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Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammasambuddhasa

Published by

Buddhist Discussion Centre Australia.

A.C.N. 005 701 806 A.B.N. 42 611 496 488

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Associated Institution of the World Buddhist University
World Fellowship of Buddhists Regional Centre

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Summary

Leanne Eames, a past student at the Buddhist Discussion Centre (Upwey) Ltd, spent some time during the 1980's living in Japan on a year contract teaching English in Junior High Schools as part of the "JET Program", a program directed toward the improvement of English language education in Japan. Whilst living there Leanne attended Zazen and Teachings in the Shobogenzo given by Master Nishijima. Shobogenzo, which means "Essence and Treasury of Buddhist Truth", was written and compiled by Master Dogen and his disciples in the 13th century. Master Dogen was the founder of the Soto line of the Zen sect of Buddhism in Japan. Master Nishijima, with the assistance of some of his students, was translating the Shobogenzo into English and that translation was used in the series of lectures Leanne attended.

TEACHINGS ON THE SHOBOGENZO, GIVEN BY MASTER NISHIJIMA. 4TH FEBRUARY 1988

The following is a transcription of the Teaching given on February 4th, 1988:

Today, I would like to have a talk about the relationship between theory and reality. We usually revere the value of theory very much. Therefore, sometimes we make our mistake that the theory is the same as reality, or theory is the same as fact. But this idea is a serious mistake. Many people do not recognise the mistake, because our brain is full of ideas. We are full of ideas, yet we do not realise what reality is. Gautama Buddha recognised this fact, so he recommended us to realise reality. But to realise reality sounds strange. We are living in reality, but at the same time it is very strange that we do not know what reality is.

In Buddhism we use a simile of a painted rice cake. Even though it looks very tasty, the painted rice cake can never satisfy our hunger. The painted rice cake is a simile of theory, and hunger is a simile of reality. Thus, Gautama Buddha recommended us to practise Zazen. By practising Zazen we sit in reality, we taste reality, we recognise reality. Therefore, by practising Zazen we can realise reality. Of course, theory is very important. But at the same time, to understand what reality is equally important. This is the fundamental Buddhist principle.

Here I would like to begin the lecture of Shobogenzo again. And the chapter I will talk about today is Bukkyo. Bukkyo means Buddhist Teachings, and in this chapter, Master Dogen explained the value of Buddhist Teachings or Buddhist Theory. In Chinese Buddhism there were many Buddhist Priests who denied the value of Buddhist theory, because they esteemed the value of Buddhist Practice so much. Therefore, they did not recognise the value in studying Buddhist theory. But Master Dogen had a different idea from them. He insists that though it is very important to practise Zazen (reality) it is also important to study theory, because by studying Buddhist theory, we can understand why we practise Zazen.

Today's lecture is from page 14. In the previous meeting I explained the 12 divisions of Buddhist scriptures. At the same time, we can find another

dividing of scriptures, that is 9 divisions of the Teachings. There is another way of dividing the scriptures which has nine kinds. It is also called the nine divisions of the teachings.

The nine kinds are:

1) Sutras, 2) Gatha, 3) Honji, 4) Honsho, 5) Misou, 6) Innen, 7) Hiyu, 8) Geya and 9) Upadesa.

Because all nine kinds of teachings are perfectly present in every teaching, there are 81 kinds of teachings in all. Since each one of the nine kinds of teachings is perfectly represented by one kind of teaching, there can be nine kinds of teachings. If they did not have this virtue of belonging to a single kind of teaching, there could never be nine kinds of teachings. As they do have the virtue of belonging to one kind of teaching, this teaching belongs to one kind of teaching. For this reason there are 81 kinds of teachings. Thus this is a teaching of concrete reality; 'I' am a kind of teaching; this hossu is a kind of teaching; this walking stick is a kind of teaching, and the Shobogenzo itself is a kind of teaching.

In this paragraph Master Dogen introduced the 9 divisions of the Buddhist Teachings, and at the same time he said that one division includes also 9 divisions, therefore we can calculate 81 kinds of Teachings. But at the same time those 81 kinds of teachings explain only one reality. Therefore, we can think that Buddhist Teachings are only one.

And Master Dogen said, "This concrete reality is a kind of Teaching. I am a kind of Teaching, this hossu is a kind of Teaching.' 'Hossu' means goods which are used for a Buddhist ceremony. And he said, 'This walking stick is a kind of Teaching. And the walking stick is also a stick which is used in Buddhist ceremony.' And at the end he said, 'The Shobogenzo itself is a kind of Teaching."

The next paragraph Gautama Buddha said, "These nine kinds of teachings of mine, preached to humbly follow all living beings, are the fundamental means of entering the Mahayana. This is why I preached these teachings.' These 'teachings of mine' means the Tathagata. In them his face, eyes, body, and mind are manifested these 'teachings of mine' are just the nine kinds of teachings; the nine kinds of teachings are just these 'teachings of mine'. One word, one verse, here and now, are the nine kinds of teachings. Because he called them 'teachings of mine', they were preached to humbly follow all living beings. Therefore, the life of all living beings appears right here; it is just the preaching of real sutras. Going further, our momentary actions are also just the preaching of real sutras. 'Teaching living beings, I make them all enter the Buddhist Truth is just the preaching of real sutras."

In this paragraph, Master Dogen quoted, "Gautama Buddha's words and he interpreted that Gautama Buddha's words suggest that Buddhist Teachings are Gautama Buddha's himself, and at the same time, conduct of Gautama Buddhas to teach living beings, is also real Sutras. Therefore, in this paragraph, Master Dogen insisted that Gautama Buddha's Teachings is just reality. That is called real Sutras."

The next paragraph, "These living beings are those who humbly follow these nine kinds of teachings of mine. To humbly follow means to follow circumstances perfectly, to follow the self perfectly, to follow living' perfectly, to follow beings perfectly, to follow ourselves perfectly, and to follow this concrete reality perfectly. Because these living beings are inevitably these

‘teachings of mine’, they are each and every line of the nine kinds of teachings.”

In this paragraph, Master Dogen identified living beings and Buddhist Teachings. “In reality, Buddhist theory and our concrete lives are the same, because Buddhist Teachings are very realistic theory. It is always related with reality, therefore, when we forget reality, we can never understand Buddhist theory. And when we recognize reality, it is not necessary for us to read Buddhist scriptures, because Buddhist scriptures are explanations of reality. Therefore, when we realise reality, it is not necessary to read Buddhist scriptures again.”

The next paragraph, "To be the fundamental means of entering the Mahayana means to experience the Mahayana, to listen to the Mahayana, and to preach the Mahayana. Therefore we do not say that living beings, by their very nature, have already attained the Truth; that is just one aspect of their being. ‘To enter’ is the fundamental means; the fundamental means is right from beginning, right to the end. Buddha preaches the Dharma the Dharma preaches Buddha. The Dharma is preached by Buddha; Buddha is preached by the Dharma. The flames this fire preach Buddha, preach the Dharma. Buddha preaches ‘the flames of this fire’ the Dharma preaches ‘the flames of this fire’. These ‘real sutras’ sometimes preach the (objective) meaning, sometimes preach our (subjective) intent. Thus not to preach these sutras is an impossibility. For this reason it is said that these real sutras are preached following our intent. Intentional preaching pervades the sky; the whole sky is preaching following our intent. These Buddhas, those Buddhas: all of them together proclaim these real sutras. This world, that world: all worlds intentionally preach these real sutras. It is for this reason that these sutras are preached; they are just the Buddhist teachings.”

In this paragraph, Master Dogen insisted also Buddhist Teachings are the same as reality itself, and at the beginning of the paragraph we can find the word Mahayana, and the word Mahayana derives from Sanskrit words. ‘Maha’ means great, and ‘yana’ means carriage, therefore the original meaning of Mahayana means a big carriage or a great carriage. And that means one stream of Buddhism in which they insist that their theory is superior to another lineage which is called Hinayana. ‘Hina’ means small, and Mahayana Buddhism moved to North West India, through the Silk Road, to China, and Korean Peninsula and to Japan. And Hinayana is called Theravada Buddhism today, and Theravada Buddhism flowed to South East Asia, for example, northern part of India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand, Burma, and so forth.

Master Dogen belongs to the lineage Mahayana so he used the words in this paragraph and he said, "To be the fundamental means of entering the Mahayana means to experience the Mahayana, to listen to the Mahayana, and to preach the Mahayana. Therefore we do not say that living beings, by their very nature, have already attained the Truth; that is just one aspect of their being. ‘To enter’ is the fundamental means; the fundamental means is right from beginning, right to the end. Buddha preaches the Dharma; the Dharma preaches Buddha. The Dharma is preached by Buddha; Buddha is preached by the Dharma.”

Dharma means reality itself, and Buddha means a person who realised the Truth, therefore, in Master Dogen's theory, the Dharma, that is the Universe, or the reality, is completely the same as a person who realised the Truth, we can become the same as the Dharma that is the Universe, therefore the aim of Buddhist practice is to become the same as the Universe. In other words,

by practising Zazen, we can become the same as the Universe, and to live our life the same as the Universe is Buddhist life. Therefore, Buddhist life is so wide that there is no limit. There we can say that our Buddhist life is as wide as the Universe.

The next paragraph, "We should know that Buddhist teachings as numerous as the sands of the Ganges are lacquered bamboo sticks and hossu; that the Buddhist teachings are like sands of the Ganges: a ceremonial staff, a clenched fist. We should now see that the three ways and the twelve divisions of the teachings are just the eyeballs of the Buddhist patriarchs. How can those who fail to open their eyes to this fact be the children or grandchildren of the Buddhist patriarchs? And how can those who fail to take up this principle receive the right eyes of the Buddhist patriarchs in one unbroken line? Those who fail to physically realize the treasury of the true Dharma-eye with their own bodies can never be the Dharma-successors of the seven legendary Buddhas."

This chapter was preached at Kosho Temple in Kyoto on November 14 (in the lunar calendar) 1241. And in this paragraph, Master Dogen said that Buddhist Teachings are as numerous as the sands of the Ganges River, and in Buddhism, when we want to show many numbers, we sometimes use a simile of the sands of the Ganges River and Master Dogen used the simile in this paragraph. And those Buddhist Teachings are the same as concrete things. For example, lacquered bamboo sticks and hossu. Lacquered bamboo sticks are sticks which are used in Buddhist ceremony, and hossu is also a good which is used in Buddhist ceremony. Therefore, we can say that desks in this room, chairs in this room, are also Buddhist Teachings.

All things and phenomena in this world are Buddhist Teachings. Everything in this world can teach Buddhist theory to us. So Master Dogen said, "We should now see that the three ways and the twelve divisions of the teachings are just the eyeballs of the Buddhist patriarchs." And three ways means, Buddhist philosophy which includes the three ways of Buddhist practitioners - Sravakas, Pratyeka Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. And 12 divisions of Teachings are explained in this chapter. And those Buddhist philosophies and Buddhist Teachings are just the eyeballs of the Buddhist Patriarchs. And eyeballs of the Buddhist Patriarchs means, very important point in Buddhist Teachings. So, Master Dogen insisted that Buddhist Teachings are very important in studying Buddhism. And if we forget the value of Buddhist Teachings, we can never arrive at the Buddhist Truth.

So Master Dogen said, "And how can those who fail to take up this principle receive the right eyes of the Buddhist patriarchs in one unbroken line? Those who fail to physically realise the treasury of the true Dharma-eye with their own bodies can never be the Dharma-successors of the seven legendary Buddhas."

...And now I would like to stop my talk and have time for questions and answers. Are there any questions?

(end of talk)

Reference:

1. Shobogenzo Bukkyo by: Master Dogen
2. [Shōbōgenzō: The True Dharma-Eye Treasury, Volume I – BDK America](#)
(A free downloadable version of Shobogenzo Volume 1-4)