

The Fundamental Aspect of Dhamma in Primitive Buddhism

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I

Needless to say, dhamma (or dharma) has performed an important role during the long period of development of Buddhist thought in various countries since Gotama Buddha. As is well known, dhamma means so equivocally that it is very difficult to put its ideas into the systematic order. Looked back upon the past studies of dhamma, it will be possible to indicate the two trends concerning its interpretations. The first trend is to try regulating, as much as possible, the ambiguous meanings of dhamma, and the second one is to search for and unify the fundamental and ultimate idea of the very complicated dhamma.

Concerning the former trend, the following instances will be considered to be pointed out.

(A) It is as known that Buddhaghosa, the great commentator of Pāli-canon, classifies the meanings of dhamma into the four items, pariyatti, hetu, guṇa and nissatta-nijjīva¹⁾, or again guṇa, desanā, pariyatti and nissatta²⁾.

(B) The Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa-śāstra (Ta-chih-tu-lun), whose author is reported Nāgārjuna traditioally, gives the several examples of dharma-classification.

(a) The dharmas are divided into the following two items:

1) What Buddha preached, the three branches of the Buddhist scriptures (sūtras, vinayas and abhidharmas), the twelve types of scriptures (dvādaśāṅga-dharma-pravacana) and the innumerable teachings.

1) Aṭṭhasālinī, 2. 9.

2) Sumaṅgala-vilāsini, 1. 1. 28.

2) The meanings of dharmas which Buddha preached, the three types of learning (*śīla*, *samādhi* and *prajñā*), the eight-fold noble path (*āryaṣṭāṅgika-mārga*), the absolute freedom (*vimokṣa*), the absolute extinction (*nirvāṇa*), etc. The Buddhist ascetic should begin with what Buddha preached and subsequently meditated on the meaning of dharma³⁾.

(b) 1) Produced (*saṃskṛta*)-dharma, 2) non-produced (*asaṃskṛta*)-dharma, 3) unexpressible (*anabhilāpya*)-dharma⁴⁾. *Saṃskṛta*-dharma points out all phenomena which are produced through causation, spiritual, mental or material, and *asaṃskṛta*-dharma means what transcends *saṃskṛta*-dharma absolutely, according to Sarvāstivādin, *ākāśa*, *pratisaṃkhyā-nirodha* and *apratisaṃkhyā-nirodha*. Such being the case, both *saṃskṛta* and *asaṃskṛta* comprehend all beings, corporeal, incorporeal or even what has no connection with those. In spite of that there is nothing at all in universe except both *saṃskṛta*-and *asaṃskṛta*-dharma, this *śāstra* asserts still more the existence of *anabhilāpya* dharma, of which the most important subject in this essay should be examined afterwards.

(c) 1) The highest dharma, *nirvāṇa*, 2) the eight-fold noble path (*āryaṣṭāṅgika-mārga*) for the sake of realizing *nirvāṇa*, 3) all the good or true words, all the dogmas which promotes the eight-fold noble path, *āgama*, *abhidharma*, *vinaya* and *Mahāyāna-sūtras*⁵⁾. The dharmas are classified here from the viewpoint of religious teaching among which the highest dharma is considered to be *nirvāṇa*. Contrasted to the former classification, this *nirvāṇa* may be equivalent to the unexpressible (*anabhilāpya*) dharma which will be expected to be the most important subject in this essay.

(C) Since the scientific research of Buddhism rised in modern times, the most important work concerning this subject will be considered to be "Pāli Dhamma" by Magdalene and Wilhelm Geiger, München, 1920. The author, referring to the interpretation of Buddhaghosa, inquires into the classification of dhamma. According to his viewpoint, the meanings of dhamma in Pāli-canon are divided into the following four epitomes⁶⁾.

3) Ta-chih-tu-lun, Taisho 25, 222c.

4) *ibid.* 74c.

5) *ibid.* 412a.

(3) The Fundamental Aspect of Dhamma in Primitive Buddhism (K. Tamaki)

(a) Die etymologische Bedeutung des Wortes.

1. Dharma ist das Feststehende, das Gesetz. Objektiv ist es das Naturgesetz des ewigen Werdens und Vergehens, subjektiv ist es die Gerechtigkeit des Königs oder Richters.

2. Norm, Regel, Vorschrift, Gebot und Pflicht.

3. Gebot, Vorschrift überhaupt, Sittengesetz, das Erlaubte, das Richtige. Daraus entwickelt sich weiter die Bedeutung, das Gute, Frömmigkeit, Tugend.

4. Brauch, Übung, Art, Wesen. Character.

5. Berechtigung, berechtigter Grund, guter Grund überhaupt.

(b) Das Weltgesetz des ewigen und Vergehens ist es, was der Buddha predigt. Daher bedeutet dhamma Lehre, Lehrgebäude, Lehrsystem.

1. Die im Kanon formulierte Lehre.

2. In der Bedeutung "Lehre" verbindet sich dhamma mit zahlreichen Verben.

3. saddhamma, ariyadhamma.

4. dhamma und vinaya; buddha, dhamma und saṃgha.

5. Zweck der Buddhapredigt, der dhamma desanā.

(c) Die einzig wahre Lehre.

1. Die Bedeutung Wahrheit.

2. Der grösste, umfassendste, höchste und übersinnliche Begriff.

(d) Ding, Sache.

II

Contrasted to that trend before mentioned, the another trend is to inquire into unifying the complicated meanings of dhamma, of which trial has arisen among modern scholars of Buddhism, for instance, O. Rosenberg, Th. Stcherbatsky, H. Ui, T. Watsuji and so on.

O. Rosenberg, based on the research of Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya, classifies the dharmas into the seven groups and takes "transzendenter Träger" for the essential idea of dharma⁷⁾. Th. Stcherbatsky also examined this Bhāṣya and shows several elements of dharma, for instance, the five groups of elements

6) Magdalene und Wilhelm Geiger; Pāli Dhamma, München, 1920, S. 5-9.

7) O. Rosenberg; Der Probleme der buddhistischen Philosophie, 1924.

The Fundamental Aspect of Dhamma in Primitive Buddhism (K. Tamaki) (4) (skāndhas), the cognitive faculties and their objects (āyatanas), matter (rūpa), mind (citta-caitta), the force (saṃskāra), causality (pratītyasamutpāda), karman and so on⁸).

In the end he concludes as follows: “The conception of a dharma is the central point of the Buddhist doctrine. In the light of this conception Buddhism discloses itself as a metaphysical theory developed out of one fundamental principle, viz. the idea that existence is an interplay of a plurality of subtle, ultimate, not further analysable elements of Matter, Mind and Forces⁹”. As a result of researching dharma itself, however, he has fallen in the agnosticism of dharma as follows: “What is dharma? It is inconceivable! It is subtle! No one will ever be able to tell what its real nature (dharma-svabhāva) is! It is transcendental!¹⁰”

H. Ui, founded on the interpretation of Buddhaghosa, inquires into the idea of dharma. He traces the word dharma to its origin etymologically, while he is concerned about the defects of the past studies. In consequence of tracing the word dharma→dhara→dhṛ, he defines it as the law, rule, standard, norm pattern etc., which comprehends both natural and moral law. It is judged to be the intrinsic good in India that the deed is in accord with this law. Based on this law, Buddha preached and showed the truth, and so Ui summarizes the multivocal meanings of dharma as a fundamental law (ri-hō), which displays the both sides of the highest good and wisdom. And he takes the fundamental law for the causality (paṭīccasamuppāda, pratītyasamutpāda), citing the composition of the Pāli-canon: “Yo paṭīccasamuppādaṃ passati so dhammaṃ passati, yo dhammaṃ passati so paṭīccasamuppādaṃ passati¹¹”.

T. Watsuji evaluates, on the one hand, the viewpoints of both Rosenberg and Stcherbatsky, and on the other hand, criticizes them. Their interpretations

8) Th. Stcherbatsky; *The Central Conception of Buddhism, and the Meaning of the Word “Dhamma”* 3rd Ed. Calcutta, 1961.

9) *ibid.* p. 62.

10) *ibid.* p. 63.

11) H. Ui; *Indo-tetsugaku-kenkyū*, 4. 1927, p. 133-5.

MN. vol. 1, p. 191.

(5) The Fundamental Aspect of Dhamma in Primitive Buddhism (K. Tamaki)

are based on the beingness of dharma which is the viewpoint of Sarvāstivādin, and so opposed to the viewpoint of nothingness (śūnyatā) of dharma. According to him, however, it is necessary for us to unify both viewpoints of beingness and nothingness, which has been already pursued by Nāgārjuna, the greatest pioneer of Mahāyānism.

So he denies both the transcendental supporter of Rosenberg and the pluralism of Stcherbatsky which is at last reduced to the agnoticism, and considers that the dharma has the possibility of being observed, viz. when Gotama realized the enlightenment, he saw the dharma clearly by his eyes of wisdom and showed it people afterwards. From such a point of view he interpretes the dharma as follows: It is most important to see the universal dharma based on the daily life which is infinitely differentiated. Even if the dharma itself is differentiated, it should be emphasized to come back to the indifference in the difference of dharma, and so the meaning of unifying dharma points out the coming back to the infinite indifference which is conditioned as the negation of itself. The ultimate negation is the fundamental ignorance (avijjā, avidyā), and the extinction of the fundamental ignorance is to come back to the absolute negation. Such a movement of negating itself is the central subject of Śūnya-philosophy which is the important core of the dharma of pratītya-samutpāda¹²⁾.

III

Geiger, referring to the absolute truth of dhamma, asserts as follows: "Nattürlich ist dhamma "Wahrheit" ganz etwas anderes als sacca. Dieses bezeichnet die Wahrhaftigkeit im Denken, Reden und Tun, jenes die Einsicht in das wahre Wesen der Dinge, wie sie der Buddha gewonnen und gelehrt hat¹³⁾". "Schliesslich wird dhamma Ausdruck für das grösste und umfassendste, was es gibt, für den höchsten übersinnlichen Begriff, für das Absolute¹⁴⁾". As is aforemen-

12) T. Watsuji; Bukkyōtetsugaku-ni-okeru-hō-no-gainen-to-kū-no-benshōhō, Zenshū, 9, p. 461-473.

13) op. cit. S. 6, Anm.

14) ibid. S. 7.

The Fundamental Aspect of Dhamma in Primitive Buddhism (K. Tamaki) (6) tioned, Stcherbatsky also says that the real nature of dharma is inconceivable and transcendental. What would be the absolute truth of dhamma as Geiger refers to, or the inconceivable dharma as Stcherbatsky asserts? Here I should like to research such aspect of dhamma in Pāli-canon which would be considered to be more fundamental than the meaning of rule, law or the absolute negation.

While Gotama meditates under the bodhi-tree after having realised the absolute enlightenment, he pours the three hymnes out of his mouth at evening, middle night and dawn¹⁵⁾.

The hymn of evening: “Yadā have pātubhavanti dhammā ātāpino jhāyato brāhmaṇassa, ath’ assa kaṅkhā vapayanti sabbā yato pajānāti sahetu-dhamman ti”.

The hymn of middle night: “Yadā have pātubhavanti dhammā ātāpino jhāyato brāhmaṇassa, ath’ assa kaṅkhā vapayanti sabbā yato khayam paccayānaṃ avedī ti”.

The hymn of dawn: “Yadā have pātubhavanti dhammā ātāpino jhāyato brāhmaṇassa, vidhūpayam tiṭṭhati Mārasenaṃ sūriyo ’va obhāsayaṃ antalikkanti”.

And the other sutta says as follows: When Gotama, having accomplished the enlightenment, meditates under the tree of Ajapāliya-nigrodha, he thinks over as: “Adhigato kho mayāyam dhammo gambhīro duddaso duranubodho santo paṇīto atakka-avacaro nipuṇo paṇḍita-vedanīyo¹⁶⁾”.

The central subject of these hymnes above-mentioned, is that the dhamma is opened to the person, viz. Gotama who is concentrating his own body and mind. And the dhamma is said to be gambhīra (profound), duranubodha (inconceivable), santa (calmed), paṇīta (excellent), atakka-avacara (beyond contemplation) and so on. Deliberated on these three hymnes, it will be clear that the dhamma is opened to the meditating person and penetrating his body and mind until his bottom, because at the time of evening hymn he knows the

15) Udāna, p. 1-3.

16) SN. vol. 1. p. 136.

(7) The Fundamental Aspect of Dhamma in Primitive Buddhism (K. Tamaki)

dhamma of causality when his all doubts disappear, and at the next time of middle night hymn he knows the extinction of causality, and at the last time of dawn hymn he is standing destroying all the devils, as if the sun illumined the sky. And so it concludes that the dhamma, in spite of being inconceivable and transcendental, is clearly the vivid power or animated life.

Gotama Buddha, after attaining his final purpose, tried his first sermon to the five bhikkhus of which the central subject is "Amatam adhigatam" (the immortality or eternal life has been acquired.). And the Devatā-samyutta in Saṃyutta-nikāya says: "Amataṃ dado ca so hoti, yo dhammam anusāsati¹⁷⁾". Necessarily is it clear that we are able to attain the eternal life through realizing the transcendental dhamma.

Brahmā Sahampati says Gotama Buddha as follows: "Ye pi te bhante ahesum atitā addhānam arahanto sammāsambuddhā, te pi bhagavanto dhammaññeva sakkatvā garukatvā upanissāya vihariṃsu. Ye pi te bhante bhavissanti anāgatam addhānam arahanto sammāsambuddhā, te pi bhagavanto dhammaññeva sakkatvā garukatvā upanissāya viharissanti. Bhagavā pi bhante etarahi araham sammāsambuddho dhammaññeva sakkatvā garukatvā upanissāya viharatū ti".

Moreover Brahmā Sahampati continues to say: "Ye ca atitā sambuddhā, ye ca buddhā anāgatā, yo ca etarahi sambuddho, bahunnam sokanāsano, sabbe saddhammagaruno, vihariṃsu viharanti ca, atho pi viharissanti, eṣā buddhānaṃ dhammatā¹⁸⁾".

According to these two compositions of Brahmā Sahampati, it is known that all Buddhas of past, present and future similarly honoured, esteemed the dhamma and stayed on the dhamma in the past, honours at present and will honour in the future, and so on. Therefore the dhamma is unchangeable through any time from past to future which is named "buddhānaṃ dhammatā". In this way it will be led to the conclusion that the dhamma, even if it is inconceivable and transcendental, is so really powerful and vividly living, so universal and perpetual that it is realized as such.

17) SN. vol. 1. p. 32.

18) SN. vol. 1. p. 140.

After Gotama Buddha preached Vāseṭṭha, a bhikkhu from brāhmaṇa, that anybody in the caste who has accomplished the enlightenment through relying on the dhamma, is to be called the highest person, he said: “Dhammo hi Vāseṭṭha settho jane tasmim ditthe c’eva dhamme abhisamparāyaṇi ca”. (The dhamma is the supreme in the human being at present and in the future.). And Moreover he continued to say: “One whose belief is really rooted in the Tathāgata and certainly settled in Him, unobstructed by anybody in the world, always talks as follows: Bhagavato ’mhi putto oraso mukhato jāto dhamma-jo dhammanimmito dhamma-dāyādo ti (I am a true son of Bhagavant, borned out of His mouth, borned out of the dhamma and a successor of the dhamma), and the synonym of Tathāgata is the Dhamma-kāya (Body of Dhamma), Brahmā-kāya (Body of Brahmā), Dhamma-bhūta (One who has become the Dhamma) and Brahmā-bhūta (One who has become the Brahma)¹⁹⁾”.

From the viewpoint of the meaning of dhamma as stated above, it is undoubted to say that such dhamma-kāya as in this canon has developed to the dhamma-kāya of Tathāgata in Mahāyānism, which is universal, unchangeable and eternal.

Here I should like to summarize the characteristics of the dhamma from what we have seen above.

(1) The dhamma is transcendental and inconceivable, but not agnostic, because it should be realized by our own personality. It does mean transcending both objective and subjective recognition that the dhamma is transcendental, and it is beyond any deliberation and so inconceivable.

(2) The dhamma is considered to be “life”. There are some kinds of lives in the world, mentioned as the physiological life, spiritual life and so on. The dhamma is, however, transcending both objectivism and subjectivism, and so it must be called, as it were, the cosmic or absolute life.

(3) Just at the time when the dhamma is opened to us, we can attain the enlightenment, and so the way to it is not we-to-dhamma, but dhamma-to-us, in other words the dhamma is quite different from us. It is, however, impor-

19) DN. vol. 3. Aggañña Suttanta, p. 83-84.

(9) The Fundamental Aspect of Dhamma in Primitive Buddhism (K. Tamaki)

tant to regulate our subjective conditions, that the dhamma may open to us, for instance, to practice the types of learning (*sīla*, *samādhi* and *prajñā*), the five moral powers (*śraddhā*, *vīrya*, *smṛti*, *samādhi* and *prajñā*) and so on.

(4) How do we feel the dhamma, just when it will be opened to us, even if it is transcendental and inconceivable? It will be considered that at this time we feel it “transparent and pure”, which are more fundamental than “holy and joyful”. Even the senses of “transparent and pure” will be, however, reduced to the sense of the movement of infinitely transcending. And at the same time we feel it “powerful”, which continues to function on the basis of our existence.

(5) While the dhamma is functioning on our existence, it penetrates gradually our personalities and at last it will be melted into us without any difference between them. Such dhamma as functioning on us may be named *dhamma-kāya* (*dharma-kāya*) both in Pāli and Mahāyāna Buddhism.