

THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

can shake hands and say *Tat Tvam Asi* (Thou art it). But Zen reminds us of the other side of this truth: We are One, and yet two. Herein is our "everyday-mindedness."

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ZEN IN WESTLICHER SICHT. ZEN-BUDDHISMUS—ZEN-SNOBISMUS. By *Ernest Benz*. Weilhelm/Oberbayern: Otto Wilhelm Barth-Verlag, 1962. Pp. 107.

This book affords us a good opportunity to discuss the nature of Zen "snobbism" which is said to be rapidly spreading in the West. As a historian of religion, the author attempts to delineate the nature of Zen snobbism, to trace its spiritual genealogy in the history of the West, and to lay bare the direct incentives to its rise. He is persuasive in analyzing the nature of Zen "snobbism" and in tracing its spiritual genealogy in the history of the West. Having described the history of religious "snobbism" in the West and having discussed Zen "snobbism" as its latest form, the author then characterizes the distinctive feature of that Zen "snobbism" as follows:

Besides the self-conceited consciousness of being initiated into esoteric sources of wisdom and salvation which are as eastern in origin as they can be, what marks off the Zen snobs is that they are inclined to reach for the fruits of this recognition—satori, or enlightenment—as quickly and effortlessly as possible, and then by an enormous material expense at once to compensate the want of preparation for the actual disciplinary efforts and to purchase the social prestige as well as the self-consciousness of exclusively possessing the highly cultivated object. (p. 74)

Zen snobbism in the specific sense of the term consists in putting on airs of having great enlightenment while in fact having no experience of one's own, but only an intellectual, literary knowledge of Zen philosophy and experience. (p. 77)

As for the direct incentive to the rise of Zen "snobbism," the author's discussion goes wide of the mark. He regards a specific tendency on the part of those writers who have introduced Zen to the West as the direct incentive. According to the author, this tendency is the tendency to westernize Zen, that is, to rationalize and secularize Zen. The result of this tendency is the uprooting of Zen from the religious soil of Buddhism. The author traces this tendency in the works of such writers as Nukariya, Ohasama and Herrigel. But he envisages Dr. Daisetz Suzuki as the central

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figure who has most powerfully expedited and intensified the westernization and the secularization of Zen. Holding Dr. Suzuki especially responsible for the rise of Zen snobbism, the author draws the readers' attention to the following two aspects of Dr. Suzuki's presentation of Zen :

(1) Dr. Suzuki first defines Zen negatively ("Zen is not a philosophy, Zen is not a religion") and then claims that Zen is in fact "the spirit of all religions and philosophies." The author maintains that such a presentation of Zen, which goes against the traditional view of Zen Buddhism, has made Zen an object of special interest to the West because it has made all the positive religions compatible with the quest for Zen, and yet reduced everyone of them as non-essential for the understanding of Zen. (p. 22)

(2) Dr. Suzuki has all the more intensified the secularization of Zen by a psychological interpretation according to which *satori* is, after all, "an insight into the Unconscious." The ontological character of *satori* as an encounter with the transcendent has thus been wholly denied. (pp. 22-24) The result of such a representation of Zen is that it has been secularized and transformed into an up-to-date substitute for religion.

Over against this tendency of its secularization, the author emphatically advocates that Zen, with its long monastic tradition and the ontological character of its *satori* as an encounter with the transcendent, is essentially a form of religious mysticism which can never be psychologically explained away. To support this contention, he quotes from Rudolf Otto and Prof. Heinrich Dumoulin, as representative European scholars who have been acquainted with Zen, and from Mrs. Ruth Sasaki, as voicing the opinion of various Zen masters in Japan who have hitherto been little known to the West. (pp. 31-40)

Let us examine these criticisms. As for the first, what does Dr. Suzuki really mean when he defines Zen negatively, declaring that Zen is not a philosophy and that Zen is not a religion? We should determine his real meaning by closely reading his own words in this connection. In his book, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, from which the author quotes, Dr. Suzuki himself writes as follows :

Is Zen a religion? It is not a religion in the sense that the term is popularly understood; for Zen has no God to worship, no ceremonial rites to observe, no future abode to which the dead are destined, and, last of all, Zen has no soul whose welfare is to be looked after by somebody else and whose immortality is a matter of intense concern with some people. Zen is free from all these dogmatic and "religious" encumbrances.

When I say there is no God in Zen, the pious reader may be shocked, but this does not mean that Zen denies the existence of God; neither denial nor affirmation

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concerns Zen. When a thing is denied, the very denial involves something not denied. The same can be said of affirmation. This is inevitable in logic. Zen wants to rise above logic, Zen wants to find a higher affirmation where there is no antitheses. Therefore, in Zen, God is neither denied nor insisted upon; only there is in Zen no such God as has been conceived by Jewish and Christian minds. For the same reason that Zen is not a philosophy, Zen is not a religion. (p.p. 14-15)

It is unquestionably clear by these words that Zen's central aim is to find a higher affirmation where there is no antitheses, and in this sense Zen is something different from religion in the popular sense of the term. In another passage of the same book, Dr. Suzuki definitely affirms that Zen's irreligion is merely apparent and that, after all, there is a great deal of religion in Zen. (p. 15) Further, he published, in 1934, a book, *The Training of The Zen Buddhist Monk*, in which many pages and illustrations are devoted to the description of Zen's religious aspect. The author's criticism that Dr. Suzuki has uprooted Zen from the religious soil of Buddhism thus misses the point. (As to Dr. Suzuki's assertion that Zen is in fact the spirit of all religions and philosophies, this will be taken up later.)

As to the second criticism, that Dr. Suzuki has interpreted Zen psychologically and reduced *satori* to an insight into the Unconscious, this also rests on a misunderstanding. Dr. Suzuki's conception of the Unconscious is correctly that of Mahayana Buddhism, especially that of Zen, and as such unquestionably retains an ontological nature. In this respect, it should be distinguished from the conception of "the Unconscious" of depth-psychology, despite a measure of affinity which exists between them. For the purpose of examining Dr. Suzuki's conception of the Unconscious, the author should have referred, besides the *Essays in Zen Buddhism* series, to Dr. Suzuki's later works. It is true that Dr. Suzuki's interest in psychology was at its height when he was working on the *Essays in Zen Buddhism* series. Even then, however, he was all the while cautious against the danger of psychologizing Zen, even when he tentatively borrowed some technical terms and ideas from psychology for the explanation of Zen. According to Dr. Suzuki, all that psychology can do in the last analysis is to trace and examine the foot-prints of the *True Person* (the central concern of Zen) after he has walked away. Zen's ontological nature is definitely beyond the reach of psychological science.

After all, it seems that all the author's misunderstandings are rooted in one basic misunderstanding, that is, the misunderstanding about Dr. Suzuki's central aim in his writing on Zen. Dr. Suzuki's central aim has

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never been to secularize Zen and make a world-wide campaign of propagating Zen as an up-to-date substitute for religion, as the author surmises. Nor, on the contrary, was it to have the West know Zen within the limits of a religious school belonging to Mahayana Buddhism in the Far East. Rather Dr. Suzuki's aim has been to elucidate the unique significance of Zen as clearly as possible, which significance, relating to the problem of Man today, is immensely challenging and thought-provoking to the philosophies as well as the religions of the world today. Dr. Suzuki's efforts have long been devoted above all to this purpose. It should be remembered that his outstanding contribution in this field is unanimously acknowledged by noted thinkers, scholars and men of letters as well as by nearly all the Buddhists of both Zen and other schools.

The unique significance of Zen alluded to can not be thoroughly discussed in this review. But the above-mentioned statement of Dr. Suzuki that Zen is in fact the spirit of all religions and philosophies is especially relevant in this regard. This is not merely Dr. Suzuki's personal conviction, but is immediately rooted in the Zen experience itself. As such it is potentially common to all the Zen traditions and has been recurrently given expression, above all, in the Rinzai Zen tradition in Japan. The meaning of this proposition may be put as follows :

Zen, with all its tradition and religious background, means the awakening to the ultimate fact of life which breaks through all conflicts and antitheses. In other words, it may be called the *absolute affirmation* or *absolute subjectivity*. (It goes without saying that these words should not be understood psychologically.) In so far as Zen means the awakening of life to the ultimate fact of life, the final solution of the problem of Man can never be found anywhere except in Zen. It is only here that man comes to the final freedom and restfulness of being. It is true that every positive religion has its own tradition and pattern of believing, thinking and feeling. Zen fully admits this fact. But to the eye of Zen, in so far as a religion intends to be an answer to the question of Man, it is ultimately bound to become awakened to Zen. In fact, we see Zen blooming out in various religious or spiritual traditions, such as Neo-Platonism, Christian mysticism, Jewish mysticism, Sufism, Indian mysticism, Taoism, etc. All this indicates that Zen is in fact the spirit of all religions and philosophies. And from this it follows as a natural result that Zen is understandable, in essence, to every man, that is, to the West as well as to the East, despite the religious and cultural differences between them.

This assertion should never be taken as an aggressive propaganda of

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Zen Buddhism. It certainly constitutes a powerful and immensely thought-provoking challenge to the religions and philosophies of the world. It is desirable that an equally powerful and open-minded response should be made by these religions and philosophies from their own depth. This sort of challenge and response will definitely make a most valuable contribution to the advancement of the whole of religious and philosophical thinking, that is, to the approach to the problem of Man. So much for the alleged secularization of Zen by Dr. Suzuki. It is, in short, a misapprehension.

As for Dr. Suzuki's influence regarding the rise of Zen "snobbism," the bare fact is that a number of Zen "snobbiests" happened to appear among those who came into some contact with Zen, including the readers of Dr. Suzuki's works. Considering the current of religious "snobbism" in the history of Western thought as described by the author himself, the rise of Zen "snobbism" was inevitable as a result of the broadening contact of the West with Far Eastern Buddhism. Zen "snobbism" would have arisen sooner or later in the West irrespective of Dr. Suzuki.

The author's description of authentic Zen is concentrated on the religious aspect of Zen as one form of monastic mysticism belonging to Far Eastern Buddhism. His point is that, in the last analysis, Zen experience does not transcend the limits of its own tradition. Regarding this point, the author repeatedly cites as most pertinent Rudolf Otto's words as follows :

No form of mysticism ever floats in the air. Every form of mysticism always rises out of its own ground, which ground it denies as powerfully as possible even though it, initially, derives its specific nature, which has nothing identical with other forms of mysticism of foreign origin, from that ground. This holds true of Zen. (p. 32, p. 34)

And the author himself writes :

As regards the satori experience of a *homo religiosus* who with the utmost effort seeks the great emancipation along the Zen way of discipline, it surely looks as if the enlightenment—when he comes to participate in it—take place over those forms and views of Buddhism which make up the ground of his efforts. These forms—Buddhist metaphysics, Buddhist monastic rules, images of Buddhas and sutras as the canonical scriptures—are definitely the presupposition of his seeking for salvation ; they build up the case from which the spiritual tension is gathered up and accumulated, and in which the inner pressure grows more intense until the emancipating explosion takes place as the result. Further, the experience of emancipation and explosion (Durchbruch) is the outlet or the door from which the (energies of) efforts that have been formed through the Buddhist discipline of both

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mind and body let themselves out for enlightenment. (pp. 32-33)

Further, the author inculcates that it is equally the case with such great mystics as Meister Eckhart, St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross. It should be noted here that in the account of *satori* above, the author does not pay due recognition to the aspect of awakening or the noetic aspect of the experience itself which has an immense ontological importance. So far as the author's account is concerned, he seems in the last resort to interpret the experience of *satori* in terms of psychological dynamics and to attribute its ontological significance to its traditional religious background.

At the close of this book, the author raises a crucial question: How far is Zen experience approachable by the European in general? He reaffirms here the view that Zen is after all a school of Buddhism and concludes as follows:

Herein lies not only the possibilities but also the limits of the western appropriation of Zen, for a specific kind of religious experience which is after all possible only on the basis of the Buddhist view of man and the universe is here imposed upon men of the West who are brought up in the environment where the Christian view of man, society, history and nature, even though secularized to some extent, is still prevalent. (p. 80)

It is known to us Japanese that Professor Benz is deeply interested in Zen as a specific form of Buddhist mysticism, especially in its method of training. But, as to the problem of the western appropriation of Zen, his position rests on cultural determinism—the position that the chasm between the traditional views of the East and the West concerning man and the universe can never be bridged; that, after all, the basic differences between them can never be transcended. The persisting nature of cultural traits can not be neglected, especially in the sphere of religion. Nevertheless, it should also never be overlooked that man as man is properly provided with the power to respond to any challenge on the religious or spiritual level.

In the world today, man is learning to question everything existing around him. No view of man and the universe passes unquestioned. No tradition remains unconditionally determinative over man. Bearing this situation in mind, who can deny that there exists not only the possibility but also the increased probability that the challenge of Zen as stated above would call forth an open-minded response in the West and ultimately be fully appropriated, that is, fully understood by the minds of the West? The limited or partial understanding of Zen does not make sense in Zen. The understanding of Zen necessarily means its full understanding because Zen is the *Absolute Affirmation*. The full understanding of Zen by the West,

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however, does not necessarily mean the full acceptance of Zen Buddhism as a religion, namely, the conversion to Zen Buddhism from any one religion of the West. But it will surely open for one a new horizon whereby to re-discover his religion and thus make for a new interpretation of that religion.

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* Quotations from the author are translated into English by the reviewer.