

CHAPTER III.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

One day Prefect Wai entertained the Patriarch and asked him to preach to a big gathering. At the end of the feast, Prefect Wai asked him to mount the pulpit. After bowing twice reverently in company with other officials, scholars, and commoners, Prefect Wai said, "I have heard what Your Holiness preached. It is really so deep that it is beyond our mind and speech. Now I have some doubts which I hope you will kindly clear up for me."

"If you have any doubts," replied the Patriarch, "please ask, and I shall explain." "What you preach are the fundamental principles taught by Bodhidharma. Are they not?" "Yes," replied the Patriarch.

"I was told," said Prefect Wai, "that in Bodhidharma's first interview with Emperor Wu of Liang, he was asked what merits would the Emperor get for the work of his life in building temples, allowing new monks to be ordained (royal consent was necessary at that time), giving alms and entertaining the order; and his reply was that really these would bring no merits. Now, I cannot understand why he gave such an answer. Will you please explain."

"Really these would bring no merits," replied the Patriarch. "Don't you doubt the words of the past Sage (Bodhidharma). Emperor Wu's mind was under an erroneous impression and he did not know the orthodox teaching. Such deeds as building temples, allowing new monks to be ordained, giving alms and entertaining the order will bring you only felicities which should not be taken for merits. Merits are to be found within the Dharmakaya (Body of the Law) and they have nothing to do with practices for attaining felicities."

The Patriarch added, "Realisation of the essence of mind is Kung (good desert), and equality is Tak (good quality). When our mental activity works without any impediment, so that we are in a position to know constantly the true state and the mysterious function of our own mind, then we are said to have acquired Kung Tak (merits). Within, to keep the mind in a condescending mood is Kung; and without, to behave oneself according to propriety is Tak. That all things are the manifestation of the essence of mind is Kung, and that the quintessence of mind is free from idle thoughts is Tak. Not to go astray from the essence of mind is Kung, and not to pollute the mind in using it is Tak. If you seek for merits within the Dharmakaya and do it according to what I have just said, then what you acquire are real merits. He who works for merits does not slight others; and on all occasions, he treats every body with respect. He who is in the habit of looking down upon others has not got rid of the erroneous idea of a self, which indicates his lack of Kung. Because of his egotism and his habitual contempt for all others, he knows not the real essence of mind; and this shows his lack of Tak. Learned Audience, when our mental activity works without interruption, then it is Kung; and when our mind functions in a straightforward manner, then it is Tak. To train our own mind is Kung, and to train our own body is Tak. Learned Audience, merits should

be sought within the essence of mind and they cannot be acquired by almsgiving, entertaining the monks, etc. We should therefore distinguish between felicities and merits. There is nothing wrong in what our Patriarch said. It is Emperor Wu himself who did not know the true way."

Prefect Wai then asked the next question, "I notice that it is a common practice for monks and laymen to recite the name of Amitabha with the hope of being born in the Pure Land of the West. To clear up my doubts, will you please tell me whether it is possible for them to be born there or not."

"Please listen to me carefully, Sir," replied the Patriarch, "for I am going to explain this to you now. According to the Sutra spoken by the Bhagavat in Shravasti City for leading people to the Pure Land of the West, it is quite clear that the Pure Land is not far away from here. But when we consider the distance in mileage, it is 103,000 which really represent the 'ten evils' and 'eight errors' within us. On this account, we may say that it is far away. To those of inferior mentality, it is certainly far away; but to the superior men, we may say that it is quite near. Although the Dharma is uniform, men vary in their mentality. Because they differ from one another in their degree of enlightenment or ignorance, therefore some understand the Law quicker than the others. While ignorant men recite the name of Amitabha and pray to be born in the Pure Land; the enlightened purify their mind, and as the Buddha said, 'When the mind is pure, the Buddha Land is simultaneously pure'.

"Although you are a native of the East, if your mind is pure, you are sinless. On the other hand, even if you were a native of the West, an impure mind could not free you from sin. When the people of the East commit a sin, they recite the name of Amitabha and pray to be born in the West; but in the case of the sinners who are natives of the West, where should they pray to be born in then? Ordinary men and ignorant people understand neither the essence of mind nor the Pure Land within themselves, so they wish to be born here or there (literally East or West). To the enlightened, everywhere is the same: as the Buddha said, 'No matter where they happen to be, they are always happy and comfortable'.

"Sir, if your mind is free from evil, the West is not far from here; but difficult indeed it would be for one whose heart is impure to be born there by invoking Amitabha!

"Now, I advise you, Learned Audience, to do away with the 'ten evils' first, then we would have travelled one hundred thousand miles. For the next step, do away with the 'eight errors', and this would mean another eight thousand miles traversed. If we can realise the essence of mind at all times and behave in a straightforward manner on all occasions, in the twinkling of an eye we may reach the Pure Land and there see the Amitabha at once.

"Sir, if you only put into practice the ten good deeds, then there would be no necessity for you to be born there. On the other hand, if you do not do away with the 'ten evils' in your mind, which Buddha will come to take you there? If you understand the 'Birthless Doctrine' (which puts an end to the cycle of birth and death) of the 'Sudden' School, it takes you only a moment to

see the West. If you do not understand, how can you reach there by reciting the name of Amitabha, as the distance is so far? Now, how would you like it, if I am going to shift the Pure Land to your presence within this moment, so that all of you can see it?"

The congregation made obeisance and replied, "If we might see the Pure Land here, then there would be no necessity for us to desire to be born there. Will Your Holiness kindly let all of us see it by having it removed here."

The Patriarch said, "Dear Sirs, the physical body of ours is the city. Our eyes, ears, nose, and tongue are the gates. There are five external gates (eyes, ears, the nose, the tongue and the body), while the internal one is ideation. The mind is the ground. The essence of mind is the King who lives in the domain of the mind. While the essence of mind is in, the King is in, and our body and mind exist. When the essence of mind is out, there would be no King and our body and mind would decay. We should work for Buddhahood within the essence of mind, and we should not look for it apart from ourselves. He who is kept in ignorance of his essence of mind is an ordinary being. He who is enlightened in his essence of mind is a Buddha. To be merciful is Avalokitesvara (one of the two principal Bodhisattvas of the Pure Land). To take pleasure in almsgiving is Mahasthama (name of the other Bodhisattva). Competency for a pure life is Sakyamuni (one of the epithets of Buddha Gautama). Equality and straightforwardness is Amitabha. The idea of a self (Atma) or that of a being is Mount Meru. A depraved mind is the ocean. Klesa (defilement) is the billow. Wickedness is the evil dragon. Falsehood is the devil. The wearisome senseobjects are the aquatic animals. Greed and hatred are the hells. Ignorance and infatuation are the brutes.

"Learned Audience, if you constantly perform the ten good deeds, the paradise will appear to you at once. When you get rid of the idea of a self and that of a being, Mount Meru will topple. When our mind is no longer depraved, the ocean (of existence) will be dried up. When you are free from Klesa, billows and waves (of the ocean of existence) will be calmed down. When wickedness is alien to you, fish and evil dragons will die out.

"Within the domain of our mind, there is a Tathagata of Enlightenment who sends forth a very powerful light that illuminates externally the six gates (of sensation) and purifies them. This light is strong enough to pierce through the six Kama Heavens (heavens of desire); and when it is turned inwardly to the essence of mind, it eliminates at once the three poisonous elements (greed, hatred, and infatuation), purges away immediately our sins which may lead us to the hells or to the other evil realms, and enlightens us thoroughly within and without, so that we are not different from those born in the Pure Land of the West. Now, if we do not train ourselves up to this standard, how can we reach the Pure Land?"

Having heard what the Patriarch said, the congregation knew their essence of mind very clearly. They made obeisance and exclaimed in one voice, "Well done!" They also chanted, "May all the sentient beings of this Universe who have heard this sermon at once understand it intuitively."

The Patriarch added, "Learned Audience, those who wish to train themselves (spiritually) may do so at home. It is quite unnecessary for them to stay in monasteries. Those who train themselves at home may be likened unto a native of the East who is kind-hearted, while those who stay in monasteries but neglect their work differ not from a native of the West who is evil in heart. So far as the mind is pure, then it is the 'Western Pure Land of one's own essence of mind'."

Prefect Wai asked, "How should we train ourselves at home? Will you please teach us."

The Patriarch replied, "I am going to give you a 'Formless' Stanza. If you put its teaching into actual practice, you will be in the same position as those who live with me permanently. On the other hand, if you do not practise it, what progress can you make in the spiritual path, even though you cut your hair and leave home for good (*i.e.* to join the order)? The stanza reads:—

For a fair mind, observation of precepts (Sila) is unnecessary.

For straightforward behaviour, practice in Dhyana (contemplation) may be dispensed with.

On the principle of gratefulness, we support our parents and serve them filially.

On the principle of righteousness, the superior and the inferior stand for each other (in time of need).

On the principle of complaisance, the senior and the junior are in affectionate terms.

On the principle of forbearance (Ksanti), we quarrel not even in the midst of a hostile crowd.

If we can persevere till fire can be obtained through rubbing a piece of wood, Then the red lotus (the Buddha-nature) will surely shoot out from the black mire (the unenlightened state).

That which is of bitter taste is bound to be good medicine.

That which sounds unpleasant to the ear is certainly a frank advice.

By amending our mistakes, we get wisdom.

By defending our faults, we betray an unsound mind.

In our daily life, we should as a rule practise altruism.

But Buddhahood is not to be attained by giving away money as charity.

Bodhi is to be found within our own mind,

And there is no necessity to look for mysticism from without.

Hearers of this stanza who put its teaching into actual practice

Will find paradise in their very presence.

The Patriarch added, "Learned Audience, all of you should put into practice what is taught in this stanza, so that you can realise the essence of mind and attain Buddhahood directly. The Dharma waits for no one. I am going back to Tso Kai, so the assembly may now break up. If you have any doubt, you may go there to ask me."

At this juncture, Prefect Wai, the government officials, pious men, and devout ladies who were present were all enlightened. Faithfully they accepted the teaching and put it into practice.