A Bodhisattva Ideal in the Here and Now

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INTRODUCTION

Observing a phenomenon, or an event, as we might call a “spot” or “point” of time-space, we often find a contradiction or inconsistency in our words and deeds, for we interpret and compare them taking place at different times and places respectively. As an example, we understand that the food we consume with gusto is inconsistent with the movement of bowels that we evacuate with an offensive odor: they are two different things. If we come to see, however, a “line”—a continuum of spots or points, or a “continuum of non-continuity,” then we are able to realize that food and bowels are not of a different nature. They are crucially essential and important to our life. Both are to be appreciated equally.

In talking about the idea of viewing things in a “line” in this way, this paper deals with the time-space interformation and symbiosis in the here and now. This paper contends that the notions of the past, the present and the future are merely concepts, and that the existential time is called “now,” in which we live “here” as we realize and activate space. Talking about symbiosis, the paper discusses an “individual” or “I” consisting of both a “distinct piece,” as a self-centered personality different from others, and yet a part of the continuum sharing the whole of reality. We then aspire to fulfill the needs of ourselves and others, and this has to be carried out in the here and now. A Bodhisattva, therefore, establishes vows to attain enlightenment (benefiting oneself; jiri in Japanese) and to save suffering beings (benefiting others; rita), and thus sets out on a course of practice that requires a long period of time to complete. In this regard, this paper tries to seek and reflect a meaning of a Bodhisattva ideal in terms of how we are able to live in, and for, the Vow, according to our limited capability, in this contemporary world of science and technology.

TIME

We generally divide the notion of time into three segments such as the past, the present and the future. The past, the present and the future, however, are simply concepts that we have invented or created for the sake of our own convenience. They are not able to exist independently of each other. For things to exist or stand, space is also of vital necessity, being mutually interfused with time. The time we experience is called “now,” in which the continuous transformation of the present including- and limited by- both the past and the future reveals itself in “here.” The past, the present and the future are all interdependently interfused into “now,” and we live in the place called “here,” realizing and activating space. Time and space thus cannot be separated from each other, and we always live in the here and now, the very place where religious experience takes place as
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well.1 We do experience and realize things in the here and now; yet we usually live in a world of concepts, very vague concepts, such as the past, the present and the future. We would now like to examine how vague these concepts are.

Regarding the vagueness of the time concept, let us start with the past. The problem is that we are not able, for example, to identify what the past specifically refers to. Does it imply a few seconds ago, a few weeks ago, last year, ten years ago, our nursery school days, two years before our birth into this world, or a time before the formation of our galaxy? We cannot specify the past when we think of it in this manner. Some people, then, define the past as something that refers to or includes all of the above, and then we may feel that we somehow understand it. But when we deeply think and wonder if the past, as we see it, exists independently, we easily realize that the past does not stand all alone. The past cannot exist or stand by itself.

The same thing can be said with the vagueness of the future. We are not able to specify what the future precisely refers to. A few seconds later, several weeks later, next year, twenty years from now, two years after our death, or the time when our planet comes to be extinguished? We become confused again if we think of what the future specifically refers to. And what is the future after all? In the same way as the past, when some people say and define the future as something that refers to, or includes, all of the above, then we may feel that we somehow understand it. But when we deeply think and wonder if the future as we see it exists independently, we realize that the future does not stand all alone. The future cannot exist or stand by itself. Both the past and the future are merely vague concepts, and they have been invented and used, for our convenience’s sake, to describe two modes of time with another mode, the present.

The concept of the present, which seems to be rather concrete, or more concrete than that of the past or the future, is also vague as to what it specifically refers to. Some people may insist that the present refers to this very moment. Yet we still cannot comprehend it. We then gaze at the second hand of a watch. It shows the present time or hour, but we are not able to grasp the concept of time identifying the present. The watch is just showing our appointed, or agreed, point of time. In order to define the length of time, we resort to such units as century, year, month, week, hour and minute; with the second being the smallest unit. Suppose we say the moment of the present signifies a second exemplifying the shortest length of time. There is yet a shorter moment than a second—one-tenth of a second, one-hundredth of a second and one-billionth of a second. One-billionth of a second can be further divided into shorter moments. There seems to be no end or limit of dividing things into smaller units or substances. Therefore, understanding or interpreting the present as a moment does not give a convincing notion of the concept of the present as to what length of period the present specifically refers to. We cannot define

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1 Shinran, the founder of Jôdo Shinshu or Shin Buddhism, says in Chapter I of the Tannishô (A Record in Lament of Divergences), “Saved by the inconceivable working of Amida’s Vow, I shall realize birth in the Pure Land”: the moment you entrust yourself thus to the Vow, so that the mind set upon saying the nembutsu arises within you, you are immediately brought to share in the benefit of being grasped by Amida, never to be abandoned. (emphasis mine) “The moment you entrust yourself thus to the Vow, so that...immediately” (okoru toki sunawachi) refers to the moment of Shinran’s realization of Amida’s Vow in the very here and now, in which all the past, the present and the future are incorporated together. The Collected Works of Shinran (hereafter abbreviated CWS) 1, Shin Buddhism Translation series (Kyoto: Jôdo Shinshû Hongwanji-ha, 1997), p. 773.
the length of the present. Depending on our realization or awareness, it can be short or long. Time as the present thus cannot be defined or identified as a “specific when” or “how long,” and cannot be independent. The present is a concept, and so are the past and the future.

Time we experience in reality is called “now,” in which the past, the present and the future are all included and interfused interdependently. In other words, the transformation of the present including- and limited by- the past and the future continuously reveals itself. A point or instant of the past, present or future does not exist separately, individually or independently. Time as “now,” in which the whole past, the whole present and the whole future are interfused together, is existential and realistic. Although the notion of “now” can be a concept, realizing time in terms of “now” associated with our daily life allows us to have a dynamic understanding of our experience.

**LIMITED-BY-THE-PAST & LIMITED-BY-THE-FUTURE**

“Limited-by-the past” (kako kara no gentei) means that we are in existence now because of various events and factors, direct and indirect, that we have experienced and received up to now. What this means is that we are able, for example, to read because we have learned to read at either school or home in the past. We can think because we have studied and been taught at first hand. “Limited,” here, means that our way of thinking is greatly influenced by, or from, whom we have learned and studied, and through what process we have come to learn or study. In this sense, our way of thinking and behaving is, to a great extent, determined and “limited” by the past—the books we have read, the places where we have learned, people we have met, the conditions under which we have studied, our former emotions or feelings, and so on.

The facts that have taken place up to now cannot be changed, since they are accomplished or established facts. The facts limited by the past cannot be altered. We were born, for example, because of our parents. Without them, we could not come into existence. We are genetically formed, and limited, by our parents and ancestors. The modern technology of science has made the knowledge of the arrangement of DNA possible, yet the fact that we were born from our parents remains as a fact. Our parents were born from their own respective parents. They are, or were, determined and limited by their own parents. This means that we have been determined and limited indirectly by our grandparents. We are also affected and limited, more or less, by things like books that our grandparents might have read. Even if we had never met them, we must have received some influence from the fact that they had read books. It cannot be said that there is absolutely no influence. It could be very close to zero or extremely high. Thus, directly or indirectly, we give and receive some or considerable influence to, and from, each other. We come into being due to all of what has happened to us and what has been accumulated before us up to now. We have been living and lived, limited by a numerous amount of events and factors we have experienced and received up till now. Enlightened or awakened ones may say that we have been limited and allowed to come into being by the whole of existence, that all things in the universe have been concerned with us, and that they have

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2 The length of our life is sometimes likened to a “moment” or an “instance” (setsuna in Japanese or kṣaṇa in Sanskrit). Even though we live a long life, when our life is nearing an end, we may feel that it’s been just a matter of a moment.
worked upon us.³

“Limited-by-the future” (mirai kara no gentei) means that we are in existence now because of various events and factors, direct and indirect, that we will have and receive from now on. We are living now owing to things that have not yet taken place but which are affecting and limiting us. Our present actions are greatly influenced and determined not only by the past but also by the future. “Limited” thus includes both the past and the future simultaneously.

Things that took place in the past cannot be changed, for they are accomplished facts; yet, the meaning for us of past things can change, or the way we see or accept them can change, even though they were once so painful and hateful. This change in the way we accept the past happens when the future gets bright or is foreseen in the now, in which we are revived and strengthened: we are able to overcome ill incidents that occurred in the past or things that we hated about ourselves. It is a matter of realization or awakening by which the way of seeing things in the world greatly changes. In Buddhism the word buddha in Sanskrit is the past passive participle of the root verb √budh, which means “to awake, or to become aware of.” Therefore, buddha means “awakened, enlightened or realized,” and in noun form “awakened one, enlightened one or realized one.”⁴

With realization, we are able to come to accept things that we thought of as limited or annoying, some of which could have been avoided, while others not. Having fallen into a bottomless pit, lost and tortured by unbearable long-lasting pain, we discover the bright future in the now and we come up with the heart/mind which is eased and filled with joy as deep as the pain and sorrow we had before. Our world, which had once disappeared, revives and comes to life again. Things manifest as they are in the now. We then realize that there has been nothing meaningless in the whole world. We see the sky, the wind and the trees. We feel that things are all real. We hear birds and the sound of the earth. Our eyes and mind are wide open. And we feel both sorrow and joy.⁵ When the future is dark

³ Dôgen says in “Genjôkôan” (“Things as They Are, Revealed in the Present”), now a part of his major work Shôbôgenzô (Eye-Store-house of the Right Dharma), “Delusion is one’s practicing and authenticating myriad things while carrying one’s self to them. Enlightenment is myriad things’ naturally practicing and authenticating the self.” Dôgen zenji zenshû (hereafter abbreviated DZZ) 1, ed. Dôshû Ôkubo (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobô, 1989), p. 7.

⁴ Shinran says in the Preface of the Kyôgyôshinshô, “If you should come to realize this practice and shinjin, rejoice at the conditions from the distant past that have brought it about.” CWS 1, p. 4. Shinran is saying that it is difficult to realize shinjin, but that once one attains it, one should appreciate the distant past (tôku shukuen), which has brought about one’s realization of shinjin through the working of Amida’s Vow. The distance past refers to literally the Vow that has been working upon us regardless of our consciousness or unconsciousness in the past up to now. But the distant past should not be restricted only to the past. It should include and embrace the future to come.

⁵ John Lennon, the late leader of the Beatles writes in Oh My Love, “Oh my love for the first time in my life, my eyes are wide open. Oh my lover for the first time in my life, my eyes can see. I see the wind, oh I see the trees. Everything is clear in my heart. I see the clouds, oh I see the sky. Everything is clear in our world. Oh my love for the first time in my life, my mind is wide open. Oh my lover for the first time in my life, my mind can feel. I feel sorrow, oh I feel dreams. Everything is clear in my heart. I feel life, oh I feel love. Everything is clear in our world.” These lyrics must have been written after Lennon had overcome difficulties and distressed circumstances and discovered the future in the now.
or not clear, however, we actually experience its darkness now. There is no progress if we hold on to a yearning for the old days or blame some past bad incidents, claiming that they are causing us misery. We blame others. We cannot afford to recognize, accept or forgive others. There is no space to live in, as we cannot breathe. There is no room for our mind to be free. Self-destruction takes place. If we see that the future gets bright, however, we are able to endure the hardship that is taking place now. “Limited-by-the-future” plays an important role in the now.6

Like the past, the future is not only limiting but also influencing our actions in the now. We work hard now, for example, for an examination we will have tomorrow (future). We sometimes cram, studying intensely, and it is hard. If we start preparing for the exam a bit earlier (past), then it is much easier now. Thus, the amount of work we do now as determined by the examination tomorrow is also limited by how much preparation we have done in the past. Furthermore, if the exam tomorrow is not so important, then we do not have to work very hard now. But if the examination tomorrow means a lot to us, we work harder accordingly. Depending on the importance or value of what we are doing now, our way of coping with problems varies. We are thus limited by the future.7

Things that have taken place as accomplished facts cannot be changed, as mentioned before. Though we are limited by the future, it is flexible and still open, since

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6 Paul Tillich, the German theologian, says, “The image of the future produces contrasting feeling in man. The expectation of the future gives one a feeling of joy. It is a great thing to have a future in which one can actualize one’s possibilities, in which one can experience the abundance of life, in which one can create something new—be it new work, a new living being, a new way of life, or the regeneration of one’s own being.” Paul Tillich, The Eternal Now (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1963), pp. 123-4.

7 We would like to examine another example. When we want to cook a meal in order to serve someone, we have to know how to cook. We learn cooking at cooking school, from our parents, from our brothers or sisters or from our friends. Depending on where or from whom we have learned, the meal may taste different. If we have learned from Teacher A, then we may cook the way he or she has taught us; if we have learned from Teacher B, then we may cook the meal differently. We are limited by the past in this way. Our action in the now, however, is limited by the future at the same time. For instance, we may be cooking the same food, but the way we cook changes depending on for whom and for what we are cooking now. If we are cooking for someone we care for as we invite that person at home for the first time, then we may get a little nervous wondering if the person would like the meal—from appetizer and the main dish to dessert. We may wonder what drinks we should serve with the dish. If we cook the same meal, however, at a restaurant where we work part-time, then the way we are engaged in cooking differs. We may wonder as we are working, for example, how much more time is left before the shift is over, watching the clock. Though the menu is the same, the way we cook makes a difference. This is because “limited-by-the-future” differs. Our actions change according to how we are limited by the future. Both the past and the future determine and limit our way of feeling, thinking and acting.

My phrases, “limited-by-the past” and “limited-by-the future,” were inspired by Enji Nakayama’s Bukkyô to Nishida-Tanabe tetsugaku [Buddhism and Nishida and Tanabe Philosophies] (Kyoto: Hyakkaen, 1979), pp. 3-87.
things have not occurred yet, or certain events have yet to occur. Thus, if we want to live better, then the problem becomes by what future, or in which way, do we want to get limited? Fear and anxiety take place when we are not able to see the future, or the future is dark. In other words, even though we may have to greatly sacrifice ourselves now, we are able to bear it when we see the future as bright. Today’s pain can be endured with the foreseeable future. On the contrary, even if we have no problem today, if we know that something awful or hateful will be coming up tomorrow or in the near future, we experience awfulness or hatefulness in the now. If there is no hope or dream for tomorrow, we sometimes lose our ground, and our existence is extinguished. We cannot separate the past, the present and the future from one another: we live them all in the now, in which our actions take place as being limited.

The place where we are acting now is “space” in “here” versus “time” in “now.” Time and space are in existence, being interfused simultaneously together: they coincide with each other. We would now like to look more closely at the notion of space.

THE UNIVERSE OR EXISTENCE

The universe contains two contradictory phases; namely, cosmos and chaos. In other words, all things in nature come into being as they envelop simultaneously two different modes of being—order and disorder. This way of existence having spontaneously two opposite features can be applied to the whole universe itself, an individual, a cell and even fractionated or subdivided pieces of an atom. The universe we know of through science originated or formed from a small piece of mass by a “big bang.” Macrocosmically speaking, the universe endlessly stretches out outwardly and, microcosmically speaking, the universe can be unlimitedly divided or subdivided into smaller sets or units, an atom being able to be disunited limitlessly. Each set or unit has the same arrangement for existence at any level of its certain phase or stage, as things go and return at the same time not in a straight line but in a spiral, in which all are interdependently interrelated and mutually interfused. It can be said, therefore, that any piece as a unit in the universe includes the whole. The way of the piece as a unit throughout the universe which conceives the whole within itself is very similar to that of the time concept of the now as discussed before.

We would now like to focus on an examination of two contrary or opposite phases of the universe. From an individual’s point of view, to be born into the world means to come into existence, and death means extinction of the self. Reflecting on the whole of existence, we come to realize that being or becoming has both life and death. Birth-and-death is the fundamental norm of existence, called samsâra. If we interpret life and death as totally different modes of existence, then we often see things in terms of chaos or disorder. This is the observation of a phenomenon or an event in terms of a spot or point of time-space. We usually live in such a world. However, when we see that life is supported by death and that death is sustained by life—viewing things in a “line”—, then we come to realize that the universe is functioning according to an orderly law. In a world containing two opposite norms such as cosmos, or order, and chaos, or disorder, we are living and dying simultaneously.

When we get a tan, the skin peels off. The skin peeling off is dying, but the new skin or cell is coming about from within. The skin peeling off and the new skin coming about are taking opposite phases of existence. As far as our body is concerned, however,
the dead skin and the new skin belong to us, and both are evenly important. Thus, to live coincides with dying, and to die or be dead coincides with living. Things that look totally opposite or contrary to each other are deeply interrelated or interconnected in terms of the coincidence of the two opposites. The way we take, interpret and accept things or phenomena then becomes our problem, a matter of recognition or realization. Though we think we are living, we may be dead; though we are dead, we can be recognized as being alive. Though we are physically dead, we may live for a long time in the hearts and minds of people. Though we are living, we may suffer from pain, sometimes more painful than death. Putting the matter in a different way, we can say that things exist in two fundamentally opposite ways—natural selection and symbiosis. To live means we have survived well having maintained this balance, and to be able to survive well is quite rare. We then feel that we are living and come to realize that we are being made to live.

Taking a look at nature itself, we understand that things totally opposite to each other can be seen as having two contrary phases at the same time. Things in nature can be viewed as something beautiful or ugly. Nature nourishes and destroys us at the same time. Snow, which falls on the mountains around Lake Biwa in Japan, is so beautiful to view in winter, but the same snow falling on the streets in cities becomes trouble. Snow is no longer beautiful but troublesome. It is even ugly when it gets mixed with soil. For mountaineers who want to climb snow-capped mountains, snow poses a constant danger. A spring shallow in a mountain after a cold winter calms and eases our hearts and minds, but the river flooded by a heavy rainfall takes our lives. Water is necessary and inevitable to us all, yet it can be dangerous and destructive, depending on its mode or way of being.

Nature, being cosmic or orderly, can be chaotic or disorderly when it turns out to be inconvenient or dangerous to us. Natural phenomena such as typhoons, avalanches and volcanic eruptions, when they cause us disaster, are chaotic. That is, disorder or chaos simply refers to a situation where things appear to be chaotic to us when they do not go the way we want them to be; but nature is orderly itself in accordance with its own laws. Without typhoons, snow slides and volcanic eruptions, the ecology of this planet cannot be in existence according to the Order including both order and disorder. Creation and destruction seem to be opposite phenomena, but the Order contains both. If we observe a phenomenon or an event in terms of a partial spot or point of time-space, things often seem to be contradictory or inconsistent, but the Order contains polarity.

A POINT IN TIME-SPACE

This reciprocal action or relationship of order and disorder can be seen in an individual’s experience as well. We generally understand that love and hate are two opposite feelings that we have. Though they seem to have opposed entities or qualities, love and hate are derived from the same place in our mind called “ego,” manifesting differently according to the way our ego feels. A form of love manifests when things go the way we want them to, while hate manifests itself when things do not go the way we want them to. When we are deeply involved in an affair or event and betrayed by others, then we get desperately hurt. When we are indifferent to things or others, we do not have much feeling or involvement to them, so that we do not care for them as much, nor do we dislike them so much. We simply cannot care for or dislike them. If our involvement is great, then its return or retribution is also considerable. Love, when it is not granted, quite often gets turned into hate. Love and hate generally take place respectively according to
varying conditions. In this regard, love and hate are not of a different nature. When love and hate are viewed separately, they look different and opposite to each other. But love and hate, when both are seen as coming from the same ego, are not different in essence—they constitute a polarity.

In our hearts and minds, various feelings freely come about as being influenced and determined by our condition or the situation of each moment. We can hardly control our emotions, living in feelings of happiness, anger, humor or pathos. The way our feelings arise is essentially self-centered. This is the way our ego is; there is nothing wrong about it, nor is it a matter of good or bad. Our ego is purely self-centered. If we try to satisfy our own ego, however, then we come to suffer. When our suffering or struggle comes in moderation, it often brings us some stimulation or even encouragement; but, if it exceeds its limitation, then we suffer from pain as a result of hurting ourselves and others.

It is not too much to say that life is a battle against oneself or one’s mental functions, such as greed, anger and ignorance (sandoku no bonnô in Japanese; defilements or passions of the three poisons), which annoy oneself and others and represent the nature of our ego. We are all endowed with them without exception, and we are consciously or unconsciously hurting and harming ourselves and others. It is easy to blame others but difficult to blame ourselves. If we blame ourselves overly much, it may lead us to self-destruction, which is also a misery. We think we know that we should live in peace and harmony together; but, when jealousy, for example, overtakes us for whatever reason, we may destroy the whole. We are living in such a world, in which any disaster or tragedy may happen at any time and any place. Being governed and controlled by our defilements or passions and viewing things only partially, we lead a life of anger and ignorance most of the time.

A LINE

A TV special program was broadcasted on NHK about ten years ago, as the United Nations was promoting the Year of the Handicapped. It was a very inspirational and heartfelt documentary of a man whose leg became disabled from infantile paralysis or polio when he was a child. The man was talking to children in a school gymnasium, who were all seated listening to him with curiosity. He talked to the children about how he used to dislike physical education classes and athletic meetings, for he was not able to participate in the classes and events and could only watch other children running and jumping around. He then always thought he would have been able to do the same as others did, if only his leg had not been disabled. He strongly felt resentment at his bad leg, recollecting that he would have been much better off without it, and that he would not have been badly teased or ill-treated.

The man came down to the floor, where the children were seated, and said, “Boys and girls, I really look funny when you see me walking like this, right? I walk strange, right? I used to be laughed at by everybody when I was a child.” He walked again in front of the children, and they laughed with the man. He then said, “When I was small, I didn’t want other children to watch me walk like this and used to resent it. But, I do not feel that way any more now.” The children were puzzled as they listened to him but seemed to be fascinated by the man who looked totally carefree. The man again repeated, “If it were not for this bad leg, I would have had a happier childhood.” He continued to talk about his early days and how he used to receive treatment under the good care of the nurses at
hospital. And he explained how he came to overcome his warped or perverse mind as he grew up. He then introduced a moving episode:

When I was receiving treatment for my leg at the hospital, there was a nurse who took good care of me. She always tried to help and encourage me when I was demoralized or broken in spirit. One day, we were talking about this bad leg as I was complaining about it and tapping it over and over again, saying, “I hate this leg.” She then said to me as she was crying, “You always say that. You know I like you. And what I like about you the most is this very leg that you hate.” She said this to me as she was patting me on the leg. At that moment, I was thrilled and overwhelmed. She is now my wife.

It can be understood that this is a story of a couple that have been able to see and realize a “line” in a profound world. They must have experienced encountering a good person when they met each other. The man had a hatred for his bad leg for a long time but came to realize that, thanks to the very leg, he was able to meet a good person, and that the leg played an important role in discovering something far greater than what he would have not experienced without his condition. He must have thanked her with deep appreciation, and his leg with a profound sense of apology, being filled with gratitude. The man must have realized the things that he thought were “useless” or “burdensome” are not really so but have meanings and roles respectively. The man and woman coincided with each other: they must have come to see light through realizing a “line.”

**SPACE AND TIME—LIGHT AND LIFE**

When we come to realize a “line” from dots, spots or points, it begins to activate itself like cell division. A line splits into two lines and then three lines. From an individual and personal experience, we become free from a closed or blockaded world bound by inconsistent spots and get led to a dynamically opened world. When three lines are crossed on a plane, space (a triangle) emerges. When the lines freely evolve vertically and horizontally, three-dimensional space emerges, where we can breathe and live. We generally understand that space exists in the same way for all of us in the first place; but, without our realization of its profundity, space does not reveal itself and does not have much value or meaning to us. It seems that we do not experience space as space without realization. As far as we observe a world in terms of broken dots, spots or points, we do not see the universe. We cannot see the sky, the wind and the trees. We cannot hear the birds. We cannot come to our senses. Recognition or realization is closed in. There is no sorrow and joy. Realization consists of two seemingly opposed modes of feelings or experiences—sorrow and joy.

Realization is an awareness of two opposite phases of one thing and of the coincidence of those two phases. When we come to see the line and live in space, then our heart/mind gets softened and calms down, forgives others and ourselves and acknowledges ourselves and others. We will be able to share a life with each other, as seen in the case of the couple mentioned above. Recognizing and facing hardships and good fortune, we live in the world, which is real with sorrow and joy, and find room where our heart/mind can

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8 When four lines are crossed, a tetragon emerges; and five lines, a pentagon. With an infinite number of lines, a circle emerges where there is no corner. The circle is a line without corners and often symbolizes enlightenment.
dwell. We live the world of the heart/mind with the medium of things or materials. We get liberated from closed space and come to realize the place called “here,” in which light incomprehensibly shines through. Where space emerges, light is shed.

In Pure Land Buddhism, the light that is shed or shines in the space of our heart/mind is called Amitābha, which means “Immeasurable Light.” Immeasurable Light then refers to the light that dispels the darkness of our ignorant mind/heart in which Wisdom (prajñā in Sanskrit) partakes.9 Wisdom is what is needed for becoming enlightened and the light that shines into the space of our ignorant heart/mind. We are able to see then the bright and foreseeing future. We get encouraged to continue to live as we find the future active and dynamic in the now, which enables us to get out of a closed or isolated world, take an action, move on and live the day. This is the transformation of space into time.

Time, as examined previously, does not refer to the past, the present and the future divided separately or independently. It signifies the now, in which the continuous transformation of the present including the past and the future reveals itself—time as the “continuum of non-continuity” (hirenzoku no renzoku). This transformation of time taking place in this very place is called Amitāyus, meaning “Immeasurable Life.” Immeasurable Life then refers to the ways of our “living” as we aspire for the Vow through realizing time as the now—we are always living in the now. While Amitābha is Wisdom, Amitāyus is Compassion (karunā). When Wisdom is partaken in us with realization of Amida’s Vow, the heart/mind with which we aspire for sharing that Wisdom with others simultaneously arises. Compassion means our acts of benefiting others and the sharing of that Wisdom with others. Just like time and space are interfused and coincide with each other, Wisdom and Compassion coincide with each other and are two qualities or features of “realization” or shinjin, which can be referred to as an essence of the Bodhisattva ideal.

We generally think that time and space are in existence in the same way to everyone, but this view seems to be mistaken. Things are present as they are, but the way we observe them greatly varies depending on the conditions, as examined before. Time and space unfold according to the degree of our respective recognition or realization; they are sometimes closed, while they are, at other times, boundlessly open. The ways we experience time and space differ greatly from one another. Without realization, we are trapped in closed time and space: time freezes and space does not activate. The transformation of time into space as well as the transformation of space into time does not take place smoothly.

9 Shinran says in “Hymns Based on Gathas in Praise of Amida Buddha” of the Jōdo-wasan (Hymns of the Pure Land),

Amida has passed through ten kalpas now
Since realizing Buddhahood;
Dharma-body’s wheel of light is without bound,
Shining on the blind and ignorant of the world.

The light of wisdom exceeds all measure,
And every finite living being
Receives this illumination that is like the dawn,
So take refuge in Amida, the true and real light.

CWS 1, p. 325.
NON-VACILLATION AND THE HEAVENLY ORDER

To realize a “line” emerging from spots or points, and “space” from lines, is to get settled at one point in life, which can be, according to Confucius, “non-vacillation” (fuwaku in Japanese). Confucius says, “At forty, I became free from vacillation.” We should be able to say that we have lived well, and that we are gratified with what we have had, whatever it might have been, without any regret. This does not imply the fulfillment of our own self-satisfaction but refers to the ways of our lives which we are able to accept as they are, though they have been incomplete or imperfect, through having lived our lives with subjectivity and putting our hearts and minds to the fullest extent into the Way. We come to be free from vacillation. Becoming free from vacillation, however, does not mean that we are no longer in vacillation, but that, though it seems to be contradictory, we come to realize that we are really in the midst of vacillation.10

We are not able to get rid of our self-centered mode of being, for it is the way of our innate nature. Thus, only through becoming aware of this nature, are we able to cultivate the understanding of people, thereby becoming free from vacillation. In other words, it can be said that when we come to realize that we are really deluded or illusory, we come to be free, in a sense, from delusion or illusion. Our mundane and daily sufferings or problems, however, increase and can be seen much more clearly.11 We come to see the sufferings and contradictions of not only ourselves but also of others, and sufferings of others begin to concern us even more so as if they were our own sufferings. We begin to see the universe as a whole. This is a shift from benefiting-oneself to benefiting-others, which, in an ultimate sense, takes place simultaneously, and it is not too much to say that the zest or the real taste of life starts with this.

Confucius says, after becoming free from vacillation at forty, he came to realize the will of heaven (tenmei in Japanese) at fifty. Yasushi Inoue (1907-91), a prominent novelist in modern Japan, says that we have to try to live in accord with the will of heaven in turbulent times, as Confucius did.12 Though our age, the twenty-first century, with its

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10 Dôgen says in “Genjôkôan,” “Those who greatly become aware of delusion are Buddhas. Those who are greatly lost in enlightenment are sentient beings. Moreover, there are persons who attain enlightenment upon enlightenment and there are also persons who are deluded in their delusion. When Buddhas are truly Buddhas, they do not need to realize that they themselves are Buddhas. Yet, they are authenticating Buddhahood.” DZZ 1, p. 7.

11 Shinran says in the Ichinen tanen mon’i (Notes on Once-Calling and Many-Calling) at the age of 85, “We are full of ignorance and blind passion. Our desires are countless, and anger, wrath, jealousy, and envy are overwhelming, arising without pause; to the very last moment of life they do not cease, or disappear, or exhaust themselves.” CWS 1, p. 488.

12 Inoue says, referring to the will of heaven, “To realize the will of heaven is to hear the voice of heaven saying you are doing fine in what you are wishing to do. Confucius then said he was able to be engaged in a work to do what heaven wanted him to do—i.e., working for the well-being of people—at fifty.” Inoue continues that since Confucius’ philosophy was derived from turbulent times, the will of heaven is severe, strict and even fearful: “He became aware, however, that heaven would not help him at all. Doing good for society has nothing to do with heaven’s help. Heaven may even interfere with his good works; yet he still wishes to do good in the world. This is the meaning of realizing the will of heaven. Confucius lived in turbulent times. Once you step out from home, you run into thieves and enemies and do not know what will happen to you. Sickness or disease is prevalent and spread all over. Being in such a world, you cannot live with an idea that heaven will help you.
highly developed technology and science, greatly differs from the time of Confucius, we are also living in his time, in turbulent times with various distrusts, society with distorted deviations, drug abuse, family disruption, vicious crimes, and so on. Japan has recovered remarkably from the devastation of World War II and become an economically prosperous country in the world. What we have lost, however, as a result of having sought material affluence, namely gratitude for a plain and simple life, is incalculable and cannot be recompensed.

We are facing many problems living in the twenty-first century. Yet we cannot clearly see what the problems really are and cannot easily answer how to cope with these problems. Love alone is not able to solve our problems. Material goods alone are not the answer. And one ideology, no matter how excellent it is, cannot save the world. Indeed, if we try by force to govern the world with a single ideology, then the world will be in danger and crisis. We are living in a complex world with many different ideas and values. In an ultimate sense, the universe contains two opposite phases such as cosmos and chaos, or order and disorder. Therefore, there is essentially nothing we can do about changing the world and solving all the problems. That is why a Bodhisattva comes down to help us all. Can we then leave the problems unsolved and do nothing about them? The question is, how we should cope with the problems as we face them, no matter how little or seemingly inconsequential our endeavor is.

In the end, there is no other place than the place where the self can achieve a deed, the very place where the self carries through an undertaking: the universe in which time and space are unfolding. And the self always goes out from and comes back to the very self itself, and only in that self does the self find some answer, though it is “answer of non-answer.” There is no rigid or fixed answer; but, whatever the self finds at each moment with realization can be shared with others: that is the world of return or repayment (kangen in Japanese) as also seen in the will of heaven by Confucius. We live in the world of return, trying to do good according to and within our capacity and capability. We try to live in, and for, the Vow as the Bodhisattva has established. This is the world of benefiting-others emerging from benefiting-oneself. In Buddhist philosophy, benefiting-oneself and benefitting-others simultaneously take place; they are not two different things, and they coincide with each other. We are living as self-centered individuals and as part of the

because you are doing good. You must still try to do good, but heaven will not help you; yet you continue to do good—this is realization of the will of heaven. You need this resolution or decision living in turbulent times.”


13 The First and Second Vows of Dharmakara in the Larger Sutra read, “(1) If, when I attain Buddhahood, there should be in my land a hell, a realm of hungry spirits or a realm of animals, may I not attain perfect enlightenment.” “(2) If, when I attain Buddhahood, humans and devas in my land should after death fall again into the three evil realms, may I not attain perfect enlightenment.” The Vows established by Dharmakara should refer to the current occurrences of this world. The “three realms” of hell, hungry spirits, and animals or the “six realms” of rebirth are our day-to-day experiences.

whole at the same time. We would therefore like to hold from time to time “noble aspirations” (kôshô na akogare). These noble aspirations are the treasure of our heart/mind as an individual as well as the treasure of the universe as the whole (uchû no takara)—life in the Vow.

**NATURAL SELECTION AND SYMBIOSIS**

Symbiosis here is used to mean that different life forms as we know them live together in correlation in terms of their mutually interdependent actions and deeds, including physiological phenomena. We give life to each other as being lived by one another. Before examining symbiosis, we would like to discuss natural selection, the principle of which was put forth by Darwin as a term used with adaptive evolution. Natural selection is an objective observation or interpretation of evolutilional phenomena of life. We are not insisting here that natural selection is the one to be criticized and blamed, while only symbiosis is to be praised. If we evaluate and define the meaning of existence only from a point of view of natural selection, however, there arises a problem. “The survival of the fittest” and “the stronger prey on the weaker” are emphasized, and “the weak becomes the victim of the strong” can be our common agreement as a natural phenomenon. In the process of evolution, this might be unavoidable when we see things through an objective observation or interpretation of adaptive evolution. Yet determining and concluding from the first place “the weak becomes the victim of the strong” should be claimed to be wrong. The secularization in a selfish and bad sense will increasingly continue to sprawl.

It seems that as we witness the rapid development of modern science and its technology, the progress of recent civilization has already exceeded the limitation that humans are able to face or control with their reason. The speed of development and progress is amazingly fast, and we even fear the “irreversibility” (fukagyakusei) that the nature of civilization contains within itself. Technological development is particularly breathtaking, so is the development of medical science. Organ transplantation in the United States is a daily practice, and in Japan it has been exercised with the introduction of brain death. Recently, cloning has been experimented with. Genetic treatment in Japan has started and been experimented with as well. We have already heard the news of genetic treatment in the United States, but in Japan we are still arguing and debating this issue from such various fields as morality, ethics, religion and humanity. There are still many problems before us.

In terms of the prolongation of human life, medical science has made significant contributions. The other essential quest, however, that humans have been seeking in an ultimate sense—“What is the meaning of life and existence?” or “How should we live?”—has been put aside. Today’s human activities of just prolonging life through medical advancements may actually deprive us of the working out of our quest of seeking and striving for the meaning of life and existence. Though it is almost impossible to say what that is, to “think” what life is all about plays a crucial role for humans as we live in harmony with nature or the universe.

As we live on, in debt to medical science for our comfortable daily life, we are not complaining of or denying the development of medical science. Yet, we are concerned with the speed of its progress, and are somehow fearful about its consequence in the near future. The progress of medical science has much to do with the theory of natural selection.
Observing the development of technology, we feel the same way in the improvement and betterment of personal computers and cell phones. We are able to communicate with people all over the world in an instant using the Internet from a room at home. Taking advantage of this modern convenience and technology, we feel that the progress of our sciences has almost come to its peak and will put an end to human civilization sooner or later. Is this just a view of a minority?

Going back to the discussion of symbiosis, we believe that we cannot afford to determine the values of evolution and civilization only as a result of natural selection, and that the time seems to have come to pay serious attention to the way of existence in mutual dependence and coexistence. We should consider how we would be able to survive better in peace with the rest of beings on the planet, not just saying “the survival of the fittest,” “the stronger prey on the weaker” or “the weak becomes the victim of the strong.” Here, the way an individual lives has to be questioned and reexamined. Since it is the individual that recognizes and experiences reality, the individual and personal review of how we can live our life is of foremost importance. This brings us, in turn, to an examination of self-reliance (jiritsu in Japanese) of an individual in society.

Self-reliance is the establishment of an individual and can be divided into “self-support or self-sustenance” (jikatsu) and “independence” (dokuritsushin). “Self-support” has two aspects. The first is financial/economic self-support, which means we should be able to live without receiving financial assistance and help. The second has something to do with daily life and activities. We should be able to take care of ourselves in our daily lives—for example, washing our own faces and going to the toilet without any help from others. Self-support as independence refers to mental/spiritual independence. We should be able to take action on the basis of our own decisions and judgments and not rely on others. So independence here means that we form a judgment and take action with subjectivity and responsibility. Self-reliance in society can be defined as something mentioned above. According to the way the universe or existence is, however, it is clear and evident that there is ultimately nothing that can stand and support all by itself as an independent individual. Factors of self-support mentioned above are some qualities that we try to seek as we lead lives as members of society in an ideal sense.

Even though we say that we are able to support ourselves financially or economically since we are working or doing business, in reality it is made possible for us to work, by our playing a part or role in society. Suppose we have to receive some support or help in order to live. We haven’t lost the functions as a member of society at all. Those who are able to work have the conditions with which to work, while the others who are not able to work do not have the conditions with which to work. Those who are supporting others have the conditions with which to help, while the others who are receiving support have the conditions to be supported. Some who can extend help and others who need help are mutually interrelated with each other, and their relationship cannot take place without either of the two. Being so, however, those who are receiving support should not presume or impose upon the favor of others. Those who are helping others should not be too arrogant about it. Being able to help others is a pleasure and a joy.

As for self-support in daily activities, when we get sick, we need help from others. Our daily lives involve extending and receiving help to and from each other. Mental independence also involves our relationship with others: even if we believe that we are making our own judgment as to how to live, it is done in relation to others. Unless we are
concerned with others, we are not often accepted in society and get isolated. It is in mutually depending on each other that individuals exist, and individuals coexist in mutual dependence. Yet, we find that it is extremely difficult to cope with and face the problems and complications emerging from a struggle between an individual seeking self-gratification and the whole or all individuals in mutual coexistence. That is to say, perfect self-reliance and symbiosis, or mutual dependence, are contradictory to each other in the first place. If an individual claims his or her own want or desire too much, it distorts mutual coexistence, while if mutual coexistence is over-emphasized, the individual loses his or her identity.

An individual is self-centered and often selfish. There is nothing wrong about this; that’s the way the individual is, as mentioned before. The individual is attached to the self, which makes the self separated from others, and is fundamentally destined to be self-centered. The world or society consists of groups of those individuals, and it is natural that our world should have various problems. However, it is not right that the strong can insist that the world of natural selection leads to the survival of the fittest and say it cannot be helped, though they find problems and injustice in society. Or if people stand on the strong side, are they not any longer able to see the problems of the weak?

Though perfect self-reliance and symbiosis fundamentally contradict each other in nature, it is necessary that we continue to seek a well-balanced relationship based on the symbiotic mutual coexistence of individuals and the community to be able to live in the age when value standards and judgments have been rapidly changing. We are not, however, appealing that an individual should stand up to make a social revolution, feeling the whole responsibility for it. If we alone try to carry all the problems of society on our shoulders and try to directly face and solve them, then we will get lost and puzzled, muttering, “How complicated and difficult all these problems are!” Then again, it seems to be easier to live in ignorance of these problems, but can we really escape from them? We may be incapable of coping with the problems, but an individual is able to start from the problem of oneself and try to deal with problems close to and next to one. Even though we try to tackle the problems in groups or organizations, the principle is that each individual should take them as a matter of subjectivity and realization. It should be carried out according to, and within, one’s capacity or capability with an aspiration for doing good to others and society, though there is no fixed or specific answer. The answers vary according to the situations and an individual’s capacity. We then try to live in, and for, the Vow that the Bodhisattva has established with the ideal of sharing Wisdom with others—in other words, helping others in the here and now.

CONCLUDING PERSPECTIVES

We have defined that the universe, in which all things with contradictorily opposite qualities come and go at the same time as they interdependently and mutually interfuse with one another, stretches out endlessly and outwardly, and can be limitlessly subdivided into smaller sets or units, in a spiral. And the world that is existentially present to us is the universe unfolding in the here and now with our realization. Yet, when we observe events in terms of spots or points of time-space, we find an inconsistency among them, since we interpret them taking place at different times and places or we evaluate things with a partial view. Since the fundamental way of existence is contradictory in the first place, it is natural that things should look inconsistent when spots or points are observed and
compared respectively. Living in such a world of samsāra, we often lead chaotic lives, usually not being able to see ourselves as we are, and easily misunderstanding others.

Realizing this, the moment we try tackling the problems of the world at first hand, we find that they are too complicated to be challenged in any way. The hardest of the hard is to live well-balanced lives in the contradictorily opposed modes of “natural selection” and “symbiosis.” It is difficult to accept the whole without gratifying oneself, while one loses one’s identity if one solely tries to please everyone: keeping the balance between an individual and the whole is vitally important and difficult. One cannot live all by oneself, nor can one exist without the relationship with others.

An assembly of self-centered individuals is the whole, and the whole consists of the assembly of the individuals. In such a world, trying to get along well with others is almost impossible. This desire of trying to live well with others is also our selfish conceit, but what more can we do, or what is left for us? We should like to seek to return what we have been given, in accordance with our capacity. In the world of returning based on realization, we see a “line” and then “space,” in which light (Amitābha) is shed through and we get encouraged to live on (Amitāyus). We may be filled with a sense of acknowledgement, “I have this much,” instead of with frustration, “Is this all I have?” This sense of fulfillment, like religious experience, does not last for a long time, but sustains the individual like a bamboo joint. We seek symbiosis and coexistence in and for the Vow, sharing sorrow and joy with all beings and things in nature, as we are living and dying, and dying and being lived in the here and now.14

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