

## THE BUDDHA AS PREACHER

### I

THE greatness of the Buddha consists not only in his extraordinary power as a religious seer and leader but in his unusual quality as a preacher. In the history of religion there are no teachers whose doctrine may be compared to that of the Buddha with regard to the rapidity of its propagation; for before a year expired after the first proclamation of the Doctrine, Buddhism gathered under its banner Bhikshus and lay-disciples numbering altogether several thousands; and when it began to spread in Rājagaha which was at that time the centre of all new thoughts in India, the king himself was converted into the Faith, followed by Sāriputta and Moggallāna with their numerous adherents, not to say anything about other truth-seekers and householders who almost struggled with one another to embrace the religion of the Buddha. Finally, it is said, the Buddha was reproached by the inhabitants of the city for separating the wife from her husband, the parents from their children, and destroying the unity of the family. After this, his propaganda lasted for forty-five years when he quietly entered into Parinirvana. Though occasions of persecution were not missing, his mission was a steady triumphal march. Among his converts we count five or six royal personages such as Bimbisāra, Pasenadi, Udena, and others; influential Brahmins, great merchants in the different cities, and people of low birth,—all hastened to Buddhism and became either the homeless monks or devoted lay-disciples. Those who attained to Arhatship are reported to have been eighty-eight in number. The incomparable gospel

Śakyamuni swept like a tidal wave all over India wherever culture extended.

As mention was made in my previous article on the Buddha, the principal external causes that among others contributed to the wonderful swiftness of his conquest were three : 1. Freedom of thought which was then enjoyed by the cultured classes of India ; 2. The general favourable economic conditions ; and 3. A transition period through which Indian civilisation was to pass at the time, and the people were seeking a new light in their religious life. Politically, the small republics into which India had been split were about to be absorbed into larger political bodies ; racially, the dominant race was acquiring a greater assimilative power over the other races that shared the land with it ; while culturally influencing these people it was in turn influenced by them in various ways. These commotions in the political and national life of the inhabitants could not but end in the disturbance of their religious life, too. As Brahmanism which was the religion of the *élite* consisted chiefly in ritualism, those who had been placed outside the pale began to assert their own spiritual experience in defiance of the old system and expressed their needs for a new one. The teaching of the Buddha was the most timely response to these needs of the masses, as it was so universal, unifying, morally elevating, and in touch with their spiritual yearnings. Besides, this was the age of free thinking and liberalism, and the Buddha was left absolutely unmolested in his missionary activity throughout India as far as his teachings were concerned, there was no political oppression over the spread of Buddhism. As Rhys Davids states, the opposition Buddhism encountered from certain quarters of Brahmanism was not directed against his teaching itself but against his congregation whose social influence began to be felt in many ways. We must not also forget the fact that the general material prosperity enjoyed by the people had

much to do with the propagation of Buddhism. (For more detailed discussion, see my previous article on "The Buddha.")

There were, besides these social conditions, moral factors which greatly conduced to the establishment of Buddhism in the East. By the moral factors I mean the personality of Śākyamuni himself and the eternal truth contained in his Dharma. His was a unique soul, so captivating and so irresistible that the sight of him alone was able to make converts. Indeed, he was a great preacher, a great religious propagandist, and, as I imagine, in the Buddha there were united the creative religious genius of Shinran and the great persuasive faculty of the preacher Rennyō.

## II

It is needless to say that success in preaching does not consist in trickery, in mere cleverness,—these can never penetrate into the depths of the human soul. The most essential requisite of a successful preacher is the sincerity and directness of his conviction, without which no religion can ever hope to win human hearts. What made Śākyamuni so great a preacher was not in the trivial arts of preaching but in the greatness and truth of his faith which so directly appealed to our inner consciousness. The truth which dawned upon the mind of the Buddha after his long meditation, after six years of ascetic life, was destined, from the very beginning, even before it was preached to any sentient being, to reverberate over the ten quarters of the world and to the end of time. The one who attained this truth, moreover, was fully and most wonderfully endowed with qualities that will gain the hearts of his hearers even before his mouth was opened. This was quite natural, seeing that the truth did not only enlighten the mind of Śākyamuni but permeated his whole being so that he was the truth itself; and who could resist the approach of such a personality, before whom all passions, all evil thoughts

lost their power? The scriptures are full of records of such instances.

What we glean from the wonderful personality of the Buddha as preacher, is that the missionary spirit springs mainly from two sources, self-confidence and overflowing love. First, it is impossible to give away what you have not, there must be something in yourself, something in abundance, even flowing over the brim. Shinran, the founder of the Shin sect, says: "My only desire is to believe myself and to make others believe"; and from this "I believe" issues that authority which makes others believe; and in this sense alone Shinran was a delegate of the Tathāgata. In the case of Śākyamuni his self-confidence was revealed with the dazzling brilliancy of the midday sun, when he exclaimed, "Above the heavens and below the heavens I alone am honoured." This is traditionally ascribed to the time of his birth, but really it must have come from him when he attained perfect enlightenment. What a powerful and exalted assertion of the spirit of self-reliance is revealed here! When the Buddha was walking in the direction of Benares to make the Wheel of the Law revolve for the first time, he met a naked ascetic, Upaka, who questioned the Buddha as to his teacher and doctrine, and the Buddha's reply was:

"All-conquering have I now become, all-knowing;  
Untainted by the elements of being.  
I've left all things, am freed through thirst's destruction,  
All wisdom's mine: what teacher should I follow?"

"I have no teacher anywhere;  
My equal nowhere can be found;  
In all the world with its gods,  
No one to rival me exists.

"The saintship verily I've gained,  
I am the teacher, unsurpassed;

I am the Buddha, sole, supreme;  
Lust's fire is quenched, Nirvana gained."\*

Again, the Buddha declared to a group of ascetics: "The World-honoured One is enlightened himself, and preaches the Law to enlighten others; he has controlled his body and mind, and preaches the Way to make others control themselves; he has entered upon the path of tranquility, and preaches the Law to make others attain tranquility; he has gone over to the other shore and has attained Nirvana, and preaches the Law to make others go over to the other shore and attain Nirvana." When King Pasenadi reproached the Buddha, saying, "While you claim to be an unsurpassable, enlightened one, there are some other religious leaders who are far more advanced in age than you are, and yet they are not making such a bold claim as you; is it not too pretentious on your part, you are yet so young." Answered the Buddha, "There are four objects which though young and small cannot be despised. They are the royal son, the snake, fire, and the Bhikshu." Such a confidence in oneself which is technically known as "Fearlessness" makes one bold to proclaim the incomparable gospel of the Buddha.

The next qualification of a preacher is a loving heart. Love is the overflow of an ever-expanding and all-absorbing heart of the strong; when such a one has crossed the four torrents of evil passions, his natural desire is to make others cross them too even as he has himself. Who is there of so small a heart and so narrow a mind as to wish to enjoy the blessings of an enlightenment all by himself? A great loving heart is awakened in him who, himself standing at the summit of the mountain, looks down on his fellow-beings below. When this fellow-feeling is stirred in his heart, there ensues a great religious movement which spreads like waves all over

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\* Warren—*Buddhism in Translations*, P. 343.

the world where there are suffering human beings. The waves of Buddhism thus started in India about two thousand and fifty years ago are still rolling in the East. But we must not forget that this love awakened in the heart of an enlightened one is not the feeling of pity which is cherished by the conqueror over the conquered; for the Buddha's love originates from his belief in the moral personality of his fellow-beings. With pity alone, with that feeling which is awakened towards one's inferiors, a preacher can never expect any kind of success for his work; all social reform must be based on the idea of fellowship; no charity in its real sense is possible without believing in others as moral beings. The meaning of "the One Vehicle" (*ekayāna*) is to be understood not necessarily in the sense as claimed by the followers of the so-called One Vehicle Doctrine, but in the sense that all sentient beings, being of one nature, can attain to the same enlightenment as that of the Buddha himself, that is, we are all conveyed on one vehicle to the other shore of Buddhahood. This belief in the ultimate sameness of all human nature culminates in the exclamation of the Buddha, "How wonderful, how wonderful! All beings are in possession of Buddha-nature," as is recorded in the *Avatamsaka* and other Mahāyāna Sūtras. The fellow-feeling of love really springs from an intellectual insight into the nature of things, and this is what makes Shinran, as delegate of the Tathāgata, desire "to make others believe." He never claimed any followers or disciples, but he had friends or "co-walkers." His sixty years' work of propagandism was the outcome of his belief in the moral value of each individual personality.

### III

The Buddha who came out into the world, thus fully equipped as a missionary, made use of every opportunity

which presented itself for the promulgation of his doctrine. He was always thoughtful in selecting the most opportune occasion, he was not without "skilful devices."

First, he selected the best city for his first mission work. The reason why he first went into Rājagaha after his enlightenment was perhaps because this was the centre of Indian culture of those days; if this city should fall into his hands, the rest of the country would easily be conquered and there would be no serious obstacles that might prevent the further progress of his religion. Rājagaha, the most strategic point, having thus first bowed to him, Sāvatti would be the next objective of his triumphant march. Therefore, as soon as his five Bhikshus embraced the Doctrine he walked towards Uruvelakassapa who was one of the great leaders of the time with a large number of followers. It was the boldest attempt on the part of the young reformer whose reputation had not yet been established, there was no doubt that the Buddha encountered many difficulties and obstacles before he completely brought Kassapa under his feet. It was a great conquest, however, for he not only gained the heart of one Kassapa but those of his followers. His entry next to the city naturally caused a great excitement among the inhabitants. While they were still doubtful whether Gotama or Kassapa was the real leader of the movement, Kassapa advanced and solved the problem for them. He bowed before the Buddha, praised his virtues, and expressed his great gratitude for being saved by the Buddha from falsehoods. Seeing this, the whole populace of the city lost no time in hastening to the Buddha and recognising the greatness and truth of his Doctrine.

Secondly, the Buddha knew how to deal with the multitude. A great discoverer of truth is sometimes found quite ignorant of the psychology of the masses, he sits too high for them to reach. The Buddha, however, knew well how to walk with them, how to get into their hearts, and his dis-

courses were well graded (*Anupubbenā-Katthā*) for the capacities of his audience, he began low and gradually going higher, he prepared them finally to grasp the truth of Buddhism. In the Āgama (阿含) we see how the Buddha first talked about alms-giving, then about moral discipline, and as the result about being in the heavens; when the minds of his hearers were thus made to turn toward the Buddha, ready to take in more from him, he discoursed on the "Fourfold Noble Truth" which was the foundation of his enlightenment. His sermons were generally short, concise, and to the point, but avoided to touch those abstract metaphysical questions which did not lead to the edification of the masses. Therefore, said he, "The Buddha does not talk about unimportant matters; whether the world is permanent or not, whether it is not limited or not, whether the Tathāgata has a future life after death or not,—these are unprofitable subjects for those who are only aspiring after Nirvana: therefore, I do not discourse on them." This does not mean that these metaphysical questions were not at all to be discussed, but that such abstract reasonings were liable to carry us away from the real facts of life and experience, and they might be best avoided, for our real spiritual welfare is possible even without deciding upon these problems.

The secret of effective preaching is for the preacher to come down to the same level as the audience and to carry them up step by step towards the summit of enlightenment. It is true that the Buddha frequently made a frontal attack by denying the authority of the Vedas or by negating the aristocratic ritualism of the Brahmans: but, generally speaking, he did not despise the popular beliefs which then prevailed. Thus Brahmadeva, Sakrendra, Śrīdeva, and other gods were made guardians of Buddhism, and the followers of the naïve worldly materialism were thereby enabled to see the true light of Buddhism. This all-embracing spirit of tolerance has



survived even to the present day, making it one of the most characteristic traits of Buddhism. Mixing freely with the masses, he was always whole-hearted, his entire spirit was poured into the discourses he delivered, his whole personality was revealed in them. As the lion uses his whole force even when he strikes a rabbit, so the Buddha's entire spirit went into his sermons; even when he was preaching to people of low birth or low occupation such as hunters, his attention never wavered because his whole heart reverentially dwelled in the Law. The Buddha thus embraced by the Law never ignored the personality of his hearer; his sympathy went to him in full force: and this was the reason for his unprecedented success as preacher.

Thirdly, the Buddha was thoughtful in the choice of the time of preaching. His sermon for the disciples generally took place in the evening. When invited to a householder's family he would partake of the meal and afterwards give the host a short talk on the Doctrine in the way of thanks for the treatment. The afternoon was for meditation, and in the evening he taught those who came to the monastery. The evening is the most opportune time for a religious entertainment, when the tropical sun is near the horizon and people refreshed after the siesta gather in the palm-grove where a cool evening breeze is stirring. The lay-disciples dispersed, the Buddha resumes his enlightening sermon for the benefit of the Bhikshus, among whom the householders are sometimes found. The moon shines in her softening mystic light; enveloped in it, the minds of the audience share in the serenity of nature as well as of the enlightened soul: this is indeed the most appropriate time for his disciples to appreciate the deep truth of the Master's teaching.

His preaching also took place while wandering from one city to another, for the Buddha was always itinerating. Sermons on such occasions were sometimes fuller of interest, but

as it was considered improper to preach while standing, he was seldom approached by those too impetuous truth-seekers who demanded a sermon on the spot. The preaching of the Law was forbidden except in cases of illness to those who carried an umbrella, or a stick, or any kind of weapon ; those who wore clogs, or leather shoes ; those who rode on a vehicle ; those who were lying or squatting or wearing headgear ; those who were sitting on a cushion while the preacher himself sat on the ground ; those who were on a high seat while the preacher was on a lower seat ; those who were sitting while the preacher stood ; those who walked ahead of the preacher ; those who were on the middle of the road while the preacher himself walked on either side of it. To such no preaching was given..

#### IV

The Buddha was no doubt a great preacher, but he was also a great educator : his witticism, his penetrating insight, his power of observation, his kind-hearted thoroughness, and his wonderful patience were some of the qualifications which made him a great teacher. When he was entering into Rājagaha accompanied by one thousand Bhikshus, he spent the night on a little hill north of Gāya where he could see the lights of the city and hear the noise as well. On that occasion he talked on a burning fire to them who had been fire-worshippers until then ; this was quite a timely theme. He said :

“O Bhikshus, all is burning, see how everything burns ; O Bhikshus, the eye is burning, form is burning, the eye-consciousness is burning, the sensation which is awakened through the contact of eye, form, and eye-consciousness, is also burning. O Bhikshus, what is this fire that thus burns all things ? The burning is due to the fire of avarice, the fire of wrath, the fire of infatuation. They are burning by the fire

of birth, old age, sickness, death, desire, grief, lamentation, etc. O Bhikshus, the ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind,—they are alike all burning.”

One time when he was wandering, accompanied by his numerous Bhikshus in the country of Kosala, he saw a mass of piled lumber set on fire. He immediately took a seat under a tree, away from the road, and making his disciples sit about him, he began to preach.

“O Bhikshus, do you see that great fire burning with all its intensity? What do you think of it? Which do you think it pleasanter, to sleep embraced in that great fire, or to sleep in the arms of a fair woman? Do you think it is needless to say that fire scalds? But, O Bhikshus, I say unto you, you may sleep in fire, but never put yourself in the arms of a woman against the teaching of the precept. The pain you experience with the fire may cause your death, but it does not affect your future, for your pain does not extend over to your next lives. But if you violate the precept to be embraced by a woman you will suffer forever in one of the hells.

“O Bhikshus, which do you think it pleasanter, to be bound by a strong man with a rope which bites deep into your flesh and be beaten with a red-hot iron bar and to have a red-hot iron ball forced into your mouth, or to pass an easy life under the hospitality and reverence of the householders? Do you think it is needless to say that it is pleasanter to live under the hospitality and reverence of the householders? O Bhikshus, I say unto you that if you desire to practise incomparable deeds of purity, you should never receive the hospitality and reverence of the householders by declaring yourself to be practising deeds of purity while you are not practising them, or declaring yourself to be a genuine monk when you really are not; you should never commit this fault even if you should be threatened to declare yourself so by a powerful man who would torture you with a red-hot iron.

The pain of the red-hot iron stops at your death, but a discourse based on corruption invites a long suffering."

## V

Lastly, I wish to mention that the Buddha was a great rhetorician, incomparable in the use of apt figures of speech, especially in telling parables and in drawing illustrations from homely facts of life. An abstract truth was thus driven home into the minds of his hearers, and there is no doubt that the teaching of the Buddha thus enriched found every opportunity to spread itself among the masses as well as among the intellectuals. Those who are even slightly acquainted with Buddhist literature will at once recognise the fact that it is a veritable mine of similes, metaphors, parables, and stories illustrating the difficult points of Buddhist philosophy. This proves that the Buddha was not only a philosopher and a spiritual leader but a poet well versed in all branches of literature.

When he wished to illustrate the truth that self-disciplining was for oneself and not for others and that when one was mindful of one's own affairs others would take care of themselves, he referred to a street juggler who might hurt others if he did not look well after himself. When he was talking about always being on guard, he said, "If you are ordered to carry a bowl filled with oil in sight of a great multitude or before a refined lady of marvellous beauty, how could you do it without spilling a drop of it if you were not on guard over yourself?" When he wished his disciples not to be too rigorous in their asceticism, he illustrated the point saying, "If the strings are too tight on a guitar they snap; if they are too loose, they give no sound; the stretch ought to be just so, neither too tight nor too loose." The virtue of impartiality was likened to the moon shining universally over

all things and all people, and that of non-attachment to the water bird whose wings never get wet or soiled.

Let me conclude with the following story which is taken from *The Book of the Kindred Sayings* translated by Mrs. Rhys Davids (Vol. I, p. 216 et seq.), where the Buddha represents himself as a farmer :

The Buddha was once staying on South Hill, at Ekanala, a Brahmin village. Now on that occasion it was the time for sowing, and the farmer Bhāradvāja, a Brahmin, had harnessed five hundred ploughs. Then the Buddha dressed himself in the early morning, and taking bowl and robe, drew near to the ploughing operation.

Now at that time Bhāradvāja's distribution of food was going on. And the Buddha came to the scene and stood at one side. Seeing the Buddha standing there for alms, Bhāradvāja said: "O Recluse, now I plough and sow, and when I have ploughed and sown, I eat. Do thou also plough and sow, and when thou hast ploughed and sown, eat." "But," said the Buddha, "I too, O Brahmin, plough and sow, and I have ploughed and sown and I eat." "But we see neither Master Gotama's team, nor his plough, nor his ploughshare, nor his goad, nor his oxen. And yet Master Gotama said, "I too plough and sow." Then Bhāradvāja addressed the Buddha in verse :

"A plough man by thine own confession thou?  
No ploughing can I see!  
The ploughman queried, tell me how to know  
The ploughing done by thee."

To this the Buddha replied also in verse :

"Faith is the seed and rain the discipline,  
Insight for me is plough fitted with yoke,  
My pole is conscience and sense-mind the tie,

And mindfulness my ploughshare and my goad,  
 Guarded in action, guarded too in speech,  
 And temperate as to my stomach's food,  
 I weed with truth, and my release from work  
 Is that fair thing of innermost desire.  
 Energy is my burden-bearing team,  
 Drawing my plough toward the haven sure.  
 Onward it goes nor never turns back ;  
 And where it goes we shall weep no more.  
 Such is the ploughing that is ploughed by me,  
 The fruit it bears is food ambrosial.  
 Who this ploughing hath accomplished, he  
 From suffering and from sorrow is set free."

Said the Brahmin ; " May it please Master Gotama to eat ! A ploughman is Master Gotama, yea, it is for fruit ambrosial that Gotama ploughs his ploughing ! " The Buddha answered ;

" Not mine to enjoy presents for chanting verses ;  
 Not lawful this, Brahmin, for minds discerning ;  
 Buddhas reject wages for chanting verses :  
 True to the Law such is their practise ever.  
 On other grounds minister thou, O Brahmin,  
 With food and drink to a great seer made perfect,  
 To one from whom purged are all mental poisons,  
 In whom is calm, peace from all fret and worry :  
 Yea, here's field, if reward thou lookest."

When he had thus spoken, Bhāradvāja said ; " Most excellent, Master Gotama, most excellent ! . . . . May Master Gotama, suffer me as a lay disciple, who, from this day forth as long as life endures, has taken in him refuge."

CHIZEN AKANUMA