



One path: the Path of Awareness –
With many ways to take it

Awakening to Sanity (letter 14)

One path or many?

Dear friend,

When looking at the multitude of spiritual traditions that are offering ways to liberation, salvation or awakening one may indeed wonder if there is something that they all have in common. According to Buddha Shakyamuni there is only one path (Ekayana): the path of awareness, expanding and deepening one's awareness. All paths leading to liberation would be included in this. Complete awakening is defined from the Buddha's perspective as all-encompassing awareness freed from all veils – freed from everything that could limit it. It is compared to awakening from a sleep or being able to see after having been blind.

To expand and deepen our awareness is the task of all liberating approaches. Awareness leads to understanding; it opens our heart-mind to its inherent qualities of love, compassion and wisdom which will radiate naturally.

Please take a moment to contemplate the question: Is there any spiritual path that does not cultivate deep, open awareness? If so, could such a path claim to be truly liberating?

That open, deep awareness is also cultivated in some theistic traditions; however they call it "becoming aware of God". A mystical approach – where God is not viewed as separate from mind – is not different from cultivating awareness of the "true nature of mind" as Buddhists tend to express it. Unfortunately some theistic traditions get stuck in believing in a separate God which is not the same as opening our awareness to its inherent, timeless nature.

Mind is awareness, and awareness is alive – a living experience. And all life experience has one taste: being dynamic and creative yet ungraspable, beyond words and definitions. Awareness is profound in its ungraspable, unfathomable nature – and it is vast in that it permeates all experiences, all situations, all sentient being in all universes wherever there is

mind. Entering that profound and vast awareness is the path of liberation. If one's awareness does not open, how could one claim to be on a path of liberation?

However, the ways of opening awareness are manifold: some approaches talk about God, others do not, some use the word Tao, and others speak of True Self, Buddha nature, Awakening, or the Body of Truth (Dharmakaya)... There are so many names pointing towards this dimension of experience which is beyond words; it is also called nondual mind or timeless, primordial awareness. Basically that awareness is a completely natural, unified way of experiencing free from subject and object, free from holding on to a self which is separate from everything else. Mind knows itself. Awareness is aware of itself and by itself. There is no-one there, no separate subject as the knower or creator; it is the effortless, spontaneous unfolding of the play of awareness. This is liberation, this is peace; it is called the wish-fulfilling jewel of mind.

On the path to all-encompassing awareness we can differentiate two motivations: the wish for oneself to become free and the wish to liberate others. It is helpful to have both. However we first need to liberate ourselves before we can help others. We might occasionally be able to already give others a hand while we are still struggling to get onto the dry shore, but this might not be very effective. We need to be on solid ground ourselves before reaching out to others in the swamp; we should first know the way before indicating it to others.

There is some discussion among Buddhists whether everyone who reaches the safe grounds of personal liberation will in turn help others to find the way. Maybe this is not the case for everyone: Some might fear to be drawn back into the swamp of samsara, others might not have the necessary forces yet, and still others might think that much more capable ones, like the Buddhas, are already helping sentient beings and that there is no need for their own involvement. Well, who knows before getting there?

If we want to make sure that our awakening will be of benefit to others as well, then let's put in some effort to develop the necessary motivation and capacities to actively benefit others. Such a wider motivation to help all sentient beings towards complete awakening, also called the "heart mind of awakening" (Bodhicitta), will definitely help to open our heart to the fullest. Once we are on dry ground, there is no harm in having a look whether anyone might need our help... It is as simple as that – it is a joy to take others along into liberation.

With the best wishes for the one path that liberates all,

Tilman Lhundrup

PS. Today's letter was an improvisation on the second half of the first chapter of Gampopa's "Ornament of Liberation".

Seen through by Andy