

THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

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WHAT IS THE TRUE SECT OF THE PURE LAND ?

I

THE True Sect, as the name indicates, is a religion founded upon the truth, which is real, eternal, unchangeable, standing against falsehood, impermanence, and provisionality.

What is the true man? What is the true Buddha? What is the true way of living? And how do we know the true Buddha? How do we become all true men? How do we enter upon the path of true living? These are the questions that have been disturbing our minds ever since the dawn of human intelligence. What the True Sect now proposes is to give these questions an easy solution so that all kinds of people, rich and poor, wise and ignorant, young and old, could understand it and practise it without much difficulty in their daily lives. The key lies in Faith.

II

According to the records, it was about one hundred and sixteen years after the Nirvana of the Buddha that the initiation of a monk called Mahādeva (大天) into the Brotherhood was the cause of a disruption among the Buddhists, the

unity of which had so far been kept intact. The question was to decide whether Faith or the dogma comes first in upholding the true spirit of Buddhism.

Mahādeva was the son of a merchant in Madhura and is said to have committed three grave crimes, after which he wandered away from his home, but always tormented by the knowledge of his depravity. He could not endure the torture of his conscience any longer when he entered the Kurkutārama and joined the Buddhist Brotherhood. He was saved and attained Arhatship, but his views concerning certain points in the creeds of Buddhism as were entertained by the Buddhist followers of those days greatly conflicted with the orthodox views held by the Elders. Mahādeva and his adherents thus came to form a separate Brotherhood to be known as the Mahāsaṅghika School.

These were the days when the so-called ten points constituted serious subjects of discussion among the Bhikshus so that a second general conference of the Brotherhood became necessary. How could the Elders give sanction to the heretical views of Mahādeva? They were too conservative and bound by the traditional and therefore orthodox views of the Buddha's teaching to lend an ear to the radicalism of the Great Council School? What the Elders considered of the utmost importance in Buddhism was to preserve its form, its letter, its traditional authority, and not necessarily the interpretation of it through one's inner experience. The schism was inevitable. Mahādeva and his followers founded an independent school. His views on the five points were the protest of humanity against traditionalism and were based upon the truth and facts of his inmost spiritual experience. Those who were always bent upon building their conception of truth upon something authoritatively handed down to them regardless of its historical

See Kern's *Manual of Buddhism*, P. 103, and also Sensei Fujii's *History of Buddhism* (in Japanese), Vol. II, P. 56.

limitations could not naturally bear the individual assertion of facts, however significant and vital they were. It was quite logical that the Elders brought all their orthodoxy down on the crushing of the Mahāsaṅghika School. The documents so far we have on the account of this discord have come from the hands of the Elders and are full of disparaging statements concerning Mahādeva and his views. But as we go over critically the natural course of history, we see in this dissension the collision of one's inner faith against the traditional authority.

In a way, the history of Buddhism in the three Eastern countries, India, China, and Japan, is no more than the record of disruption between facts of experience and the traditional authority and of their reconciliation. This will be illustrated in the history of an individual spiritual life; for when a man wants to assert his own inner experience, he is generally apt to run counter to the authority of traditional formalism. However, there must be some standard of judgment which will give a verdict on the nature of one's inner facts; mere subjectivism lacks finality. Just to say, "I believe" is not sufficient, religiously considered; "I believe" must also be confirmed by some doctrinal authority. When there is a happy concord between "I believe" and "It is so" we find here a genuine expression of the soul satisfied and in peace. The significance of the dogma is thus by no means to be ignored. Only its assertion regardless of experience should be avoided. Naturally, when Mahādeva boldly announced his views on the five points, he appealed to the true teaching of all the Buddhas, he never once dreamed of defying them, he sincerely thought he was acting in perfect accord with it. His faith in the facts of his inner experience was not something quite independent of the dogmatic authority of Buddhism. Faith and dogma happily went hand in hand in this case.

The True Sect of the Pure Land is founded on the believing heart, the truth and fact of which was first confirmed

by Shinran, and as we may well expect this set all the existing sects of Buddhism in convulsions, there was a whirlwind of discord, and the founder of the new sect was persecuted on all sides. However, Shinran's doctrine of faith was not such an absolute assertion of the truth as to be independent of all the traditional dogmas of Buddhism. As in the case of Mahādeva, Shinran sought the foundation of his doctrine in the latter. In fact, the text-book of the True Sect known as "Kyō-gyō-shin-sho" 教行信證 (Doctrine, Practise, Faith, and Attainment) which was compiled by Shinran himself is a collection of one hundred and forty-three passages from twenty-one Sutras such as the Avatamsaka 華嚴經, Nirvana 涅槃經, etc., in which Shinran found his faith thoroughly confirmed. More than that, the justification of faith was also in the teaching of Hōnen himself, the teacher of Shinran, of whom the latter states in his *Tannisho* 歎異鈔, "I have no regrets whatever even if I am destined for hell because of my 'nembutsu' [that is, reciting the name of the Buddha] which I practise being induced by Hōnen Shonin."

In this we can see how the inner experience of Shinran is harmoniously working not only with the teaching of the Buddha but with that of his own teacher Hōnen. The spirit of Buddhism divested of all its traditional appendages and encumbering dogmatism is seen here after a long history of migration from one country to another shining in its original true light through the spiritual life of Shinran, the founder of the True Sect of the Pure Land. Therefore, declares Shinran, "In what I, the simple-hearted, wishes to advise you there is nothing selfish, for my own desire is to believe in the teaching of the Tathāgata and to preach it to others." In short the truth must be one and not two or three; if my faith is to be true, it must be justified by the teaching of the Enlightened One; and if this teaching is really true besides being merely traditional or only invested with dogmatic

authority, it must fully be confirmed by the facts of my inner experience. When there is a collision, an obstruction somewhere, either one of the two, my experience or the dogma, must be lacking in verity. The True Sect is not a religion of goodness but a religion of truth. Whoever believes in the truth, he is saved, good or bad. That is to say, the True Sect finds the principle of salvation in Faith and not in work or merit. However depraved one may be, faith will save him from eternal damnation.

III

Faith has a special connotation in religion. It differs from scientific knowledge: when we have the latter, it does not give us any final sense of gratification and happiness; our curiosity is no doubt satisfied, the spirit of inquiry is set at peace, but the soul has no feeling of sufficiency or fulfilment. Faith in religion expands and enriches one's life, the past and the future are embraced in the present. Men of the same faith get united in one current of life, through which the individual facts of experience gain significance. When it thus extends to the past, the dogma grows alive with passions, the tradition gains real authority. When the faith points to the present and future, it is now aglow with the ardour of a missionary spirit.

Thus a religious faith does not stop at merely being an individual affair, it wants to be justified by tradition and dogmatic authority, it then goes forward to embrace others in the same faith, for it lives and grows by assimilating others. If there should be a collision between faith and dogma, this would mean either one of the two things: faith lacks in solid foundation and permanent value, being a temporary kindling of the soul-fire; or the dogma has no element of truth and eternity in it, and the authority conventionally ascribed to

it is merely formal and altogether superficial. When both of them are genuine, there is perfect harmony between them, and they are confirmatory to each other, or they both testify one eternal truth. Therefore, one ought to try to seek the truth in oneself which when expressed is the truth of dogmatics. And this truth is the reason of the True Sect of the Pure Land. When a man is after it, he is really the one who is endeavouring to be a true man, to see the true Buddha, and to live a life of truth, away from a world of simulation, sensuality, and falsehood.

IV

Now the question is, "Where is this absolute truth to be sought?" Within, or without? In this world, or in a region transcending this? Says Shinran, "There is nothing real in this life, nothing true, nothing substantial." Is this to be understood literally? Shall we consider everything of this world empty, void, and of no substantial value? Shall we have to look somewhere else for a world of real reality? Is our daily life of such a nature in which we cannot find anything permanently true? The question is pregnant with thoughts vitally concerning our spiritual welfare. Naturally it evoked already in India a heated discussion among the Hinayanists as well as the Mahayanists.

Let us first note what the Hinayanists or Elders had to say about this problem of truth. In the *Mahāvibhāṣā śāstra* which was compiled by the five hundred Arhats of the Sthāvira School in the fourth century after Buddha, the Fourfold Noble Truth is discussed at length. According to some, there is no truth in the world of birth and death, for it is the product of ignorance, the truth lies in the Annihilation and the Path, while others insist that even the Annihilation cannot be the truth, it is only conditionally so, the knowledge of the Path

alone is true. There were yet others who asserted that as far as the world of the senses is concerned there cannot be anything that we can designate absolutely true, that the latter must be sought in a region beyond this world of relativity. When Nāgārjuna began to expound the principles of Mahāyāna Buddhism, he rejected the Hinayanistic view of distinguishing between the relative and the absolute as existing independent of each other. He attempted to see this distinction in knowledge itself. After him this question of truth further developed. Asanga and Vasubandhu distinguished three forms of knowledge: confused knowledge, relative knowledge, and perfect knowledge, but the standard of judgment was placed in the objective world.

Later in China the Tendai philosophers emphasised the subjective element of truth; Jion (慈恩) of the Viññānamātra School (唯識宗) was inclined towards objectivism, while Kajo (嘉祥) who was the founder of the Sanron School (三論宗) in China put stress on the dogma. We can thus perceive that there were two main currents of thought concerning the question of truth, the one was objective and the other subjective. Subjectivism logically tends towards the doctrine of faith, whereas objectivism is apt to uphold the authority of the dogma. As I regard the question as very important in the discussion of the doctrine of the True Sect, I wish to consider the famous parable of a house on fire* in the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka Sūtra* (法華經), which will help us to illustrate the connection between Truth and Dogma.

The house is on fire, and it may be reduced to ashes in no moment when all will be lost. The children ignorant of the perils of fire are playing inside. The father standing outside reflects: How could my dear children be saved from certain death? He calls out to them at the top of his voice

* Kern's English translation in "The Sacred Books of the East," P. 72 et seq.

warning them about the imminent danger. But the children are too absorbed in their amusements and show no inclination to get out of the house. The father now devises a scheme and tells them he has a fine cart for each of them all ready for use. Knowing well what they are, the three children rush out of the fire which soon devours the house. But when they are out, they see but one great cart drawn by oxen, on which they all mount and enjoy themselves to their hearts' content. This is the gist of the parable.

But here is a point which has become the centre of arduous discussion among the Buddhist scholars, especially during the Ts'in (晋) and the T'ang (唐) dynasty, which is, Why did the father say that there was a cart for each of the three children while there was but one for them all, though it was the best they could get? Was this not making a false report? It was true that there was a cart, but the statement that the father had three was untrue. This discrepancy in the story of the father has been the occasion of producing various dogmas in the philosophy of Buddhism.

V

Objectively considered, the statement of the father will be true only when there are three carts waiting for the children outside the gate. There was however nothing exactly corresponding to his statement in the objective world, and yet he referred to it as if there really were, which evidently points to a "skilful device" on the part of the father Buddha. The truth of existence in this case was provisional and not absolute. But from the loving heart of the father who so intently bent on the deliverance of his children from the threatening danger, that he disregarded the truth in its objectivity, his "skilful device" was really the assertion of his fatherhood. He was true as father, though objectively his

fatherly advice could not fully be verified. The father's truthful statement of a fact is often ignored by his children who are too blind to see the fact as objectively as the Enlightened One does; but they are not to be left to their own fate, there ought to be some way to make them come out of the burning house. The device thus thought out of the fulness of the parental heart is the system of dogmatics as taught in the sutras. It may be logical to say that "A" is "A" regardless of its moral or spiritual consequence, but the religious truth is of a different order, and is found often in making a negative statement of a fact, in declaring "A" not to be "A." Therefore, the test of truth does not necessarily lie in its objective verifiability, but in the relation between the one who makes a statement and the one to whom it is made, that is to say, between the fatherly advice and its recipients, the children.

When the children ran out of the house on fire, what moved them was the cart or carts in their own imagination, rather than those in actual existence. Indeed, there was only one instead of three, but really the number had nothing to do with their moving out of the house. They had the desire for carts, and this desire put in motion by the suggestion of the father saved them from the impending catastrophe. In other words, it was faith, the most subjective element of knowledge that proved a boon to the ignorant. In one sense therefore the objective reality could be dispensed with, for the content of faith is justified by the strength of the faith itself regardless of its objective correspondence. Therefore, we can say that believing and being are identical. A thing is because we believe, truth is born of faith, an absolute truth issues out of an immovable faith.

VI

Some years ago there was in Japan a philosophical

movement emphasising the subjectivity of knowledge which was set against rationalism, historical objectivism, or traditional orthodoxy. It was a sort of religious pragmatism, whose followers insisted upon the identity of believing and being, saying that a thing exists or is true because I believe. The Elders of those days representing the orthodox party were greatly exercised over the bold declaration on the part of the young and progressive followers of the True Sect. They said, "It is subjectivism pure and simple, and stands against the traditional understanding of the doctrine; it is heterodoxy." For according to the Elders the dogma of the True Sect was, "I believe because a thing exists objectively." In other words, there is Amitābha Buddha really residing in the Western Paradise, and in each of us there is an immortal soul; when the latter is turned towards the former, this is faith; when a complete unification takes place between the two, we are saved. To them subjectivism was too frail a thing to be trusted, they wanted the object of their faith to be something more than mere believing.

This is all well as far as it goes, but there is one thing in their thought which requires a closer examination, which is, what do they really understand by "actual being" when they say Amitābha Buddha really is? Buddha is not an object of perception; even when they may say that they have actually come in his presence, this does not mean that he is an objective reality; for he may appear to us in a dream or vision with no externally corresponding existence. If this be so, what the orthodox Elders believe to be an actuality, must come either from their own fancy or from the teaching of a text or something else, or from their own hypothesis. The objectivity of their belief is thus in fact the machination of their desire and imagination. At first blush their statement looks so well founded on objective reality, but when critically examined we can see that it is also filled with subjectivism,

just as much as the statement they pronounce to be heterodox and full of dangerous pitfalls.

Ultimately speaking, all religious truth transcends the dualistic way of thinking, it has its own sphere of validity appealing to our non-discursive and non-discriminating sense of judgment. Faith is such judgment. The ultimate belief which justifies the teaching of the True Sect of the Pure Land has perhaps nothing to do with objectivism or subjectivism. For the children did not run out of the house because they believed in the objective reality of the carts, nor did they do so because they thought their belief would create the real thing; but they ran out of the house because they simply believed in the sincerity of their father, because they knew that he loved them and would not tempt them merely with imaginary carts. Their absolute faith in the teaching or dogma of the father was what established the truth of the whole proceeding. As far as the objective fact was concerned, the dogma as represented in the father's advice was not quite true, was not the whole truth, it was a "skilful device"; nevertheless the three carts for the children were in real existence in their minds, in their desires, in their trusty acceptance of the fatherly love which was expressed in its fulness and with all the sincerity it was capable of in his offer of the three carts. Finally, they found the only one cart, instead of three carts, far surpassing their expectations in every way. Their trust and faith was rewarded, it was after all founded upon facts.

Both Asanga and Vasubandhu therefore distinguish three forms of faith, among which they recognise the value of faith in a world of ideas or moral "oughts." There is indeed more truth or reality in a world of values than in that of actualities, and the flower of faith blooms and bears fruit in the former rather than in the latter, for a world of facts is a limited one bound in time and space where the highest imagination feels

so constrained. The absolute faith the True Sect teaches transcends such limitations, and naturally is not to be sought in a world of relativities. Therefore those who are yet unable to go beyond the ideas of being and believing are those who have not fully realised the ultimate significance of the principle on which the True Sect of the Pure Land stands. This is well expounded in the volume of "Faith" in the "Kyō-gyō-shin-sho" compiled by Shinran himself.

VII

The "Kyō-gyō-shin-sho" (教行信證) in six volumes is the fundamental text-book of the True Sect or Shin-shu, through which we can not only know what is the true man, what is the true Buddha, and what is the true world, but put this knowledge in practise and attain to the realisation of the ultimate faith. Then we will perceive that it consists in the perfect unification of all these four thoughts. If the children were conscious of the teaching of their father as teaching, they would not have come out of the house. The teaching so called was so completely identified with their inner yearnings that there was no room left in their minds for any doubt and hesitation; they did not stop and think of the carts whether they were really there or whether the father had a scheme for them; their simple-heartedness was the reason of their faith; and it was their faith that led them out into a world of freedom. Such a father is the Buddha, such children are true men, such a world of freedom is the true world.

When the dogma ceases to be perceived as something external to one's inner experience, it becomes at once the living principle of conduct; and when one's deeds and conduct are loosened from the bond of constraint and become the movement of a free soul, faith is expressing itself through the medium of a physical body.

Therefore, the True Sect of the Pure Land has for its texts the three sacred sutras and attaches due importance to the traditional authority as handed down through the seven patriarchs in India, China, and Japan, and yet the ultimate faith forming the reason of the True Sect is not conditioned by these dogmatics. When one realises this somewhat paradoxical statement one enters upon the true path of faith.

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