

## What is Shin Buddhism?

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PERHAPS the best approach for us ordinary people to the understanding of Shin Buddhism will be the psychological one, for the problem of consciousness is the closest to us and we all have a keen desire to know what constitutes this "self."

We talk of the self constantly, but none of us know exactly what it is and yet we seem to understand each other. We talk so much about individuality and individual responsibility, legal as well as moral.

Here is a dish broken on the floor. Unless it fell from the table by itself, there must have been somebody or something that caused it to fall and break. If it were not swept away by the wind or by some inanimate agency, there must have been a human hand that touched it accidentally or intentionally. If it were a mere accident, there would be no one responsible for the breakage of the dish.

If a cat or a dog happened to be on the table, it would not be held responsible for the event. Even if it were a human being, we would not blame him if he were a mere baby or a very little child; we may scold the child for its carelessness, but would not hold him responsible for the broken dish. It is only when the human agency is a fully-grown one and some evil intention is connected with the deed that one would have to stand all the censure that would be coming upon him, because he is a moral being fully conscious of what he has done.

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■ We thank Matsugaoka Library, Kamakura, for its permission to publish this posthumous article, dated 1950. The manuscript contained the mark # before each paragraph; these have been removed for readability. Footnotes have been added and other minor changes have been made for editorial purposes. Eds.

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What is this moral responsibility? Who is the moral being? Unless this question is fully settled, the very existence of our society will fall into ruin.

To be a moral being one must first of all have consciousness, without which one cannot be held responsible for anything one may do. To have consciousness means that one can stand away from oneself and be a critic of oneself, pass a judgement over what one thinks or does. This means further that the self divides itself into two in order to be conscious of itself, it divides itself into the doer and the onlooker.

To be moral, therefore, means that there must be a self, an individual agent, who performs a certain act being fully conscious of what he is doing. Because of this consciousness he is a moral individual and differs from the animal as well as from the child.

But, psychologically speaking, what is this individual, this self, who does all these things?

The idea of self is closely associated with the idea of a substance. A substance is something remaining unchanged under changing appearances. Buddhism takes up this question: Is there really such an unchanging substance behind appearances? Is there really what we call "self"—the self unchanging, permanent, eternally holding itself behind the kaleidoscopic shifting of events?

According to Buddhism, the existence of this kind of self substantially conceived is denied. There is a Pali text entitled, "Questions of King Milinda," which records the dialogue taking place between King Milinda and Nāgasena the Buddhist sage. When the king asks the sage what his name is, the sage answers in this wise:<sup>1</sup>

"Your majesty, I am called Nāgasena; my fellow-priests, address me as Nāgasena: but whether parents give one the name Nāgasena, or Sūrasena, or Virasena, or Sihasena, it is nevertheless, your majesty, but a way of counting, a term, an appellation, a convenient designation, a mere name, this Nāgasena; for there is no Ego here to be found."

Hearing this, the king is surprised and makes this declaration to those who are assembled:

"Listen to me, my lords, ye five hundred Yonakas, and ye eighty thousand

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<sup>1</sup> *Buddhism in Translation*, trans. Henry Clarke Warren, Harvard Oriental Series, vol. 3 (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1922), pp. 129-133.

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priests! Nāgasena here says thus: 'There is no Ego here to be found.' Is it possible, pray, for me to assent to what he says?"

After this, he directly addresses Nāgasena thus:

"Bhante Nāgasena, if there is no Ego to be found, who is it then furnishes you priests with the priestly requisites,—robes, food, bedding, and medicine, the reliance of the sick? who is it makes use of the same? who is it keeps the precepts? who is it applies himself to meditation? who is it realizes the Paths, the Fruits, and Nirvana? who is it destroys life? who is it takes what is not given him? who is it commits immorality, who is it tells lies? who is it drinks intoxicating liquor? who is it commits the five crimes that constitutes 'proximate karma'?"

"In that case there is no merit; there is no demerit; there is no one who does or causes to be done meritorious or demeritorious deeds; neither good nor evil deeds can have any fruit or result. Bhante Nāgasena, neither is he a murderer who kills a priest, nor can you priests, bhante Nāgasena, have any teacher, preceptor, or ordination."

He then continues, facing the question of non-ego directly: "When you say, 'My fellow-priests, your majesty, address me as Nāgasena,' what then is this Nāgasena?"

The king then asks if his hair is Nāgasena, if his skin is Nāgasena, his flesh, his "sinews, bones,...sensation, perception, predispositions, consciousness...?"

To all these questions Nāgasena gives a negative answer, whereupon the king expresses his utter bewilderment:

"Bhante, although I question you very closely, I fail to discover any Nāgasena. Verily, now, bhante, Nāgasena is a mere empty sound. What Nāgasena is there here? Bhante, you speak a falsehood, a lie: there is no Nāgasena."

It is now Nāgasena's turn to bombard the king with questions; he asks him how he came here, by foot or by carriage. When the king answers a carriage, Nāgasena asks, What is a cart? Axle, pole, wheels, chariot-body, banner-staff, the reins, goading stick, and so on, until every part of the carriage is exhausted. The king gives a negative answer to every question Nāgasena asks.

Nāgasena then concludes: the king is just as much a liar as he says Nāgasena is; for when the king is asked what is a carriage in which he came, he answers that there is after all no carriage.

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Even as the word of "chariot" means  
That members join to frame a whole;  
So when the Groups (*skandha*) appear to view,  
We use the phrase, "A living being."  
(a living entity)<sup>2</sup>

What is known as the body, fleshy body, is analysable into so many elements, and the elements are still reducible into atoms or electrons, and electrons are something that can be expressed in a kind of mathematical formula. The body is after all a composite and the composition is likely to undergo all possible combinations. There is nothing permanent in this combination. The world is thus said to be in a constant flux.

Now turn to what is designated as the mind; is there anything permanently remaining as such to be called mind-substance or ego-substratum? The mind which is sometimes called soul or spirit and said to be of something enduring even after the decomposition of the body, is nothing but a combination of sensations, feelings, images, ideas, and so on. When it is dissected into so many consciousness-units, there is nothing in it which remains as mind or soul or ego. It is just like "Nāgasena" or "the cart," it is but a name, but a concept, which hides nothing behind it.

Thus all things are declared to be transient, impermanent, in a state of constant flux, subject to birth-and-death. This statement is generally understood to be the Buddhist doctrine of non-ego, *anatta*, *anātman*, although there is a deeper conception of *ātman* in Buddhism and this *ātman* is not denied by Buddhists.

What is then this self, the integrating principle of human consciousness? All we can affirm about it is that it cannot be made an object of thought, it cannot be brought out into the ordinary field of consciousness. For if we try to do that, the self is to divide itself into "self" and "not-self," which means that the self is no more the self. The self is somehow to be grasped by the self and yet not to bifurcate itself. How do we do that?

The reason why Buddhists deny the *ātman* and establish the so-called doctrine of non-ego is because the ordinary self as it is conceived is not the real

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<sup>2</sup> The words in parentheses in this verse are by Dr. Suzuki.

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one but a divided one, a postulated one, a concept presented to the relative field of consciousness. This is negated by Buddhism, for such a concept is just a name, a convenient way of fixing our attention to it. There is not substance corresponding to it, therefore it is absurd to cling to it as such. The doctrine of non-ego, of *anatta*, is not just psychological, but it aims at morally fortifying ourselves against undue attachments to things not really worthwhile clinging to.

What then is it, that which makes us so tenaciously cling to the notion of the Self, to the reality of an individual existence, to the dignity of human personality? There must be something in us which really constitutes selfhood. While this cannot be brought out to the relative field of consciousness, there must be some way to take hold of it whereby we can explain the reason of our tenacious clinging to it, and, more than that, give satisfaction to our never-tiring search after the true "substance" which holds not only this relative self together but in fact moves the whole universe.

What is this self? How do we "interview" it? How do we come to know that it really constitutes the basis of our being? All our religious quests converge on the solution of this most fundamental problem. Each religion has its own method of realisation whereby the ultimate reality, the final self, the integrating principle is reached.

Shin has its apparatus whereby the final goal is attained: on one hand, Amida, his Original Vow, his Enlightenment, his Pure Land; and on the other we sentient beings called "*bompu*" (*bāla* or *prishag-jana*), our limited existence which invites us to commit all kinds of evil deeds, to cherish all manner of delusive thoughts and desires.

The former is called *bō* and the latter *ki*. To use the terms already used, the *bō* is the absolute self while the *ki* is the relative, conceptual self. Shin teaches then that the *bō* and the *ki* are one and that when this is realised you know what the absolute self is, what Amida is, what his Pure Land is, what the destiny of human existence is, what the significance of life is. But here is one most important thing in this connection which ought not to be missed by any means. It is this: the oneness of *bō* and *ki* does not interfere with their duality; they are one and yet two, they are two and yet one. This doctrine is known as the doctrine of non-hindrance, or of interpenetration.

This doctrine may better be illustrated by practical examples. I quote some

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of the free verses composed by one of the most remarkable Shin devotees of modern time. He died seventeen years ago (1933). He was quite an illiterate person, but he somehow managed to write his thoughts in the *kana* style of writing. He had very much to write as he meditated on his wonderful spiritual experience which was rich and exuberant.

To him Amida was *oya-sama*, as he is to all Shin followers. *Oya-sama* means both father and mother and represents their combined qualities. It is a very expressive term in Japanese.<sup>3</sup>

O Saichi, who is Nyorai-san?  
He is no other than myself.  
Who is the founder of Shin Buddhism?  
He is no other than myself.  
What is the canonical text?  
It is no other than myself.

Saichi exchanges work with Amida:  
When Saichi worships Amida,  
Amida in turn deigns to worship Saichi.  
This is the way we exchange our work.  
How happy I am for the favour!

I am lying,  
Amida deigns to worship me,  
I too in turn worship him.  
Namu-amida-butsu!

What are you saying to *oya-sama*, O Saichi?  
I am saying "Amida-bu, Amida-bu."  
What is *oya-sama* saying?  
He is saying, "O Namu, O Namu."  
Thus thee to me, and I to thee:  
This is the oneness of *ki* and *bo*.  
Namu-amida-butsu.

<sup>3</sup> The name of the author of the verses is Asahara Saichi.

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(Angelus Silesius:)

I know that without me  
God can no moment live;  
Were I to die, then he  
No longer could survive.

I am as great as God,  
And he is small like me;  
He cannot be above,  
Nor I below him be.

This feeling of oneness, however, does not prevent Saichi from cherishing another feeling, which is that of wretchedness and misery over his sinfulness. The oneness does not wipe out the separateness of Saichi from Amida, who is great and infinitely beyond him.

How miserable!  
Saichi's heart, how miserable!  
All kinds of delusion thickly arise all at once!  
A hateful fire mixed with evils is burning.  
The waves mixed with evils are rising,  
How miserable! A fire mixed with follies is burning.

This heretic, how miserable!  
Cannot you call a halt?

Saichi's heart, worrying,  
A heart in utter confusion,  
Saichi's heart rising as high as the sky!

The Shin philosophy rationalising this experience so as to satisfy our logical cravings is, as we can well see, full of subtleties and abstractions and is not at all easy for ordinary minds to comprehend.

From the practical and experiential point of view, we can say that the *ki* is what we called before the conceptually postulated ego occupying the relative field of consciousness. This ego or self has no substantial existence as everything

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else we see about us: a table, a cup, a house, a mountain. They may seem to be existing forever retaining selfhood; but as we all experience they have no permanency, they are subject to constant changes. Those we saw yesterday are gone today, those we see today will be gone tomorrow. Besides, we are such frail things, just one flash of the atomic bomb and thousands of human souls vanish into nothingness. The earth is really filled with the dead everywhere, there is not a spot of ground where life has not once thrived. The proud kings and wise philosophers are equally subject to the dictates of Yāma-rāja, they are all annihilated just as the humble creatures we carelessly crush under our feet. The "ego" so arrogantly asserting itself and carrying its "head" and "body" so defiantly, is laid low when once something goes wrong with it. The limbs considered "mine" no longer obey "my" commands and the corpse is left to worms for their feed. The psychological or logical ego is destined to undergo an ignominious death.

Where is now that which symbolised the dignity of human personality? that which embodied moral responsibility? that which enjoyed all sensuous pleasures? that which stood so magnificently or so gracefully among its fellow-existences?

There is nothing permanent in this world, all is transient. *Sarvam anityam.*

As far as our conscious ego, conceptually posited ego, is concerned, there is nothing substantial in us. This ego is called by Shin philosophers *ki*, it is the product of *bakarai*, human reasoning.

*Hō* can never be reached by *bakarai*, by the process of reasoning, and unless *bō* is grasped, there is no cessation of pain (*dubkha*), no attainment of peace; we have to go on worrying, fearing, trembling.

The *bō* is the *ātman* itself, not the *ātman* reflected in the relative field of consciousness, but that which activates consciousness itself, making it seek after its own foundation in something beyond itself.

Our consciousnesses are like so many reflections of the moon in the sky which casts its images wherever there is even a drop of water; the reflected image is in the wave-disturbed ocean, in the mountain-lake serenely tracing its well-defined outline, it is also in the little puddle of water formed in a road after rain. They are no doubt all reflections, of whatever size and quality they may be, of the same moon illuminating the three thousand chiliocosms. A Japanese poet sings:



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Each shelters the moon in its own way,  
Each paddy field in every possible shape;  
But lift your head and look up at the sky,  
And we all see one eternal moon serenely shining!

This eternally serenely shining moon is Amitābha, here termed *bō*. He casts his shadow or likeness or image in every one of us and we are to take hold of the real one through the shadowy one in us. It is indeed because of this shadowy one or *bakarai* that we feel an urgent desire to come to the real one. The desire will never be appeased until this is accomplished. The desire takes the form of anxiety, worry, fear, vexation, "angst."

Psychotherapeutics including all kinds of psychic treatment will never be complete until the real moon is taken hold of, for no amount of psychic maneuver will enable one to break through the relative field of consciousness. The fact that there are so many schools of psychic therapeutics and they are equally well patronised by the present-day Americans, shows their desperate needs for the Buddhist treatment, which, disregarding all unnecessary paraphernalia or superficialities, reaches directly the root of the trouble.

The integrating principle of consciousness that takes it to its deepest bed-rock is "Namu-amida-butsu"—in this the oneness of *ki* and *bō* is embodied: "namu" is *ki* and "amida-butsu" is *bō*.

If we call it a mystery, the mystery of Namu-amida-butsu is utterly beyond human reasoning; however much *bakarai* we may manipulate, we can never analyse this mystery, for what we can reach by *bakarai* does not go any deeper than the outer shell of things. This mystery is to be experienced. Every experience that is of really fundamental value eludes our rationalistic analysis.

In Namu-amida-butsu, we experience the oneness of *ki* and *bō*, the oneness of the relative self and the absolute self.

Let us go to Saichi again and listen to his personal experience of "Namu-amida-butsu" which will save our indulging in *bakarai*, ratiocination. Saichi uses here the word "taste," which is quite expressive, and it is interesting to find that a Jewish mystic also uses this word. (Namu-amida-butsu is the same as Nembutsu, they are interchangeably used by Saichi and by all Shin devotees.)

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“O Saichi, tell us what kind of taste is *Namu-amida-butsu*,  
Tell us what kind of taste is the taste of *Namu-amida-butsu*.”  
The taste of *Namu-amida-butsu* is:  
A joy filling up the bosom,  
A joy filling up the liver,  
Like the rolling swell of the sea—  
No words—just the utterance: Oh, Oh!

*Namu-amida-butsu* is not just one undifferentiated oneness, it moves in two directions: the *ki*-way and the *bō*-way. Saichi is fully conscious of this:

How wretched!  
The *Nembutsu* of wretchedness  
And the *Nembutsu* of gratitude.  
O Saichi, are there two kinds of *Nembutsu*?  
No, not necessarily two;  
Only, one *Nembutsu* working in two ways.

.....  
“O Saichi, let me have what your understanding is.”  
“Yes, yes, I will:  
How miserable, how miserable!  
*Namu-amida-butsu*, *Namu-amida-butsu*!”  
“Is that all, O Saichi?  
It will never do.”  
“Yes, yes, it will do, it will do.  
According to Saichi’s understanding,  
*Ki* and *bō* are one:  
*Namu-amida-butsu* is no other than Saichi himself.  
This is indeed Saichi’s understanding:  
He has flowers in both hands,  
Taken away in one way and given as gift in another way.”

This is not so good as the following one, for it is somewhat mixed with

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reasoning. The following is better:

Namu-amida-butsu  
Is like the sun-god,  
Is like the world,  
Is like the great earth,  
Is like the ocean!  
Whatever Saichi's heart may be,  
He is enveloped in emptiness of space,  
And emptiness of space is enveloped in Namu-amida-butsu.  
O my friends, be pleased to hear Namu-amida-butsu—  
Namu-amida-butsu that will free you from *jigoku* (hell).