

3rd part of the 1st chapter "Imagination" from the book "The World Could Be Otherwise..." by Norman Fischer, from p.10 below

Fischer sets out the two Buddhisms in a short and a longer paragraph: that of the originally so-called 'Hinayana Buddhism', in which Buddha is described as an exemplary human being whose teachings can be experienced by anyone who carefully follows these sober, direct, practical instructions, examines them and recognizes them as true: That his suffering from the world is reduced, just as the Buddha teaches.

However, there was another, far wilder, more visionary and less 'scientific' tendency within the teachings, which developed into what we call 'Mahayana Buddhism' ('Great Vehicle', polemically differentiating itself from the supposed 'Small Vehicle' of the Hinayana), the author continues. In the writings of the Mahayana, there is a great deal of lengthy and extravagant verbosity in which it is argued that Buddha was not just an extraordinary human being, but instead an eternal cosmic principle. According to these writings, Buddha did not carefully end all suffering in order to then enter nirvana - he only pretended to die in order to reassure and encourage people. The suffering that almost crushed people temporarily put them in a state that made them long for a simple, conceivable and finite goal of endless peace in nirvana.

In truth, however, the Buddha never entered into such a nirvana. How could he? The Mahayana scriptures reveal the Buddha as an endless, enlightened, imaginary projection whose unlimited purpose was exactly the same as that of each and every one of us human beings. This purpose was compassion: endless caring, a saving activity that would end the suffering of countless beings for all time and in all spaces. Buddha, as portrayed in Mahayana scriptures, is the imaginary embodiment of love. Every human being, by his very nature, is a potential Buddha.

I realize on re-reading, an intensely attentive reading, that I have to meticulously translate practically every sentence in order to do justice to the content. In this book, Norman Fischer develops such a new, personal, but at the same time useful reinterpretation of Mahayana Buddhism that each of his thoughts is part of the teaching itself and all the explanations build on each other in a certain way.

I find myself in the dilemma of deciding how to proceed; if I continue at this pace, the book will perhaps be partly translated and partly made accessible to the reader by the end of next year. From my point of view, you can spend a long time on these two paragraphs, as I did in my first attempt: a kind of summary.

The difficulty here is that concentrates cannot be summarized, that is, shortened, without losing depth. Secondly, I note – which does not refute, but rather confirms, the first assertion – that the book has the quality of a teaching. In the case of a teaching, you can open a book at any page, read a sentence or a paragraph and be satisfied. The content is so profound that the sentence, in a sense, contains the entire book. Nevertheless, there is an arc, because the book deals deeply with the 4th Noble Truth, the end of suffering, and the path to it, the so-called Eightfold Path, which the author makes into a sevenfold path, with the completely new Chapter 1: The Power of our Imagination. As soon as I think of chapter 1 and the title of the book, a radiance spreads across my face and through my whole body: the world not only COULD be different, it IS different! Namely, different from what we always thought, different from what we were taught and what we were shown, different from what our sensory organs can grasp. And this is where the Zen teacher arrives at the next step, namely, the pain, the suffering, the gnawing dissatisfaction, etc., etc. Here, too, we have been led to a completely false interpretation. Rather, we need a

new and noble approach at the heart of the Buddha Way. We misunderstand the nature and meaning of suffering by speaking of “my” pain. In fact, however, every pain we experience is not “mine”, not “ours”: it is the pain we all share.

(We are now on page 12 of the book)

September 22, 2024