

The Dharma Breeze

December, 2016

Volume XXII-2

Maida Center of Buddhism
2609 Regent Street, Berkeley, CA 94704

Tel/Fax: (510) 843-8515 E-mail: MaidaCenter@sbcglobal.net Online: www.maidacenter.org

Two Issues Concerning the Truth of Impermanence

Nobuo Haneda

Introduction

In this essay I want to talk about two issues that most concern the truth of impermanence. Impermanence is the Dharma (truth) that is taught in Buddhism. It was this truth that Shakyamuni was meditating on under the Bodhi tree immediately before his Great Awakening. When he recognized that it is absolute and became one with it, he attained Awakening. Insight into this truth was the content of his Awakening. From the time he attained Awakening to the time he passed away, he lived a powerful and creative life, being one with the truth.

These are the two issues I want to discuss: First, I will say that insight into the truth of impermanence was the content of Shakyamuni's Great Awakening. Second, I will explain that when Shakyamuni attained Awakening, he learned that the truth of impermanence had two essential aspects.

In discussing the first issue, I will say that in his meditation under the Bodhi tree Shakyamuni understood the truth of impermanence only as it subjectively pertained to his own self. Then, in his Awakening he recognized that this truth was absolute and that his knowing the truth was coincidental to his becoming it.

Although many people have explained that insight into the truth of impermanence was the content of Shakyamuni's Awakening, I do not think that they have fully discussed the second issue: that there are two—negative and positive—aspects to the truth of impermanence. Without a good understanding of the two aspects of this truth, our understanding of Buddhism will not be thorough. Our Buddhism will become either a one-sidedly pessimistic teaching or a one-sidedly optimistic one.

1. Insight into the Truth of Impermanence—The Content of Shakyamuni's Great Awakening

Let me start my discussion of the first issue by talking about the legend of the young Shakyamuni's going out of the four gates. Tradition tells us that four gates surrounded the castle where Shakyamuni lived. One day Shakyamuni went out of the first gate, saw an old man, and learned that someday he too would become old. When he went out of the second gate, he saw a sick person and learned that someday he too would become sick. When he went out of the third gate, he saw a dead person and learned that someday he too would die.

Having witnessed the reality of suffering (or impermanence) in aging, sickness, and death, Shakyamuni learned that all things he had cherished had to be lost some day. He became despondent and terrified by the prospect of becoming old, sick, and dead. Now he could not live his life like before. He wondered, "How can people live peacefully while knowing that everything must inevitably be lost?"

On one of those days, Shakyamuni went out of the fourth gate. This time he had a positive and delightful experience. He met a travelling monk. The monk's face was shining because of his wisdom. Deeply moved by the mendicant, Shakyamuni became aware of his desire to become like him. His aspiration for Buddhahood was awakened.

Not long after that, Shakyamuni left the castle. At that time he was twenty-nine. Then, he studied traditional religions and took up various practices. In performing them, he was seeking something permanent that could overcome the reality of impermanence. But after

having spent six years performing those practices, he stopped them because he recognized that they would never lead to his attaining something truly permanent.

Then, Shakyamuni simply sat under a tree and meditated. What was his meditation? It was self-examination. He was asking a question, “What am I? Do I have something permanent in myself?” His meditation was the process by which he discovered that there was nothing permanent in the self.

(Subjective Understanding of the Truth)

The critical import of Shakyamuni’s meditation is that in it he discovered the truth of impermanence not only in terms of things outside himself but also in terms of the self. Seeing this truth outside ourselves is not so difficult. We can easily see that all things outside ourselves, such as people, animals, and plants, are impermanent—constantly moving, and changing. If we see this truth only in things outside ourselves, and not within ourselves, we are not true Buddhists. The true Buddhist sees it in the self as well. We must see it subjectively within the context of the self. If seeing this truth outside ourselves makes us Buddhists, scientists must be Buddhists. Although scientists know that all things are in a state of flux—constantly moving and changing—they do not necessarily know that this fact is subjective truth—that objective truth is also subjective truth. Buddhism is called a teaching of self-examination, because we see the truth subjectively within the context of the self.

Since the self consists of the body and the mind, Shakyamuni first examined the body—things that formed the body, such as skin, muscles, bones, and blood. From this examination he learned that they were constantly moving, changing, and flowing. He realized that there was nothing permanent about the body.

He then examined the mind—things that formed the mind, such as sensation, conception, impulse and consciousness. Then, he learned that all these things were constantly moving, changing, and flowing. He realized that there was nothing permanent in the mind. Thus he could not find anything permanent in either the body or the mind. There was no permanent entity or substance anywhere.

One morning when Shakyamuni was thirty-five, he attained the Great Awakening; he became the Buddha. When he clearly understood the truth of impermanence, he became the Buddha. He learned that this truth was absolute. This insight was the content of his Great Awakening.

Shakyamuni described the contents of his Awakening with this statement, “Form is impermanent. Sensation, conception, impulse, and consciousness are impermanent.” Here the word “form” refers to his body; and the words “sensation, conception, impulse, and consciousness” refer to the contents of his mind. So he was saying, “My self that consists of my body and my mind is impermanent.” This statement, therefore, is a confession that he does not have anything fixed or consistent in his being.

This discovery of the truth of the impermanence of the self is traditionally called *bodhi* (awakening) or *prajna* (intuitive wisdom).

(Knowing the Truth Is Becoming It)

Here it is important to know that in Buddhism knowing the truth of impermanence means becoming it. Although knowing an object does not necessarily mean becoming the object in our regular social and academic contexts, knowing the truth of impermanence means becoming it in Buddhism. In our regular contexts, the knower (subject) and the known (object) are two separate entities. For example, when I know about things such as computer programs, the lives of great artists, and the prices of different kinds of food, I do not become those things. In Buddhism, however, my knowing the truth of impermanence means my becoming it. Because the truth of impermanence encompasses all things that exist in this world, which include my existence, my knowing of this truth, and the truth that is known, I, the knower of this truth, cannot stand outside it and see it objectively. This truth is so total that nothing can stand outside it and see it objectively. The knower and knowing are all part of the truth and participate in it. So actually knowing this truth means discovering that the knower and what is known are a part of it and participate in it—that the knower and knowing are compositely the truth. Thus knowing this truth is synonymous with becoming one with it.

If I compare the truth of impermanence to a huge flow of water, myself as a knower and my knowing are like drops of water contained in the huge flow. Thus the only way I can accurately know the truth, or the flow, is through my intuition that is working here and now. My objective speculation cannot grasp it because this truth cannot be objectified. Only intuition that exists in the present moment and is concurrent with the truth of impermanence can know the truth that exists here and now. Dr. Kitaro Nishida (1870-1945, a Japanese philosopher) calls this way of knowing “actional intuition.” It means knowing the object by becoming it. [For more information on “actional intuition,” see Endnotes on p. 6]

2. Two Aspects of the Truth of Impermanence

I have said that insight into the truth of impermanence was the content of Shakyamuni's Awakening. Now let me talk about my second issue, two aspects of the truth of impermanence. In his Awakening, Shakyamuni saw that this truth had two—negative and positive—aspects. In other words, he experienced the truth in two different ways. He initially experienced it as a negative and destructive truth; later he experienced it as a positive and wonderful truth.

When Shakyamuni attained the Great Awakening, he said, "My life is already spent. The Dharma's universal working is already established." These two sentences describe the two aspects of his Awakening or of the truth of impermanence. The former sentence talks about the negative aspect and the latter about the positive aspect. When he stated, "My life is already spent," he was talking about the negative aspect; when he stated, "the Dharma's universal working is already established," he was talking about the positive aspect.

When Shakyamuni first encountered the truth of impermanence, it challenged him and showed him the emptiness of a self that was based on fixed values and its attachment to those values. This truth made him recognize that all those fixed values were illusions. When he recognized the emptiness of the self, he said, "My life is already spent." This way, when he first encountered the truth of impermanence, it was a negative, destructive, and cold truth. In that sense his Awakening was a very humbling experience.

His Awakening, however, was not simply a negative, sad, or terrible experience. It was also a positive, joyous, and powerful experience. When he experienced the emptiness of the false self (or ego-self) that was based on its attachment to fixed values, he also discovered the true self, the self that was one with truth. When the truth completely negated the false self, he discovered the true self that was dynamically moving and changing.

Although the first sentence, "My life is already spent," talks about the demise of the false self, the second sentence, "The Dharma's universal working is already established," talks about the birth of the new self, the true self that was one with the truth, i.e., the Dharma's universal working.

Now Shakyamuni saw the truth of impermanence as the universal flow of life, as a gigantic, dynamic, and creative flow of life. He realized that all things in the universe were constantly new, fresh, lively and creative.

Shakyamuni realized that all existing things are components of the universal flow of life—that they are fellow participants. He realized that all things were creative elements of the creative world. Now he had come to see himself as one creative element of the creative world. He realized that his true self was a participant in the dynamic flow of life. This means that he started to live his life as a constant seeker and learner, being liberated from attachment to all fixed values. This realization is expressed in his words, "The Dharma's universal working is already established."

We can say that we humans have two layers of self: the false self (or the ego self) with which we usually identify and the true self (or dynamically moving and changing self) that exists behind the false self. In his Awakening, the truth of impermanence challenged and negated Shakyamuni's false self to which he was attached; he recognized the emptiness of the self. The same truth realized and actualized the true self, the wonderful self.

Thus the same truth can be seen as negative or positive depending on how we view it. If we see the truth of impermanence from our attached perspective, it is a negative truth. If we see the same truth from a nonattached perspective, it is a positive truth.

Since we are usually attached to such things as our possessions, status, youth, health, and life, we see this truth as a negative truth. Since an awakened person is not attached to anything, he does not see this truth as a negative truth; for him it is the dynamism of life—the source of his creative inspiration. Whether the truth remains negative or becomes positive is quintessential Buddhism.

(Two Examples of the Two Aspects of the Truth)

Although there is only one truth, it can take two totally different faces depending on how we see it. Let me give you a couple of examples that demonstrate this:

First, let me talk about two types of people: a conservative person and a creative artist. For a conservative person, impermanence or constant change is a devil. For a person who wants to maintain old values, impermanence is his worst enemy. Whatever he cherishes will be challenged and destroyed by the truth of impermanence. He has to tremble before the prospect of losing objects to which he is attached. He has to experience sorrow constantly when his values are destroyed.

But for a creative artist, the truth of impermanence, the truth of constant change, is his best friend. Yesterday this artist created a work of art; today the work of yesterday belongs to yesterday. He forgets it and creates another work, something new. Tomorrow is a totally new day. He will forget what he has created today. His creative spirit does not allow him to be

attached to the past and be complacent or stagnant. For a creative artist, the truth of impermanence is the newness of life; it is creativity itself. Impermanence is not his enemy but rather his best friend. Nothing is more precious to a creative person than the truth of impermanence. It is the source of creative inspiration. For a person who identifies himself with the truth, it is his most wonderful friend.

Next, let me talk about a greengrocer whom I saw in Japan when I was a small boy. I used to see him peeling the skin off *taro* potatoes in a very interesting way. He first filled a round tub with more than one hundred *taro* potatoes. He put water into the tub to cover the potatoes. He then put a large paddle with two handles into the tub and started to twist it back and forth. When the grocer twisted the paddle, those potatoes hit and rubbed each other in the tub. As a result, the potato skins were gradually scraped off. When the grocer did this for about twenty minutes, all the potatoes were completely white and skinless.

Now let me personify these potatoes and ask them how they are feeling in the tub. Let me ask one potato in the tub, “Mr. Potato, how are you feeling in there?” The potato answers, “This greengrocer is a terrible person. I love this thick skin, my thick coat. It’s so nice and warm. But this guy is trying to destroy my precious coat. It hurts. It’s so painful. I really hate this guy. He is a devil.”

Then, I ask another potato that is in the middle of the tub, “Mr. Potato, how are you feeling in there?” The potato answers, “This grocer is a wonderful person. I hate this dirty old skin, my old coat. This guy is so kind. He is taking away my dirty skin. I am so happy. I am grateful to this person. I can feel myself becoming new each moment. I am getting fresher and fresher. This grocer is my good friend.”

I think it interesting that there is only one movement here, but the same movement is interpreted in two totally different ways by the two potatoes. The “conservative” potato that is attached to his old skin considers the grocer’s work terrible; the “creative” potato that is not attached to his skin considers it wonderful.

Shakyamuni was the first potato when he first encountered the truth of impermanence as a young prince, but he became the second potato when he recognized the absoluteness of this truth and became one with it. When Shakyamuni became one with impermanence, he was no longer afraid of it. He accepted it as the most dynamic and creative truth—as the most wonderful and positive truth.

(Importance of Facing the Truth of Impermanence)

Buddhism teaches us to gain insight into the truth of impermanence. Although the truth has two aspects, we usually see impermanence only as a negative truth. Usually we do not like it. When we learn that we must get old, become sick, and die, we try not to think about it. We try to forget it or block it from our minds. In order to forget it, we engage in all kinds of activities, such as parties, games, and sports. All forms of entertainment and amusement are designed to make us forget the impermanent reality of life.

But Buddhism teaches us to face impermanence as it is because it is *the* absolute truth, the Dharma. When we see the mistake of ignoring it and face it, true Buddhism begins. But if we see impermanence only as a negative truth, we are recognizing only one half of Buddhism, only the first half of Shakyamuni’s Awakening. The most important thing in Buddhism is to appreciate the second half of Shakyamuni’s Awakening—the positive, dynamic, and creative aspect of the truth of impermanence.

We must ask ourselves. “Am I seeing impermanence only as a negative truth, or am I seeing it not only as a negative truth but also as a positive truth?” How we answer this question determines whether we are authentic Buddhists or not. Our being Buddhists is not a matter of how many Buddhist doctrines we know. It is not a matter of how many Buddhist activities we are participating in.

Then, how can we appreciate the truth of impermanence as a positive and wonderful truth? We can do so only through self-examination, serious self-examination that is the core of Buddhism. Self-examination makes Buddhism Buddhism. Buddhism that does not teach self-examination is not authentic Buddhism.

Then what enables us to examine the self? The three treasures (the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha) enable us to do so. Only the words we hear from our teachers and Dharma-friends enable us to know the absoluteness of the truth of impermanence and thereby know the emptiness and pettiness of the false self. When this truth negates the false self, it realizes the true self that is one with the truth. We start to live our lives powerfully and creatively.

There are many different Buddhisms in this country. There is meditation-oriented Buddhism, ethics-oriented Buddhism, ritual-oriented Buddhism, or culture-oriented Buddhism. It does not matter what kind of Buddhism we take up. The crucial point that we must remember is that the core of Buddhism is self-examination.

Conclusion

Once a student asked Rev. Haya Akegarasu (1877-1954, a Japanese Shin teacher), “Is Buddhism a form of pessimism?” Rev. Akegarasu answered, “Yes, Buddhism is a form of pessimism. It is an extreme form of pessimism. But you must know that an extreme form of pessimism is also an extreme form of optimism.”

Shakyamuni was an extreme pessimist when he saw the reality of aging, sickness, and death. He thought impermanence was a devil that would deprive him of everything he had cherished. So he intensely examined the self. He squarely faced the truth of impermanence. He was, then, totally overwhelmed and overpowered by this truth. He became one with it; he became it. Then this truth turned into a wonderful truth. The devil turned into a guardian. Shakyamuni, who had been an extreme pessimist, now turned into an extreme optimist.

In this essay I have said that insight into impermanence was the content of Shakyamuni’s Great Awakening and that he learned that there were two aspects to the truth of impermanence. To remain stuck in the first negative aspect leads to despair and abject nihilism. In this aspect we fight against impermanence as an unwanted enemy. This is always a losing fight. By awakening to the positive aspect we recognize impermanence not only as our best ally but as our true self that is never definitively found and so can never be ultimately lost.

If we carefully examine the self by hearing the words of our teachers we will know that it is impermanence. Impermanence is synonymous with the dynamism of life, freshness and newness of life, or the seeking and learning spirit. It is synonymous with creativity itself. Thus by knowing the self as nothing but the truth of impermanence, we start to live a powerful and creative life. (12/8, 2016)

Knowing

Shuichi Maida

What is “knowing (or knowledge)”? This is the most difficult question in the world. It is the essential question for human beings. The answer to this question penetrates into the heart of human existence. The answer allows us to solve all human problems. Unless we find a clear and satisfactory answer to this quintessential question, no matter what other kind of solution to human problems is presented, it cannot be considered an ultimate and total solution. The light of the answer will still be obscured by the shade of questions.

The question “What is ‘knowing’?” has always been the most important and difficult one from the beginning of human history—of culture, thought, and spirit. It will eternally remain the same throughout human history. It is *the* question for human beings, for human life. Human beings have risked and will risk their lives to find an answer to this one crucial question.

In the past, philosophers have attempted to answer this question with epistemology (the theory of knowledge), a primary branch of philosophy. We can even say that epistemology is truly of central importance in philosophy and that as far as difficulty is concerned, other branches of philosophy cannot be compared with it at all. We can even say that epistemology *is* philosophy.

What, then, is “knowing”? After seventy years of investigation and speculation, Dr. Kitaro Nishida (1870-1945, a Japanese philosopher) answered this question with the concept of “actional intuition.”¹ It may be my unique view to consider Dr. Nishida’s actional intuition an answer to the question, “What is ‘knowing’?” But having found that the core of his *A Collection of Philosophical Articles (No. 7)* is nothing but this concept, I have arrived at this simple conclusion.

What is “knowing”? It is actional intuition. Apart from “knowing” there is no truth. It is not so much that “knowing” and truth are two sides of the same coin as that “knowing” itself is truth. The reason I say this is that the world [in which we find ourselves] is itself nothing but the world of our subjective self-awareness; and truth must be the truth that is subjective self-awareness. Thus actional intuition is truth and truth is actional intuition. Dr. Nishida also calls it “*poiesis* (production)” or “creativity.” I may also call it “life.”

Twenty-five hundred years ago Shakyamuni called it “impermanence.” Creativity is impermanence and impermanence is creativity. Thus actional intuition is impermanence and impermanence is actional intuition. Impermanence, the truth that is subjective self-awareness, is actional intuition. Shakyamuni understood truth as impermanence. Following the Eastern tradition, Dr. Nishida understood truth as actional intuition.

Truth is creativity, or life. It is impermanence. Dr. Nishida calls it actional intuition. As an answer to the question “What is ‘knowing’?” he came up with an answer that “knowing” itself is truth—that truth means the truth that is subjective self-awareness.

Thus, in answering the question “What is ‘knowing’?” Dr. Nishida also answered the question “What is truth?” Hence we can know this: if we do not answer the question “What is truth?” by saying that truth means the truth that exists in the world of subjective awareness, there cannot be any ultimate and perfect answer. The answer to the most difficult question in human life is simultaneously the answer to the question “What is truth?”

Further, since actional intuition is synonymous with human life, Dr. Nishida also answered the question “What is life?” Here truth, life, impermanence, and creativity are all synonyms. And actional intuition encompasses all of them.

It is not correct to say that we objectively know the truth of impermanence. Impermanence is “knowing” itself. Thus it is truth. This is what Shakyamuni meant when he talked about impermanence. It is “knowing [or intellect]” itself. This is the Buddhism of *prajna* [intuitive wisdom].

The Buddhism of *prajna* [intuitive wisdom] means the Buddhism of truth. There is no authentic Buddhism other than this. Buddhism is the teaching of “knowing [or intellect],” the teaching of wisdom, and the teaching of truth. This is the ultimate, absolute, or only religion. It is the ultimate form that religion can take; it is the ultimate spiritual realm that religion can teach. I believe that the Buddhism of *prajna*, and nothing else, can liberate the present-day world. At the present stage in world history, the Buddhism of *prajna* could play the role of liberator of mankind.

All people in the present world should study the Buddhism of *prajna*. It is only by doing so that they can be liberated. Whether they can be liberated or not depends on one point—realization of the spiritual realm of Ordinariness² that is based on actional intuition, which is synonymous with “knowing,” truth, and life. Ordinariness is our life as it is. It can be grasped only by actional intuition.

What, then, does it mean that our life is as it is? As I said earlier, it is *poiesis* and creativity. It is our daily activities, life’s activities. This Ordinariness is precisely our liberation. How can we attain it? We can attain it through “knowing,” recognition of impermanence, or insight into impermanence—through the Buddhism of *prajna*.

Our liberation does not depend on pathos or volition; it is simply a matter of intellect. It simply depends on “knowing [or intellect].” It is not a matter of emotion or passion. It is not a matter of action based on strong volition. It is a matter of calm wisdom. What is most lacking in the present-day world is the calmest wisdom, intellect, knowing, or *prajna*.

Religion is related to “knowing,” to absolute knowledge (*absolutes Wissen*)³. “Knowing” or absolute knowledge is precisely the core and essence of religion. Religious life means the life based on “knowing,” in which we exclusively rely on truth and we always return to truth. It is only in this life that peace is realized—the peace that the modern world is continuously seeking.

Endnotes (by the translator)

1. Actional intuition. According to Dr. Nishida, actional intuition means “seeing is acting and acting is seeing”—recognition of reality as it is here and now as one takes physical actions here and now.
2. Ordinariness (*heijotei*) is a Zen term referring to a life that one lives without being hindered by dualistic ideas, such as “religious and secular,” or “mundane and supramundane.” One identifies oneself as an ordinary person (who is neither religious nor secular) who lives his life fully appreciating all things in the world as manifestations of the Dharma, the ultimate truth.
3. Absolute knowledge (*absolutes Wissen*), a philosophical concept by Hegel (1770-1831, a German philosopher). Maida identifies Buddhist concept of *prajna* (intuitive wisdom), or Dr. Kitaro Nishida’s concept of “actional intuition,” with this concept by Hegel.

(Written 5/16, 1956. *The Complete Works of Shuichi Maida*, vol. vii, pp. 525-526. Trans. N. Haneda)

The Buddhism of *Prajna*

Shuichi Maida

Buddhism in its essence is the Buddhism of *prajna*. *Prajna* means [intuitive] wisdom, absolute knowledge (*absolutes Wissen*). Absolute knowledge means knowledge about knowledge—an answer to the question “What is knowledge?” The Buddhism of *prajna* is based on the answer to this, the most fundamental human question. Thus it is a position that is based on truth. It simply attempts to establish the life that is based on truth alone. It is the Buddhism of truth, the Buddhism of absolute knowledge. It is the essential core of Buddhism.

Here the truth means impermanence. When we understand this truth, we gain insight into [the reality of] suffering, and eventually into [the reality of] no-self¹. Thereupon we realize our life of Ordinarity (i.e., Nirvana or Naturalness). This is the teaching about the absolute which Shakyamuni taught for the first time. No matter how his teaching may have been interpreted or developed in later Buddhist history, it is the Buddhism of *prajna*, the essential basis, to which we must always return. We must return to it as the essential form of Buddhism.

For the person who grasps this essential basis of Buddhism, how Shakyamuni’s teaching was interpreted and developed in later Buddhist history is not a real concern. For example, for him how Shakyamuni’s teaching was interpreted and developed in sutras such as the *Lotus Sutra*, the *Avatamsaka-sutra*, the *Vimalakirti-nirdesa-sutra*, and the *Larger Sutra* is not important. For him the most important issue is the essential basis of Buddhism, which exists in the depths of those sutras. It is important to grasp the Buddhism of *prajna*.

If people do not lose sight of *prajna* as the essence of Buddhism, it is not crucial whether people interpret Shakyamuni’s teaching as Zen teaching or the nembutsu teaching. Some understand the Buddhism of *prajna* as Zen and others as the nembutsu. People should not think that those who do not practice Zen are their enemies or that those who do not chant the nembutsu are not human beings. They should not take such a one-sided, exaggerated, and self-righteous position. Either interpretation is all right if it does not lose sight of the essence of Buddhism as the Buddhism of *prajna*.

People appreciate knowledge or absolute knowledge—the essence of the Buddhism of *prajna*—as Zen or as the nembutsu. Should we not be open-minded and be able to say that either appreciation is all right? Was it not the case that Shakyamuni himself allowed his disciples to interpret his teaching freely according to their individual spiritual abilities? He is said to have had ten great disciples. They are known for their respective ways of understanding his teaching, such as “being foremost in wisdom,” “being foremost in super abilities,” or “being foremost in listening.”

In short, the teaching of the Buddha is a teaching for us to become independent persons. Each one of us is expected to appreciate his teaching to become independent persons with our individual self-awareness. What Shakyamuni desired in us was individual self-awareness. He did not want us to just listen to his teaching mechanically without seeking our own individual self-awareness. Thus the Buddha must be watching, with a smile, the same teaching of *prajna* being appreciated as Zen or as the nembutsu. It is quite natural that the same teaching develops into manifold forms since we have disparate karmic conditions, individualities, and self-awarenesses.

For example, consider Rev. Kanzo Uchimura (1861–1930, a Japanese Christian thinker). If he had had the karmic conditions to meet with one of the great Buddhist monks, his life would surely have been totally different. But he had karmic conditions with the Sapporo Farming School [where he met a Christian teacher]. We should recognize in respective individuals their unique karmic conditions, independence, personalities, and self-awareness; and we should discover *the one thing* that consistently runs through the basis of their beings.

I understand *the one thing* as the Buddhism of *prajna*. It takes manifold forms because of our respective individualities. Dr. Kitaro Nishida’s words, “One is many and many are one,” describe how things exist in the world of the human spirit. For example, his word “many” refers to Zen and to the nembutsu. He is seeing the “one” at their bases. He is also seeing the “one” working actively as “many” in their respective uniquenesses.

Both in Shinran, who is saying the nembutsu [i.e., *Namu Amida Butsu* (Come to Limitless Light and Life!)] and in the Zen master Dogen, who is doing Zen, I see the Buddhism of *prajna* consistently running through the bases of their beings. Dogen says that he peacefully sits in the samadhi called Self-Enjoyment [i.e., the samadhi in which one fully enjoys his own enlightenment]. Sitting is the only thing that exists there. It is an easy practice. Shinran says that he just utters the nembutsu. It is also an easy practice. That which underlies their easy practices is a piece of knowledge, a sharp flash of momentary truth. We can see “easiness” in

their teachings because the two teachers talk about liberation that is based on knowledge alone—because they teach the Buddhism of *prajna*.

If we understand the Buddhism of *prajna*, we come to think that Zen is all right and the nembutsu is also all right. The differences between them are no longer a big deal. They become an important issue only for those who do not understand *the one thing* that exists in the depths of the two teachings. Some people feel that the differences between them are a decisive matter. But they are like those who make a big fuss about the differences between men and women, saying that those differences are something decisive. Never mind the differences between men and women, are all people not different from each other? Should we not grasp *the one thing* that exists in the depths of our differences? Zen and the nembutsu are different. Buddhism and Christianity are different. We should grasp *the one thing* at their bases. And we should enjoy the manifold and various forms that *the one thing* takes.

It is not until we grasp *the one thing* that we can experience peace. I understand the “one” in “The world is one” (a sentence that I often mention) as the Buddhism of *prajna*. It is only when we reach the Buddhism of *prajna* that we can, for the first time, say that the world is one. In the final analysis, the Buddhism of *prajna* culminates in Ordinariness. Starting from the truth of impermanence, we must get there.

Endnote (by the translator)

1. Impermanence (*anitya*), suffering (*duhkha*), and no-self (*anatman*) are called the three Dharma marks. Many *Agama-sutras* (the earliest records of Shakyamuni’s sermons) say, “Everything is impermanent. Impermanence is simultaneously suffering. Suffering is simultaneously no-self.”

(Written 5/22, 1956. *The Complete Works of Shuichi Maida*, vol.vii, pp. 532-533. Trans. N. Haneda)

Notes:

We held the Maida Center summer retreat July 29–31, 2016, 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. Twenty people attended it.

We will hold the 2017 Maida Center retreat July 28 (Fri.)–30 (Sun.), 2017, at the Jodo Shinshu Center in Berkeley. Information will be given in the next issue of this newsletter.

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

Mr. and Mrs. Roy Nakahara, Dr. Kiyoto Arakawa, and Mrs. Jeanette Arakawa for creating DVDs of Dr. Haneda’s lectures.

Mr. Donald Bender and Mr. Steve Kaufman for valuable suggestions concerning the articles in this newsletter. (T.H.)

We hope you welcome a wonderful new year in good health.

© Maida Center of Buddhism, 2609 Regent St., Berkeley, CA 94704