

I already explained the nature of the Nirmānakāya Buddha and Sambhogakāya Buddha. The Nirmānakāya Buddha comes into this world with the vow that he will save all sentient beings. Not by karma, but by vow, he appears in this world, practices the Bodhisattva's way, attains enlightenment as Buddha did, and saves all human beings. So he is called an incarnated body. He changes his form in various ways, sometimes to a bodhisattva, sometimes to a buddha. He takes on various forms to help people, so in the widest sense of the word, everything is Nirmānakāya Buddha. But in the narrow sense, those who appear in this world by vow instead of by karma are called Nirmānakāya Buddhas. The Sambhogakāya Buddha is the original source of the Nirmānakāya Buddha: it gives birth to the Nirmānakāya Buddha. In order to explain the Dharmakāya Buddha, it is necessary to explain the Sambhogakāya Buddha more. Then you will understand what the Dharmakāya Buddha is naturally.

The Dharmakāya Buddha is called the fundamental, undeveloped Buddhakāya. In Buddhism, when we say the undeveloped, or fundamental, body, it means that it is the original source itself. But there are two interpretations for one reality. When we understand it as something which is very calm, which is not in activity, we call it the Dharma Body. But the Dharma Body does not actually remain calm and inactive—it is always active. When we understand it as activity, we call it Dharma Nature. "Dharma Nature" means something in action, and "Dharma Body" means something which is not in activity, or which is not developed. But the whole Nature exists in the Dharma Body as a potentiality. So we have two understandings of one reality: Dharmakāya [*kaya* = body] and dharma nature.

The Sambhogakāya Buddha is the Buddha who realized this dharma nature in activity, or as something which has a nature. And when we understand the reality which has various potentialities to act or to develop, that is called Dharmakāya Buddha.

Figuratively speaking, the Sambhogakāya Buddha may be like the sun. Instead of observing things objectively, he understands his Buddha Nature, which is always in activity within himself, figuratively speaking of course. So, like the sun, although he is not trying to illuminate everything objectively, he is actually illuminating everything. He is actually helping others without trying to help. He can illuminate everything because originally he has that kind of power or potentiality. But the most important thing for the Sambhogakāya Buddha is to

attain enlightenment inwardly, or to illuminate himself, instead of illuminating the objective world. Instead of observing each thing respectively, one by one, he observes his nature within himself. When he observes his inside world, as the sun does, he finds himself as earth. That earth nature is universal. This earth is also earth, and the sun is also earth. Everything is earth, so there is no difference between the objective world and the subjective world. To be enlightened in his inward nature is to be enlightened outside in the objective world. So for him the whole world is his inside or subjective world. When he reaches this kind of world, we call him Sambhogakāya Buddha.

His world is limitless. It includes the sun and stars and everything. So his virtue and wisdom are also limitless. He is the Omniscient One, who knows everything as being within himself. For him there is nothing outside his being. That is the Sambhogakāya Buddha. When we understand reality in this way, our understanding includes everything. And the reality which includes everything as an undeveloped reality is the Dharmakāya Buddha itself, Dharma itself, Being itself.

Our way of understanding things is exactly the same as our zazen. We say, "Just sit!" What does this mean? When we say, "Just sit," it includes all the potential activity which we have. We remain in an inactive state, but we have potentiality. So in this sense, our practice includes everything. When we sit, we are just sitting. Each one of us is sitting, and each one of us is Dharmakāya Buddha. But within ourselves, even though we are sitting, we take breaths and our heart is beating, so we are also Sambhogakāya Buddha. We understand reality in this way.

So the Sambhogakāya Buddha or the Dharmakāya Buddha is the source of all buddhas, which exists before Buddha. In this sense, Buddha is eternal, perpetual being. So we call it *tathatā* in Sanskrit ["suchness," "thusness"], or *shinnyo* in Japanese. And the *Lotus Sūtra* is the sūtra which describes this kind of reality, the world of *tathatā*. That is why it is told on a big, cosmic scale. We say in Japanese *jisso*, the way everything exists in the realm of reality or the realm of *tathatā*. In this sūtra, everything presumes this world of *tathatā*. Of course, it is described in a very dramatic way, but what it means to show is how things exist in this world, in this dharma world or world of *tathatā*. The purpose of this sūtra is to give a dramatic version of *tathatā*. This is an important point.

This sūtra was told by the Sambhogakāya Buddha, with his wisdom, to save all sentient beings. It verbally tells us what dharma nature is, not with a substantial idea, but rather in a dramatic, figurative way. And this sūtra especially puts emphasis on dharma nature instead of

on the dharma body, because the dharma body is inexplicable. You cannot talk about the dharma body because it is something beyond our world, beyond our wisdom, beyond our understanding. That is why we say the dharma body does not talk. My mouth talks, but my body doesn't talk. When we say "body," it is a source of activity, but not activity itself. But without the source, there is no activity. So when there is activity, there should be a source. But the source does not always have any activity. You can have the idea of source or body without activity.

There is something which is not in activity. That is the Body. But actually, there is no such thing. Whatever it is, it has some activity. Even a stone has some activity. So there is no such thing. We cannot talk about the Body itself, so what shall I do? If I talk about something, that is already the dharma nature, how dharma goes, what it is like. When I say what it is like, that is the Nirmānakāya Buddha. Objectively speaking, that is form. More subjectively speaking, it is its nature. But what the source of that Nature is, no one knows. We know it, but we cannot say anything about it. If you say something, it is not the Body, it is the Nature, or it is an attribute of the Body. So we do not talk about what the Dharma Body is, but we understand that there must be some source.

That is the dharma body, the dharma nature, and the dharma attribute, or form and color. That is [reversing the order] the outlook of dharma, nature of dharma, and dharma itself. And the Nirmānakāya Buddha, the Sambhogakāya Buddha, and the Dharmakāya Buddha. Did you understand? The Nirmānakāya Buddha is the form of dharma, the Sambhogakāya Buddha is the nature of dharma, and the Dharmakāya Buddha is the dharma body, which is beyond words, which we cannot describe. So this sutra tells what the Dharma Nature is, and when we listen to it, we will understand what the Dharmakāya Buddha is and who the Nirmānakāya Buddha Shākyamuni was.

I say there is no way to talk about the Dharma Body, but if you will allow me to say something about it, we can call it "Truth Itself." Truth is something which you cannot see. You can see the apple, but you cannot see the theory of gravity. But there is some theory, some truth. So nothing happens just by accident. When something happens, there should be some reason. It is caused by Dharma. In this sense, truth is close to the Dharma Nature. But we can understand it in some way, we can figure out some rules. In Buddhism, those rules, or that truth, is sometimes called the Dharma itself. That is the way in which we call it the Dharma Body. It is the source of all truth.

When we say "nature" it is, of course, truth. But nature is something

which includes what we see. In its strict sense, truth is not something which we can see. Buddhists figure it out in this way: because many people ask us, "What is Dharma Body?" we must say something about it, so we try to figure out what we should say. In this case, we give a very difficult explanation. If I don't say anything, you may say, "He doesn't know anything about the Dharma Body. He is not such a good teacher." So I must make a narrow escape. The way to do it is to talk about some truth. Nature and truth are not exactly the same. Truth is nearer to the Dharma Body. The idea is also pretty close to the Dharma Nature, but it exists just in between the Dharma Nature and the Dharma Body.

So sometimes "Dharma" means "teaching," sometimes "reality," and sometimes "being," just "something," just "there." *Ri* means "truth," and *ji* means "event" or "being," something which exists, like a stone or like water. *Ri* means, not "water nature," but how it becomes water from air. [There is some theory of how air becomes water.] So another side of water is truth, and that truth is not something which we can see. You can see the nature of water: it flows from a higher place to a lower place.

The Japanese term for truth is *ri*, and the Japanese term for various beings is *ji*. *Ji* and *ri* are very important, key technical words in Buddhism. When we realize *ri* in its true sense, we are Sambhogakāya Buddha. When we observe things as we observe the objective world, and when we want to help people involved in the objective or materialistic world, we are Nirmānakāya Buddha. The way to help others as Nirmānakāya Buddha is to take various forms and give them some handy [appropriate] help. But as the Sambhogakāya Buddha we should realize that there is no "I" or "you"—it is all one being. When we realize this nature, which is universal, we can help others without trying to help them, because whatever we do, that is our activity.

You are a part of me, you know. When we reach this kind of understanding, when we become Sambhogakāya Buddha, then when you practice zazen you have no "you" and no "others"; your practice includes everything. So everything will take place within yourself. There is no objective world anymore. Without trying to help others, you will help them anyway. That is the Sambhogakāya Buddha.

But when we realize that our practice includes everything, why don't we include the Nirmānakāya Buddha? Shākyamuni Buddha is included in our practice. So all the Shākyamuni buddhas, and all the Nirmānakāya buddhas which were spoken of by Shākyamuni Buddha will attain enlightenment all at once when we practice zazen. Do you understand? The Nirmānakāya Buddha is within ourselves.

Before we reach this kind of understanding, the Nirmānakāya Buddha

is just a hero. He has no eternal life. He is one of the great heroes of our history. But when we understand Shākyamuni Buddha as the Sambhogakāya Buddha or the Dharmakāya Buddha, for the first time, he has perpetual life. This is a more traditional understanding of Buddha. And actually, this kind of understanding was supported by Buddha when he was alive, although it took several hundred years before we understood who Shākyamuni Buddha was in reality. This kind of understanding, which was accomplished by his disciples, gave Buddha new life, made him a perpetual buddha. In this sense, he is called the Tathāgata.

This is a history of the development of the understanding of Buddha, and at the same time, the true understanding of his teaching. He did not stick to the words he said. He was like a doctor who gives his patients prescriptions. According to the people, he gave various prescriptions. He didn't have any idea of giving the same prescription to various patients. What he said was for him like a paper. [Suzuki-rōshi makes motions of writing various prescriptions out on paper, saying, "*Hai, hai, hai,*" as he gives them out.] That is actually what he did and how he understood that he should help people. But the reason he was Buddha is that he was the Enlightened One. He was illuminated in his own nature, Dharma Nature, and everyone's nature, so he knew who he was. For him there was no disciple and no objective world. So he said all sentient beings are his sons, are part of him. That was Buddha. So only when we understand Buddha as the Sambhogakāya Buddha or the Dharmakāya Buddha does he become real.

Since we have arrived at this kind of understanding, there is no need to talk about what Theravāda or Mahāyāna Buddhism is. All Buddhism, whether it is Theravāda or Mahāyāna is one whole Buddhism. This is how we have transmitted his teaching from Buddha to us. And the purpose of this sutra is to describe our Dharma Nature.

**Student A:** I have two questions. We read about certain masters who, upon attaining complete enlightenment, are able to direct their future rebirths, in other words, to return to help all sentient beings, coming back through a vow rather than through karma. Would a master, say in this century, who could do that, be a Nirmānakāya buddha?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Do you mean someone who actually knows his former and future lives? Since I don't know my former and future lives, I cannot say for sure that he is or is not. If I really knew, then I could say yes. When my self doesn't know, how is it possible to say, "Yes, he is"? But according to our more traditional teaching, I think I can say he is a real master.

**Q:** Then I'm confused about the meaning of the word "buddha," because we talk about the last buddha being Shākyamuni and the next being Maitreya. Do we understand that the understanding of Bodhidharma or the Sixth Patriarch or Dōgen-zenji allowed them to become buddhas? Can we say that those people attained complete perfect enlightenment?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Uh-huh.

**Q:** Then why don't we call them buddhas also?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Dōgen-zenji Buddha. We say "buddha" or "zenji" or "*busso*." *So* means patriarch. The way we name them is different, but what we mean by "buddha" and "patriarch" is the same. When we point them out, one by one, as successive teachers, then we call them Patriarchs—first, second, third, etc. But they are all buddhas. So they are not different, but what we call them is different.

**Q:** Then what is the meaning of Maitreya, the coming buddha?

**Suzuki-rōshi:** Maitreya Buddha is the buddha who will come. There must be a future buddha too. We call him by the name of Maitreya. Buddha attained enlightenment and saw his Dharma Nature, so he became the Nirmānakāya Buddha. And he also knew the source of his buddhahood. He recognized himself as the seventh patriarch or seventh buddha. Before Buddha there were seven buddhas. But seven doesn't mean just seven, but many. He didn't say, "I am the first one." He acknowledged many buddhas before him. He is one of the many buddhas, and he is Maitreya Buddha also.

(Transcription checked and edited by Brian Fikes.)

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