

## *Shoyo Sensei's Dharma Message:*

### Buddha-Dharma: Introduction – 6

#### **Question (1):**

“There is no one more dear to me than myself.” This is the Queen Mallika’s reply to her dear husband. The Buddha further progressed one step and stated, “Having traversed all quarters with the mind, One finds none anywhere dearer than oneself.” Another Buddhist text, called the *Dhammapada*, also tells you, “All living beings wish to be free from harm and danger; all living beings are afraid of punishment and death.” Do you believe in all these messages?

#### **Answer (1):**

Buddha-Dharma is not something to believe in. We are always encouraged to question and investigate it. Let’s have a reality-check. Example 1: When I chased a tiny ant walking on the ground with my finger, he frantically ran away to escape from a giant and unknown danger (my finger). He must have had an enormous fear. He tried to protect his precious life as much as possible. Example 2: Yesterday someone gave me a group picture that she had taken of myself with friends. At that picture, whom did I see first? Example 3: A week ago, someone gave me a photo in which my son was with his friends. At that time, whom did I see first? In both of these last instances, I looked at myself or my son at first, only after that I looked at others. Without any exception, when I see photos in which I or my family members are in, I see myself or my family first. And I think this is also true for others, except enlightened ones.

From all these cases, I agree with Buddha’s and Mallika’s statements that for all living beings there is a strongest attachment to oneself.

#### **Question (2):**

How about those who voluntarily kill themselves. Doesn’t it mean that there are some exceptions to the above statement? Doesn’t it mean that those who commit suicide don’t love oneself most?

#### **Answer (2):**

There are many in our society who kill themselves as suicides, which is a more and more serious problem especially among the young. Suicide is not a new issue and has been recorded throughout human history. It has been discussed by philosophers and religious people such as Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and Immanuel Kant. For Aristotle, suicide is “unjust” to others, but not to the self. His claim is based on the idea that one can never treat oneself unjustly and that an injustice is an act done to oneself against one’s will. Aristotle thought that suicide could not be unjust to the suicidal person, because it is a voluntary action. He believed that one cannot intentionally hurt oneself.

From the Buddhist view, however, suicide is rooted in attachment or greed, hatred and delusion; (1) The person may be dominated by attachment for a better existence; (2) he or she may be dominated by hatred toward the present condition of life; or (3) may not have clear and complete understanding of the existing conditions. All these are rooted in ignorance, and the lack of clear understanding of the situation. Therefore, although Aristotle thought that the suicide was unjustifiable because of its voluntariness, for Buddha-Dharma, it is not. We, when become deluded, can always harm and hurt ourselves with full knowledge of what we are doing. Voluntariness itself does not “justify” an action.

For Kant, who tried to establish that the fundamental moral principle would always be self-consistent, suicide was an issue of moral dilemma, because Kant thought that a candidate for suicide believed that “care for oneself” required “destruction of oneself.”

From a Buddhist perspective, what a suicidal person wants is to eliminate not his or her own life, but his or her pain, suffering, despair, torment, affliction, depression, stress, or other physical or mental pains which he or she experiences. The suicidal person has confused two things: the elimination of life and the elimination of suffering and pain. Self-love never requires self-destruction. True “care for oneself” derives

only from non-attachment, non-hatred, and absence of confusion. A good evidence for this is that modern research on suicide proves that in many suicides, individuals wish neither to die nor to kill themselves.

For example, there is a person who is determined to kill himself or herself. Thinking this way, he or she goes to the Golden Gate Bridge to commit suicide and stands on the bridge and is about to jump into the San Francisco Bay (it is interesting that the majority do not jump into the Pacific Ocean side). At that moment, a dump truck driver, mishandling the steering wheel, suddenly begins to direct itself and drives towards him or her on the bridge. Then, he or she, who had decided to die, spontaneously tries to avoid the truck and escapes from the truck. Whether he or she may still commit suicide is not the issue. The point is in the deep bottom of the human psyche, attachment to oneself is undeniable.

In this way, by seeing and learning reality closely and analytically, we will find Buddha-Dharma to be truthful. That is the very moment that Buddha-Dharma becomes a valuable information for oneself and one wants to share it with others.

Love and hatred are neither separated nor different from each other. These seemingly opposing negative emotions are like two sides of the same coin: self-centeredness. Depending on the situation, sometimes it shows the love side, and sometimes it shows the hatred side. In newspapers we read sad news of those who were in deep love one day kill each other on the next day. We all know it. Such is a deep complexity of human emotion, about which will be discussed in the next *Golden Chain*.

Gassho,  
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