

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

The contents of this issue of the *Wind Bell* were originally presented in the context of six lectures given by Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, at Zen Mountain Center at the beginning of the fall 1968 practice period. The material has been edited by Suzuki Roshi and the editor, for the sake of clarity and continuity, into four chapters, with a discussion of some main points following.

During the fall practice period students at Zen Mountain Center studied the *Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra* (the *Lotus of the True Law*, or simply the *Lotus Sūtra*). This Sūtra, considered the "King Sūtra" of Mahāyāna Buddhism, contains what many great teachers of the past have considered the quintessential teachings of the later Mahāyāna. As well as being the focal point of such schools as *Tendai* and *Nichiren*, the *Lotus* is central in virtually all sects of Mahāyāna Buddhism. It is studied, chanted, and venerated in the temples and monasteries of both the *Soto* and *Rinzai* schools of Japanese Zen.

Essential in understanding and interpreting the *Lotus Sūtra* is an understanding of the *Trikāya*, the Three Bodies of Buddha. (The prefix *tri* means, as in English, triple; *kāya* means body). This Mahāyāna Trinity is composed of the *Nirmānakāya Buddha*, the *Sambhogakāya Buddha*, and the *Dharmakāya Buddha*. The phenomenal *Nirmānakāya*, or Transformation Body, and the noumenal *Sambhogakāya*, Bliss or Reward Body, are aspects of the One Ultimate Reality, the *Dharmakāya*, or Law Body. The historical Śākyamuni Buddha is considered a *Nirmānakāya Buddha*, while Amida Buddha is one example of an embodiment of the *Sambhogakāya Buddha* in its usual sense. The *Dharmakāya Buddha*, beyond all conceptualization, represents the highest spiritual quality embodying all perfections, all processes, all manifestations.

The doctrine of the *Trikāya* is of fundamental importance in delineating the teachings of the Mahāyāna, and shows clearly the development of the conception of Buddha from the earlier *Theravādin* doctrine to the later Mahāyāna teachings. It was with these points in mind that the following lectures were given. They indicate Suzuki Roshi's emphasis on intellectual study to deepen and focus *zazen* practice.

Tim Buckley

## THE TRIKĀYA

An unsurpassed, penetrating and perfect Dharma  
Is rarely met with even in a hundred thousand million kalpas.  
Having it to see and listen to, to remember and accept,  
I vow to taste the truth of the Tathāgata's words.

## THE HISTORICAL BUDDHA AND THE LOTUS SŪTRA

There are several points I want to make. One is that when we read Buddhist scriptures it is necessary for us to know on what kind of historical stage they were told. In other words, *who told the scripture?* For instance, when Westerners started to study Buddhist scriptures they thought that these scriptures were a kind of myth. Scriptures may seem like nothing but myths if someone studies them literally, without knowing what kind of background they have. Or, when someone describes or compiles a scripture in a very visionary way the scripture itself may seem to be very strange, or very mysterious. So we should know what kind of people compiled the scripture; whether it is based on Mahāyāna teachings or on *Hīnayāna* teachings. I am not comparing or saying which is better, just that we should know with what feeling, in what kind of attitude, the scripture was told, or else we will not understand what it is.

It is the same with things and with people. Without knowing who a person

is, we cannot help him. When we know who made this tea bowl (picking up his cup), and what kind of history it has, then we can treat it properly. So it is necessary to know how the tea bowl appeared here, in front of me. Without knowing who made the tea bowl and what kind of tradition it has it will be just a bowl. At the same time it is necessary to know whether it is suitable for the guest and for the season. Even though it is a very traditional, valuable one, a summer tea bowl cannot be used in the winter-time. In this way you should choose the tea bowl. We should also arrange the teachings in this way, and choose which one to use according to the time and occasion. You should know the history, the tradition, of each teaching; then you can use the teaching in its true sense and develop the teaching forever. That is the Four Vows,<sup>1\*</sup> and this kind of effort will be continued forever. I am not forcing you to observe our Japanese way at all, but you should know how Buddhism is extended from Buddha to us. This is one very important point. The other point is to know, to understand, whether a certain kind of teaching is effective to use right now, like a tea bowl. So, to arrange the teachings just horizontally is not good, and to arrange the teachings just vertically is not good enough either. When you arrange the teachings *both* horizontally and vertically, both historically and spiritually, and understand the characteristic nature of the various teachings, then you will find which kind of teaching you should apply.

This Sūtra, the Saddharma-Puṇḍarika Sūtra, was supposed to have been told by Buddha himself, but actually it appeared about seven hundred years after Buddha passed away. So, historically, we cannot say that Buddha told this Sūtra. If we ask who told it, or if you ask if all of the Sūtra was told by Buddha, the answer may be "Only a part of it was told by Buddha." But it will not be exactly the same as he told it. Even the Hīnayāna Sūtras, or *Suttas*, were not handed down by Buddha's disciples exactly as he told them; even they were not told by Buddha. The Mahāyāna Sūtras *cannot* have been told by Buddha. But we say Buddha because this Sūtra was not told by the Nirmānakāya Buddha, or historical Buddha, but by the Sambhogakāya Buddha. It was told a long, long, long time ago—a long time before Buddha, who knew that there was this kind of Sūtra before him and told about the Sūtra which was told by the Sambhogakāya Buddha, or *Vairocana Buddha*. We can say that Vairocana Buddha told the Sūtra a long, long time before. The Sūtra is constructed accordingly; it does not say that it was attributed to the historical Buddha.

So it is necessary for us to know, first of all, how an understanding of Buddha, in all aspects, developed from the historical Buddha to the Dharmakāya Buddha. Without this understanding this Sūtra does not mean much. If you do not have this kind of understanding, this Sūtra is just a fable, maybe like a fairy tale—very interesting, but actually it doesn't have much to do with our lives. Accordingly, I have to explain what the Nirmānakāya Buddha is, and what the Sambhogakāya Buddha is, and what the Dharmakāya Buddha is; and how the Buddhism which was told by the Nirmānakāya Buddha developed to the Mahāyāna Buddhism which was told by the Sambhogakāya Buddha.

Some people may be disappointed to hear that the Lotus Sūtra is not a Sūtra which was told by the historical Buddha, but this is the characteristic

\*All footnotes are to be found on page 19.

of Buddhism; Buddhism had a long history before a complete understanding of the historical Buddha came about. It took a pretty long time. At first his teaching was transmitted by the so-called Hīmayāna Buddhists, or Śrāvakas, who were the disciples, or the followers, who tried to preserve his teaching in their memory, through discussions, and at meetings. No one is sure when these meetings were held, but it is said that soon after Buddha's death they had a meeting at Rajagriha where they chose various disciples to compile Buddha's teachings.<sup>2</sup> Ānanda was head of the group, and he recited what Buddha had said. Then this was discussed. In that way they set up some teaching; "This is what Buddha told us and these are the precepts Buddha set up." Naturally they became very attached to the teaching, rigidly so. Those who knew this kind of teaching, who studied this kind of teaching, of course had a special position among Buddhists, and the distinction between the four classes of Buddha's disciples, between layman and laywoman, priest and nun, became more and more strict.

It is said that a second meeting was held at Vaisali in a big cave, perhaps seventy-five or one hundred years after the first one. Buddhism had become already by that time a religion of priests, not of usual, ordinary people or laymen. They say that when this second meeting was held there were many people who did not join in. That group, and there were many good disciples and followers among the people who did not come, naturally got together and formed a separate group. So Buddha's followers divided into the *Joza Bu*, in Japanese, or *Mahāstahavirah*, the "Great Elders," and the common followers, the so-called *Mahāsamghikas*, or *Daishubu* in Japanese. (*Daishu* means great assembly, people, or followers; *bu* means group). Among them there were many good teachers. And this group, about one hundred years after Buddha passed away, established another kind of understanding of Buddha and of his teaching which was very important in the origins of the Mahāyāna School.

Buddhism seems to have developed from Śrāvakas to the Mahāyāna, yet in reality it was not changed and did not develop. Rather, Buddhists have always tried to regain the original way, the original understanding of Buddha. This effort makes it seem like Buddhism has changed from its original form to some different teaching, but it is not so. Actually, true Mahāyāna Buddhism resumed the traditional and fundamental teaching of Buddha. So, the effort we have to make in these lectures is towards knowing who this Buddha is, and what his purpose was in teaching. Do you understand this point? That is why I am telling you what kind of nature this Sūtra has and who told this scripture. The point is not whether the Lotus Sūtra was told by the historical Buddha or by some other person. That is not the point. As long as you get attached to the historical Buddha you cannot understand Buddhism. Buddha was great because he understood things in this way.

How did pre-Buddhistic thought become Hīnayāna teaching which is a completely different current of thought? It is impossible for pre-Buddhistic teaching to be the Hīnayāna teaching; what was the bridge? The bridge was the Buddha who told the teaching that was the source of all the currents of Buddhist thought. When we realize this point, we see that even the Hīnayāna understanding was not perfect enough. The Hīnayāna Buddhists rejected the

broader implications of Buddha's teaching and understood Buddha as a pre-Buddhistic person<sup>3</sup>. He was pushed backwards into having a pre-Buddhistic character. Mahāyāna students found that the Hīnayāna scriptures could not be recognized as the true, main current of Buddhist thought. How should we understand the Truth and how should we accept the Truth in the situation of each age? Because of this question we have the various schools. It is necessary to have schools, but we should not stop developing the true spirit, the main current of Buddhism.

When you have a cup of coffee on the freeway, that is very good, but no one will stay in the coffee shop—you must go on to San Francisco. We like, emotionally, that coffee shop and a big banana split, but even though it is good, we should go on with our trip. That is the Mahāyāna way—on and on and on. If it is not the main current it will die, eventually; only the main current will continue. That is our way, so we have no time to stay at the coffee shop so long. We must have some coffee once in awhile when we get sleepy. That is our way. With this attitude we should continue our trip. And if we want to continue our trip the Four Vows are necessary. We should continue our trip as long as our car goes, anyway; this is our being, and our attitude, and our practice.

### THE NIRMĀNAKĀYA BUDDHA

Do you know of the Nirmānakāya Buddha and Sambhogakāya Buddha and Dharmakāya Buddha? The Nirmānakāya Buddha is the historical Buddha. But the Nirmānakāya Buddha has two elements. One is that of an historical human being and the other is that of a super-human being. Historically such a character existed. Buddha was, as you know, a human being. When he attained enlightenment he reached to the bottom of our human nature, True Nature, through his human nature which is universal to everyone and to every being; he subdued all the emotions and the thinking mind; conquering all of this and all of the world he became the World Honoured One. He was confident of this after he attained enlightenment, and his followers listened to him as a teacher who is also the Perfect One. So, in this way he was a super-human being even when he was alive and, at the same time, since he was their teacher, or master, there was no need for them to have some special super-human god. But after he passed away, because his character was so great, the disciples thought of him more as a super-human being. This idea of a super-human being was very important in promoting an understanding of Buddha as the Perfect One. So the Nirmānakāya Buddha has two elements. The most important, the vital element for the idea of Buddha, was the super-human element. If Buddha was just an historical person, or one of the great sages, then Buddhism could not have survived for so long.

The idea of Buddha as a super-human being was supported by the teaching he told. One of the most important teachings of Buddha is the teaching of cause and effect; the teaching of causality. According to the teaching Buddha told then, if you do something good you will have a good result; if you practice hard you will acquire good character; that was what he told his disciples. How could the disciples acquire such a lofty and good character

as Buddha's? He told them that his good character was a result of his long practice, and they thought that since his character was so profound and deep, his former practice must have been an incredibly hard and long one. When Buddha's disciples' adoration was limitless they felt that the practice he had before attaining enlightenment, or Buddha-hood, should be limitless. Here Buddha is not just a human being; his former lives must have been endless, so the idea of "absolute"—limitless limitlessness—came to his disciples' minds. In this way the historical Buddha became more like an absolute being.

It is the same thing with us. We appeared in this world, but *how* did we appear in this world? We had a limitless background. We do not appear all of a sudden from nothing. There is something, there must be something before we appear in this world and before Buddha also. That Buddha was so great was because he had a limitless background, a limitless practice. This point is very important in the development of the idea of Buddha.

As a super-human being Buddha was described in various ways. He had eighteen characteristics which were completely different from the usual person's, and he had eighteen virtues which were also different from the usual person's. And he had, physically, the thirty-two marks of a great man. They say this is just a description, just a big adjective for the Buddha. Maybe so, but there was some reason behind using such a big adjective for Buddha so that this kind of thing was described even in the Hinayāna Sūtras. But actually Buddha was a human being and when he was eighty years old he passed away. At this point he was not a super-natural or super-human being. How should we understand his death in terms of his being super-human? If he was a super-human being there would not have been any need to take Nirvāna. When we say "to take Nirvāna" this means it was his choice to die or to remain alive. For other people it is not possible to have this kind of



choice. Buddha took Nirvāna because he had given people the chance to attain enlightenment; he had completed giving the full teaching for attaining enlightenment so there was no need for him to live anymore. That is why he took Nirvāna, and his disciples understood his death in this way.

Usual people appear in this world, according to Buddhism, because of *karma*, and because of *karma* they die. This is usual for a person. But Buddha appeared in this world because of his vow to save all human beings. With this vow, instead of *karma*, he appeared in the world. Here we have the teaching of vow instead of *karma*. Actually *karma* and vow are the same thing, but our attitude changes when our understanding changes; *karma* changes into vow and instead of living by *karma* we live by the vow to help people who live in *karma*. That is Buddha's teaching. And this kind of teaching was supported by the teaching which was actually told by Buddha when he was alive and this is the actual teaching we see through Buddha. This kind of Buddha, who started his limitless training as a Bodhisattva and finally appeared in this world as a Buddha, as a Perfect One, is called an incarnated body or Nirmānakāya Buddha.

So far, all of this kind of teaching is called Hinayāna Buddhism. But if you see these teachings closely you see that there is already Mahāyānistic theory and understanding in them—it is difficult to say which is Mahāyāna teaching and which is Hinayāna teaching. But I said "incarnated body." So there must be an essential body, too, the mother of the incarnated body. When our understanding reaches this point, the more profound teaching will be understood.

### THE SAMBHOgakāYA BUDDHA

I started this kind of talk to explain who told the Lotus Sūtra. This Sūtra was supposed to have been told by the historical Buddha, but actually, what is told here was told by the Sambhogakāya Buddha, not the historical Buddha. It is valuable *because* it was told by the Sambhogakāya Buddha instead of the historical Buddha. Śākyamuni Buddha, as I told you in the last lecture, has two elements; Buddha as a human being and Buddha as a super-human being. The idea of a super-human nature of Buddha is the result of the more emotional attachment to his character and his teaching, which the Śrāvakas, or Hinayāna Buddhists, had. This Buddha, Śākyamuni Buddha, who has two natures, or two elements—that of the historical Buddha and that of the idealized Buddha—is called the Nirmānakāya Buddha. Actually, who is the historical Buddha? If we arrive at the concept of just the Nirmānakāya Buddha we have already lost Buddha himself. The reason that the historical Buddha was Buddha is because he attained enlightenment. He changed. Starting as a Bodhisattva, he became Buddha; he is always changing. So he is not a true historical Buddha.

*Who* is changing should be the next thing we ask when we really want to know who Buddha was. When we want not just an emotional or romantic observation of Buddha, but, more sincerely, deeply, want to accept him as our teacher, it is necessary for us to know why he is Buddha. If we come to this point we must have a fuller idea than just that of an incarnated Buddha.

or Śākyamuni Buddha, or Nirmānakāya Buddha. That is, we must know that Buddha is the Sambhogakāya Buddha and that the Sambhogakāya Buddha is the Perfect one, or Truth Itself. Truth Itself, when it is observed by people as a truth, may be a teacher; but even plants and animals, mountains and rivers, can be our teachers when we really have eyes to see them. When the idea of the historical Buddha has this kind of background, he will be accepted as our teacher in its true sense. Not just in an emotional way, but wholeheartedly we can accept the historical Buddha as our teacher, because he is the one who teaches us, who is enlightened in the Eternal Truth, who is the strong background of Truth. He became the Buddha because he was enlightened in the Truth, and he is the one who teaches us the Truth he found. For the Buddhist, Buddha is not just an historical person, he is Truth Itself. An historical Buddha cannot be perfect, but the background of the historical Buddha should be Truth and, if so, Truth itself should be the real Buddha for us. Without this kind of background, Buddha would not have been remembered by human beings for such a long time. When Buddha is acknowledged as Truth Itself, then, as long as Truth exists, and as long as we care for the Truth, we can remain as Buddhists. This Buddha is the Sambhogakāya Buddha.

The true Buddha is the Sambhogakāya Buddha, and when the Sambhogakāya Buddha takes some activity, or is observed by someone, he may be called the Nirmānakāya Buddha. So before the Nirmānakāya Buddha there must be the Sambhogakāya Buddha, and before a Bodhisattva appears to save others, there must be the Sambhogakāya Buddha as a background. Bodhisattvas, and Buddhas, and their activity of helping others come from this source, from this origin in Sambhogakāya Buddha, who is Truth Itself.

Buddha's teaching is not the written teaching, or something told by the historical Buddha. When the Sambhogakāya Buddha tells the teaching, it is the true Buddha's teaching, very much so. But when we read, trying to figure out what he told us, what the true teaching was, and who the historical Śākyamuni Buddha was, we are deeply attached to someone else, forgetting all about the ultimate fact that "we are here." As long as we try to understand the real Buddha in this way, we cannot understand who he was. To help others and to help ourselves, is the same thing; to realize the truth myself and to make you realize it, too, is the same thing. To be enlightened does not mean to be aware of it, or to observe oneself objectively. Of course when Buddha attained enlightenment he was aware of himself, but not objectively. He had confidence in himself, and accepted himself as he was. He knew that "I am here" and accepted that. When you do not care for anything, you know "I am here" already.<sup>4</sup> That is the most important point. To stand on your own feet *before* you observe yourself objectively, that is the true way. When you ask "Who am I?" or "What kind of enlightenment did I have yesterday?" that is not true. To realize oneself is a deeper experience than this kind of superficial observation. To be one with ourselves *before* we objectively observe ourselves, that is enlightenment.

Buddha attained this enlightenment when he found his true nature and knew exactly who he was. At that time he became the Sambhogakāya Buddha; he became Truth Itself, one with himself, and one with the whole universe.



He was completely satisfied with himself, and when he became one with himself and with everything else, he saw that everything had the same nature as himself. As he existed under the Bodhi tree as an Enlightened One, as a Perfect One, so everything existed. That is why the Buddha said, "It is wonderful to see. Everything has Buddha Nature."

"As he is so everything is Buddha", we say; but when we say so, in its true sense, it means "I am Buddha". Only when we have this view, when we stand on our own legs, can we help others. Before this, when you observe yourself with ideas like "Who am I?" "Have I attained enlightenment or not?" "Am I able to help others?" you cannot help others. When you become just you yourself, without comparing yourself to others, just "I am I", "I am here", and when you have difficulty, just "I can manage myself pretty well," that is Buddha.

But we should be this kind of Buddha, the Sambhogakāya Buddha, even before we attain Enlightenment, and without this confidence, you cannot even practice *zazen*. How can you practice *zazen* when you doubt, or when you are observing yourself objectively without having any subjectivity? Only when you accept yourself, when you really know that *you exist here*, that you cannot escape from yourself, can you practice *zazen*. This is the ultimate fact: "I am here." This is very true. Don't you think so? But still you doubt, and still you make a separation from yourself and observe yourself from outside: "Who am I?" "What am I doing?" *Zazen* practice is not this kind of practice. Someone else is practicing *zazen*, not *you*. *You* should practice *zazen*. That is *shikan taza*,<sup>5</sup> and that is Sambhogakāya Buddha.

Sambhogakāya Buddha is, figuratively speaking, like the sun; instead of observing things objectively, he understands his Buddha Nature in activity within himself. So, like the sun, although he is not trying to shine on everything objectively, to illuminate everything objectively, he is actually illuminating everything; he is actually helping others without trying to help. He can illuminate everything because he has, originally, that kind of power or potentiality. For Sambhogakāya Buddha the most important thing is to see, to attain enlightenment inwardly; his way is to illuminate himself, or to acquire enlightenment, instead of trying to illuminate the objective world.

His purpose is, instead of observing things respectively, one by one, to observe his nature within himself.

When he, as the sun, observes his inner world he finds himself as the earth. That earth nature will be universal. This earth is earth and the sun will also be earth. Everything is earth, so there is no difference between the objective world and the subjective world. The Sambhogakāya Buddha is the Omniscient One who knows everything within himself. To be enlightened in his inward nature is to be enlightened outside too, in the objective world. For him the whole world is his inside world, or subjective world. When he reaches this kind of world, we call him the Sambhogakāya Buddha. His world is limitless; it includes the sun and stars and everything. His virtue is limitless, and his wisdom is also limitless. So, for Buddha, to save others and to be enlightened himself is the same thing. To help others and to help himself is the same thing. For him there is nothing without. That is the Sambhogakāya Buddha.

The Sixth Patriarch said, "When we are in delusion, the Lotus Sūtra will turn us, but when our mind is clear we will turn the Lotus Sūtra." When the Lotus Sūtra is understood by us as a Sūtra which was told by the Sambhogakāya Buddha, then it makes sense to us, and if we lose this point we will turn it. I say "I am reading", but actually, I am *telling* the Lotus Sūtra. We will tell the Lotus Sūtra for Buddha. So to read and to study the Lotus Sūtra, to listen to it and to tell it are not two different things; to read it and to tell it are the same thing. Whenever we talk we tell the Lotus Sūtra. Now I've come to the conclusion already but let us think more calmly, and understand clearly what we have been studying in these lectures.

### THE DHARMAKĀYA BUDDHA

There is, you know, Nature. When we say Nature, Nature is, of course, Truth; but Nature includes what we see, and Truth is not, in its strict sense, something which we can see. Because many people may ask us, "What is Dharma?" or "What is the Dharma Body?" we must say something about it. What can we say about it? If I don't say anything people may think, "He doesn't know anything about it, he is not a good teacher." I must make some narrow escape. I must talk about some truth. There's no way to talk about the Dharma Body, but still, if you allow me to say something about the Dharma Body I'll call it Truth Itself, like the Sambhogakāya. There is some Truth, yet Truth is something which you cannot see; you can see the apple; you cannot see the theory of gravitation. But nothing happens just by accident. When something happens there must be some reason. In this sense the "reason" may be Dharma Nature or close to Dharma Nature. We can understand it in some way, we can figure out some rules. We call Dharma *Body* the source of all Truth, of all rules, of all Nature.

Dharmakāya Buddha, or the Dharma Body of Buddha, is called the fundamental, undeveloped Buddha Body. When we say undeveloped body or fundamental body, we mean that it is the Original Source Itself. It is another interpretation of the same thing as the Sambhogakāya, but when we understand this thing as something which is very calm, which is not in

activity, we call it the Dharmakāya. Actually, the Dharmakāya does not remain calm and inactive; it is always active. We understand this reality in two ways, as activity and as non-activity; we have two understandings for one reality. In one case we call it *Dharma Nature*, meaning something in action, or *Sambhogakāya*, and in the other, *Dharma Body*, or *Dharmakāya*, meaning something which is not active, which is not developed. Rather, all *Dharma Nature* exists in the *Dharma Body* as potentiality. So we have two understandings for one reality: one is *Dharmakāya*, the other is *Sambhogakāya*. The *Sambhogakāya Buddha* is the Buddha who realizes this *Dharma Nature* in activity, and he is the Buddha that is the original source of the *Nirmānakāya Buddha*. The *Sambhogakāya Buddha* gives birth to the *Nirmānakāya Buddha*. So I think it is necessary to explain the *Nirmānakāya Buddha* and the *Sambhogakāya Buddha* more thoroughly. Then, naturally, you will understand what *Dharmakāya Buddha* is.

When we realize *Dharma Nature* in its true sense, we are the *Sambhogakāya Buddha*. When we observe things as we observe the objective world, and when we want to help people who are involved in the objective, or materialistic world, then we are the *Nirmānakāya Buddha*. How can we help others as *Nirmānakāya Buddha*? We must take various forms and give them some handy help, that is how to help others as *Nirmānakāya Buddha*. But as *Sambhogakāya Buddha* we should know our own nature, and we should realize that there is no "I" and no "you," that all is one being. When we realize this universal nature, we can help others without trying to help others because whatever we do, that is our helping activity.

When you practice *zazen* there is no "you" and no "others," your practice includes everything. You are a part of me, and I am a part of you. When we reach this kind of understanding we are the *Sambhogakāya Buddha*. Everything then takes place within yourself. For one with this understanding there is no objective world anymore. Without trying to help others, we will help others anyway; that is the *Sambhogakāya Buddha*, and that is the way to help others, the way to preserve our teaching, the way to practice Buddhism. There is a difference between the *Nirmānakāya* and the *Sambhogakāya Buddha*, but when we realize that our practice includes everything, *Śākyamuni Buddha* is included in our practice, too. Thus, when we practice *zazen*, all of the *Nirmānakāya Buddhas* which *Śākyamuni Buddha* spoke of all at once will attain enlightenment. Do you understand?

The *Sambhogakāya Buddha* is not the Buddha who will attain enlightenment or who will not attain enlightenment; he is the Truth Itself and, at the same time, the *Nirmānakāya Buddha*. People observe the truth in many ways, but the truth is always the same. Do you understand? If we understand the *Sambhogakāya Buddha* and his background in this way that is also the *Dharmakāya Buddha*, Truth Itself.

The *Nirmānakāya Buddha* is within ourselves, but before we reach this kind of understanding, he is just a hero. He has no eternal life. He is just one of the great heroes in our history. But when we understand *Śākyamuni Buddha* as a *Sambhogakāya Buddha*, or a *Dharmakāya Buddha*, for the first time he has perpetual life. This is the traditional understanding of Buddha, and actually this kind of understanding was supported by Buddha when he

was alive, although it took several hundred years before we understood who Sākyamuni Buddha was in reality. This kind of understanding, which was accomplished by his disciples, gave Buddha a new life, and made him the perpetual Buddha. So Buddha, in this sense, is called the *Tathāgata*.<sup>6</sup> This is the history of how understanding of Buddha developed and, at the same time, the true understanding of his teaching.

When we understand reality in this way, as the Sambhogakāya Buddha, our understanding includes everything, and the reality which includes everything as an *undeveloped potential* is the Dharmakāya Buddha itself; Dharma itself; Being itself. For the Dharmakāya Buddha there is no need to attain Enlightenment. He is already enlightened—from beginningless beginning to endless end, he is always enlightened. Only the Nirmānakāya Buddha attains enlightenment, and becomes Buddha. This is our way of understanding things, and it is exactly the same as our zazen.

We say “just sit.” What does it mean, “just sit”? When we say “just sit” it includes, actually, all of the activity, all the potential activity which we have; we remain in an inactive state, but we have infinite potentiality. In this sense our practice includes everything. When we sit we are just sitting; each one of us is sitting, and each one of us is the Dharmakāya Buddha. But, even though we are sitting, we breathe, our heart is beating, so we are, in activity, the Sambhogakāya Buddha and the Nirmānakāya Buddha too. We



understand reality in this way. The Sambhogakāya Buddha and Dharmakāya Buddha are the Source of all Being. They existed before the Nirmānakāya Buddha, and so, in this sense, Sambhogakāya and Dharmakāya are eternal perpetual beings. So we call Buddha the Tathāgata or, in Japanese, *Shinryo*.

The Lotus Sūtra describes this kind of reality, the world of the Tathāgata. That is why it is told on a big, cosmic scale. In short, the Lotus Sūtra is the sūtra which tells us what the Tathāgata is and how everything exists in the realm of reality, the realm of the Tathāgata, this world. Of course, it is described in a very dramatic way, but what it means is, simply, how things exist in this world, this Dharma world, this world of the Tathāgata.

This point is important. The Lotus Sūtra was told by the Sambhogakāya Buddha, in his wisdom, in a figurative, dramatic, verbal way to save all sentient beings. It puts special emphasis on Dharma Nature, instead of Dharma Body. You cannot talk about Dharma Body because it is something beyond our world, beyond our wisdom, beyond our understanding. The Dharma Body is just a *source* of activity, but not activity itself, you see? But without this source there is no activity. When there is activity there must be a source, but this source does not always expect some activity. You can have the idea of Source, or Body, without activity, of something which is not in activity, but actually there is no such thing—whatever it is, it has some activity. Even a stone has some activity. So we cannot talk about the Dharma Body itself.

What shall I do? If I *talk* about something, that already shows Dharma Nature, tells how Dharma goes and what it is like. When I say what it is like, that is already Nirmānakāya Buddha—objectively speaking that is form; more subjectively speaking it is Nature. But what is the Source of Dharma Nature? No one knows. We know it, but we cannot say anything about it. If you say something, it is not Dharma Body, it is Dharma Nature, it is an attribute of the Dharma Body. So we cannot talk about what the Dharma Body is. But we understand that there must be some source; that is the Dharma Body. Form and color of Dharma, and nature of Dharma, and Dharma itself; Nirmānakāya Buddha, Sambhogakāya Buddha, and Dharmakāya Buddha. Do you understand? Nirmānakāya Buddha is the form of Dharma, and Sambhogakāya Buddha is the Nature of Dharma, and Dharmakāya Buddha is the Dharma Body, which is beyond our words, which cannot be described. When we listen to the Lotus Sūtra we will understand what is the Dharmakāya Buddha, and who is Nirmānakāya Śākyamuni Buddha.

The purpose of this Sūtra is to describe our Dharma Nature. Buddha was Buddha because he was the Enlightened One, he was illuminated by his own nature, Dharma Nature, which is everyone's nature. He knew who he was. For him there was no disciple, and no "objective" world. So he said all sentient beings are his sons, are part of him. That was Buddha. Only when we understand Buddha in this way, as Sambhogakāya Buddha or Dharmakāya Buddha, does he become the real Buddha. When we arrive at this kind of understanding, there will be no need to talk about what is Therāvada Buddhism, or what is Mahāyāna Buddhism. All Buddhism, whether it is Therāvada or Mahāyāna, will just be Buddhism. This is how the teaching has been transmitted from Buddha to us.

*Student:* What does understanding of the Bodhisattva's Vow have to do with understanding the Sambhogakāya Buddha?

*Roshi:* Sambhogakāya Buddha is the Buddha, the Perpetual One, who exists from beginningless beginning to endless end. Like the Dharmakāya, he is Truth Itself. Secondly, as the Nirmānakāya Buddha, he is the one who exists moment after moment in various forms. So, the Sambhogakāya Buddha is the background of the Nirmānakāya Buddha, and the Nirmānakāya Buddha is called the Nirmānakāya Buddha because he is the embodiment of the Sambhogakāya Buddha. The Sambhogakāya Buddha gives birth to the Nirmānakāya Buddha who exists moment after moment in various forms. That is why "Sentient beings are numberless"; we are beginningless and endless. We exist here, but we are not permanent beings. Only in this moment do we exist like this. In the next moment I will change and tomorrow I will not be the same person. This is true. In the next moment I shall be the future Buddha. Yesterday I was the past Buddha. In this way there are many and many Buddhas.

Since we are only incarnated bodies, with some certain color and form and character, there must be some source of each being just as the Sambhogakāya Buddha was the source of Śākyamuni Buddha, who is called the Nirmānakāya Buddha. When Śākyamuni realized this point and accepted himself as the Nirmānakāya Buddha, he also knew himself to be the Sambhogakāya Buddha and the Dharmakāya Buddha. When we understand ourselves in this way we will live in this world to continuously try to express Buddha Nature, moment after moment. That is the effort we should make, instead of being caught by some certain color or form. We should make our best effort in each moment. That is a kind of attachment but this attachment is, at the same time, detachment, because in the next moment you should make your best effort also. So it means detachment from our last incarnation, a moment ago. In this way, moment after moment, we exist. This kind of understanding is expressed

by our technical terms of Nirmānakāya, Sambhogakāya and Dharmakāya.

*Student:* Can all sentient beings, then, be considered the Nirmānakāya?

*Roshi:* Yes, all sentient beings are Nirmānakāya Buddha, whether they realize it or not. For them, they are not if they don't accept themselves as a Nirmānakāya Buddha. But for us who understand ourselves and others they are, all of them, Nirmānakāya Buddhas and Sambhogakāya Buddhas and Dharmakāya Buddhas.

*Student:* What do you mean by "making your best effort in each moment"?

*Roshi:* I mean don't sacrifice this moment for the future, and don't be bound by your past life, or try to escape from it either. This is the kind of effort you usually make. But there should be a more important point in your effort. What is that? To stand on your feet is the most important thing. To sacrifice this moment for your future, for your ideal even, means that you are not standing on your feet. So, the most important thing is to accept yourself, to have true subjectivity in each moment. Don't complain; accept things as they are and satisfy yourself with what you have, right now. You should think, "This is the only reality, the only Buddha I can see, I can experience, I can have, I can worship." At that time you are the Nirmānakāya Buddha, and Sambhogakāya Buddha, and Dharmakāya Buddha.

*Student:* I didn't understand the emphasis in the Lotus Sūtra on the future lives of the different disciples, and why or how they are valued.

*Roshi:* "Future disciples" means that Buddhism is the teaching which is limitless, which has a limitless future and a beginningless beginning, which is always true. So, in the Lotus Sūtra there are many disciples and Buddhas who will exist in the future and who existed in aeons of time before.

If your understanding does not lead to an understanding of the Sambhogakāya Buddha or the Dharmakāya Buddha the kind of description which is in the Lotus Sūtra won't make any sense. It will look like a fable, like tales. In this Sūtra, as you may see, Buddha said that his direct disciples should survive until Maitreya Buddha appears, many many aeons into the future. You cannot understand this kind of thought without the idea of the Sambhogakāya Buddha. Now, you may say that the Sambhogakāya Buddha is just an idea, but if you have the experience of zazen you can accept it. That is why Zen Buddhism has survived.

*Student:* Some people live by karma, you said, and some by vows.

*Roshi:* By vows, yes. For people who do not understand this truth life is karmic life. For those who know this point, life is not karmic life. But even karmic life is another version of Buddhist life. The Nirmānakāya Buddha comes into this world, not through karma, but with a vow to save all sentient beings. By a vow he appears in this world, and practices the Bodhisattva's Way, and attains enlightenment as Buddha did, to save all human beings. He is called an incarnated body. He changes his form in various ways—sometimes he's a Bodhisattva, sometimes a Buddha; to help people, he takes various forms. So, in a wide sense, everything is Nirmānakāya Buddha. And in the narrow sense, people who appear in this world because of a vow, instead of karma, are called Nirmānakāya Buddhas.

## EDITOR'S FOOTNOTES

1. The fourfold Bodhisattva's Vow, or Four Vows, of Mahāyāna Buddhism are:  
Sentient beings are numberless; I vow to save them.  
Desires are inexhaustible; I vow to put an end to them.  
The dharmas are boundless; I vow to master them.  
The Buddha's Way is unsurpassable; I vow to attain it.  
Although, in the usual view, Hīnayāna Buddhists do not take or follow this vow, according to the Lotus Sūtra and to Suzuki Roshi's teaching, all Buddhists follow this vow, consciously or unconsciously. Actually, the *Agoma Sutta*, the earliest extant Buddhist scripture, is written very much in the spirit of the Bodhisattva's Vow, but later Hīnayāna interpreters of this Sutta neglected this point. In a deep sense Buddha became manifest as the Tathāgata Śākyamuni to fulfill this vow. Thus, as Dogen Zenji, the founder of the Soto Zen School, taught, there can be no real distinction between Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna Buddhism in terms of following or not following the Bodhisattva's Vow. All Buddhism is simply Buddhism, and all Buddhists seek the salvation of all sentient beings (see below).
2. The Sanskrit term for this convocation is *sangiti*, meaning the collection, fixing, or revising of the canon; the defining of terms in order to have a certain uniformity of understanding. This effort perhaps began with some specific meeting, but it certainly continued over a long period of time until the creation of the Pali Canon, long after the death of Buddha and of his direct disciples.  
Because Śākyamuni Buddha spoke in the ancient dialect of Magada, and his original followers, coming from many different areas, spoke diverse dialects, it was necessary to arrive at some common terminology among them. No texts appeared in either Pali or Sanskrit until at least two hundred years after Buddha's death when, recent scholarship has suggested, both Pali and Sanskrit arose, almost simultaneously. However, none of the texts from this early period have survived.
3. One of the fundamental teachings of Buddhism is that of the Three Marks, or Three Signs of Being. According to this doctrine all being is subject to three conditions; *anicca*, change, transience; *dukkha*, suffering, imperfection; and *anattā*, having no separate or immortal soul. In the pre-Buddhistic view permanence and immortality were possibilities, in Buddha's view they were not. Because early Buddhists misconstrued *dharmas* as static, they missed the true import of such teachings as that contained in the Three Marks—that *everything*, even the dharmas, changes. In doing so, in missing the subtle distinction between "immortal", and "eternal" or "perpetual"—the former a static concept, the latter fluid ones—they could not see that even Buddha and his teaching changes. In this way they cast him as a pre-Buddhistic character.
4. This is not an advocacy of selfishness. On the contrary, because the Sambhogakāya Buddha includes everything, (see below), there is no-thing outside of "himself" to care for. Thus in taking care of "himself", "his" immediate situation, the Buddha cares for, and takes care of, everything.
5. *Shikan taza* is themeless meditation, and it includes the source of all themes. It is "just sitting", or "sitting quietly doing nothing". *Shikan* means "to give up illusions and attain enlightenment", *taza* means "to sit".  
This type of *zazen* is practiced mainly by the Soto Zen sect, in contrast to the use of *koans*, or "no-sense" questions, in Rinzai Zen practice.
6. *Tathāgata* is a title of the Buddha coming from the words *tatha*, thus, or such, and *gata*, gone (or *āgata*, come). It means one who has attained unity with the Absolute, who has realized Suchness (in one sense *Sūnyā*, Emptiness, the Unconditioned Reality), and so neither comes nor goes. The nature of all sentient beings are the nature of the Tathāgata, yet the Tathāgata is eternal, always abiding. Thus the title connotes at-one-ness with the Dharmakāya; however, it is applied to Buddha in his Nirmanakāya manifestation. It implies infinite wisdom and compassion. Śākyamuni Buddha took this title himself after his enlightenment, and it is used by Buddhists, in reference to the Buddha, as a term of the highest respect and veneration.