

VIEWS AND REVIEWS

EAST-WEST RELIGIOUS COMMUNICATION

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“The only true communication takes place without words.” Such was the final statement made at a seminar by one of Japan’s leading philosophic-religious scholars.² It neatly and forthrightly puts what may roughly be termed the Buddhist-Eastern view of knowledge and its communication on the most fundamental level. As such it calls for some further discussion, particularly when it stands *vis-à-vis* Christian-Western attempts to communicate on the subject of religion.

I

First we may consider something of the nature of communication in the generic sense. It may be broadly defined as the sharing of information, intention, or meaning between persons. Two obvious conditioning factors should be noted at once:

(1) A common symbol-system, such as a language, or somewhat more indirectly, common cultural forms, makes such sharing as easy as possible. For it was community which produced communication in the first place; that is, communication is essentially an intra-communal sharing. And “community” always implies taken-for-granted common values and experiences, which, to use an analogy, put everyone within that community on the same communicational wave-length or resonance-frequency. To be sure, a language, once the exclusive possession of an organic community, may be spread widely abroad. But then the resulting communication becomes very superficial, because the depth-dimension of common feeling and assumption lessens in direct proportion to the spread of the language.

(2) Obviously also, the “thing” or “physical-object” level of communication is the easiest of all. It is not difficult to point to some object and

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² Professor Keiji Nishitani, at a seminar at Kyoto University, December 4, 1965.

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indicate one's desire, dislike or neutrality toward it; nor to learn the thing-form words of another language which describe color, shape, size, etc. And at the other end of the communication spectrum there is also the abstract vocabulary used in mathematics, science and to some extent in philosophy, in which the impersonal, seemingly non-related conceptual entity can achieve a rather painless inter-cultural currency.

Yet even here there are difficulties. With the possible exception of certain mathematical and scientific formulations, there is nothing completely objective in language, *i. e.* objective in the sense of having nothing directly to do with human existential concern. For as F. R. Tennant long ago pointed out in his *Philosophical Theology*, one must say even of science that it is completely anthropic, *i. e.*, pursued for the sake of human purposes, constructed with human needs in mind, adapted to human understanding. Its objectivity is therefore relative and methodological, not absolute or ultimate.

As for the rest of our communicative process it is obviously a web of meaning-feeling subtly interwoven at every turn with the subjective-existential life of man. It expresses man's being as man, his hopes, fears, concerns. Not even merely informational items, impersonal and objective as they seem, can be completely detached from utility, intention, and experiential overtones and relations. How much more so those experiences, truths, beliefs, and concerns which we call "religious;" those which have to do with man's most ultimate concerns as an individual human being! Here the "subjective" factors of the communicative process reach their maximum degree.

This then brings us face to face with the problem of ineffability, *i. e.* that inexpressibility in words suggested by the original quotation. And that implies the presupposition also of inconceivability, I judge, or "unconceptuality" if I may coin a bad word; for what can be conceptualized can no doubt be expressed in language of some sort. In any case we are here on the mystic's territory. For the mystic is one who tells us most eloquently that what he has experienced, the truth that he now knows to be true beyond any possible doubt either as to meaning or validity, is beyond all description. Like the finger pointing at the moon his words only indicate the direction of the experienced reality, but are in no sense like that reality, or even descriptive of it. He also maintains that he knows immediately, without intermediary of any sort—person, word, sensation, thought, or concept. His apprehension of truth is such that all subject-object relation is overcome; in the moment of truth's apprehension he is one with that truth.

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Thus I would call Professor Nishitani's statement an expression of mystical quality, without knowing his view of the matter. And I say it with knowledge of Dr. D. T. Suzuki's recent statement¹ that he now repents of having called Zen "mystical." However, I am here not using "mystical" in the sense of being puzzle-mysterious, or occult, or necessarily including visionary appearances of heavenly beings, but in the sense suggested above—direct knowledge (or communication) of truth without any intermediary item or process, whose inexpressibility springs out of fullness rather than poverty of significance. Thus our opening statement, which I take to be characteristically Buddhist, is mystical par excellence.

But it is not my purpose here to define or discuss mysticism in detail. Nor are we yet ready to fully consider the quality of Professor Nishitani's statement about communication. There are some preliminary matters to be taken up. First there is to be noted the *partial* ineffability of *all* experience. Sense experience, for example, such as the sight of blue, the sense of coolness, the taste of salt, can only be partially described either by scientific formulation or directly descriptive words. For there is a surplus, a depth of experience, which can only be hinted at by words, perhaps evoked by poetry. Yet, be it noted, this inner residue is not completely of a wholly-other nature, for it *can* be hinted at, pointed to, evoked by imaginative language, and be thereby put into relation to other more externalized forms of experience.

What then of religious experience? Here, as noted before, the ineffability of experience reaches its maximum case, though with perhaps almost matching ineffability in the esthetic sphere. In religion the inner dimension is predominant, almost exclusive in fact, not only as the context of that experience, but often also as its content. Feeling and awareness themselves, the subtle overtones or emotional resonances of experience—whatever the object or material of experience—these are of prime concern. They themselves are the phenomena dealt with in religious communication. But here too feeling, emotional resonance, and psychic-inner experience are never in a total conceptual vacuum. The religious-subjective is nourished by certain historical forms, induced by specific mental and physical disciplines, and specifically related to other experiences and "outer" realities by some web of meaning or other.

¹ *The Eastern Buddhist*, September, 1965, p. 124.

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II

We are now ready to concern ourselves with religious communication proper and with the problems therein. And they are many, for not only are all the difficulties attendant upon ordinary communication here present, but they are intensified and added to by those peculiar to religion itself. With the intention of dividing and conquering these difficulties I shall separate them into areas or groups.

(1) *What* is it that religion seeks to communicate?

Here I speak as from within religion, not about it, for the inner view is primary to all religious communication, whether faith-communication of, or philosophical communication about. And from this view-point we may say it is essentially a subjective inward experience of reality that religion, qua religion, seeks to communicate. Information, facts, doctrines, history, and ritual patterns may be the ostensible content, but in the final analysis these are but means to an end; and this end is the communication, indeed the impartation of the original (i.e., primordial) religious experience on which the religion itself rests. Ritual and devotional exercises more properly communicate religion in this sense, than do doctrinal and philosophical discussions; for they do not seek to give information but only repeat familiar patterns, in the hope that the aboriginal experience of reality which underlies them may again be livingly experienced by the participants. Or to put the matter very plainly, religious communication, in the sense of the communication *of* religion, is always for the purpose of producing in the receiver the foundational experience of a given faith, i.e., confirmation in or conversion to the faith.

(2) What is the *mode* of religious communication?

The communication *of* religion must always be indirect, rather than direct. It has to do with evocation rather than information, connotation rather than denotation, it aims at apprehension rather than comprehension. It is closely analogous to poetic and esthetic communication here. A new mood or existential orientation is aimed at, rather than new statements. About successful religious communication one says: Ah, now I see; or, I see what it (the old truth) means for *me*, for the first time; *I* am the sinner here spoken of. The Quaker "opening into truth" is to the point here. Words serving as instruments for the communication *of* religion, do so primarily as symbols, that is, by indirection and suggestiveness.

(3) *Why* is religious communication undertaken?

This question has been answered already in one way. But here on a

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deeper level we must ask: Why does one seek to produce a given experience in another, i.e., communicate it to him in an existential sense? Just because each of us wishes to break through our existential solitude by communicating our inwardness to another? Or the innate desire for "self-expression"? Or the human desire to recruit another for our cause? Yes, often, so far as individuals are concerned. But the basic *religious* reason is much deeper. The communication of religion is undertaken because the experience to be communicated is considered to be of surpassing worth and absolute importance. And that it has this absolute quality is precisely what constitutes its religious quality.

Now what has been said in thus speaking? Among other things, that the religious experience which is to be communicated to (induced in) others is *not* an experience in a conceptual vacuum, no matter how ineffable its content. For evocation of religious experience always takes place in a framework of some sort, through some means. Therefore *what* is evoked or experienced is always related to other realities and experiences by definite and conceptualized patterns. Connotation proceeds from a denotative base and takes place in a denotative context. Not even the intensity or vividness or reality-sense of an experience stands completely on its own feet. It is because such vividness is in part produced *by* its context of meaning, and is given meaning *therein*, that it becomes supremely important to share it.

Let me expand and illustrate my meaning. First, all experiences are set in a context of culturally conditioned feeling and ideation. Though one may speak of some "basic" human experience-forms growing out of common human nature and of the human relation to a generally similar environment, the existence of a "pure," i.e., pre-cognitive, pre-evaluative experience common to all men seems very difficult to identify. Or, *if* identified, its religious value seems to be nil until it is incorporated in a context of religious interpretation. Perhaps indeed Professor Nishitani's "pure" experience and Dr. Suzuki's "absolute subjectivity"¹ are thought to be possible, and desired as religiously meaningful, because they spring from a specific religious faith (Buddhism) and represent a faith-perspective in terms of that religion, rather than a universally available or significant type of religious experience.

Second, and corollary to this: The inner religious experience always *identifies* and *consolidates* itself as a form of experience by relating itself to other experiences and realities by some given conceptual scheme. St. Teresa's high moments of ecstatic contact with Reality were both achieved in the context of Catholic theological presuppositions and identified later, upon

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

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return to normal states of consciousness, by the same means. Hence she termed them experience of "God." Judging from what has been written of Buddhist satori, though it is formless in its experiencing and self-effacingly penetrative of all subsequent experience of reality, it *is* considered to be the prime proof or living realization of the truth of *Buddhism*, a participation in Śakyamuni's Enlightenment, and a realization of Suchness. Even though satori as a quality of experience is sometimes generously extended to other-than-Buddhist experiences, its basic quality is Buddhist, i. e., connected to the rest of experience by Buddhist interpretation.

Third, religious experience by virtue of being considered religious—i. e., partaking of ultimate reality and expressing intimate concern—is necessarily and inherently compared with other experiences. For an experience to be esteemed religious it must partake of the depth of man's existential concern, be life-forming and existence-determining in its importance. And in order for it to exercise this religious function, it must be conceived to be the most convincing, the most real experience, that one has ever had or can have. Or, perhaps better, lest this statement suggest merely a spectacular or intense, emotional experience, let it be said that religious experiences are those which persuade the experiencer that the reality experienced therein is the most fundamental Reality that can be encountered. This is what makes satori to be satori, conversion to be conversion, and both of them to be profoundly religious. Whatever the outward form of such experiences, reality is experienced as Absolute Reality, that Reality in which man lives, moves, and has his fundamental being. As such, experience of Reality becomes existentially functional and life-organizing, i. e., religious.

The provisional conclusion of our discussion thus far is this: Though the ultimate experience of the Ultimate Reality toward which our various words and symbols point may well be One and Undifferentiated, beyond all words, the only way, short of conversion, by which we can speak to each other about our religion, is to speak from our own particular word-symbol doorway into the ineffable beyond. For this doorway represents the vantage point from which *we* see, and go forth to experience ultimacy. Thus we must examine our respective doorways again to see whether and how our concept-determined words about experiences of the Ultimate are both reflective of and productive of that experience. That is, there is some danger that we may take the decorations on our gateposts themselves to be elements of the Eternal Reality, or not recognize in what way our gateway determines our experience of that Reality. And sometimes it is easier for an outsider to observe another's gateway than his own. Hence, in the second part of this

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paper, I turn to some specific Buddhist terms often used with regard to ultimates, to examine their possible cultural-traditional presuppositions and coloring in the hope of understanding them better, i.e., enabling them to communicate something about Buddhism to me.

III

To begin with, let me state in five consecutive propositions where, i.e., in what kind of conceptual-traditional gateway, the Buddhist stands when he makes important statements about ultimate religious matters.

1. *He stands within existential inwardness.*

I am tempted to use the term "subjectivity," but I have rejected it because of its connotations of subject-object dichotomies which Buddhism itself hopes to overcome. What I intend to say by means of "existential inwardness" is that Buddhism in its quest of the Ultimate, in common with Upanishadic Hinduism, seeks the primary key to life's fundamental meaning *within* the human psyche, in its conditions, states, and experiences.

2. *In consonance with this, Ultimate Reality is often termed Mind-Only or Buddha-Mind.*

Now I am quite aware that the "mind" spoken of here is no mere analogue of ordinary human consciousness; indeed it is often portrayed as the annihilation of that subject-object oriented consciousness—hence can with equal fitness be called *No-Mind*. But I think it is significant that such words as *Mind-Only*, *Buddha-Mind*, or even *No-Mind* are used in Buddhism to point to the Ultimate Reality. We might put it that the very last words the Buddhist saint uses before he achieves unity of consciousness or being with the Absolute are "mind-" not "thing-" words; and that when he returns from enlightenment it is such "mind-words" that he uses to communicate his Enlightenment to others.

3. *Though Reality is thus inwardly rather than outwardly experienced, the Reality-Experience does not remain imprisoned within the individual psyche.*

In Western philosophical terms, Buddhist enlightenment is not solipsistic. It is conceived to be a penetration into Absolute Reality. While inclusive of individual psychic reality, it is much greater than that reality and quite other than its ordinary-personal manifestation—so much so that the latter is called *no-self* by comparison. Thus the meditational door to one's own withinness leads to the Ultimate Withinness of all things, i.e., the seeing of them "as they truly are."

4. *The Ultimate Withinness is what the West calls impersonal, even*

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though discovered in the psychic within.

It is different from ordinary conscious personality in two important respects. First, its awareness is non-objective, i. e., not of out-there objects separated by physical, epistemological, or emotional distance from a within-here subject. Its awareness is of one piece, a complete awareness-unity in which subject and object inhere in each other without conscious distinction. It may be called "pure subjectivity" if we keep in mind that there is no "pure objectivity" to be opposed to it; or we may term it "living within the inwardness of all things." Second, and corollary to this, is the conviction that "inwardness" is no special respecter of personality as such, but is to be found equally in "things"—which after all, in the Buddhist view, are only creations of the subject-object level of apprehension.

But a "withinness" that is also found in things, which is perhaps even *better* experienced in things than in separate self-conscious personalized awareness—this is an inwardness or subjectivity which can be called *No-Mind* as well as *Mind-Only*. Perhaps then it should be called the supra-mental or *Supra-Mind*. I find Professor Nishitani's words here most suggestive. He would apply the two terms "personal" and "impersonal" *equally* to the Christian conception of the God-man relation. This relation is "personal" in its quality of an existential confrontation that calls for immediate decision of salvational import. Yet it is also "impersonal."

"... but not impersonal in the usual sense of being the opposite of the personal. For example, when pantheism thinks of the Universal Life, or the productive power of Nature, they are impersonal in the usual sense. But when we meet with God's omnipotence existentially, when it presents itself as an iron wall that prevents us from all further movement forwards or backwards, it is not impersonal in the usual sense. Rather here appears a totally different point of view with regard to "personal" and also with regard to "impersonal." This should be considered, so to speak, as an im-"personally" personal relationship, or as a "personally" impersonal relationship."¹

This, I think, is a very provocative statement of suggestive worth to Western theologians. But it is important for our purpose here to note that some sense of the *personal*, or the existential-within, remains as *primary* in this statement. That is, when the inner-personal-subjective is thus transcended, even in its transcendence into a supra-personal category of some sort, it remains supra-*mental*, supra-*personal*, supra-subjective, rather than non- or anti-*mental*, personal-subjective. Though transcending the subject-

¹ "What is Religion?" p. 59.

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object, mental-physical polarities of ordinary experience, it is from the subjective-mental pole that such transcendence takes its departure into ultimacy.

5. To this we may add the further specification: *All Buddhist evaluation of religious ultimates stems from, and roots in, a particular type of meditation-produced experience called enlightenment—or in its Zen form, satori.*

In this experience is synthesized the essence and meaning of the previous-named four items.

Now what is enlightenment? To discuss it at length would be to detail the whole history of Buddhism. Here we shall deal with it narrowly and scantily in terms of its psychic quality and religious significance. Th. Stcherbatsky writes provocatively with regard to Nirvana, the result of the enlightenment experience:

“We will better understand the solution at which Buddha arrived if we take into account a specific Indian habit of mind, its idea of Quiescence as the only real bliss which life can afford. The Buddhist Saint (*ārya*) regards the life of the worldling as an unhappy existence of constant turmoil. His aim is to escape from phenomenal life into a state of absolute Quiescence, a condition in which all emotion and all concrete thought is stopped forever. The means of attaining this Quiescence is profound meditation (*yoga*).”¹

What does Stcherbatsky intend to say in implying that Buddhist enlightenment is essentially yogic? Yoga has extremely varied meanings in Hinduism. But Stcherbatsky seems to take “yoga” here to mean a meditative method by which an absolute knowledge-experience or perhaps better, a knowledge-experience of the Absolute, is aimed at. The quality of that experience, and its Absolute, is that of Absolute Quiescence; timeless, distinctionless cessation from variety and change. The implications are of course monistic—as also specifically affirmed by Stcherbatsky elsewhere in the same volume.

Is this characterization of Buddhist Enlightenment, from which all else in Buddhism flows, and by which everything is ultimately judged, too easy and neat? *Methodologically* there is great similarity between Buddhist meditation and yoga. Both emphasize the focalizing of body-mind forces in discipline of total and unified awareness; there is a generally similar cutting off of, or sharp reduction of, sense-awareness of the outside world and con-

¹ *The Concept of Buddhist Nirvana*, Leningrad, 1927, Academy of Sciences; reprinted in Shanghai, 1940. pp. 3-4.

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centration of attention one-pointedly upon a chosen subject-object; and the quietening of body-mind is considered good by both.

If we speak of the *goals* of the two meditative disciplines, they are also strikingly similar. In each an absolute knowledge is aimed at; and it is a state of realization, or an existential mode of being here entered into, in which deluded self is released from its illusion of separate, narrow beinghood, into a sense of unity with all Being, or Ultimate Being. So also this crowning "knowledge"—or better, wisdom—is absolutely different in kind from all the lower and lesser rational knowledges. The Reality discovered in both Yoga and Buddhist Enlightenment surpasses all categorical description whatsoever, being beyond time, space, subject-object, good-bad, true-false characterizations. So too in both instances the final illumination is a discovery of the essential "divinity" of the human self—either that Atman is Brahman or one's original nature is the Buddha Nature. Thus considered it is almost impossible to distinguish between the realization of Hindu Brahman and Buddhist Suchness.

But here we must also note important, and perhaps crucial, differences. If both experiences represent the achievement of "unity" with the Ultimate, and that Ultimate (Brahman or Suchness-Nirvana) is "monistic" as Stcherbatsky maintains, then both "monism" and "unity" must be carefully qualified in the case of Buddhism. There is here no merging of substances into a Super-Substance which monolithically and monochromatically blots out all individual difference.¹ If, for no other reason, this is the case, because for Buddhism "self" is no substance or separate entity, but a potency in relation to other potencies-in-relation—including thing-selves as well as person-selves. Further, Mahayana sets the absolute *reality* of each particular entity over against its absolute emptiness (or relativity) and stoutly maintains the reality-emptiness of each item. Thus the Buddhist "non-self" is cherished in all its integrity as jealously as the Christian cherishes his "soul." It is not something to be merged into, or lost in, either another particular or in universal Nirvana or Suchness!

Thus Mahayana cherishes the world of particularity as opposed to a monolithic monism. The Bodhisattva descends from non-determined, indescribable Suchness into the phenomenal world of particulars over and over again, thus sanctifying and blessing them. Each thing in itself becomes precious as it-is-in-itself, without judgmental denigration or exaggeration. Each particular is equally the bearer of indefinable Suchness and individua-

¹ Cf. "Review Article", Masao Abe, *The Eastern Buddhist*, September 1965, p. 115.

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lized uniqueness. So it is that Mahayana states that Nirvana is Samsara, and that manyness and oneness are the same. And thus it is that as Zen especially emphasizes, all of reality may be concentrated in *any* act—even the drinking of a cup of tea¹—and into *every* act in the enlightened life.

Is this then a genuine modification of, or even a contradiction of the yogic drive to the Quiescent Unity of monism described by Stcherbatsky? That it is a modification there can be no doubt—at least in the form of expression. Here in Mahayana there is a revaluation of the phenomenal life as being significantly the embodiment and manifestation of the noumenal, even and especially in its diverse particularity. Enlightenment is not a trance-state to be repeatedly returned to as to a heavenly refuge for its own sweet sake; but it is the basis for, indeed the mode of, a genuine, awakened re-involvement in the phenomenal world. Compassion flows out again from realized suchness into individuality, rather than the droplet of individuality losing itself in the ocean of universality.

Yet Stcherbatsky has a genuine point to make with which I agree in the main, if not absolutely. For despite all qualification, the balance in Buddhism is still tipped toward the timeless, the unconditioned, the quiescent, the unitive—though more subtly and indirectly so than in yoga, as Stcherbatsky interprets it. Dualism of *any* sort—subject-object, good-bad, true-false, noumenal-phenomenal, psychological-ontological—is the prime evil of man's lot, his "original sin." And the inmost gate that opens to Enlightenment is the realization of the irreality, non-existence, or merely imaginal reality of individuality as such. So too the highest, the absolute Reality of all realities is to be found on the Dharmakaya plane (Nirvana, Voidness, distinctionless Suchness), *not* on the historical-individual plane of Nirmanakaya, in the historical-personal manifestation of Buddhahood. Indeed on almost every page of Mahayana writing the reality of individuality is persistently and subtly undermined—inevitably in the direction of a monistic Suchness of non-individuality.

Now if it be said that *after* Enlightenment, one (a bodhisattvic individual) returns to the "world" and fully accepts the reality and preciousness of all particulars, it must be replied that this acceptance is now detached and devalued. For the bodhisattvic mind has *first* and *primarily* realized the irreality (imaginal reality) of all particulars, including and especially the empirical self. And such passion as the bodhisattvic awareness has, is precisely the compassionate desire to save particulars from their mere parti-

¹ D. T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism, First Series*, Harper and Brothers, 1949, p. 265.

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cularity. Thus we have the good life lived among particulars as *sub specie aeternitatis*, one of detached compassionateness, of samsara nirvanically lived, not concerned involvement. And though there may not be a mergent monism of substance, there *is* a relational monism of irreal particulars non-particularly related in non-individual Suchness. Or to state it conversely: There is a non-discriminative cherishing of *all* existent particulars as of equal reality and worth, thus devaluing each *separate* particular by a non-evaluative, non-judgmental “monism” of Absolute Equality. And both are the end result of Yoga-derived mystic-intuitional realization of Ultimate Oneness.

IV

With this preparation we now turn to those most Buddhist of all words by which the Ultimate Real is designated. I do not say “describe,” for this is in opposition to the central Buddhist conviction of the non-conceptuability of ultimates. And the words which it actually uses are as near “non-words” as one can come, namely *śūnyatā* (translated Void, Emptiness, Nothingness) and *tathāta* (translated Suchness or Thatness),—and by implication, Nirvana, or gone-outness. Now some of these words embody sea-changes in translation, I believe. And I would also maintain that though such words, as good symbols, point beyond themselves, they bear clearly on their faces these marks of their contextual origin that are important in our estimation of their significance.

These terms originate in the Enlightenment experience, ultimately. And therefore they, like that experience and its quality of awareness, are paradoxical in that they join radical negativity of concept with radical positivity of experience and sense of reality. Methodologically and conceptually that experience, and these “non-words”, are completely negative. For, as already noted, enlightenment or satori experience are arrived at by abstraction from multiple sense-stimuli and by concentration upon some sense-neutral object such as the *kasina*, or concept-neutral object such as a koan. Since the method abstracts from conceptualizable content, the resultant awareness-object is likewise inevitably described in terms of concept-neutral emptiness or nothingness.

But, as Buddhism has always insisted in one way or another and as Westerners have always found difficult to apprehend (in part because of mistranslations), this negativity of conceptual content is not an existential Nullity, Annihilation, or Mere Zero. It is contrarily a fullness that overflows all possible descriptive terms. In a well-known passage Rudolf Otto has set

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forth the existential fullness of Ultimate Emptiness in his description of a conversation with a Theravāda Buddhist monk:

“He had been putting before me methodically and pertinaciously argument for the Buddhist “theology of negation,” the doctrine of an-ātman and “entire emptiness.” When he had made an end, I asked him, what then Nirvana itself is: and after a long pause came at last the single answer, low and restrained: “Bliss—unspeakable.” The hushed restraint of that answer, the solemnity of his voice, demeanor and gesture, made even more clear what was meant than the words themselves.”¹

Perhaps for Zen Buddhism the “bliss-unspeakable” phrase is too lushly emotional to describe satori qualities, which have more of unemotional clarity than suffocating emotion. Yet the essential situation is identical: Neither Nirvana nor satori can be described because of the all-other-surpassing experience-quality they represent. It is of course to this experience-positive aspect that Suchness refers. For though a very neutral word, it does indicate a Somethingness, indeed The Fundamental Somethingness, which is encountered when one has pierced on through fear-curtained Nothingness.

I would therefore suggest that the Somethingness of the ultimates in Buddhism is in religious actuality more central to it than the Nothingness. Indeed the nothingness vocabulary is primarily a device to keep Somethingness from being too lightly, too readily esteemed and described. But as indicative of religious reality, of the highest possible experiential quality, Suchness always overcomes the Void. Theravāda Buddhists tell us that Nirvana is bliss, not annihilation. Jodo Shinshu tells us of the mighty Other-Power of Amida Buddha’s eternal vow to bring all beings to enlightenment. Mahāyāna in general suggests that Nothingness produces somethingness, i. e., the phenomenal order. As noted, Professor Abe would interpret this to be a sustaining of phenomenal particularity in its integrity. And Dr. Suzuki has intriguingly suggested that the ancient Buddhist evil, *tanhā* or the thirst for existence, is sanctified and redeemed, so to speak, by the ever-lasting reembodiment of Suchness (through the bodhisattvas) in phenomenal forms.

And now what has happened to our ultimacy-indicating categories? Despite a Buddhist reluctance to call them ontological, and though they spring out of a “merely” inner-psychic experience of timeless oneness and quiescence, they have, as *religious* expressions, become fully and centrally

¹ *The Idea of the Holy*, Oxford, 1924, p. 30.

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ontological. Emptiness of ideation, voidness of concept, and quiescence from activity, do become a Suchness of completely indeterminate character (in its depth). Yet Suchness, in creative grace and as its Ground of Being, produces and sustains a phenomenal order. Indeed, for the Enlightenment experience to become *religious*, i. e., life-transforming, it could do nothing less or other than to ontologically affirm such a humanly transcendent and blessed Reality as Suchness.

V

As has been obvious at many points in the foregoing discussion, communication between Buddhist-East and Christian-West, even *about* religion is difficult at the best. In conclusion therefore it may be useful to suggest, as already implicitly indicated at many points, that the difficulties here center in four main areas, so far as Westerners are concerned.

1. *Eastern use of negative terminology*

For many in the West, Buddhism in particular is characterized by entire and pervasive negativity of language. No-self, impermanence, illusion, void, Nirvana—or at best a very neutral Suchness or Thatness—is all that comes through to the West from Buddhist statements about human-cosmic realities. And for the substance-minded, category-inclined, and theologically affirmative West this is dubious coinage for communication; it is indeed a seeming non-coinage. There results an almost complete communicational impasse in which the East resolutely (and proudly?) draws back into its inscrutability surrounded by thick veils of paradox and “oriental nothingness”—to use the Professor Hisamatsu’s phrase; and the Western mind turns confusedly and scornfully away. Non-contact results. For the West there is no single door or easy path into Eastern Nothingness. Part of the difficulty is a matter of translation of key terms, and I shall propose a modest change in one such term a little later. Further, a look by the West into its own *via negativa* (in medieval mystical theology) would help, but this has been so thoroughly rejected by religious and secular West alike that it is almost as incomprehensible as Eastern Nothingness. Perhaps the current decline in the simplistic literal dogmatism of conservative theology and some of the contemporary theological uncertainty *may open the door to less assertive affirmations* about the nature of ultimates; but whether the “God is dead” development represents the redefinition or the total surrender of the religious remains to be seen. The latter result would leave nothing at all to use for coinage in religious intercommunication with the East. So too the increasing fluidity of theoretical scientific categories about the ultimate nature of scientifically

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perceived reality may prepare a way for the West to penetrate to what Northrup calls the Eastern "undifferentiated esthetic continuum."

As far as the Buddhist-Eastern "side" is concerned it might be suggested (by a Westerner) that there ought to be no mere glorification of the vocabulary of mysterious nothingness for its own mystifying sake. From the Eastern side it should perhaps be more persistently noted that the negative vocabulary is (1) *primarily methodological* only, a device for destroying attachment to particularity which indeed is the goal of "high" religion everywhere; and (2) that emptiness is also its name for Ultimate Reality. As J. B. Pratt observed years ago, when *everything* is called emptiness, then "emptiness" is the new name for reality.¹ Buddhism is of course quite within its religious rights and tradition to continue to affirm the negation of traditional metaphysical entities, and to assert the sole reality of some kind of Thing-in-Itself, or Mind-in-Itself, or Suchness-in-Itself which is beyond all categories of description. But it is undoubtedly a Something or Somewhat of positive proportions.

Therefore it would seem that in conversation with the West about Ultimate Reality, at least the words Suchness or Thatness should be more frequently used than Nothingness. And perhaps indeed the term "Nothingness" is altogether an unfortunate one to indicate the Buddhist Empty-because-Full Reality called Suchness. I would propose a term that has been applied to Heidegger's ultimate reality—No-thingness, i. e., a reality beyond particular specification.²

2. *The Opposition of the Intuitional to the Rational-Analytic*

While there are continually important intuitive elements in the Western religious and philosophical tradition, they are heavily overlaid, even smothered as the rule, by the prevailing rational and empirical tendencies. In the East the reverse has been the case. The result is a cliché-situation in which the Buddhist East is completely for intuition and against rationality, and the Christian West is dogmatically rationalistic with absolutely no capacity for intuition.

For the West it is necessary that the intuitive elements of its own traditions be uncovered when seeking to understand the East. Not only has ethics had important intuitional formulations, not only do the arts necessarily *major* in the intuitional or non-conceptual, but even science is almost entirely dependent on the intuitional "hunch" for its significant discoveries. Indeed

¹ *The Pilgrimage of Buddhism*, Macmillan, 1928, p. 240

² John H. Walsh, "Heidegger's Understanding of No-Thingness", *Cross-Currents*, Summer 1963, pp. 305-323.

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there is even in the West a somewhat pervasive sense among intellectuals that Western cultures are now characterized by over-rationalism and under-intuitionism. And psychiatric research often bears this out in its clinical finding or prevalent cerebral-visceral, rational-emotional disjointedness in individuals, resulting in a strong sense of estrangement from one's own true or real being. Such a situation accounts in part for the attractiveness of Zen existential integrality for some in the West. Yet some Westerners, e.g. Arthur Koestler and easy-Zen addicts, who have sought Eastern intuitional wisdom, have come away disillusioned or disoriented in a new mingled East-West way.

Perhaps the East does not fully recognize the depth of this division or the importance of analytic rationality to the West; and even may—this again from a Westerner—have over-estimated or partially misunderstood intuition. To a Westerner it seems that the East sometimes makes Intuition into a sacrosanct Entity, almost a god, which the Western pilgrim to Eastern Wisdom finds it most difficult, if not impossible, to serve as completely and blindly as he is often required to. Intuition is made supreme by erecting an impassable barrier of nearly-absolute difference of intrinsic nature between it and rationality. Reason is portrayed as limited, object-minded, superficial, clingingly attached to distinctions; intuition is considered to be unlimited, pure subjective consciousness, inherently penetrative, and omnipotently floating above all distinctions or barriers as a kind of eternal essence. As opposed to rationality, intuition seems sometimes to represent a deliberate intensification of *irrationality* until the intuitional essence is paradox, contradiction, and non-sense. In any case it thus becomes for the Westerner an impenetrable mystery and a Holy Irrational Essence, as unapproachable as the Jewish Holy of Holies by the unclean rationalist. Is all this the self-defensiveness of a tradition that deals more readily with the inner than the outer world, the Westerner asks himself?

Now few Westerners, even though convinced of the individual and cultural dangers of over-rationalization, are willing to consign the rational to inconsequence even when dealing with ultimate matters—unless they have come to deep personal disaster or are completely unnerved by the seeming meaninglessness of their own cultural life-pattern. From the Buddhist viewpoint this clinging to rationality may indeed represent a basic delusion, but for the Westerner, rationality, for all its hazards and limitations, has done too much to improve human physical welfare, destroy superstitious fears and social tyrannies, overcome human impotence before natural processes, and enrich the mental and spiritual life of man, to be so

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easily rejected. Nor can a Westerner—at least this one—escape the conviction that no matter how high intuition rises above particulars and mere plodding intellection, it always rises from a particular basis of conceptualized belief and knowledge.

Is there not some better way to relate intellect and intuition than by setting them at each other's throats in deadly strife; some creative way to join their potencies? The danger of their continually unfruitful, even destructive separation is the greater just because each has been made to some extent the battle-cry of a religious-cultural party-line, as noted above.

3. *The Psychological-Existential versus the Ontological-Metaphysical*

Here is another aspect of the Eastern-Buddhist-favored inner, intuitional, idealist, immaterialist, immanent emphasis in tension with the Western-Christian-favored outer, rational, realist, materialist, transcendent emphasis in matters philosophical and religious. But all these distinctions relate to a common East-West religious concern of the utmost importance; Where is the key to the right, i.e., salvation-bringing, understanding of Ultimate Reality to be found?

Generally speaking—allowing for variations on both sides—the predominant Buddhist-Eastern attitude is one of distrust of the objective-outer in separation from the subjective-inner. Buddhism and Hinduism have made many analyses of the close interrelation of the two, especially of the dependence of objective form and ontological categories upon the inner-existential. (Parenthetically it may be noted that many depth-psychologists and existentialist philosophers in the West have also emphasized the existential-inner coloration of the objective world, even if not its Buddhist formulation.) And the East has seen the West as obsessed with the outer, i.e., the physical, historical, and social aspects of life, resulting in a distortive superficialization of human awareness and existence; in a fearful unwillingness to face the basic question of self-identity at its deepest *existential* level; and in a destructive dualizing of life into an inner-outer, subject-object dichotomy at every level. The East calls for the creation of a truly organic unity of existential-personal reality, controlled from within rather than by the forces of uncertain outer circumstance.

And the West? Understandably it is fearful of Eastern subjectivism. Where, it asks, are the landmarks of truth to be found in this vast inner space of shifting mood and feeling among the ghostly forms of mind-states and visions seen with the half-closed eyes of the meditator? How can one find in such twilight atmospheres the shape of meaningful reality? Indeed here, in sheerly inner-psychological space, what does "truth" mean—that is,

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truth for more than one man for more than one moment? What can here save the hard-won rational life of man from sinking into a bottomless abyss of subjective fantasy and un-reason?

And so a most paradoxical situation results. The West confirms its hold on reality, even and especially the reality of the *inner* world, i. e., self, consciousness, and the spiritual dimension, by a strong assertion of the reality of the *outer* objective-material world. Thus the very separation between the objective-outer and the subjective-inner worlds which the Buddhist deplors as the essence of human bondage and ignorance, is almost intrinsic to the Western way of asserting the reality, the uniqueness, and the importance of the *inner* world. And on the other side the East, fearful of the dangers of mere objectivism and its technology, when cut loose from subjective reference and mooring, *denies* the reality of that unique selfhood which the West so highly prizes as the essence of spiritual reality. It seeks to unite the inner-personal with the outer-objective by means of an *impersonal*, neither-inner-nor-outer reality. Therefore "communication" in this area can scarcely be said to exist in any intelligible sense.

I do not know what the Buddhist East might wish to suggest to the Christian West to achieve some understanding here. But as a Westerner I will propose two matters of possible Buddhist-Eastern clarification. One is that the ontological and metaphysical assumptions and positions of Buddhism should be more clearly and explicitly acknowledged by it. I realize that this goes against the Buddha's warning against questions that do not tend to salvation, i. e., the indeterminables. But it must be borne in mind that even this statement took for granted certain Hindu-Buddhist metaphysical-ontological doctrines, those of karma and rebirth for example. And further the positing of the enlightenment experience as that which gives man the central clue to the fundamental meaning of human life is also an ontologically determined and determining position. For if Enlightenment is Enlightenment, all other visions of reality are partial or false. Personally therefore I was glad to note the very explicit statement by Professor Hiroshi Sakamoto in a recent book review¹ that the position of Zen, as expounded by Dr. Suzuki, with respect to the reality of *True Person* and the Unconscious is definitely ontological rather than merely psychological.

Secondly, and correlate to this: It should be expressly admitted that the type of Reality which is best apprehended from the subjective-existential inwardness of the meditative process—even though it be termed transcendent of all distinctions of inner-outer, subjective-objective nature—*is* appre-

¹ *The Eastern Buddhist*, September 1965, p. 128.

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hended from the gateway of inner subjectivity. While the Buddhist East may not wish to use the Western philosophical term "idealism" with regard to this mode of apprehension and the ontology which ensues, it would be in the interests of all-around clarity and further inter-communication if at least the idealistic *context* and *take-off point* of this insight were acknowledged.

4. *Self and Not-Self*

No Western-Christian, Eastern-Buddhist discussion can long avoid a consideration of self. And in a real sense it is the prime focal point of all Buddhist-Christian discussions. As might be expected, here too stereotyped formulae for discussion have developed. Crudely stated the West hopes to save its individual selfhood unto all eternity; and the East sees in the destruction of that very selfhood the only door to salvation. The result of such stereotyped discussion is a dead-end predicated to non-communication. But the matter of self and its destruction or preservation is by no means so simple as this. As Herbert Fingarette¹ has noted the word "self" actually is a whole family of confused meanings. Further, both Eastern meditation masters and such Western psychoanalysts as Freud and Jung have observed the many-leveled operation which the human psyche represents in its functional actuality. Thus much discussion of the meaning and existence (or non-existence) of "self" has been confused by the failure to carefully specify the context in which the discussion takes place, by absolutizing one context or level of selfhood as total self, or by unconsciously shifting from one context to another while continuing to use the same word "self."

Needless to say a few final paragraphs will not bring complete illumination to this complicated matter, but the following suggestions seem pertinent: A basic clarification might be found in the fact that the Christian-Western view of self-hood has been predominantly *conceptual* and the Buddhist-Eastern *existential*. For the West, therefore, selfhood has become a tightly-packaged individuality which is to be sharply separated from, and protected against, all invasions of the impersonal or non-personal. Hence it has strongly emphasized specific self-consciousness, i. e., the consciousness of the personal self as separate from other selves and from things, and tended to identify this self with what Fingarette calls the "anxiety-generated" subjectivity, that subjectivity resulting from intra-psyche conflict;² or we might call it the self of consciousness-in-emotional-tension-with-its-existential-situation. The West has also tended to soften the call of its own predominant

¹ *The Self in Transformation*, Harper and Row (Torchbook 1177), 1963, Chapter 7.

² *Op. cit.* p. 311 ff.

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faith (Christianity) to “self-denial,” or to give such denial narrow and obvious forms; and above all to fearfully reject the mystic witness and call to the achievement of an *unself* consciousness or *impersonal* awareness.

The Buddhist pattern in contrast has been to abjure *all* conceptual selfhood whatsoever as intrinsically evil, and to glory in its precise opposite—the destruction of the sense of self-hood, the denial of the reality of the self, the illusory quality of self-consciousness, and so on. And it has accorded full support to the mystic witness to a final and complete awareness of Non-self,¹ or what may be the same thing, a seemingly non-personal awareness. But we may ask, *which* self (or self in *what* context) does Buddhism desire to rid humanity of? For the non-self language of Buddhism should not blind *anyone*, either non-Buddhist *or* Buddhist, to overwhelming *existential* vitality of some sort of selfness in Buddhism. For the discovery that one is a “non-self” by no means emasculates or paralyzes the active mental-physical entity of an enlightened non-self, say a Zen roshi for example. Quite the contrary as a matter of fact. Indeed throughout the Buddhist spiritual discipline in all its varieties and history, a persistent feature strikes the attention: The increasingly “non-selfed” or “de-selfed” self acts increasingly like what the West has sought to designate by its terms autonomous, integrated, liberated, spontaneous, enlarged, or redeemed self, i. e., the achievement of genuine self-controlled, acting-from-within selfhood—though it may be argued, that Buddhism achieves a deeper level of subjective spontaneity and integration. In any case, so dominant is the *actuality* of the Existential Self as goal and criterion of religious living for the East that paradoxically the Christian West has often charged Buddhism with complete submersion in egoism, with the magnification of the Self to deity-status!

What then can be done here? Somewhat less of uncritical waving of party banners (Self against No-Self) in simple language-bound literal mindedness is certainly called for. Especially there should be some further serious attempts, including psychological experimentation and philosophical analysis as well as interchange of religious experiences, to penetrate both the meaning and experiential basis of such words as “subjective” and “objective,” “personal” and “impersonal,” “self” and “non-self” that cluster about all Buddhist-East, Christian-West discussions. Such open-minded discussion would hopefully prevent the indicative word-symbols of diverse religious experiences from hardening further into completely impassable barriers to authentic religious inter-communication.

¹ Cf. *Mysticism and Philosophy*, W. T. Stace, J. B. Lippincott, 1960, pp. 111-122 and Chapter VI.