

How To Listen To Dharma In Brief

Today I will say a bit about how Dharma should be taught and received. Generally speaking it is ones own free choice whether to enter into the teachings of Buddha and practice them or not. I also have never bragged about Dharma, saying that Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism in particular are the best, or that you all must follow me and become Buddhist. Buddha himself said,

O monks and scholars!
Check my teachings just as you would gold,
By melting, cutting, and polishing it
Only then accept them, not just out of respect for me.

Buddha's teachings should not be followed with blind faith. It has never been my intention just to spread Dharma in America and convert as many people to Buddhism as I can. My true intention has been to sow a small seed of inner peace and happiness in your minds. The example I have presented is that Dharma is a medicine, Buddha is a doctor, the Dharma center is a hospital, delusions are a sickness, and we are the patients. Patients with different kinds of disease need different kinds of medicine. All medicines cannot treat the same illness. For this reason all the world's religions are good. They are all similarly based in contentment, patience, pure morality, and so on. It is just like for disease: various medicines are needed because the diseases are different.

What I know, however, is Buddhism; I don't know other religions. From my perspective, this knowledge is something very important for our present day. Buddhist scriptures assert that if you want true happiness you must first study the teachings, and when you study you must first find a good teacher. Once you find a good teacher you must sit before them and listen to Dharma teachings. You should listen with single-pointed focus of your body, speech, and mind with the perceptions, as I mentioned above, of yourself as a patient, Dharma as medicine, and the teacher as a doctor.

You also need to be free of three faults of a vessel. The first of these is not listening, like a vessel that is upside down. You are sitting in the teaching but your mind is distracted elsewhere, you fall asleep, or talk about meaningless things. If you attend without paying attention it is like a vessel that has spilled; whatever liquid you try to pour into it, tea, water, etc, it won't go in. So first it is important to really listen.

The second fault of a vessel is not to keep the teachings in mind, like a vessel with a leak. If you listen but can't remember anything it is like a vessel that is right side up but, unfortunately, has a hole in the bottom, so nothing poured into it will remain inside. You must be able to remember what is taught with stable certainty.

The third fault of a vessel is listening with delusion, like a vessel that contains poison. In this case the teachings are heard and remembered but, unfortunately, with a bad motivation. Such motivation would be, for example, seeking to compete with others, being jealous of your Dharma friends, or planning on making a living in the future by

putting the teachings you have heard up for sale. You must make sure to listen to the teachings with a good, compassionate motivation unstained by delusions.

Refraining from these faults is not a rule imposed on students by a teacher but were taught by Buddha so the teachings could integrate with and transform your mind. If the teachings can really affect your mind you will be able to decrease the force of delusions and eventually abandon them completely. If you can free your mind from delusion you will experience inner peace and happiness. Ultimately this is all taught for your own well-being.

Before Buddha taught the main body of his teachings he would say,

Hey, sons and daughters of the lineage! Listen well, keep this in mind, and I will explain.

First it is very important to listen with single-pointed attention without distraction. If you don't first listen you will have no idea whether the teacher has given a good explanation or not. Whether the teacher's explanation is good or not, from your side you must listen and remember it so you can examine the teacher and their teachings in order to accept or reject them, have questions, and so forth. Then you will know whether the teacher is correct or not. If you need to examine a teacher you must first attend their teachings and listen to them. It is very important for you to listen well even if you don't understand. I never say that whatever Dharma I teach today is very good and you must definitely listen to me. For the time being, I have already become your teacher. If I don't explain things well with a good motivation it is my mistake. Whether you listen or not is your responsibility.

From another point of view, you are supposed to be my disciples. In the future many teachers will come here to our Dharma center. If we attend their teachings improperly it is not impossible that these teachers would become displeased. Also, everyone comes here wishing to hear good teachings of Dharma. Without this wish they would not come. We can all make mistakes however. Many mistakes occur because of not knowing. We must learn about what we do not presently know, and to do that we must learn from others. It is for this reason that I have briefly explained about how to listen to Dharma teachings. I wrote this without intending to address anyone in particular, but just in case it would help new students in the future to know how to listen to Dharma. Please everyone, keep this in mind.