

Shoyo Sensei's Dharma Message

Buddha-Dharma: Introduction – 1

What is “Buddhism”? –I

Beginning with the October 2004 Golden Chain, a series of lectures on Buddhism. Using simple and clear words, I will try to explain Buddhism as easily as possible.*

**The term “Buddhism” is imprecise and misleading: “Buddha-Dharma” is a more correct term. The Buddha’s teaching cannot be named an “-ism.” However, until I explain the meaning of “Buddha-Dharma,” the term “Buddhism” will be used occasionally for conventional purposes.*

Question (1):

What is the basic foundation of Buddhism that may differentiate it from other religions?

Answer:

The basic principle that differentiates Buddhism from other religions is Causal Conditionality. It identifies Buddhism as Buddhism.

Any teachings that deny Causal Conditionality do not belong to Buddhism. The entire teaching of Buddhism is based upon it. Causal Conditionality has been regarded as the Buddha's distinctive teaching throughout Buddhist history. All other Buddhist teachings, such as Non-self (*Anatta*), Impermanence (*Anicca*) and Suffering (*Dukkha*) are direct outcomes from Causal Conditionality. All Buddhist schools, including Jodo Shinshu, are based upon Causal Conditionality. The Buddha declared, "Whoever sees Causal Conditionality sees Dharma (Buddhism), whoever sees Dharma (Buddhism) sees Causal Conditionality."

Question (2):

What is Causal Conditionality?

Answer:

Put most simply, it means: when all the causes and conditions coexist, there is always a corresponding effect. When causes and conditions do not coexist, there is no corresponding effect.

The general formula for Causal Conditionality is:

When A is present, B is present;
From the arising of A, B arises;
When A is absent, B is absent;
On the cessation of A, B ceases.

These four sentences embody a full and precise explanation and definition of all events (phenomena) of reality. Thus, the Buddha called it the “law” (Dhammata). In science, it is said that a law can be more universal when it is shorter. In this sense alone, the law of Causal Conditionality is highly universal.

There are four distinctive characteristics of Causal Conditionality:

(1) Objectivity:

Causal Conditionality always exists, if it is discovered by the Buddha, or not. This time, the Buddha discovered and explained it to the world. The discovery of Causal Conditionality can be referred to like the discovery of any scientific laws, such as the gravity law of earth: gravity operates, whether or not it was discovered by Newton. The Buddha’s discovery is analogous to the uncovering of a magnificent ancient city hidden in a forest for years.

(2) Necessity:

A certain set of causes and conditions necessarily gives rise to a certain effect. Whenever there is a certain effect, there are necessarily its causes and conditions.

(3) Invariability:

A certain set of causes and conditions always gives rise to its corresponding effect. Whenever and wherever this same set of causes and conditions exists, the effect will never be a different one.

(4) Conditionality:

A certain effect comes to exist only when a required set of causes and conditions exist. But when one or more causes and conditions from a certain set of causes and conditions are changed, this effect must be different. When, and only when, all the causes and conditions are the same, is, the effect always the same.

These characteristics affirm the consistency of the Causal Conditionality. To summarize the above into today's simple example, using physics:

(1) When proper wiring, a bulb and electricity are there; "light" will always be there.

(2) When all the necessary causes and conditions for "light" are present, "light" will arise. It is impossible to have this "light" without all the necessary conditions being present.

(3) When all the necessary causes and conditions for "light" come together, it is impossible to generate some other effect, i.e., proper wiring, a bulb and electricity will never generate "water."

(4) "Light" is generated only when all the necessary conditions are there; it is impossible to generate "light" when one or some conditions are not there.

These four characteristics tell us one very important point: Causal Conditionality enables us to make positive changes, consciously, to generate desirable effects by making causes and conditions come together. We can also eliminate undesirable and unwanted effects by NOT putting causes and conditions together.

Indeed, we are already utilizing the principle of Causal Conditionality in our daily life, making such changes and having positive ways of living. For example, we turn on the light switch in a dark room and turn off the light switch in a bright room.

Furthermore, in the medical field, medical professionals are utilizing Causal Conditionality particularly in the most up-to-date study of human genomes. Recently, they succeeded in reading the entire human genetic information and discovered causes of hitherto "unknown" diseases. Because now they are able to explain the relationship between some genetic information and its effect (disease), they are able to change (i.e., treat) genes (i.e., causes) so that they can prevent the unwanted effect (i.e., disease). The degree of risk of getting disease can also be reduced, if not completely cure. It is indeed a revolutionary development in medicine, but its principle is simple: By utilizing Causal Conditionality and changing causes and conditions, they are achieving the wanted effect, while attempting to avoid the unwanted effect.

Question (3):

You have explained Causal Conditionality only in the material world. But, does Causal Conditionality operate also in the non-material (mental) world?

Answer:

Out of all the teachings and philosophies in the world, in the past and in the present, Buddhism is the only knowledge that emphasizes that everything that happens in human life happens in the same way that it happens in physics or chemistry. The Buddha was the first and the last one to show the cause and effect of human behavior, action, attitudes, mind, heart and habits just like in other science subjects.

Every minute thing that happens in life is causal conditionally (scientifically) defined. Just like one defective part in a car can be replaced by a new good part to make the car run smoothly, we can make life run smoothly by fixing the defective functions of the mind. Several centuries ago, people were not able to define many things in the physical world.

Several centuries ago, they were now able to define about how things happened. They thought things happened that way for some strange reason. But, now physicists and other scientists are able to explain how exactly things happen and what causes what. They know how to generate electricity when they want it. They know how to turn it off when they don't want it. All the modern technology is created now, but early people had no idea.

The Buddha was the first person to show that everything in human life happens exactly the same way as science. This is the Buddha's greatest contribution: his discovery of Causal Conditionality. Information of Causal Conditionality (or Dharma) is everywhere. Its number is uncountable. Among them, the Buddha selected only the most urgent and valuable one, i.e., pain and suffering in our life. This is what we call "Buddha-Dharma."

It was like a thunderclap that the Buddha presented Causal Conditionality at a time when people were relying on ritual and human/animal sacrifices to appease "super" powers who they believed controlled humans and nature. But, it is even more a wonderful thunderclap that the Buddha's Causal Conditionality presented a "complete" set of problems for human suffering and pain; its causes, cure and treatment methodologies.

A Buddhist means a person who understands Causal Conditionality (Buddha-Dharma) and utilizes it to make positive changes in life.

Gassho,
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(November *Golden Chain* talks more about Causal Conditionality)