

A CONSIDERATION OF DHARMA, ADHARMA, JÑĀNA, AND AJÑĀNA

Esho Yamaguchi

A consideration of dharma, adharma, jñāna, and ajñāna is intimately connected with the understanding of Buddhism, especially, when we notice the central role that dharma and jñāna both play in its system of thought.

It is a well known fact that the term dharma has a plurality of connotations. The Buddha himself spoke of dharma-bodhi and of realizing enlightenment by means of dharma-jñāna; the Buddhist texts make references to the produced dharma, the annihilated dharma, the all existing dharma, and the created saṃskṛta-dharma; and the basic philosophy of Mahāyāna Buddhism is the dharma of pratitya-samutpāda. What does dharma denote in each of these instances, and what does it mean in the expression Buddha-dharma?

When the Chinese translated dharma into their own language, they used the character *fa* (法). This character was also used to translate bhāva into Chinese. What is the connection between dharma and bhāva, and how do they differ in meaning? Regardless of their difference, what was the reason for translating both terms into the same Chinese character? There must be a common denominator in dharma and jñāna which justifies the identical translated term. Unless we clarify their point of agreement, we would fail to fully comprehend their difference.

(1) For a recent study on this point see M. Saigusa, "*Fa* 法 und Dharma in Kumārajīva's Mādhyamikakārikā," in the Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies (JIBS), Vol. XIII, No. 1 (1965), pp. 419-412.

(48) A CONSIDERATION OF DHARMA, ADHARMA, JÑĀNA (E. Yamaguchi)

A possible clue to the reason for the same Chinese character for both dharma and bhāva may be found in the fact that both refer to existence. Dharma in Buddhism denotes both the highest form of existence and the highest truth. It is said that "Gotama the Buddha is one who has realized dharma and by realizing dharma has become the Tathāgata." Bhāva, however, does not denote the highest truth which is the major distinction between this term and dharma. But questions remain: What do existence and truth mean? Do they have anything in common? Or are they completely disconnected? Is it impossible to consider any connection between dharma and bhāva?

In considering these questions the Sāṃkhya concepts of dharma, adharma, jñāna, and ajñāna provide us with a source of reflection. These four concepts are mutually interrelated to form a meaningful totality, and they are unified in and embraced by bhāva. In Sāṃkhya philosophy dharma, adharma, jñāna, and ajñāna are the four parts of the bhāva of buddhi which perfume liṅga, thus forming the contents of the bhāva of buddhi. It is said that liṅga is the mergent, subtle astral body which is determined by buddhi and the rest down to primary elements, and it is perfumed by the four types of the bhāva of buddhi which undergo transmigration, as well as reach deliverance. This explains the transmigration and deliverance of sentient beings in the three worlds. This is clear from the commentary which states that liṅga indicates the agent of transmigration and deliverance.

The relationship between the four types of the bhāva of buddhi is

(2) The Chinese translations for dharma, adharma, jñāna, and ajñāna which are 法, 非法, 智, 無智, respectively, do not necessarily present a clearer picture of their points of difference and identity.

(3) Kārikā, 40 and 44. G. Bh. (Gauḍapāda, Sāṃkhya-kārikā-bhāṣya), p. 24; M. V. (Māṭhara, Sāṃkhya-kārikā-vṛtti), p. 58; V. T. (Vacaspatimiśra, Sāṃkhyatattvakaumudī), p. 88; cf. Y. D. (Yukti-dīpikā), p. 145.

(4) Kārikā, 37 and 44. G. Bh., pp. 22, 25 f.; M. V., pp. 42 f., 61 f.; V. T., pp. 84 f., 90 f.

described in the following Kārikā :

There is elevation (gamanam ūrdhvam) because of dharma, and there is demotion (gamanam adhastāt) because of adharma.

There is emancipation (apavarga) because of jñāna, and there is bondage (bandha) when this is opposed.⁽⁵⁾

The first part of this quotation means that if sentient beings perform the rightful dharma, then they will without fail gain the result of elevation (birth into paradise) with dharma as the cause. If, in contrast, they perform the unrightful adharma, then they will gain the result of demotion (animal existence) with adharma as the cause. In this case dharma means the good dharma of yama and niyama, and the consideration is made from the standpoint of its relationship to adharma which⁽⁶⁾ opposes yama and niyama. This means that it is a value object which is the condition that determines the fate of the life of a sentient being, and it stands in opposition to the anti-value object of adharma. "There is elevation because of dharma, and there is demotion because of adharma" indicates that dharma and adharma are the conditions that determine the transmigration of beings. All sentient beings transmigrate into paradise through the condition of dharma, and they transmigrate into the animal world through the condition of adharma. In this case, however, dharma is not simply a value but a value object, and adharma is that which opposes dharma, an anti-value object. And since dharma and adharma are the guṇa (triguṇa) of buddhi (mahat) which is the subjective organ of judgment of sentient beings, each is either a value object or an anti-value object, having bearing on the subject of sentient beings. It is neither a mere value object nor an anti-value object in opposition to the subject. It is possible that dharma and adharma are determined

(5) Kārikā, 44: dharmeṇa gamanam ūrdhvam gamanam adhastād bhavaty
adharmeṇa /

jñāneṇa cāpavargo viparyayād iṣyate bandhaḥ //

(6) G. Bh., p. 26; M. V., p. 38; Ś. J. (Śaṁkara, Jayamaṅgalā, ed. by H. Sarma), p. 31; Y. D., p. 112.

or selected (adhyavasāya) by sentient beings themselves. In this case, they produce transmigration based upon ajñāna and not jñāna. They definitely do not effect deliverance from transmigration.

Then how is deliverance from transmigration accomplished? Deliverance depends upon jñāna. The Kārikā states that “deliverance is achieved through jñāna.” Jñāna does not generally denote wisdom, but denotes tattva-jñāna (true wisdom) which is the wisdom of Sāṃkhya. This is essentially the discriminating wisdom (viveka-jñāna⁽⁷⁾) which separates the subtle difference between guṇa and puruṣa, but it is none other than the jñāna-bhāva as one type of sattva nature which accomplishes the goal of puruṣa—deliverance (kaivalya)—and it is only by means of this that deliverance is accomplished. Thus, jñāna is the cause of the goal of puruṣa, deliverance. Therefore, it is jñāna that sentient beings themselves must determine. As long as jñāna is determined, sentient beings can attain deliverance from transmigration (Yoga agrees with this point⁽⁸⁾).

As for ajñāna, it does not denote unwisdom in general. It denotes atattva-jñāna which opposes jñāna, and it may be called the indiscriminating wisdom (aviveka-jñāna) which fails to grasp the subtle difference between pradhāna and puruṣa. Therefore, in the Sāṃkhya all jñāna which opposes tattva-jñāna and viveka-jñāna, even though they are called jñāna, are not the supreme wisdom, since they do not accomplish the goal of puruṣa which is deliverance. The Kārikā states:

“There is bondage when this is opposed” (viparyayād iṣyate bandhaḥ). “When this is opposed” means to oppose wisdom. What is the result of this unwisdom? It is none other than bondage (bandha). Here we can see the criticism of wisdom against dharma and adharma which reveals

(7) =viveka-khyāti. Cf. Y. S. (Yoga-sūtra), 2, 26; 28; 29; 3, 52; 54; 4, 26.

(8) In the statement that “deliverance exists by means of jñāna” (viveka-) jñāna is the true cause of deliverance and deliverance is the necessary conclusion of jñāna; therefore, it is possible to recognize jñānaphala-vāda. The reference to Yoga is made with consideration for the standpoint of jñāna of the Yoga-sūtra.

the true nature of the transmigration of sentient beings. It criticizes the theory of the consequence of ajñāna⁽⁹⁾ which cannot distinguish jñāna and ajñāna.

It is important to notice the following Kārikā on this point:

“By separation from desire (vairāgya), there is return to prakṛti (prakṛti-laya); by desire arising from rajas, there is transmigration.

By self-independence (aiśvarya), there is non-hindrane (avighāta);

by opposition (to it), there is its revolvment (tad-viparyāsa).⁽¹⁰⁾”

There is also⁽¹¹⁾ taught the relationship between four types of cause and effect. Among them the four types of cause, such as separation (vairāgya) and so forth, are in reality two pairs of relative concepts. Separation (vairāgya) and desire (rājasā-rāga, avairāgya), independence (aiśvarya) and non-independence (anaiśvarya) stand in mutual opposition. But when we consider the fact that vairāgya and so forth are the bhāva of buddhi, then we see the contrast between value object and anti-value object, such as vairāgya—avairāgya and aiśvarya—anaiśvarya. In this case, however, both value object and non-value object belong to the theory of the consequence of ajñāna, in opposition to jñāna, and it is to be criticized from the standpoint of the theory of the consequence of jñāna. Thus, their contrasting relationship is radically different from the contrasting relationship between jñāna and ajñāna. They are established in the realm of the theory of the consequence of ajñāna.

From the standpoint of the separation from atattva-jñāna there is only prakṛti-laya. Although prakṛti-laya differs from transmigration, prakṛti-sarga, it merely stands in opposition to prakṛti-sarga but it does

(9) Ajñānaphala-vāda remains within the dharma-adharma theory and is unconscious of its own ignorance. Although it may appear in the form of jñānaphala-vāda, since it does not correctly distinguish between jñāna and ajñāna, it does not lead to deliverance.

(10) Kārikā, 45: vairāgyāt prakṛti-layaḥ saṁsāro bhavati rājasād rāgāt /
aiśvaryād avighāto viparyayād tad-viparyāsaḥ //

(11) See my article, “The Problem of Dharma in Buddhism and the Dharma-Adharma in Sāṁkhya,” JIBS, Vol. XIII, No. 2 (1965), p. 32.

not absolutely transcend prakṛti-sarga. When the time comes, it cannot avoid transmigration. The reason is that it believes that prakṛti is ātman (puruṣa) and is nothing more than the judgment that its deliverance is found in prakṛti-laya.

Although vairāgya is able to become separated from change (vikṛti) and transcend worldly gains, it cannot become separated from prakṛti as prakṛti-laya; therefore, it fails to grasp the subtle distinction between prakṛti and puruṣa. For this reason, from ajñāna there results prakṛti-bandha.

If it is the case that from the standpoint of vairāgya, there is only the return to prakṛti and no possibility of acquiring the highest bliss of deliverance, then what of the case of avairāgya, the opposite of vairāgya? This is the next inevitable question. Now, by avairāgya, there is only the effect of transmigration in the three realms. The reason is that avairāgya is none other than rājasa-rāga of the triṣaṇḍ of buddhi, and consequently, to recognize this and depend on this assumes rajas; therefore, there can be no consequence of highest bliss possible. Transmigration is established when we assume rajas⁽¹²⁾; it is possible only by the pravṛtticala of rajas. This has been suggested in the consideration of the contrasting relationship of values found in dharma and adharma which have bearing upon the universal law of cause and effect in the activities of sentient beings; however, in the case of dharma and adharma, the sattva and tamas of buddhi determine the respective elevation, (sattva-saṃsāra) and demotion (tamaḥ-saṃsāra). In contrast to this in the case of avairāgya, the cycle of pain (rajaḥ-saṃsāra) based upon rajas occurs. Since rajas continues, maintaining a position of superior influence, there results transmigration filled with pain which cannot be limited either to the aspect of elevation or demotion.

Although the observance of rituals and the practice of giving may be considered to accord with dharma in themselves, the problem is the

(12) Kārikā, 12 and 13. V. T., pp. 53, 55.

matter of avairāgya. In avairāgya we calculate to gain the highest bliss of deliverance in the future world by observing rituals and practicing giving. This calculation is the bondage of giving (dākṣiṇa-bandha), since it attempts to pursue and fulfill self-centered gains. It cannot avoid impurity and regression and the contrast of superiority and inferiority.⁽¹³⁾

Furthermore the relationship between cause and effect intended in the statement that “from aiśvarya there is avighāta” is interpreted generally as the true cause and true effect of deliverance, but it cannot by any means be interpreted in such a way. To gain avighāta which means the realization of desire in the fact that aiśvarya, the power of freedom, to be infinitely subtle or great and so forth, is gained may be most desirable for those who cannot realize the highest bliss of deliverance. But, as it is evident from the fact that aiśvarya can be summarized by the eight kinds of activities,⁽¹⁴⁾ such as being subtle, it does not mean an absolute power and function over the three worlds. Standing in relationship to the three worlds, it has only a relative power and function over the three worlds. Thus, it is impossible to realize from such an aiśvarya the deliverance of absolute non-hindrance. Avighāta definitely does not mean non-hindrance in relation to the totality of the three worlds. It means nothing more than a relative freedom (vaikārika-bandha) in contrast to hindrance (vighāta). In this way the criticism of aiśvarya and avighāta are intended.

If the statement, “from aiśvarya there is avighāta,” is problematic, its contrast, “from anaiśvarya there is vighāta,” must also be considered. But from anaiśvarya there can only be vighāta. “From viparyaya there is its viparyāsa.” If we choose anaiśvarya because aiśvarya does not mean absolute power and efficacy over the three worlds, then there would only be hindrances in the three worlds. It would mean nothing more than the

(13) Here we can say the criticism of karma-mārga by jñāna-mārga. Cf. Kārikā, 2; G. Bh., p. 39; M. V., p. 62.

(14) G. Bh., p. 26; M. V., p. 41; Ś. J., p. 31.

(54) A CONSIDERATION OF DHARMA, ADHARMA, JÑĀNA (E. Yamaguchi)

lack of freedom in opposition to avighāta. In this way a criticism of anaiśvarya and vighāta are intended here.

We have thus considered the relationship of the four types of cause and effect, such as prakṛti-laya, by means of vairāgya. We find here a criticism of the validity of the path of practice of the priests and laymen, of saints and of commoners, for the spiritual and secular ideal of deliverance. The way of renunciation of the worldly life by priests and the way of benefit (artha), including supernatural and other powers, of the laymen are based upon the three worlds and exhaust the three worlds, but they do not perfect the goal of puruṣa which is deliverance. They have unwisdom of atattva-jñāna⁽¹⁵⁾ as the true cause and, therefore, they cannot escape being bound to the three worlds.

-
- (15) Cf. Kārikā, 46ff: eṣa pratyaya-sargo viparyayāśakti-tuṣṭi-siddhy-ākhyāḥ /
guṇa-vaiśamya-vimardāt tasya ca bhedās tu pañcāśat //
pañca viparyaya-bhedā bhavaty aśaktiś ca karaṇa-
vaikalyāt /
aṣṭāviṃśati-bhedā tuṣṭir navadhāṣṭadhā siddhiḥ //
bhedaś tamaso' ṣṭa-vidho mohasya ca daśa-vidho mahā-
mohaḥ /
tāmisro' ṣṭādaśadhā tathā bhavaty andhatāmisraḥ //.....

— New Publication —

Japanese-English Buddhist Dictionary

pp. 340, Index pp. 43

¥ 6,000 Daito-shuppan Press.