The Present Actualization of Buddha-Nature in Buddhist Education

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The present essay is concerned with the principal methods for the realization of ideal character in Mahayana Buddhist education. The main focus will be on; (a) the concept of religious conversion based on the Bodhicittodpada, as a method for religious practice to realize an ideal Buddhist character, (b) the methods of healing of conceptual play and defilements through the dialectic of wisdom and emptiness, (c) a method of practice for the actualization of Buddha-nature and enlightenment, (d) and the peculiarity of the method leading to the accomplishment of the Buddhist ideal character.

Buddhism emphasizes education for enlightenment, enlightenment being in the Buddhist sense, a realistic apprehension and understanding of the ego and the world. Ignorance is the cause of misunderstanding of the original nature of things and it is fundamental to the formation of an undesirable character. Greed, anger, and stupidity, the so called three poisons, originate from discriminative thinking. This Buddhist understanding of man denotes a vicious circle of bewilderment, deeds done out of bewilderment, and suffering as consequent retribution for these deeds.

Actually, the problem of modern society and education can be considered

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as a consequence of ignorance and defilements. The melancholy experienced by most of modern humanity as a result of the loss of meaning and purpose in life, the loss of spiritual life, the alienation from one's self, humanity and nature, feelings of guilt, solitude, the fear of death, nihilistic thinking and so on are all defilements and illusions caused by one's own misperception of the real nature of the world.

Buddhism diagnoses human character deficiencies as resulting from ignorance, defilements, self love and conceptual play. As an antidote to these, Buddhism prescribes a way which can lead to correct enlightenment of one's self and the world. It is further suggested that Buddhist character education can contribute to modern educational reform.

I. Awakening Enlightened Mind and a Radical Change of Oneself

The ideal religious character¹ is formed through the process of religious conversion. As an experience of a deep change of one's self, conversion is essentially a personal experience or awareness of the ultimate. This is a fundamental function of religion.² In Buddhist terms this means awakening the mind which seeks enlightenment and thus bringing about a radical change in one's self. Awakening the mind which seeks after enlightenment is the beginning of religious conversion and this changes the ignorant mind into an enlightened one.

Santideva expressed this change of the mind as follows: "Like the flashing light of a thunderbolt in a pitch dark cloudy night, Buddha's miraculous power leads sentient beings toward good actions and is the

¹ William James describes a mature religious person as possessing a 'saintly' character with (a) a feeling of leading a broader and more open life transcending the interests of the usual worldly life, (b) consciousness of the continuity of intimacy between ideal power and one's own life, (c) a free and unhindered mind transcending ego boundaries. (d) a nucleus of feelings progressing towards harmonized love and affection (James, 1902: 266~267).

² Fredrik Streng considers religion as functional and defines it as a means towards ultimate transformation. His definition implies two different meanings. The first is that religion contributes to the formation of power which changes the perception of man. Here perception is essentially and directly connected with the existential source of man. The second meaning is that religion is the expression of concrete techniques to realize change in the quality of life. Rituals, spiritual insight, and religious practice are all employed in order to achieve solutions to the man's most deep-rooted problems. These techniques are what makes man religious and therefore are called 'methods' or 'techniques' (Streng, 1973: 6~12).

cause of mental bliss" (Śantideva, Bodhicaryāvatāra, 1:5, Hung, Jong-shik, 1968:10). But these good deeds are always weak and without power, so that evil power cannot be defeated unless the mind seeking enlightenment is produced. Therefore, "Buddha, the sage among the sages, immersed in deep thoughts during innumerable aeons, understood this good and blessed enlightened mind. Since it is good and blessed, it leads innumerable beings toward supreme bliss" (Śantideva, Bodhicaryāvatāra, 1:7). Like the huge devastating fire of the last aeon, the Bodhi mind burns down great and small evil deeds. Therefore, the one who makes the vow to save one's self and all sentient beings should never discard the Bodhi mind and continue to practice destroying the false and manifesting the right by means of dissolving one's worn-out self and replacing it with a new one.

The preliminary practices necessary for one to cut off defilements and activate the mind for 'the perfection of this character in Buddhism ',3 together with the mental functions concomitant with the good mind referred to as "the dharma of the stage of great goodness" are clearly elucidated in the *Abhidharma-kośabhāsya* (T.29.119ab). Here the following items are enumerated:

- ① correct faith without doubt, purifying one's own mind and that of others (faith):
- 2 concentrated practice of meditation (awareness);
- 3 tranquil mind and body and avoidance of being enslaved by all kinds of defilements (relieved tranquility);
- ④ a calm state of mind without bewilderment or dullness (unconcern);
- (5) knowing for one's self one's own wrong deeds and feeling ashamed of them (shame):
- 6 feeling ashamed for others (shame);
- 7 not being greedy or clinging towards an object (absence of greed);

³ The Buddhist view of the ideal human character can be defined as; (a) a wise person who discerns the real nature of the self and the world as it is, (b) a compassionate person who practices insight into the self and the world as one, originally interdependent living organism, (c) a free man who does not consider the cycle of birth and death, and liberation from birth and death in nirvana, as two different entities, and thus abides nowhere, (d) asovereign person who is rationally aware that he himself is his own ultimate savior (Kim, Yong-pyo, 2002: 301).

- having pity towards living beings and refraining from anger (absence of anger);
- n preserving the good mind and practicing assiduously (assiduousness).

By way of the practice of the virtues of faith, awareness, relieved tranquility, unconcern, shame, absence of greed, non-injury, and assiduousness, a Buddhist can overcome 'ignorance', 'conceptual play', and 'self-love', which are character hindering factors.4 Ignorance refers to both false ideas, which disguise the real nature of things, and to discriminative consciousness. This misconceived discriminative mind creates conceptual play by means of the operation of language and thinking. Conceptual play (prapañca) arises because each and everyone has their own futile opinion and is engaged in dispute about the assertion of truth. The one who knows the falsity of such assertions knows the right view. The one who rejects all assertions made by others and gives oneself to conceptual play is indeed a stupid person. If everyone who asserts that his own opinion is the right one and gives himself to conceptual play is said to have bright wisdom, then there would be no one without bright wisdom" (Mahā-prajñā-pāramitā-sastra, T.25.60c).

II. Breaking through for Perfection of Wisdom

The practice of wisdom and emptiness is nothing other than the process which leads to final enlightenment by means of the Bodhi mind. From a pedagogical point of view, emptiness is the process of religious conversion which refutes wrong opinions. The dialectic of

⁴ The Mahā-prajñā-pāramitā-sastra enumerates the following causes which explain why man is mentally unable to preserve the ideal state of quiescence and how he becomes entangled in anxiety and defilements: (a) The gentle mind is either thin or sunken in bad habits. (b) The principle that everything undergoes change is not correctly apprehended. (c) The phenomenon of death is not correctly viewed. (d) The world is not apprehended as being emptiness. (e) Attachment to one's span of life. (f) Happiness is not sought in Buddhism but outside the mind (Mahā-prajñā-pāramitā-sastra. T.25, 119a).

emptiness leading to 'right contemplation of the true nature of all existence' has been proposed as an antidote to the fundamental causes of man's existence of life and death, that is: ignorance, defilements, and perverted conceptual play. Based on the dialectic of emptiness, the practice method is concerned with destroying man's delusion and attachments. Contrary to logic and formal logic which recognizes the essence of contradiction, dialectic admits contradiction and is therefore a logic of contradiction and a logic of development, which considers all concepts as a dynamic process.

Seen from this concept of dialectic, the 'universal contradiction' is manifested wherever there is the function of human thinking. In particular, the philosophical method which tries to systematize a new theory through discriminative logic seeks such a universalization of contradiction. As a result, an opinion or point of view is formed and all things are seen from this point of view. In Mādhyamika thought, this is called opinion. All philosophical systems try to build up such an opinion or point of view and this is precisely the root or the seed of the problem. The dialectic of emptiness does not aim to set up a new philosophy or opinion. On the contrary, its aim is to dismantle such philosophical systems. The method used therein is the dialectical methodology inherent in emptiness.

As a theory of practice, the dialectic of *prajñā* and *śūnyatā* arises out of a mystical stage which dismantles and transcends the capacity of logical analysis, the critical spirit, and its own logic. Hence there is a very great difference between this dialectic and general formal logic or Western dialectics. As the logic of the dialectic of emptiness aims at the edification of an upward tending spirit, it uses the *tetralemma* as its main method. Nāgārjuna inherited this method which appeared in the early Mahāyāna Sūtras and he used it in the religious pedagogical dimension as a weapon for the confutation of attachment.

A final conclusion which can be drawn from the dialectic of emptiness consists in a both a negative and a positive factor. In the dialectic of emptiness, it is the attribution of real existence to whatever is entirely denied; even the reality of Buddha or *nirvāna* experience

(Yuiichi, 1976:116-118). The fourth stage among the four negative clauses as a stage of religious enlightenment leading to the highest truth, reaches the limit of thorough philosophical introspection, and there philosophy dismantles itself. Then in accordance with the method of discarding attachment to substance and attachment to substantial language, mediated by the thought of the former, correct contemplation of no-obtainment is obtained, and phenomena are perceived as they truly are. That is only possible in the stage where the mind of man is opened and awakened to emptiness. Here emptiness teaches seeking the mind of liberation, freed from all metaphysical opinions and conceptual play.

Although the dialectic of emptiness continuously uses the method of negation, the conclusion is not negative but is rather peace and supreme bliss. All existent beings come into being because the process of the dialectic of emptiness is based on the principle of the utimate middle and because of the principle of Nāgārjuna, which states that he who accepts emptiness and understands it completely, knows that all worlds each have their proper place in universal harmony. But to the ignorant person, this world is nothing other than chaos and suffering (MK, 24:14).

The teaching of 'the three kinds of the middle way', 'the four kinds of two truths', or 'the four kinds of interpretations' asserted by the She ling school in China, all negate the concept of truth, as cognized in the former stages, as a preliminary pseudonym and also the use of the method of elevation towards a one-stage higher dimension. The essential point of such a dialectical understanding of truth is the guidance of a person from a low dimension of truth to that of a higher dimension. The simultaneity and monistic approach employed to destroy the false and manifest the right in Mādhyamika dialectic, demonstrates that religious practice and dialectic cannot be separated from each other. This method is very clearly expressed by the words "destroying the false is precisely manifesting the right". Here destruction of all opinions is religious practice and manifesting the right is enlightenment. Thus the system of *prajñā* and *śūnyatā* consists of the non-dual structure of religious practice and enlightenment. The process of religious practice

based on a correct view of emptiness is indeed the process of enlightenment and the way of ultimate change itself.

Such religious conversion and change is possible through the deconstruction of discrimination and conceptual understanding, that is, the endless dialectical process of negation. The synchrony of 'breaking through' and 'understanding' can be easily understood if we remember that the Korean word 'enlightenment' means both 'understanding' and 'breaking through'. "Breaking through is the experience of enlightenment", in that, the destruction of bewilderment itself is considered as enlightenment. The dismantling and destruction of a fixed and closed opinion is a liberating wisdom that opens the horizon to correct enlightenment.

For the concept of enlightenment in its Korean context, holds the meaning of "breaking," "brokenness," "breakage," "to break," or "break-through." At once, two questions thus arise here, namely: (a) What is it that is "broken" in the enlightenment experience? and (b) How, in fact, does this total breakage actually occur? We have asserted that in Korean Buddhism, a total breakage is the necessary prius to enlightenment. What is to be broken? It is precisely the "ego" which must be broken-down or broken-up or broken-apart, and all of the ontological-intellectual-axiological systems posited and sustained by the ego. Again, one may state that there must be a total breaking-up of one's sedimented thought system which functions to "disseminate" the original uncarved or non-divided continuum of reality (Park, 1983:470)

The central point of the Mādhyamika dialectic is the ceaseless destruction of clinging to a fixed conceptual truth. To think that there is one absolute truth is to hold a closed and prejudicial opinion. Therefore the Māhyamika proposes the ceaseless dismantling of the concept of truth as a correct method for cognizing truth. Thus the function of the dialectic of the Middle Way is to destroy conceptual clinging and to purify the mind. The central point of the dialectic of emptiness in Mādhyamika is the ceaseless destruction and dismantlement of the clinging to whatever fixed view. Thus the dialectic of emptiness has the

function of destroying conceptual clinging and of purification. The method of the middle way deconceptualizes the mind and liberates it from oppression by all kinds of conceptualizations. This is essentially a catharsis of the intellectually discriminative mind. Murti interprets this as follows: "The function of dialectical negation called *Prajñā*" (Murti, 1955:22). *Prajñā pāramitā* comprehends man's perfect religious conversion and ultimate change towards liberation. The dialectic of emptiness is the way to attain such ultimate change and is also an antidote to the perverse mind. The liberation theory of Mādhyamika implies the pedagogical possibility of fundamental change resulting in the total spiritual recharging of man.

The human mind can be educated and trained. The problem is essentially one of knowledge-insight into the nature of the real. The supremacy of the intellect and its absolute power to control and eradicate passions is the rock on which the Mādhyamika spiritual discipline is built. Not the will but the intellect is the supreme faculty to which others are subject. (Murti, 1955:22).

Here, The emphasis is on the intuition and intellect of man. Also, the sword severing defilements is said to be the intellect. Therefore Mādhyamika considers the perfection of wisdom as the most valuable and virtuous among all perfections. The perfection of wisdom possesses the pure brightness of the mind. Here, the attainment of perfect freedom and liberation is the essential point of the Mādhyamika's theory of liberation and salvation.

In order to attain the highest wisdom *prajñā pāramitā*, the following five *pāramitās* must be practiced as preliminaries: First, giving and compassion; second, observation of moral precepts; third, tolerance and patience; fourth, energy and perseverance; fifth, meditation and *dhyāna*. Perfection of wisdom cannot be attained without the help of all other five perfections. Without perfection of wisdom, the practice of precepts and meditation has no special meaning. The sophistic habit cannot be overcome only through the intellectual practice of the dialectic of emptiness. Therefore, Mādhyamika emphasizes the necessity

to practice meditation to attain a new habit leading to the experience of emptiness and transcending all concepts. But even meditation must be lead by wisdom in order to be called $p\bar{a}ramit\bar{a}$. The true nature of life and the world becomes completely elucidated through the perfection of wisdom, and it is by means of this perfection that supreme bliss and perfect liberation, integration of character and a deep change of the self, universal love and compassion are attained.

III. Present Actualization of Buddha-Nature

Buddha-nature means both "the possibility of becoming enlightened" clearness manifested from enlightenment". actualization of perfect Buddha-nature is manifested through perfect enlightenment. Buddha-nature is the equality and possibility possessed by all human beings. Buddhism promotes the discovery and practice of Buddha-nature and proposes peace of mind and sound life through the discovery of man's true nature. Erich Fromm purports the experience of enlightenment as a stage where perfect harmony is attained psychologically in the true nature inwards and outwards of man. It is "neither schizophrenia nor ecstasy but perfect awakening of the whole character concerning the real nature" and "a reaction and response of myself as a whole and as I really am and to all people and things as they are" (Fromm, 1976:76-77). Nishida Kitaro (1870-1945) considered character as the unitive power of consciousness and said that "rather, where one forgets oneself, there one's genuine character becomes manifest. A true unification of consciousness is a pure and genuine function naturally manifesting in the unconscious, it is also the self-existent original consciousness without intellectual discrimination and segregation of subject and object" (Nishida. 1966:15). The genuine self can be realized in a united consciousness, without dichotomy of subject-object.

But Buddha-nature is not something actualized apart from concrete life. Rather, Buddhism is only meaningful if the actualization of Buddha-nature implying Buddha's mind and enlightenment, occurs right in this life of birth and death and of transmigration. The Buddhist experience of enlightenment is always characterized by its actualization 'here and now'. The reality of no-mind does not exist outside of man because it is the content of the enlightenment experience itself. Emptiness or absolute nothingness is not a real existent being outside man but is the non-dual evolutive process we are experiencing right now in the present.

The problem of the actuality of enlightenment was explained by Dogen (1200-1253) by way of the concept of genjo koan, which denotes that all phenomena are the undistinguished manifestation of ultimate truth. Dogen considers "genjo" to mean the undisguised manifestation of the real nature. He describes this as follows: "To study Buddhism means to seek one's own self. To seek after one's own self means to forget one's self. To forget one's self leads to enlightenment by means of all things. To be enlightened by all things means the casting-away of body and mind" (Shobogenzo, 1970:7-8).5 "Genjo" means 'already existing in a perfect state'. Sometimes this is incorrectly interpreted as meaning "the phenomenon of the immanence of the transcendental". Dogen's "genjo" is never something static but is always experienced as the paradoxical process of something in movement. The Genjo koan can be interpreted as 'actualization of reality'. This is not to be understood intellectually in the way of the concept of an old koan, but should be considered as something endowed with a life of its own. That would be the experience of enlightenment, i.e., cognizing the real nature of things just as it is. Here existence becomes one with time. Time is not a flowing external object but is existence itself.

Thus, for the Buddhist practitioner, "everyday is a good day and every moment is beautiful." (Pi-yan-lu, T.48). Here no difference exists between name and form and emptiness, phenomenon and substance. Again, "all sentient beings are Buddha-nature" and "all existence is time". There is no existence apart from time, and time is the movement of ultimate existence. Therefore "when time comes, Buddha-nature will actualize itself". For the Buddhist practitioner, life exists every moment

⁵ The genjo koan was also asserted by the Ch'an masters Ke Qin (1064-1136), Da Hui (1089-1163), and Zhong Feng (1243-1323).

as ecstasy. The Buddhist character is always forged and perfected in the affirmative and creative process of the actualization of Buddha-nature.

IV. Conclusion

The phenomenon of moral devastation in modern society is caused by materialism, which is fed by the perversions of greed and hedonistic values. Instead of a holistic human education, we have a depersonalized system of education which values functional "cramming". Instead of a sovereign educational environment cultivating students' self-reliance, our worldly educational climate fosters dependency and egocentrism and impedes the development of a desirable humanistic educational system. How can Buddhism contribute to modern education in there conditions?

First, Buddhism emphasizes education for enlightenment which leads to a realistic apprehension and understanding of the ego and the world. According to Buddhism, ignorance is the cause of our misunderstanding of the original nature of things and it is the fundamental cause leading to the formation of undesirable character. Greed, anger, and stupidity, the so-called three poisons, originate from discriminative thinking. Buddhist understanding of man is based on the vicious circle of bewilderment. deeds done out of bewilderment, and suffering consequent retribution of these deeds. Actually, the problems of modern society and education are arise from ignorance and defilements. Pollution environment, increase of nuclear weapons, greed-oriented materialism, mechanization of man, the formation of human relationships based solely on economic concerns; all are factors which aggravate arising and subsequent anxiety, resulting from a wrong understanding of the world. The existential melancholy of modern humanity resulting from loss of meaning and purpose in life, loss of spiritual life, alienation from one's self, humanity and nature, feelings of guilt, solitude, fear of death, nihilistic thinking and so on, are all defilements and illusions caused by one's own misperception of the real nature of the world. Thus Buddhism diagnoses human character deficiencies as caused by ignorance, defilements, self-love and conceptual play. As an antidote to

these, Buddhism prescribes a way leading to correct enlightenment of one's self and the world.

Second, in Buddhism, man is understood to be originally endowed with Buddha-nature, that is, he is originally a perfect being. So the way to the perfection of character is through the actualization of this Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature is the potential for unlimited creation and can be understood as the repletion of the present as it is. Man is originally Buddha-nature, replete with freedom, self-reliance, peace, hope, love, and wisdom. This Buddha-nature is now polluted with non-original defilements such as oppression, attachment, dependence, violence, anxiety, despair, pride, and ignorance. Thus the main point of Buddhist character education is to return to the original Buddha-nature. The practice of Mahāyāna Buddhism focuses on the actualization of Buddha-nature. This Buddha-nature opens the present and enables one to understand the profoundity of the present moment, and seeks the perfection of life in this secular realm. By awakening in this manner, man becomes aware of the essence of his own existence and of his function in this world. Also compassion and respect for others arises through the awareness that all sentient beings are endowed with Buddha-nature. Hence the one who gains insight into Buddha-nature will inevitably cultivate the practice of compassion coupled with skillful Such practices as the contemplation of emptiness leading to means. wisdom and practice of compassion indicate that Mahāyāna Buddhism accepts the possibility of ultimate change in human nature. This is a very important fundamental for the education of character.

Third, one can develop a rational insight of self-reliance, which is awareness of oneself as one's own ultimate savior. According to the Buddhist Sūtras, we must attain our own personal salvation, there is on one else who can do it for us, "You have to strive on diligently. The Tathāgata only pointed the way" (*Dharmapāda*, 276). This spirit of sovereignty and self-reliance is an important teaching for correcting the dependent and subordinate character which is the norm in our society.

Thus, Buddhist character education develops creative wisdom, practical compassion, and a self-reliant free personality. This is possible

by waking up and activating our inherent Buddha-nature, and offering external pedagogical prescriptions concomitant with one's own efforts. The Buddhist concept of character education begins with belief in the possibility that anyone can transform into a Buddha-like person, endowed with wisdom, compassion, and liberative skills. And fortunately, according to the Buddha's teaching, there are more than 84,000 methods that can be developed and used in the pedagogical process. With such a vast methodology available to us we are sure to be able to find appropriate means for application to the ills of modern times.

Glossary

Abhidharma kośabhāsya 阿毘達磨俱舍論
Bodhicitta 菩提心
Bohicarayavatara 菩提行經
Dhammapada 法句經
Digha nikaya 長部經典
Dōgen 道元
Genjo koan 現成公案
Lin-chi-lu 臨濟錄
Pi-yan-lu 碧巖錄
prajñā 般若
prapanca 戲論
Santideva 寂天
śūnyatā 空性
Ta-chi-tu-lun 大智度論
Zhong-lun (Madhyamaka sastra karika) 中論

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