

Shoyo Sensei's Dharma Message

Buddha-Dharma: Introduction – 2

Summary of October Message:

Out of all the teachings and philosophies in the world in the past and the present, Buddha-Dharma is the only knowledge which emphasizes that everything that happens in human life happens in the same way that it happens in physics and chemistry. The Buddha was the first and the last one to show that the cause and effect of human behavior was just like in other science subjects. Every minute event that happens in life is causal conditionally (or scientifically) defined. Just like one defective part in a car can be replaced by a new good part and will make the car run smoothly, so 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, due to their ignorance of mechanisms of things. They thought things happened that way for some strange reason. But, now physicists and other scientists are able to explain exactly how things happened and what caused 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.

Question (1):

How good is the law of Causal Conditionality that the Buddha discovered?

Answer:

Generally speaking, the broader range of phenomena a law covers, the more excellent this law is; The simpler the a law is, the more universal this law is. Causal Conditionality is the law that covers both physical and psychological worlds, and yet its general formula is made of only four lines:

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.

This formula illustrates the causal conditional relationship between “this” and “that.” In Buddhism, wisdom means information of relationships between an action and its reaction. To utilize this knowledge for positive change means to live as a Buddhist.

Question (2):

Could you explain historical value of the law of Causal Conditionality?

Answer:

In the olden days, people could not explain why the sun rose in the Eastern sky every morning, why the moon “changes” its shape, why seasons repeated, why the sky suddenly turned into darkness, sparks, and then exploded (thunderstorms). So, they imagined there existed some super normal being(s) (usually, god(s)) and believed it controlled nature, including human beings. They thought that such beings, in anger, could destroy nature in any way that they liked. So, people, with fear and awe, performed various rituals and ceremonies to satisfy and appease them. The ancient Mayan frequently offered even living human beings, often infants. At the time of the Buddha, too, some religious groups performed a huge number of animal sacrifices. According to anthropological researches, in the primitive stage of human history, ignorance and fear were the major reasons for the arising of “religion.”

The Buddha's discovery of Causal Conditionality definitively challenged primitive ways of view such as fatalism and accidentalism. It is amazing that, when those people were relying on rituals and cults, the Buddha launched a highly systematic way of thinking.

In this regard, it seems correct to conclude that the discovery of the law of Causal Conditionality is the greatest discovery in human history.

Question (3):

Causal Conditionality sounds easy to understand for us who live in the 21st century. Is it still valuable?

Answer:

Definitely. Look around, and you'll find how anti-causally and anti-conditionally we think and behave. It was only at the end of the 18th century that scientific medicine started. Until the invention of the microscope, viruses did not "exist" for them because they could not see them. It was believed that people become sick because of evilness, mystic wickedness, accidents, or even without any reason. In Japan, for example, up until a few years ago, patients with Hansen's disease were discriminated by the Japanese government and forced to be segregated from their own families and society. Medical professionals pinpointed the virus and knew how to treat and cure the disease. But people were dominated by fear, worry, anxiety, pride and selfishness and kept unreasonable discrimination for decades. A similar case exists with HIV positive patients here in the U.S. Some irrational Christians consider that those who are punished by God become HIV positive. These are only a fraction of many unfortunate cases that illustrate that we are still irrational, unscientific and unreasonable: we still act and think just like those who lived in the primitive period.

The Buddha's Causal Conditionality has validity today in the field of natural science, too. All what medical science is trying to do is to find the causal and conditional relationships between diseases and their causes and conditions, such as smoking and lung cancer or diet and heart disease.

The Buddha clarified how the human mind functions, how human behavior activates, and how human thinking operates, by Causal Conditionality. (Continue to the next Golden Chain)

Gassho,
Shoyo Taniguchi, Ph.D.

Buddhist Poem for You

A Little Bird, a Bell and Me

No matter how hard I flap my arms
I cannot fly,
But a little bird that can fly in the sky
Can't run as fast as I can.

No matter how hard I shake my body
It doesn't sing a beautiful song,
But a bells that sings
Don't know as many songs as I know.

A bell, a little bird, and me --
We are all different
And are all good just as we are.
Misuzu Kaneko
(Tr. by Dr. Shoyo Taniguchi)

