

Living the Truth: Constructing a Road to Peace and Harmony
--- The Realization of Non-duality

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore the central role of teaching Seon(Zen) Buddhism based on the concept of non-duality, according to the thought of Korean Seon Master Daehaeng. With case studies, this paper shows that how the practice for the realization of non-duality makes a contribution to a vision for peace and harmony.

□. A Dream of the Bodhisattva: The Realization of Non-duality

In the essence of Buddhist thought lies the principle that everything originates from the One Mind, Buddhata. Accordingly, the followers and practitioners of Buddhism, seeking spiritual enlightenment, have pursued the realization of their fundamental Mind, true and genuine self as opposed to the temporal, false "I" which is commonly represented by the human body. Because of this, Buddhism, particularly Seon(Zen) Buddhism is considered to focus on one's own inner spiritual world, often resulting in the cause of attaining lofty spiritual goals and highly individualistic attitude toward society.

On the other hand, Mahayana Buddhism has presented an ideal model of Bodhisattvas who always unconditionally strive to help and save other beings. It is known for its four Bodhisattva vows: Innumerable are sentient beings: we vow to save them all; Inexhaustible are deluded passions: we vow to extinguish them all; Immeasurable are the Dharma teachings: we vow to master them all; Infinite is the Buddha's way: we vow to fulfill it completely. What is suggested here is that the top priority is given to 'saving others' as the first vow.

Then what is the meaning of one's spiritual enlightenment and becoming a Bodhisattva in this current age of globalization in which everybody seems to be living as a world citizen of the earth? The thought of Korean Seon Master Daehaeng(1929-present) has given a clear

answer to this question: It is the realization of non-duality as practice of Seon.

The distinct characteristics of Master Daehaeng's thought are her thoroughly practical point of view and methods of the Buddhist teachings, and applying the Buddhist philosophical principles to the people's daily life situation in the contemporary society. Fully recognizing the importance of interdependent living in present and upcoming age, Master Daehaeng has long declared the principle of non-duality for Buddhist practice and a future vision for everybody.

In fact, this principle exactly comes from traditional Buddhist thought. Since the foundation of everybody is the same One Mind, like leaves of a tree having one root, people have to live interdependently whether they recognize it or not. According to Master Daehaeng, originated from and sharing same foundation of One Mind, material and spiritual world are not two; others and I are not two; knowledge and Seon practice are not two. Instead of defining as same "one", the concept of "not two" emphasizes the various characteristics of the particular by manifestation of one mind.

Master Daehaeng reinterpreted the famous Buddhist Four Noble Truths. The original teaching of "the cause of suffering" by Shakyamuni Buddha is attachment: Everything is empty in its nature, so do not make any spiritual attachment on anything in your mind. Master Daehaeng changed it into "The cause of suffering is that people are ignorant of the truth of the fact that in their nature, they have always been engaged in interdependent mind, body, use, eating and living. Not accepting the fact, they live mainly focusing on their own life and self-benefit." (Daehaeng 1983:780)

In this paper, I will present case studies for teaching Seon Buddhism based on the principle of non-duality.

□. The Practice based on the Principle of Non- duality

1. Knowledge and Seon practice are not two

Among many Buddhist sects, Seon Buddhism in particular puts strong emphasis on attaining enlightenment by the practice of mindfulness and meditation, thus it has warned not to rely upon the written word. To Master Daehaeng, any word of teaching whether written or said, is the manifestation of the One Mind.

I make an effort in order for students that I teach Seon Buddhism to directly reach into their heart. It is to make the knowledge and contents real, alive in their mind. Teaching Seon thoughts in history or various kinds of Buddhist sutras, I try to make sure that students understand the teachings in their own terms so that those teachings can affect their mind and

ultimately help live a better life. For instance, there is the teaching of the Buddha, 'Everything is empty, so do not cling to anything.' What does it mean to the young college students who are so eager to compete and achieve, that is to say, emotionally attached, in everything that interests him?

It naturally leads me to use the teaching methodology, which facilitates discussion and interaction among students more effectively. In the group discussion, everyone is encouraged to talk in an open way with no prejudice or discrimination. In the process, I should sometimes play a role of their parent, friend or counselor. I have found that I should be able to answer to the problems in their life as well as the question of the text, and to give supports when necessary. Also, I make students pick up a subject of their life in order to practice it according to what they learned, and to follow the principles in the texts. One cannot be just 'lecturing,' in a class of Seon.

2. Others and I are not two.

No human being is perfect nor can he or she be free from suffering and sorrow in life. Almost every other religious philosophy emphasizes the importance of helping and serving people. The phrase "Love and forgive your enemy," is one of the common examples. Yet what makes Buddhist view distinctive is that it declares that there is no enemy who really exists, as there is no other being completely separate from yourself, again as everything comes from One Mind. It is to believe and accept seeing and treating other people as an equal soul regardless of their character, physical appearances, social position, gender, race, and so on.

It may not be difficult to say, but dedicating oneself to doing so requires a firm faith and persistent efforts. In order to train myself to live according to this principle, I always try to put some time aside to be a volunteer for any work or help for the people in need.

For instance, I have taught Seon Buddhism as a volunteer instructor and counselor for the people in prison. I know there are many people who are willing to help prisoners, but as for me, it is a small revolution. Years ago, I used to have a very sensitive mind so that I even could not be able to read reports of any kind of crime, because I felt so empathic toward the victims. And maintaining this prison class also takes me considerable amount of time and money as all the financial supports for this activity are made by donation of the group in which I work as a volunteer.

I go to the Seoul Detention Center once a week to meet with five prisoners under the sentence of the death penalty. Leading this weekly class, I have set a question to challenge myself: My 'Students' are so-called the criminals of the worst (To my surprise, some of them did

not commit the worst, though.) and facing death. Am I really seeing and treating them as an equal soul from deep in my heart? It does not mean to avoid what they have done. It is accepting them as who they are, and still respecting their integrity as a human being. From my own experience, as Master Daehaeng asserts, I truly believe that "The only sin in the world is one's ignorance of not recognizing what is wrong."

Due to this meeting and understanding the life of the people in prison, I have been much more capable of accepting different viewpoints of people, various aspects of life, not to mention pain and hardship of people in need. Now, those friends of mine in prison are the proof to me that everybody has same Buddha nature, and that anybody can be changed completely into recovering his inherent goodness and love. Thanks to them, I became a member of the Amnesty International, which advocates human rights, and help stop any kind of unjust discrimination and violence around the world.

3. Enlightenment and daily life are not two.

Buddhists have been ordained with the Buddhist five precepts, which represents their moral and social norm for practice in daily life. However, some contents of the five precepts do not seem to exactly fit into the people of contemporary society, and it needs to be complemented for better application. At the request of the Dept. of Dissemination of the Korean Buddhist Chogye Order, I presented "The Buddhist five precepts for interdependent life," which has made a new interpretation on the traditional Buddhist five precepts and provide practical sub-rules for each precept in order for people to apply them to their daily life in the current society. My interpretation was made according to the principle of non-duality.

I have been teaching it as a part of the 2002 official education project of the Dept. of Dissemination of the Korean Buddhist Chogye Order. Part of the purpose conducting this program is to investigate Korean Buddhists' communal consciousness by analyzing their answer of how they are doing with those new precepts. "The Buddhist five precepts for interdependent life" was also provided for the yearly campaign of Popbo, a main Buddhist weekly newspaper in Korea.

In making a new interpretation, the emphasis is put above all, on one's inner mind rather than one's behaviors. For example, the first precept "Do not kill," has been changed into "Do not kill or harm others in your mind," and one of the sub-rules for this is "Do not wish that your competitor would perform wrong." Much consideration has also been given to make the precepts possible to apply in the daily living of this current society. Lastly, much consideration was given to make the content positive. The third precept "Avoid lewd conduct," has been

changed into "Practice love and compassion for mutual happiness, beyond your self-desire."

Below are the original Buddhist five precepts and my reinterpretation of them for the sake of modern people who strive to live in harmony as a global citizen.

1. Do not kill. □ Do not kill or harm others in your mind.
2. Do not steal. □ Have a rich mind of wishing everybody's bliss and merits.
3. Avoid lewd conduct. □ Practice love and compassion for mutual happiness, beyond your self-desire.
4. Do not talk falsehood. □ Talk in understanding of others' viewpoints with loving, encouraging words.
5. Do not drink alcohol and intoxicants. □ Pursue moderate consuming habits, always keeping your country and the earth in your mind.

□. Hope of Living the Truth

I have presented the cases of what I have tried to realize non-duality in education. From my own experience, if asked whether there is any hope for religious education, I can answer in my whole heart, that there certainly is a hope teaching and researching Seon Buddhism, because it is the effort to live and realize the truth. Above all, at the center of this truth exists Bodhisattva's unconditional love for all beings, seeing others as themselves. As it is said in 1 Corinthians 13, "The greatest is love. (because) Love never fails."

Trying to realize the principle of non-duality, in return, gives me bliss deep in my heart. It is a joy in the faith that as a religious educator, I can be the one of those who strives to do their best to make a difference in society and heart of other people. Obviously there are times when I get frustrated losing trust over things going wrong or unstable responses of people; yet I have also noticed and met with many Bodhisattva candidates in Korea and other countries. Master Daehaeng herself is an ideal model alive, who has lived the life of the Bodhisattva. Thus, as far as I never give up depending on the truth in every aspect of my life, and building a bridge to peace and harmony, I am confident that my dream of becoming a Bodhisattva will come true someday in the future.

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