

GREEN TEA LEAVES
Monthly newsletter of Awarezen
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Friends,

As Christmas approaches, I'd like to share some thoughts on a theme that has not always received sufficient attention. The theme is *incarnation* as understood in Christian tradition and its comparable concept of *emanation* as espoused in the Buddhadharma.

Incarnation and Emanation

The Christian idea of incarnation affirms that the totality of God in the Son, the eternal *logos*, “became flesh” — that is, embodied in the man Jesus of Nazareth some 2,000 years ago. Theologically, it is possible to see this historical incarnation of Jesus as an atemporal event that is timelessly realized across space and time beyond all bounded conditions. In other words, the incarnation of Christ is not only historical but also trans-historical and timeless: real and effective for all time and without beginning or end, across all dimensions of space. For Christians, the incarnation is a singular person-event exclusive to Jesus alone.

The Buddhist idea of emanation affirms that all enlightened buddhas have three bodies (Sanskrit. *kaya*) of which the third, the emanation body (Sanskrit. *nirmanakaya*) expresses the all-pervasive compassionate activity of Buddhas for the sake of all sentient beings entangled in the cosmos of suffering and affliction (Sanskrit. *samsara*). Every Buddha, and

there are countless ones, manifests emanation bodies in whatever forms necessary to alleviate the suffering of beings and meet their needs according to their matrix of actional imprints and potentials (Sanskrit. *karma*).

Liberative Mission

The mission of Jesus Christ of history is the salvation of all creation and humanity, seen as eternal communion with the Triune God graphically described as eternal life in heaven. I do not see heaven as place but an ineffable experience beyond time, place, and conditioned things. The mission of the historical Buddha is teaching the path to enlightenment so as to enable all suffering beings to be liberated into their full potential of freedom. Again, enlightenment is not about location but transformation. Moving deeper, we understand Buddhas as plural in existence ceaselessly working for suffering beings but ultimately unable to bear their karmic potentials and sufferings. Their sole purpose is to teach the Dharma and guide those who aspire to liberation and enlightenment towards their final goal. Christ, however, is singular and is the only one who is able to bear the sins (i.e. *karma* and mental afflictions) of all creatures so as to become their way to ultimate freedom, termed salvation. Are these two understandings contradictory? I do not think so.

Let me use an analogy. Buddhas could be compared to rays of sunlight that illuminate and enlighten the minds of sentient beings by way of the Dharma they transmit and teach. But they cannot, despite their perfect wisdom, compassion and capacity to benefit, absorb into themselves the darkness of mental afflictions (Sanskrit. *klesha*) and destructive action potentials (Sanskrit. *karma*) of these beings. Each light ray is like a clear mirror perfectly reflecting the luminosity of all other light rays in a vast expanse of blissful *dharmakaya* (or truth-body) wisdom. Buddhas, as rays of sunlight, show the way to liberation. They cannot purify or liberate sentient beings by direct absorption and removal of their mental afflictions and destructive *karma*. They do not have the gravitas to do so. Nevertheless, Buddhas continually and repeatedly manifest as emanation-bodies (Sanskrit. *nirmanakaya*) to compassionately benefit all sentient beings throughout space and time.

Christ could be compared to the sun itself. Christologically, it is apt for Buddhas to be likened to rays of sunlight following *Nostra Aetate*, a Vatican II document that elucidates how the Christian faith can relate to other faith traditions. While particularly salient for the Roman Catholic tradition, this view is not universally accepted in Protestant denominations and especially evangelical circles. Be that as it may, it is possible to see that *contra* light rays, the sun itself being the source of all light rays has gravitas enough to absorb the darkness of mental afflictions and destructive *karma* of sentient beings. In short, sin and all its ramifications of guilt, shame, and condemnation of all beings could be assimilated and appropriated by the incarnate and crucified Christ. The excruciating suffering and death of Jesus on the cross following a perfect life thrown into unjust persecution and scorn reflects just how much cosmic *karma* and affliction is actually being

born by Jesus in his arc of redemption. The immense burden of sin can be dealt with only by the unimpeded “gravitational pull” of the sun, to to speak. Christ as the sun is thus the only reality with the power to absorb cosmic sin, bearing its unimaginable consequences within himself. Christ as *logos* (akin to the *dao* in Chinese philosophy or *brahman* in Indian philosophy) was fully embodied as a perfect human being in a singular, unprecedented, and unrepeatable event — the incarnation. And it is only Jesus the incarnate Christ *contra* all spiritual masters and Buddhas who could qualify to be crucified in a redemptive act of atoning sacrifice even as his perfect human life was redeeming sin in every moment. While the exact mechanism of the incarnation is elusive, redemption can be understood via the Buddhist concept of giving and taking (Tibetan. *tonglen*) in which all of sentient beings’ suffering, mental afflictions, and *karma* are *taken* into Jesus Christ while all of Christ’s goodness, peace, and freedom is *given* to sentient beings for their salvation (liberation). Not imaginatively but actually. This has been happening from incarnation to crucifixion.

Realizing Reality

What does it mean to say that Jesus has accomplished perfect *giving and taking* in his act of redemption, which is both historical and atemporal? It means that at the level of deepest reality all cosmic sin of all sentient beings and creation has been transferred onto Jesus and all of Jesus’s purity and goodness has been accounted to all sentient beings and creation. While true ontologically and nominally, this reality is not always apprehended by beings experientially. But when one opens one’s mind and heart to the possibility of this reality, an uprising of trust and confidence in the person-event of Jesus can trigger a cascade of spiritual reverberation that purifies and transforms one’s being in unimaginable ways. One is ushered into a dance of loving communion with the Triune God in and through Jesus Christ, a profoundly rich intimacy of wisdom and love that is at once personal and cosmic. The effulgence of buddha-nature which is the microcosm of the indwelling Spirit of Christ radiates as that pure emergent faith that draws us back into the source from which it came. One’s buddha-nature is thus activated; it becomes certain that we can purify our minds and be transformed into the fullness of Christ in perfect enlightenment.

Knowingly or unknowingly, whenever one engenders an authentic sense of refuge in the spiritual path — be it in the form of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha or otherwise — it is the buddha-nature of primordial consciousness that is calling one from deep unto deep. This is Christ consciousness at work. The Buddha without and the Buddha within are both realities of experience for those with sufficient degrees of trust and openness. Paraphrasing Christian theologian and Dzogchen contemplative Eva Natanya, to have faith that the Buddha within us and the Buddha outside us will one day be joined in nondual realization is predicated on the basis of insight into the emptiness of our being, that our mindstreams are not as inherently fixed as we assume them to be. What makes all of this possible and in fact certain is precisely the atemporal and historical finished work of Jesus Christ in his act of divine exchange or cosmic *tonglen*. It is an act that mysteriously removes all blockage

and obscuration impeding our access to buddha-nature. Christ's cosmic *tonglen* enables and activates within sentient beings the definitive intention to emerge from cyclic suffering (*samsara*) and the heart to altruistically awaken as Buddhas for the benefit of all. Christ by his person-event and work has made nondual enlightenment a definite certainty for all.

Mandala and Kingdom

In light of the above, one can view Jesus's description of the kingdom of heaven as the cosmic enlightened *mandala* of Christ. This cosmic mandala of Christ can be understood as a renewed heaven and earth in which all who belong to Jesus abide as resurrected enlightened beings in their rainbow bodies. This sacred dimension is seamlessly material and spiritual in a way never seen before. Through authentic faith and spiritual practice, one may arrive at the perfect awakening of a Buddha which is none other than complete *theosis* into the fullness of Christ. One realizes an incorruptible resurrected body identical to that of the risen Christ, and one's mind melts into the perfect diamond mind of Christ. In Dzogchen terminology, this is the "great transference rainbow body" and "dharmakaya wisdom" of a Buddha. All of this takes place by the pure unmerited grace of Christ. Even "our merit" is not really ours to own. Merit derives its power and fulfilment from Christ.

A final word: Christ seeks the ultimate wellbeing of all beings without exception, But Christ cannot control everything. Nor can he compel all beings to be liberated from suffering and its causes and to be enlightened to the fullest degree. God as creator and redeemer is not a separate entity cut off from creation. He is not omnipotent but *amipotent*. This means God is not all-powerful but maximally powerful to the extent that he/she could intervene out of egoless non-controlling love. The prefix "ami-" derives from the Latin word for love, "*amor*." As such, God's amipotent love would orchestrate the working of all things together for good in the end, without contravening the conditioned free will of living beings. Be blessed.

Everyday Wisdom

Try out these ideas for the next month:

1. *With loving openness and self-honesty, inquire into the possibility that your worldview to date may not be as complete as you think. Can you stay receptive to alternative ways of thinking, theologizing, and being a spiritual practitioner?*
2. *Continue your ongoing practice of meditation for serene stillness (shamatha) and vipashyana (deep insight) without necessarily fixating on Buddhist doctrinal beliefs or some other religious belief system.*
3. *To paraphrase the Dalai Lama, remember to be kind to yourself and others whenever possible. As the Dalai Lama says, "It is always possible." Mindfully nourished the four immeasurables of loving-kindness, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity.*

Blessings,

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