

THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

THE TEACHING OF THE SHIN-SHU AND THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

WHAT is the life of truth? How do we attain the life of truth? These are the questions left for our solution in the study of the Shin-shu teaching.

I

Whether life is really suffering, or whether it is on the whole an agreeable business, is not to be so readily decided upon as we may superficially imagine. As a mere fact of everyday experience, life contains elements enjoyable as well as painful. Besides, there are individual conditions which we have to take into account, for what appears to be pleasant to one individual may impress another altogether differently. Each one of us has his own way of valuing experiences. But from the common-sense point of view life may be taken on the whole as containing both pains and pleasures—and its practical effect is that we shun what is disagreeable and run after the pleasurable. There may be some who appear outwardly to avoid things agreeable—I mean those self-mortifying ascetics of India who are evidently eschewing even the most innocent pleasures. But in truth they are also seekers after pleasures—pleasures that are not yet actualised but are believed to be coming by virtue of these penances. Sometimes the ascetics are deriving real pleasures in what ordinary people consider unbearable tortures. In a certain sense, therefore, stoicism is at bottom a form of hedonism. We are all Epicureans in various shades of meaning. While it is difficult to decide whether we are all to be Hamlets or Don Quixotes, practically

“To do all goods,
 To avoid all evils,
 And to keep the heart pure —
 This is the teaching of all the Buddhas.”

This is the gāthā known as the teaching common to the seven Buddhas and constitutes the moral aspect of the so-called primitive Buddhism. The Vinaya is the codification of such moral rules as were applicable to the life of the Bhikshus and Bhikshunis.

Shinran Shōnin was not however satisfied with mere morality, he wanted to go beyond good and evil in order to reach the other shore of the religious life. It was due to him that the later Buddhists came to know the existence of another world which moral life could not attain and which was unknown to the followers of the Vinaya. Here reigns the freedom of the religious spirit unhampered by the dualistic bondage of good and evil.

III

When I say this, the reader may think that the teaching of Shin Buddhism is immoral, anti-ethical, and therefore has nothing to do with our everyday life. But in point of fact Shin has a very keen critical sense of our moral imperfections, and teaches that because of these imperfections we ought to be humble, penitent, and grateful. Moreover, Shin is conscious of the unnaturalness of the monkish life, and its followers lead an ordinary family life not distinguishable in any way from the rest of the world. Social relations and obligations are confirmed to by them. Humanity is thus strongly upheld by Shin, and in this respect Shinran was audacious enough to deviate from the course uniformly followed by other Buddhists. For this reason, the Sutra on the Great Infinite One (i.e. the *Sukhāvatīvyūha*) which is the foundation of the Shin-shu is also called the Sutra on Humanity. In no other Buddhist schools is the relationship between morality and religion so emphati-

cally and essentially established as in the teaching of Shin. This relationship is discussed by scholars under the special heading, "Relative Truth and Absolute Truth", in the systematic philosophy of Shin Buddhism.

During the Meiji Era, that is, during the latter part of the 19th century and early in the present one, Shin scholars were divided into two groups in regard to relations existing between morality and religion; the one group held a unitary view while the other was inclined to be dualistic. And among this latter group we could further distinguish two types, one of which asserted a sort of parallelism between moral ideas and religious life. According to this, these two were like the two wings of a bird or the two wheels of a cart, one could not go without the other, for they were complementary. The other class of thinkers took the one as antecedent to the other. And, generally speaking, the conservatives tended to uphold a dualistic parallelism and the liberals tried to establish a unitary relation between religion and morality.

Those who maintained a theory of antecedence thought that moral life was the necessary outcome of religious faith, or that religious faith came to us prior to morality. The late Rev. Manshi Kiyozawa who was the President of the Shinshu College and led the liberal party of the time, stoutly opposed the doctrine of the priority of religious faith and said: "All moral deeds are the products of deliberation and must issue from the will. Therefore, such deeds as flow from our inner necessity, however beneficial results they may bring upon our social or individual life, cannot be regarded as moral deeds. Therefore, in religion, especially in the teaching of Shin Buddhism, moral life must precede the attainment of faith, it finally leads up to a life of faith instead of its following the latter." According to this doctrine, a genuinely religious life is only possible when one grows conscious of his moral imperfections. Rev. Kiyozawa's motto was that morality was our guide to religion, which reminds us of the mediæval saying:

we know that life is partly enjoyable and partly painful and that we try to avoid the latter and embrace the first.

This practical fact of life is also reflected in the Fourfold Noble Truth as enunciated by the Buddha. The first truth is that life is suffering; the second is that this comes from accumulating causes of suffering; the third is that by cutting off these causes Nirvana, the state of absolute bliss, is realised; and the fourth teaches how to attain this. But that the idea of pain and pleasure ought not to be made the ultimate principle of our spiritual life was already expressly taught by the Buddha in the Agama part of Hinayana literature:

“Not to avoid pain when it comes to you,
Not to long for pleasure when it comes to you,
But to be serene and tranquil—
Such I call a Śrāmana.”

While pain and pleasure so largely enter into the structure of human life, a life of truth must not be made to depend upon these opposites, but, by going beyond, find its ultimate foundations somewhere else.

II

As long as man cannot rise above the mere notion of pain and pleasure, he has not made much advance over the animal life. To do this he must find some moral meaning in life which distinguishes him from the rest of creation. He cannot get rid of the feelings since he is a sentient being, but his feelings can be sanctified and ennobled so that they can be adjusted to our moral conduct. Pain will then be the feeling when we have not acted morally, whereas a noble pleasurable emotion will be aroused when our duties have been properly discharged. This is an ethical world created by cultured minds, which endeavour to rise above a life of mere feelings, and in this world we find the idea of good standing against that of evil. There is no doubt that this moral life is a step ahead of the one controlled by feelings alone.

“Philosophy is the handmaid of theology.” After him, the discussion on the relation between morality and faith has not abated. Whatever the issue, the main point was to clear it up definitely if that was possible.

If religious life is to be distinguished from moral life, it ought to be something transcending the dualism of good and evil. This is the thesis I wish to assert here, and in the meantime let us see into the relation between Purity and Defilement.

IV

When we consider the practical side of Buddhist life, we must not forget the six or ten Virtues of Perfection (*pāramitā*), which are inculcated upon us as the followers of the Buddha. The six *pāramitās* are Charity, Morality, Patience, Energy, Meditation, and Wisdom; and when Means (*upāya*), Vows (*pranidhāna*), Power (*bala*), and Knowledge (*jñāna*), or another group of mental qualities known as the four Immeasurable Thoughts, that is,—Energy, Compassion, Goodwill, and Impartiality, are added, the Perfections are ten in number. Whether six or ten, these virtues constitute what is known as Holy Life (*Brahmacharya*). The holy ones who practise these deeds of virtues one after another will finally reach the stage of Buddhahood. There are ten stages of spiritual development (*daśabhūmi*) corresponding to the ten Virtues of Perfection, and the Mahayanists go up from one stage to another by practising the holy virtues until the Supreme Perfect Enlightenment of Buddhahood is realised. The ten stages are: Joy, Purity, Brilliance, Burning, Unsurpassableness, Manifestation, Far-going, Immovability, Good Intelligence, and Dharma-clouds. When Charity, which is the first Virtue of Perfection, is practised in the most thoroughgoing manner, the Mahayanist realises the mental state where he is free from the idea of passion, and his heart is filled with the feeling of joy transcending the time-limits of the present, past, and future. This

is the first stage of Joy. When he comes to the sixth stage of Abhimukhi (face-to-face manifestation), he attains to the thought of sameness realised by the exercise of Prajñā. When he still pursues his upward course of spiritual development, he arrives finally at the tenth stage known as Dharmameghā when he becomes the master of love and wisdom. Like the clouds enveloping the whole universe, he has now identified himself with the Dharma and his heart embraces all beings with love and wisdom. He is now the enlightened one, the holy one, the pure one, he has gained an infinite world within himself, which is built in and over the world of relativity and finitude.

These six or ten Pāramitās are therefore so many deeds of purity or holiness prescribed as it were by the Buddha for his Mahayana followers. Those who are able to act in accordance with those virtues are holy or spotless ones, while those who are too weak-minded to follow the path of perfection in order to go up the ladder of spiritual holiness are common mortals, technically called the ignorant (*bāla*). And here we see that Buddhism has taken notice of the opposition or contrast between holiness or purity and defilement in the life we lead in the world, and that the principle regulating the life of a holy man is not the idea of goodness so much as that of saintliness. Shiuran Shōnin, the founder of Shinshū, distinguished this aspect of Buddhist life as the Holy Path and distinguished it sharply from Easy Practice. In the religion of the Holy Path, the object is to follow the way of perfection, that is, to practise deeds of purity or holiness until the entire world will be thoroughly transformed into a kingdom of purity or holiness. There is no doubt that this idea of universal sanctification is the highest aim set up for the followers of the Buddha, but in our actual, finite, mundane life it is of no easy task, perhaps it is altogether impossible, to carry out in any thoroughgoing manner even one of the six Pāramitās in our moral relations to one another. We must concede that the distance between the Mahayana ideals and

our ordinary everyday life is immeasurably wide. Lately, scholars of the philosophy of religion have advanced arguments for a new moral category to be known as the Holy, and to make it the ultimate goal of religion. Philosophy aspires after the True, the arts the Beautiful, ethics the Good, and religion the Holy. If we accept this distribution of the categories among the several spheres of human activities, the Mahayana ideal must be said to be in full conformity with the scholarly definition of the religious life. But, as things go in this finite life of ours, the wall of holiness is altogether too high for us to scale successfully, and if this were made the only condition by which we were allowed to be saved, there would be indeed very few mortals at the topmost rung of enlightenment. Thus Shinran Shōnin wished to see the basis of religious life set upon something other than goodness as well as holiness. So sings the Shōnin :

“Since eternity, even to the present,
 The proof there is that he loveth me;
 For was it not through him that I came to the mystery of Buddha-
 wisdom,
 In which there is neither good nor evil, neither purity nor im-
 purity?”

After these considerations, we are now ready to take up the problem of Atman which will shed light upon the Shin conception of religious life.

V

Indian thinkers faced the problem of Atman for the first time in the Upanishads where the profoundest of all the philosophical ideas in India found its way in the following dictum: “Tat tvam asi”; and the rest of Indian philosophy became more or less a superstructure over this fundamental idea. If modern European philosophy started from “Cogito ergo sum,” the depths of Oriental thought must be said to be lying in this intuition. While the pre-Upanishad philosophers

sought God in the external world, the writers of the Upanishads themselves found it in the soul (Atman). Buddhists however denied not only the existence of an objective God but also the reality of a soul substantially conceived. And for this reason Buddhism is regarded as an atheistic and soulless religion by those who have been accustomed to think of the world as the creation of a historical God and of the body as the habitat of an immaterial soul. It was chiefly through these Western critics that Buddhism came to be identified with nihilism, or the teaching of absolute nothingness. In this however they fail to understand the exact meaning of Buddhist negation. For the negation applies not only to a thesis but to an anti-thesis as well; the idea is that by doing this Buddhism wishes to transcend the dualism of intellection. When the absolute ground is reached, Buddhism teaches that there is an affirmation beyond which nothing could be postulated. Therefore, the Buddha's refusal of an objective God ended in the positive notion of the Dharma eternally abiding; and when he realised the Perfect Supreme Enlightenment, his declaration was: "I alone am the Honoured One," instead of "There is none to be honoured but egolessness." Indeed, without this ultimate irrefutable affirmation, the Buddhist theory of non-Atman could not be maintained; for non-Atman is the logical overflow of the "I" in "I alone am the Honoured One" at the time of his Enlightenment, and also of the "I" which culminated, when the Buddha was passing, in the teaching that "Nirvana is Great Self." Thus the doctrine of non-Atman is the criticism given to the ego-essence of the Indian philosophies, and at the same time the outcome of Enlightenment experienced by the Buddha under the Bodhi-tree, and also the meaning of Nirvana in which there takes place the identification of Egolessness and Great Self. In this we see the Buddhist life realised which transcends the dualism of "to be" (*Sat*) and "not to be" (*Asat*).

VI

When we considered the Ego of the Buddha at the time of Enlightenment, I tried to show that there was no real ego-substance which only appeared to exist because of the relativity of all human ideas such as subject and object, self and not-self or the other; in other words, we have the notion of self only when it moves along through its varying phases. And these phases are conceivable as subject-ego, possessing-ego, and object-ego. When these three phases are regarded each as independent of the others a chasm breaks up in one complete undivided I-consciousness, ending in the rapture of the religious life.

The manifold forms of disturbance which are observable in our social organisation may be in a way traceable to the breaking up of the threefold ego in social consciousness. By this breaking up each ego comes to conceive itself irreducibly independent of the others, the result of which is the assertion of itself against the interests of the other two. Absolute monarchism or statism separates the subject-ego from the rest, and revolution is the outcome, which means that the other egoes want to get the subject-ego back among themselves. When a specially privileged class monopolises the possessing ego by wresting it from the labouring classes, we have capitalism. The present social unrest is not merely the question of wages or treatment, its deeper reason lies in the separation of the possessing-ego and in its autocratic assertion. The woman-question also reflects this tendency. The unrest however cannot be remedied by merely transferring the ego-consciousness from one class of society to another or from one sex to the other. So long as the ego is divided and monopolised by one party at the expense of another, social turmoil will never come to cease. The ego ought to be restored to its original, flowing, indivisible, and unsolidifiable state so that it never grows clogged or cramped in its ever forward movement

which is its essence.

The three phases of ego may be likened to the three sides of a triangle; every "I" is conceivable only in its triplicity, when one is singled out and lords it over the others, that is, when ego is statically or substantially conceived and loses its fluidity, there will be no declension of "I", the nominative case refuses to be transferred into the possessive or objective case, and the result will be the death of "I". All the factors in social organisation ought to be allowed to have the full liberty of going through these three ego-phases as they find themselves proper and profitable to do so without causing any injury to one another. This is the privilege permitted to human mind as sentient and rational being. We can thus sometimes assert ourselves as lords, sometimes as possessors, and sometimes as servants, as recipients or hirelings. As we have this liberty of transforming ourselves in conformity with the infinitudes of relationships social or otherwise, among which we find ourselves moving on, Buddhism teaches that there is no ego, no Atman, meaning thereby the fluidity of what we in our common parlance designate as "I." The rigidity of the notion of "I" is thus got rid of, and when it is thus got rid of, it is enlarged into Great Self. Therefore only by being selfless the true self is attained, which is Great Self.

In my last article on charity (*dāna*) I analysed the Buddhist notion of charity. The giver corresponds to the subject-ego, and the thing given to the object-ego, while the consciousness that I am giving represents the possessing ego. In deeds of charity Buddhism illustrates how the triplicity of ego-phases can be made workable in our practical daily life. The object of Buddhist life will be thus to attain to the perfect fusibility of the three phases of Ego, which is really no Ego as it transcends itself by freely flowing from one phase to another. When this mutual fusion or flowing-into is attained, we shall have peace and glory prevailing on earth.

In a word, there are five forms of life as it unfolds itself in this world of ours :

1. Those whose lives are regulated by feelings of pain and pleasure ;

2. Those whose lives are regulated by ideas of good and evil ;

3. Those whose lives are regulated by ideas of purity and defilement ;

4. Those whose lives are regulated by ideas of being and no being ;

5. Those whose lives are regulated by the truth of egolessness.

While we distinguish these five types of the spiritual life among mankind we may regard these also as the stages of an individual spiritual development. The true life is therefore no other than that which comes to one after the experience of the egolessness of the ego, and when this is really attained, the preceding four stages will now, purified, sanctified, ennobled, and unified, be the content of the egoless life itself.

GESSHO SASAKI