

THE BUDDHA IN MAHĀYĀNA BUDDHISM

THE whole system of Mahāyāna Buddhism may be said to depend on its conception of the Buddha. With it the Buddha ceased to be merely historical; he grew to be the object of the religious consciousness which came to assert itself more and more strongly as the Mahāyāna conception of Buddhism gained its force in India. The Buddha for the Hīnayāna followers so called was a great teacher who revealed the Law to dispel their ignorance. Whatever reverence they showed him was that for an extraordinary human being, who, while far surpassing them in intellect, morality, and spiritual insight, was still human, subject to the law of karma or birth and death. The Dharma was not his creation, it existed before him, and disclosed itself to his superior spirituality. The Buddha was to the Hīnayānists, therefore, a sort of medium through whom the truth became accessible and intelligible to them. They were grateful to him and paid him all the deference due to a rare spiritual seer. To them thus the Dharma and the Buddha were two distinct items of conception, in fact together with their own congregation (*Samgha*) they formed the Triple Treasure (*triratna* 三寶) of Buddhism. The Buddha (佛), the Dharma (法), and the Samgha (僧), as the three essential constituents of Buddhism stood on equal footing. Of course the Buddha was the center of the congregation, without whom the latter could not have any reason of existence, but since the congregation was the only ethical school where human character could be perfected, its importance in the body of Buddhism could never be ignored. Especially, when its component members began to go out and missionarise the entire earth, they were representatives of the Buddha and transmitters and propagators of the Dharma.

They and their devotees bowed to the Dharma and honoured it as the agent of enlightenment. While the Buddha was by no means and under no circumstances neglected, he could not surpass the Dharma. that is, he was not regarded by the Hīnayānists as a supernatural being from whom the Dharma itself issued. This Hīnayāna conception of the Buddha was in perfect accord with his own declaration that he was the revealer of the truth and not its inventor or creator. It is not incorrect to say of the Hīnayānists that "the Buddhist saint stands in no relation of dependence to any being above himself. There is no Creator, no Saviour, no Helper in his purview. Religious duties, properly so called, he has none. He has been his own light, his own refuge. He is what he is by grace of himself alone." (Coppleston, p. 63.)

This the Buddha himself has in an unmistakable manner preached to his disciples: "Therefore, O Ananda, be ye lamps unto yourselves. Be ye a refuge to yourselves. Betake yourselves to no external refuge. Hold fast to the Truth as a lamp. Hold fast as a refuge to the Truth. Look not for refuge to anyone besides yourselves. . . . And whosoever, Ananda, either now or after I am dead, shall be a lamp unto themselves, shall betake themselves to no external refuge, but holding fast to the Truth as their lamp, and holding fast as their refuge to the Truth, shall look not for refuge to anyone besides themselves. It is they, Ananda, among my Bhikkhus who shall reach the very topmost height! But they must be anxious to learn." (Coomaraswami, p. 77, quoting Rhys Davids.)

Hīnayāna Buddhism was a religion of self-discipline and self-enlightenment. When the Buddha finally passed away, his disciples, gods and men, were assembled about him, their grief was extreme, their hair was dishevelled, they wept bitterly, stretching forth their arms, or falling prostrate on the ground, or rolling to and fro in anguish, they cried: "Too

soon hath the Buddha passed away! Too soon hath the Buddha died! Too soon hath the Light of the World passed away" The loss of a teacher, a guide, or a master was indeed an event of the greatest possible sorrow, but "impermanent are all component things," "even the Buddha cannot escape the karma of birth and death," for "it is in the very nature of all things most near and dear unto us that we must divide ourselves from them, leave them, sever ourselves from them." The Dharma, however, will remain forever, it is only its revealer that has succumbed to the law inherent in all things; as long as the transmission of the Dharma continues in the Saṅgha, our earthly human sorrow must be quieted by the exercise of logic. Thus reasoning and thus consoled, the Hīnayānists kept up their spirits and went on propagating the Dharma revealed to the superior spirituality of the Master.

Even when we read in the *Last Sermon of the Buddha* (佛遺教經) that "After this let all my disciples follow them [that is, his teachings] in succession, and then the Tathāgata's Dharma-body (法身) will abide forever and not pass away." this does not necessarily refer to the Dharmakāya as conceived later by the Mahāyāna followers as one of the Trikāya (三身), but merely to the systematised collection of the Dharma, which, being the Truth revealed to the Buddha and not merely formulated by him, will remain forever even after his passing; and it was this that was so strongly urged by the Buddha to be kept holy and unbecloved. The Dharma, was, therefore, later symbolised by the Wheel (*Dharmacakra* 法輪), the revolution of which was first started by the Muni of the Śakyas. His followers of course lamented deeply the passing of their Great Master, but as long as the Dharma was preserved from decay, his Nirvāna was to be accepted as one of the practical examples of the doctrine of impermanence. For there was yet no connection spiritually established between

the Dharma itself and its revealer in the minds of his immediate followers.

This was not however the case with the Mahāyānists, it was not in their character to remain so impersonal, so logical, so scientific, and so calmly rational. Their intensely human interest centered in the personality of their Master. Whatever his teachings, they were vital only so far as they were considered in connection with the Master himself. There was something in him besides his mere teachings which deeply touched their hearts, and it was in fact this deep feeling that gave such animation and power to the teachings of the Buddha. The teachings, when taken by themselves and independent of their author, were cold and too logical to satisfy the Mahāyāna disciples, or rather they were ever desirous to understand his teachings as vitally connected with his personality. They wished to warm up the Buddhist teachings with the fire of his personality. This does not mean that they rejected the logic of the Fourfold Noble Truth (四聖諦) and the thought of the impermanence of all things, but that the objective truth as it were of the Dharma had to be interpreted according to the subjective truth which now imperatively demanded recognition in the hearts of the Buddhists who were now with no living, energy-imparting guide. And then there were not lacking in the many and varied discourses of the Master statements that would justify the Mahāyāna interpretation as to the personality of their author. There was no thought in them of orthodoxy or heterodoxy, of conservatism or liberalism. They were simply impelled to go their way which was illumined by their inner spiritual light only.

What was this light?

The light in which the Mahāyānists took refuge, the spiritual command which they had no choice but to obey, told them that the Buddha and the Dharma were one and

the same thing, that the Dharma could not be comprehended apart from the Buddha, and that the Dharma in fact was the Buddha himself. When they took refuge in this light, everything became perfectly intelligible, the Buddha ceased to be an enigma, and the Dharma grew full of force and energising spirituality. Not only that, their religious aspirations found full justification in the Master's teachings themselves. The growth of Mahāyāna Buddhism was thus an inevitable event. If the Buddhism of the Hīnayānists is the literal transmission of the Buddha's teachings in their logical and objective form, the Buddhism of the Mahāyānists must be said to be the spiritual interpretation of the same in vital relation to the Buddhahood of the Master himself. With the Hīnayānists the Master remained a master who discoursed on the Dharma, while with the Mahāyānists the Master's personality was so intimately connected with and interwoven into his teachings that it could never be overlooked in their acceptance. The signification of Mahāyāna Buddhism lies in its conception of the Buddha. Those who charge the Mahāyānists as non-Buddhists or even un-Buddhists are entirely forgetful of the fact that, strictly speaking, the Mahāyāna alone can justify the claim to be Buddhism.

A parallelism may be found in Christianity. There are two main currents of thought in Christianity, one is Johannism and the other is Paulinism, and we can say that most of the Christians these days are followers of Paulinism. For it was Paul that succeeded in deifying Christ, in religiously interpreting the crucifixion, and in promulgating the theory of salvation by faith. Paul concentrated his attention on Christ himself rather than on his teachings independently, he made use of the latter to consolidate his theory as to the personality of Christ which so vitally concerned us rather than the teachings themselves. The Mahāyāna advocates have done almost, if not quite, the same thing to their own

spiritual leader. This will grow much clearer as we proceed.

However deep and blissful the Buddha's teachings were, what most profoundly affected his disciples was his own personality. While he was yet alive, they were not quite conscious of all its wonderful attractions. As they listened to his discourses, they felt them so satisfying and thought that this feeling of sufficiency came from the truth of the discourses themselves, which was not in any inseparable manner connected with the personality of the preacher. Indeed he frequently declared himself a Buddha, but they felt this referred more to his intellectual insight than to his superhuman personality. He was great in the latter quality no doubt, but his general emphasis on the Dharma itself turned the hearers' attention more or less away from the person. This unconscious diversion was quite natural as we can see exemplified in our daily intercourse with others. But the disciples had to pay more than double for this when their Master was carried away from their midst. The absence was felt by them with vehemence, and all the memory was vividly awakened. The mysterious and indescribable power which had hitherto unconsciously been exercising itself over the minds of the disciples raised its head now and most emphatically asserted itself in them. As the natural consequence such questions as the following agitated them :

Who was he really that called himself the Enlightened ? Who was he that was the owner of such superhuman qualities ? He was so good, so lovingly kind, so highly endowed with intellectual powers, so fully morally trained as to break the bonds of ignorance and karma, and so spiritually elevated as not to allow our approach to him. Who could such a being be ? What constitutes Buddhahood ? He could not be an ordinary mortal, though apparently he was subject to all the ills that flesh was heir to. He said that he would not come back on earth again as he had cut successfully asunder all

the bonds of karma, but could *we* think of him as gone forever, as abiding eternally in the serenity of Parinirvana? Could *we* conceive of that wonderful, inexpressively impressive personality as carried away for ever from among us?

Not only the Buddha's personality but his superior intellectual insight was also the subject of inquiry among his disciples. If his moral purity so strongly appealed to the imagination of his followers who were like the rest of us ever prone to hero-worship, his analytical intellect which most deeply penetrated into the nature of things and laid bare all the mysteries of life could not but excite the wonder of his disciples. How could such a mind be merely human? It must have come directly from the source of all things if there is any such. Or there must be something more than human in this world, for if otherwise such a soul as the Buddha could not come among us. His passing must be only apparent, he must be living somewhere yet, his disappearance must be one of his innumerable contrivances of love just to show us that the sorrow of separation and dissolution is inherent in the nature of things, while in fact he is above all changes. Freedom from evil desires which set the wheel of karma agoing cannot mean mere extinction, absence of all things, which is negative, but there must be something in it to be positively affirmed, though our language may not be adequate enough to point it out affirmatively. As we read in the *Nirvana Sutra* the moon behind a cloud does not mean that she is gone forever, her temporal disappearance has in fact nothing to do with her real existence that is above our visual conditions. So with the Buddha, his passing away from us must be only an event of the phenomenal world, in the spiritual realm which is also the realm of truth and reason, the Buddha divested from all his physical encumbrances, must be eternally living. He was a unique figure while with us, and this uniqueness cannot be in vain.

That the Buddha was designated with so many titles while yet walking among us, the number of which ever increased after his Nirvana, proves sufficiently the naturalness of the questions cited just above. The ten appellations most commonly given to him are: 1. The Enlightened One (*Buddha* 佛), 2. One who hath thus gone (*Tathāgata* 如來), 3. One who is worthy of offerings (*Arhat* 羅漢), 4. One who is perfect in enlightenment (*Samyaksambuddha* 正偏智), 5. One who is perfect in deeds and knowledge (*Vidyacaransampanna* 明行足), 6. The Well-gone One (*Sugata* 善逝), 7. The Peerless One in the knowledge of the world (*Lokavidamuttara* 世間解無上士), 8. The Controller of Man (*Purushadamyasvathi* 調御大夫), 9. The Teacher of Gods and Men (*Shastadevamanusyanam* 人天師), and 10. The World-honoured One (*Lokajyestha* 世尊). The *Mahāvajrapatti* which is a kind of Buddhist dictionary in Sanskrit mentions eighty-one titles of the Buddha including the ten already referred to. Among the rest I may mention a few here: The Ocean of Merits (*Gunasagara* 功德海), The Saviour (*Tayī* 救世主), The Leader (*Nayaka* 導師), The Lord of the Law (*Dharmasvami* 法王), The Omniscient One (*Sarvajña* 一切智), The Serene One (*Shamita* 寂靜者), The Immaculate One (*Nirmala* 無垢), and so on.

So long as we are mortal, finite creatures, we are ever prone to worship great men, to worship divinity enshrined in them and operating through them. They have of course their weaknesses or peculiarities, but when their fleshy structures are finally blown away, the life, the power that used to shine out of them is now revealed in its full glory and strength. All that belonged to their flesh is forgotten, singularly forgotten. It may be due to the innate goodness of human nature, but the fact stands out most prominently that we are generally oblivious of our friends' shortcomings and prejudices when they are dead, and that we easily forgive

them for whatever faults they have committed while alive. In the case of a master or hero whose personality has already deeply impressed us, his good qualities are immeasurably enhanced; in other words his divine virtues shine forth and overwhelm us with their irresistible superhuman power. We bow to them without questioning origin. Indeed we contrive to give some intellectually and spiritually satisfactory interpretation to the source of this mysterious power which so compellingly demands our submission to it. The result is the deification of the master or hero. He grows differentiated from us ordinary mortals, not only in his mental qualities, but in his bodily form. Hence the Buddha's thirty-two major (三十二相) and eighty minor (八十種好) extraordinary marks of personal appearance.

When we know that this sort of superhumanisation or deification was already going on in Hīnāyāna Buddhism, we can realise that the process will not stop until it has reached its climax, that is, where our human hearts find a complete satisfaction of their religious yearnings. Siddhartha could not remain even as the Muni of the Śakyas, nor as a historical Buddha who preached the Fourfold Noble Truth (四聖諦) and the Eight Ways of Righteousness (八正道). He was to be made into an ideal Buddha transcending history or mere facts. It may be better to say that Siddhartha formed a point of crystallisation around which our spiritual yearnings coagulated and solidified, just as Christ formed such a point for his followers.

The physical uniqueness of the Buddha as I referred to before naturally presupposed his superhuman spiritual qualities. He is generally described as the owner of the following powers: the *Dasaśāla* (ten powers 十力), four sorts of *Vaiśarādyam* (usually translated "fearlessness" 四無畏), and eighteen uncommon virtues (十八不共法). As all these faculties were ascribed to the Buddha by followers of the Hīnāyāna,

we may infer how far the process of deification had been going on before the Mahāyāna conception of the Buddha was fully established by Nāgārjuna and Asanga.

Miracles are inevitable to religion. Human nature longs for them. A world so rigidly bound up in the law of causation that no miracles are possible, no supernaturalism is allowed, will be an extremely uninteresting place for us mortals to live in. When everything is prearranged, when one thing determines another, and all surprise, all unexpectedness is excluded, our sense of logic may be gratified, but our religious nature will revolt. Whether scientific or not, we are so constituted as to demand something supernatural, that is, something directly coming from the source of all things and not determined by a chain of causes and conditions. Miracles are essential. If the Buddha is endowed with so many superhuman qualities, mentally and physically, how can his life itself be devoid of miraculous deeds?

For these it is not necessary to come to Mahāyāna Buddhism, for the Hīnayāna is already full of them, showing that the process of deification began soon after the death of the Buddha, as well as that the so-called Hīnayāna Buddhism is by no means primitive or original Buddhism. To cite a few examples. When the Buddha was about to pass away, transfiguration took place, and the colour of his body grew exceedingly bright. When asked by Ananda how this was so, the Buddha replied that transfiguration took place twice in the life of the Tathāgata, when he attained Enlightenment and when he entered Parinirvana (般涅槃). As he was lying on the couch between twin sal-trees, suddenly they all burst forth into bloom though it was not the flowering season, and the blossoms scattered themselves over the body of the Tathāgata. Then the earth shook in six different ways; men and gods from the ten quarters of the universe filled the space about the departing Master, so that one could not find

room to stick even the point of a hair. What a miracle this!

The deification of the Muni of the Śakyas has thus been going on in various ways after his death, perhaps even while he was still alive. It was in vain for the Buddha even if he had any desire to avoid this form of supernaturalisation, as far as he himself was concerned, to check the inevitable course of human psychology which ever wants to take hold of something for its support, for its own unification, or for its transcendentalism. What Buddhists, Hinayāna or Mahāyāna, conceived of the personality of their Master in regard to his physical, intellectual, and spiritual qualifications, was no extravagant outburst of the Indian imagination. To save the truth of the Dharma preached by the Buddha, as well as to fulfil the religious requirements of the human heart, the Buddha had to perform miracles and to be endowed with superhuman qualities both in his personality and spirituality.

All the stage-settings being now thus complete for the Buddha to pass from human to superhuman, it needed the Mahāyānists to give them the final touch. The Buddha was now Vairochana (盧舍那) or Amitābha (阿彌陀), or Dharmakāya (法身) as the case may be. His sermons were then attended with wonderful phenomena. A mysterious light shone forth from his crown, and his voice resounded through the ten quarters of the world, awakening all sentient beings from ignorance and folly. The gods, demigods, Bodhisattvas, Arhats, spiritual beings and the rest of the creation hastened to manifest themselves before the Buddha, praising, honouring, and worshipping him in the grandest possible style. The dramatic scene thus projected beggars description, and those who have ever read such Mahāyāna sutras as the *Saddharmapundarīka* or *Gandhavyūha* will at once see that the Buddha manifested here is no ordinary mortal subject to the laws of the world, but that he is really the Lord of all the universes. Miracle is no word to describe the phenomenon thus produced

by the spirituality of the Master. The superficial critics who try to find in Buddhism an empty, dreamy, abstracted theory of life called a philosophy of nothingness will be completely taken aback by the tropical richness and extravagant luxury of the Mahāyāna imagination.

Here we have the Mahāyāna Buddha in full development. How grand, how poetic, how mystical he is! Compared with the prosaic and altogether too logical concept of the Hīnayāna Buddha, how deep in thought and how rich in imagination and yet how intimately in contact with the religious cravings of human nature is the Buddha in the minds of the Mahāyāna followers of Buddhism.

As to the idea that the Buddha is the Dharma incarnate, that is, Dharmakāya, it was not probably consciously entertained by Śākyamuni himself, but that he was a Buddha, an enlightened one who was not conditioned by the law of birth and death, he cut completely asunder the bondage of karma, that he was the only honoured one above and below the heavens, and that he could by his will either prolong or shorten his earthly life, which means he was absolute master of his fate, points directly to his superhuman character. If this did not do so to the mind of the Buddha, they certainly did to his disciples, especially after his death. The ultimate problem of Buddhahood could be solved only when the Buddha was regarded as a superhuman being or a personal manifestation of the highest principle. In some respects we are also manifestations of the ultimate reason, for we are all in possession of the Buddha-nature as is taught in the Mahāyāna text of the *Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra* (涅槃經).

In the Pali text of the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, according to Warren, the Buddha gave his final instruction to Ananda in the following words: "It may be, Ananda, that some of you will think, 'The word of the Teacher is a thing of the past, we have now no Teacher.' But that, Ananda, is not

the correct view. The Doctrine and Discipline, Ananda, which I have taught and enjoined upon you is to be your teacher when I am gone." In the Chinese translation of the Hinayāna text, we have that "even the diamond body of the Buddha passes away." The idea that the Buddha passes but the Dharma or Doctrine or Law remains goes well with the ordinary human point of view, but in the case of a supernaturally endowed personage, this idea is sure to be transformed, and the identification of the Buddha and the Dharma takes place. The result is what the *Srīmālā Sūtra* endeavours to establish: that is, not only the Buddha is the Dharma itself, but the Saṅgha also has its reason of existence in the Buddha, indeed the Buddha means the unity of the Threefold Treasure; when you take refuge in the Buddha, you take refuge in all of the Triratna (or Threefold Treasure), Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha; whereas taking refuge in the other two of the Treasure is incomplete and leaves one still unsatisfied in one's inmost religious yearnings. When the Buddha was thus interpreted it was quite natural that the Threefold Treasure was considered to be united in one Buddha, and that where he was worshipped all the rest were included in him, that he was the main and sole stay of Buddhism as a system. Therefore, Mahākāśyapa exclaims in the *Mahāparinirvāna*, "O ye my fellow-disciples, you need not lament and cry so, this is not an empty world, and the Tathāgata lives for ever, he suffers no change; so does the Dharma and the Saṅgha." The Buddha chimes in, "The Tathāgata indeed abideth for ever, no change takes place on him, and he never entereth into Parinirvāna."

This is the Mahāyāna idea intellectually developed, but the foreshadowings of it we find already in the Buddhology of the Mahāsaṅghika school, which was one of the two main divisions of Buddhism rising soon after the death of the Buddha. According to Vasumitra's *Samayabhedo-paracana-cakra*

(異部宗輪論)*, "The human Buddha who appeared in India was a temporal body and not a real one. The real body of the Buddha was obtained by him as the result of innumerable meritorious deeds he had practised through a long series of kalpas, and therefore it is infinite in duration and spiritual power. When others look at him, they are blessed, their evil passions are subdued, and they are saved from transmigration. Whatever he utters never fails to be in perfect accord with truth. This body of the Buddha will appear on earth whenever conditions are ready for him." The logical development of these ideas is Nāgārjuna's Double Body theory of the Buddha which is discussed at length and in several places in his treatise on Prajñāpāramita. Before the Trikāya theory of Buddhahood came to be fully established, Nāgārjuna's served as a sort of passage through which the primitive conception of the Buddha had to walk. Its culmination later in the triplicity of Dharmakāya (法身), Nirmānakāya (應身), and Sambhogakāya (報身), as an established doctrine of Mahāyāna Buddhism, will be treated in another article in one of the coming issues of this magazine.

DAISETZ TEITARO SUZUKI

* The text exists both in Chinese and Tibetan translation. It is an important work describing different views held by the various schools of Buddhism concerning the Buddha's teaching, which arose in India during one or two centuries after the Nirvana. The passage quoted here is an abridged one.