

The Dharma Breeze

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The Most Important Thing

Shuichi Maida

The most important things, we write only in the mind's diary—not in any actual paper diary. This tells you the limited value of paper diaries. If I extrapolate, you will also know that the value of magazines and books is limited because the most important things are not written down on paper. Now you know the limited value of all published materials.

Once Rev. Haya Akegarasu said, "Although people such as Rousseau, Tolstoy, and Augustine wrote their confessions, I cannot write mine. There is something that I cannot confess." These words of his express a deep fact. Things that can be easily confessed to others are not crucial matters of the human heart. No one can confess a truly shameful thing before others.

Thus I am skeptical that religious texts such as sutras and the Bible can tell the most important thing or the ultimate fact about human life. I wonder if both Shakyamuni and Jesus expressed the true fact that they hesitated to say. I wonder if there was something behind their spoken words.

What then is the most important thing? It is the fact of life. It is intuition. It is what I call "ordinariness (*heijo-tei*)."

It is the fact of our daily and ordinary life. It is a fact that we do not have to mention as something special. If we call human life "oneness between body and mind," the most important thing is the fact of this "oneness between body and mind."

Whatever people label as something special is dubious. They have some kind of motivation in making this claim. Thus there is an element of exaggeration and deviation from fact. There is abstraction and conceptualization. Whatever people assert to be something special is false and vain.

"Oneness between body and mind" means the most ordinary thing. It means that there is nothing special to speak of. It is the fact of intuition. Our human life is all there is. We are born, work, and die. There is nothing in our life that must be exaggerated. "Ordinariness" is not to be confused with nihilism. Nihilism has already exaggerated one aspect of human life. Philosophers such as Kierkegaard talk about existentialism. They are speaking about something special. It seems to me that Western thinkers cannot understand the taste of "ordinariness." I can say the same thing about those who advocate mysticism.

Prince Shotoku said, "We are all [foolish] ordinary persons." This saying of his describes the most crucial fact of human life. He said that ordinary human life is the truth. That is "ordinariness."

Truly the most quintessential thing is the ordinary life of ordinary people—not the extraordinary biographical facts of geniuses, insane people, eccentric people, or unusual people. Therefore individuals such as Leonardo da Vinci, Goethe, Basho, and Shinran are not the most important. The most important thing is the ordinary matters of ordinary people, which we witness daily before our eyes.

Let us stop loudly proclaiming the value of something that is "special." If we do so, we are already departing from fact. What is the fact? It is life. First of all we are life. As one aspect of our lives' activities, we have something called thinking. Our thinking does not represent our entire life; it is one aspect of our life. "Ordinariness" [that is based on "oneness between body and mind"] means the position that encompasses our entire life. Our thinking merely chases after it.

One time at one of his lectures, Rev. Akegarasu demanded that those who had pencil and paper and were taking notes should get out of the lecture hall. He said:

What are you going to remember? What are you going to do with what you've remembered? Just look at this forehead of mine. Then, while you are listening to me, something, at some moment, may flash. Truth is an instant flash. That's the only important thing. Even if you don't remember how it came to you, that's all right. This flash is the only important thing.

These words of his mean that there is nothing special. Those who attempt to remember something special want to enhance themselves with it. They want to behave like important people. They want to make themselves special people. But all human beings are just "[foolish] ordinary persons."

When we come to recognize this fact, things such as Buddhism and Christianity are no longer necessary. The only fact is that human beings exist here. There are men, women, old people, and children. There are rich people, poor people, wise people, foolish people, good people, and evil people—that is all. That is the fact of human life. What are you going to do by propagating Buddhism? What are you going to accomplish by advocating Christianity? Simply, the facts of our ordinary lives are flowing like a river that flows without being attached to anything.

From what or from whom do we receive the most important teaching? It is only from ordinary people that we receive the most important, crucial, and genuine truth. They teach us precisely the teaching of "ordinariness." So-called great people, giants, geniuses, brilliant people, and teachers of life, do not teach us the true. Rather, ordinary people are the teachers of life, the teachers of the world. We must be awakened to this point.

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The Taste of Life

Shuichi Maida

Are you saying that you will not be able to die until you have thoroughly enjoyed the taste of life? What kind of future happiness are you hoping to attain with your limited body and mind? What kind of taste of life are you hoping to enjoy with the eighty years of your life? Stop talking about your future happiness! The taste of life exists here and now. Today, this one day, when you are alive, is your entire life. There is nothing more than that anywhere.

Some people die after having experienced passionate love and others die without experiencing it. There is nothing wrong with that. There are people like Goethe, or like Spinoza. There are people like Shinran, or like Dogen. There is nothing wrong with that.

For example, Shinran does not say that he has understood the meaning of life. He says that he is "a foolish bald-headed one." He says that he does not understand anything. Honen says the same thing. He calls himself "Honen of stupidity."

What, then, did Shakyamuni say? He said, "Impermanence." This also means that he has not understood anything. Simply, "impermanence," one truth, is playing itself out in this world. That's all. After having gained "insight into the truth of impermanence," Shakyamuni lived his entire life being one with the truth. In this fact, we can see his unshakable "absolute affirmation" of this actual world.

When Shinran called himself a foolish bald-headed one, he "bowed before the Inconceivable Light-Tathagata" [*namu-fukashigi-konyorai*]. This was his *nembutsu*. This was his "insight into the truth of impermanence." Having been reduced to an ignorant person, Shinran just recognized the reality of his life as it was. Apart from this position of truth—the position of absolute recognition, he did not have any other position. Zen teachers call this "[ordinary] things like drinking tea and eating food" or "ordinariness."

Stop saying, "I want to understand the depths of life and the world"! Stop saying such grandiose things! Besides this present ordinary fact, the fact of things as they are before your eyes, what else do you think you can understand? If we dig into the earth deeper and deeper, we will end up in coming out of the surface of the other side. This place where we are standing now is it! It is the deepest place, the depths, because the shallowest is the deepest.

No matter how hard human beings may try, they cannot come up with anything more profound than Shakyamuni's "impermanence" because the shallowest truth is the deepest truth.

People are born, they study, they fall in love, they start families, they give birth to babies, they bring up children, they get old, and they die. Besides this, what kind of life could we have? Clearly see this world where impermanence, the one and only truth, unceasingly plays itself out!

Don't tell yourself such an inflated thing like "I will thoroughly pursue the taste of life in my future"! The taste of life exists here and now. What you have to seek is the present fact—the fact

of things as they are before your eyes! Don't seek anything more than that! Even if you seek it that way, you will never find it.

(Written 10/22/1957. *The Complete Works of Shuichi Maida*, vol. vii, p. 855. Trans. N.H.)

The Truth Alone

Shuichi Maida

The most certain thing in this world is that there is nothing certain in this world. This truth is described as “talking about a dream within a dream.” This is reality for us human beings. Understanding reality as “talking about a dream within a dream” is the most certain way of understanding it. The Zen master Dogen says the following in the volume “Talking about a Dream within a Dream” in his *Shobo-genzo*: “Since we are seeing a fact within a fact, we are talking about a dream within a dream.”

Dogen says that since our life is something so obvious like seeing truth within truth, this plainly evident reality is called “talking about a dream within a dream.” This means that Dogen understands reality as “talking about a dream within a dream.” This expression means that we cannot grasp reality by any means. But it also means that we are grasping it moment by moment. Although we are grasping it, we are not grasping it. This is called “talking about a dream within a dream.” This is the impermanence that Shakyamuni taught. This is the truth. This is Buddhism. There is no other Buddhism.

The truth is “talking about a dream within a dream.” It is “things are as they are before our eyes” [or “suchness”]. The truth that Buddhism teaches is something like this. Dogen also called this truth “why [are all things] necessarily so? (*ka-hitsu*)” in the volume “The Koan of Present Becoming (*Genjo-koan*).” “Talking about a dream within a dream” is synonymous with “why [are all things] necessarily so? (*ka-hitsu*).” This truth is everything in Buddhism; it is the alpha and omega of Buddhism. This truth is the truth of “things are as they are.”

Chinese Zen called this truth nothingness. Nothingness does not mean that there is nothing. It means that things are as they are—that they are impermanent. Shakyamuni rose from his meditation and stood up, once he gained insight into this truth alone. Buddhism is there. The unique feature of Buddhism is that we stand up with this truth alone. We do not have anything else. Other religions have various things besides the truth. But Buddhism does not have anything besides the truth. For example, it does not have a practice or ‘precepts and the rules of conduct (*sila-vinaya*).’ When Shinran talks about the *nembutsu* [i.e., the calling voice, saying, “Take refuge in the Buddha’s limitless wisdom and compassion!”] alone, he is following this tradition of Buddhism. What is the *nembutsu*? It is the truth.

The truth alone. Besides the truth we do not need anything else. This is Buddhism. It is in this respect that we can see the revolutionary significance of Buddhism and the unique feature that makes Buddhism Buddhism. Shakyamuni was a perfect atheist; he negated and nullified Brahma [i.e., the universal god] and atman [i.e., the soul] that the Vedas and Upanishad philosophy taught before Shakyamuni’s time. What, then, did Shakyamuni rely on? He relied on one truth—things are exactly as they are before one’s eyes.

It is said that Shakyamuni attained Buddhahood under the bodhi tree because he gained insight into twelve-chain causation. Although people after his passing formulated the idea of “twelve chains,” there is no doubt that the core of his Buddhahood was his insight into “causation.” “Causation” means “conditional arising.” Understanding things as “conditionally arising” is the basic way we understand things in Buddhism. Insight into “conditional arising” was the core of Shakyamuni’s attainment of Buddhahood.

What, then, is “conditional arising”? It is the perspective in which we just grasp things before our eyes as they are. Seeing existing things as they exist is called grasping things as “conditionally arising.” This grasping does not mean that we are literally grasping, yet we are grasping. This strange way of grasping that entails both “grasping” and “not grasping” is grasping things as “conditionally arising.”

The fact that we are grasping things does not mean that we are capturing them. Things cannot be captured. We are not capturing them as fixed objects; we are grasping them as they flow and move. We are flowing and moving together with flowing and moving things. Our grasping of flowing things while we flow, i.e., that we become flowing and flow together with flowing things, is called “conditional arising.” This way of grasping things is called grasping things as “conditionally arising.” Thus, grasping things as “conditionally arising” means grasping things as impermanent.

Insight into “conditional arising” is precisely insight into impermanence. Thus, we can say that it was his insight into twelve-chain causation or into the truth of impermanence that allowed Shakyamuni to attain Buddhahood. Understanding things as “conditionally arising”

is identical with seeing things as impermanent. Thus, when Shakyamuni attained Buddhahood, he recognized that all things are impermanent. And recognizing that things are impermanent means understanding them as “conditionally arising.” It also means understanding things just as they are before our eyes. The three things, “conditional arising,” impermanence, and things as they are, are precisely one and the same. They are the truth. With this truth alone Shakyamuni stood up.

All of Shakyamuni’s teaching was designed to explain this truth. He traveled all over India for forty-five years because he wanted to help people to clearly understand this truth. That was his compassion. He desired one thing—all people would come to recognize the truth. He did not have any other desire. Simply because he desired to make truth, truth alone, clear to people, Buddhism came into being. There was no other reason. Buddhism was exclusively a teaching of truth. Shakyamuni was a teacher of truth. He was nothing else.

“The truth alone” is the unique feature of Buddhism. It means recognition, nothing else. It means “knowing alone.” Shakyamuni did not seek or desire anything else; he did not have anything more than that. He was not concerned about “What should I do after knowing?” “Knowing alone” was good enough for him. From beginning to end his only concern was “knowing.” “Knowing” was everything to him. It is Buddhism.

If we think “What should I do after knowing?,” we are already deviating from Buddhism. It is in “knowing alone” that the entirety—beginning, middle, and end—of Buddhism consists. For example, Shinran said, “*Shin* (genuine understanding) alone is necessary.” It is not that we do something or have to do something after *shin*. Here we can see that Shinran faithfully followed “recognition of the truth alone,” the origin of Buddhism.

In the first chapter of the *Tannisho*, Shinran says, “As far as the Innermost Aspiration (or the Primal Vow) of Amida is concerned, it does not discriminate between the young and the old, or the good and the evil, only *shinjin* [genuine understanding] alone is necessary.” “*Shin* alone” means “knowing alone.”

“Knowing alone” is the essence of Buddhism. It was for “knowing alone” that Shakyamuni taught for forty-five years. “Knowing alone” precisely refers to the Buddhism of *prajna* (wisdom). The Buddhism of *prajna* is authentic Buddhism. This means that Buddhism is the teaching of wisdom. Shakyamuni simply sought “knowing.” He did not seek anything else. If he had sought other things, he could not have had only one objective. Then, what could he have fulfilled? In this world, it is only when we human beings have only one objective that we are able to accomplish anything. “A man chasing two rabbits cannot catch any.” A person like Shakyamuni would not have chased two rabbits. What, then, was the one thing he sought? It was “knowing.”

For example, Devadatta requested that Shakyamuni establish a *vinaya* (rules of conduct) for the Sangha. But Shakyamuni refused to do so. This refusal is said to have triggered Devadatta’s revolt within the Sangha. Devadatta chased two rabbits. Further, did Shakyamuni ask people to pursue compassion [in addition to “knowing (or wisdom)”?] Did he ask them to love each other? Or, did he ask them to do other ethically good actions besides “knowing (or wisdom)”? If he had done so, he would have been chasing two rabbits. And Buddhism would have degenerated into a set of moral precepts.

“Knowing alone”—everything develops out of that. It is from recognition of truth that other things, including compassion, are engendered. It is not the other way round. It is not from other things that “knowing” is born. “Knowing” is the first and foremost point from which all other things necessarily emerge. We do not have to ponder beforehand how to produce things that will inevitably follow. “When the fountainhead is opened, a water trail will naturally come into being.” Thoroughly digging into “the fountainhead” is the only important thing we must do. We don’t have to deal with other things. This is the path of Shakyamuni. Thus, Shinran talked about “*shin* (genuine understanding) of the Innermost Aspiration alone.” From *shin* (genuine understanding) the practice of the *nembutsu* necessarily comes. Shinran did not ask people to have both *shin* and the *nembutsu*. Chapter one of the *Tannisho* says, “...a person understands (*shin*) that he is going to be born in the Pure Land... and the thought of saying the *nembutsu* arises...” This means that a person has *shin* first and the *nembutsu* necessarily comes out of *shin*. This is traditionally called “*shinjin* (genuine understanding) being regarded as foremost.”

Knowing alone without dealing with other issues—this is the core of Shakyamuni’s teaching. Shakyamuni pursued wisdom throughout his life. That is why Buddhism is known as the teaching of wisdom. Buddhism cannot be defined in any other way. It is not accurate to call Buddhism the teaching of wisdom and compassion. I say this because compassion necessarily comes out of wisdom. We do not have to talk about compassion as a primary issue. Hence, if we only call Buddhism the teaching of wisdom, that is good enough. It is not that wisdom comes out of compassion. Although people often call Buddhism “the teaching of compassion,” the expression does not describe the essence of Buddhism. If there is no wisdom, there is no compassion.

What is the one crucial point by which we can grasp Buddhism? The one crucial point is intellect (or knowing). Nothing else can be the one crucial point of Buddhism. In the Shakyamuni who stood up with “the truth alone,” we can see the true image of the Buddha. The religion of Shakyamuni is simply a religion of intellect (or knowing). It is not the religion of volition and, therefore, is not a religion of practice. It is not a religion of feeling, either. From beginning to end Buddhism is concerned with intellect (or knowing). Buddhism does not need anything else...

Shakyamuni clearly explained the truth alone. In doing so, he did not have any self-attachment because truth is something genuinely objective, common to all people, and universal. It is only through the one truth that all people can become one. If a person grasps something intentionally, it will make him develop self-attachment; he will not be able to become one with others. Hence, he will not be able to help others to return to oneness. The truth alone can make us become one.

Buddhism is a teaching of selflessness. Is there any other teaching that is so all encompassing and limitlessly lenient as Buddhism? Buddhism is such because it is a teaching of truth—because truth is genuinely objective and universal. Thus, it is only through Shakyamuni that the world can become one. All humanity can return to oneness. I cannot help saying that Buddhism is the religion of all mankind.

What is the truth? It is nothing but grasping things as they are before our eyes. It is my becoming as I am. It means my becoming “the [foolish] ordinary person.” No, I am already “the [foolish] ordinary person.” The religion of truth is the religion of “the [foolish] ordinary person.” This is the religion of all people. Prince Shotoku described this teaching with his words, “We are all [foolish] ordinary persons.”

Conversely, the religion of “the [foolish] ordinary person” is the religion of truth. It is only when the light of truth illuminates us that we can see ourselves as “[foolish] ordinary persons” and be awakened to the true reality of the self. Prince Shotoku understood Buddhism within the context of this one truth alone.

What is the one truth again? It is “impermanence,” “conditional arising,” “nothingness,” “talking about a dream within a dream,” “why [are all things] necessarily so?,” “naturalness,” “things as they are,” and “ordinariness.” I think of the dignified presence of Shakyamuni who stood up with the one truth alone. It is by taking refuge in his teaching that the world can become one for the first time. “The world is one” must mean “There is one truth.”

(Written 12/10/1955. *Complete Works of Shuichi Maida*, vol. viii, pp. 268-272. Trans. N.H.)

The Priceless Jewel

Shuichi Maida

There is a parable in the eighth chapter (entitled “Five Hundred Disciples’ Receiving of Prophecy”) of the *Lotus Sutra*. My modern Japanese translation of the parable is as follows:

Mr. A visited Mr. B, his close friend. Since they had not seen each other for a long time, they were happy and started to have a drink. Mr. A was in a happy mood, drank too much, and became totally intoxicated. He soon fell asleep in Mr. B’s house.

Then, a messenger from the government came with an order that Mr. B should immediately go out to take care of some business. Before leaving, Mr. B decided to give Mr. A one priceless jewel as a gift. He sewed it into the back of a sleeve of Mr. A, who was sleeping like a log. Then, Mr. B went out to take care of his business.

When Mr. A woke up the next morning, he was totally unaware of what Mr. B had done for him while he was sleeping. Then, Mr. A travelled to a foreign country. But, Mr. A, who did not have a job, quickly used up all his money. In order to survive, he had to work as a day laborer at different places. He could barely survive. With the little money he earned, he lived an extremely impoverished life. Having lived as a miserable vagrant for many years, he finally decided to return to his home country. On the way, he happened to meet Mr. B.

Mr. B said to Mr. A, “You look awful! How come you are leading such a poor and miserable life? The last time we drank together at my house, I left to take care of some business while you were still sleeping. But before I left, I sewed a priceless jewel into the back of your sleeve so that you might be able to live rich and comfortably. Even now I can remember the day, month, and year when I did that. There, look! Look at your sleeve! The jewel is still there. Not knowing about this treasure, you have been working so hard to earn your living. What a sad turn of events this is! Why don’t you immediately take the jewel out of your sleeve, sell it for cash, and buy everything you want and need? You will be able to live a wonderful life.”

Every one of us has this “priceless jewel.” Even so, none of us know we possess it. We are living our lives in a poor, stingy, shabby, and miserable manner. We are like the pathetic drunken man in the parable. What, then, is “the priceless jewel” that all of us already have in the heart of our beings? What is “the priceless jewel” whose ignorance makes us live our lives in such a shabby way? What is this “priceless jewel” that we have in the heart of our beings and yet are totally unaware of its existence?

My readers, can you give an appropriate answer to this question? Please think carefully about the answer. What is the one most appropriate word that can accurately describe this “priceless jewel” that we have? Please ponder over what “the one word” might be.

Flaubert [1821-80, a French novelist] said, “There is only one word in the world that can accurately describes any one particular thing. The work of the novelist is to discover that word.” Likewise, there is only one word in this world, which can most adequately describe the “priceless jewel” at the heart of our beings.

My readers, please say the word. Please speak the word that everybody considers adequate here. Now I am purposefully delaying giving my answer to the question as much as possible and making you impatient. You may be thinking that I actually enjoy tantalizing you.

Now let me give my answer. Does it agree with your answer or not? I say that “the priceless jewel” is “freedom.”

Yes, we are all tremendously free. But even so, we convince ourselves that we are bound up and unfree. This is called upside-down-ness or delusion. We can do whatever we want to do. We are inherently endowed with perfect freedom. True religion is simply recognizing the fact that we are already free. Even a person like Shakyamuni would not be able to think of any word that could better describe “the priceless jewel” than the word “freedom.

(Written 5/1/1958. *The Complete Works of Shuichi Maida*, vol. ix, pp. 835-836. Trans. N.H.)

“The Path Is Easy to Walk On; No One Is There”

Shuichi Maida

If I were to pick one phrase from the *Larger Sukhavativyuha-sutra*, I would choose this one: “The path is easy to walk on; no one is there.” For me this phrase is the core of the entire sutra. Such a great phrase exists in the sutra. Truly appreciating this phrase means appreciating the entire sutra. It encapsulates the entire sutra. To the question “What is the main idea that the sutra teaches?” I can answer that this phrase is it.

Furthermore, this phrase describes the core of Buddhism. I can unreservedly declare that this phrase represents Buddhism in its entirety and it is in this phrase that Buddhism exists. The basic feature of Buddhism is fully expressed in it. If we were to regard Jesus’ cry at the last moment of his life, “My father, my father, why have you forsaken me?,”* as the core of Christianity, we can say this phrase has power that fully matches the power of Jesus’ cry.

[*Translator’s note: Concerning Maida’s view of Jesus’ cry at the last moment of his life, see Maida’s article “The Realization That We Are *Ichchantikas*” in *The Evil Person*, pp. 79-80.]

The sentence, “The path is easy to walk on,” means that freedom is already given to us. It means the very fact we are alive—that we are without any restraint, that we are perfectly liberated, and that we are being made to live our lives as they are. It is not that we must become free through our efforts. Life itself is *already* free as a given fact. In other words, we may do whatever we want to do. We are gifted from the start with total freedom.

The sentence, “The path is easy to walk on,” is a declaration of liberation, saying, “You may do whatever you want to do.” It is saying, “Why are you so hesitant and reserved? Do whatever you want to do! You are allowed to do all kinds of things. Why don’t you gratefully receive and enjoy this noble freedom, this absolute freedom, which is given to you? Why don’t you use it? Don’t you know the great power of freedom, of life, that is noble and absolute? When you act with the absolute freedom of life, there is nothing that can obstruct you. All things will kneel down to pay homage before this great power, authority, and dignity of that absolute and noble freedom. This freedom of life is ‘the path without hindrance.’ Before it ‘all gods of heaven and earth kneel down to pay homage’ [the *Tannisho*, chap. 7]. Why do they do so? Because the freedom of life is extremely noble and is filled with absolute authority and dignity.”

All human beings are *already* endowed with such a tremendous “jewel.” They have it inherently. But, they are unaware of the fact that “the priceless jewel” has been sewed into their sleeves. This is expressed as “no one is there.” The sentence, “no one is there,” means that people are seeking freedom, “the jewel,” in the wrong place. Their focus is mistaken. They are seeking freedom in the direction where it does not exist; they are seeking it outside

themselves. With the belief that they can find it in their surroundings or social conditions, they are seeking it outside themselves.

Freedom is not a matter that needs to be sought outside because it is already inherent in human existence. Our own lives, which manifest themselves as acts of seeking, are *already* free in themselves. The freedom that we seek has already been given to us. That is why [Zen teachers] tell us, “Reflect on the place where you are standing!” [i.e., “Know yourself!”] That is why self-examination is so important. Life itself is already given to us as “the priceless jewel.” Life is itself freedom.

Thus, the sentence, “no one is there,” concerns the issue of seeking freedom. The sentence means that although seeking freedom is not necessary at all, all people are seeking it. It means “there is no one who is totally separated from seeking and demanding freedom.” It means that people are wrongly seeking and demanding it from outside.

The noblest “jewel” is already given to our lives as freedom. We have it inherently. Do we have to seek something more than that? Already possessing absolute freedom in ourselves, what else do we have to seek? We have only to enjoy freedom. We have only to live our lives freely as they are, as they desire. There is no longer anything that needs to be sought.

Freedom can never be found by seeking it in the world. Seeking freedom in external objects already indicates the absence of freedom, and imposes restraints from external objects. Freedom is the only thing that cannot be realized in us through our seeking it. Freedom is realized in us, not by seeking it but by discovering the fact that it is already given to us.

The free person does not make demands. He does not demand anything. He does not demand anything from anyone. Demanding something from others means attempting to control them. It is impossible to control human life that is originally free. Further, our demanding something from others betrays the fact that we lack something in ourselves. When we realize that absolute freedom is given to our lives and that we have such a noble thing within us, what lack could we feel? The free person is a perfectly contented person—a person who does not demand anything from others. He does not demand anything from others, nor does he attempt to control them. Thus, he does not feel any obstruction from other people’s existences. He lives his life like a traveler in the field where “no one is there.” For the free person, the sentence, “no one is there,” could also mean that no other people give any obstruction to him. For him, “the path is easy to walk on” means an endless track and “no one is there” means a field where no one is [obstructing].

I regard this phrase as the core of the *Larger Sukhavativyuha-sutra* because it teaches us the absolute fact that freedom is already given to us. Buddhism teaches us nothing but this direct fact of life. It teaches us the nullification of self power [i.e., the calculative way of thinking]. It teaches us to intuit the fact that freedom is integral to life. The fact that we no longer have to do anything with our calculative thinking is called the Power Beyond the Self (*tariki*). Intuition of the life and freedom that are given to us—of the absolute fact—is called “ordinariness.” The phrase, “The path is easy to walk on; no one is there,” absolutely rejects and negates our attempts that we make to seek freedom outside ourselves without intuiting the obvious fact before our eyes. This phrase teaches us that the essence of Buddhism is nothing but immediate intuition of the fact before our eyes.

(Written 2/17/1960. *The Complete Works of Shuichi Maida*, vol. v, pp. 525-526. Trans. N.H.)

What Is “Discipline” (*Sila*)?

Shuichi Maida

The second of the six *paramitas* [(1) giving, (2) discipline, (3) patience, (4) continuous effort, (5) meditation, (6) wisdom] constitutes discipline. What is discipline? It is guarding one’s own life. It is having only one direction in our lives. I could also say that it is having spiritual stability. It is deeply honoring our own lives. For example, Shoin Yoshida [a Japanese Shinto scholar, 1830-1859] wrote an essay on “not eating a poisonous puffer fish.” Further, the fifth of the five unwholesomenesses [i.e., (1) killing, (2) stealing, (3) adultery, (4) lying, (5) drinking] is drinking.

“Having only one direction in our lives” that I mentioned above means that we do not look aside. It also means that we are paying direct attention to life. I also said “deeply honoring our own lives.” It means respecting our own lives. Why do we honor and respect them? We do so, because our lives are the life of the world. We honor others’ lives, because they are also the life of the world. If we do not assume the basic position of deeply honoring life, we cannot talk about “discipline.”

It is because we limitlessly honor life that we keep “discipline.” We can call the “disciplined” life the braced-up or concentrated life. “Discipline” means not having our purity spoiled. It means maintaining our integrity or single-minded commitment. For example, in my youth I aspired to learn from Shakyamuni. I decided to learn from him alone. Thus the crucial question here is “Are you still maintaining the same commitment?”

“Discipline” means the direction that the single-minded person’s life takes. Why is a person single-minded? Because he deeply honors life. For example, the Zen master Dogen devoted his entire life to learning from his teacher Zen master Ju-ching. Shinran also studied only under his teacher Honen. The *Shobo-genzo* was an expression of Dogen’s integrity. The *Kyogyoshinsho* was an expression of the integrity of Shinran, who exclusively studied Jodo Shinshu [i.e., Honen’s teaching]. This is the “discipline” that we can see in Shinran. I cannot help but revere Shinran as a person of strict “discipline.”

Life’s expressions are unique individual expressions. It is only through our individuality that life can be expressed. When we revere the limitless life that gushes up out of our own individuality, we cannot help becoming single-minded. There our lives naturally become braced-up and concentrated. This single-minded way of living is the true way of living. The true mark of life is found in “discipline.” “Discipline” does not mean restricting and limiting our lives with narrow regulations. It rather means living our lives with single-mindedness. It means the desire to single-mindedly enjoy the taste of life to the fullest.

All those who live a dynamic and creative life are men of “discipline.” In order to maintain their single-mindedness, both patience and continuous effort (i.e., the second and third *paramitas*) are necessary. That is why patience and continuous effort follow “discipline” in the six *paramitas*.

The life of Goethe was rich and concentrated. That is why he was able to produce a great amount of work. He considered *Enthaltung* (resignation) to be the basic principle of his outlook on life. It was his “discipline.” He completed his masterpiece *Faust*, which he had started in his youth, at age 82, one year before his death. This means that there was one theme that penetrated through his life. I call this spirit of his—that deeply honored his own life— “discipline.”

(Written 10/30/1960. *Complete Works of Shuichi Maida*, vol. ix, p. 849. Trans. N.H.)

Notes:

We held the Maida Center summer retreat July 24 – 26, 2015, at the Jodo Shinshu Center in Berkeley. Forty people attended it. We held the Maida Center (Japanese) fall retreat November 13 – 15, 2015, at the Maida Center in Berkeley. Nineteen people attended it.

The 2016 Maida Center summer retreat will be held July 29 (Fri.) – 31(Sun.) at the Jodo Shinshu Center in Berkeley.

Dr. Nobuo Haneda’s Japanese commentary on the *Larger Sutra* entitled *Shinran’s Larger Sutra (Shinran no Daimuryoku-kyo)* was published in Japan. It is available at the Maida Center. The price is \$30 including postage.

We want to express our deepest gratitude to the following individuals:

Mr. and Mrs. Roy Nakahara for creating DVDs and CDs of Dr. Haneda’s lectures.

Mr. Donald Bender, Mr. Steve Kaufman, and Mr. Paul Vielle for valuable suggestions concerning the articles in this newsletter.

DVD sets of the Maida Center summer retreats are now available. Each set is \$50 including handling/postage. Other DVD sets and CD sets of Dr. Haneda’s lectures are available.

Every Saturday (2:00 – 5:00 pm) we hold a study class at the Maida Center. We are now studying Shinran’s *Shoshin-ge*. Everyone is welcome to attend. (T.H.)

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