

67-FA-00 [67-09-00-A]

A16EM, Fall, 1967 (date unknown)

Z.M.C.

Fall, 1967 (date unknown) -- A16

(transcribed by Brian Fikes, transcription checked by Mel Weitsman, edited by Brian Fikes and Mel Weitsman)

Tonight my talk will be quite informal. We are, of course, interested in Zen. But Zen is also Buddhism, so it is necessary for you to understand Buddhism in general. Although my talk will not help you immediately, it is necessary for you to have some understanding of the original teaching of Buddha, and at the same time, to know various understandings of the original teaching of Buddha. Or else, I am afraid, you will miss the point.

Tonight I want to talk about the three-fold body of Buddha. The other day, Bishop Sumi explained the various ways we have of understanding Buddha, such as the historical Buddha [Nirmanakaya], Buddha as the truth [Sambogakaya], and Buddha as the pure Dharma [Dharmakaya]. This concept originated, of course, from the historical Buddha, who was so great. And he was so great that Hinayana Buddhists, after the direct disciples of Buddha, held the idea that Buddha was some supernatural being, who had the 32 marks. Those concepts already viewed Buddha in two ways: as an embodiment of the truth and as a Buddha who attained Buddhahood after some unusual practice. So Hinayana Buddhists had 32 reverent aspects of Buddha, but Mahayana Buddhists had the three aspects of Buddha. And these three aspects formed a trinity, like some non-Buddhistic religions. The first one, Nirmanakaya Buddha, is Buddha as a historical being who has a physical body. And from the character and image of Shakyamuni Buddha was formed the idea of Sambogakaya Buddha. What the historical Buddha talked about was truth itself, and from the ideas of teaching and truth was formed the idea of Dharmakaya Buddha. So we have Buddha who attained Buddhahood after his long practice, and truth as the embodiment of Buddha, and Buddha as truth itself. Here we have the three aspects of Buddha.

These three aspects of Buddha were necessary in order for Mahayana Buddhists to accept the possibility of attaining Buddhahood. For Hinayana Buddhists, Buddha was so great that they didn't imagine the possibility of being Buddha. But Mahayana Buddhists put emphasis on the buddhahood which was possible for them to attain. Here, Buddhist practice became more religious. The Buddha for Hinayana Buddhists is some unusual person, something quite different from a human being. But Buddha for Mahayana Buddhists is someone who is like every one of us. So they put emphasis on Buddha Nature. Dharmakaya Buddha actually expresses the essential nature of every one of us. Because we have the potentiality, after long practice it is possible for us to attain Buddhahood. And every one of us is nothing but

the embodiment of the Buddha. Here Buddhism became more popular, or took the form of a religion rather than some special teaching.

This was very important for the development of Buddhism, because Hinayana Buddhism became more and more formal, and their teaching became more and more philosophical or verbal. They had a strict distinction between laymen and the priesthood. But in Mahayana Buddhism, there was not much difference between Buddhism for laymen and Buddhism for priests or monks, because the potential for everyone to be Buddha was emphasized. So whether they were priests or laymen, they got together and recited sutras, and practiced various formal practices.

As you know, although Buddha's ashes were divided into six [eight?] parts and enshrined in various places, they did not worship Buddha's ash. started to enshrine Buddha's relics and build pagodas, and various religious activities were observed by people. So they had to have these aspects or understandings of Buddha: Buddha as the truth, Buddha as our true nature or Buddha as in every one of us, and Buddha as a historical person. So they had already created a distinction between Buddha as our own nature and the historical Buddha. And yet, those three bodies of Buddha are one. One includes the others.

Although Buddhism became very common, philosophically it became deeper and deeper. In this way, Buddhism was developed as a religion and as a philosophy too. This is how Buddhism developed, and why we have three aspects of Buddha. We have three kinds of spiritual teachings: philosophical ones [abhidharma], what was told by Buddha as a teaching [sutras], and scriptures about precept observation [vinaya]. In Hinayana Buddhism, the teaching was not so philosophical, but the philosophical understanding of the teaching developed in Mahayana Buddhism. And there are many threes in our teaching: three kinds of scriptures, the three-fold body, and the three shades of the teaching. As Buddhists, we must have this kind of knowledge, just as knowledge. Those teachings or those aspects of our teaching were also the background of Zen. So it is necessary for us to have those understandings or that background of Zen, as well as our practice.

Since we don't have much dokusan, please ask some questions, any questions. Q: Is Mahayana Buddhism also known as the second way?

R: Excuse me, what do you mean?

Q: I was reading someplace about the second way as being the way of total annihilation of life as a goal, rather than going into life.

R: Mahayana Buddhism? No. We say "Mahayana Buddhism", but there are many teachings in Mahayana Buddhism. The Kegon school classified our teaching in three parts or three aspects of understanding. So if the understanding is poor, that is the second way, not perfect understanding. And if the understanding is good, that is perfect understanding. And that perfect understanding cannot be attained by just intellectual understanding. That is the Tendai canon. And of course this is true with Zen too. I must explain some other time the understanding from three aspects.

If you study the canons of various schools, you will understand why it

is necessary to practice zazen. The various schools suggest practicing zazen. That is why we practice zazen. Do you understand? Our practice is based on the canons of various schools. So Zen includes, or Zen is based on all the teachings of many schools, or Zen is the result of the effort of many scholars of many schools. Do you understand? Zen is not something special. In other words, Zen is not one of thirteen schools. Zen includes the thirteen schools of Buddhism. If you understand Zen, you will understand other schools. The gist of the teaching in its wide sense is Zen.

Q: Now that the weather's cold, how can we concentrate when we're chilled in the morning, when we're really cold, not from the outside but when the cold gets sort of inside our clothes. How can we get our meditation and concentration back through the tenseness of being cold?

R: That's how you feel, but nevertheless, you are sitting. We say, "Sickness or cold will not kill you, but long practice will kill you." Even though it is cold, you should do that. You see, it will be the challenge or occasion to realize the truth. Cold weather, or some difficulty in your practice will give you a chance to attain enlightenment or to practice real practice. When it is cold, you should practice it, because it is a good chance to practice. This is, I think, a rather traditional way of realizing our true nature. We have various desires, you know. But by stopping them, by nature, more than if you have a positive attitude towards your desire. This doesn't mean to annihilate your desire; by stopping I mean to take a negative attitude towards your desire. But negative attitude, without the true understanding of the desire itself or human nature itself or Buddha nature itself, isn't enough. So, if it is cold, you shouldn't wear too much. I think you are sitting with clothing that is too warm. It is not that cold, or it's much better not to wear too much clothing. Another question?

Q: Around here its very easy not to get too attached to food and not to sit around thinking about when's a good time to eat, and all this sort of thing, because your mind just isn't going in that direction. But say you're home, and the kitchen is a combination kitchen and family room, and all the life centers around the kitchen, and you're in kitchen all day. What do you do if you have this problem: Since I've been sitting, all my senses have gotten sharp, and food tastes better now. So what do I do if when I just have something to eat that ordinarily I wouldn't care about, that simple thing tastes so marvelous now, that I'm looking for some more where that came from. Well then, you know what I mean?

R: Yes.

Q: Pretty soon I'm sitting in the kitchen, eating and eating and eating, you know? What would you do?

R: You should realize your nature by negative practice. For all religions, negative practice is necessary. We should not always pick a positive attitude only. Both positive and negative attitudes are necessary, but the negative one is the most important practice. This is very true.

Q: I'm a little confused. What is a negative attitude?

R: A negative attitude means to practice under some difficult circum-

stances, and to refrain from various activities, like sexual activity. It is a negative attitude towards various desires which will get you aroused. We have to think more about this point, at least.

Q: By "thinking negatively" about desires you don't mean to suppress them, do you?

R: Yeah.

Q: You don't mean feel guilty about it, do you Sensei? Do you mean feel guilty about it, or say that it's bad, or something like that, or do you mean just not to do it?

R: If you feel guilty about it, it will help you. I can say, "Don't feel guilty," but that looks like I'm making some excuse, or something. It is not a matter of discussion, you know. It is rather a matter of practice or experience. You should not be blind in what you do, even if it is a fundamental instinct. You must open your eyes to those activities. You shouldn't ignore them. At least you should have both positive and negative. And as it is difficult to have a negative attitude, we should try to be negative.

Q: The word "negative" leaves a very bad taste in my mouth, it has very bad associations with me, and I think it does with a lot of people. I don't really quite understand what you mean when you say negative.

R: If the word "negative" creates bad feelings, it's all the better. It is not a matter of whether you like the teaching or not. What I mean is actual experience. So it is necessary for you to open your mind to your true nature. You see, as long as you are trying to ignore one side, I don't think you can understand our true nature. What will happen if you die? That is the most negative experience. But whether you like it or not, you will die someday. Just remember what I said, you know, and open your eyes, and be more and more careful, or more alert.

*****[TAPE TURNED HERE]*****

If you feel your desire more, you will attain freedom from various desires, and you can change one desire to another. It is like the way a blind person can hear better than the usual person.

Q: What you're saying is that you should put the snake in the small can.

R: Yes. Nagarjuna asked someone, "How can you make a snake straight?" As no one could answer, he said, "Put it in a straight bamboo," or a pipe. That is a way to make a snake straight, and the snake will know what his nature is. If he is like this [presumably making a wavy gesture], he doesn't know his own nature.

Negative and positive are both very important, like the strands of a rope twisted together: positive, negative, and positive. "You cannot make a rope with just one strand," we say.

Q: Sensei, didn't Buddha get down to one grain of rice a day? Didn't he deny himself a whole bunch of things when he talked about the middle way?

R: The difference between his way and asceticism was that asceticism

was practiced in that way, limiting their food or sleep, to attain something or to be born in some heaven. They practiced it for some purpose. But Buddha found the truth in that practice. The practice itself is the goal.

Q: Do you think fasting is good practice?

R: Good practice for what?

Q: For mastering desire or thinking negatively about desire.

R: There will be no need to fast for many days. That is a kind of practice, but that is not our practice. Even though you do not fast, you can practice our practice in the most usual way. This is a very important point. We have to think more about this point. You may wonder why I talk about negative and positive attitudes toward desires, but I myself don't have an answer to it.

Q: Is there a difference between negative desires and positive desires?

R: No, it is one.

Q: It's the same thing to kill someone and to love someone?

R: Yeah. They are two aspects, or two kinds of attitude you take.

Q: Does that mean that we should suppress these desires to love and hate?

R: Yeah, sometimes it is necessary. It is necessary, and you are doing it!

Q: Well, what about sincerity, Sensei? That's a very positive thing.

R: Mmm-hmm.

Q: If you suppress it, what do you have?

R: That is not sincerity, is it?

Q: I don't know. I get confused on things like sincerity and compassion.

R: If I say sincerity or compassion, you may think that is a very positive statement, but it is not actually so. Just positive sincerity or positive compassion are not true sincerity or compassion. Sometimes you will hate what you want to say to someone if you are sincere. If because you know what is meant by some statement, you are very careful, that is already negative. Even though you may want to eat more, sometimes you will hesitate to eat as much as you want. Without this kind of attitude you cannot live. Positive things are not always positive in the true sense. Which is a stronger person, a man who beats someone, or a man who is being beaten? It is easy to beat someone, but it is not so easy to be beaten without much difficulty, or to be patient in being beaten. Hai.
yes to your desires?

R: Actual experience will tell you, you know. If we think religion will give us some advantage in having pleasure, or give us some excuse for doing positive things always, that is not true.

Q: It seems to me, though, that there is nothing wrong with enjoying eating or sex or sleeping, just in being attached and in wanting it when it's not there. So if there's some way that you can just really enjoy eating as long as the food is in front of you, and when it's gone not think about it, then is it alright to just say yes and eat?

R: Yes, if you think that way, it is alright. There is nothing wrong with

it. But it is not always so.

Q: This teaching sounds as if it's saying we're supposed to fight with ourselves, from the time we're born to the time we die. I would like to get to the point where I wouldn't be continually fighting with myself.

R: That is your understanding of your life. It is not actually fighting, it is a way to develop your desires. Those are two different understandings of one practice. If you say you are fighting with your desire, it may be so. I cannot deny the statement, "I'm fighting with myself." But that is not a perfect expression of our way. Let's study this more. I'm so glad that you are concerned about my talk. That is not my problem and not a problem of Buddhism or Buddha or Zen. It is your problem, so please study more.

That's why there are no rules. There are rules, but those rules are not always observed in the same way. Your practice will be mostly right when it is forced on you. Then it is mostly pure. But if you practice by your own choice, there are many dangers of having some wrong element in your motives. "I have to do it, because someone told me to. As long as I am here in this monastery, I have to behave in this way, so I do it." This kind of practice will have a better result than the practice you do by your own choice. This is very true. If you become more sincere and more conscientious about your practice, you will find it very true.

Thank you very much.

EZT – early SFZC transcript - 67-09-00-A
