are ignoring totally cause and effect, **rgyan 'phen pa** (barhaspatya) those who believe some power of mind, **mu stegs pa** (tīrthika) – eternalist view. The fourth view is **mur thug pa** (extremists), materialistic or nihilistic view where adherents are proving that nothing exists after death. Scientific approach belongs to this. See Namkhai Norbu 2008. *The Precious Vase*, pp. 24-30.

“*dharmic science*” or one is *lokiya*, the other is *lokuttara*). In our article, the main area of research is to examine how Buddhist education systems can contribute to contemporary science and education.

The origin of the Teaching

We have to answer two main questions in spiritual traditions or religions, when we talk about a Teacher, who gives teachings. What is the source or background of His teaching, this is the first and what is the purpose of His teaching, this is the second. Both of them is very important if we want to understand the characteristic of a teaching or we can say education system given by the particular Teacher. The first one is the source: what is the previous process (learning, practicing) that led to realization or what kind of experience is preceding the time of taking the role as a teacher. This experience or turning point can be manifold: sometimes it is called “experience of God”, travelling in the Universe or into some celestial realm, heaven, or enlightenment, realization, liberation and so on. If we see the life stories of any founder of a religion it is clearly seen that before they started to teach disciples they had a fundamental experience that opened up inner gates, opened up new horizons.

In case of the Buddha, this experience is called enlightenment because the Buddha saw all phenomena without torsion, in the light of unexcelled wisdom. It is called also liberation, because the Buddha liberated from the bondage of karma, from samsara (no more rebirth in samsāra or cyclic existence). Also called *nibbāna* because all the defilement of the mind is purified. It is also called awakening because the Buddha awakened from the dream of ignorance and realized the Truth. When we talk about the qualities of the Buddha we recall His realization that He attained during the process of enlightenment. There are different lists of qualities, one is very well known in every Buddhist traditions:

*Iti pi so bhagavā arahaṃ sammā-sambuddho, vijjā-caraṇa-sampanno sugato lokavidū,
anuttaro purisa-damma-sārathi satthā deva-manussānaṃ buddho bhagavā 'ti.*⁵

The above quotation is listing the Nine Qualities of the Buddha or the qualities of enlightenment. There are many explanation connected to each of them. In Mahāyāna traditions for example in one of the works of Asanga (or Maitreyaṅgāthā) the

⁵ The Buddha in *Mahānāma Sutta* (AN.6.10) lists six recollections. The first one is recollecting the Buddha (Buddhānussati) and we can find the quotation primarily there. In the Pāli texts there are around 140 occurrences of the above sentence, and is widely used as part of recitation. In *Visuddhimagga* we find also the same quotation for the practice of Buddhānussati.

*Abhisamayālaṅkāra*⁶ there are explanations about the 112 qualities of *Nirmānakāya*, 60 qualities of *Sambhogakāya* and 144 different aspects of *Dharmakāya*. The Three Kāya⁷ teaching is very important in Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna traditions because it expresses the different levels of extraordinary states of a Buddha.

Enlightenment preceded by discovering the Middle Path, this is one of the key factor of the whole teachings of the Buddha. Without entering the Middle Path it is not possible to attain liberation from cyclic existence. To discover the middle the Buddha first experienced the two extremes of livelihood: royal way of life, indulgence in sensory pleasures and six years of asceticism where the sensory pleasures were totally blocked. Reading the biography of the Buddha we can have clear understanding of the qualities of His learning, practice and realization.

If we would like to understand better the Buddhist education systems, it is important to see that the Buddha started His spiritual journey because He wanted to put an end to old age, sickness and death. This means that the starting point of His teaching is not something abstract, not something in celestial realms but such an experience that is true for everybody. The starting point is a down to earth experience, experience of suffering, limitation, lack of physical, emotional and mental satisfaction. That is why the process of education in Buddhism is based on presence and alertness,⁸ based on experiencing reality as it is.

Before the Buddha started to teach, He was hesitating if there are proper vessels or disciples to train or not. It is interesting to read the Buddha's own words when He was talking about His enlightenment. We can find two proclamations, one is right after His realization expressing what is attained, the joy of enlightenment:

Verse 153: *"I, who have been seeking the builder of this house (body), failing to attain Enlightenment which would enable me to find him, have wandered through innumerable births in samsara. To be born again and again is, indeed, dukkha!"*

⁶ One of the five books attributed to Maitreya, the next Buddha. Asanga received these teachings in the Tushita Heaven directly from Maitreya.

⁷ The Three Body of the Buddha is actually derives from the Three Gates. Enlightened body, enlightened speech and enlightened mind. In the tantric system, a Yogi is practicing visualization of the mandala of Three Body; the form of the Buddhas, the mantra as the speech and the symbol or seed syllable as the enlightened mind aspect.

⁸ Pāli: sati and sampajañña

Verse 154: “*Oh house-builder! You are seen, you shall build no house (for me) again. All your rafters are broken, your roof-tree is destroyed. My mind has reached the unconditioned (i.e., nibbāna); the end of craving (arahatta phala) has been attained.*”⁹

The second one is when the Buddha was contemplating about how to teach. This is an expression of how difficult to reach enlightenment:¹⁰

“*Enough now with teaching what only with difficulty I reached. This Dhamma is not easily realized by those overcome with aversion & passion. What is abstruse, subtle, deep, hard to see, going against the flow— those delighting in passion, cloaked in the mass of darkness, won’t see.*”¹¹

Finally, the Buddha decided to teach.¹² Teaching Dharma has a crucial meaning not just because it is the same as teaching the Path or teaching what reality is, but Dharma is also one of the Triple Gem one of the precious object of Refuge. According to the first teaching of the Buddha reality can be perceived in four levels: first level and the second level belongs to the law of karma. The First Noble Truth is the teaching of the effect, which is the three kinds of sufferings.¹³ The second is the cause. The cause is primarily the three kinds of cravings.¹⁴ The root of craving is ignorance. According to this clear causality, if we would like to eliminate the effect, we have to eliminate the cause, the root that is ignorance. One of the main factor to eliminate ignorance is - like in any field where there is lack knowledge - to **learn and educating** ourselves. There can be many levels of teaching and learning, as we will

⁹ From *Dhammapada* verse 153-154. According to Theravada traditions these are the first utterances, exclamations (udāna) after enlightenment.

¹⁰ We can find these sentences in those suttas where the Buddha was talking about the story of His enlightenment and how Brahmā Sahampati requested Him to teach. In addition, there is a sutta about the Buddha and the previous six Tathāgatas realization (*Āyācana Sutta* (SN 6:1), and *Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta* (MN 26) and the previous Buddhas we find in *Mahā Padāna Sutta* (DN 14).

¹¹ In Pāli: Kicchena me adhigataṃ halaṃ dāni pakāsituṃ, Rāgadosaparetehi nāyaṃ Dhammo susambudho. Paṭisotagāmiṃ nipuṇaṃ gambhīraṃ duddasaṃ aṇuṃ. Rāgarattā dakkhanti tamokkhandhena āvuṭṭā. ti

¹² Interesting to note that in Mahāyāna tradition in one of the two main biographical sources, in *Lalitavistara Sūtra* (the other one is *Buddhacarita*) we find that the first proclamation by the Buddha after His enlightenment was almost the same as in *Āyācana Sutta*:

“*The ambrosial Dharma I obtained is profound, immaculate, luminous, and unconditioned. Even if I explain it, no one will understand. I think I shall remain silent in the forest. That which is free from words cannot be understood through words, likewise, the nature of phenomena is like space, totally free of the movements of mind and intellect.*”

¹³ suffering of suffering, suffering of changing and all-composite suffering (*dukkha dukkha, vipariṇāma dukkha, saṅkhāra dukkha* in *Dukkha Sutta* (SN 45.165))

¹⁴ sensual craving, craving for existence, craving for non-existence (*kāma taṇhā, bhava taṇhā, vibhava taṇhā*)

see in case of Buddhism. Teaching and learning is not just giving information then learning it (make it interior) and giving back during examinations (how we see in modern education), but it can be a way to fully eliminate the causes of limitations, suffering and attain liberation, happiness and wisdom. Nevertheless, to achieve this goal we need special methods of learning, special methods of education.

Even in the Western world if we look back into history, education belonged to religious institutes, so there were no difference between worldly and religious knowledge (till the point when science lost its religious base). All the main Universities belonged to one of the branches of Christianity. Even in the time of Descartes his philosophy was deeply considering God and the nature of creation but his works planted the seeds for a new paradigm, where science lost spirituality, lost subjectivity and became totally objective, even mind became an object of investigation by electronic measuring instruments.

The purpose of Teaching

As we saw in the previous chapter, the base for Buddhist education is the knowledge of karma, when we have clear understanding of the effects of our previous deeds. The effect, where we live is called cyclic existence, where the main experiences are suffering, lack of content, lack of satisfaction. Cyclic existence (*samsāra*) is a place (*kāma loka*, *rūpa loka*, *arūpa loka*), a place of constant changing and also the container of different beings (six loka beings: devas, asuras, humans, animals, pretas, and hell beings). However, cyclic existence is actually not else but the different states of mind. That is why for example *rūpa loka* and *arūpa loka* is connected to *rūpa-* and *arūpa-jhāna*, different states of meditation. Therefore, when we talk about the effect we have to see the whole existence with the eye of wisdom.¹⁵

The second aspect of karma is the knowledge of the causes. It is not just an intellectual understanding but the real causes can be discovered just by serious meditation. Considering the basic teachings of the Buddha, usually we recall His first sermon, what is laid down in the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*. However, if we investigate to whom the Buddha delivered His first teaching, we find that they were originally the five astrologers in the Court who were following the Buddha into the homeless life; they were His personal attendance in all that six years of austerities and practices. They did the same as the Buddha, they abandoned worldly life and they were very well trained in meditation as well. It is not by chance that this

¹⁵ *samsāra* as space, time, beings, and confused states of mind

teaching is called “Noble Truth”, where Noble Truth (*ariya sacca*) means truth or reality that can be discovered by only *ariya* beings, high level of beings who entered the Middle Path.

To enter the path of Dharma seeing clearly the effect and the cause (karma) is crucial.

The third and fourth levels of reality are belonging to Dharma and we can understand the real purpose of Buddhist training, Buddhist education by the Noble Truth of Cessation and the Noble Truth of the Path. The Third Noble Truth is about cessation (*nirodha*)¹⁶ where the causes of suffering, the different levels of obscuration are diminished, purified, transformed. The fourth level of reality is the Path of cessation that is the Eightfold Noble Path. So according to the two “Dharma truths” the real purpose of teaching is to eliminate the causes of suffering and manifest enlightenment through the path (one is eliminating the obstacles of enlightenment, the second is developing enlightenment on the Middle Path according to Mahāyāna traditions).¹⁷ In the first sermon, the purpose of training is well established according to the four levels of reality or truth: to *understand* the condition called suffering, to *eliminate* the causes, *experience* cessation and *develop* the Path.¹⁸

From the above viewpoint, we can understand that learning is not just a kind of information output-input process but rather developing different capacities of *understanding*, *restraining*, *experiencing* and *developing*. That is why concerning the purpose of education in Buddhism we can say that learning how to learn is more important than the information what we learn, or the same way: the capacity to learn from our experience or learning from ourselves is crucial on the Buddhist Path. The required capacities and the way of learning (from ourselves, from our experiences) is clearly stated in the last teaching of the Buddha. In *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (DN 16):

“So Ānanda, be your own island, your own refuge, with no other refuge. Let the teaching be your island and your refuge, with no other refuge. And how does a person do this? It’s when a

¹⁶ five *nirodha*, *pahāna* or *vimutti*:

- *vikkhambhana* overcoming by repression
- *tadanga* overcoming by opposite
- *samuccheda* overcoming by destroying
- *patipassaddhi* overcoming by tranquillization
- *nissarana* overcoming by escape

(*Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines*, by Nyanatiloka Mahathera p.228)

¹⁷ eliminating *akusala dhammas* and developing *kusala dhammas*

¹⁸ *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* (SN.56.11)

person meditates by observing an aspect of the body—keen, aware, and mindful,¹⁹ rid of desire and aversion for the world. They meditate observing an aspect of feelings ... mind ... principles—keen, aware, and mindful, rid of desire and aversion for the world. That’s how a disciple is their own island, their own refuge, with no other refuge. That’s how the teaching is their island and their refuge, with no other refuge.

Whether now or after I have passed, any who shall live as their own island, their own refuge, with no other refuge; with the teaching as their island and their refuge, with no other refuge—those disciples of mine who want to train shall be among the best of the best.”²⁰

In western scientific methods, *information* and *objectivity* are the leading factors but in Buddhist education, **learning to learn** and **subjectivity** are highlighted instead, although the aim to understand reality is similar. When we practice according to *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10) we are not focusing on what we see or what we think, but instead the focus is on the process of seeing, on the process of thinking. Not information is important but the way how information is perceived, this aspect is very essential considering the Buddhist way of learning. Traditionally the *Bodhipakkhiyādhammā* or the 37 factors of enlightenment²¹ are the capacities that a practitioner should develop on the Path of liberation. Among them, the most important ones are *sati*, *sampajañña*, the Five Faculties²² and the Seven Factors of Awakening.²³

These capacities can be rendered into two main categories: method (*upāya*) and wisdom (*paññā*). The same way we can divide the Buddhist education models into **method oriented** and **wisdom oriented** systems.

¹⁹ key terms of training: atāpi, sampajāno and satima (keen, aware and mindful)

²⁰ Translated by Bhikkhu Sujato, the key terms are: attadīpa, attasaraṇā, dhammadīpa as a fruit of the practice and the four sati (kāya, vedanā, citta and dhamma) as the method.

²¹ „Katame ca te, bhikkhave, dhammā mayā abhiññā desitā, ye vo sādhukaṃ uggahetvā āsevitabbā bhāvetabbā bahulīkātā, yathayidaṃ brahmacariyaṃ addhaniyaṃ assa ciraṭṭhitikaṃ, tadassa bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāya atthāya hitāya sukhāya devamanussānaṃ. Seyyathidaṃ—cattāro satipaṭṭhānā, cattāro sammappadhānā, cattāro iddhipādā, pañcendriyāni, pañca balāni, satta bojjhaṅgā, ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo.” (*Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*)

²² pañcendriya: according to Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche these five are the most important factors to develop on the Path (faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom)

²³ satta bojjhaṅga: they are the most important capacities to enter the Path of Wisdom (mindfulness, investigation, effort, joy, tranquillity, concentration, equanimity)

Method oriented systems on the Path

1. Sīla-samādhi-paññā

The first educational system we can find in all schools of Buddhism. It is based on monasticism, where the aspirant due to understanding the nature of existence turns away from worldly life²⁴ and enters the monastic community of monks. This system is connected to three steps of learning, also to the Three Baskets of Buddhist canon (Tipitaka) and to the Three Gates of an individual. Through the famous steps of ethic, meditation and wisdom we can eliminate craving, hatred and ignorance. From *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (DN 16):

*Ethics, meditation, and wisdom,
and the supreme freedom:
these things have been understood
by Gotama the renowned.*

*And so the Buddha, having insight,
explained this teaching to the mendicants.
The teacher made an end of suffering,
seeing clearly, he is extinguished.”²⁵*

Also from the same source:

“Such is ethics, such is meditation, such is wisdom. When meditation is imbued with ethics it’s very fruitful and beneficial. When wisdom is imbued with meditation it’s very fruitful and beneficial. When the mind is imbued with wisdom it is rightly freed from the defilements, namely, the defilements of sensuality, desire to be reborn, and ignorance.”²⁶

Sīla is the solution for craving, desire and attachment and connected to basket of Vinaya. *Samādhi* is the solution for hatred, anger and connected to the basket of Sutta. *Paññā* is the solution for ignorance, delusion and connected to the basket of Abhidhamma. This education model is very effective; with proper ethic, we establish **self-control and non-**

²⁴ according to Tibetan Buddhism it is called the Path of Renunciation (Tib: spong lam)

²⁵ "Sīlaṃ samādhi paññā ca, vimutti ca anuttarā; Anubuddhā ime dhammā, gotamena yasassinā. Iti buddho abhiññāya, dhammamakkhāsi bhikkhunaṃ; Dukkassantakaro satthā, cakkhumā parinibbuto ti"

²⁶ „Iti sīlaṃ iti samādhi iti paññā. Sīlaparibhāvito samādhi mahapphalo hoti mahānisamsa. Samādhiparibhāvītā paññā mahapphalā hoti mahānisamsā. Paññāparibhāvitaṃ cittaṃ sammadeva āsavehi vimuccati, seyyathidaṃ—kāmāsavā, bhavāsavā, avijjāsavā”ti.

violence, two essential elements for proper meditation.²⁷ With proper meditation, we attain the state of *samatha* or samādhi,²⁸ the fully **focused and calm state** of mind, where we can see the real nature of Dhammas. This is the gate for paññā or wisdom (*vipassanā*),²⁹ when we can see by the **eye of wisdom**. This way directly perceiving *anatta* we can attain the state of the Fruit, the different levels of realization. According to Tibetan sources ethic is mostly connected to body, meditation is to gain control over emotions, and wisdom is when one sees the nature of mind, so connected to mind. The three stages can represent aspects, steps of realization as well. It is possible to distinguish the different Buddhist schools according their main focus among the three. For many lineages ethical conduct is the most important, the monks are very well trained in Vinaya, or there are Yogi lineages where meditation is the most important factor and also there are monasteries, practitioners to whom wisdom or studying Abhidhamma is the most significant.

Even in one meditation session, we can find the above three: keeping control of the senses and the body is connected to sīla, keeping one pointed presence is connected to samādhi and relaxing and perceiving reality is connected to paññā.

If we decide to learn any skill in worldly life, first we have to decide the goal and then keeping the connected commitments to train regularly (sīla). Then we attain total presence in that skill (samādhi) and at the end, we will be professionals, understanding the deeper aspect of that particular skill (paññā).

To conclude the sīla-samādhi-paññā model (the Three Trainings) it could be used in any part of training but of course the original goal is to attain full liberation: Shakyaprabha in His Vinaya Commentary, *Luminous Discipline* ('Dul ba 'od ldan) says defining what is the word of the Buddha:

“It perfectly teaches the three trainings,

It perfectly possesses the four signs,³⁰

It brings virtue at the beginning, the middle and the end:

In this way the wise recognize the word of the Buddha.”³¹

²⁷ in Vinaya among the four sīla, one is indriyasamvara sīla, restraint of the senses which is the base for meditation

²⁸ samatha jhāna: four form and four formless absorption leading to the absolutely controlled mind

²⁹ vipassanā ñāna: three preliminary and nine levels of ñāna leading to perfectly seeing anatta

³⁰ Four Sign or Four Seal: impermanence, suffering, lack of self and nirvāna

In Mahāyāna traditions one of the main aspect of the Path is developing compassion by way of helping people through giving, healing and teaching. The Mahāyāna education system is also based on three principles.

2. **Lta ba-sgom pa-spyod pa**³²

For many centuries, the biggest Universities were Buddhist institutions where the training was based on three steps: *View*, *Meditation* and *Conduct*. These three steps are the opposite of the previous one, because here conduct is the last step. Establishing the view means reading, learning many texts understanding different philosophical tenets. Forming the **proper understanding** is the factor that opens the gate of meditation.

Meditation according to the mainstream of Mahāyāna was based on the Three Bodhicitta training:³³ bodhicitta of intention, bodhicitta in application and ultimate bodhicitta. This is because karma as a cause has three aspect: intention, action and result (feeling after the action). This education system aims to transcend karma that is why it was possible to practice this system without ordination, living in ordinary life. As we know, some of the Bodhisattvas were lay practitioners (Avalokiteshvara, Mañjuśrī, Vimalakīrti and so on). The meditation part started with developing the altruistic attitude for enlightenment (this practice is called Refuge and Bodhicitta, this is bodhicitta of intention), then came the practice of Pāramitās (bodhicitta in application) and at the end the meditation on the empty nature of all phenomena (Prajñā Pāramitā, ultimate bodhicitta).

In this method, Pāramitās are representing the three trainings of sīla-samādhi-paññā, since giving (*dāna*), ethical conduct (*śīla*), patience (*kṣānti*) and effort (*vīrya*) represent sīla. Dhyāna Pāramitā, the Perfection of Meditative stability represents samādhi and the sixth one, Prajñā Pāramitā represents paññā. All the methods on this Path consists of four factors,³⁴ it means that every practice has this four aspect: compassion,³⁵ using antidotes,³⁶ emptiness³⁷

³¹ Choegyal Namkhai Norbu 2008. *The Precious Vase*, p.23.

³² In Tibetan *lta ba* means view, *sgom pa* meditation and *spyod pa* behaviour. In Sanskrit: dṛṣṭi, bhāvanā, carya

³³ One of the most respected source text of this training is the *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra* by Śāntideva.

³⁴ In Patrul Rinpoche's work *The Brightly Shining Sun, A Step-by-Step Guide to Meditating on the Bodhicaryāvatāra* we can find the four factors of all practices: they are antidote to adverse factor (1), based on non-conceptual wisdom (2), fulfils all wishes (3) and brings all beings to maturity (4).

³⁵ karunā: means to be open to other beings suffering

³⁶ In Tibetan: gnyen po'i lam - path of antidotes, for example: love is antidote of hatred, compassion is attachment, joy is envy, equanimity is pride, prostration is conceit, offering is antidote of desire and so on.

and attainment.³⁸ Compassion can be understood as **communication** and emptiness as **openness**. That is why although traditionally this method is called the path of antidotes³⁹ but in our modern time we could call it openness and communication, two factors that are so important in our world.

After meditation the Bodhisattva attains the third step, the **proper behaviour** that is corresponding to Dharma and attains the perfection of keeping the commitments to save all the beings from cyclic existence. When the proper action and the deep realization of emptiness become inseparable that is the sign of the Fruit (unity of upāya and prajñā).

This education model is a little bit similar to the Eightfold Noble Path, because both of them are starting with proper view, and then comes the proper intention, then action of body, speech in the Eightfold Path or actions (giving and so on) of the Bodhisattva in the Mahāyāna training. At the end there is meditation in both systems.

3. Outer, inner and non-dual mandala

The tantric system is called the Path of transformation,⁴⁰ where the Yogi by special methods transforms negative states of mind into the wisdom of enlightenment. In the Sutra systems,⁴¹ the practices are planting the causes for realization that is why it is called Causal Vehicle but the tantric system is called the Fruitional Vehicle:⁴²

“The Fruitional Vehicle or Vajrayāna is so called because the nature of mind is deemed already endowed with all the qualities of the ‘fruit’ of enlightenment. In fact this nature is introduced by the teacher through initiation as the inseparability of the two truths and is then applied as the path according to the tantric method being utilized.”⁴³

If we take tantras as a model of learning, we can see again three steps: after getting initiation from a Vajra Master, there are three levels of practice.⁴⁴ Initiation means that someone is introducing us into the state what we would like to attain (the result,

³⁷ śūnyatā: emptiness is twofold in Mahāyāna; pudgala- and sarvadharma śūnyatā

³⁸ it means that these practices are leading every beings toward enlightenment

³⁹ Tibetan: gnyen po'i lam, as above

⁴⁰ Tibetan: sgyur lam

⁴¹ In Tibetan Buddhism Sutra systems means those Vehicles where the teaching and practice (dharma) are based on Suttas and Sūtras, it is also called Lakṣaṇayāna. The Tantric system is based on different Tantric texts, Tantras (Tantrayāna, Mantrayāna, Vajrayāna, Guhyayāna).

⁴² Tibetan: 'bras bu'i theg pa

⁴³ Chögyal Namkhai Norbu 2008. *The Precious Vase*, p.30.

⁴⁴ Three krama (phase, level, stage) is used in Highest tantras, in Anuttara Tantras

enlightenment). It means if someone for example wants to learn how to swim, then looks for an expert and asking him to show, introduce him into the world of swimming. Similarly during initiation the Vajra Master introduces the disciple into the state of Vajra, into the state of enlightenment.

The first phase of the practice is called Development stage,⁴⁵ where the Yogi attains the state of samatha by way **visualization** transforming his ordinary environment and beings into an enlightened mandala with its inhabitants, transforming his body into an empty light body of a Buddha, his speech into a sacred mantra and his ordinary mind into the mind of a Buddha. Systematically building up this Dharma vision or pure vision until the point when it is transforming all ordinary thoughts and the Yogi becomes stable attaining meditative stability.

The second phase is called Perfection or Completion stage⁴⁶ where the Yogi through **breathing and physical exercises**⁴⁷ perfects the inner mandala (called *Vajrabody*).⁴⁸ Purifying the channels, chakras, prāna energies give possibility to transform the energy of karma into wisdom energy. This phase corresponds with vipassanā.

After Completion stage, the last phase is called *Mahāmudrā*.⁴⁹ This is when the previous two stages are unified, that is why this system is called Yoga (unification). The first phase is dealing with **outer space** (six sensory fields, objects) transforming it into outer mandala, the second phase is dealing with **inner space** (feelings and sense consciousness) transforming it into inner wisdom mandala and the last phase is the stage where outer and inner space become **non-dual** (union of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*).

Interesting to note that in all the above-mentioned education methods, we can find three steps through we can overcome the causes of cyclic existence, the three poisons (desire, hatred and ignorance):

- ethic, meditation, wisdom
- view, meditation, behaviour
- outer mandala, inner mandala, non-dual mandala

⁴⁵ Tibetan: bskyed rim (utpattikrama)

⁴⁶ Tibetan: rdzogs rim (sampannakrama)

⁴⁷ Tibetan: 'phrul 'khor (Yantra) exercises, usually a complete system consist of 108 practices. They are very similar to Thai Yoga (*Ruesi Dhatton*). See Choegyāl Namkhai Norbu 2008. *Yantra Yoga, the Tibetan yoga of movement*

⁴⁸ Tibetan: rdo rje'i sku (Vajrakāya)

⁴⁹ Great seal, in Tibetan: phyag rgya chen po

After the different education models based on method (upāya) we can investigate a well-known education model spread in all the branches of Buddhism. This model is based on the three steps of wisdom (prajñā).

Wisdom oriented systems on the Path⁵⁰

1. Suta-maya Paññā

There are many possible ways to translate the above term but for me the most meaningful is “**intelligence by listening**”. In a learning process there is someone who transmits knowledge and obviously there is a receiver and there is a third factor; the way to transmit. Transmitting properly the Dharma requires several conditions. That is why there are list of qualities that a valid teacher should realize before starting to teach. Also there are lists about the proper vessel, the student. There are some instructions about the necessary conditions that are essential for proper teaching as well.

Concerning the proper student,⁵¹ she or he should avoid the three failures during receiving teachings. The first one is “upside down vessel”, when due to opposition or dullness the student is unable to pay attention. The second one is “leaking vessel”, when due to distraction or tiredness the information is going in and right after out, not remaining anything in mind. The third one is “poisoned vessel or full vessel”, when the student is judging the teaching due to his arrogance, pride mixing it with his own concepts and ideas.

If the student can properly listen to the teachings (avoiding the three improper vessel), it means that facing the teacher with back straight, opening his chest and all the senses, then the disciple is like a pure and empty vessel, ready to receive Dharma. Before receiving any teachings, the student should also develop proper intention, by way of taking Refuge, generating Bodhicitta and so on.

It is clearly seen that receiving teaching in the proper way needs capacities to develop, again **learning to learn** is very important. From the student’s side developing **openness, respect, presence and proper motivation** is very important, in many cases could be even more important than the topic itself. These qualities enable the student to remember easily, because here we use the mirror like aspect of the mind. In our modern time the value of “**empty vessel**” in learning is well known for example in learning languages. Considering sutra recitation the same principle, openness and presence makes the practice very effective.

⁵⁰ The well-known three wisdoms by hearing, thinking and by meditation is mentioned in the Book of Analyses (Vibhanga), in Chapter 16. (Analyses of Knowledge, Threefold Summary).

⁵¹ There are many qualities that the student should possess. About the worthy student we can read in *Sekha Sutta* (SN 48.53) or *Sigālovāda Sutta* (DN 31) or in Tibetan literature there are detailed lists for example in *Yon tan mdzod* (The Precious Treasury of Qualities) by Jigme Lingpa or in *Shes bya kun khyab* by Jamgon Kongtrul.

Not thinking, not judging, just reciting the words of the Buddha is like filling the empty vessel with the ambrosia of Dharma. It also helps to learn the suttas by heart planting the meaning deeply into mind.

The other necessary aspect of learning process is the proper qualities of the Teacher.⁵² In case of teaching, the proper motivation is very important, that is why before teaching the Teacher is also taking Refuge, invoking the wisdom of the Buddha and so on. The student should trust the Teacher that is why the Teacher should be worthy to follow and of course, certain experiences of the Path should be realized (experience of the Dharma means some level of realization of the Third and Fourth Noble Truth). There are many qualities that a proper Teacher should possess in order to be authentic to transmit the same Dharma that the Buddha taught but it is not so easy to check these, even the Buddha suggested to His students:

“Mendicants, a mendicant who is an inquirer, unable to comprehend another’s mind, should scrutinize the Realized One to see whether he is a fully awakened Buddha or not.”⁵³

In a Teacher-student relationship it was advised to constantly check each other till proper trust and faith aroused. The Teacher should be an **example** for the student, not just the teaching style or **knowledge** is necessary but very important His lifestyle, conduct, **ethical behaviour** and of course the **capacity to lead** the students in practice or in meditation. The great Guru, Padmasambhava states:

*„Not examining the teacher is like drinking poison,
Not examining the disciple is like jumping off a cliff.”⁵⁴*

Success of the teaching on this level depends on the quality of the Teacher and the student, and the way of transmitting and receiving the teaching. Connection to each other and being present adapting the circumstances in the teaching is significant in this process.

2. Cintā-maya Paññā

⁵² Usually when we read those texts examining the qualities like *Bodhisattvabhūmi* or in *Abhidharma-dharmaskandhaśāstra* there are separate lists of a good teacher worthy to follow and teacher not worthy to follow. Today it is a significant problem that how we can know whom is worthy to follow, who is authentic. The proper teacher should apply the so called ‘four attitudes that attract’ students, should be devoid of the Eight worldly dharmas and so on.

⁵³ *Vīmaṃsaka Sutta* (MN 47, *The Inquirer*)

⁵⁴ Choegyal Namkhai Norbu 2008. *The Precious Vase*, p.75

The “intelligence by listening” depends on repetition. Repetition is one of the most effective way for learning. For example if we want to learn how to cook, we have to repeat cooking until the point it becomes natural. However, in Buddhist education just to know something is not enough to attain real understanding, real wisdom. Here comes the second aspect of paññā. Again there are possibilities to translate the term but for me “**intelligence by thinking**” gives back the most valid meaning. Thinking means that the structure of the teaching becomes clear and also the meaning becomes internalized by way of comparing our experiences with the given ideas. In this process, **analyzation and using logic** is momentous.

Buddhist logic has many elaborate systems. Mainly in the Mahāyāna monastic education learning logic and debating is an integral part of curriculum.⁵⁵ It is a vast theme with a huge treasury of texts, commentaries and also a lot of western researchers investigated Buddhist logic, writing translations, articles and books. Here we can just summarize the most important factors in a few words. Logic is very much connected to the Buddhist Philosophical Schools,⁵⁶ historically developed from the Abhidhamma or Abhidharma literature. Drawing back the historical line of Buddhist logic, we can arrive to the first teaching in Benares where the Buddha gave a very profound logical scheme, the cause and effect of karma and Dharma in the Four Noble Truth.

In short, the aim of thinking in Buddhist Philosophy is to make difference between disadvantageous and advantageous dhammas (akusala-kusala) and to make a difference between provisional reality and ultimate reality by the tool of logic. By thinking, reasoning we try to find the answer what is valid, what is real:

„Strictly speaking, pramāna (tshad ma) means "valid cognition." In (Buddhism) practice, it refers to the tradition, principally associated with Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, of logic (rtags rigs) and epistemology (blo rigs).”⁵⁷

And:

⁵⁵ There are many Buddhist logic systems for example Catuskoṭi attributed to Nāgārjuna that we can find in many Madhyamaka works, but this fourfold logic can be find also in *Brahmajāla Sutta* (DN 1). Another system is the Sevenfold Reasoning attributed to Candrakīrti.

⁵⁶ All the philosophical schools are using logic. In the ancient time at Nālandā Monastic University all the student had to study four philosophical tenets: Vaibhāṣika, Sautrāntika, Cittamātra and Madhyamaka. This is the way of learning Buddhist philosophy even today in Tibetan monastic education.

⁵⁷ Śāntarakṣita 2005. *The Adornment of the Middle Way: Shantarakshita's Madhyamakalankara with commentary by Jamgön Mipham*. Boston, Massachusetts, USA: Shambhala Publications, p. 390.

„The means of cognition (*pramāna*) are [immediate and mediate, namely,] perception (*pratyakṣa*) and inference (*anumāna*) because the object to be cognized has [only] two aspects.”⁵⁸

According to the quotation, there are two valid ways of cognition (*pramāna*), one is direct; it means that in the present moment one directly perceives objects by the senses or in **meditation** (*pratyakṣa*). The other one is not direct; it means that one is not in the present moment and it is done by thinking process, by **logic** (*anumāna*).

The aim of logical thinking is to properly understand cause and effect, discovering what are the sources of suffering, what are the sources of happiness, what can be the object of trust, and what cannot be because those phenomena are under the power of impermanence and defilements.⁵⁹ Logical thinking is the antidote to doubts, so before we embark on serious meditation where we go beyond concepts, one must be clearly aware of what the objects of cessation are, what should be reduced (*akusala*), and what dharmas are useful on the Path, so need to be worked out, to develop (*kusala*).

In Mahāyāna monastic education debate was part of training, with the help of debate we could develop logical thinking, memory, not just understanding but also expressing ideas and also to control attachment, anger and pride. Constructive debate can lead to proper understanding of dependent nature of dharmas. As it is written even in some texts, it can lead to meditative states where the breathing stops, when the mind also stops thinking.

In our modern times, communication is one of the key factors but we are not trained in constructive debates, usually we try to control the ideas of the opponent where the goal is to win, but this approach does not correspond to *ahimsā* and not develops compassion and openness.

Developing logical thinking is very important, not just on the Path of Dharma, but in daily life as well. At one point we have to understand Dharma through the lens of our life, it means for example that we can teach the Four Noble Truth not just in a theoretical way but also as something, which is organic part of our life. Training in logical thinking starts by understanding the correlations and characteristics of outer phenomena, and then inner objects

⁵⁸ *Pramāṇa-samuccaya* by Dignāga (1.1: *pratyakṣam anumānam ca prāmane*), the two aspects are *nāma* and *rūpa*

⁵⁹ In Buddhist logic investigating dharmas means trying to figure out whether the chosen object is compounded, impermanent, defiled or not. If not we can trust in it, if it is we have to abandon it.

are investigated, like feelings, thoughts. At the end, we can have deep understanding of interdependent nature of all dharmas and emptiness.⁶⁰ Understanding emptiness opens the door for meditation,⁶¹ where we do not think but feel reality.⁶²

3. Bhāvanā-maya Paññā

The last step of training, after learning how to listen (being attentive and open) and how to think properly (applying logic) is the “**intelligence by meditation**”. Meditation means that the practitioner is one-pointedly abiding in emptiness, seeing directly the nature of all dharmas. Here we need the capacity to practice **calm abiding and insight**.⁶³

The above steps of education by the three wisdoms are:

- listening to the subject
- thinking about, understanding the subject
- meditating on the subject

This process is a way from outside to inside, first opening the gate of mind to the given subject (listening), then during the thinking process internalizing the subject (logical thinking) and at the end realizing the subject or being one with it (meditation):⁶⁴

“Listening to scriptures and reasonings frees us from the obscurations of ignorance,

Reflecting on the key instructions vanquishes the darkness of doubt,

Meditation’s light illuminates the true nature just as it is –

May the brilliance of the three kinds of wisdom increase.” (5)⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Actually the student analysing dhammas by the lakkhanas (aniccā, dukkha, anattā) and this way realizing emptiness using the tool of logic.

⁶¹ There were different meditation systems connected to the Philosophical schools, some are still practiced today. For example, Yogācāra meditation system was popular in China, Madhyamaka mainly in Tibet.

⁶² Madhyamaka training has three main steps. In short: by way of logic realizing the intellectual emptiness, this way dissolving doubt (1), then feeling, experiencing directly the dharmas, training in compassion (2), in compassion there is the Buddha (3).

⁶³ samatha and vipassanā

⁶⁴ There is a comprehensive work about the three wisdom: *The Source of Knowledge in Theravāda Buddhist Philosophy* Ratanak Keo, Phrakhrubhavanabodhikun and Suwin Thongpan, Mahachulalongkornrajavidya University, KhonKaen Campus, Thailand

⁶⁵ *The Aspiration Prayer for Mahamudra* by the Third Gyalwa Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje

Ideally, a class from the viewpoint of Buddhism starts by paying homage to the Triple Gem, then the Teacher is explaining the main topic, students are listening ardently. Then comes conversation or even debate about the topic till the point, when there are no more questions, all doubts are dissolved. Here comes meditation beyond thoughts. At the end of the class again paying homage and dedicating the merits to all beings.

Summary

Learning to learn according to the teachings of the Buddha is more important than the object of learning itself. It invokes different capacities that we need on the Path of Liberation. Listing the qualities, we need: openness, logic, intelligence, discipline, concentration, wisdom, clear comprehension, mind training, altruistic behaviour, respect, clear vision, going beyond duality and we could continue. All these qualities can be developed by the precious education methods given by the Buddha. It is crucial to use these methods in contemporary education as well, this way, not just integrating some information about the world and the human beings but giving possibility to live in a better world and live as a better human being.

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Abbreviations

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DN – Dīgha Nīkāya
MN – Majjhima Nikāya
SN – Saṃyutta Nikāya

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