

Buddhism



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TJ: How do you define Buddhism?

TASAKA: Buddhism is a kind of “cosmology” that can accept various value systems - not only religions but philosophies that exist around the world. Zen Buddhism, especially, is a “philosophy of contradiction” that can accept all the contradictions in our life, because contradiction is an essence of life. An important thing in Buddhism is the ability to keep the contradictions in mind, to keep gazing at them and think about the meaning of the contradictions.

TJ: In Europe, many philosophers think Buddhism is not a religion but more of a way to understand life or a style of life because it is not theist. What do you think?

TASAKA: It depends on the definition of religion. If we define a religion as a value system centering around one god, then Buddhism is not a religion. Buddhism sees numerous gods, Buddhahood, everywhere - in mountains, rivers, grass, trees, land and even in the wind. However, we need to understand that religion itself is in the process of transformation and evolution in today's age. An important question is, “What religious systems will replace the old religious systems in the 21st century?” Even a traditional religious system should transform itself to adapt to the changes in people's minds in modern society.

*“There is no past. There is no future.
Existing is only now. Live now.
Live now to the fullest.”*

TJ: We are very interested in knowing how Buddhism views life and death. Could you explain what life and death means to you?

TASAKA: For Buddhists, there is no difference between life and death in their true meaning because life and death share the same reality in life. If we hope to talk about death, we need to answer the question, “Whose death is it?” Is it the death of the Small Ego or the death of the Great Self? Once we ask this question, we will find that the Great Self cannot die. If we see the

Small Ego in our mind, it will die sooner or later. However, if we see the Great Self as the world itself, then there is no life and death. A famous philosopher left an important message to us: “You are the world. The world is you”.

TJ: If there is no life and death, then we shouldn't be afraid to die. Have you ever experienced a fear of death?

TASAKA: Yes. Thirty years ago, in 1983, a doctor told me that I had terminal cancer. Some other doctors gave me the same diagnosis and told me I could expect to live a year or so at most. I was thrown into deep despair; it was like a living hell caused by the fear of death, day in and day out. Finally I went to a Zen temple to find hope after all the doctors told me there was no medical cure for my illness. I met a Zen master at the temple who told me a very important message, “There is no past. There is no future. Existing is only now. Live now. Live now to the fullest.” This message gave me a deep insight into life. I then started practicing this message every day, imagining “Today is the last day of my life.” After practicing this message every day for a year, I found the fear of death had completely disappeared from my mind. This way of living enhanced my power in life and I have survived cancer until now.

TJ: That's amazing! Can you tell us how Buddhism influenced you during your disease?

TASAKA: I learned many things from Buddhism during the disease. Among them, the most important thing I learned is the meaning of “eternal life.” Eternal life does not mean how we can avoid physical death. It means “who I am.” Once we realize the fact that behind this Small Ego, there is a Great Self, deep in our mind, we understand the Great Self cannot die because we are the world and the world is us. We were born



TASAKA: In today's modern society, science seems to have become the most influential religion for people in many countries including Spain and Japan. However, people are always seeking the truth of life deep in their mind. So the problem is not the mind of ordinary people; the problem is the mind of religious people. Religious people should talk a lot about their religious experience in their daily lives in an attractive way to the audience. For instance, when we face a difficult problem, after praying to God we sometimes hear the voice of something great to guide our lives. That kind of motivational talk is much more attractive than just explaining the text of the Bible.

TJ: Is Japan living a similar phenomenon of laicism?

TASAKA: Yes. But I am very optimistic about that phenomenon because people are always seeking the meaning of life deep in their minds. This is because their subconsciousness is always looking at death and hoping to understand the meaning of life.

TJ: If we observe the world, we can recognize many economic differences with the United States, Japan and Europe as stronger zones. But some people are predicting the end of Western dominance. What do you think?

TASAKA: I think what we are seeing is the beginning of the fusion of Western and Eastern civilization. Greece, Italy and Spain used to be very strong countries economically and are still excellent countries in terms of culture. The important thing is to not only look at countries from the viewpoint of the economy but also to look at countries from the viewpoint of culture and civilization.

TJ: Where do you think humanity is heading?

TASAKA: At this moment, humankind is walking on the stage of “pre-history”, because the “true history” of humankind has not yet opened its curtain. This is because humankind is still suffering from war, terrorism, violence, crime, starvation, epidemics, poverty, discrimination and environmental pollution. There is a famous science fiction novel entitled “Childhood's End” by Arthur C. Clarke. Like the title of the novel, I think humankind is still walking in the age of childhood. But we are growing now. tj

13.7 billion years ago as the universe, which we can see every night when the sky is full of stars. The universe began a long journey 13.7 billion years ago, and it thinks, “Who am I?” through you, me, him and her now. So, we cannot die as the Great Self; we can die only as the Small Ego.

TJ: What are the main differences between Buddhism and other big religions?

TASAKA: True Buddhism does not exclude other religions and philosophies. That is because Buddhism understands that every religion and philosophy has an important meaning to exist, and that is because Buddhism believes that the roots of all religions and philosophies are the same.

TJ: How does Buddhism explain injustice, social suffering and inequalities?

TASAKA: The world is still in the process of evolution and growth. Buddhism believes that everything that happens and exists in the world has an important meaning. Of course, we need to change the state of injustice, social suffering and inequalities in the world; however, they are a kind of deep message sent from the world to us in order to foster compassion within us.

TJ: What is the objective of a Buddhist?

TASAKA: The objective is to consider the meaning of life, find the deep and quiet joy of life and celebrate the miracles of life. In fact, it is a miracle when someone encounters someone in his or her very short life, which goes by like a blink of an eye. We call the feeling of miracles “Enishi.”

TJ: Many Buddhist practices are becoming alternative health solutions in Europe and North America. For example, yoga, meditation and vegetarian diets. Why are people adopting these customs?

TASAKA: Harmonizing with the world and nature through yoga, meditation or a vegetarian diet always results in better health. But for Buddhists, harmonizing with the world and nature itself is the ultimate purpose. Becoming healthy is not the ultimate purpose; it is merely a result. But many people tend to control their bodies to become healthy. It is a kind of mental illness that people living in modern society have to put the result as the purpose.

TJ: In Spain, the number of catholic believers is decreasing. What is your opinion about this flood of laicism?