

Book Review

The Essence of Buddhism

(Dukkha is for Seeing, but Sukha is for Living)*

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1. Introduction

The book entitled “The Essence of Buddhism (Dukkha is for Seeing, but Sukha is for Living)” was composed from the Dhamma talk given by the most venerable Phra Promkunaporn (P.A. Payutto) to the senior administrative officers at department of religious affairs on 12th February, 1998. This book was published for free distribution on the celebration of Vesak in 2011. Now it is the 17th press version; thus, it was the most recommended book on the topic of the reality of live, the heart of Buddhism, natural law, the liberation as the ideology of Buddhism.

2. The Structure of the book

There are 3 main topics of the book:
1) the heart of Buddhism: avoiding of all evil and bad actions, culturing goods and wholesome actions, and purify the mind;
2) the essence of Buddhism: the truth is the truth, the Tathagata is just the one who present to the mankind; most of people think that they live with happy live, but in fact they live with unreal happiness which is full of sad and unsatisfied, having understood the reality of live, a man live with wisdom and find out the ways to generate the wisdom to live on the right path it should be; 3) Dhamma principles of

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living: the path of living that lead to perfect aim or living as a wise man that free from ignorance (Avijja), craving (Tanha), attachment, living with the principle of Four Noble Truth (Ariyasacca). Being free from suffering or liberation is the final goal of Buddhist training; thus, Buddhist practices mostly focus on training oneself to obtain the right knowledge and wisdom in order to understand the reality of human personality and the reality of the universe that full of unsatisfaction, and then realize the truth. However, liberation or Nibbana is the supreme goal of the Buddhist cultivation and it is the true essence of Buddhism.

This book started with presenting the heart of Buddhism, showing how the world really is, and continues to the essence of living and that of Buddhism. To me, the most venerable Phra Promkunaporn did very well on presenting the topics on this book, he presents with academic order and excellent style of presentation.

3. The structure of the content

As I study on this book, the most venerable Phra Promkunaporn gave the Dhamma talk to the senior administrative officer at the department of religious affairs that could be summarized into 3 main

topics, and I would review each topic as following:

The point on the heart of Buddhism

The writer starts with introducing the heart and the main doctrines of Buddhist teachings such as Ovadapatimokkha (the Fundamental Teachings), Ariyasacca (the Four Noble Truth), suffering and the ways to end it, Paticcasamuppada (Dependent Origination), and Nibbana or liberation. However, the Buddha himself pointed out the one should not attached on the Dhamma. Many Buddhist might confuse that which Dhamma considered as the heart of Buddhism; the answers was whatever Dhamma could be the heart teaching, but all liked to the principle of the Four Noble Truth (Phra Promkunaporn (P.A. Payutto), 2012 : 4).

On the issue of the heart of Buddhism, Venerable Buddhadasa mentioned in his book of "The Handbook of Mankind" in the Pali word thus "Sabbe DhammaNalang Abhinivesaya (all Dhamma principles should not be attached on)". Here, the word attached mean holding the Dhamma principles as one own. The heart Buddhist teaching should be all the Dhamma that could lead the practitioner to be free from suffering. (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 2008 : 71 -73).



The two great Buddhist scholars have the same point at the end, although they had likely difference at the beginning. Venerable Phrapomkunaporn stressed that one should not attached on the principle of Ovadapatimokkha (the Fundamental Teachings), Arirasacca (the Four Noble Truth), suffering and the ways to end it, Paticcasamuppada (Dependent Origination), and Nibbana or liberationas these all intend the practitioner to realize the Four Noble Truth. However, he said at the end that the Four Noble Truth is the practical principles that a mankind could utilize the reality of the world in accordance to the principle of Indappacayata-Paticcasamuppada order to develop oneself to attain Nibbana. Nevertheless, the Buddha presented the principle of the Four Noble Truth as the practical principles for his followers to understand easily and interested to engage the Buddhist teachings, to understand the essence of Buddhism. On one hand, Venerable Buddhadasa Bhikkhu pointed out that the saying of the Buddha thus “Sabbe Dhamma Nalang Abhinivesaya (all Dhamma principles should not be attached on)” is the heart of Buddhism, as this saying lead a Buddhist practitioner to realize that there is no place of attachment in Buddhism-the same as

the essence of Buddhism. To me, the two Buddhist scholars have different view on topic of the heart of Buddhism due to the way of individual interpretation; nevertheless, they came up with the same conclusion.

The point on the essence of Buddhism

Venerable Phra Promkunaporn explained the essence of Buddhism that it is very importance to look at the main purpose of Buddhism, that of, seeing the thing as it really is; he mentioned his point with the frequent Pali chanting of “Uppadava bhikkhave tathagatanan anuppadava tathagathanan thita va sa dhatu... even there was no the Tathagata (the blessed one) reality is there and it is always there- this is the truth of the thing”. In short, the reality of the world is nothing but just only the depending re-origination of the law of nature, and it is always present as it is, the Buddha didn’t create or wrote it; he just represent what was there before. What the Buddha developed himself in accumulating all the perfections to become to Buddha was to enlighten the reality and presented it to the poor people. Therefore, the whole of Buddhist teachings and practices always referred to the reality of the thing such as all things are impermanent (Anicca), full of suffering (Dukkha), and have no self at all



(Anatta). (Phra Promkunaporn (P.A. Payutto), 2012 : 23) On the same corner, Subhee Tumthongs hared the same ideal of Venerable Phra Promkunaporn that a man's life is noting rather than the combination of mental physical factors which running on the law of nature or the reality of depending re-origination. There was no creator and superpower deity who created the world. (Subhee Tumthong, 2012 : 49-50) Moreover, Venerable Buddhadadassa also agrees that the essence of Buddhism is nothing rather than the law of causality, no place for the man to attach or cling on as all things are conditioned with different factors, it is useless of cling on it. (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 2008 : 18-19)

All the three Buddhist scholars agree that the essence of Buddhism was the law of nature, no one created it, reality is reality and always be there forever, even there was no the Buddha.

The point on the core of Dhamma for living Venerable Phrapromkunaporn says on this concern that as the life of the being could be divided into 3 stages (arising, continuing, and ending), the most important core of life should be the developing of oneself to have wisdom, because, only with wisdom one could find

the ways to success, it guides the path of living and free him from suffering that of liberation. (Phra Promkunaporn (P.A. Payutto), 2012 : 45) Setting the 3 stages of live, he puts the principles of Threefold Trainings (Tisikkha) for developing a mankind with the means of integration. The Threefold Trainings was divided as Sila (moral conduct), Samathi (meditation), and Pañña. It is the process of developing the behavior, mind, and generating the wisdom leading to attain the goal of liberation. Living with wisdom, being far always greediness and attachment, is the way to eradicate Samudaya that is Nirodha. Whoever develop his live in accordance to the Three Fold Training, he would be noble man who achieve the certificate of education of lives. This Three Fold Trainings is the shorted version of the principles of the Noble Eightfold Path; while, looking at the view of Ariyasacca it is the path leading to the noble living. Here, the most Venerable Phra Promkunaporn mainly focused on the developing of wisdom as it is the key of all Buddhist practices that leading one to earn the right path of living, to change unwanted characteristic and eventually leading to liberation. (Phra Promkunaporn (P.A. Payutto), 2012 : 47).



The real essence of Buddhadhamma is liberation with one own potential among the community of noble friends (Kallaṇanamitta); again, the essence of Buddhist practice is Vimutti or being released from suffering and liberation. (Phra Pomkunaporn (P.A. Payutto), 2012 : 23) This goes in accordance with the Mahasaropamasutta where the Buddha addressed on the case that the monk Devadatta tried to instigate the Sangha to split up in which could be summarized thus, this noble doctrine is not windfall, neither the perfection of moral conduct nor meditation nor wisdom but it is the deliverance of mind (Cetovimutti) that stand as the total essence. (M.Mu. 12/311/346) Venerable Phra Promkunaporn further concluded thus:

1. Acquisition and fame are like the branch of wood.
2. Sila is like splinter.
3. Samadhi is like bark.
4. Wisdom is like sapwood.
5. Vimutti is like the essence of the wood.

Moreover, Venerable Buddhadasa also agrees that the Buddha once address the short conclusion of his wholesome teaching thus one could be purified by wisdom not by moral conduct nor meditation but

with wisdom that liberated oneself from conditioned suffering. (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1958 : 67-68).

To me, those two scholars pointed out the core Dhamma for living should be carry on with no attachment to anything. This concern goes on the same vein of the teaching in the Pali canon of the word “Cetovimutti” the deliverance of mind which is the total aim, the essence of the noble practices. The reason for the outcome of this conclusion arises from direct experience of the two great Buddhist scholars at all time, as they study the Dhamma together with putting it into practiced, then, share their direct experience to us. This is the beauty of impeccable in conduct and understanding of them.

4. Conclusion

Remarkable Point

Having read this book “The Essence of Buddhism (Dukha is for seeing, but Sukha is for living)” written from the speech of the great Buddhist scholar of all time, Venerable Phrapomkunaporn, even though it is the academic work, it could let a reader to have clear understanding on the essence of Buddhism. Being as a great Buddhist scholar of the world of Buddhist studies



would guarantee the authentic of his work. However, this book could draw attention of a reader to practice the Buddhadhamma as the true practical book for living.

Presenting Point

This book enlighten me to the essence of Buddhism. Reading this book, let me understand the truth of the things and the principles to leading us to realize the

reality of the world. Thus I do recommend this book to those who interested to study the Buddhist teachings and the core living of life. At last, reading this book, one would understand that Dukkha is the nature, so be with it; instead, we should look beyond such the point and prepare to develop oneself to the live with wisdom.

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