

MODEL SUBJECT NO. 84 from The Blue Cliff Records

The Hekigan Roku, translated into English by R.D.M. Shaw under the title of The Blue Cliff Records, is a famous collection of 100 ko-an stories compiled by Set-cho Juken (A.D. 980-1052), who added an "Appreciatory Word" to each one. A later Zen master, En-go Koku-gon (A.D. 1063-1135) added his "Introductory Word" as a kind of Preface to each Main Subject. The following is a translation and commentary of Main Subject No. 84 by Reverend Suzuki.

YUI-MA'S "THE DOCTRINE OF ATTAINING NON-DUALITY"

This Model Subject is about the Yui-ma-kyo (the Vimalakirti-nirdesa Sutra). This sutra is as famous as the Sho-man-gyo (the Srimala-simha-nada Sutra). Both sutras relate stories reputed to have taken place during the time of Sakamuni Buddha, and both have great Mahayanistic spirit. The hero of the Yui-ma-kyo, Yui-ma, was a "ko-ji" (a householder or lay Buddhist), while the heroine of the Sho-man-gyo was a daughter of King Ha-shi-noku (prasenajit) and empress of a king in a neighboring country. She became an adherent of Buddhism and received "juki" (recognition as one who will achieve Buddhahood), and gave her people a sermon about Mahayana Buddhism in the presence of Buddha.

When Yui-ma was ill, Buddha told his disciples and Bodhisattvas to visit him in his sickbed, but no one could accept the order because they had had bitter experience with the lay Buddhist before. And his illness was a very unusual one: he was suffering the suffering of all sentient beings.

Mon-ju-bosatsu (Manjusri), the Bodhisattva of the Zendo (Zen practice hall), at last came to visit him accompanied by thirty-one fellow Bodhisattvas. Mon-ju-bosatsu found Yui-ma in a large vacant room. When he asked what Yui-ma's illness was, Yui-ma said that he was suffering from the same illness of all sentient beings and because sentient beings suffer he suffers. He said that he wanted to provide a perfect remedy for all who suffer from ignorance and passion. After asking questions and giving answers to each other, they revealed how to attain a true understanding of the non-duality of phenomena.

To these two typical Mahayana sutras and to Myo-ho-zenge-kyo (the Saddharma-Pundrika Sutra), the famous Japanese prince Sho-toku (574-622) who built Ho-ryu-ji, (the oldest wooden temple in the world,) wrote a commentary and delivered lectures to the Empress Sui-ko. This is regarded as one of the three best commentaries in India, China, and Japan. The prince set up the constitution of old Japan based for the first time on the spirit of those sutras.

The ninth section of Yui-ma-kyo is entitled "doctrine of entering into non-duality," and this is also the title of our Model Subject No. 84.

Introductory Word:

Introducing Engo says: There is nothing to be decided upon as right (non-attachment) or wrong (non-discrimination). If we get away from right or wrong and forget all about gaining or losing, we will become utterly naked and independent. Now what is in front of us and what is behind us? Some monk may come out and say: In front of us there are the Worship Hall and the Temple gate, and behind us there are the Sleeping Room and Sitting Room of the Head Monk (Ho-jyo). Can you tell me that this monk has open eyes or not? If you can, I will allow you to see men of old (Yui-ma and Mon-ju).

Note:

"Ho-jyo": Literally "ho-jyo" means a ten-foot square room in Chinese or Japanese. It now means the sitting room of the resident monk or priest. Sometimes we address the resident monk or priest himself as "Ho-jyo". The source of this Zen Buddhist custom originated in a very dramatic story about the Yui-ma of this subject, a story which likewise can be found in the Vimalakirti Sutra. Yui-ma is said to have been living in a ten-foot square hut in Vaisali and at one time would have accepted 32,000 guests in it! (32,000 means innumerable or all sentient beings; in his room Yui-ma suffered their suffering).

"Oneness of duality": This doctrine is the essential teaching of Buddhism. Oneness and duality are two sides of one reality. Reality has two inseparable sides like a paper-slide picture. Both the reading side for a teacher and the watching side for children are needed. If one side is set apart from the other, it is no longer a paper-slide picture. One side of Reality is diversity, and the other side of it is universality. When universality reveals itself in the diversity of phenomena, then we have universal validity which at the same time has the deepest personal meaning. Universal truth is perceived as unique and personal to yourself alone. Enlightenment is the acceptance of all teachings as if they were only for you yourself. From this acceptance springs a great gratitude to all the Buddhas.

Above the earth there is sky, below the sky there is earth. In the light there is darkness, in darkness light. The sun shines on the moon, and the moon reflects the sunshine. The good exists because of the bad; the bad exists because of the good. There is nothing good nor bad by itself. If you have understood what is good, you have understood what is bad. The good is something you want to do, and the bad is something you do not want to do. Once having decided to do or not to do something, it is what you actually do that counts. Within this comprehensive understanding of reality, everything that exists will in its true sense be the aim of your activity and will encourage your practice.

Main Subject:

Attention! Yui-ma-kitsu (Vimalakirti) asked Manjusri: "What is Bodhisattva's doctrine of attaining non-duality?"

Manjusri said: "In my comprehension, on each doctrine there should not be any word, any verses, any interpretations or any understanding. This is the true entrance to the doctrine of non-duality, and all discussion about it makes no sense. This is the doctrine of attaining non-duality."

Then Mon-ju asked Yui-ma-kitsu: "Each one of us already has finished giving our interpretations; what is your explanation of this doctrine of the oneness of duality?"

Here Set-cho said: "What did Yui-ma say? Did you understand?" (Set-cho was the compiler of the Blue Cliff Records).

Note:

Each one of the Bodhisattvas had tried their interpretations on the supreme doctrine of non-duality. When Yui-ma was asked to give some interpretation to the doctrine, he did not say anything about it. None of the other interpretations were better than the silence of Yui-ma.

If you understand this Model Subject in this way only it may not be perfect, because Yui-ma's silence was not just to keep his mouth still. Set-cho was very kind to us just to leave this point to our own effort, so that we would not be caught by Yui-ma's powerful silence. Yui-ma's way, including his silence, is a good example of the Bodhisattva's way: to help others before helping himself, through suffering the same suffering with others, in accordance with the circumstances and the temperament of the people.

Appreciatory Word:

Totsu! Foolish aged Yui-ma!¹ Grieving for the people who suffer in vain,² he helplessly laid himself in the sickbed at Vaisali. His whole body was withered and exhausted. When the teachers of the seven Buddhas came, he tidied³ up his room thoroughly. Earnestly he asked them about the doctrine of obtaining non-duality, but when he was asked back about it, he seems to have collapsed.⁴ However, he was not broken down.⁵ Even the Golden-maned Lion (Bodhisattva Mon-ju) could not follow in Yui-ma's track.

6 Notes:

1. An ironical eulogy by Set-cho of Yui-ma, who is a good example of the Bodhisattva.
2. See the quotation from Dogen's Sho-bogenzo, below.
3. He cleared up his mind of discriminating ideas, of gaining or losing, good or bad, and waited for Buddha's disciples' visit.
4. When Mon-ju was asked about the doctrine of obtaining non-duality, he said: "No words, no verses, no interpretations." But Yui-ma did not say anything when he was asked back about it, just as if he had collapsed. But this "no answer" in this case was the best relish ever given by any disciple of Buddha to the eternal teaching of non-duality.
5. However, later, even Zen students became attached to his silence without knowing that we should realize the same truth even in the prattle of an old man. Set-cho is said to be very kind in that he did not say anything about Yui-ma's silence so that his students would not be attached to the practice of silence alone. When Mon-ju was talking about the ultimate teaching, the whole world was nothing but Mon-ju's and there was no Yui-ma; and when Mon-ju and the other disciples of Buddha were listening to Yui-ma, the whole universe was Yui-ma and there were no disciples of Buddha. For this reason, you should say that before Mon-ju disappears Yui-ma appears expressing one whole universe in different connotations. This is called the oneness of the duality or the doctrine of non-duality. The Bodhisattva's Way of life is supported by this truth.

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After all, Yui-ma's silence and his illness should be understood not just as the "finger to point at the moon", but also as the actual practice of the ultimate teaching of Buddha. This is the Bodhisattva's way which is neither for yourself nor for others, but for Buddhism. Dogen-Zen master says: "When you practice right practice, your inner treasure house will open by itself and the treasures will offer themselves for your free use (Oneness of duality)."

"By the Awakening of the Wisdom-heart is meant the earnest desire to save all beings, even before we ourselves (laymen and priests) have attained Enlightenment. Anyone who cherishes this desire is the great teacher of all living beings. Even a little girl seven years old may be the teacher of four classes of men. This spirituality has nothing to do with sexes or age in the law of the supreme teaching of Buddha (Duality of oneness)."

"The Buddha Sakamuni is to be found in one's own mind. Find out what this one mind is, and by so doing you will show your gratitude to the Buddha." (Dogen).