

BUDDHISM OF HUMAN SOCIETY

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In *Ekottarikagama* we find: "Buddha is from the world and did not become Buddha in heaven." The Buddhist Scripture often says: "The human body is difficult to achieve." Bountiful discussions take place on the preciousness of the human body and human life. Buddhism stresses that although all living beings have Buddha-nature only human beings can achieve Buddhahood.

Buddha was born into this world. In this world, he became Buddha, preached the dharma, and practiced the *paramitas*--the freeing of self and other human beings from miseries. According to the Buddhist Scripture, he taught industriously throughout the years after his enlightenment and his footprints were widespread on both sides of the Ganges. His disciples were of all colors and ranks--from kings, nobles, rich merchants, and scholars to beggars and slaves. He abandoned the royal life and devoted himself to the pursuit of wisdom and truth and to the cause of the enlightenment of others. He was tireless in discovering truth and in passing it on to others. His objective throughout his Buddhahood in this world was to rescue human beings and society. To realize this he formed the *sangha* and led them to the country and to cities to beg alms and to preach the dharma to purify this world. Buddha also labored with the

sangha to clear the ground, draw water, repair houses and care for patients. He opposed the caste system and respected women, accepting them into Buddhism. Overall, Buddha did all he could to work for human society. He engaged himself in this world instead of remaining aloof from society and human affairs. Buddha was of this world. So is the dharma.

Much of the dharma is concerned with the welfare of society and the livelihood of people. Among typical philanthropic activities are such things as tree-planting, dredging of river courses, ferrying, well-sinking, handing out medicines to the poor, and building bridges, inns, and baths. That may be why in The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch there are words like: "The Dharma is to be realized nowhere but in this world; to seek Buddha outside this world would be like looking for horns on a rabbit."

The idea of the "pure land" is found in Buddhism. We often hear that if one cultivates oneself well enough according to the rules and disciplines of Buddhism, then in afterlife one may live in the "pure land," or "the world of utmost joy." The idea of the "pure land" first appeared in the Agamasutra, where it can refer to the "pure land" either in heaven or on earth. Maitreya was born a Brahmana and later became a disciple of Buddha. One sutra of Maitreya says that when Maitreya dies he rises to the world of utmost joy. But another sutra, *Maitreyavyakarana*, has it that Maitreya will come down to this world again, where he is to become Buddha under *Naga-puspa* and to teach all living beings in Buddha's place. The "pure land" of Maitreya in the latter sutra aims at a "pure land" on earth, rather than in heaven. *Vimalakirtinirdesasutra* puts it like this: "One who wishes for the 'Pure Land' should have a purified heart; where the heart is purified is the 'pure land of Buddha.'" The "pure land" exists with enlightenment of the heart.

Buddhism of Human Society

Another Buddhist concept is the "ten worlds," or "ten Dharma-worlds," which are: hell, hunger, animality, anger, humanity, rapture, learning, realization, Bodhisattva, and Buddha. In fact, these ten worlds refer to ten realms or states of mind rather than to ten actual worlds; it is not implied that, beyond ours, there are other worlds which are for hunger, animality, and so on. The worlds relate to human beings, who, with the changes of feelings, may be at one time in hell and at another in heaven. For instance, when one suffers emotional or physical torment, one is in the state of hell; when greedy, one is in that of hunger; when evil-minded, in that of anger; and when over-indulgent in material pleasures, in that of animality. One is in the state of humanity when calm and peaceful, and in that of rapture when pleased by joyful events. Mr. Ikeda, the famous Japanese peace movement leader, gives a brilliant explanation of these ten states. In *Life: From Hell to Buddha* he writes, "Through speculating upon the ten states we may find a path that will lead people to a more humanitarian life. It is a path to prevent war, environmental and social pollution and social diseases, a path to lead people to the control of their own destinies."

"Buddhism of human society," advocated by Mr. Zhao Puchu, the president of the Buddhist Association of China, has been accepted in recent years by many Buddhists and Buddhist scholars in China. Its core content consists of the five rules and ten disciplines to purify the self and the four behaviors and the six paramitas to bring happiness to other human beings. After all, the idea of "Buddhism of human society" for us is to take responsibility for creating a "pure land" on earth and for contributing to justice, peace and happiness in one's own country and around the world.

Today human society is troubled by numerous global problems. In the first place there is the danger of nuclear war. But, apart from that, there are many other serious challenges

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such as economic justice, the environment, population control, protection of human rights, education, public health, development, and so on. Faced with so many global problems, Buddhism as Buddhism of human society, with all its mercifulness, should naturally contribute to the mitigation of these troubles and suffering on earth. It is both proper and feasible for Buddhism to play such a role.

We are all well aware of the complexity of the modern world. Therefore, the solving of many difficult issues requires much cooperation from different factions. Owing to different historical traditions and social systems there might be different understandings and viewpoints regarding an issue. In view of this, we should work very actively but also with considerable patience. As long as we are persistent in practicing Buddhist mercy to help humankind, in endeavoring to spread friendship and love among Buddhists and all people in this world, and in increasing in all possible ways academic and cultural exchanges among all peoples, we are confident of purifying ourselves and of building a "pure land" on earth in the sunshine of Buddhism.