

On the Problem of 'Mokṣa'

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Mokṣa (解脱, Gedatsu) has been proposed by Indian philosophers as a common basic problem for these thousand years. Before the birth of Buddhism, Upaniṣadic philosophers had made clear of it in their own way. In this paper, I would want to contribute a total comprehension of Buddhism, commenting on Gotama Buddha, a subject of mokṣa that is the fundamental point of Buddhism.

As is known, there is a method of understanding of what is Buddhism by the tri-ratna—Butsu (仏), Hô (法) and Sô (僧). Butsu is the Buddha, that is, the Sambuddha who acquires the bodhi (Satori, 覚) like the Śākyamuni-Bhagavān. Hô is the dharma, that is, the truth like the “pratītya-samutpāda” or the “madhyamika”. Sô means the saṅgha, that is to say, the assembly of the bauddha who embraces and follows the dharma of the Buddha.

This basic method of understanding of Buddhism, however, is scarcely adopted at present. Today most popular method is to make observation historically of Buddhism. The establishment and the historical process of Buddhism are elucidated positively with documents and other materials. Therefore, succession and development between the early Buddhism and the post are most important questions after this method, and opened were new fields of investigation such as the primitive Buddhism, schools of Buddhism and so on.

This method brought us the fruit from the view point of understanding of Buddhism, but have such a weak point that is suggested by the arguments that the doctrine of the Mahāyāna is not of the Buddha.

The doctrine of Mahāyāna Buddhism that depends upon the Mahāyāna-Sūtra is not necessarily considered as that of Śākyamuni, for the Mahāyāna-Sūtra came into being later than the Hīnayāna-Sūtra dependent upon by Hīnayāna Buddhism, and has different opinions or inconsistencies in it. On the other

hand, the doctrine of Hīnayāna Buddhism organized before Mahāyāna Buddhism does not coincide necessarily with that of the Buddha either. All the documents of the Sūtra presented till today (Tripiṭaka, etc.) came into being after the death of Śākyamuni, and are thought to be annexed or transformed for a long time in history, so we could not consider that even old document was described the doctrine of Śākyamuni as it was.

In order to understand the primitive doctrine of Śākyamuni, many tentatives brought forward through the documents to be thought "relatively old". This method of elucidation holds difficult points either on method or on its position. If we would want the documents to make distinct old horizon from new, it is very difficult to examine a great deal of documents developed complicatedly in every detail. On what ground or how can we select the relatively old documents? In the case of understanding the primitive doctrine of Śākyamuni through the relatively old documents, even if the primitive doctrine of Śākyamuni means the earliest of that of Śākyamuni, can we understand it surely? We should discuss the ground of truthfulness and at the same time primitiveness of the primitive doctrine of Śākyamuni.

As above mentioned it is not easy to resolve the problem. In this case, it is most important point how we treat all Śākyamuni's life. How did Śākyamuni, Gotama Buddha who is looked up to as the founder of Buddhism, spend his life? This questions is worth investigating in conforming with truthfulness of the primitive doctrine of Śākyamuni, especially truthfulness of mokṣa. For Śākyamuni, in a word, is none other than the mokṣin.

In spite of mythological embellishments we could take up the deeds of lifetime of Gotama Buddha, Śākyamuni, as a historical personage if we investigate critically the documents of the Sūtra preserved till today. Among the deeds of lifetime, it is a turning point when he became the siddha-mārga¹⁾ that meant the birth of the Buddha, a subject of mokṣa. The siddha-mārga is not only distinguished from the pre-siddha-mārga but characterizes the deeds of the post-siddha-mārga consistently. It is a mission work that

1) Dīgha-Nikāya, II, p. 52.

was acted continually after the siddha-mārga. The mission work of Śākyamuni was to endow the equal dharma as śāstā-devamanuṣyānām, that is to say, dharma-cakra-varta (轉法輪) and it continued till the parinirvāṇa at Kuśinagara²⁾. In the case of Śākyamuni, the parinirvāṇa formed a part of the dharma-cakra-varta in itself, and acted in unison with the dharma-cakra-varta that endowed at the suburbs of Benares³⁾ for the first time of the siddha-mārga. He completed the mission work for the last dharma-cakra-varta. In this connection we should remember the statue of nirvāṇa that simbolizes the parinirvāṇa at Kuśinagara.

Today, the statue of nirvāṇa is generally accepted only as an object of worship, but it differs clearly from the statue of the dharma-cakra-varta as to āsana (physical position). All the people who live on the earth universally agree with the āsana of side-way-lying, as it belongs to the natural posture of human-beings. It suggest that the śāstā-devamanuṣyānām (人天導師) who acted selfless mendicancy beyond the senility or the illness, teaching⁴⁾ "Depend upon yourself, conform the dharma, endeavor to improve yourself usually", completed the suffering, genuine act of purifying subect and object. The āsana expresses not only the death of Gotama Puruṣa (Human Buddha) but also the last mission work of Gotama Buddha (Śākyamuni).

People of the saṅgha seemed to think deeply that this mission work was scarcely done and moreover shold be succeeded with pious heart. This supposition is proved by the fact that some of the saṅgha edited the dharma left behind and the others consigned the Buddha to the grave in co-operation each other. What did make people of the saṅgha co-operate each other ? Nobody else made do it except Gotama Buddha who endeavored the mission work earnestly. Human beings subjected to the vicissitude are destined to be mutable as the dharma shows. On the contrary the dharma-kāya of the Buddha endeavored the mission work for the public benifit and the public happiness emites the eternal light brilliantly beyond the dharma of mutability.

2) Dīgha-Nikāya, II, p. 137.

3) Majjhima-Nikāya, I, pp. 171f.

4) Cf. Dīgha-Nikāya, II, p. 100.

I think people of the saṅgha was immersed heartily in the religious ecstasy.

The idea of submission to the Buddha or following after, comes naturally into the world, at the time when they have a firm faith that they live not only by themselves but also live with the Buddha, being enveloped in the light of the Buddha. As to follow after the Buddha, editing the dharma left behind by the Buddha and consining the Buddha to the grave fuse into one. In this point, we could make an inference of the traditional ground of Buddhist after the parinirvāṇa, and at the same time we could understand why all of the Sūtra edited after the parinirvāṇa begin at the word "evaṃ mayā śrutam (Nyo-ze-ga-mon, 如是我聞)". "Evaṃ mayā śrutam" expresses a hearty devotion of people of the saṅgha with confidence that the Śūtra is not written willfully but no other than the doctrine of the śāstā-devamanuṣyānām, to its śāstā-devamanuṣyānām.

In this way, as the chronicle of Gotama Buddha was edited with a mind of devotion, it connoted, as a matter of course, mythological embellishments, however, the last scene of the chronicle of Gotama Buddha does not suggest "the Resurrection and the Ascension" for instance, but it means the fact that the deed of purifying subject and object has accomplished as the statue of nirvāṇa shows. Therefore, it was thought to be taken after by people of the saṅgha. We should notice this point in relation to the fact that the foots of Gotama Buddha touched the ground. The mission work of the Buddha was realized through the deed of selfless mendicancy of no gain for the public benefit and happiness of people and this brought about that the foots of Gotama Buddha touched the ground. Deed of selfless mendicancy was already devised and practiced at the time ascetic practices of becoming a bonze or searching for the dharma, that is, before the siddha-mārga of the Buddha. Therefore, if people want to complete the deed of purifying subject and object, they should endeavor the deed of selfless mendicancy. The mission work of Buddhist is to practice the deed of the selfless (egoless) mendicancy.

Through this devotion and belief, we could realize the fact that the chronicle of Gotama Buddha took up the achievements before the siddha-mārga, putting great emphasises upon the achievements after it. Becoming a bonze,

searching for the dharma, comprehending the truth were not only accepted by people of the saṅgha but also told by Gotama Buddha himself as his own achievements through the lifetime. We should compare these achievements with noble blood of Gotama Buddha or favourable circumstances of the time before becoming a bonze. The chronicle of the Buddha was arranged with a hope that people should begin with thinking of the permanent value—mokṣa leading to immortal—to which everybody on the earth ought to aim. At the same time, however, it does not deny the stand point of layman. On the contrary, it can be coincided with that of layman in the highest dimensions. These our suppositions are manifested by followings; (1) Becoming a bonze, searching for the dharma was started after the grhastha (married life) of the favorable Kṣatriya. (2) Selfless mendicancy after becoming a bonze was accomplished under the relations to the selfless mendicancy of layman. (3) Above all, familiar varied lifetime of Gotama Buddha.

After all, we could set up an opinion that the siddha-mārga is a turning point of Gotama-Buddha's achievements throughout the whole course of his life as the chronicle of Gotama Buddha shows and that the achievements contain all the processes from the birth of Gotama Puruṣa to the appearance and the death of Gotama Buddha. The chronicle of Gotama Buddha inserted in the Sūtra, though veiled in mythological atmosphere, expresses tacitly a qualitative improvement in process of change from Gotama Puruṣa to Gotama Buddha. In other words, it suggests enlightenment of Buddhātva from Gotama Śākya—historical being with manlike character—, the birth of Gotama Buddha Śākyamuni, and progress of the achievements. If we base on this point, we could have a total comprehension of the early doctrine of Gotama Buddha and the establishment or development of the primitive Buddhism.