



THE PHILOSOPHY OF BUDDHA AND BUDDHISM: A RELOOK IN THE DOCTRINAL EXTENSION

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Abstract:

This paper discusses the core teachings of Buddha and the extension of his teachings through his followers in different lines over successive times. Buddhist philosophy is the elaboration and explanation of the delivered teachings of the Buddha as found in the Tripitaka and Agama. Its main concern is with explicating the dharmas constituting reality. A recurrent theme is the reification of concepts, and the subsequent return to the Buddhist middle way. Early Buddhism avoided speculative thought on metaphysics, phenomenology, ethics, and epistemology, but was based instead on empirical evidence gained by the ayatana. Nevertheless, Buddhist scholars have addressed ontological and metaphysical issues subsequently. Particular points of Buddhist philosophy have often been the subject of disputes between different schools of Buddhism. These elaborations and disputes gave rise to various schools in early Buddhism of Abhidhamma, and to the Mahayana traditions and schools of the prajnaparamita, Madhyamaka, Buddha-nature and Yogacara. Above all, the four noble truths and the eightfold path remain the authentic foundation.

KEYWORDS:

Abhidhamma, karma, Theravada, Tripitaka

INTRODUCTION

Buddhist philosophy is the elaboration and explanation of the delivered teachings of the Buddha as found in the Tripitaka and Agama. Its main concern is with explicating the dharmas constituting reality. A recurrent theme is the reification of concepts, and the subsequent return to the Buddhist middle way. Early Buddhism avoided speculative thought on metaphysics, phenomenology, ethics, and epistemology, but was based instead on empirical evidence gained by the sense organs (ayatana). Nevertheless, Buddhist scholars have addressed ontological and metaphysical issues subsequently. Particular points of Buddhist philosophy have often been the subject of disputes between different schools of Buddhism. These elaborations and disputes gave rise to various schools in early Buddhism of Abhidhamma, and to the Mahayana traditions and schools of the prajnaparamita, Madhyamaka, buddha-nature and Yogacara. It is believed that Buddha discouraged his followers from indulging in intellectual disputation which would distract from true awakening.

LIFE OF BUDDHA

Siddhartha (560 BC-480 BC) was born in Kapilavastu in Nepal. When he was born astrologers predicted that he was going to be either a world-ruler or a world-teacher. So his father, king Suddhodana, took all precautions such that he was not exposed to any of the suffering of this world. But despite the king's efforts, when Gautama attained youth, he went out one day in his chariot for a ride into the town and saw

three painful sights: an old man, a sick man, and a dead body being carried to the cremation ground. He asked his charioteer, Channa, what these sights meant, and if these things could happen to everyone. Channa explained and said that these could happen to anyone. Gautama got very perturbed at these scenes, and got disillusioned with his princely and worldly life. By this time he was already married and had a son, Rahula, to his wife Maya. One night, in his 29th year, he left his home without saying good bye to his family, became a monk, and roamed about in forests and jungles looking for an answer to his spiritual quest.[1]

He became a disciple of a few contemporary religious teachers, became dissatisfied with their meditational practices, austerities, and other types of discipline, and left them to seek his enlightenment alone. His practice of austerities went so far as mortifying his body; but he became so weak that he could hardly get up from the water in which he fell. He vowed that he would not mortify his body any more through fasting and other means, but instead would eat just as much as necessary to enable his body to survive. One day he sat under a Pipal tree and vowed that he would never get up until he became enlightened. After 14 days of intense contemplation, he became enlightened. He rested for 9 more days assimilating his newly found wisdom and started walking back to Benaras where he started preaching. He first looked for the 5 associates who were earlier disappointed in him for the lack of his success in achieving enlightenment and left him, and made them his first disciples. The Buddha soon established a monastic order. His own son, his father, and relatives became his pupils. He wandered with the monks from place to place, accepting food given by people, particularly the rich, and preaching the Dharma, his doctrine. He died at the age of 80. He is known to have been a compassionate man, tending to care for the sick, the downtrodden, and the crippled.

After the death of the Buddha questions arose as to what the Buddha actually taught. Several Buddhist councils were held to clarify unclear and controversial issues. The first council was held at Rajagrhā in 480 BC, the second in Vaisali in 383 BC and the third one was held by the Emperor Ashoka in Pataliputra in 247 BC. Direct disciples of the Buddha and their disciples who had good memory recited Buddha's teachings, and checks and counterchecks were made on what they recalled. The teachings thus recalled were grouped in three collections: the Sutra Pitaka, the Vinaya Pitaka and the - Abhidharma Pitaka, containing rules of discipline, discourses of the Buddha on various topics, and the Philosophy of early Buddhism respectively. By the time of the third council there developed a great schism in Buddhism, i.e., the split between Hinayana and Mahayana. Hinayanais also called Theravada, the doctrine of the elders, Pali Buddhism because the basic texts in this Buddhism were written in Pali, a language derived from Sanskrit. Many sutras of Mahayana were written in Sanskrit.[2]

CORE TEACHINGS

According to the scriptures, during his lifetime the Buddha remained silent when asked several metaphysical questions. These regarded issues such as whether the universe is eternal or non-eternal or whether it is finite or infinite, the unity or separation of the body and the self, the complete inexistence of a person after Nirvana and death, and others. Buddhism is a very pragmatic, and to a large degree empirical and rational religion. In some fashion it is also atheistic. It does not believe in the existence of a supernatural entity called God, although it believes in many gods. These gods, however, have no special status in Buddhism, for they are considered to be part of the natural world, like animals and people are; only they may have superior powers and occupy heavenly regions. The Buddha also tried, as much as he could, to avoid metaphysics and metaphysical questions which are not relevant to the understanding of suffering and being liberated from it. For example, he avoided the questions of whether the world is eternal or not, whether the world is finite or infinite, whether the body and the soul are identical or different, and whether the soul does or does not exist after death. Questions like these the Buddha did not answer because he thought that they did not tend to edification, meaning that they were not conducive to the solution of the existential problems of the human being.[3]

The Four Noble Truths

The Four Noble Truths are: Suffering, the Causes of Suffering, the Cessation of Suffering or Nirvana, and the Path to the Cessation of Suffering.[4] The first is the truth of suffering: it is a fact that there is suffering everywhere in life. Not having what we want is suffering. Having what we do not want is suffering. After getting what we want, not being able to keep it is suffering. Worrying or being afraid of the possibility of losing what we have is suffering. Old age is suffering, sickness is suffering and death is suffering. The second noble truth is that there is a cause to suffering: The Buddha's analysis of suffering is that it is ultimately based on the fact that we desire things, and this desire is in turn based on an ignorance, particularly the ignorance that we are an independent and permanent ego or self, and on the resultant

grasping of the self. We will later give a more detailed analysis of the causation of suffering. The third noble truth is that it is possible to remove suffering. The fourth truth gives us, in the form of the famous eightfold path, the way to remove suffering.

The Eightfold Path

The eightfold path of the Buddha offers the way to attain Nirvana or liberation. The path consists of right views, right determination, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. The step of right views involves knowing and understanding the four noble truths and how they are true. Right determination is to resolve to renounce the world and not commit any harmful deed. Right speech is to abstain from speaking falsehood, slander, malicious talk, and prattle. It also involves practicing kindly, friendly, purposeful and meaningful speech. Right conduct is to abstain from killing, stealing, and sexual incontinence. Positively, it means acting in such a way as to enhance peace, happiness and well-being of all living beings. Right livelihood is supporting oneself by means which do not involve professions which harm others, such as selling arms, liquor, drugs, poisons etc., but which promote peace and well-being among living beings. Right speech, right conduct and right livelihood all imply love and compassion to fellow beings. Right effort is to strive with all of one's energies to stop harmful qualities from arising in oneself, to abandon those which are already in oneself, to nourish good qualities which have not arisen, and to reinforce, encourage, increase and perfect the good qualities that already exist in oneself. Right mindfulness and right concentration constitute the early Buddhist practice of meditation: the former involves being passively aware of what state the body and its different parts are in, what one's feelings, thoughts or emotions, inclinations, and actions are, how they arise and pass away, and so on. It is also to be aware of one's actions in each of their stages analytically, without assuming the ego. Right concentration is to develop and dwell in an ecstasy which is free from lust and wrong dispositions. In the second stage of concentration one becomes free from all mental activities including observation and reflection and develops and dwells in a state of serenity. Then the mediator passes on to the third and fourth stages of concentration which consist of complete equanimity and awareness beyond the opposites of happiness and unhappiness. The right views and determination, the right speech, conduct and livelihood, and the right effort, mindfulness and concentration all support each other--it is not that somehow one is a prerequisite or preparation for the others.[5]

PRINCIPLE OF CAUSALITY

The principle of causality is a basic teaching in Buddhism; it describes a fundamental aspect of nature. It states that every phenomenon comes into being due to various causes and conditions. When the right cause and conditions come together, the right result or phenomenon arises. However, when the conditions fall apart, things fall apart. This is the way of all life. Science, in fact, is based on causality. Things do not happen by accident but are related by causes. The task of the scientist is to discover the correct causal relationships. Buddhist causality, however, is wider in scope. It deals with both mental and physical phenomena. The scripture says, "To know what you've done in the past, observe what is happening to you in this life. To know what will happen in the future, observe what you are doing in this life." This verse contains the key to understanding our fate. As with all phenomena, our fate also follows the Principle of Causality. Whatever happens to us in this life is due to previous cause and conditions, due to actions we ourselves have performed. Whenever we perform certain actions, we create karma, which means our actions have some effects on the rest of the world. When the effects are beneficial, it is called good karma; when the effects are harmful, it is called bad karma. Actions lead to reactions. When we benefit others, we generate good karma and will receive blessings in the future. When we hurt others, we generate bad karma and will be hurt in the future. This is a natural law, the Law of Causality stated in the simplest way.[6]

CONCEPTS IN EARLY BUDDHISM

There are few basic concepts and doctrines either explicit or implicit in early Buddhism. These pave the way for further extension of Buddhism.[7] Impermanence: Buddhism believes, unlike the Upanishads, in a changing view of reality: everything in the world is impermanent (anitya). It is not only that change exists, but that everything in the universe is in a constant flux, such that we cannot say that there are any stable self-subsistent things. Dependent Origination: Buddhism believes in a view of causation called the doctrine of dependent origination (pratitya-samutpada). Buddhism uses this doctrine to explain how suffering occurs and how it can be removed. Both the second and the last noble truth are explained by use of this doctrine. The Wheel of Becoming: The explanation of suffering occurs through the use of what is

called the Wheel of Becoming (bhava chakra): There are 12 links in this circular chain of causation. Ignorance is the first link in the chain and old age and death, the culminating points of suffering, are the last link. This chain is circular because the last link in the wheel in turn causes the first link in the next round of births and rebirths creating an otherwise endless wheel of births and rebirths which constitute samsara.

No-Self: The most important doctrine of early Buddhism is the doctrine of no-self (anatmavada). This follows directly from the doctrine of impermanence (anitya): If everything in the world is constantly changing, then there cannot be a permanent entity called the self. Therefore, what appears to be a permanent self in us is only an appearance, and is an illusory entity. There is no basis for any belief in such an entity in our experience. **Skandhas:** The Buddha asks us to investigate and find out for ourselves what we really are in our own experience: he says that whenever we look into ourselves whatever we find are nothing but sets of processes: the bodily processes (rupa), the process of sensation (vedana), the process of perception which involves recognition of the object we perceive, (samjna), the process of tendencies or impulses to act in certain ways (samskara), and finally, the process of consciousness (vijnana). The Buddha asks us if there is anything in our experience we can find which we can call ourselves besides these processes. These processes are called skandhas, the aggregates.

HINAYANA AND MAHAYANA

Two broad sects Hinayana and Mahayana manifest some important differences in doctrinal extension.[8] The Hinayana is the more conservative of the two schools, claiming to be more faithful to the original teachings of the Buddha. The Mahayana is the more liberal and claims to represent the true spirit and not the letter of the Buddha's teachings. At times it even claims to be the esoteric teaching of the Buddha, which, according to it, the Buddha reserved for a select few constituting the inner circle of his pupils. Hinayana teachings are mostly based on the three pitakas teachings. Mahayana developed its own Prajnaparamita and other works written by various philosophers. Both schisms developed subschools of their own. These are the Vaibhashika (Sarvastivada) and the Sautrantika from the Hinayana tradition, and the Yogachara (Vijnanavada) and the Madhyamika (Shunyavada) from the Mahayana tradition. Problems arose as to how to interpret the Buddha's doctrine of impermanence. If everything is changing all the time, and if there is no such thing as a permanent ego or substance in the person, then how can we say that the person who is striving now for Nirvana is the same person who will attain it later? Or if I am acting now, how can I be said to reap the benefits or demerits from my action in my later life, or in another lifetime? In other words, how do we explain the identity and continuity of a person? Hinayana gave some metaphysical answers to these questions.

Kshanikavada: Hinayana developed a metaphysics called Kshanikavada (doctrine of momentariness) to clarify Anityavada. The universe is constantly changing. However, there is no change without something that changes. Or else, we cannot explain the continuity of things, or explain any of our knowledge, or expect certain results to follow from our actions. The something that changes in any change is called a dharma or element. The dharmas are the ultimate constituents of the universe. There are dharmas for instance, in all the five skandhas. Each of these dharmas arises for a moment, stays only for a moment and passes away the next moment giving rise to another dharma. Although each dharma has a past, a present, and a future, lasting only a timeless moment which is in itself eternal. There is a continual stream of these dharmas arising and passing away. Such a stream is called Samtana. The Vaibhashikas do not make it clear how dharmas which only exist for a timeless moment can constitute a temporal series.

Personal Identity: The Vaibhashikas maintained that a particular set of dharmas called the prapti makes sure that dharmas of the same kind stay together in a particular series. It is these series, which we may also call processes, which make up a person, and also make up the things in the external world. Most of these dharmas are conditioned, because they are caused by and in turn cause other dharmas. However, there are unconditioned dharmas, as for example, the dharmas of Nirvana which are neither caused nor cause other dharmas. They attach themselves to the conditioned dharmas. It is these that explain the difference between a man in samsara and a man in nirvana. To explain the identity of a person some other Hinayanists (Pudgalavadins) believed in what is called the Pudgalavada. Pudgala means a person. They say that behind the stream or samtana constituting a person there is a pudgala characteristic of each person, which explains what makes that stream the stream of that person and not of another. If asked as to what this Pudgala is, they say it cannot be further explained, nor can what the relationship between the stream of dharmas constituting the person and the person himself, or between the person and the pudgala, or between the pudgala and the stream of dharmas constituting the person. Thus Hinayana developed a realistic metaphysics of external reality consisting of eternal, independent dharmas, each lasting only a moment. These are some sort of

particles or elements. The Mahayana philosophers, particularly the Yogacharas and the Madhyamikas, believe that the notion of the self, along with the notion of the phenomenal world, is ultimately invalid, although it is relatively valid at the empirical level of experience.

Madhyamik holds that empty is both external as well as internal substances. In the Madhyamik Karika it is mentioned as follows: [9]

Na sannasanna sadsanna chapyanubhayatmakam I
Chatuskotivinirmuktam tattvam madhyamikam viduhu II

EXISTING OF BODHISATTVAS

The Mahayana believes that an individual is not an isolated entity that his destiny is bound up with the destiny of all other beings in the universe. So, Mahayana develops the notion of the Bodhisattva who although enlightened to some degree, takes a vow to postpone his own final enlightenment to help other beings in their path to liberation, until all the beings in the universe are liberated. He takes this vow and several other similar vows in the presence of the Buddha, if he happened to be alive at the time of the Buddha, or in the presence of another Bodhisattva, who predicts that he will become a Buddha after some aeons. First an ordinary person hears the teaching of a Buddha or Bodhisattva. As a result of the virtue generated from such hearing, after several lifetimes, the person performs many good deeds. This in turn will result in course of time in the person being interested in enlightenment both for reasons of his desire to transcend samsara and for altruistic reasons. In due course he transcends the duality of these purposes and realizes that he and others are the same. Arousing the thought of enlightenment is itself a meritorious act. It ensures that the person will not be reborn miserable but only well. This is called 'winning the stream.' Thus a Bodhisattva is born. He takes the vow mentioned above and other vows such as, 'When we have crossed the stream, may we ferry others across. When we are liberated, may we liberate others.' [10].

As part of his career a Bodhisattva practices six virtues. He practices them without any self-consciousness, ulterior motives or self-congratulation. Doing any act without such self-consciousness etc. is what constitutes the first virtue, viz. Wisdom. This virtue is necessary to practice the other virtues. They are: Charity, Morality, Patience, Vigor, and Meditation. There are several stages, varying in number, depending on the text one consults, in the career of a Bodhisattva. These are called Bhumis. In each stage one of the perfections is supposed to be practiced. The final stage involves the non-dual awareness that the cause of suffering, i.e. the illusion of the ego is destroyed and will never arise again. The usual length of a Bodhisattva's career is three aeons, called kalpas. Mahayana also had occasion around the Seventh Century AD in Tibet to mix Tantra with its philosophy and practice. Such a path is called Vajrayana, the thunderbolt or diamond vehicle. This path involves concentration on Mantras such as Om and on Mandalas, geographic representations of the universe as well as of the human being similar to yantras in Hindu Tantra. The Mahayana metaphysics is in general idealistic, or dialectical, meaning that it tends to deny the possibility of the human intellect to comprehend reality, the self or Nirvana.

DOCTRINAL ARGUMENTS

Vaibhashika: This is a Hinayana school. It is also called the Sarvastivada School. The followers of this school believe in the momentary dharma theory. They believe in 75 different sorts of dharmas, 72 of them conditioned and 3 unconditioned. Nirvana is an unconditioned one. Prapti is what glues the conditioned dharmas in an individual to the dharma of Nirvana. Vaibhashikas are direct realists in theory of knowledge: they believe that we can through our senses know objects in the external world directly as they are.

Sautrantika: This is also a Hinayana school. This school also believes in the dharma doctrine, except they believe that each dharma arises in one moment, and does not even stay for a moment, but passes away the next moment, giving rise to another dharma.

Yogachara: The term Yogachara is probably given to this school because the followers of this school practiced Yoga. And the term Vijñānavāda signifies their doctrine that in the final analysis the universe is nothing but an impersonal consciousness. Asanga and Vasubandhu are the famous teacher-philosophers of this school who lived probably around the 5th to 7th century. Their works are retranslated from Tibetan translations. Vijñānavāda holds that the belief in an external material world is mistaken.

Madhyamika: Madhyamika means the middle. Shunya means emptiness or nothingness. The term Shunyavada signifies their view that we can only say that Reality is Emptiness or Nothingness, for no

ascriptions can be made about it, not even that it exists or it does not exist, for existence and non-existence are merely relative terms which are applicable to the empirical world of ordinary experience and not to Reality as such. Nagarjuna's works such as Madhyamika Sutras, Mulamadhyamika Karika, and Vignahavyavartini explain the doctrinal positions. Nagarjuna is well known in Buddhism for his startling statement that there is no difference between Samsara and Nirvana. Nagarjuna holds the distinction between empirical and absolute truths or realities. The empirical reality is a construction or fabrication of the mind or thought. In this reality everything is relative: substance and attribute are relative; so are cause and effect, time and space, reality and knowledge, the self and the world, and even samsara and nirvana. That means that the two items in each of the pairs depend on each other and create each other. Nagarjuna sets out to show that all our views about Reality are false because they lead to contradictions: The list of subjects he considers includes all the categories we use to describe reality: for instance, substance and attribute, cause and effect, time and space, knowledge and error, the self and the world, Samsara and Nirvana, and even the very notion of a Path.[11]

CONCLUSION

In the earliest period of Buddhism, more attention was paid to the four noble truths than to systematic metaphysics. It is believed that Buddha discouraged his followers from indulging in intellectual disputation which would distract from true awakening. The Abhidhammas hardly give us any new philosophy which was not contained in the Suttas. They only elaborated the materials of the suttas with enumerations and definitions. With the evolution of Mahayana scriptures, the doctrine of the nonessentialness and voidness of all dhammas began to be preached. This doctrine, which was taken up and elaborated by Nagarjuna and others, is more or less a corollary from the older doctrine of Buddhism. From the third century some Buddhists took to the study of systematic logic and began to criticize the doctrine of the Hindu logicians. In association with this logical activity, both the Vaibhasikas and the Sautrantikas accepted the existence of the external world. Theravada promotes the concept of vibhajjavada which says that insight must come from the aspirant's experience, critical investigation, and reasoning instead of by blind faith. As the Buddha said according to the canonical scriptures: "Do not accept anything by mere tradition ... Do not accept anything just because it accords with your scriptures ... Do not accept anything merely because it agrees with your pre-conceived notions ... But when you know for yourselves—these things are moral, these things are blameless, these things are praised by the wise, these things, when performed and undertaken, conduce to well-being and happiness—then do you live acting accordingly."

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