



May the fruit of dharma practice
ripen in the open sky of non-sectarian mind!

Awakening to Sanity (letter 9)

The Thirst for “One Dharma”

Dear friend,

Our traditional Asian teachers were originally surprised to see that Western Buddhists step out of an engaged adherence to their lineage so easily, and even after having put in long years of faithful practice. They were puzzled and tried to understand why this happened. Nowadays they are not surprised anymore, they almost expect Western students to ‘drop out’ at any moment and they often prefer to rely on teachers and helpers from their own cultural background.

Almost all Asian masters understood that no one can simply neglect his or her upbringing and they usually believe that our lack of adherence to their tradition is due to the influence of Christianity and modern sciences – but very few understand what it really means to have grown up and to be growing up in the West. It means having easy access to almost all the views that exist on this planet! This has never happened before and our Asian teachers were not exposed to this in the same way.

From the time when I grew up an enormous variety of political and religious views were accessible; already during my school days I could study Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism along with Christianity and non-conformist movements as well as psychology. Nowadays access to all of these competing views has become even easier. When we first met the Buddhist masters they were aware that some of us had done a lot of studies but they were not aware of what this actually meant. In my case it meant that I had compared the ideas of communist, socialist, capitalist and humanistic thinkers; the views of Protestant, Catholic, orthodox and non-orthodox Christians; the ideas of thinkers and preachers like Steiner,

Krishnamurti, Aurobindo, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda – to name just a few that influenced me.

We had the possibility of reading and meeting a great variety of Buddhist teachers from Tibet, Japan, China, Korea, Vietnam, Burma, Thailand, Sri Lanka and so on. And of course Western adaptations of Buddhist teachings were also already available. In psychology we encountered the views of the founding fathers like Freud, Jung, Adler, Reich, Rogers and so on and the newer disciplines evolving from their work. In philosophy we had access to Greek and Roman philosophers up to Kant and post-Kantian thinkers. We might not have studied any of them in depth, but their thinking was around us all the time.

In brief, we had the possibility to compare and to look for “the best”, the most convincing views and approaches. Some of us found great support and clarity in the Buddhist approach and decided to follow one of its traditions and one of its masters. And now, after having spent half a lifetime in these practices and having gained some understanding, there is a yearning for a unifying approach that would allow the integration of the various truths expressed in such a multitude of different views.

This thirst for a single, unifying approach seems to be felt very strongly by the younger generation because their exposure to a multitude of views has been constant since their birth. If this thirst for “one dharma” is not quenched, the Buddhist tradition as well as the other religions will lose much of their liberating potential because people will simply turn away. Authentic spiritual life will take place outside of the limitations of the old traditions that hold their own views for supreme, unable to consider that others might experience and teach the same thing.

What lies in front of us – the people of this era of all-pervading information – is to go to the very essence, the very source of liberation itself and find out what this “One Dharma”, one teaching or one truth might be. Each one seems to have to go this path alone, but we can help each other along the way by sharing our insights.

All the best, Tilmann Lhundrup

(corrected by Andy)