I have discussed about freedom with you in a previous Message, and now I am going to talk about independence. The two concepts are related so closely that we may consider them as two different ways of looking at the same thing.

Let P be a person and Q any entity in the universe U; that is, they are connected by a relation f. If P and Q represent husband and wife, or father and son, or friends, the relation between them is very clear. As a matter of fact, the two co-exist. For this case, f is a strong relation. If P is a person and Q represents the economical fluctuation, for example, the two are related in a certain way, but the existence of one does not require that of the other. In this case, f is a weak relation. Now let us consider the following definitions.

If P is not "affected" when Q has an "expression E" in a time interval $[t_1, t_2]$, P is independent of Q relative to E in that interval. If P is independent of all expressions of Q for all time, P is independent of Q. If P is independent of all Q of U for all time, P is independent in U. If P has an expression in $[t_1, t_2]$, and Q is not an obstruction, P is free relative to Q in that time interval. If P is free relative to all Q of U for all time, P is free in U.

Let E^P be E of P in U. If E^P is not altered or affected by E^Q, and E^Q gives not obstruction to E^P, then they are not related. Since we cannot directly know a person, but only his expressions; if E^P and E^Q are not related, P and Q are not related either.

In the universe, E^P and E^Q are either related or not. If they are related, complete freedom and independence of P and Q are not possible. If they are not related, P and Q are not in the same universe; this is a contradiction because of the definition of universe. How can we remove this contradiction without dimming our hope for a state of complete freedom and independence? Let us examine the following possibilities.

1st. If we find that P and Q are not related, U is not complete. That is: U is not the real or complete universe, but only an apparent one or part of it. Only can we discover the complete universe, P and Q will be related. Therefore, we can construct a sequence of universes U_0, U_1, U_2, ..., U_n, such that U_j is a subset of U_k if $k > j$. This situation is very similar to that of the first law of thermodynamics which states that, in a closed system, the total energy is conserved. If the energy is not conserved, either there is a new type of energy to be discovered or the system is not closed.

2nd. We should observe that infinity and zero are only mathematical abstractions. Physical or real quantity is always finite; it may be very large and approaching, but never equal, to infinity; it may be very small and approaching, but never equal, to zero. Therefore, the influence of Q, no matter how large it may be, is always restricted in a finite geographical or functional domain, the domain of influence. If P is out of or dodges away from the domain of influence of Q, then P is free and independent. Hence, the larger the universe P is accessible, the more freedom and independence P will enjoy.

3rd. If P assigns a small value to the relation f with Q; then, for some purposes, f will not affect P or be an obstacle to P. Hence, P is practically free and independent.

4th. Not only P assigns a small value to the relation f, but P also finds the existence of Q transitory and phenomenal, like a mirage. If so, P cannot be affected by Q, P is independent; Q

cannot give any obstruction to P, P is free. Since P and Q are in the same universe U, they must have a common denominator. Let C^Q be the denominator. We may ask the question: What is P - C^Q equal to ? That is: What is the remainder of P if C^Q is removed from it? Find it out (參)!

From the second discussion, we realize the importance of the accepted universe to our freedom and independence. Then, what is the basic structure of the universe taught by the Buddha.

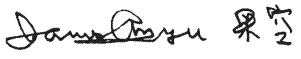
According to one classification, there are thirty apparent worlds, denoted by W_0, W_1, ..., W_{29}. W_0 is the physical world which we know by our five senses. W_1, ..., W_6 are the six heavens of the desire realm, denoted by R_D. W_7, ..., W_{24} are the eighteen heavens of the form realm, denoted by R_F. W_{25}, ..., W_{28} are the four conscious fields of the formless realm, denoted by R_L. The last one is Bodhisattvas world, denoted by W_{29}. These worlds form a sequence of universes, denoted by U_0, U_1, ..., U_{29}, where $U_0 = W_0$, $U_1 = W_0 + W_1$, ..., $U_{29} = W_k$. The only real universe is the Buddha world, but one must pay heed to the fact that the Buddha World is not the stun of all thirty apparent worlds, nor we can find the Buddha World away from the apparent ones. Why?

If P values the world he lives in so little, will P be indolent and pessimistic? If you think so, you need to understand the meaning of value. Value is always assigned according to a standard and for a particular purpose. Value is a function of time, relative to an individual person and the world in which the person lives. Some relations may not appear important in one apparent universe, but may be detrimental in a larger one. This is a very important, but neglected, issue in ethics.

Most of us like to do important things. But importance only means beneficial to ourselves in most cases. We have done so many such important things in our lives, it becomes a habit of doing things for and thinking of ourselves first. To break this habit, we need first to learn doing unimportant things for others.

When you took a leisure walk in an evening and saw children playing in the front yard; suddenly the ball of a young child was rolling in front of you, you picked it up and returned it to her. You might even say some caring words to her without intervening your walk. When you were picking up the ball, you did not seek the opportunity nor try to do the picking, you just did it effortlessly. Is this a pleasant way of doing things? Is this the ideal way that life should be lived through? If you answer Yes to these questions, you are walking along with the Bodhisattvas; because this is the way all Bodhisattvas are living and working. They see the wonderful Buddhas world that they can enter. While on their way, they practice the six paramitas to help others without a single thought of the importance of their works, because they see themselves and all living beings - are just mirages, manifestations of causes and effects. As a proverb says, Bodhisattvas save people in dreams and build Buddha Halls like the shadows of the moon in ponds.

A Buddha Heart Villager



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