

On Hakuin's "Commentary and Poems on the Prajñā-pāramitā-hṛidaya-sūtra"¹⁾

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I

It is an obvious fact that in Zen Buddhism it has been customary throughout its history to read the scriptures of Buddhism by means of adding a commentary and poems from reader's point of view. This was done as an activity of the Buddha-nature, which is directly brought out by Satori enlightenment, and done in spite of the fact that Zen declares "A special transmission outside the scripture; No dependence upon words and letters. . . ."²⁾

Of course, such a way of reading scripture as one of operations of Buddha-nature has been done by the absolute subject which is inherent in man. Therefore it is no other than a footnote of the Onemind in oneself so to speak.³⁾

Being the absolute subject, when the Buddha-mind reads the scripture not even the scripture exists as an object anymore. It becomes identified with Buddha-mind. That is to say, the real reading of scripture is done at the very stage where scripture and mind are not separated but are one.

When Hakuin-Zenji 白隱禪師 (1685-1768) was sixteen years old, he began to doubt the Hokkekyō 法華經 (Saddharma-puṇḍarīka-sūtra)

1) "Shingyō jyakugo narabini ju" (心經著語并頌) in Japanese. cf. Dr. D. T. Suzuki, "Manual of Zen Buddhism" (grove press, Inc. New York, 1960) p. 26-27.

2) "Direct pointing at the soul of man; Seeing into one's nature and the attainment of, Buddhahood." is supposed to follow.

3) cf. Jōzan Hidane "Zenshūgaku" (The study on Zen) 禪宗學 (Naigai Shobō, Tōkyō, 1942) p. 22.

and said, "Everything written here is nothing but the teaching on Causation or similes, excepting some sentences like 'If there exists Oneness, everything in the universe is in Nirvāna'... If this scripture had any virtue, any other books on history, philosophy, song and entertainment also might have virtue." and he began to practice Zen which had been transmitted without scripture.

According to his biography, after twenty-six years "one night when he was chanting Hokkekyo he suddenly awoke to the deep meaning of it at the moment of listening to the beautiful note of a grasshopper, and the whole doubt of his young days disappeared immediately... He cried loudly... Thus he attained absolute freedom, Zen-wit and the true eye to read scripture..."⁴⁾ Reading this, we can see that Hakuin walked the same way as the great Zen masters had done before. Namely, his practice of Zen began with a great doubt of scripture. Therefore it can be said that his great doubt of scripture in his young days did not mean the separation from Hokkekyō but meant the motivation of inquiring into the real understanding of scripture.

Hakuin-Zenji's "Commentary and Poems on the Prajñā-pāramitā-hṛdaya-sūtra" is one good example of a subjective reading of scripture which was done on the basis of his tremendous experience of Satori enlightenment achieved through discipline at the risk of his life.

II

"Kokurin and Tōrei's Venomous Annotation on the Prajñā-pāramitā-hṛdaya-sūtra" 鶴林東嶺兩禪師毒語注心經 is quite a wellknown text in Zen in which Tōrei Enji 東嶺圓慈 (1721-1792), a disciple of Hakuin,

4) cf. "Hakuin oshō nempu" 白隱和尚年譜 (Biography of Hakuin): Articles of sixteen years old and forty years old, which appears in "Hakuin oshō Zenshū" 白隱和尚全集 (Ryūgin Sha, Tōkyo, 1935) Vol. I

5) According to Hakuin's biography the text lectured on by Hakuin was named "Dokugo shingyō" (Hṛdaya-sūtra commented with venomous words.) The word "venomous" may signify the tremendous ability of Zen wit which smashes both medicine and venom, both good and evil.

made an annotation on the Prajnā-pāramitā-hṛidaya-sūtra from a Buddhist doctrinal point of view by Hakuin's orders and added it to Hakuin's own "Commentary and poems" on the same sutra on which Hakuin had already lectured twice.⁵⁾ The text which I am going to consider is Hakuin's Commentary and poems only. From the poem at the very end of the present text we can know when this text was corrected and edited for the first time.

"The winter of the first year of Enkyō-Kōshi (1744)

My students co-operated to copy this.

Each character is worth ten yen.

The total characters used here amount to two thousand."

When "Keisō-dokuzui" 荆叢毒蘂, one of Hakuin's representative Goroku (biography and literature of a Zen master), was to be published, Hakuin wanted to include the venomous annotation on the Hṛidaya-sūtra in it. But this plan was cancelled for some reason. Three years later, however, (1759) it was published without Tōrei's annotation for the first time, being included in "Keisō-dokuzui-shūi" 荆叢毒蘂拾遺 (Supplement to Keiso-dokuzui).⁶⁾

Recently, in 1958, Rev. Zenkei Shibayama, the abbot of Nanzenji in Kyoto, edited Hakuin's "Commentary and poems on Hṛidaya-sūtra" adding his own annotation. He published this as an independent text with the title "Kunchū-dokugo-shingyo" 訓註毒語心經. I think this is quite a remarkable work. My English translation of the present text owes much to this Shibayama text.

Almost all of Hakuin's works were completed after he was fifty. They may be divided into three periods according to their type and contents.

I.—Traditional type texts written in Chinese which declare the essence of Zen for its transmission. These include such works as "Jōzan-hyakuin" 杖山百韻 (53),⁷⁾ "Sokkōroku-kaien-fusetsu" 息耕錄

6) Tōrei's annotation had been handed down in handwritten form until it was published in 1854 for the first time. It was exactly ninetyfour years after he had written it.

7) Number shows Hakuin's age.

開筵普說 (56), "Kanzanshi-sendaikibun" 寒山詩闡提記聞 (57), "Kaiankokugo" 槐安國語 (65) and so on.

II. — Works written in a rather difficult old style Japanese. These include such works as "Hebiichigo" 邊鄙以知語 (70), "Yasen-kanna" 夜船閑話 (73), "Kanamugura" 假名叢 (79) and so on.

III. — Stories and Songs written in the language of daily life for the common people.

These include such works as "Anjin-hokoritataki" 安心法興利多々記 (80), "Otafukujyorō-konahikiuta" おたふく女郎粉引歌 (?), "Neboke-no-mezamashi" 寢惚氣廻眼覺誌 (?), "Kana-hōgo" 假名法語, (?) and so on.

The tendency for the mind as it becomes more mature to make the way of instruction more plain is especially remarkable in Hakuin. Since it was edited when he was sixty (in 1744), the present text is supposed to belong to the first period. Therefore its explanation is keen and powerful yet beautiful, simple and direct, yet deep. Quite often we can find in this text very essential words of Zen which we can not understand by our intellectual thinking. These are, of course, nothing but Hakuin's grandmotherly kindness toward his descendants.

III

Although there has been a great deal of study on the uniqueness of Hakuin's Zen, we may summarize it briefly as the fusion of two elements that is to say the emphasis on the experience of Satori enlightenment and the new way of instruction. This included, for monks, the systematizing of the Koan (a sort of problem which is given to an aspirant to test his qualification for progress toward enlightenment) and, for common people, the writing of an easy text.⁸⁾

All his works, therefore, are nothing but encouragement to get enlightenment. Yet his way of teaching is multitudinous according to the object. Nemely he gave intense encouragement to the monk to

8) cf. Rev. Z. Shibayama, "On Hakuin" which appears in "Zen culture" (Hanazono College, Kyōto) Vol 15th. p. 109.

practice the Bodhisattva's discipline, and on the other hand endeavoured to make people awake to their inborn Buddha-nature. At any rate, the Zen of Hakuin which he displayed to both monk and layman may be characterized as "Shikaku type Zen" 始覺的禪風 (Zen asserting that we can not be in enlightenment before we awake). As Hakuin says, "If you do not penetrate closely by the sweat of your brow, you will not see anything happen!" We may say this type of Zen is just opposite to Bankei-Zenji's Fushō-Zen 盤珪禪師の不生禪 (1622-1693) or the Mokushō-Zen of the Soto school 曹洞宗の默照禪 which might be called Hongaku type Zen 本覺的禪風 (Zen asserting that we can be in enlightenment originally).⁹⁾

The purpose of the present text, therefore, must be to call up the real reader of scripture rather than to put a commentary or poems on the scripture. In fact, he asserts a real grasp of the meaning of the scripture can be had only by the real reader who has the real eye to read it. Therefore we can see Hakuin's unique treatment everywhere in the present text which is quite different from the uncountable numbers of annotations on the same scripture made by other priests.¹⁰⁾

IV

Now let me try to analyse the contents according to the process of Zen practice, so that you may know how important the experience of Satori enlightenment is in Zen and how deep an experience Hakuin had.

For the man who has longing to realize the true understanding of prajñā, great transcendental wisdom, it is crucial to stand in the deep

9) cf. Rev. Z. Shibayama, "Rinzai-Zen no seikaku" 臨濟禪の性格: "The characteristic of Rinzai-Zen" (Rokuyanon, Tōkyo, 1951) p. 29, and his "Hakuin-Zen no Kanna ni tsuite" 白隠禪の看話について: "On the Kanna in Hakuin's Zen" which appears in "Zen no ronkō" (Iwanami shoten, Tōkyo, 1949) p. 83.

10) Some of them are included in "Nihon Daizōkyo (Shueisha, Tōkyo, 1934): Hannyabu shōsho" 日本大藏經般若部章疏 (Japanese edition of the Tripitaka in Chinese: the article on Prañā).

abyss of absolute death once to see it. Hakuin says,

“Unless you cast your hand away from the precipice.

You would never see the Praiñā.”

(on *Prajna*)¹¹

“If you do not cut off your liferoot on your way of Zen,

You will have to have a hard discipline eternally.”

(on *Paramita*)

“If one wants to such Samadhi,

He must sweat all over the body once.”

(on *what is capable of allaying all pain*)

We easily understand that Hakuin himself had a tremendous experience of this “great death” or “human death” (not animal death) from his unapproachable explanation as follows;

“Both ears are as though deaf, the eyes as if blind;

The universes loses its body at midnight.”

(on *Prajna*)

“Burning black fire with black light;

The universe having lost its colour.”

(on *there is no knowledge, no attainment*)

“When this bumpkin stick has been broken, the universe is just a mass of black; heaven and earth lose their colour; sun and moon swallow their shining; filling a black lacquered bowl with black soup...”

(on *the Mantram of great wisdom*)

The state of mind which is thus explained is to be called “Absolute non-dualistic world”, “absolute negative world”, “absolute equal world”. Only through this crucial state of mind can one get enlightenment. I may say that this state of mind is more important than the state of enlightenment from the stand point of practicing Zen.

However this stage of darkness of non-duality should be broken. Otherwise it is no more than so-called “dead Zen” which is specially criticized by Hakuin. He says;

“Foxes holes and dead man’s graves make many men fall down.

You should fear these dark deep holes!”

(on *therefore in emptiness*)

“The cave of emptiness or formlessness”

(on *Bodhisattva*)

The admonition against “dead Zen” is one of Hakuin’s important teachings. For it is possible in mystical religion in general

11) The italic is a part of scripture. (Dr. Suzuki’s translation)

that one is satisfied with being selfless through identification with God or the universe and forgets to come down to the real world which is multifarious. ("Dead Zen" is the term by which Hakuin was in his young days criticized by his master Shōju-rojin 正受老人 (1642-1721)).

Now let us see what happens after one awakens from the absolute death. According to Hakuin's explanation of reality, which is gained only through such a desperate experience, ultimate reality can not be explained in usual terms. This may be seen by the following lines.

"Putting on cosmetics, a limping tortoise is standing in the evening breeze."
(on form is not other than emptiness)

"The stone woman throws away her reed, and squares her thin shoulder; The muddy ox walks on the waves and shakes his angry fang."
(on the same can be said of sensation, thought, volition and consciousness)

"The wooden chicken stands on the coffin holding an egg;
The earthenware-horse following the wind goes back to his home."
(on he reaches final Nirvana)

Being essential words of Zen-wit, these sentences are unapproachable and meaningless in this secular world. The ultimate value which is gained by hard discipline in climbing up to the highest stage of mind has to come down to work in the lowest stage of world again. This is the basic idea of the Bodhisattva, which is the ideal image of Mahayana Buddhism.

Therefore Hakuin says,

"Jumping out of the cave of non-selfness,
To float up and down on the waves of the secular ocean;
O Bodhisattva who saves us!
Ten thousand separate bodies of him are still not enough."
(on Bodhisattva)

"Vowing never to remain at the low stage of enlightenment.
He tries both to seek the higher and to save sentient beings.
Even if the universe were destroyed.
He would continue eternally to keep his vow."
(on Bodhisattva, because is no attainment)

When one looks around the world surrounding him with enlightened eyes, everything in the world is complete. There is nothing to want,

nothing to hate, nothing to avoid. Therefore the following poems of Hakuin are not only descriptive of the highest beauty but also of the highest truth.

“How clear the mind never to be gained!
The long sky is swept clear.....
On the platform being colder than iron.
I am meditating at midnight.
Moonlight comes with fragrance through the small window.”
(on *hridaya*)

“The bush warbler’s song comes with the breeze.
The peach flower blooms in the warm smoky day.
A group of pretty girls wearing flowers on their beautiful dresses.”
(on *that which is form is emptiness*)

“Like the beauty of the falling leaf in the autumn rain, So the yellow rice field and the cloud in the glow of evening.....”
(on *the highest Mantram*)

In this way in Zen Buddhism the whole of nature and every affair in our daily life are nothing but real scripture. Therefore Hakuin’s poem on the word “scripture” runs as follows :

“At Pippala cave.
This scripture has not yet been written ;
Kumaraiva has not even a word to translate ;
Ananda can never hear the Buddha’s teaching ;
The wild goose from the south standing on the beach in the snowy reeds ;
The mountain moon looks slender because of being clear ;
A cold cloud seems to drop ;
No matter how many Buddhas appear in this world.
They can never correct in them even a word.” (on *Sutra*)

Here in this poem we can see the purpose of present text. That is to say, to make people awake to understand the real signification of life so that they may live more strongly and with great appreciation. This final purpose of Zen practice was Hakuin’s aim in this commentary with poems.

This small thesis is supposed to be the foreword to my English translation of Hakuin’s “Commentary and poems on Prañā-pāramitā-hṛdaya-sūtra”, the whole of which I can not present here by the limitation of space.