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Exploring the Way of Improving Patience : There is not an Actual ‘Me’

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Respected provost, Miss Deng, good morning. My name is Manyu Yang. The topic which I would like to share with you today is about how to improve patience.

In Buddhistic practicing, the level of patience is an important part. In *the Discourse on the Ten Wholesome Ways of Action*, we can find many principles which can make our lives better, such as ‘no killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct, no lying’¹...etc. These are called Buddhistic precepts, upholding precepts is the fundamental step of Buddhistic practicing. However, once we start to learn and try to obey these precepts, we realise that it is not easy to follow them. For example, Buddha told us not to be greedy, not to get angry, but we always want to have one more bit when having tasty foods, and feel upset when others take away things belong to us. Upholding precepts requires people to have high level of patience and endurance.

In practicing Bodhisattva’s Six Paramitas, ‘Patience’ comes after the ‘Precepts Observation’. It is exact the Precepts Observation allows us to know that how impatient we are, and only through following precepts, the patience will get improved. However, when looking at these precepts, we always feel like ‘we know, these are all kind deeds, but how can I give up all the desires which are against to the precepts’? If you have the same problem, Citta-matra (唯識學), which has also been translated as ‘mind-only school’ may bring solutions to you.

¹ *Foshuo shishan yedao jing* 佛說十善業道經, to see *Shengxue genzhigen* 聖學根之根(Taipei:Shijie Shuju Press, 2015), p.45

This presentation will be divided into five parts, an introduction comes first, and then I will introduce you some questions of a mathematician called Marcus, and the third to fifth parts are about the detailed explanation of the first branch of One Hundred Dharmas, the final part is a conclusion.

1. Introduction to the Mind-only School

Within the phrase the ‘mind-only school’(唯識), the word ‘mind’ is called *shi* 識 in Han Buddhism. The character *shi* refers to not only ‘mind’ and ‘consciousness’, it is a Buddhistic term which can involve the whole spiritual world. People always believe what they see is true, what they touch is reliable. They observe these materials as something solid. However, the mind-only school tells people that the materials do not exist, what we see and touch is only an delusion created by minds, and beyond these solid things, it is the consciousness manipulating everything. A treatise called *Baifa mingmen lun* 百法明門論 is the basic textbook for starters of the mind-only school. Its author is Vasubandhu(天親菩薩) who lived in almost the year 100 B.C.E. He wrote this book in order to summarise and simplify a sutra called the *Discourse on the Stages of Concentration Practice* (瑜伽師地論). In this sutra, all things in this universe had been categorized into 660 kinds. However, Vasubandhu thought it is still too much for common people to learn. Hence he had simplified them into 100 categories which is called the One Hundred Dharmas. By studying the One Hundred Dharmas, the sense of who you are will be overturned, and people will be educated with the truth that is: there is no actual ‘me’(一切法無我).² This cognition will help practitioners a lot especially when they are practicing patience.

2. Marcus’ questions and One Hundred Dharmas

Before we dive into the world of mind-only school and the One Hundred

² *Baifa mingmen lun* 百法明門論, to see Shi Zhixu 釋智旭, *Dacheng baifa mingmen lun zhijie* 大乘百法明門論直解, *Ouyi dashi quanji* 藕益大師全集(Chengdu: Sichuan Bashu Press, 2013), vol.6, p.496

Dharmas(百法), I would like to introduce you a documentary produced by BBC called *the Secret You*.³ In this documentary, a mathematician called Marcus du Sautoy were interested in a series of questions about his own mind and consciousness. He became curious about it because he was confused of where does his ideas of mathematics come from, and he thought if he could find out the origin of ideas, he would be able to gain more of them. This is a really smart way of thinking, and he took part in many medical experiments which were specifically designed to rob him of his faculties, to see if the scientists can find out where his consciousness is. The reason for using Marcus's case here is the questions he raised in the documentary are all closely related to the One Hundred Dharmas. In another word, his questions can all be explained by One Hundred Dharmas. Even the results of the experiments are showing us how One Hundred Dharmas actually work during our daily lives. Due to the time limits, it is impossible to introduce all of the Dharmas today. So I will be focusing on the first branch which is called *Xinfa* 心法, the Consciousness Citta-dharma. In venerable master Chingkung's dharma talks, he pointed out that the five branches of the One Hundred Dharmas are arranged in order.⁴ Therefore, it is important to learn it step by step, and materials included in the first branch are enough to answer most of Marcus' questions.

3. The Former Six Consciousnesses

There are total eight categories involved in the Consciousness Citta-dharma (心法), which are the Seeing-consciousness, Hearing-consciousness, Smelling-consciousness, Tasting, Kinetic, Empiric, manas and Warehouse consciousness. The former six consciousnesses are relatively easy to understand. In the very beginning of

³ BBC, Two Horizon-The Secret You, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00nhv56>, accessed in 17th Dec 2021

⁴ Venerable Master Chingkung's Dharma Talks, Baifa mingmenlun 百法明門論, No.10-008, Episode 2, http://www1.amtb.tw/baen/jiangtang.asp?web_choice=21&web_rel_index=258, accessed in 17th Dec 2021

the documentary, Marcus had asked ‘how does my brain turn colour into a private experience in my mind? how do I experience the feeling of sun on my skin? Or for that matter, the sound of a voice?’⁵ These questions are related with these former six consciousnesses(前六識).

Marcus was very smart to raise this question, because he had realised that there are differences between the actual colour and the appearance of this colour in his mind. Hence he was curious about how does this special feeling form in each person’s mind toward one same material. This phenomena is firstly related with the former six consciousnesses. Taking Seeing-consciousness as an example, in the *Weishi yijian* 唯識易簡 written by Tang Dayuan, the Seeing-consciousness is explained as ‘the function of perceiving form objects based on the faculty of sight’(依眼根了別色塵之作用).⁶ The faculty of sight does not equal to the eyes, it is a concept that is very hard to understand. However, what we can tell is the Seeing-consciousness incessantly perceiving the outside environment for the other consciousnesses. Hence the Hearing-consciousness will be perceiving the information of sound, the Smelling-consciousness will be perceiving odour and so on. The former five consciousnesses can only observe the outside environment without telling its specific differences. The function of distinguishing the differences is from the Empiric-consciousness.

4. The *Manas* and the secret of ‘me’

Till this point, some of you may realise we have not talked about how does the sense of self form during the former six consciousnesses perceiving the outside environment. As Marcus asked, ‘How does this private experience form?’ It does not contained any sense of self at the first moment we see the red colour, but when we

⁵ BBC, Two Horizon-The Secret You, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00nhv56>, accessed in 17th Dec 2021

⁶ Tang Dayuan 唐大圓, *Weishi yijian* 唯識易簡(Shanghai:Shanghai shijie fojiao jushilin), p. 47

look at it and start to think, this red is old-fashioned, or this colour is dazzling, the personal experience has formed. However, where does this sense of self come from? Does the Empiric-consciousness add it by his own wish? Actually, the sense of me comes from the seventh consciousness which is called *manas*. It is also the faculty(意根) of the Empiric-consciousness. The behaviour of thinking of this red is old-fashioned or dazzling, is called *wojian* 我見, the self-view, it is one of the four main afflictions caused by *manas*.

It is unfortunate that the sense of self is called affliction in Buddhism considering all of us have it, and its origin is *manas*. *Manas* is a Sanskrit word, its original meaning is ‘polluted consciousness’(染污意), saying it is not purely kind but has been polluted by these afflicted thoughts. The main function of *manas* is to create the sense of self, with the sense of self, there will be four kinds of afflicted thoughts which are self-craving(我貪), delusion regarding the self(我癡), arrogance(我慢) and self-view(我見).

Next, I would like to share with you a short video which reveals the function of *manas* more clearly. It is during Marcus’s journey to Sweden, join in the experiment conducted by a scientist called Henrik Ehrsson.

It is fascinating that Henrik designed such an experiment, which can easily separate our consciousness and our body. In the video, Marcus’ consciousness were easily fooled by giving his eyes and body confusing information, and his consciousness gradually took another spot as ‘himself’ instead of his own physical body. This is because the sense of self does not exist in his body, it is created by *manas* and carried out by Empiric-consciousness and affected by the information perceived by the former five consciousnesses which are all intangible. Henrik also

told us that ‘the brain is always trying to solve the question, ‘where am I’?’⁷ This attachment to the sense of self is the beginning of delusion, and being constantly fooled by this delusion, and our wisdom is actually concealed during this process. As Marcus said ‘That's extraordinary that the brain can take all that huge amount of information and produce just the sense of one me’.⁸ It is a question worth thinking. It is very the sense of self prevent us from being smarter and more capable. The sense of self is like an obstacle, a limitation set inherently, making all of our consciousnesses working for that ‘self’, while there is actually not an real one. Thinking about the experiment, our sense of self can be easily changed by some simply tricks, it is not something worth attaching to .

5. The origin of wisdom : *ālaya*

However, it is still not easy for people to give up the sense of self because that will make us feel dreadful, and we cannot imagine what will happen if we lose this sense of self. However, if we know that there is much bigger world existing behind *manas*, the situation may change. This is the last Consciousness Citta-dharma which is called *ālaya*, the Warehouse consciousness.

We have mentioned that the sense of self is created by *manas*, and its basis is the Warehouse consciousness, honestly, a very small part of Warehouse consciousness. To say, if we let go of the sense of self, we can truly see the rest of the world. Seeing the name of *ālaya*, we should know it is like a warehouse which can stock many things. In the Han Buddhistic classics, *ālaya* was translated as *zang* 藏, and the word *zang* contains three meanings, which are storer (能藏), the stored(所藏) and appropriated

⁷ BBC, Two Horizon-The Secret You, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00nhv56>, accessed in 17th Dec 2021

⁸ BBC, Two Horizon-The Secret You, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00nhv56>, accessed in 17th Dec 2021

store(執藏).⁹ The sense of self is related with the ‘appropriated store’, which also refers to *manas*. As a huge warehouse, all the wisdom is locked inside by *manas*, through breaking the sense of self, people can obtain the key of the warehouse and be able to access to the wisdom hidden in our nature.

What is more, *ālaya* is also the changed-version of Buddha’s nature. By breaking the sense of self, people not only obtain the key of the warehouse, but also be able to turn their Warehouse consciousness into the Great perfect mirror wisdom(大圓鏡智). This is the first step of turning the Eight Consciousnesses Citta-dharma into Four Kinds of Wisdom (轉八識成四智). After finishing this whole process, a common person will become a buddha and become able to access the wisdom in their nature.

6. Conclusion

Through learning about the first branch of the One Hundred Dharmas, we get to know more about the truth that the material world is manipulated by the consciousness, and what we can perceive now is only a very small part of our nature. Buddhist practicing is not forcing us to do something against to our own wishes. It just provides us a way to improve ourselves both physically and spiritually. As the sense of self is only a delusion created by *manas*, and it prevents us from accessing the wisdom stored in nature, knowing these two facts, a smart person would choose to let go of it and keep his way of practicing.

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⁹ Venerable Kuiji 窺基, *Prajñā-pāramitā xinjing youzan* 般若波羅蜜多心經幽贊, to see CBETA ONLINE, https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw/zh/T33n1710_p0539a12?q=%E6%88%91%E6%84%9B%E5%9F%B7%E8%97%8F&l=0539a12&near_word=&kwic_around=30, accessed in 16th Dec 2021.

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