

Chapter 25

Conclusion

This book examines the relationship between Buddhism and modern society. I devote a lot of space to discussing the themes and theories of Buddhism. I attempt to introduce the gist of Buddhism to the readers and more so, to share with others what I have learned from my personal experience and understandings. In the following I will briefly reiterate the key learning points derived from the classical sutras.

1. Buddhist sutras enlighten us to perceive the correct attitude towards life. The *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* has stated that “The Buddha’s teachings in this world cannot be appreciated without worldly references.”¹

Problems of various nature can arise in life. On the conscious level, everyone has to overcome difficulties, confront challenges, and improve their living conditions. In light of this, having longings for fame, profit, health, and longevity make complete sense. Generally speaking, these longings are part of living in the world. It would be impossible for Buddhist teachers to ask their sincere disciples to completely abandon worldly things. Even Buddhist monks and nuns cannot wholly ignore worldly demands and concerns.

¹ 六祖壇經：“佛法在世間，不離世間覺。”

2. Although we are unable to completely get rid of worldly demands and concerns, we need to recognize the principle of cause and effect, practice morality, meditation and wisdom, and eradicate craving, aversion, and ignorance.
3. One famous quote from the *Diamond Sutra* is worth close examination. “All conditioned phenomena are simply illusions - like bubbles, like shadows, like dew, and lightning. This is the way one should see the conditioned,” says the sutra. Chapter 3 of this book already indicates that we ought to see life as the morning dew, and not attach too much to fame and profit. This quote is extremely meaningful and we should treasure it in our minds.
4. Human life and other things that arise, change, and cease are called “conditioned phenomena” in Buddhism. Conversely, the eternal and immutable conditions separated from arising, changing and ceasing are called “unconditioned phenomena.” According to the *Diamond Sutra*, “all sages and highly respected scholars are different in one aspect, and that is the way they understand or appreciate the permanent nature of eternity”². My understanding is that all sages of different religions are distinguished by their differentiating understandings of the permanent aspects of eternity. When mentioning conditioned phenomena, this scriptural text already implies its distinction with unconditioned phenomena and the application of the latter in religion.

² “一切賢聖，皆以無為法而有差別。”

Below is an example to illustrate this statement in the *Diamond Sutra*:

Suppose there are two gentlemen: Mr. A and Mr. B. Mr. A has spent money on child support. He has done this because he believes that is within the expectation of an eternal power that governs all sentient beings including himself. Mr. B, on the other hand, has made similar expenditures, but he did it because of legal requirements or other reasons. The former may be a Christian, and the latter perhaps an atheist scientist. As I see it, the behaviours of the two men reflect their different understanding of “unconditioned phenomena,” and furthermore, their different levels of cultivation - just as it is stated in the *Diamond Sutra*.

5. For beginners who would like to gain some basic understanding of Buddhism, recognizing the value of the first three points would be sufficient. People of great virtue and virtuous friends have given an incisive explanation on “conditioned phenomena,” but they have rarely talked about the abstruse “unconditioned phenomena.” It is well known that after Śākyamuni attained Buddhahood, he incessantly lectured on the scriptures for forty-nine years, but the sutras say that the Buddha never taught any Dharma.

As Section 21 of the *Diamond Sutra* asserts: “Anybody who would say such things as ‘The Tathāgata (Buddha) has taught the Dharma’ would misrepresent me, on account of wrong learning.”³ It also says that “There exists no Dharma

³ 金剛經第 21 分: “若人言如來有所說法, 即為謗佛.”

whatsoever which can be apprehended called the teaching of the Dharma.”⁴ My own understanding is that anything that involves unconditioned phenomena cannot be uttered. Verbal eloquence alone is not enough to explain the truth of eternity. Practitioners have to walk every step themselves to search for enlightenment.

6. As far as the eternal “unconditioned phenomena” is concerned, Christians have their beloved God. Is there any eternal matter in Buddhism? The answer is yes. Buddhists believe in the existence of “emptiness,” namely, the emptiness of all phenomena mentioned in the *Heart Sutra*. It is neither created nor destroyed, neither defiled nor pure, and neither increases nor diminishes.⁵ This emptiness is the intrinsic nature, thusness, original nature, and the Buddha-nature. Chapter 6 of this book has articulated that human nature is originally pure. People need to train themselves to see their intrinsic nature. Then they could cultivate, practice, and attain Buddhahood on their own. The above are some of my thoughts on the study of Buddhism.

For questions about the future of religion, especially whether or not people should fully negate religious beliefs, have been expounded in the last part of Chapter 5.

⁴ “說法者，無法可說。”

⁵ “不生，不滅，不垢，不淨，不增，不減。”

A Light-Hearted Sense of Joy

Readers have different innate character traits and study skills. I will feel satisfied with the writing of this book as long as readers are able to comprehend the meaning of religion and the two keynotes of Buddhism, including:

- 1) the central theme of Buddhism,
- 2) the outline of cultivation.

In other words, I hope readers could appreciate a set of appropriate conducts of life. The following words could be used to describe the mindset of a cultivator: truthfulness, purity, equality, the right understanding, compassion, to see through things, to cast off attachment, to feel comfortable in spite of such abandonment, to be in accord with circumstances, to remember the teachings of Buddha.

Readers should also keep in mind the insight from the *Diamond Sutra* that encourages “when giving away to help others, there should not be any link or attachment to other considerations”⁶, and “conceiving an aspiration (for giving away) that is not fixed on anything at all”.⁷ Such insight has perfectly captured the outline of cultivation.

⁶ 應無所住行於布施。

⁷ 應無所住而生其心。

This book also provides abundant materials for Buddhist studies, from which readers could clearly understand the two keynotes and cultivate a correct attitude of life. I sincerely hope readers will benefit from reading the book. If readers resonate with the ideas I lay out here and feel enlightened by them, please carefully store the book and read it again. I hope this book will bring joy to the readers.