

Turning Point in Propagation of Buddhism

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His Holiness Sangharaja, Maha Nayaka and friends in the Dharma;

Today we have made a history on two counts. First, we have held the longest opening ceremony in the history of Buddhist conferences. Thanks to our lovely and patient audiences. Secondly, we have witnessed the great Buddhist conference participated by the supreme leaders from Buddhist countries. We have seen for the first time that the supreme patriarchs from Thailand, Laos and Kampuchea and Maha Nayaka from Sri Lanka are in the same platform with the Dalai Lama and other leaders of Buddhist communities. This means something. The significance of this conference should not be overlooked because it does not happen by chance. This conference should not be the first and the last.

I would like to point out that the success of this conference is due to the organizers, i.e. the Maha Bodhi Society and the personal charisma of Most Venerable Kyuse Enshinjo who has traveled extensively to many countries to make personal contact with leaders of Buddhist communities. His personal acquaintance has drawn the Buddhist leaders to the conference.

Another unique aspect of this conference is that both monks and laymen have equal roles to play for its success. When I attended other Buddhist conferences I would see either monks or laymen becoming dominant participants. It is totally different here. I can see that both monks and laymen are working together with spirit of Buddhist brotherhood.

**Rector of Mahachula Buddhist University, A Speech given at the Opening Ceremony of First World Buddhist Propagation Conference (WBPC), Kyoto, Japan, April 6, 1998.*

Our urgent agenda in this conference is to translate this short-lived dignitary's gathering into the long-term corporation. I have a high hope that the policy to be announced in our communique will be implemented immediately and effectively for the success of propagation of Buddhism in the world.

What kind of Buddhism that we are going to propagate? First of all, we should focus on the Buddha's main teachings which are acceptable to both Theravada and Mahayana traditions. Although there are some differences in our external practices such as rituals and ceremonies, both Theravada and Mahayana are equally labelled as 'Buddhism' because the main teachings of the Buddha are still preached and practiced in both the schools. Germs of Mahayana Buddhism are found in the Pali Tipitaka. The Buddhist scholars reach the agreement that the following are the Buddha's main teachings commonly found in both Theravada and Mahayana traditions.

1. The Belief in the Triple Gem, i.e. the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha.

The point is that the Buddha and the Dhamma are one. As the Buddha said, "One who sees the Dhamma sees the Buddha. (*Yo dhammam passati so mam passti.*)" The Sangha is a group of noble persons who realizes the Dhamma. Therefore, the Sangha signifies the group of perfected persons (*Arahant*) who see the Buddha. The unity of the Triple Gem is to be found in the perfected persons. Mahayana Buddhism interpret this act of "seeing the Buddha" as realization of the Buddha-nature within oneself.

2. Non-existence of God, the Creator of the world.

In the Pali Tipitaka, *Brahma* is a name of God. He is described as "the Mighty, the All-seeing, the Ruler, the Lord of all, the Maker, the Creator, the Chief of all, the Father of all." The Buddha rejects such a conception of God by saying, "the Tathagata, not grasping after that conception, is set free."

3. The Law of Dependent Origination (*Paticcasamuppada*).

The world is not created by the Creator God. It comes into existence in accordance with the law of Dependent Origination (*Paticcasamuppada*) and the whole course of the universe is governed by the law. *“Wether Tathagatas arise or not, this order exists namely the fixed nature of phenomena, the regular pattern of phenomena or conditionality (Idappaccayata). This the Tathagata discovers and comprehends; having discovered and comprehended it, he points it out, teaches it..”* The concepts of Karma and rebirth are explained as parts of the law of Dependent Origination.

4. Three Common Characteristics of Things, i.e. Impermanence (*Anicca*), Suffering (*Dukkha*), and Selflessness (*Anatta*).

The Buddha said in the Pali Tipitaka; *“All component things are impermanent. All component things are subject to suffering. All dhammas are not-self.”* The concept of three characteristics of things is popular even in Mahayana Buddhism as Most Ven. Enshinjoh has touched upon it in his talk and His Holiness the Dalai Lama has mentioned the quantum theory. This theory proposes the existence of the smallest amount of a physical quantity that can exist as a unit of energy.

Scientists today find out that a atom can be divided into three components; electron, proton, and neutron. No component can stand alone on its own; its functioning depends on the interrelationship with the other parts. This can be seen from the way the electrons orbit around the protons and neutrons. If someone tries to split up the nucleus of an atom by fission, the atomic mass will turn into energy immediately; as we learn from Einstein's equation: $E = mc^2$. This equation tells us that substance equates energy.

Einstein's equation reveals to us that the atomic mass is energy. Because all things in the world arise from atoms, they are like energy fields spreading all over the universe. In these

energy fields, there is no permanent entity. Things are impermanent, subject to change and not-self or non-substantial. They are empty of independent entities (*sunyata*).

5. The Four Noble Truths, viz., (1) suffering, (2) cause of Suffering, (3) cessation of Suffering, and (4) the Noble Eightfold Path Leading to Nibbana.

The fourth truth is the methodology or practice of the Treefold Training (*Sikkha*) i.e., morality, concentration and wisdom. It constitutes the middle way (*Majjhima Patipada*) which teaches the Buddhists to keep the balanced way of life. The middle way seems to be forgotten by the Buddhists nowadays. That is why we are facing the economic crisis in Thailand, South Korea and other countries in Asia. Japan is also affected by the economic crisis. If we have faithfully followed the Buddha's teaching of the Noble Eightfold Path, we would have avoided the economic crisis. In the Noble Eightfold Path is included the right livelihood (*Samma-ajiva*) which is a key concept of Buddhist economy. According to the Buddhist economy, material well-being should not be separated from spiritual well-being. We are facing the crisis because we neglect the spiritual well-being. When the Japanese people first came across Western technology they set the policy that Western technology had to go side by side with Japanese culture. That is to put the Eastern mind into the Western technology.

Right now we are living in the age of information technology. The way we propagate Buddhism is affected by this technology of information. How did the Buddhists preserve the Tipitaka, the Three Collections of the Buddha's teachings, after the Buddha passed away? They did it by memorizing, reciting and chanting it. This method was proper in the agricultural age. Then came the industrial age when the Buddhists preserved the Tipitaka by publishing it in the book form. They produced thousand copies of Tipitaka in a few days. How do they preserve and distribute the Tipitaka in the information age? I would say that Thailand is the first country to put all 45 volumes of the Tipitaka on the CD-Rom with the initiative of His Majesty the King of Thailand. We can make a search of a word in the Tipitaka in just a few seconds. My students at Mahachula Buddhist

University are learning how to use the computer in order to study the Tipitaka on the CD-Rom. This is just an example of the advantage of information technology in propagating Buddhism.

How can we utilize this advanced technology in propagating Buddhism? One thing that we can do immediately is to create a Buddhist network throughout the world. By organizing a teleconference through satellite we can save both time and money in bringing Buddhist leaders to a meeting like this one. The Buddhists living in different countries can create the network of communication through the superhighway of information in order to share ideas and work together. I hope that the Buddhist network will be materialized one day. We are trying to create such a network in Mahachula Buddhist University which consists of ten branches or campuses. We try to join them together by the internet and other networks of information. If the Buddhists throughout the world can join hands and work together through the network then we will have unity and success. As the Buddha said, ***"the unity of the group is a source of happiness."***

Buddhism is like a bird. For the bird to fly, it needs two wings. One wing is Theravada Buddhism and another wing is Mahayana Buddhism. In the past these wings worked in different directions. Right now we try to make them work together to carry the bird of Buddhism to right direction and to spread the message of Buddha throughout the world. It will be a successful mission if these two wings join together in the same mission. I hope that these two wings will not forget this special occasion of the historic meeting and start working together.

I would like to look at this Conference from viewpoints of the Thai Buddhists. This is the first time that the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand accepted the invitation to attend the conference outside the country. People in Thailand ask how this happens. Who is this Most Ven. Enshinjoh? How can he invite the Supreme Patriarch to visit Japan? The Buddhists in many countries have extended invitations to the Supreme Patriarch with no avail. His Holiness chooses to be here instead.

I personally would like to see a concrete result of the Conference. Don't just sit and talk. Please think about the implementation of the policy which follows our discussion.

Thank you for your attention.