

# The Buddhist Conception of Reality

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THERE is one question every earnest-minded man will ask as soon as he grows old, or rather, young enough to reason about things, and that is: "Why are we here?" or "What is the significance of life here?" The question may not always take this form; it will vary according to the surroundings and circumstances in which the questioner may happen to find himself.

Once up to the horizon of consciousness, this question is quite a stubborn one and will not stop disturbing one's peace of mind. It will insist on getting a satisfactory answer one way or another.

This inquiry after the significance or value of life is no idle one, and no verbal quibble will gratify the inquirer for he is ready to give his life for it. We frequently hear in Japan of young men committing suicide, despairing at their inability to solve the question. While this is a hasty and in a way cowardly deed, they are so upset that they do not know what they are doing; they are altogether beside themselves.

This questioning about the significance of life is tantamount to seeking after ultimate reality. Ultimate reality may sound to some people too philosophical and they may regard it as of no concern to them. They may regard it outside their domain of interest, and the subject I am going to speak about tonight is liable to be put aside as belonging to the professional business of a class of people known as philosophers. The question of reality, however, is just as real, just as vital as the question of life itself. What is reality?

Reality is known by various names. To Christians it is God; to the Indians it

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is Brahman or Atman; to the Chinese it is *jen* 仁, it is *tao* 道, Heaven, or *tien* 天; to Buddhists it is Bodhi, it is Dharma, Buddha, Prajñā, Tathatā, etc. Buddhists perhaps have a richer vocabulary than other religions or philosophies for ultimate reality.

How do we approach reality and take hold of it?

A general approach to reality is the so-called objective method. This is an attempt to reach reality by means of logical reasoning, by appealing to the intellect, which is a very useful and frequently powerful instrument in dealing with our daily practical affairs. Being useful, efficient, and effective in innumerable ways, the intellect is generally regarded by us as the most precious thing we can employ and enjoy in this world. It is therefore natural for us that we should resort to it in our attempt to reach reality. This is what philosophers do. They are indeed most intellectual men.

But the question is: Is the intellect really the key to open the door of reality? It raises all kinds of questions belonging to the objective world and it is able to solve most of them, I believe. But there is one question which defies the intellect. It is the question of reality. Reality is that which lies underneath all things, not only of nature but of mind. (To say "underneath" is not exact. This will become clear as we proceed.)

It was due to the working of the intellect that the question of reality was raised. The intellect tries to establish a complete system of relations obtaining between ideas which we have formed in our contact with the world. In this trial we come to postulate an ultimate reality whereby a harmonious unification of ideas becomes possible. But so far we have not succeeded in this, as is proved by the history of philosophy. One system of thought is formed by a great thinker, to which he has applied the best of his speculative powers. But his successors generally find it insufficient, defective one way or another. His logic shows flaws somewhere and is rejected as incomplete, though not entirely. Another great thinker arises and again tries his best, to the same effect.

According to my view, the intellect is not an efficient weapon to deal with the question of an ultimate reality. It is true that it has raised the question, but this does not mean that it is qualified to answer it. The asking of the question in fact demonstrates that there is an urge in every one of us for something final to which we earnestly desire to attach our human destiny.

This urge for the ultimate reality, while it is made conscious by means of the

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intellect, is really seated in a far deeper recess of mind. If the intellect is unable to give it full satisfaction, where should we look for it? Before we go on, let us examine the nature of the intellect.

The intellect looks outwardly, takes the so-called objective view of things. It is unable to look inwardly so as to grasp the thing in its innerliness. The intellect attempts to achieve a unitive view of the world by the so-called objective method. The objective method may work well when the inside view has been first taken hold of. For the unifying principle lies within and not outside. It is not something we arrive at, but it is where we start; it is not the outcome of postulation but what makes postulation possible.

According to the Vedas, there was Atman or Brahman in the beginning; it was all alone, then it thought or willed: "I am one, I will be many." From this, a world of multiplicities arose.

In Christianity, God in the beginning was alone. He willed to create a world of manyness and commanded light to appear, saying, "Let there be light." A world of light and darkness thus came to existence.

When a thing is by itself and there is nothing beside it, it is the same as nothing. To be absolutely alone means to be a nothing. So there is reason when Christians say that God created the world out of nothing. If God created something out of something, we naturally would ask: What is that which made this something? When we go on like this there is no end, and finally we have to come to nothingness, which is the beginning of the world.

Here is the most puzzling question we humans can encounter: Why did God or Brahman or Atman (or it) not stay all alone quietly in his absolute sense, enjoying himself? Why did he move to divide himself and create this world of woes, miseries, anxieties, and sufferings of all kinds?

To create something out of nothing, which is a contradiction in itself, and this something not a mass of joys but being inextricably mixed with pain in all its possible forms—this is really something that goes altogether beyond the realm of intelligibility. It is the most baffling question for the intellect. How can the intellect reconcile the idea of nothing, or non-being, with that of being, two conflicting ideas which defy the intellect—something coming out of nothing? As long as we resort to the objective method, no answer will be forthcoming, however ingeniously we may manipulate the intellect.

Not only the intellect but the heart also refuses to be reconciled to the fact

that God is apparently committing himself to this act of inhumanity or ungodliness. Why did he put us in this world of iniquities and cruelties?

As long as we look at this world from the outside, as long as we try to effect a synthesis of the conflicting ideas by intellectualization, as long as we stand as mere observers and critics, this question of something coming out of nothing will never be solved, will forever lie outside logical comprehensibility.

It is not really the intellect that remains unsatisfied but the heart that is troubled to the utmost. The intellect and the heart are good, inseparable companions. When one is worried the other shares it.

The only solution of the problem, as far as I can see, is to become Atman itself and to will with it in its creation of this world. Instead of looking back to the beginning of the world while staying in it, we must leap back at once to the spot where Atman stood when the world was not yet created. That is, we must go back even to the point before the world came to exist. We must plunge ourselves right into the midst of nothingness. If one is a Christian, one must become God himself and feel the motive he had when he uttered that fatal cry, "Let there be light."

This seems to be the only way to come to a definitive solution of the question. The intellect will naturally protest, saying: How is this possible? We are not God, we are creatures, the created, and it is the height of sacrilege to think of our becoming God himself. We are forever separated from him by his act of creation; the chasm is utterly beyond human power to cross. Besides, we are already created, the time of creation is past, it is gone forever. We can never go back to the time where there was yet no time. A timeless time is beyond our conception. To go out of time means annihilation. To use a Buddhist expression, we are what we are, swimming along the stream of samsara (birth-and-death), and how can we stay in the stream and at the same time be on the other shore of Nirvana?

This protest on the part of the intellect is quite rational, for it is in the nature of the intellect to stay outside and not to enter inside. It is so made as to be an observer and not a mover. But it knows how to raise all kinds of self-baffling questions, and as long as it can do this there must some way for it to quit its attitude of objectivity. It must somehow devise the means to kill itself and to let something else take its place. This act of killing itself on the part of the intellect means a revolution in our life of relativity.

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According to Buddhist philosophy, we can become God or Atman or Brahman. No, not *become* it, for we *are* it. No becoming is required, only a recognition of it, a becoming conscious of the fact. Becoming means a certain movement or transformation from one state to another state—for example, a dog turning into a cat, or a tree transforming itself into a man. Man being man and God being God, this transformation is impossible. Buddhist philosophy does not require this of us. It only tells us to realize the fact, to become conscious of the fact that man is God. By this transformation man can understand what moved God in the beginning to create the world out of nothing.

God made man after his own image. Man can surely go back to this stage—the image he has been in possession of even before he came to this world. So it is not to become, but to be; not transformation, but simple recognition.

As long as we are outsiders, there is no way to get inside the thing, and if we do not get inside, our disharmony with life and the world at large will never come to an end. This is where we have to undertake a grand experiment with ourselves.

When a Buddhist devotee was asked whether or not Amida could save us, he replied to the inquirer: "You are not saved yet!" This is an experiment, and you have to conduct it yourself. You cannot leave it to others.

When Erō (Hui-lang, 慧朗), of the late T'ang era, came to Baso (Ma-tsu, 馬祖), Baso asked, "What do you seek here?" "I wish to attain Buddha-knowledge." "Buddha has no knowledge; knowledge belongs to the world of devils." Erō later went to Sekitō (Shih-t'ou, 石頭) and asked him, "What is Buddha?" Sekitō said, "You have no Buddha-nature." "What about these wriggling, creeping creatures?" "They rather have the Buddha-nature." "How is it that I have none?" "Because you do not recognize yourself." This brought the monk to awakening. After this he shut himself up in his monastery and did not go out of it for thirty years. Whenever a monk came to him to ask for enlightenment, he said only this: "You have no Buddha-nature."

Christ often admonished his disciples, "ye of little faith!" Faith is generally considered the opposite of intellection and often irrational, and for this reason philosophy has nothing to do with faith. But life itself is a great affirmation, and philosophy or no philosophy, we cannot go on without taking this fact into account when we want to arrive at some solution to the question that is the subject of this lecture. If so, philosophy too must have something of faith in it

and be standing on it. An intellectual understanding of any sort must be after all an attempt to arrive at an integration of ideas, which is nothing but faith.

Underlying our intellection there is faith. When the intellect forgets itself, it cherishes a doubt as to the presence of faith and this makes the intellect wander away further and further from its root. In fact all the intellectual efforts we make to solve the problem of reality are really directed towards the restoring of faith from which it started. The trouble with the intellect is that it does not realize for what it is working, and imagining that it has its own end, it goes on proposing question after question. We can describe the process in another way. Faith negating itself is turned into doubt, and doubt, which is at the bottom of curiosity and questioning, starts up intellection. When intellection comes to an impasse—to which it will surely come one day if it works honestly—it sees itself reflected in the mirror of faith, which is its home-coming. The intellect thus finally arrives at the great affirmation.

Here is a good story which I believe I quoted somewhere else but which I wish to quote here again, for it is illustrative of the character of doubt above referred to. It also demonstrates how masters take up this question, giving it their own solution—a solution which rests after all with the doubter himself.

A monk came to Yakusan (Yueh-shan, 藥山) to have his doubt settled. Yakusan said, "Wait until I come to the Dharma Hall, where I will have your doubt settled." In the evening the master appeared in the Dharma Hall as usual, and seeing the whole congregation assembled he announced, "Let the monk come out who wished to have his doubt settled today. Where is he?"

When the monk came forward and stood before the master, the latter came down from his chair and, holding him, made this announcement, "Here is a monk who cherishes a doubt!" So saying, the master pushed him away and went back to his room.

Later another master, called Gengaku (Hsüan chiao, 玄學), remarked on this incident: "Let me see, did Yakusan solve the doubt for the monk? If so, what would be the solution? If there were still no solution, I would say this again, 'Wait until I come to the Dharma Hall, where the doubt will be solved!'"

If this is repeated in this way, where do we come to a final settlement? Yakusan says somewhere else, "It is not difficult to say a word for you; but all that is needed is that you come to an immediate apprehension. If you begin thinking about it, the fault may turn out to be mine. It is after all better for

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each of us to see to the matter by ourselves, so that nobody will be blamed for it.”

When the baby first separates itself from the mother-body, it utters a cry resounding all over the universe, from the Akanishta heaven down to the deepest parts of Naraka. But as it grows up, it becomes timid because of its intellectual development, so-called, until it finally separates itself entirely from God. When it comes to this pass, it loses its Buddha-nature, falteringly asking if it ever had it. Is not the intellect here forgetting itself and plunging right into the abyss of utter darkness and confusion?

The intellect divides, dissects, and murders; faith unifies, puts the broken pieces together, and resuscitates. But division or analysis is possible only when it has something at its back that unifies. Without unification, division is not possible. To divide must after all mean to unite and consolidate. We thus cannot go on just dividing and analyzing. After all our dividing and analyzing we must once more come back to the point where we started, for this is where we belong.

When a Zen Buddhist master of the T'ang dynasty was asked how to attain the ultimate goal of Buddhist life, he said, “Have an interview with yourself who is even before your birth.”

This is getting back to the source of the universe where even the intellect has not begun its dissecting business. This is when God has not yet given his fiat to have light. This is where the Vedantic Atman has not yet stirred itself “to will.” It is up to the intellect, if it can, to retrace its steps and put itself back even where it has not yet started its work.

When I talk like this, we are apt to consider the matter chronologically in terms of time. This is also the case when it is declared that God created the world out of nothing. We consider this “objectively” in the physical sense and are mystified. The event of creation did not take place so many kalpas or eons ago, astronomically or biologically speaking. Creation is taking place every moment of our life. My talking is a work of creation, and your hearing is a work of creation. We are creators, each one of us, and we are also the created at the same time—created out of nothing and creating out of nothing.

The eye cannot see itself. The intellect cannot dissect itself. This is true as long as the matter is considered objectively, as long as we are outside observers. But after all the eye that sees God is the same eye which sees myself. To

get this knack or trick, if we are to call it so, is to open the eye and see the flower in front of yourself, or to look out to the starry heaven. But it is not the eye that sees the flower or the stars, nor is it the flower or the stars that are seen. The eye is the flower and the stars, the flower and the stars are the eye.

Again, I stretch an arm and the intellect dissects this event or experience, declaring: "I move the arm, and the arm is moved." But the truth is that there is no agent called "I" that moves the arm, nor is there the arm that is moved. The arm is "I" and "I" is the arm; the actor is the acted, and the acted is the actor. There is only pure act, that is, pure experience. This, however, when expressed in words, is, as the saying goes, "one thousand miles off."

In this connection I wish to say a few words about Buddhism being often regarded as pantheistic. For this is not correct. Buddhism is neither pantheism nor mysticism; it has a unique way of interpreting reality; it apprehends reality as it really is or as it actually asserts itself. When Buddhist philosophers state that the green bamboos swaying in the breeze are the Dharmakāya, or that the yellow foliage luxuriantly growing in my front garden is Prajñā or Buddha-nature (*buddhatā*), critics believe that this is a pantheistic statement. But Buddhists will say this: that if the yellow foliage is Prajñā, Prajñā is a non-sentient being; that if the green bamboo is Dharmakāya, Dharmakāya is no more than a plant. When I eat a bamboo shoot, am I eating Dharmakāya, that is, the Buddha himself? No. Dharmakāya is Dharmakāya and the bamboo is bamboo; they cannot be the same. What is meant is this: Dharmakāya or Prajñā, being "emptiness" itself and having no tangible bodily existence, has to embody itself in a form and is manifested as a bamboo, as a mass of foliage, as a fish, as a man, as a Bodhisattva, as a mind, etc. But these manifestations themselves are not the Dharmakāya or Prajñā, which is something more than forms or ideas or modes of existence. Now when statements like the above are made most people are apt to be confused. They fix upon the bamboo and they cannot but think it is a real existence, an objective reality. Buddhists also, while not denying the bamboo's objectivity with a certain qualification, still insist that it is not the Dharmakāya itself.

The strangest thing is that the intellect raises questions and then separates itself from them and does not realize that those questions are the intellect itself. When it understands this act, that is to say, when the intellect apprehends its own way of moving out into questioning, the questioning will be



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the answering, the answer will be directly discovered in the question. As long as the intellect remains objective, it will never be free of the snare contrived by itself. But at the same time we must not forget that if not for the intellect devising all those innumerable questions out of itself we would never be called back to look within ourselves and find the answer snugly nestled there.

The animals and plants and inorganic objects are all endowed with Buddha-nature. They are acting it, they are living it, but they never come to a state of self-realization, for they have never awakened to an intellectual life. The intellect is what makes this human life worth living. It may also lead man astray in its attempts at intellectual interpretation. But when it is once awakened to its true nature, man attains enlightenment. And it is for this reason that the true enlightenment or illumination corresponding to the Sanskrit Bodhi has an intellectual connotation.

When a Buddhist teacher was asked as to that which even transcends Buddhahood, he answered, "The dog, the cat."

Another teacher told his disciples, "If you wish to know what Buddhism is, go ask the peasants working in the fields; if you wish to know about worldly affairs go to those grand professors of religion."

These statements by Buddhist teachers are not meant to be ironical or sarcastic. They really point to the truth of Buddhism. The truth is where it is, and not where it is talked about or argued. Nevertheless, unless it is argued and discussed, it may never have the opportunity to be itself, to discover itself, to be back within itself. The main thing is to know how to make a judicious use of the intellect.

What the intellect aims at is a system of unification on the cosmic basis of all human experience. In the crying of a baby there is this unification, in the highest productions of art there is this unification. When Confucius said that at seventy one follows what one's heart desires and yet does not go beyond the natural order, he reached this *citta-gocara*, that is, a state of spiritual unification.

To say that at the bottom of intellection there is belief or faith or affirmation means that it conceals within itself a fundamental unification in which we all have our being and from which we work out our daily life.

The main trouble with the intellect is that it gets away from itself, that is, it ignores the fact that it belongs to life, and undertakes to work out its own system independent of the original system in which it properly finds its mean-

ing. However much it may try to achieve this, it can never work it out, though it may sometimes imagine that it has.

Why this impossibility? Because its feet are firmly set on the great mother earth out of which it has grown up and away from which, with no supply of nourishment, it cannot thrive. The intellect belongs where its roots are.

Intellectualization ought to be made the means of logically, or if necessary, even "illogically" constructing a greater system of unification on the basis of self-realization.

Reality is all-inclusive, there is nothing that can be outside it. As it is all-inclusive, it is fullness of things and not a contentless abstraction, as the intellect is too frequently apt to make it. It is not an aggregation of individual objects, nor is it outside them. It is not something that is imposed upon the aggregates, stringing and holding them together from the outside. It is the principle of integration residing inside the aggregated masses and identical with them.

To take hold of reality, therefore, we must find a means other than sheer intellection, which is always looking outward and running away from itself. If we can make the intellect turn within itself and achieve what Buddhists call *paravritti*, a kind of mental about-face, it may accomplish something. But this is going against the habit we ordinarily make the intellect assume. In other words, the intellect must awake to a more fundamental faculty lying dormant within it. Though it is going in the wrong direction, further and further away, one day it must become aware of its having gone in a way it ought not to have gone. Herein a complete revolution will take place, which is called *paravritti*. The intellect must once for all experience an impasse in the course of reasoning, and when it is sincere to itself, it is sure to meet this fate. When it thus faces a blind alley, when the wall stands absolutely unyielding to the pressure, it will for the first time realize its own nature. This means that it surrenders to something greater and stronger than itself. The surrender means salvation, for the wall now suddenly opens from the other side as if by a miracle. The Bodhisattva Maitreya snaps his fingers and the heaviest door yields and Sudhana sees at one glance all the treasures inside glowing in their glory. (The *Gandavyūha sūtra*, section on Maitreya.)

I said just now "a more fundamental faculty" when speaking of the working of the intellect, but I am afraid this is somewhat misleading. There is no special

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faculty destined to take hold of reality, rising from some special outside independent source. To tell the truth, it is reality itself which now comes out in full view, shifting the stage and making the intellect see itself reflected on reality. Reversing the order, the intellect seeing itself is no other than reality becoming conscious of itself. This self-consciousness on the part of reality, intellectually interpreted, is where subject and object just begin their differentiation.

This may be designated "pure experience" and the method leading to it may be called subjective experimentation in contrast to objective methodology. "Pure experience," as I remember, is a term used by a noted American psychologist. I am using the term not in its psychological sense but in its metaphysical bearing. In this there is no experiencing "I," nor is there any "experience reality." Here is an experience in its purest form, in its most real aspect; here is no abstraction, no "emptiness," no mere naming, no conceptualization, but an experience experiencing itself. Though there is here neither subject nor object nor their mutual coalescence or unification, there is a distinct experiencing provided with noetic quality. While it is not one of those individualized experiences which go under this name in our daily life, it is in a most eminent sense an experience.

When I see an object as confronting me, it is generally understood as a case of immediate apprehension. But "pure experience" is not this kind of immediate apprehension or intuition. This is to be distinctly understood, for in "pure experience" in the sense I wish to use it here, there is no subject seeing the object, that is, there is no apprehending or intuiting agent coming in contact with the apprehended or intuited, nor is there any event taking place which is called apprehension or intuition. To understand "pure experience" in this fashion as the compact between subject and object is the outcome of intellectualization. All these differentiated ideas come out of the experience itself, they lie deeply in it, they are it. We must first have the experience in its purest form and then the differentiation follows. The intellect, forgetting its own nature and limitations, persuades itself into thinking there is an "I" effecting union with a "not-I" and proclaims this "union" to be a mystic experience. When the intellect thus proposes an unnecessary interference or mediation, the whole thing turns topsy-turvy and an "I" with all its egocentric impulses comes to assert itself. As long as mysticism is understood as the union of

“subject” and “object,” I cannot endorse the use of the term for the Buddhist experience. Though we cannot avoid resorting to words even where they are not at all adequate, we must try to make the nearest approach to the fact.

Masters of Buddhist philosophy therefore exhaust their stock of terminology trying to impart this knowledge to those who have not yet been initiated.<sup>1</sup> In fact, not only do the masters exhaust the terminology but they also use a multitude of “skillful means” (*upāyakaṣālya*).

A monk approached a master and asked, “What was Bodhidharma’s idea in visiting this country (China)?” Bodhidharma came to China from India in the Six Dynasties Era, about 1500 years ago, and is generally accepted as the founder of the Zen school of Buddhism in China. The question proposed here means: “What necessity was there for him to come to China from the west to teach Buddhism, or rather about the Buddha-nature, which is said to be possessed by everybody? There was no need at all for him to undertake such a hazardous trip from a faraway land to teach the Chinese—as if they were not already endowed with the Buddha-nature.” This, however, is the superficial meaning of the question; its real purport is about being informed about the Buddha-nature itself, that is, “What is reality?”

The master, however, following up the literal meaning of the question, tells the monk, “Why not ask about your own idea (or mind)? For there is no use asking about another man’s mind when the Buddha-nature concerns yourself. You ought to know your own Buddha-nature, your Self, the ultimate reality.”

The disciple then obediently asked this: “What, then, is my own mind (or nature)? What is my inner Self? What is ultimate reality?” This is really the question that had been troubling the disciple.

The master said: “You must see into the secret working.”

“What is the secret working?” asked the disciple.

The master opened and closed his eyes. And this is said to have opened the inquisitive monk’s mental eye to the secret working of “pure experience.”

To add a superfluous comment: The secret working of reality is not confined to this master’s opening and closing his eyes. Here is my hand, I make a fist

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<sup>1</sup> It is after all a kind of knowledge, although we have to insist that this *prajñā*-knowledge is of different order.

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by clasping the fingers together, I open it, and now I show you the palm. Here is no secret, it is all open, no evidence of whatever nature is needed, those who have eyes are the witnesses. But if you say there is still a secret, an obscurity, a mysticism, you cannot blame me; all that is on your side.

Dipankara Buddha is the first Buddha, according to Buddhist legend, under whom Śakyamuni had his first teaching in Buddhism. Dipankara therefore may be considered the first form God assumed in order to teach human beings ultimate reality. Now there was a monk in the Five Dynasties Era, about one thousand years ago, who asked this, "What is the world like before the appearance of Dipankara, the first Buddha?" This may be understood in this sense: What is the world like even before the appearance of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden? Or, what kind of a world is it before God created this world of multiplicities?

The master said, "The same as after the appearance of Dipankara Buddha."

"What is the world like after the appearance of Dipankara?"

"The same as before the appearance of the Buddha."

"What is the world like at this very moment with Dipankara among us?"

"Have a cup of tea, O monk."

This *mondo*—the "questioning and answering" between monk and master—is apparent and intelligible enough, I suppose; but if you say it is not, I am afraid that to make it intelligible and perhaps more rational would take much time and a great deal of intellectualization. Even after that, the matter might not be understood in the way it should be. Indeed, unless there is a perfect and harmonious assimilation of all our ideas into the total body of thought in which all the opposites, such as subjective and objective, God and man, nature and mind, find their proper assignments, there cannot be a real understanding of the "absurdities" running through Buddhist philosophy.

Now the question will be how to have a self-realization of "pure experience" whereby we take hold of reality.

Realization means experimentation. Unless we experiment, we can never come to a realization. By mere talking about, or by mere looking at, we never reach anywhere. To reach somewhere we must use our own legs and tread every inch of the ground. Nothing is more self-evident than this. Nobody will quarrel with it.

Philosophy is all very well. We are born to argue, to discuss, but if we do not

move on, it is like working a tread-mill: we never make progress. If the purpose is just to work the treadmill, the means and the end are in harmony. But if it is accomplishing something more than that, we must try the means suited to the purpose, that is, we must experiment for the experience.

And for this experiment it is not at all necessary to sacrifice thousands of human lives, innocent human lives. If any sacrifice is needed, let it be our own life. By losing life, we find it—this is what is told by wise men of all races. If it is so, is not the experiment worth trying?

Let me quote another *mondō*:

Disciple: "As I do not yet see into the truth, I get involved in errors and falsehoods."

Master: "As to the truth, do you see anything specifically to be so called and pointed out as such to others?"

Disciple: "No, it cannot be something to perceive as specifically definable."

Master: "If so, where do you get what you call errors and falsehoods?"

Disciple: "I am really puzzled here and am asking you about that."

Master: "If that is the case, stand in a field ten thousand miles wide where there is not an inch of grass growing."

Disciple: "Where there is not an inch of grass growing—is any standing there at all possible?"

Master: "Do not argue, just go ahead."

A field where not an inch of grass is growing symbolizes *śūnyatā*, the ultimate reality of Buddhist philosophy. *Śūnyatā* is literally "emptiness." Being "empty" means that reality goes beyond definability, where it cannot be qualified as this or that. It is above the categories of universal as well as particular. But on that account it must not be regarded as contentless and void in its relative sense; it is, on the contrary, fullness of things, containing all possibilities. Errors and falsehoods stand against right views, and they belong in the world of relativities. In *śūnyatā* no such contrasts exist; there are no such grasses growing in "the field." But you cannot say this by just walking around the field, by just peeping through the outside walls; you must at least once be in it, "stand in it" as the Chinese original has it. The "going straight ahead" is a great experiment and experience.

The ultimate reality as conceived in Buddhist philosophy is "pure experience," *śūnyatā*, a grand integration which is before subject and object are

intellectually differentiated; it is the cosmic or divine Unconscious becoming conscious.

The following may help the reader understand what is really meant by the Buddhist idea of *śūnyatā* (emptiness) where there is not an inch of grass growing and yet where we pass this bustling life of ours day after day, year after year.

Tōzan (Tung-shan, 洞山) once gave this sermon: "O ye Brethren, in early fall and late summer you go about east and west; only by going straight ahead in the direction of the field where not an inch of grass is growing can you get anywhere."

On another occasion he said: "As to the field where not an inch of grass is growing, how do you get there?"

When Sekisō (Shih-shuang, 石霜) heard of this he remarked: "Just out of the gate, and you see the grass growing."

Later Tōzen-sai (Tung-ch'an chi, 東禪齋) commented on this: "Let me ask whether Sekisō understood what Tōzan meant or not. If you say he did, O Brethren, what about your going around here and there, attending to all kinds of things, day in day out? Is this sowing grass all along the road? Or is it in harmony with the ancient usage? If you say Sekisō fails to understand Tōzan, how did he manage to make such a remark? O, Brethren, do you understand what I mean?"

"Let me ask, where do you want to go now? When you have a clear understanding you will be singing the 'Homeward Ditty'. Don't you see? Once, I made this response: 'If so, I won't leave'."<sup>2</sup>

The Buddhist idea is always to start from the source where division of subject and object has not yet taken place—and this not by analysis, nor by postulation, nor by dialectics, but by the method which I call *prajñā*-intuition. This is not an ordinary kind of intuition, for *prajñā* works where there is yet no differentiation. Philosophers would not subscribe to this idea, for they would say that we are already in a world of subject and object and that to reach an order other than this is possible only by postulation. Whether or not they are right, let me introduce you to Tōsu (T'ou-tzu, 投子), one of the great masters towards the end of the T'ang dynasty.

<sup>2</sup> We have revised Dr. Suzuki's translation of this sentence in order to make its meaning clearer. Eds.

Someone asked Tōsu: "I am told that Prince Nata returns his bones to his father and his flesh to his mother. After this, where is his Primary Body?"

In philosophical terms, it is asking about the ultimate reality. The Primary Body is reality. When Nata gives up everything that is regarded as constituting his body, his individuality, where is his self?

When an individual object is subjected to analysis, physically it is reduced to atoms, to electrons; but what are atoms, what are electrons? Even when they are reduced to mathematical formulas, this does not add an iota to our knowledge of reality. The question is merely pushed further and further back into a mysterious recess where no illumination comes forward.

When, on the other hand, speculative analysis is carried into the metaphysical field, the question grows more complicated; all kinds of hypotheses are proposed over which great controversies take place. When a world of multitudes, of individual objects, of relative existences, of particular phenomena, is reduced to one reality which is called God, Brahman, Reason, the Absolute, *élan-vital*, *śūnyatā*, emptiness, "undifferentiated aesthetic continuum," etc., what is it after all? We may give it all sorts of names, but mere naming does not give us much satisfaction. Philosophically, we may think that we have said the last word, but the heart does not seem to be quieted by it. The metaphysical questions we may raise one after another seem to issue from a deeper source than our rational nature. For this reason, what we call the "heart" must be in more direct and concrete contact with what we call reality than the intellect.

Prince Nata as "Primary Body" must be found out not by analysis of any kind but by directly taking hold of reality itself, that is, by immediately apprehending reality, whatever it may mean.

But if it is directly and immediately apprehended, how do we express it? How do we communicate it to others? How do we transmit it to our fellow beings? Objects of direct apprehension as a rule cannot be communicated in words, for words are symbols, ideas, abstractions, and cannot be realities themselves. Words are an efficient means of communication only when the addressee has the experience somehow corresponding to the contents of communication. Otherwise, words are empty, or cryptic, or mystical.

Masters of Buddhist philosophy know that fully well, and they have devised other means of communication such as gestures, ejaculations, meaningless utterances, impossible statements, illogicalities, irrelevant remarks.



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What, then, is Nata's "Primary Body"?

Tōsu, the master, thus asked, threw down the staff he carried in his hands. Where do we now see Nata's Primary Body?

Tōsu was asked another time, "Who is Vairocana Buddha?" (Vairocana Buddha is ultimate reality.)

Tōsu said, "You have already named him."

The inquirer continued, "Who is the teacher of Vairocana Buddha?"

"Take hold of him before Vairocana Buddha was!"

This reminds us of Christ who "is even before Abraham was."

When Tōsu was asked about his own "teacher," he answered in the Laotzean style, "When you face him, you cannot see his head. When you follow him you cannot see his form."

This description of reality is more or less conventional. How about the following?

Someone asked Tōsu: "I understand that Buddha exclaimed as soon as he came out of the mother-body: 'Above the heavens and below the heavens, I alone am the honored one!' Pray tell me what this 'I' is."

Tōsu answered, "Why push this old fellow down? What fault did he commit?"

To paraphrase this in more or less familiar terms: Why do you take the old Buddha to task by demanding he explain what "I" or reality is? He just cried as all babies do when they come into this world of individualization. By doing this, he did not commit any fault. His cry comes out of the very depths of reality; there is in it no intellection, no dialectical analysis, no intermediating postulation.

When I was once talking with a young philosopher about a baby's first cry, he said it was an "uninterpreted sensation." Yes, that is the way the philosopher would "explain" reality; he always resorts to an "objective" method when dealing with the subject under consideration. But by this he can never come to an understanding of it. What he calls the objective method will never penetrate into the realm of "pure experience" where the dichotomy of subject and object has never yet taken place. Where there is no such happening there is no room for objectivity of any sort.

The baby cries and the philosopher explains or interprets, but the baby goes on crying regardless of the intellectual subtleties. To "understand" it, we

must become the baby and cry with it. It is on the side of the philosopher's interpretation of the "uninterpreted sensation." "Above the heavens and below the heavens, I alone am the honored one!" Let the baby not be "interpreted"!

Babies are one of the favorite subjects of Buddhist masters as they were with Christ. Let us quote another case.

Sekishitsu Zendō (Shih-shih Shan-tao, 石室喜道), of the latter part of the T'ang dynasty, would lift up his staff whenever a monk approached him and say, "All the Buddhas of the past, future, and present come forth from this." When someone asked him about the difference between the Buddha and the truth (*tao*) the master said: "The truth is like opening the palm, and the Buddha is like closing it up to a fist." The questioner of course failed to understand what all this implied and wished a further elucidation. The master, waving his hand, said, "No, no! If you go on like that you will never come to an understanding. All the teaching contained in the scriptures and canons is all very well, but if you endeavor to draw anything out of them [by means of an objective method], you will utterly fail. For you make the mind stand against its objects whereby there is bifurcation of the seer and the seen and this will lead you to further speculative complications and crazy casuistries. Don't have anything to do with the world of opposites, it comes to naught."

The ancient master says: "From the beginning there is absolute nothing"; [therefore do not fabricate a world of dualities out of that.]

"See the baby coming out of the mother's body? It does not say, 'I understand the sutras!' nor does it say, 'I do not.' It is never bothered with the existence or the non-existence of the Buddha-nature, but as it grows it learns all sorts of things and will declare, 'I know all that!' This is after all something added to it later on; it is the working of the evil passions.

"Here, however, we have to be on our guard and not be so hasty as to conclude that babyhood is the truth. For this is not quite to the point."

This last remark of Zendō is significant. While the baby has its life to live ignorant of all scriptures of Buddhism and of the subtleties of *sūmyatā* philosophy, we grownups have also our lives to live, however sophisticated and involved in dialectical reasonings we may be. We are no more babies, and it would be the height of stupidity to aspire for their undeveloped mentality. What is important is to remain ourselves in every way possible with all our faults, moral as well as intellectual, and yet be "wise" as babies.

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The Buddhist conception of *śūnyatā* is in one way the easiest and directest to grasp—just as easy and direct as feeling hot water hot or as tasting sugar sweet. But when this approach is rejected and an appeal is made to intellection, *śūnyatā* becomes the hottest issue for a “philosophers conference.” Masters of Buddhist philosophy, however, are fully aware of this interminable struggle for objective evidence and rationalistic treatment. They refuse to waste their time on this for they are not “philosophers” but men of fact, men of direct action, men of “experience.”

Note how they respond to inquirers:

Q. “How about the golden chain which is not yet loosened?”

A. “It is opened!”

Q. “When the golden cock has not yet crowed, what about it?”

A. “There is no sound whatever.”

Q. “After it has crowed, what about it?”

A. “Each of us knows time.”

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Q. “When the sun and the moon are not yet shining, where are the Buddha and we sentient-beings?”

A. “When you see me angry you say I am angry; when I am glad you say I am glad.”

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Q. “When not one thought is awakened, what comes out of it?”

A. “This is truly a nonsensical remark!”

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Q. “When not one thought is awakened, what comes out of it?”

A. “What can you do with it?” (That is, you cannot do anything with it.)

The “chain not loosened,” “the cock not crowing,” “no thought awakened”—all these refer to *śūnyatā*. And when the monk wants to have some kind of information about it, that is, from an objective point of view—for this is the only method so far known to him—the master is disappointing. The master’s standing is not that of the monk; they are talking about different things. The master knows this but the monk does not. When an object is approached from outside, this means that we see it among other objects, that we put it in rela-

tionship with them, and therefore when we refer to it the nets of relationship are always woven around it; we can never single it out from them. This means that it ceases to be itself. We may thus know many things about it, but as to its inner working we know absolutely nothing.

If we are satisfied with this ignorance, it is well with us. But human curiosity knows no ends. It is better to say that the spirit is never satiated until it finds the final abode where it belongs. Moved by this spiritual anguish the intellect asks about "the golden cock that has not yet crowed," about the "golden chain that is not yet loosened," or about "one thought unawakened." This is the intellectual attempt to probe into the innerliness of things, wishing to take hold of *śūnyatā* directly or absolutely instead of surveying it in its inextricable meshes of reference, instead of pushing it into the labyrinth of conceptual abstractions.

In other words, we want to immediately apprehend the undifferentiated. When the golden cock crows it is differentiated; by this, time is known. But what we are after is to hear the cock when it has not yet uttered a sound—for it is by this experience alone that the undifferentiated is immediately apprehended, and the only way to get acquainted with the undifferentiated is to be personally introduced to it—no, to *be* it. The undifferentiated is never within our apprehension as long as it is undifferentiated; it is apprehensible only as differentiation. So reverse what I have just said: "We must hear the uncrowing cock when it crows!"

To repeat: hear the cock when it does not crow, or hear the cock remaining dumb all the while it crows.

The master stands where the intellect finds contradictions, and he goes on riding over them as if nothing stood in his way, whereas the disciple or philosopher is balked at every step because his intellect makes him too timid against the threat of contradictions.

When the philosopher is told of "not one thought awakened," which is *śūnya*, he is puzzled and will ask, "What state of a thing could this be?" The doubt rises because he takes "no thought awakened" for some special state of consciousness to be distinguished from "all thoughts rising." When his thinking runs along this line, he cannot comprehend that "no thought awakened" is no other than our everyday consciousness. For this reason, one master brands this philosophical way of thinking as truly nonsensical, while

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another retorts: "What do you want to do with it?" or "What can you do with it?"

When the master is ill-tempered his monks realize it; when he is pleased, that is also perceived by them. This is the way not only with the masters but with every one of us. Being human, we are all susceptible to joy, to irritation, to pleasure, to pain. As we all belong in a world of differentiation, we cannot be indifferent to conditions prevailing there. Buddha as well as all we sentient beings have to submit to them. While conditioning ourselves thus to laws of differentiation we are all the time unconsciously conscious of that which is not differentiated, that which is where the sun and moon are not yet shining, that which is when light was not separated from darkness.

The Buddhist conception of reality or *śūnyatā* is something concrete, but not in the sense of individualization. This will be seen again in the following *mondō*:

Q. "I am told that rain universally falls over all beings. What is this one rain?"

A. "A pouring rainfall."

Q. "One particle of dust contains the universe. What is this one particle?"

A. "Already differentiated into several particles!"

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Q. "The old year is gone and the new year is ushered in. Is there anything that does not belong to either of these two?"

A. "Yes, there is."

Q. "What is that which transcends the two?"

A. "An auspicious new era is ushered in and all things are assuming a fresh aspect."

See, these *mondō* are after all more or less on the intellectual plane while claiming to be above it; there is here a taint of ratiocination. Let the "philosopher" comment on the following:

A monk asked, "When the moon is not full, what would you say?"

Tōsu, the master, answered, "Swallow two or three of them."

Q. "What after the moon is full?"

A. "Vomit seven or eight of them."