

# TEACHING PHILOSOPHY AND THE BUDDHIST WAY OF LEARNING

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## Abstract

*The Buddhist way of learning is composed of four natural stages: listening, speaking, thinking, and doing. These four stages lead to three kinds of wisdom: (1) Sutamaya-paccâ, wisdom resulting from listening to others, (2) Cintâmaya-paccâ, wisdom resulting from one's own reflection, and (3) Bhâvanâmaya-paccâ, wisdom resulting from doing or practice. Teaching philosophy according to the Buddhist context, therefore, will begin with "love of wisdom" and end with "wisdom of love".*

## I. Introduction

What is philosophy? Etymologically speaking, "philosophy" means "love of wisdom". According to this etymological sense, a philosopher means a lover of wisdom. As a matter of fact, a philosopher is usually considered as a lover of arguments. To define philosophy is not an exception. Philosophers usually argue and give different answers to the above-mentioned question. Thus it is not exaggerated to say that "philosophy" may mean different things to different people including philosophers. According to Plato, philosophy is the "final test" for those who are considered as qualified to become the guardians. Philosophy as "Socratic dialectic" deals with *episteme*, not *doxa*. In other words, philosophy can lead us to the intelligible world or the world of forms.

## II. Doing Philosophy

As we well know, not all philosophers agree with Plato. One among those prominent philosophers is John Dewey. Dewey rejects knowledge as contemplation. Actually, he rejects knowledge itself. For Dewey, there is nothing called knowledge. What we have is just knowing, not knowledge. And for Dewey knowing is just doing. There is no such a thing as the ideal or intelligible world. What we have is just the real or

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actual world. This world is subject to change, and, therefore, learning as doing is appropriate. According to Dewey, doing philosophy does not mean doing contemplation. Doing philosophy for him can mean only doing observation and experiment. From Dewey's proposal, philosophy will inevitably be reduced or transformed into science. Again, not all philosophers agree with Dewey.

### III. Teaching Philosophy

In the contemporary western world, philosophy may be divided into two main traditions: Anglo-American/ analytic tradition and European/continental tradition. Roughly speaking, what generally interests analytic philosophers is *Apollo* whereas what attracts continental philosophers in general is *Dionysus*. Analytic philosophers generally deal with truths and knowledge while continental philosophers deal with values and life. Thus while logical arguments are a necessary instrument for analytic philosophers, dialogue or communicative action is a means for continental philosophers in general. When these philosophers are requested to deal with teaching philosophy, they use quite a few approaches to teaching their students such as history of ideas, text-oriented, author-oriented, argument-based, problem-based, or even brain-based approaches. Whatever approach used by these philosophers in their teaching philosophy, they use it either through logical argumentation or dialogue.

### IV. The Buddhist Way of Learning

Buddhism exercises its own way of learning. There are four steps of learning. Let us turn to the way babies learn. Babies, if they are not deaf, take at least one year by average to learn to listen. Then they will learn how to speak. After they have acquired a language, they will learn how to think. Then finally, they will learn how to act or do things with their labor. The Lord Buddha taught four natural steps of learning which may be defined as 4 D's: auditing, dialogue, dialectic, and doing. All human babies, if they are not deaf by birth, learn from listening to other people as the first stage. Then they will learn how to speak and have dialogue with other people. After they have acquired a language, they will learn how to think. Since we cannot think without a language, our thought or thinking always comes after our acquisition of language. After we learn how to think, then we will learn how to do things in terms of *praxis* and *techne*. Thus according to Buddhism, doing things

in terms of *praxis* and *techne* does not come first. Learning from listening is prior to learning from doing things. Doing philosophy is not an exception. According to the Buddhist context, the natural way of learning philosophy is according to the following sequences: *listening to philosophy*, *speaking philosophy*, *thinking philosophy*, and *doing philosophy*.

As we well know, after we have acquired linguistic literacy, we can learn a lot from reading. Reading is considered as another dimension of listening to others. When we read texts, we listen to them. For this reason, Buddhism considers that listening to others, having dialogue with others, and reading texts belong to the same type of wisdom. Accordingly, wisdom according to Buddhism can be classified into three main kinds: (1) *Sutamaya-paccâ*, wisdom resulting from listening to others, (2) *Cintâmaya-paccâ*, wisdom resulting from one's own reflection, and (3) *Bhâvanâmaya-paccâ*, wisdom resulting from doing or practice.

## V. From Love of Wisdom to Wisdom of Love

As human beings, unlike our thought or thinking, our feelings are innate. No one has ever taught us to feel. Feelings have been with us since we were in our mother's womb. This is the reason why a philosopher like Whitehead considers aesthetic values as the most fundamental. We can feel like or dislike without training or teaching by anybody. No one has ever taught us to be pleased or displeased. Satisfaction and dissatisfaction come with us like an ability of crying. No one has ever taught any baby to cry. Thus we can say that aesthetical values are innate whereas other kinds of values are acquired or learned. Let us consider other kinds of values such as truth values in logic and science, moral and religious values. We learn these values from other people. In other words, we learn how to make a distinction between true and false, right and wrong, good and evil, after we have already learned or acquired a language.

Thus our positive feeling is very important for learning in the Buddhist context. The Lord Buddha talked about *Iddhipâda 4* or the fourfold path of accomplishment. The path begins with *Chanda* or satisfaction. If we like or love to learn something, we will put our *Viriya* or effort on it. Then our effort will be followed by *Citta* or dedication and finally followed by *Vimamsâ* or examination. If we start with our love to do something, we will end with our examination of whether we succeed in doing such a thing or not. The Lord Buddha himself loved

to be enlightened, and then with his persistent effort he could attain *Nibbâna* or enlightenment.

*Chanda* is necessary for learning philosophy because it is a powerful internal motive. Any teacher who can make their students “fall in love” with philosophy is considered as a great inspirer. Great teachers always inspire their students. Though *Chandha* is necessary, it is not sufficient for learning philosophy. Learning philosophy requires another factor. While Aristotle calls this factor a sense of wonder, the Lord Buddha calls it an inquiring mind. In his doctrine *Kâlâmasuuta*, the Lord Buddha says,

1. Be not led by reports.
2. Be not led by traditions.
3. Be not led by hearsay.
4. Be not led by the authority of texts.
5. Be not led by mere logic.
6. Be not led by inferences.
7. Be not led by considering appearances.
8. Be not led by the agreement with an approved theory.
9. Be not led by seeming possibilities.
10. Be not led by the idea “This is our teacher.”

The above ten sources of knowledge or wisdom according *Kâlâmasutta* may be classified into three main groups as follows:

1. Traditions and verbal testimony (No. 1-3)
2. Texts and trustworthy persons (No. 4 & 10)
3. Different kinds of logical thinking or inferences (No. 5 = deduction, No. 6 = induction, No. 7-9 = the synthesis or integration between deduction and induction)

The first two groups lead to knowledge or wisdom resulting from listening to others (*Sutamaya-paccâ*). The third group implies knowledge or wisdom resulting from one’s own reflection (*Cintâmaya-paccâ*). The Lord Buddha told people not to adopt or reject knowledge or wisdom from these sources easily. It seems to me that “rationality” according to the Buddhist context is a virtue between the two extremes, namely, skepticism and credulity. People who are “rational” are neither those who are too hard to believe nor those who are too easy to believe.

Then for wisdom resulting from doing and practice (*Bhâvanâmaya-paccâ*), we cannot get it from anybody, and nobody can do it for us or give it to us. We have to gain it by ourselves. That is the reason why this kind of wisdom is reliable and undoubted.

## VI. Conclusion

Teaching philosophy in the Buddhist context starts with teaching students know how to listen to other people and read scriptures and texts. In Buddhist terms, students will be taught how to listen to *Saddhamma* or doctrines. Then students will learn how to have dialogue especially with *Kalyānamitta* or good friends and scholars. Then they will be taught how to think critically or *Yonisomanasikāra*. Last, but not least, they will be taught how to act properly through *Trisikkhā* (the Threefold Training), namely, *Adhisīla-sikkhā* (training in higher morality), *Adhicitta-sikkhā* (training in higher mentality), and *Adhipaccā-sikkhā* (training in higher wisdom). According to the Buddhist context, love of wisdom (philosophy) and wisdom of love (religion) need to come together hand in hand. In other word, philosophy and religion are always interrelated or interdependent. Thus *teaching or doing philosophy* is always expected to come together with *doing religion*.