

Lorig-Mind and Awareness

Thursday 31 March 2011

Lorig, mind and awareness teaching, which is part of the Buddhist curriculum, can sometimes be difficult. This talks about mind which isn't easy to come to terms with, as it has no colour or shape. Buddhist practice is mainly a practice based on understanding the mind and how it works in different situations. To be able to understand and do Buddhist practice well, we need to know about this. The Four Truths are the foundation of Buddhist thought and practice. The first two are the truth of suffering and truth of origin of suffering. Suffering is a sensation which we experience physically and mentally and it originates from the 2nd truth, the cause, which originates from karma. Karma comes from mind which has fallen prey to negative mental factors or delusions. When our mind is clouded and deluded, with regard to how it perceives the object and responds to it, what do we do? We create causes of suffering and resultant suffering ensues. Can the first two truths be overcome? They can, by following and embracing the next two truths; cessation of suffering and path to cessation. The 4th truth, true path, is a process of knowing the delusions, addressing them and learning to separate the mind from delusion by applying antidotes. When antidotes are applied confusion and delusions wear off. This way we reach a state of cessation of suffering caused by delusions. People are at various levels of spiritual development. Some are highly developed and others not so. Progression through the five spiritual paths and 10 Bodhisattva grounds is a process of refining and enriching the mind. You cannot talk about the quality of a person in terms of their looks. Spiritual qualities have all to do with the mind.

Each sentient being who is a person has 3 things; matter, consciousness or mind, and non-associated compositional factors. Form is matter, to be seen and touched, and therefore made sense of. We have an impermanent entity which is neither form nor consciousness and is therefore a non-associated compositional factor because it is not associated with either. What could be an example of this? A person is an example of it because a person is neither mind nor body, yet there is a person. Person is impermanent, not associated with consciousness nor with form; so our person-hood is neither mind nor matter.

What does a person have predominantly? They have consciousness. Materially what do we as persons have? We have the material body; physicality. Where has this body come from? It came from the gathering of four elements, water, air, fire, earth etc. The body is an example of matter conjoined with consciousness. When we talk about body and consciousness in terms of the common perfection vehicle, Sutrayana, body and mind are separate entities. When you go to the higher tantric level, the strict compartments of body and mind seem to fade away as they overlap with each other.

We are sentient beings, we have consciousness and mind, so we cognize. How do we know something does or does not exist? This determination is a matter of experience by our consciousness of something. Mind is a really difficult topic to grapple with and thus mind has become a central issue in Buddhism. Of mind there are four schools of Buddhist tenets or philosophy. The first three schools subscribe to an idea called apperception, which is self-cognizing consciousness. When they ask, how do we know we have a mind? They answer; through apperception we can establish that we have mind. The highest 2 schools of Buddhist thought however rule out apperception. They say; you don't need to establish that mind exists; it can be posited by what the mind does, which is, knowing its object. For them it is through this function and the process of cognition that mind is labeled as an entity.

Another point that is important to remember is; the cause of a consciousness is only a consciousness. What is called the corresponding cause of mind can only be mind. Mind does not emanate from matter or body, or from our person because person is non-associated and therefore not connected with the mind. Only mind can give rise to mind. There is correspondence between the previous moment of causal mind and the subsequent moments of resultant mind. What is the cause of your present consciousness? It is its prior moment. How do we know that? Through memory, we can recall. Only your mind which has experienced events this morning can recall these events. This process goes back to our birth, to our conception in the womb and even back to our last life and previous lifetimes. In this way our mind is traced endlessly back to its similar type in the past. In this way the mind's continuum can be traced back endlessly. This is why Buddhism says we have had beginning-less existence. Each time the mind seamlessly existed, by nature, the mind experienced different sensations of joy and pain. Since consciousness has had a seamless continuum in the past, the thread has been there all along. Due to this

consistency whatever is done positive or negative an imprint is encoded on the consciousness and remains there until it is challenged otherwise. If unchallenged these encoded propensities will give rise to effect as karma in the future. That's how karmic consequences arise.

Mind unfortunately cannot be physically demonstrated as it has no physicality; yet it is a powerful force. Only through being introspective, reflective, and truly looking within, directing the attention of the mind onto itself, can the mind begin to be more and more evident to us. In the beginning, concepts about mind are difficult, but we cannot do without dealing with these and they will be discussed by this text, Lorig, the Buddhist epistemology about the mind.

In Tibetan Buddhism mind has 3 definitions: "shepa" meaning knowledge, consciousness, being conscious of something, "lo" means mind, and "rigpa" means awareness. All 3 are used for mind. What does mind do? Mind is highly reflective. Whatever appears before it, it takes complete cognizance of the attributes of the object and reflects these. The mind cognizes or becomes aware of the object, including its properties.

All consciousness can be grouped into 2: consciousnesses which are in line with facts on the ground, and consciousnesses which are not in line with the facts. We don't take time to analyze whether a certain consciousness is one or the other. Is it factual and thus grounded in truth or misleading and distorted? Whether we see this or not consciousness is so powerful that it propels the person to do an action that ends up being negative. This by nature brings about its result which is invariably painful. It is through this we experience suffering.

Mind dichotomies:

1. prime valid cognition and non-prime valid cognition.
2. distorted and non-distorted
3. mistaken and non-mistaken
4. conceptual and non-conceptual
5. sensory mind and mental consciousness

1. What is prime valid cognition?

This has been discussed by various schools of thought. Prime, valid direct cognition is an awareness which is fresh in terms of cognition of its object and non-mistaken in terms of the cognized object. It is a new, fresh and incontrovertible cognition of the object. Its three features are: it is new, it is non-misleading/non-mistaken/non-deceiving and it is an awareness.

New means that a prime direct cognition is an awareness which cognizes or understands a phenomenon for the first moment in time; powerful and fresh. The second moment of perceiving the same object has lost a touch of its heat and is therefore less powerful than the first moment. Thus the term 'new' is used for the first moment's cognition. Prime valid cognition is called incontrovertible or non-deceiving because from the first moment a consciousness cognizes an object, it is perceived to exist as it is perceived by the consciousness such that if the object is engaged in subsequently by the person then it will lead to a positive, correct, identification of that object; that is, the desired outcome. The object cognized exists in the way it is perceived to be. It is vital to check whether the object, entity or phenomenon registered afresh for the first time, exists or does not exist in the way it presents to exist or does it exist in such a way that its appearance is deceptive.

The Buddhist idea of the 2 truths, conventional and ultimate, is very relevant here. Rigpa/awareness is used in the definition of valid cognition to rule out the physical sense base performing any function of cognition because there are some lower schools within Buddhist tenets who assert that a prime direct cogniser can be the function of something other than mind alone. They say that there are non-conscious entities which also cognize. They believe that the various sense organs, visual, auditory and so on, also cognize objects. To rule that out then awareness is attached to the definition.

Prime cognition has 2 parts; prime direct valid cognition and prime inferential valid cognition or inference. Prime direct cognition is empirical cognition or empirical knowledge of an object. If a consciousness understands an object correctly without relying on reason to establish the validity of the object and this is sensorally established, it is called prime direct cognition. Inferential valid cognition does not understand an object empirically but by logic

and reason. For example, impermanence; do we perceive it directly? No. Impermanent phenomenon undergoes constant momentary change. Although permanent things momentarily change we cannot see this momentary disintegration and change. How do we know something is impermanent? It is the result of a cause. It is a product, a compounded phenomenon. Any compounded phenomenon is brought into existence by causes and prevailing conditions. Whatever is produced by causes and conditions by its very nature is impermanent and momentary disintegration is built into the very nature of such a phenomenon by its causes and conditions. Thinking about such things we develop some understanding of impermanence.

The process of moving from distortion to valid cognition is in this way: At first when reading or hearing about something during a lecture you have difficulties believing it. Even though it is given by a knowledgeable person, you still have doubt. There are three kinds of doubt; doubt tending to fact, doubt tending to no fact, and balanced doubt which is half believing, half doubting. When you hear about a difficult topic at first you develop suspicion, skepticism. After hearing again and again then thinking about, reflecting on the information, in time that which was tending to non-fact in your mind will become factual doubt, or doubt approximating to fact, with regard to what has been conveyed in the discourse or conversation. When you have spent time meditating and reflecting on doubt tending to fact then this will become inference. Reasons you have used to make doubt tending to fact become fact will then become the same reasons that will help you generate inferential valid cognition. Although inferential cognition is valid and non-mistaken, it is not as powerful as empirical cognition. However the veil of conceptuality will become thinner and in time the veil disappears completely and the object that was so hard to understand in the beginning when you had skepticism becomes fully cognized empirically.

Prime direct cognition is empirical in nature. It can be valid, or mistaken. Let's say that it is non-mistaken with regard to what it perceives. Whereas inferential valid cognition, while it is valid in its perception of the object, it is mistaken. It is not distorted but it is mistaken. Distorted and mistaken are two completely different things. There is a big difference between mistaken consciousness and distorted consciousness. For example, when you see a vase, that moment you are satisfied that it is a vase. Your unimpaired visual consciousness is unmistaken. In understanding that it is a vase, you don't have to hold concepts or generic images, the mere perception or visual cognition is enough to understand it is a vase, whereas inferential valid cognition does not empirically cognize an object, but uses a meaning generic image. Think of an object in your home; you don't see it, but a likeness of the object has developed in your mind. Is that wrong? No, the likeness of the object helps you understand the object, but it is mistaken. Inferential valid cognition, understanding a vase, does not understand the vase but through the appearance of a likeness of the vase to the mind. Using this generic image which is a perfect likeness of the vase, you understand the vase. It is mistaken in the sense that the likeness of the vase is not the vase. Yet the likeness of the vase helps you understand the object that you are thinking about.

What I have just talked about tonight is a rough introduction about mind and awareness. The topics covered by this are difficult to appreciate immediately but the veil of difficulties will gradually disappear when you think about it again and again. The process of valid cognition is considered very important, so much so that Indian Buddhist masters had heated discussions with their Hindu counterparts about it and many works have been written about it. Please bear with us in the beginning. If you have difficulties, then raise your hand and ask questions. In Tibet mind has been given top consideration and priority so much so that many meditators from different traditions, rather than meditate on the Buddha, would use the mind as their object of meditation. Mind meditating on mind is very difficult and so they would spend decades meditating on the mind and still not know what the mind is. Just as we are all interested in lessening our difficulties of body and mind and wish to replace these with a lasting sense of well being, in doing that we need to employ the mind and tap into it. Only through knowing what the mind is like, how it is influenced and how it then prompts us to do things and so understanding these processes will we gradually achieve lasting happiness. For this goal we need to turn to our own mind. I will try my best to explain mind and awareness to you. Although I know a lot there is still more for me to learn and using many texts including those by His Holiness we will work together. I believe that if more people understand the Buddhist explanation of mind and awareness it would be better. So by word of mouth please let people know that we are learning about this here.