

The History of the Buddha Way – Butsudo shikan

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(The present translation was made from a copy deposited in the Otani University Library, Kyoto. This is a partial translation of a series of three talks delivered by Kaneko Daiei (1881-1976) at Otani University in early June 1945, two months before the end of World War II. Kaneko's talk was later published in June 1947 in a series issued by the Otani Institute for Doctrinal Research to which he belonged. The sponsoring institute seems to have existed only during the last years of the war and its series is comprised of just two booklets, of which this is the second. The lectures given on this occasion are not compiled in Kaneko's selected or collected works.)

Lecture One

I. The Time of Practice of the Buddha-way

What I wish to clarify in this talk is that the history of Buddhism in Japan is the traces of the Buddha-way practiced by the Japanese. I have earlier broached this theme in the final section of my book, "The History of Japanese Buddhism" (Nihon bukkyo shikan, 1944) last year, and as far as the contents goes I do not expect to go beyond what I have stated there. In that work, though, I start off by looking at Japanese Buddhist history in terms of the dialectical process of the Three Vows, and end up discussing the history of the Buddha-way. And so it seems that I am looking at it first this way and then that. This time I intend to be consistent throughout and look at it in only one way. What is generally referred to as history cannot be established without the practice of the Buddha-way. History, in this sense, is in itself nothing other than the practice of the Buddha-way -- THAT is history. This is the point I wish to emphasize here.

When we speak of the Buddha-way, it means to aspire to the path of Buddhahood through the teachings of the Buddha. To aspire to the path of Buddhahood, according to the scriptures and commentaries, is no easy matter. It is nothing that can be completed in the course of one or two lifetimes. To become a Buddha requires practices extending over an infinite number of lifetimes. Even the practice of Dharmakara Bodhisattva, as with all bodhisattvas, is the practice extending over infinite kalpas.

But we must also bear in mind that the scriptures and commentaries explain that with each moment of thought we become Buddha. The path to Buddhahood lies right beneath our very feet; it is consummated with each and every step we take.

This way of explaining things makes perfect sense if we think of the path as arising from a boundless dimension. In a boundless path, we leap into it only to discover that we have always been standing in its very midst. Again, because it is a boundless path, the deeper we enter into it, the more we become aware of its limitless nature.

As such, the moment-to-moment depiction as well as the eternities required for Buddhahood version are equally appropriate explanations of the actual path. From this perspective, the time frame for becoming Buddha depends on individual emphasis. Those who give priority to the here and now of present reality will favor becoming Buddha in a single moment of thought. For those who think this one day of their life important, this one day is the Buddha-way. For those who deem a lifespan of fifty years important, an entire lifespan is the time of the Buddha-way.

Therefore, although the Buddha-way is described in terms of kalpas and eternities, we may find it more readily conceivable as the depths of our present existence, set in the time frame with which we usually associate this sense of our lives. But this is not all that the scriptures and commentaries explain. A transformation or evolution of sorts takes place on the Buddha-way. And so while the process of becoming a Buddha takes place over a boundless expanse of time, it also is described as the practice of three great asamkheyas. An asamkheya refers to an eternity, and so it does not quite make sense to refer to eternity in an ordinal sense as being one or two in number.

The three great asamkheyas here refers to three stages of transformation of the Buddha-way. How that transformation takes place differs in explanation depending on the emphasis each person places upon it. But what is important is that each and everyone of us must reflect on our own lives and affirm that, as those who practice the Buddha-way, this transformative evolution has been taking place. We must reconceive our lives as the practice taking place on the boundless plane of three great asamkheyas. The length of time our lifespan measures on the Buddha-way corresponds to what the scriptures and commentaries call the infinite kalpas of the Buddha-way.

But before we proceed to explore that aspect, there is another correspondence to our lives that we must consider, and that is history. Here we must conceive of history in its broadest sense. History can be conceived of, for instance, in the narrow sense as the history of Japan, or it can be conceived of in a broader sense as the evolutionary process of life. Either way, our life corresponds closely to the long historical life of humankind. As such, as the medium of the life of humankind, we can conceive of ourselves as mediators of what we call our history and that eternal practice [of the Buddha-way] spoken of in scriptures and commentaries. In particular, we are confronted with problem of history and karmic destiny (shukuse).

II. History and karmic destiny

Up until recently I used to think of history and karmic destiny as two sides of the same coin. After all, if we enquire into history we can sense the working of karmic destiny, and conversely in karmic destiny we can sense the working of history. These were roughly my thoughts on the matter. But can history and karmic destiny be identified? This was the doubt that appeared in my mind. First of all, what we call history has to have at least a written record of some kind. While the records themselves do not comprise history, they are clues imparting us a sense of history. History is thus something we sense tangibly. It is sensed by dint of the fact that some written record exists, and even if records do not make up the stuff of history, it is through the medium of records that we acquire a historical sense.

But there are no written records for karmic destiny. Things carried over from one's previous life, for instance, are intangibles we experience affectively, rather than sense. From this perspective, karmic destiny is what we feel, while history is what we sense. And so it would seem impossible to identify the two. This was the doubt that confronted me. Again, although [karmic destiny and] history may be conceived of in various ways, one is by analogy to parent and child. Though parent and child are different, it is also important to see their essential unity (ittai). Accordingly, we can sense in history the flow of time in essential unity with it throughout its course.

When we penetrate the so-called historical concept, we find ourselves saying, "Now I see that humankind is not simply at the level of the individual." What we call karmic destiny, on the other hand, is experienced wholly at the individual level. And so, sayings such as, "Parent and child come into existence in [the mode of] cause and effect," recognize the child's essential unity with the parent. All the same, we usually speak of the parent as

parent and the child as child, as if the two were distinct. Seen in this light, karmic destiny is what transpires at an individual level, while history is what runs throughout the whole. Also, in the case of historical tradition, it is possible to recognize that the transmission clearly came from this teacher or that master.

But with karmic destiny, this is not always the case, and we sometimes find ourselves wondering when that essential link was made -- a link that we are not always consciously aware of ever having made. When we reflect on the matter, it would seem that the differences outweigh the similarities as far as karmic destiny and history are concerned.

This is an age-old problem and so let us review it once again. First of all, as stated above, history is sensed, while karmic destiny is felt. But are these two really so different? History necessarily requires written records, but such records do not necessarily make up the stuff of history. Written records are like footprints in the sands of time, but the footprints are not history themselves.

With the passage of time, however, there appears on the scene those who will mistake the footprints for history. In the past I too have made the same error. But the stuff of history is not what is set down in written records from the past. The stuff of history, rather, is what is showing its face here and now. If written records so absorb us, we could well say that our very bodies are the pages on which those records are inscribed, our blood the course on which living history flows. Living history is none other than this person itself, the person which we encounter when we look into ourselves introspectively. Once met, we get a glimpse of what history has recorded there.

That is, a historical sense is extrospective, while karmic destiny is an introspective sense of history. By that criterion, one could well say that "in my previous life I was my father." Here the difference between history that runs through the whole and karmic destiny as transpiring at an individual level clearly comes to fore.

And what is this history that philosophers and historians have approached from various angles to produce many a difficult tome? One might depict it as follows: we are what history makes, history is what we make. But whence comes that foundation on which we make history. In my opinion, it is the pure individual who makes history; hence, we must think of what this so-called karmic destiny means. From the standpoint of those who are made by history, it is all right if they do not possess independence. But in the case of those who make history, it is essential that they have independence. In this sense, the fact that we are living is the fact that we have been made by depending on history. [By contrast,] when we are to die, even if we are forced to throw our lives away, it would seem (aru yo) that for the first time we are making history.

Here, the concepts of "knowing gratitude for oneself" (chion) and "returning the favor by oneself" (hotoku) are clearly related to this spirit. But there is one other distinction that must be brought in before we can discuss these two concepts. To know gratitude for oneself is to be grateful for one's good fortune, to be thankful for the fact that one is alive. At the ground where we feel this thankfulness for the fact we are alive, this by dint of the efforts of our parents and grandparents who have passed on, there is the "me" that has been made by depending on history. By contrast, when we have to make history by returning the favor by oneself, we are compelled to return the favor at whatever cost it may require our personal self. It is in these terms that we must consider the notions of "knowing gratitude for oneself" and "returning the favor by oneself."

"It's enough just to feel grateful," some say, but those who say this are strangers to the true meaning of being thankful. In our historical existence as human beings we experience the thankfulness of being alive, but at the same time we are compelled to throw down our

lives in response to this. To be thankful for the good fortune that has enabled us to sustain our lives means we are those who have been made by depending on history; [in contrast,] to throw down our lives in order to return that favor is the meaning of those who make history. When we think of making history, we cannot help but confront [the question of] our own karmic destiny.

To fulfill our karmic destiny is tantamount to saying we must make history. If we speak of the benefaction of our parents, there may be those who will say that not only the good things are due to our parents, but also the bad things as well. Again, if something bad happens and we attribute it to our own bad karma, there may be those who will boast that these are the due to the seeds of good karma planted in past lives. While these ways of thinking are plausible enough, we cannot accept them.

Instead, when good things happen we must say they are due to the efforts of our parents [who have passed on], and when bad things happen they are due to our own store of bad karma (shukugo). Unless we say it in this way, then history cannot be established. It is only when we sense history as comprised of the good things due to the kindness of our parents and the bad things due to our own bad karma, that history holds the significance of our being made by history and our making history. History [in this sense] does not appear in the absence of this feeling.

III. Tradition

Now we must ask ourselves what tradition comprises. In traditional learning especially, it is the rule that the tradition is perpetuated by the master of the lineage. At the same time, we must ask ourselves what form it takes in general traditions? In our case the most wonderful thing that could happen to us is for us to know who our teacher is, to know his or her name, to receive the teaching from him or her before our very eyes. Of course this does not have to be a strict "I teach, you learn" relationship. In a teaching-learning relationship, the teacher presents the student with the spirit of his lineage, and the student receives that teaching, but I think that sort of relationship is unnecessary. All that is needed to establish the tradition is that the receiver recognizes his indebtedness to the giver: "All I am I owe to you."

But we must now ask: does it always have to be a human being that is the agent of transmission for the spirit of the tradition? Today, there were air raids from morning. We were left standing on the brink of death. In this situation, what thoughts crossed our minds? I do not know how you may have reacted, but as for me I felt confronted with a major problem; that is, does it always have to be a human agent to transmit the spirit? If a person must be the transmitter, what kind of person must that be? While that person can of course never divide spirit from body, if the spirit cannot be conveyed by the workings of the conscious mind, then can it be conveyed physically? For the longest time I was confused as to whether I should convey my message in writing or by speech. The written word remains, the spoken word vanishes, or so I thought. But in recent years I realized that I had gotten this all wrong, for in truth the written word vanishes, the spoken word remains.

What is spoken is never lost. Written works are preserved in libraries, but there is no guarantee of that. Spoken words are heard by someone. It may seem that there is no one listening. But even if I am not listening with my heart, my body is listening. When I speak at the university lecture hall, the hall is listening. And when someone enters this hall on another day, if what I said was truly worthy of speech, the hall will surely transmit that message to those who come. It is with confidence that I speak of the university tradition as well as to the historical tradition it suggests.

But there is another aspect to what I call tradition. This is alluded to by Dogen Zenji's assertion "the grasses, trees, tiles and shards all preach the Dharma." In this dimension, the grasses, trees, tiles and shards are all discoursing the Buddha's teaching to us -- this is tradition. More than the clear cut enumeration of historical tradition, there is a deeper feeling of karmic destiny, of something real at work with which this perspective puts us in touch. It may well be that our link to the Buddhadharma today has emerged, as one tale has it, out of our previous lives as sparrows perched on the eaves at Jetavana [where the Buddha was preaching]. It is this sort of mysterious link to the Buddha-dharma that we can sense at work here. Likewise, the sense of history and the feeling of karmic destiny do not stand in opposition to one another, but it is through their mutual cooperation, rather, that tradition is established. Indeed, without the feeling of karmic destiny, can there truly be a sense of history? This at least is what I think. And this is not just an opinion I have arbitrarily arrived at.

The same line of argument is taken by Kiyozawa Manshi (1863-1903) in his remarks on the [scientific] theory of evolution and the Buddhist theory of cause and effect. I have developed these ideas further for the purposes of today's lecture. But a similar vein of thought exists in Shinran (1173-1262), who said, "This practice and faith one happens to come into should make one rejoice over the karmic link (shukuen) in the distant past that made it all possible." The karmic link, in popular belief, is the idea that our predecessors guide those who come later, and that those who come later [in time of need] call on those who have passed on, this pattern repeated in endless cycle. From that perspective, the feeling of karmic destiny and so-called historical tradition are never separate. This is what is suggested by Shin doctrinal study itself. In this sense, history and karmic destiny are not so much separate entities as they are one event seen from two different angles, or one thing expressed in two ways.

IV. The global significance of Buddhism and the acceptance of Japanese Buddhism

This provided one of the foundations on which the history of the Buddha-way was established. Thus, while the theme of the history of the Buddha-way would seem to be a broad one, what I mean by my theme is the history of the Buddha-way in Japan. From the time Shotoku Taishi (573-642) accepted Buddhism as his own religion, he practiced the Buddha-way as a Japanese. It is from this time that Japanese Buddhism was established. This is the point I wish to clarify. As is well recognized, Shotoku Taishi is the patriarch of Japanese Buddhism. It was through Shotoku Taishi that the Buddha-dharma was accepted. The following sums up my views on how I regard the fact that the Buddhadharma came to be accepted in Japan through Shotoku Taishi. Shotoku Taishi was an imperial prince. He was not Shotoku Taishi the individual, but the representative of the emperor of Japan. The emperor was thus the opportunity (ki), the Buddha-dharma was the agent. It was through the emperor that the Buddha-dharma was accepted; this was Japanese Buddhism. The emperor provided the opportunity for the Dharma as the Buddha's agent.

As such, the opportunity was limited to Japan, whereas the Dharma's scope is a global one. On the other hand, we may well ask, is it possible to speak of Japanese Buddhism as an existence separate from Indian Buddhism and Chinese Buddhism? This same question has been touched on earlier in the talks by Soga Sensei and Suzuki Sensei. [They agree that] the distinctions Indian, Chinese and Japanese Buddhism do not exist: Buddhism is one. But since popular convention employs these distinctions, they see no reason to go against them. These were points that appeared in their discussions. Expressed in those terms, this gives food for thought. To say that the distinction of Japanese Buddhism is a false one, is to say the same as to Indian and Chinese Buddhism. It is only because Buddhism originated in India that we speak of an Indian Buddhism, but there is no such thing; there is no Indian, Chinese or Japanese Buddhism. That is to say, Buddhism is global.

To speak of a global Buddhism, however, would seem to stir waves of discontent amongst a segment of the intellectuals. Without stating it in so many words, people assume that what is Japanese stands in opposition to what is global. Whatever is Japanese thus has to be special or has to be made out to be special, when in fact is not the very opposite true? Is it not splendid that the light that shines upon us, that the air we breathe is global? There is no need to be disgruntled by that fact. There is no need to assert that the sunlight is special Japanese sunshine, that the air we breathe is special air. Likewise, since Buddhism originated in India there is something Indian about it, and having passed through China there is something Chinese about it. Was it not [in Japan] that it was distilled of those peculiarities to take on a pure, global form as Japanese Buddhism? Should we not be proud of [Japan] as the site where this process of refining [Buddhism] into a global form took place? In other words, should we not rejoice that this is the place where the pure global form [of Buddhism] was discovered?

Our thinking ought to follow these lines. I think we can make an analogy to the moon of Ishiyama. We call it the moon of Ishiyama, but the moon is not on the property of Ishiyama; Ishiyama does not own the moon. The moon shines on Ishiyama, on Miidera, on wherever its light reaches. But there are many who think the moon must be viewed on Ishiyama. In terms of time, we speak of the autumn moon, but autumn does not own the moon. It shines all the same whether it is spring, summer or winter. The reason we speak of the autumn moon is that in autumn the moon appears in its fullness. In the fields of heaven, where there are no colors to change, The moonlight is splendid in autumn. Seen from the heavens above, autumn is nothing other than the light of the moon. In Buddhism, [likewise,] there is no place for change.

It was this Buddhism that came to Japan and which Shotoku Taishi accepted. It was through its practice in Japan that Buddhism, like the moon in autumn, came to fullness. The fullness of Buddhism as such presented itself in its totality in Japan. I think we can say that it was through its practice by the Japanese people, through becoming the Buddha-way of the Japanese, the way of life of the Japanese, that Buddhism released its true light. This is especially true of the time [of practice of the Buddha-way]. Circumstances allowing, I will return to this topic later on to reemphasize the point I wish to make. And so, for now, unless [Buddhism] reaches this autumn of its years, we cannot feel the true face of its moon [in its fullness]. In this sense it was through Buddhism's acceptance in Japan that Buddhism's global significance was clarified. This is the meaning of the phrase, "the land of the sun [Japan] is the place where Mahayana's correspondence" [to the world was established]."

V. The mind of faith, the issuing of the mind, and the turning-over of the mind

I have elsewhere discussed the process of [spiritual] transformation of the Buddha-way. This was presented in my book, "The History of Japanese Buddhism" (1944). In that work I explain that there are three important nodes in the practice of the Buddha-way that we must always keep in mind. All three are, in a sense, of first-order importance [to practice]. This inexplicable fact about them [is one that needs to be sorted out]. The three are the awakening of the mind of faith (shinjin), the issuing of mind (hosshin) and the turning-over of mind (eshin). There are suitable quotations [that argue] for the primacy of the issuing of mind, but speaking content wise, it is [the issuing of] the mind of the Way (doshin).

The turning-over of the mind is, again speaking content wise, [the turning-over of] the true mind (shinjin). In the Avatamsaka and other sutras, faith is regarded as being of prime importance; that is, "it is through faith that we are able to enter the vast sea of the Buddhist teachings." Without the awakening of the mind of faith, we cannot cross the threshold of Buddhism. [Faith] is thus foremost [amongst the three].

The saying, "It is only with the clarification of faith that one is able to understand the sutras' opening refrain, 'Thus [have I heard],'" points to the fact that [faith] lies at the very hub [of Buddhist learning]. I would assert that this is how we are to understand the words "Thus [have I heard]" that appear at the very beginning of all sutras. As to sutras, they are to be put into practice according to that particular sutra, that is, sutras contain their own policy of practice of the Buddha-way. As such, the fact that sutras open with the words, "Thus [have I heard]," marks the beginning of the Buddha-way. And at the beginning of the Buddha-way, needless to say, there is faith.+ At the same time, we could also say that at the beginning of the Buddha-way there is the issuing of the mind to seek enlightenment (bodai). Once one issues the mind to seek enlightenment, one engages in practice the Way. However, until that Buddha-way reaches the first stage of joyfulness (kanki), it is not the real thing.

As long as one is striving to become the person one ought to be, one is still at the stage prior to joyfulness. Once that stage has been attained, though, for the first time one's practice becomes congruent with one's existence. The first stage of joyfulness is, in a broad sense, the turning-over of the mind. When we look at the sutras in this way, as the transformation of this triad of the mind of faith, the issuing of the mind and the turning-over of the mind, there seems to be [a sort of orderly] development taking place. But the fact is the relationship between the three is an interweaving of elements. If we look at what is "given," in the mind of faith there have to be the issuing of the mind and the turning-over of the mind as given. A mind of faith in which the mind of the Way is not given is superstition. The reason why the mind of the Way is truly such is that it has at some point acquired the awakening of the mind of faith. In this sense, whenever we pick one of them up, the other two have to come along as given.

While it need not be said, as they unfold of themselves it is possible to say that the mind of faith is the mind of faith, the mind of the Way is the mind of the Way, the turning-over of the mind is the turning over of the mind. A chicken is sure to come out of a fertile egg, but when it is an egg it is an egg, when it is a chicken it is a chicken. The chicken surely appeared out of the egg, but it would be a mistake to confuse the two.