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PRACTICE OF THREEFOLD LOGIC

The purpose of using threefold logic is to properly study the teachings. To do so, there is a need for clearheadedness and a sense of how things evolve. In studying dharma, we are relating with our own minds rather than studying a philosophy or psychology. Therefore, our approach should be simple and direct, gut level. There should be no compromises, even with words.

Threefold logic cannot be forced or applied mechanically. If we try to do so, it become a way of complicating things rather than of simplifying. It begins to promote conceptual mind rather than directness and clarity of thought and expression. The point is to be able to communicate to students and others in a manner that is accurate, that touches their personal experience and is valuable to them, and that can be understood. We have to learn to communicate beyond jargon.

The Vidyadhara said that his own talks always followed a threefold process, although people might not always hear them that way. In addition, he combined logic and evocativeness, so that each presentation would have the following four elements:

1. personal experience
2. that experience relates to students and is valuable to them
3. metaphor
4. quotations.

Without the use of metaphor, a talk may become too heavy-handed. A metaphor may make the hard truth easier to take, like adding soda to our scotch. A metaphor evokes an intuitive understanding of the teachings, and therefore should not be treated too literally.

Threefold logic is based on respect for language and an awareness of how language can create a state of mind. What you are presenting when you are speaking dharma, or truth, is sacred. This sense of sacredness can keep you from being either too sloppy and informal or too pompous and still. Such sacredness is based on trust in the teachings, that the teachings speak for themselves. That make the dharma very personal, not at all foreign. This does not mean everything has been fully understood. A person could talk about banking without being a millionaire.

In presenting dharma, we should not be afraid to be technical, almost academic. The point is not to psychologize or to ponder too much, but to cut through discursive thought. In this regard, it is important to distinguish between discursive mind and questioning mind. Discursive mind jumps back and forth on a topic with endless speculation on what could be. Questioning mind has caught the fever of what the truth could be. So it is more clear; the question is already the answer. It is this quality of questioning mind that is expressed in the sutras in the dialogues between Buddha and his disciples.

The basic approach of threefold logic is to:

1. take a theme
2. elaborate on that
3. make it solid.

One common approach is discuss *ground*, *path*, and *fruition*:

1. *ground*: basic perspective
2. *path*: how you practice that

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3. *fruition*: realization

However, there are other possibilities, such as:

1. *definition*: what are we talking about?
 2. *nature*: how it works or how you practice it
 3. *function*: what it accomplishes
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1. *essence*: what something essentially is
 2. *cause*: how it activates or manifests
 3. *effect*: final result or surface manifestation

In thinking about a topic in threefold logic, there are two basic paradigms:

1. Examine what is happening now and see how it arose, starting with step three and working backwards.
2. Examine what is happening now and see where it leads, starting with step one and work forward.

Examples of threefold logic can be found in seminary teacher's exam questions. To get a feel for the logic, first study the general paradigms, then the more detailed exam questions.

GENERAL EXAMPLES

1. see
 2. examine
 3. pigeonhole
-
1. this is the case.
 2. what shall I do?
 3. how do I do that?
-
1. vague
 2. action
 3. clear
-
1. how did it happen?
 2. what is the process?
 3. where is it going?
-
1. because this has happened
 2. this is the cause
 3. so this will happen
-
1. sun
 2. sun shines out
 3. dispels darkness
-
1. first we are here
 2. cross river
 3. get to other shore
-
1. buying a ticket
 2. getting on an airplane

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3. arriving at the destination

1. something is burning.
2. it radiates heat.
3. therefore it is fire.

EXAMPLES FROM TEACHER'S EXAMS

What inspires anyone to get onto the path?

1. bondage
2. suffering
3. freedom from bondage (cessation)

What is the motivation to practice shamatha?

1. clumsiness of one's neurosis
2. inspiration to be unclumsy or mindful
3. tranquillity or one-pointedness

What is a teacher in the hinayana?

1. student's sense of inadequacy
2. looking for an example
3. finding a teacher

What is peace from the hinayana point of view?

1. having passion
2. seeing possibilities of releases
3. peace

What is egolessness?

1. sense of imprisonment and claustrophobia from clinging to self
2. two-edged prajna, which sees that suffering
3. egolessness

What is egolessness of individuality?

1. impermanence
2. prajna, needlessness of fixation
3. egolessness of individuality

What is egolessness of dharmas?

1. existence of this and that; cause and effect
2. relative reference point
3. leads to one-half-fold egolessness of dharmas

What is vipashyana?

1. mindfulness
2. expanded awareness
3. insight

or

1. precision, seeing one thing at a time accurately
2. awareness of totality

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3. insight

What is a broad definition of sangha?

1. having been inspired by the dharma
2. one works towards trying to discipline oneself
 - less emotionalism
 - more contentment
3. one joins with others (sangha) to work with
 - oneself
 - others
 - energy of others

What is discipline (shila)?

1. sense of renunciation
2. cutting through habitual patterns
3. discipline

What is samadhi?

1. discipline
2. egolessness
3. absorption

What is prajna (sherap)?

1. discipline and samadhi
2. discriminating awareness
3. proclaiming and demonstrating (activity of pratyekabuddha)