

Understanding Buddha Nature

Previously, I spoke about Buddha nature and how all sentient beings have the potential to attain full enlightenment. Now I will elaborate a little more upon this subject to make it more understandable.

The Buddha nature can be categorized into two different kinds:

One is Natural Buddha Nature and other is Progressive Buddha Nature. When I said that from beginningless time, all sentient beings have Buddha nature within, they have the first kind of Buddha nature which is the Natural Buddha Nature. Therefore, all sentient beings have the Natural Buddha Nature while only the Bodhisattvas or those who have taken the Bodhisattva vows and are practicing on the path of Bodhisattvas or have Bodhichitta have Progressive Buddha Nature.

Other than Bodhisattvas, whether you are Buddhists or non-Buddhists, we all have the Natural Buddha Nature within. And so to give you an example, the Natural Buddha Nature is like the head while the Progressive Buddha Nature is like the hat which you put on top of the head. The Natural Buddha Nature is like the base or foundation and the Progressive Buddha Nature is like what you build on top of the foundation.

Now although all sentient beings equally have Buddha nature, there is a difference in the kind of Buddha nature within each being because in some sentient beings Buddha nature is awakened and while in others that same Buddha nature is un-awakened.

Having an awakened Buddha nature, means that it is ready to progress and when I say un-awakened, there is Buddha nature within but it is not ready to progress yet towards eventually attaining enlightenment.

There are four signs that a person's Buddha nature is awakened or ready to progress:

- The first sign is that before even entering the door of Dharma, a person has natural compassion.
- The second sign is that even before taking refuge in the Dharma, they have this natural faith in the Triple Gem (Buddha, Dharma and Sangha).
- The third sign is that if others harm such a person even before they enter the path of Dharma, they have natural patience and forbearance towards their tormentors.
- The fourth sign is that such a person enjoys accumulating good merit even before entering the path of the Dharma. These are the four signs of a person's Buddha nature being awakened.

On the other hand, there are four faults or obstacles to a person's Buddha nature being awakened.

- The first obstacle is that having become used to letting one's defilements control one's mind for too long, one happens to have a natural attachment to material things like, wealth, food, attachment to sentient beings (those that one loves) and aversion to sentient beings (those that

one does not love). This is the first of the obstacles that prevents one's Buddha nature from being fully awakened.

- The second obstacle is that one is connected to bad company and therefore swayed by bad influences.
- The third obstacle is that if one had a non- Buddhist teacher earlier and that non- Buddhist teacher prevents one from following the path of the dharma and even if the teacher allows the pursuit of dharma, if the teacher continues to teach of non-Buddhist teachings or views, that is an obstacle. Even if you have the opportunity to study with a teacher who can teach Dharma, yet you are conflicted since you do not wish to displease your previous teacher, such a situation is an obstacle in your following of the Dharma and therefore prevents the Buddha nature from being awakened.
- The fourth obstacle is that because of poverty, one does not have basic facilities like food and clothing, one does not have the confidence nor feel worthy to follow the dharma. Also, because of one's loved ones and peers as well as kings and leaders that have power over you, one can be prevented from following the path of the Dharma and that is the fourth obstacle to awakening of Buddha nature.

Therefore, it is good to think of these four signs that establish one's Buddha nature as being awakened and the four signs of obstacles that prevent the awakening of the Buddha nature. These factors determine the state of the Buddha nature within you and so it is good to be aware of this.

To be clear, these words are not coming directly from my own experiences nor am I good at preaching or sharing the profound dharma. I am just repeating what the great masters of the past have already said. There is no need to make up anything new since the masters of the past have already written down very eloquently and beautifully and left these precious dharma treasures for us.

I have nothing new to say from my own experiences but rather I am repeating what the great masters have already said before my times and hope that it will be of benefit if not to all but at least to some.

These teachings come from Sakya Pandita's Clarifying the Sage's Intent which describes the stages of the Bodhisattva's path.

--H.E. KhÖndung Asanga Vajra Rinpoche, March, 2018.