



# Tathagata

People wondered how to address the Buddha; he was sublime and sacred, serene and beautiful, majestic and affectionate that they believed he was a super human -- deity or god. So, one bold person actually asked him how to call to him whether god or a man. Then the Buddha replied that he was neither human nor deity, but a Buddha. Ten epithets are actually used in literatures and ceremonies as the titles of the buddha: 1) *bhagava* (Blessed

One), 2) *arahan* (Perfected), 3) *samma-sambuddho* (Fully Awakened), 4) *vijja-carana-sampanno* (Wise and Virtuous), 5) *sugato* (Well Done), 6) *lokavidu* (Realistic), 7) *annutaro* (Unsurpassable), 8) *purisa dhamma sarathi* (Trainer of the Difficult), 9) *sattha deva-manussanam* (Teacher of Humans and Deities), 10) *buddho bhagava* (Awakened and Blessed). However, all these ten epithets are inadequate in terms of precisely describing his true quality. Another text says that Buddha used to call himself, "*Tathagata* (Thus-Come, Thus-Gone)." What is the significance of "*Tathagata*?"

To the often-asked question, whether the *Tathagata* still exists after death or not, it is said that, in the highest sense, the *Tathagata* cannot, even at life-time, be discovered, how much less after death. And that neither the five groups of existence are to be regarded as the *Tathagata*, nor can the *Tathagata* be found outside these corporeal and mental phenomena, arising and vanishing from moment to moment. Not only the true existence of the Buddha, also it is equivalently or even more difficult to truly understand the message and philosophy of the Buddha, which never belongs to the realm of conceptual knowledge or speculation. That's the exact reason why the Buddha called himself *Tathagata* – Thus gone, Thus come. It is also said that a buddha is never seen even by other buddhas.

It is also mentioned in the sutras that the Buddha admonished the disciples or followers who are only attracted to his physical appearance and do not, or could not actually see his true face. The true face refers to the personality that required ten epithets. It seems that this topic belongs to supramundane sense that is unavailable to ordinary persons who see only substantial existence. In this point we can classify several different kinds of people in terms of seeing things: 1) One who does not see anything, 2) one who sees only physical splendor, 3) one who studies only the statements and messages of the Buddha, 4) one who sees the true quality of matter, 5) one who does not need to see anything at all.

Not only the Buddha himself, but there are super humans who transcend any literary expression or verbal description. Those extraordinary persons are said that, "We can see only half of him." Or "We are simply dazzled and cannot see him." George Washington, King David were said to be like this.

*Tathagata* neither comes nor goes, neither sits nor stands nor walks nor lies down. *Tathagata* neither dies nor is born. Can we actually see a buddha? Here is another epithet that may help a person to see a buddha. That is *sato-sampajano* (mindful and wakeful, maintaining right mindfulness). Even if we see the Buddha with his physical body and intellectual statements, if we miss his true meaning of enlightenment that we call nibbana, there is actually no merit of seeing him. What matters is enlightenment.

Seeing *Tathagata* requires *Dharma eye*. *Dharma eye* is the eye that sees oneself. This is solely matter of practice and enlightenment. When we see ourselves, we see buddhas. *Dharma eye* is the eye that sees every phenomenon as *tatha* (thus), and does it without any distraction – neither expectation nor disappointment, let alone, anxiety, fear, emotion, love and hate, pain and worry, egoism, vanity, pride and honor, ignorance and infatuation, addiction or attachment, all of which make our life incorrect and distorted.

Our life is natural phenomena – *Dharma* – that is coming and going, rising and falling, meeting and separating, laughing and weeping, dying and being born, happy and unhappy all at the moment of the present

instant. All thing is neither solid nor stable nor constant nor eternal; instead, everything is changing and ephemeral, insecure and frustrating. However, one who exactly knows the nature and character, entity and reality of our life and natural phenomena, is neither frustrated nor depressed by the reality and cruelty of the life and nature. One who knows this reality of all phenomena is the *Tathagata* connoting "The Perfect One."

Actually, there is nothing special to be deluded or enlightened. There is nothing to seek or realize. Everything is just as it is – *tatha* (thus, such). This is quite a fact and reality in the natural world, and which are assumed actually vicious and hostile with human life. So much the humans demand security inventing all the facilities of civilization and culture. Finally, culture and civilization occupy the major part of their life putting the entire nature and natural destiny aside. That much they are away from *tatha*, that much they suffer, that extent they are confused; that much they are attached, they are ignorant, they are infatuated, they are blind, they are strange.

Even they do not understand the natural destiny, natural limitation, natural inability of themselves; they want to know everything, they want to possess all things what they see. They are without doubt just like little babies. They do not like to die; not want to be sick and ill; they do not want to be old and senile. They want to control everything, even weather and climate, time and space, birth and death. They want to rob and rape others; they want to kill and eat others; they destroy all trees and grasses. Still, they are yet not satisfied, as a matter of fact, they become greedier, when they become richer and more powerful; they demand the more when they become the more luxurious; they need the more when they become the more civilized. They consume the more resources, when they become the more advanced in their civilization. They go further and further from the natural order and natural entity – *Dharma -- Thus-ness*. Finally, they do not know where to go, how to satisfy themselves. All become crazy, all become drug addicted, all become alcoholic, and workaholic.

They cannot accept old age, diseases, death as all other beings do as natural phenomena and ultimate destination. They decorate life as well as death with all vanity and decoration, memory and attachment.

They are quite against *Tathagata*. From the beginning till end, they are deluded. They do not know, and cannot accept and acquiesce with the fact and reality that they are the *Tathagata*. All phenomena in this universe is simply *thus come* and *thus gone* as a wind or a morning glory. They are just *thus born* and *thus dead* as a dragonfly or cicada. We are just *thus come* and *thus gone* just like our breath that is what exactly we are breathing, or better say, *it is breathing*.

All our life depends upon this moment of inhalation; all the value and happiness of our life relies upon this instant of exhalation. Our life is so hazardous and ephemeral that any moment we have to die. If we know that our life is only continuation of this moment on respiration, we would be ready to die at this second leaving all the loved ones, possessions, titles and knowledge, privilege and position, fame and reputation and everything behind us. Also, we'll realize that all our body and mind as well as our substantial possession and property are as delirious as mirage or phantom.

Still, mentally, emotionally, or physically and in all senses, we are quite sure that we have been living or existing a certain period of time, say eighty years, or even one hundred years, under good and stable conditions surrounded by good and lovely children and grandchildren, kind friends and neighbors. That life is quite sure and real, it is never a phantom or delusion. We neither understand nor realize what many sages and enlightened teachers unanimously say that life is delusion and impermanent. That life has no entity and no substance. Let alone we neither agree nor realize that Buddha says he himself does not exist and that he is merely *Tathagata* – natural phenomenon.

In further speculation and more devoted meditation, however, we know that life is quite boring, very lonely and tiresome that we need constant activity and stimuli and excitements. Even if we have enough food or money, still we have to be busy doing something. It seems that a human has no ability to live his own life, rather he behaves like a slave of some other person; or he is controlled by some superior being like god or creator. He

has no ability to decide what to do or what should not to do. He simply does whatever helps him to kill time. Instinctively he does whatever most exciting and favorable thing to him. In this sense people are stupid enough to indulge in only harmful things to them, to their good health, to good family life, to good reputation and trust, namely they love gambling, drinking, and womanizing the most.

Then why cannot we stay at this moment and at this place? Why have we to bump around to confuse and embarrass us? This is something the most essential and significant mechanism of our life. We have to breathe every moment. We cannot store oxygen in lungs, blood, cells, or anywhere else, and take rest for a while. We cannot do this. We have to be diligent enough to breathe every moment for solely this moment of survival.

Likewise, we cannot store or reserve the activity for next moment, we are only capable to live this moment, we are able to do activity only for this moment just as breaths and pulsation of pulse are working at this moment and for this moment only. This is life. We can live neither past nor future, we have to live only this present moment. We have to do something at this instant. We have no choice, no liking or disliking; we have to do it, just as our breaths, pulsation, or reproduction of cells. Otherwise, we are dead. We are not happy with what we are doing now, let alone we never know what we are doing now! Our conscious mind is perfectly neglected and isolated from our essential function. In this sense our conscious mind – mentality is the secondhand helper, if not foolish reserve. Our consciousness is insensitive and blind. Our mind is always going astray: we are lost and are almost dead while alive. Actually, we are dead – unawake.

We neither perceive nor experience nor manifest any meaning or happiness whatever we do at this moment. We hate meaningless movies, we abhor harmful and nonsensical commercials, and still, we have to watch TV. We are constantly embarrassed with our neighbors, friends, and family, still we have to live together, call, or visit them at times. Otherwise, our relationship will even deteriorate and spoil. We hate our jobs and colleagues, still we have to do it to pay bills. We lose everything. We simply have to do something; otherwise, we become depressed or even neurotic, unless we have something to do.

The reality is that everything is ephemeral and transient. Nothing has substance or reality unless we enliven to substantialize or materialize our life. Every moment we have to do it to cling to life, which is actually no entity and only a continual transformation. The only way that materializes and substantializes our life is constant actions, feeling, or thinking. We cannot pass vacant moment except death or unconsciousness. This is the perfect proof and evidence that life is enlivening this moment.

However, if we see, know, and practice in the correct way; and if we are happy about the moment-by-moment activity that is essential; moreover, prerequisite and indispensable, meritorious and fruitful, we would be neither frustrated, depressed, nor lost. We would be never bored or rotten. This practice is called, "Meditation." That is otherwise defined as awareness or wakefulness just as conscious breaths, wakeful observation of our perception, precise examination of our mentality. This is the action and activity of this moment, and which conform to the natural phenomena; further, when we are absorbed in this activity at this instant to breaking through all the sensational, emotional as well as mental hindrances, we would experience bliss and ease, perfect liberation and purity that pervade entire space. Finally, we realize that we are empty and void, that we do not exist in any senses at all that we are merely constant change thus coming and thus going.

The Awakened One is constantly practicing this gracefully. He -- *tathagata* is the one fully focused on this practice, he merges this, and he is never distracted to anything at all, which annoys or irritates him. He does that which quickens, renovates, reproduces, balances, and harmonizes him with him; yet that is perfectly functioning at this instant. This is real natural phenomenon. This is the reality of life, which has no entity, no ego, no delusion, but vividly acting and reacting to this moment without any confusion or depression, as wind blows, clouds drift, water flows, birds fly, fish swims, and animals run. This is the life; this is the nature; this is the truth itself. This is seeing oneself.

**Natsuo Shibuya**