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The Virtue Reality of Humanistic Buddhism by Ven. Yinshun

Abstract

Samadhi is one of the most important ways in Buddhist practice. Why must we practice *samadhi*? What is the effect of practicing *samadhi*? Has it limitations? Ven. Yinshun, who was called the spiritual mentor of the Humanistic Buddhism, had written an important article named *To Practice samadhi: To Practice One's Mind and Idealist Mystery*. According to Ven. Yinshun, someone will easily lead to deviating from the Buddhism if he practices meditation without *prajñā*. I think this is the problem about the virtue reality in Humanistic Buddhism.

Key words

Humanistic Buddhism, *samadhi*, virtue reality

In the 20th century, many famous monks proposed the Humanistic Buddhism in China. The Humanistic Buddhism has become the most important theoretical innovation in the Han areas. It is not only a theory but also a practical method. There are two main aspects of its practice: in social life and in personal religious training. The former is represented by the social activities which accord with its theory. The latter is mainly related to the method of practice and the ways one after another, which is less researched in the academic circles. Ven. Yinshun was called the spiritual mentor of the

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Humanistic Buddhism. Based on his article *To Practice samadhi: To Practice One's Mind and Idealist Mystery*, I will discuss the virtue reality in practicing meditation of Humanistic Buddhism.

I. The Effects and Limitations of *Samadhi*

Generally speaking, religions are transcendental. The followers who want to obtain this kind of transcendent experience must practice a special method. Among the ways of Buddhist practice, to practice *samadhi* or meditation (*xiu ding*, 修定) is one of the most important ones which can lead the trainees to get to the transcendent achievement. *Samadhi* (*ding* 定) means meditation in Buddhism. Sometimes it may be translated as 'concentration of mind.' Not only in the early period sutras (such as *Agama sutra*), but also in the later period scriptures and commentaries (as in tantric Buddhism), was *samadhi* numerously discussed. According to these classics, Ven. Yinshun mainly analyzed four possible results (with meritorious virtue) of *samadhi*. They were *xian fa le* (现法乐), *sheng zhi jian* (胜知见), *fen bie hui* (分别慧), and *lou yong jin* (漏永尽). These meritorious virtues are the achievements after meditation. This can be explained to the way-followers that why practicing meditation is necessary. But on the other hand, the four results show the limitations of each *samadhi's* result.

The first result is *xian fa le* (现法乐). *Xian fa* (现法) means present life. It is not about the future world. Practicing meditation may bring you benefits at present. When you practice *catur-dhyana* (four-stage meditation, *si chan*, 四禅), it may lead to obtain the states such as 'heaven with joy of leaving the bond of rebirth' (*li sheng xi le*, 离生喜乐), 'paradise with joy of cessation of rebirth' (*ding sheng xi le*, 定生喜乐), 'land of wondrous joy after the previous joys' (*li xi miao le*, 离喜妙乐), 'the Pure Land free from thinking' (*shen nian qing jing*, 舍念清净) and so on. They are all what you can get at present, and can make your body and mind happy. Although it is without the word *le* (乐, joy), the fourth stage *dhyana* (the Pure Land free from thinking) is surpassing previous stage. As the pure mind is correspondent with the clean body, one can get the freedom of the mind and the wisdom of attaining everything at will. This ideal realm is quite different from the secular world which is full of *klesha* (the delusion and temptation of the passions and of ignorance, 烦恼).

The second result is *sheng zhi jian* (胜知见). *Sheng* (胜) is victorious, surpassing. *Zhi* (知) means knowing and *jian* (见) means seeing. This re-

sult can be subdivided into three categories. They are ‘cultivating thought of clear light’ (*xiu guang ming xiang*, 修光明想), ‘cultivating thought of pure things’ (*xiu jing xiang*, 修净想) and ‘showing supernatural power through mental concentration’ (*fa shen tong*, 发神通). ‘Cultivating thought of clear light’ is a kind of spiritual training when someone is asleep. By overcoming lethargy and upside down in the dreams, a soundly sleep with bright light and correct memory of truth will be retained. Even with it, one can see the shape of celestial spirits, meet and talk with them. And then, one can know the name, the suffering and the joy, the desire for food, and the life-span of the celestial spirits. (TRET¹ 1924–1934a: 539–540) ‘Cultivating thought of pure things’ is a kind of meditation on the uncleanness of the human body. When meditating the disintegration of the dead body – stasis, decay, discrete all dead – one can destroy his desire, and understand the primary cause and conditional cause. But another effect such as pessimistic mood, the deed of suicide, maybe occur. To avoid these bad effects, Buddha taught followers the pure contemplation. Buddhists could meditate and think the purity of other things which are counterpart to the bones. ‘Showing supernatural power through mental concentration’ is also a practice way to see phenomena (*lakshya*, 见相, *jian xiang*), to know enlightenment (*bodhi*, 觉知, *jue zhi*). There are five different supernatural powers to see and to know all kinds of environment which are *deva-vision* (*siviyachaksus*, 天眼通, *tian yan tong*), *deva-ear* (*divyashrotra*, 天耳通, *tian er tong*), insight into other minds (*parachitta-jnana*, 他心通, *te xin tong*), recollection of previous existences (*purvanivasanusmriti-jnana*, 宿命通, *su ming tong*), and *deva-foot* (*riddhi-saksatkriya*, 神足通, *shen zu tong*). Yinshun said,

When practicing in the fourth stage of Dhyana, someone can show five different kinds of supernatural powers at will. Supernatural powers can make someone see and know things beyond conventional. Deva-vision, for instance, can make someone see things near and far away; visible things and invisible tiny material; its appearance and internal; at the front and the rear; in the bright and in the dark place. When someone cultivates thought of clear light, he may get Deva-vision. (Yinshun 2009b: 103)

That mentioned above – ‘cultivating thought of clear light,’ ‘cultivating thought of pure things,’ and ‘showing supernatural power through mental concentration’ – are the second result through meditation.

¹ The abbreviation ‘TRET’ is hereafter used for Taisho Revised Edition of Tripitaka.

The third result is *fen bie hui* (分别慧). *Fen bie* (分别) means someone can tell everything clear at every moment. *Hui* (*prajñā*, 慧) is wisdom. Man who practices meditation must keep an awake consciousness. Ven. Yinshun said,

When dressing himself, he knows he is dressing. When going for alms, walking, talking, arising a good or a bad memory, he knows what he is doing. So does he know when he obtains knowledge and awakes himself or others. It's easy to achieve the purposes in meditation if someone keeps a calm and clear mind in his daily life. (Yinshun 2009b: 103)

The way how to do it, is to observe commandments. If someone keeps commandments with all his heart for a long time, his mind will be pure and clear at last. This is so called to get concentration by depending on disciplines (*yi jie de ding*, 依戒得定). 'If someone enters into the state of *samadhi* with all illusions eliminated, the surplus power of *samadhi* will accompany with him when he comes out off the state of meditation. If so, whenever he speaks or not, comes into or out off a place, his mind is clear, just like he is still in the state of abstraction.' (Yinshun 2009b: 104) These kinds of result of *samadhi* are mentioned in *Yogacharya-bhumi-shastra* (《瑜伽师地论》). They are called 'to holdout the root' (*shou hu gen men*, 守护根门), 'not to drink and eat excessively' (*yin shi zhi liang*, 饮食知量), 'to awaken yoga' (*jue mei yu jia*, 觉寤瑜伽), and 'to stop when correct views has been gotten' (*zheng zhi er zhu*, 正知而住). (TRET 1924–1934f: 414–417)

The forth result is *lou yong jin* (漏永尽). *Lou* (*klesha*, 漏) means distress, worry, affliction, passion, or temptation etc. It is an appellative of all conflicting emotions. *Yong jin* (永尽) means to end it forever. The *dharma* (Buddhist law and principles, *fa*) declares that the basic of life and death is *klesha*. Only when someone cuts off the *klesha* entirely, can he attain a completion of enlightenment. But the power of *samadhi* can only cut off the *klesha* temporarily. As it is only an *upaya* (*fang bian fa men*, 方便法门, appropriate skillful method), meditation can not cut off the *klesha* from its root.

The above four *samadhi* results definitely have some special effects. Someone may get supernatural experience and power which differs from that of ordinary people. But there are some obvious limitations when meditation. Ven. Yinshun pointed out these limitations clearly. In his opinion, *xian fa le* (现法乐) is concerned with human's body and physiology. If someone pays particular attention on the joy in meditation, he might put forth his effort on his body only, and lay his daily life aside. They are

called ‘person to benefit self,’ because they seek the personal joy only in the meditation. And this can’t display its significance of *mahayana* (great vehicle, 大乘). *Sheng zhi jian* (胜知见) was evaluated by Ven. Yinshun as followed,

The meaning of Cultivating thought of clear light and pure things is surpassing. The objects of thinking are fake, not real ones. This kind of contemplating may strengthen one’s Samadhi, cut off one’s Klesha, but can’t lead into the complete freedom. If someone focuses on the material appearance (of all the sentient living, including Buddha) and material realm, then practices meditation, his mind may be pure and clear in the ideal realm with glorious material appearance. If this result were combined with Xian Fa Le (现法乐), someone would take spirit and ghost as faith which is quite away from the complete freedom. (Yinshun 2009b: 102).

In *dharma* (Buddhist law and principles), one can attain freedom and liberation (*mukti*, 究竟解脱) without cultivating thought of clear light and pure things. The meritorious effects, *xian fa le* (现法乐), *sheng zhi jian* (胜知见), as well as supernatural power, are not indispensable factors on the way to attain enlightenment. Although some *arya* (the holy) can prove the *bodhi* through the transcendent realm when they practice meditation, the similar state can also be attained through non-Buddhist doctrines. According to Ven. Yinshun, this is the limitation of merely *samadhi*. He said,

If Xian Fa Le (现法乐) and Sheng Zhi Jian (胜知见) are one-sidedly emphasized, secularization and deification may occur. (Yinshun 2009b: 104)

Ven. Yinshun animadverted fiercely on the secularization and deification in his life time. If *sheng zhi jian* (胜知见) is emphasized in the practice meditation, ‘it means the turndown of Real *dharma* (Buddhist law):’ (Yinshun 2009b: 103) Accordingly, he held the same critical attitude towards the seeking-salvation way of the Pure Land sect. He thought that the Pure Land is the retribution of Buddha’s deeds. Anyone who wants to live in the Pure Land in future, must make a great effort in cultivating himself like this,

‘Doing every tiny good deeds without any evil ones. Keeping a pure Buddha-nature in his mind, One must seek and practice the real virtue actually’. He can, then, obtain the Buddha’s fruits. In this process, the power of a vow from Maitreya (the Buddha of the Pure Land, 弥勒佛) is only one seed (Yinshun 2009a: 24–25).

II. Cultivating *Prajnā* and the Supreme *Mukti* (究竟解脱)

In the 20th century, with the mighty impact of Western culture in China, and the rapid collapse of the Qing Empire, Chinese from all social circles were forced to reflect on the reasons thoroughly why there were a huge gap between China and Western society. At first, 'salvation,' 'enlightenment,' then 'science,' 'democracy' in New Culture Movement, dominated the main theme and its variations of Chinese intellectuals' thoughts. Under these circumstances, Humanistic Buddhism was produced and developed. In its theory, the *prajnā* was thought to have a rational spirit, which were connected with modern science, and of cause had been paid particular attention. Ven. Yinshun emphasized two aspects of the *prajnā* when someone practicing Buddhist conduct.

A. The result of *lou yong jin* (漏永尽) is not complete

Among the four results of *samadhi*, Ven. Yinshun said, *fen bie hui* (分别慧) and *lou yong jin* (漏永尽) are not the ideal effects of Buddhists' meditation, they are not complete. *Fen bie hui* (分别慧) puts stress on awakening of knowledge and seeing of objects, and *lou yong jin* (漏永尽) may come from *samadhi* or *prajnā*. It is different ultimately for *lou yong jin* (漏永尽) coming from *samadhi* or *prajnā*. Buddha told us, because ordinary people tend to cling to things as real, they feel suffering. But the real state of things is impermanent. There is no ego (无我, *wu wo*), there is no one's belongings (无我所, *wu wo suo*). This kind of state is *shunya* (voidness, 空, *kong*). So the sutra says: 'To empty your desire, to empty your anger, to empty your ignorance.' 'If someone removes all of it, suffering will be ended, and the *mukti* will be got.' (Yinshun 2009b 104) One can achieve it 'depending on *samadhi*.' But the Buddhism theory indicates that the *mukti* 'depending on *prajnā*' is complete more. In order to get *lou yong jin* (漏永尽) entirely and permanently, wisdom is fundamental. (Yinshun 2009b: 104)

B. *Samadhi* of *Tantra-Mahayana Dharma* is not supreme

As Ven. Yinshun praised the importance of *prajnā*, he criticized secularization and deification a lot, especially the extreme deed and thought in the spiritual training of *tantra* sect. From his view, *tantra-mahayana dharma* emphasizes the way of *samadhi* obviously. (Yinshun 2009b: 130) Three

kinds of *bodhi* (*bodhichitta*, 菩提心, *pu ti xin*) are mentioned in *Adaman-tine Pinnacle Sutra* (《菩提心论》). They are ‘action and vow’ (行愿, *xing yuan*), ‘beyond description’ (胜义, *sheng yi*), and ‘*samadhi*’ (三摩地, *san mo di*) (TRET 1924–1934g: 572–574). Later, *tantra-mahayana* expanded *bodhichitta* to five kinds: ‘vow,’ ‘action,’ ‘beyond description,’ *samadhi*,’ and ‘*gunda*.’ *Samadhi* is important in any different way. Why is it? Ven. Yinshun pointed out the reason. Comparing with *madhyamika* and *yoga-chara* (two other practicing ways of Buddhism) which emphasize *prajñā*, *tantra-mahayana* stressed on draws a line the *samadhi* (定, *ding*) and the faith (*shraddha*, 信, *xin*) (Yinshun 2009b: 130).

Buddha is an enlightened one who awakes himself, awakes others, and attains the perfect enlightenment. He gets it by knowing the real essence of the world, and its law – the Absolute Noble Truth. The terms in Buddhism are ‘*shunyata* (the nature of the void, 空性, *kong xing*),’ ‘*bhutatahata* (the true nature of all beings, 真如, *zhen ru*),’ and ‘*dharmadhatu* (*dharm*-realm, 法界, *fa jie*).’ In order to obtain this Noble Truth, one must follow a certain path: Observing the object from body, mind, and the material world, making a choice, and the most important, wisdom. When Buddhism developed into the stage of ‘*tathagata-garbha*’ (the Buddha-treasury, 如来藏, *ru lai zang*), ‘mind of absolute purity’ (Buddha-natures 自性清净心, *zi xing qing jing xin*), and ‘I’ (我, *wo*), the importance of *prajñā* reduced. Whereas, the importance of ‘knowing with *shraddha*’ and ‘seeing with *samadhi*’ rised. *Abhaya-Tripitaka* (《无畏三藏禅要》) said,

Samadhi is, and only is the self-existent pure mind. the mirror-like pristine cognition (Adarshana-jnana, 大圆镜智) is its another name. All sentient beings, from Buddha (at the top) to the hungry ghosts (in the bottom), both have it, and can’t increase or decrease a little of it. Imagine that there is a round brightness, just like a pure moon [...] It is bright and pure, no other things in the world could compare with it. At first, someone may not see it in his mind. After a long time of observation, it becomes as clear as the moon [...] But in the end, the round line disappears, with the void brightness left [...] This is what is called Mind of absolute purity [...] When someone enters this realm, all Klesha will be ended [...] Whenever he is doing and thinking something or not, his nature is pure. This is the only path for him to obtain all the virtue of Dharma. (TRET 1924–1934e: 944–945)

This kind of method starts with ‘Imagine that there is a round brightness, just like a pure moon,’ and then meditation is practiced to achieve the *bodhi*. So it is obviously based on the faith and *samadhi*. The book *Pra-jnaparamita arhashatika* (《菩提心论》) also says,

Samadhi, not mentioned in other doctrines, is a real way to achieve the Bodhi [...] Because all kinds of sentient beings have the Buddha-nature in his mind. (TRET 1924–1934g: 572–574)

The full moon is the metaphor of it. If I see a full moon then void, I will get the complete Prajna. (TRET 1924–1934f: 573–574)

So the basic of *tantra-mahayana's* practice method is *shraddha* and *samadhi*. 'Cultivating the mysteries of Buddha, Prove and realize the Buddha nature.' (TRET 1924–1934g: 572–574)

There are four classes of *tantra*: *kriya* (action), *charya* (performance), *yoga-tantra*, and *anuttara-yoga-tantra* (supreme *yoga tantra*). *Anuttara-yoga-tantra* is the highest. If someone uses this method, what he meditates and thinks is not only Buddha, but also Buddha's Land, palace, and his families – *bodhisattva*, Queen of Mystic Knowledge, and Fierce Guardian of Buddhism. So, Buddha is not external. Buddha is in himself. He himself is Buddha. He possessed all Buddha virtue, and removed all obstruction of illusion. Also, the essence is to looking into (观, *guan*) and *samadhi* (定, *ding*) (Tsongkhapa 2012a). What's more, the book *The Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path to Tantra* ((密宗道次第广论)) indicates a method called six levels (六支).

In the second level, one must repair his body as a physical form. In third level, let winds to enter, and remain them in fourth level. With the dissolution of winds, the fifth level comes into the indestructible formless result. In six level, there are two kinds of truth to be awakened, the Void of Phenomenon and the Felling of Joy on the Unchangeable Enlightenment. (Tsongkhapa 2012b)

Ven. Yinshun maintained that it is important stage in practicing *tantra-mahayana* which depends on desire and then eliminating it. (Yinshun 2009b: 136) He said,

In the world of desire (Kamadhatu, 欲乐), lust is the highest. In world of form (Rupadhatu, 定乐), Samadhi joy of the Third Dhyana in Heaven of Form is the ultimate. But they both are not Mukti joy (解脱乐) Tantra-Mahayana wants to combine the Kamadhatu joy with Samadhi joy, and then makes an Unchangeable Mahasukha (great joy, 大乐), just like Yab-yum (masculine and feminine deities in sexual union, 男女和合) shows. (Yinshun 2009b: 141)

According to *dhama*,

this enlightenment can not be obtained from looking into the superlative wisdom. That's why Tantra-Mahayana must developed a Samadhi Bodhi, and put the superlative Bodhi aside. (Yinshun 2009b: 130)

In short, the practicing methods which are based on *samadhi* and *shrad-dha*, tend to ignore *prajnā*, and easy to deviate from the path of correct knowledge (正知, *samyak-jnana*) and correct views (正见, *samyak-drishti*). This is the main reason why *tantra-mahayana* is criticized.

III. *Maitri-Karuna* (慈悲) and Virtue Reality in Practicing Meditation

Merciful and pity (*maitri-karuna*, 慈悲) has two aspects. *Maitri* (慈, *ci*) means 'To give joy', *karuna* (悲, *bei*) means 'To save from suffering'. So subject and object must be appear, and of cause, *maitri-karuna* can only be fulfilled through the interaction between the living beings. *Maitri-karuna* is mind itself, reflects the virtue nature of the way-seekers. *Samyuktagama* (《杂阿含经》) says: 'People have worldly passions which lead them into delusions and sufferings. If the mind can be rid of these worldly passions, they can be freedom. (TRET 1924–1934b: 69) So, cultivating mind and cultivating *samadhi* possesses the significance of virtue nature.

Maitri-karuna and *prajnā* are twinning concepts in Buddhism. Some terms ('*maitri-karuna* and *prajnā* both running,' for instance) describe this kind of relationship. In the beginning of practice, 'generating the thought of enlightenment' means 'to seek to attain perfect wisdom' (*prajnā*) and 'to save of all living beings' (悲智双运). Only when combining two characteristics perfectly, one can attain the entry to Buddha-truth. Also in the process of the way, *prajnā* must be aware at any time in any places, in order to guarantee the virtue of Buddha nature would be emerged sufficiently. In vol. 47, *Samyuktagama* (《杂阿含经》) says: You listeners should meditate your mind on the phenomena of forms, just like Clever Golden Master (the alchemist, 金匠) does – putting raw gold into the stove, adding firework, blowing wind, cooling by watering etc. Thus raw gold would be ready for the purpose. (TRET 1924–1934b: 342) The above sutra tells us that one's mind must be adapted to circumstances just like Clever Golden Master does in order to get correct *samadhi*. In every stage, he does the right things, and get the right virtue reality. As so, the virtue reality of enlightenment will appear apparently. Furthermore, *Samyuktagama* (《杂阿含经》) says that gold is smelted procedurally – Picking out hard stone, grit, sand, black earth, goldlike dirty. Then to soften, to polish, to make something out of one's will. When a monk wants to cultivate thought, ways one after another should be followed too. First, to cut off *klesha* (烦恼), evil *kamma*

(evil action resulting in misery, 恶业, *e ye*), *mithya* (wrong views, 邪见, *xie jian*). Second, to cut off the consciousness of desire (欲觉, *yu jue*), hate (恚觉, *hui jue*), the thought to injure another person (害觉, *hai jue*), and good things (善法觉, *shan fa jue*). Finally, no support (from sutras) is added to the *samadhi*. Thus, one can obtain the surpassing pure realm, including all the effects (*catru-dhyana*) of *samadhi*, and the abilities possessed by a Buddha. (TRET 1924–1934b: 341) In short, alchemy is a metaphor to show the virtue reality in different stage of *samadhi*.

The theory of *tathagata-garbha* (the Buddha-treasury, 如来藏) appeared in 3 A.D. It raised the importance of the virtue reality of *dhama* to a high level. Ven. Yinshun explained that:

Tathagata (a title given to all Buddhas, 如来) is eternal, and this is original. Then all living beings should possess Buddha nature. *Tathagata* is everywhere. Then it should be in all the living. (Yinshun 2009b: 112)

Avatamsaka sutra (《华严经》) says,

The wisdom of Buddha, the wisdom of formless (无相, *wu xiang*), the wisdom of no obstacles (无碍, *wu ai*), are all in living being's body. Ignorant and unenlightened people don't know, see, believe it [...] If someone can see all the Buddha wisdom in his body, there is no difference between them. (TRET 1924–1934c: 624)

Tathagata Garbha Sutra (《大方等如来藏经》) also says:

Among the *klesha* of human beings, Buddha's wise, Buddha's eye, Buddha's body are there. It sits cross-legged without moving [...] If someone can cut all his annoyance away, Buddha's wisdom will be with him. (TRET 1924–1934d: 457)

So, in the theory of *tathagata-garbha*, Buddha is not only in human beings' mind, but also in their bodies. Obviously, it conveys the meanings that 'everyone has Buddha nature,' 'everyone can achieve Buddha realm.' (Yinshun 2009b: 113) Among all the Buddha nature, virtue is the most important. And the theory of *maitri-karuna* remarkably shows the virtue reality.

Mahayana, instead of *hinayana* (smaller vehicle), was chosen by Chinese. Among the *mahayana*, the theory of *tathagata-garbha*, which is not popular in India, was carried forward in the area of Confucian culture. Besides, the *tiantai* school, *huayan* school, and *chan* school (which were produced, developed in China, and with Chinese characteristics), they are much concerned about virtue. To some extent, the heyday of Buddhism in Tang Dynasty, was due to the 'conscientious reform' by the theory of

tathagata-garbha. I think that the theory and practice method of the Humanistic Buddhism in 20th Century continues the tradition. It was a positive responding to the modern scientific and humanistic thought that Ven. Yinshun revealed the virtue value of Buddhism.

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