

B3. Only Buddhism Can Show the Path to Liberation

C1. All the Buddha's Teachings Are Skillful Means of Attaining Nirvana

Verse 38

*All that you have taught
Proceeds by way of dependent origination;
That too is done for the sake of nirvana;
You have no deeds that do not bring peace.*

However much has been proclaimed by you has originated and proceeded from dependent arising itself. And, moreover, it's been for the purpose of nirvana (a release from suffering). You do not do anything that doesn't bring about (such) pacification.

- a. All Buddhist teaching has originated and proceeded from dependent arising

This verse tells us that, all the eighty-four thousand Dharma paths taught by Buddha Shakyamuni have originated and proceeded from dependent arising itself.

We should recognize the fact that all eighty-four thousand Dharma paths can be categorized into teachings of relative truth and teachings of absolute truth. From the perspective of relative truth, all phenomena arise dependently from causes and conditions; if there is no cause, there is no effect. All phenomena can be further classified as to whether it is subject to outer or inner dependent arising. Inner dependent arising is illustrated by the twelve links of dependent origination, while outer dependent arising exists in relation to the natural laws of the external world, in which trees, plants and so on are produced by corresponding causes and conditions. In all, none of these dreamlike and illusory appearances arises, independent of causes and conditions. So, ultimately speaking, the nature of all phenomena is emptiness, which means that it exists on a plane beyond the four extremes and the eight elaborations.

The Buddha shared all of these teachings in order to guide living beings to eliminate suffering, to attain liberation, and to reach nirvana. All of the Buddha's teachings are able to pacify mental afflictions and sufferings, as their intent is for the realization of dependent arising and emptiness.

- b. All of the Buddha's teaching can bring peace

The teaching of the two truths is necessary because it can help ordinary beings to eliminate their suffering and purify their mind. In *The Meeting of the Father and Son Sutra*, it is said, "Buddhas appeared in the world and proclaimed the way leading to peace and liberation. Those who are wise, clearly realize that by choosing this path, they will cross the ocean of samsara, once and for all."

Even if we have not yet reached this state, we can still appreciate that none of the teachings of the Buddha is contrary to achieving a state of peace. Everything that the Buddha did was about peace. For example, the Buddha has taught that one should not harm any living being. So learning to do no harm is exactly the teaching that brings peace.

For average people, entering nirvana and attaining Buddhahood are lofty goals, but

coming to understand the Buddhist view of emptiness and altruism shouldn't be too difficult for them to accept. Many well-educated people have the feeling that before they learned about Buddhism, their thoughts and behaviors were kind of crazy due to the fact that they were confined by their limited perception and driven by their ego. Without knowing about the karmic law or emptiness, many people strongly and blindly cling to fame, wealth, relationship, social status and so on. Therefore, it is of great benefit to spread the philosophy of emptiness and compassion to everyone in every corner of this world.

Indeed, the Buddha's teachings can also greatly help national leaders to efficiently govern their countries. In *The Golden Light Sutra*¹ and other sutras, the Buddha taught many skillful means that are well suited to just this purpose. It is fair to say that both the relative view of compassion and the ultimate view of emptiness are beneficial not only to individuals, but also to any nation and to the whole of humanity.

C2. Thus One Should Accept All the Buddha's Teachings

Verse 39

*Alas! Your teaching is such,
In whosoever's ears it falls,
They all attain peace; so who would not be
Honoured to uphold your teaching?*

How wondrous! Because your teachings bring about a pacification (of suffering) to all those in whose ears it passes, who could not respect upholding your teachings?

a. The benefits of the Buddha's teaching

How wondrous are the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni! No matter which topic the teaching may concern, as long as it is heard by a living being, a virtuous seed is planted which enables one to destroy wrong views and to set oneself on the path towards nirvana. Knowing this, who is not willing to respectfully uphold such teachings?

In this world, all living beings want happiness, yet happiness that lasts for more than just a moment, remains elusive for most. From birth to death, living beings are bustling about trying to catch happiness. If one were to learn of a method to achieve true happiness, who wouldn't rush to follow it? This method is the Buddha's teaching; if living beings are able to grasp it and put it into practice, it is certain that they will attain not only short-term, but ultimate happiness. Knowing that the Buddha's teaching can offer such great benefit, who would not be joyful to receive it?

In *The One Hundred and Fifty Praises of the Buddha* it says: "Upon hearing the wondrous Dharma taught by the Buddha, one becomes filled with joy and the mind becomes clear. With subsequent careful contemplation, one is then freed from all mental afflictions." When one first encounters the precious and supreme Dharma, they feel joyful; then through continuously studying and contemplating it, one can eradicate afflictions and experience even more unusual levels of happiness and joy. This enlightenment that is accompanied by unspeakable joy, is referred to, in the many realization songs of enlightened beings, as the

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Light_Sutra

great bliss.

The main reason that one experiences this great happiness, is that the Dharma is able to lead a person to recognize his own afflictions and reduce his clinging to things of this world; as a result, their mind will naturally relax and become peaceful and calm. Just like a prisoner that has been released from prison, if one understands the meaning of emptiness and compassion, the mind becomes free from the bondage of one's own afflictions and attachment, and consequently, one will achieve peace and happiness.

b. The merit of listening to the Dharma teaching

For this reason, Lama Tsongkhapa says that upon hearing the Buddha's teaching, people will be able to achieve liberation. The sutra of *Remaining Mindful of the True Dharma* says: "For sentient beings to rise above birth and death, their foremost recourse is to listen to the Dharma." Listening to Dharma teachings is the best way to free oneself from samsara. Merely hearing one Dharma teaching every day, makes the day meaningful and valuable.

Before studying the Mahayana teachings, one may have the perception that they are surrounded by enemies and that whatever happens in daily life presents itself as a constant struggle with adversity. After being educated by the Mahayana teachings, even when one is actually insulted or mistreated, this type of situation can still become a favorable condition in the progression of one's spiritual practice. This is because, through study and practice, the Mahayana teachings are able to open one's heart, and make it more flexible and soft. With a rigid mind, everything has the potential to become a cause of suffering, however with an open mind, everything becomes acceptable.

The Flower Adornment Sutra states that, "The Tathagatas and bodhisattvas appear in this world, and their purpose is to open sentient being's wisdom eyes to enable them enjoy true happiness." In fact, happiness that lasts a day or two is not real happiness nor is the enjoyment that we get from those things that please only our senses. So what then is this true happiness that we are speaking of? It is the realization of wisdom, and the end of ignorance. It is the perception of reality as it truly is. When we have recognized the essential truth of all phenomena, we are no longer troubled by emotional upheavals or suffering. Once we recognize this, we should make every effort to understand and uphold the Buddha's supreme teaching, because it is only the Dharma that can lead us to lasting peace and great joy.

C3. The Author Feel Joyful by Realizing the Three Distinctive Characters of Buddhism

Verse 40

*It overcomes all opposing challenges;
It's free from contradictions between earlier and latter parts;
It grants fulfilment of beings' two aims –
For this system my joy increases ever more.*

My delight ever increases in this system (of yours), which defeats every kind of challenging opponent, is devoid of contradictions from top to bottom, and bestows the two aims of the nine kinds of beings.

a. The three distinctive characteristics of Buddhism

This verse tells the three primary reasons that the Buddha's teaching arouses such immense joy and respect in Lama Tsongkhapa.

First, the Buddha's teaching defeats all philosophies or doctrines held by the tirthikas of this world. This includes such schools as Vaisesika, Shaivism and Charvaka², none of which have been able to prevail against the rational arguments of Buddhist philosophy. The Buddha's proclamation, like the lion's roar that scares away all other wild animals, simply cannot be refuted; this applies to arguments made against it, in the past, the present, as well as in the future. Thus, Lama Tsongkhapa developed great joy in the Buddha's teaching.

Second, the Buddha's teachings have no contradictions within themselves, nor are there inconsistencies between its earlier and later parts, in spite of the fact that he gave his teachings over a period of forty-nine years to living beings of many different capacities. Because of the diversity of these provisional teachings, they are collectively known as the 84,000 Dharma paths or gates. In his first turning of the Dharma wheel, the Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths; in the second turning, the Buddha taught the reality of emptiness, and in the third turning, the Buddha taught the true meaning of buddha-nature. Additionally, the Buddha also spoke of the unsurpassable tantras. In spite of the fact that there are all of these numerous teachings, including both the ultimate teachings and the provisional teachings, none of them will ever become outdated, useless or need to be eliminated.

Thirdly, the Buddha's teaching clearly has great benefits to all living beings. In this world, a certain philosophy may appear to be intellectually stimulating, but if it does not benefit sentient beings, it's unworthy of our endorsement. Only the Buddha's teaching, has the capacity to help all beings to achieve both their temporary and ultimate aims, as well as their worldly and other-worldly pursuits. As long as a person embraces it with devotion and feels an affinity for it, it is certain that they will gain both temporary and ultimate benefits.

For these three reasons, Lama Tsongkhapa generated tremendous joy in receiving the Buddha's teaching.

b. Arouse conviction by following in the footstep of Lama Tsongkhapa

Even though we currently do not have the wisdom to fully appreciate the Buddha's incredible qualities, through learning this great text, composed and written by Lama Tsongkhapa, we should strive to develop such conviction.

On the one hand, the Buddha's wisdom is absolutely matchless. In Chapter 23 of *Connected Discourses* it says that, "Just as the water of an ocean cannot fit into the hoofprint of a cow, the wisdom of the Buddha cannot be held by ordinary people." The Buddha's compassion toward living beings is boundless and unconditioned; there is no one in this world that has the same compassion as the Buddha. *The Flower Adornment Sutra* says, "Delivering limitless sentient beings, teaching in accordance with their capacities, and pronouncing numerous doctrines unhindered, these are feats accomplished only by the Buddha." The Buddha is able to bring countless living beings to enlightenment by teaching

² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charvaka>

the correct approach that is appropriate for each individual's need and potential. It is only the Buddha who has perfected this extraordinary ability.

That is why in another text praising the Buddha, *Praise to the Exalted Buddha Shakyamuni*, it says, "The more I analyzed the non-Buddhist doctrines, the stronger my faith in you grew, Peerless Teacher!" And further on in the same text, "I have no desire to follow any other teacher but you, Honorable Buddha, because you are unstained by fault and are replete with perfect qualities." This verse was a favorite of His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche and was frequently quoted by him.