

## THE BODHISATTVAS.

IN my previous article on "What is Mahāyāna Buddhism?" I said, "A Being who is on the road to Buddhahood is a Bodhisattva. From the Dharmakāya, the Absolute, come many Buddhas and Bodhisattvas which we find in the Mahāyāna pantheon, but never when contemplating these gods and divinities must it be forgotten that all beings are divine, all may become gods, all are on the path of deliverance." This gives a different idea to the popular conception of "gods." The popular conception of the so-called heathen gods is that the gods always represent supreme, superhuman divinities having the qualities of the godhead, the Absolute itself. But in Mahāyāna, this conception of the gods is incorrect, the gods are Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who have themselves evolved from lower states. A Buddha must have gone through many existences and have lived in lower and in higher states. This shows at once that the Buddhist conception of a "god" is quite different from the popular conception of Oriental gods which is held in Western countries.

A Bodhisattva is a future Buddha, one whose essence is perfect knowledge; that is to say, he is a being who through all his existences is destined some time to be a Buddha, but until that time perfect knowledge (*prajñā*, 般若) is still undeveloped in him. He exerts himself not for his own good or salvation but for the good of others. From this developed the idea of offering prayers for help to the Bodhisattva, and this again easily led to worship. Not only, however, is the Bodhisattva a manifestation of the Dharmakāya the Absolute; but the Bodhisattva has arrived at a stage which we have yet to reach, at a realisation which we have yet to attain;

and therefore we look up to him in respect and reverence, and even offer prayers to him, since by his own desire he wishes to help other beings. What I wish to show is that the worship of the Mahāyāna Buddhas and Bodhisattvas did not begin as a worship pure and simple of a God, supreme and almighty, but that this worship was a process evolved from respect and reverence, and from requests for the Buddhist saint to give his aid to help spiritual development. While the popular conception of the ignorant masses later deteriorated into ordinary worship, I wish to emphasise that the conception of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas did not originate according to the outline of a "god," but had its origin of worship in an entirely different philosophical conception, and among comparatively ignorant Mahāyāna followers, I find quite prominent the conception of individual Bodhisattvaship, the goal of attaining this exalted state upon realising the truth of existence.

We find something similar to this in the Roman Catholic Church. The Catholic saint started as a man in the midst of men, not of gods; by his greatness or goodness or kindness, he obtained an exalted position in the minds of his fellowmen and was revered and respected and admired. But as time went on, this admiration and reverence took the form of worship, and we have as a result the communion of saints of the Catholic Church, who receive adoration and worship and who receive petitions of help from their devotees. In Mahāyāna Buddhist temples, as in Catholic churches, we see candles lighted before the figures of the saints, and flowers and incense offered before them, and worshippers bending the knee and telling the rosary and murmuring prayers of praise and petition. Yet just as the Catholic does not believe that the saints have the powers and attributes of the supreme God, neither do the Buddhist worshippers look upon their Bodhisattvas in the same light that a Christian looks upon the

supreme God or the Mohammedan worshipper looks upon Allah. On the contrary, we often find a homely familiarity practised towards the most popular of these Bodhisattvas and a prevailing thought that they still have left to them many of the feelings, thoughts, and sentiments of an earthly man.

Besides these great Bodhisattvas who have taken on divine aspects through the worship of their admirers so that they have become the so-called gods of the Mahāyāna pantheon, we have another class of Bodhisattvas, those indeed who are historical characters, great teachers who manifested many of the qualities and perfections of a Bodhisattva while they lived on earth. Such were Nāgārjuna, Aśvaghosha, Asanga, and Vasubandhu. This is the logical consequence of the conception of the Dharmakāya as held by the Mahāyānists. For does not the Dharmakāya “universally respond to the spiritual need of all sentient beings in all times and in all places and at any stage of their spiritual development? And is it not considered by the Buddhists that all spiritual bodies, whatever their nationality and personality, are the expressions of the one omnipotent Dharmakāya”?

Let us now consider the work of a Bodhisattva. As we have seen before, the Bodhisattva is a being who seeks not his own good but that of his fellow-beings. If he wished, with the realisation of truth which he has, he could enter at once into Nirvana and leave behind him forever the contemplation of evil and misery. But unlike the Śrāvaka and the Pratyekabuddha of the Hīnayāna, he refuses to do this and will not seek Nirvana until all his fellow-beings have also come to their freedom. Therefore, he steps aside, as it were, and stands on the path to Nirvana to help others below him. The Bodhisattva is also willing to turn over the karma of his own good action for the purpose of assisting his fellow-beings. This turning over of his own merit is called “*pari-namana*,” in Sanskrit (廻向). When beings try to throw off

the fetters of ignorance, then they find a Bodhisattva ready to aid them and turn over for their benefit his own good deeds. He stands therefore to the Mahāyānists as the highest possible conception of a manifestation of the Dharmakāya, which is in essence mercy and goodness.

In Hīnayāna Buddhism the conception of the Bodhisattva is also found, but more limited in its conception. All Buddhas were Bodhisattvas in their former lives, but the Hīnayāna did not teach that every one may become a Buddha. This, as I have said before, is the characteristic feature of Mahāyāna; for Mahāyāna says there is no being so humble that it may not aspire to be a Bodhisattva and eventually a Buddha; indeed we have our Bodhisattvahood latent within us, for are we not all manifestations of the Dharmakāya?

The Bodhisattva has certain desires which arise in his heart. According to Vasubandhu these ten desires or *Pranidhānas* (願) are as follows:\*

“1. Would that all the merits I have accumulated in the past as well as in the present be distributed among all sentient beings and make them all aspire after supreme knowledge, and also that this my *Pranidhāna* be constantly growing in strength and sustain me throughout my rebirths.

“2. Would that, through the merits of my work, I may, wherever I am born, come in the presence of all Buddhas and pay them homage.

“3. Would that I be allowed all the time to be near the Buddhas like shadow following object, and never to be away from them.

“4. Would that all Buddhas instruct me in religious truths as best suited to my intelligence and let me finally attain the five spiritual powers of the Bodhisattva.

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\*Quoted from D. T. Suzuki's *Outlines of Mahāyāna Buddhism*, pp. 308-310. See also L. de la Valée Poussin's article on "Bodhisattva" in Hastings' *Encyclopedia of Ethics and Religion*, p. 745.

“5. Would that I be thoroughly conversant with scientific knowledge as well as the first principles of religion and gain an insight into the truth of the Good Law.

“6. Would that I be able to preach untiringly the truth to all beings, and gladden them, and benefit them, and make them intelligent.

“7. Would that, through the divine power of the Buddha, I be allowed to travel all over the ten quarters of the world, pay respect to all the Buddhas, listen to their instructions in the Law, and universally benefit all sentient beings.

“8. Would that, by causing the Wheel of the Immaculate Law to revolve, all sentient beings in the ten quarters of the world who may listen to my teachings or hear my name, be freed from all passions and awaken in them the heart of intelligence (*Bodhicitta*).

“9. Would that I all the time accompany and protect all sentient beings and remove for them things which are not beneficial to them and give them innumerable blessings, and also that through the sacrifice of my body, life, and possessions I embrace all creatures and thereby practise the Right Law.

“10. Would that, though practising the Law in person, my heart be free from the consciousness of compulsion and unnaturalness, as all the Bodhisattvas practise the Law in such a way as not practising it yet leaving nothing unpractised; for they have made their *pravidhānas* for the sake of all sentient beings.”

There are ten stages or *bhūmi* (十地) of the Bodhisattva. These may be read of in Suzuki's *Outlines of Mahāyāna Buddhism*, Chapter XII, and in L. de la Vallée Poussin's article in the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, pp. 743-748. Briefly the stages are: 1. *Pramuditā* (歡喜地), the stage of joyfulness; 2. *Vimālā* (離垢地), the stage of purity; 3. *Prabhakarī* (發光地), the stage of brightness of mind and heart;

4. *Arcismatī* (發慧地), the stage of radiant energy: 5. *Sudurjayā* (難勝地), the invincible stage or the stage of command devoted to meditation; 6. *Abhimukhī* (現前地), the stage for the preservation of intelligence; 7. *Dūrangamā* (遠行地), the stage of going far away, when he goes still further in the path of knowledge; 8. *Acalā* (不動地), the immovable stage, where the Bodhisattva passes beyond the world of becoming; 9. *Sādhumatī* (善慧地), the stage of goodness; and 10. *Dharmameghā* (法雲地), the stage of the clouds of Dharma, where the Bodhisattva has now attained to the knowledge of all things and has arrived at the summit of all activities. He is now a true Buddha, a being of love and wisdom, a true reflection of the Dharmakāya. An aspirant to Bodhisattvaship can comparatively easily attain the first seven *bhūmis*. He who wishes to become a Buddha must not only pass through these ten stages or *bhūmis*, but by right meditation, works, and vows, must progress ever further on the path. Compassion or love together with wisdom are the greatest virtues of the Bodhisattva, all others are inferior to these. But the Bodhisattva also practises all the other virtues and above all he works, works for the good of others. In fact, there is no other, since all are one in the Dharmakāya.

Sometimes one may find it difficult to distinguish the Buddha from the Bodhisattva inasmuch as reverence and adoration are paid to the latter in the same manner as to the former in the practical psychology of most of the Mahāyāna followers. But in theory or at least as far as Buddhist dogmatics are concerned, the distinction is definite enough; for the Buddha is the one who has reached the summit of perfect knowledge and perfect conduct and whose every thought and act is conducive to the spiritual welfare of all beings, but the Buddha himself may have no special intention to do anything for them. We may say that he is the perfect incarnation of the Dharmakāya, or that he is the perfect idealisation of

humanity. Either way, he is the highest being and the limit of evolution; he is then regarded as being in possession of the ten powers (十力), four forms of fearlessness (四無畏), and eighteen extraordinary qualities (十八不共法). The Bodhisattva as a future Buddha is still on his way to perfection. As long as he never fails to practise the six virtues of perfection (*paramitas* 六波羅密), he is practically a Buddha. Yet in him there may be a trace of effort, a desire to become a higher being, even when this has no selfish motives behind it. In his inmost consciousness there may still be lurking the idea of practising goodness for his fellow-beings, while in the Buddha there are no conscious efforts of doing anything good for others; he moves as he wills, and the whole world is glorified; he opens his eye, and the past, present, and future are seen to be a continuum of beatification. There are no beings to be delivered from misery, yet when the Buddha speaks, what a heavenly joy they feel! and each after his own manner is embraced in the ray of enlightenment, while the Buddha himself uttered just a word or two. The Bodhisattva is a being destined to be a Buddha and given assurances for it by the Buddha, and so far he is nearer to us, being more human, and more intelligible to us. In essence he is a Buddha just as we ourselves are, but in practical life he walks so intimately with us and among us, ever leading us on the higher and nobler path of love and wisdom, and furnishing us with living earthly examples of Buddhahood.

Let us conclude by considering one of the greatest Bodhisattvas in Mahāyāna Buddhism. I mean Mañjuśrī or Monju (文殊) as he is known in Japanese, who personifies intelligence and wisdom. Mañjuśrī is supposed to be not only an ideal but to have had his origin in history and to have introduced Buddhism from India into Nepal. We do not know how much truth there is in this story, but the fact is that he is the patron and ideal of Mahāyāna Buddhism. His

image is invariably found in the meditation halls of the Zen temples in Japan; this is set up in order that the monks sitting on their mats in the act of meditation may have before them the representation of one who was such a mountain of wisdom and illumination. He is often represented in the triad of Śakyamuni, Fugen, and Monju. Where Monju represents wisdom, Fugen or Samantabhadra (普賢) represents love and is often seen seated upon an elephant on the right side of the Buddha and Monju seated upon the left on a lion. While Monju has a masculine appearance, Fugen is more feminine and often in Japan is spoken of as a woman.

In this trinity of Buddha, Mañjuśrī, and Samantabhadra, the central doctrine of Mahāyāna Buddhism is most symbolically expressed. Intelligence alone is not enough, love must coöperate with it, in order to accomplish the most sublime work of universal salvation. Love is the mother and intelligence the father, and these two are perfectly united in the person of the Buddha. This is really the principal topic of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, especially of the chapter entitled, "The Entrance into the Spiritual World," which corresponds to the Nepalese *Gandavyūha*. In this Sutra Sudhana (善財) is the chief figure who inspired by Mañjuśrī goes through a long spiritual pilgrimage. He interviews all kinds of people, men and woman, kings and ascetics, men of immense wealth and women somewhat disreputable, but all of whom are philosophers and saints in their own ways. He finally comes to Maitreya (彌勒), the last of the long series of fifty-three teachers, each of whom has given him enlightening instructions according to his or her spiritual insight. Maitreya after teaching the pious pilgrim in religion advises him to go back to Mañjuśrī, for it was through his mysterious ways that Sudhana was able to get instructions from the various philosophers. When he thinks of Mañjuśrī with singleness of heart, the Bodhisattva suddenly appears to him, and teaches



him to practise the deeds (行) and resolves or desires (願) of Samantabhadra. Sudhana, here throughout depicted as a youth seeking the light of truth, is no less than a manifestation of Mañjuśri himself, who, through the instructions of Maitreya, the future Buddha, now enters upon the path of spiritual life, which is love and wisdom.

One significant fact in the pilgrimage of Sudhana which must not escape our notice is that so many of the teachers this young Buddhist seeker of truth approached for enlightenment were women. Oriental people are generally imagined by the Westerners to be indifferent to the dignity and virtue of womanhood, but that this view is incorrect is most eloquently proved by Sudhana's religious pilgrimage. Before he comes to Maitreya, he is embraced in the love of Māyādevī (摩耶), for without her sanctifying love he could not appear in the presence of the future Buddha. "Eternal femininity" thus finds expression in the conception of the Bodhisattva.

The best example of this is seen in the popularity of the cult of Kwannon (or Kwan-yin in Chinese, 觀音菩薩). Originally Kwannon was not a goddess, but a god, known as Avalokiteśvara. In the *Saddharma Pundarika* (法華經), he is referred to as a great Bodhisattva, and out of the fulness of his heart he manifests himself in thirty-three different forms in order to save every being who approaches him with a prayerful attitude of mind. Probably this qualification on his part, that is, his great, all-embracing compassionate heart (*Mahākaruṇā*, 大悲) transformed him into a woman in the minds of the devotees. Nowadays both in China and Japan, no one, except scholars, ever realises that Kwannon is anything but a female Bodhisattva. Kwannon to the popular eye corresponds to the Christian conception of Maria, the mother of God; in fact the so-called "Nursing Kwannon" (子守觀音) is no other than "Maria with Infant Child."

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