

PROFESSOR RUDOLF OTTO ON ZEN BUDDHISM

Professor Rudolf Otto, of Marburg, is the author of *Das Heilige*, whose English translation entitled, *The Idea of the Holy*, appeared recently. Not satisfied with scholarly achievements he is one of the active workers in the movement of a world's religious union. His view on Zen as a special form of Japanese Buddhism was published in the second report of the said movement. The article is more or less a recapitulation of Professor Suzuki's paper on Zen in one of the previous numbers of the *Eastern Buddhist*, but as it comes filtered through the brains of such a scholarly author, it is reproduced here in an English translation for the perusal of the readers of the present magazine.

PRAJÑA

ZEN, Sanskrit Dhyāna, is the name of a great school of Chinese-Japanese Buddhism whose foremost saint is Bodhidharma. Its peculiar form, which is still living in Japan, was given to it by the Chinese master Hyakujo, circa A. D. 800. The ground of the teaching upon which it rests is Mahayana. And so are its ceremonies, its myth, its pantheon (if it is permitted at all to apply such a distorted expression to the Mahayana). The solemnity of the Numinous that in general lies over Buddhist ceremonies and over the conduct of the better monk is also in keeping with their wonderful temples, halls, religious paintings, acts of worship, and personal conduct. In distinction from the great principal school of Japanese Buddhism, the Shin-Shu, which is essentially personal in nature and which seeks salvation in personal faith in the saving grace of the personal Amida Buddha, the Zen followers are mystics. They are at the same time practical mystics; for like Benedict they couple *ora* and *labora*, like the Benedictines they are tillers of the soil, men of practical labour, or, according to talent, men of creative art in sublime works of painting or sculpture. "He who does not work shall not eat"—was the motto of Hyakujo. Yet all that is not their essential charac-

teristic. I asked a venerable abbot in a fine quiet abbey in Tokyo the question: "What is the basic idea of Zen?" Since he was wedged in by this question, he was obliged to answer with an idea. He said: "We believe that Samsara and Nirvana do not differ, but that they are same. And that every one should find the Buddha-heart in his own heart." But in truth this is also not the chief thing; for it is still "said," still "doctrine," still transmitted. The main point in Zen, however, is not a basic idea, but an experience, which shuns not only concepts, but even the idea itself. Zen reveals its nature in the following instances in which its artists have drawn without words before our eyes in an incomparably impressive manner by mien, gesture, bearing, facial and bodily expression.

1. One must form here first of all a picture of Bodhidharma himself, the prodigiously heavy man who "sits before a wall ten years in silence," in concentrated, nay, in conglobate force of inner tension like a highly charged Leyden jar, the large eyes almost pushed out of his head by the inner compression, boring their way into the problem, eyes of an exorcist who wishes to conjure up a demon, or a God to stand before him in order that he shall reveal and deliver up his secret. What he is gazing at, what he wishes to compel, who could say? But that it is something monstrous, that it is the monstrous itself, that is revealed in his features. And the great pictures of Bodhidharma are therefore quite monstrous in every nuance of the term as I suggested on page 51 of my book, *Das Heilige*. That this seated person seeks a something, which matters above everything, compared with which all things are viewed with unconcern, a something in word such as only the Numinous itself has, springs directly to the mind. And whoever loses himself entirely in this picture, to him must come the light terror in the presence of the thing which is mirrored in these eyes, in this collectedness.

2. At the same time this collectedness is nothing less than a self-scrutinising, than a self-making or the willing

to find the self. And the final discovery is, God knows, not the product of one's own cleverness, or of one's own doing. And the emancipation which is connected with the discovery is the farthest conceivable from the so-called self-emancipation. The assurances of many expounders of Buddhism who consider that the superiority of Buddhism lies in its teaching of self-emancipation are miles astray. This discovery is a final cracking, a final breaking which comes to one simply as an altogether mystical fact, a fact which however cannot be made by anything. It either gives itself, or withholds itself. No man can make, produce, or find it himself. One can hardly characterise it as "Grace," for to "Grace" belongs a "Gracious One." But it is related to grace, in so far as by grace and the experience of grace the utterly wonderful mystery is meant. It is the using of the "celestial eye" and more fittingly comparable to an entering charm than to an emancipation of self.

3. What is the content of the discovery? The lips of those experiencing it are firmly sealed. And so it must be, for if this school has a dogma, it is that of the inconceivability and complete ineffability of the "thing itself. It is the Truth which has bearing upon all things, which transmutes life in a trice, and which gives a hitherto unseen, misunderstood sense to the existence of himself and of the world. It is accompanied by the most intense heightening of the emotions, and boundless joy. It is linked with a continuous "study of the Inconceivable." This study, however, is nothing intellectual, but an indescribable, ever deeper penetration into the discovered truth of Zen. It streams out into the daily conduct, and illumines the faces of those experiencing it. It engenders readiness to serve, for the meaning of life is service for salvation of all feeling creatures. It is revealed in an oft-repeated four-fold vow :

"How innumerable sentient beings are, I vow to save them all ;
How inexhaustible our evil passions are, I vow to exterminate them :

How immeasurable the Holy Doctrines are, I vow to study them;
 How inaccessible the path of Buddha is, I vow to attain it."

It stretches the mind to the highest ideal, but it enjoins renunciation of all personal fame, and inculcates willing humility: "Let one's ideal rise as high as the crown of Vairocana (the highest of the Buddhas), while his life may be so full of humility as to make him prostrate before a baby's feet."

All self-discipline, however, and all actions for others are without compulsion, and "without recompense," unconscious of oneself, without emphasising the things and without merit for oneself.

"The bamboo shadows are sweeping the stairs,
 But no dust is stirred:
 The moonlight penetrates deep into the bottom of the pool,
 But no trace is left in the water."

Samsara itself is now Nirvana. The feverish quest for a goal of salvation beyond being comes to an end. For the object of the quest is found in being itself and in union with it. This world of migration, otherwise a heap of sorrow and evil, is itself the blissful Buddha-sphere; it scintillates in transparent mystical beauty and depth, just as the inspired brush of this artist reproduces it with unparalleled impressiveness. It treats with equal disdain all book-learning and scholastic erudition. But it is a rare, deep, inner wisdom which finds expression in a laconic word, in a prompt maxim, in a concise verse, which only suggests. It is a truth which is not at all that of everyday and which expresses itself best in its own peculiar way in contrast to everyday truth, namely, in its apparent loutishness when judged from the outside, by which, as in the case of Socrates, the deep spiritual import becomes doubly visible in its victory over an ugly or bizarre form or face. Such constantly depicted, painted figures are especially Han-shan (寒山) and Shi-te (拾得) whose representation by Shūbun seems to me to be the greatest physiognomical masterpiece of the world.

In no other place has any one succeeded in making the perfectly ridiculous, grotesque of a given external appearance disappear so entirely into nothing, and to make one forget it before the outbursting depth, and in this manner to make felt the utter non-importance of all material or outer things compared to the Inner. And this quite in the laconic manner of Zen itself, with a few strokes and blurs of the most marvellous India-ink. And it is at the same time like "the bamboo shadow which plays without stirring up the dust," that is, so indifferent to all outer effects and without ambiguity. Some have wished to explain the Mahayana in their favourite way as "a penetration of the Vedanta mysticism into Buddhism." One can learn, however, from the forms of Han-shan and Shi-te, or also from the form of the big-bellied one, of Pu-tai (布袋), how wary one must be of these assertions of smuggling. Such figures were simply unthinkable among the pupils of Sankara. And their experience, however ineffable it is, is in tone utterly different from the Brahman-Nirvana of the Vedanta. It is far more naive, more blissful, more thoroughly illumined, far richer in potentialities; it is not world-rejecting, but world-transfiguring. It is mysticism. But it shows that mysticism is not all one and the same thing, that mysticism is not a separate, self-existent category of being, but a something formal, namely the coming to preponderate of the Irrational, which may take place in various ways and with widely differing content. If one wishes analogies for figures like those named, they are offered most readily among the disciples of St. Francis, as Sant Egidio and Ginepro. The statement: "Nirvana and Samsara are the same," would constitute for Sankara an enormous abomination.

4. In a sudden flaring-up the new viewpoint enters. The content of the experience is utterly ineffable. For that reason it simply cannot be transmitted. It must arise in all its originality in each and every person. Instantaneity and especially intransmissibility are the real dogmas of this peculiar

school. It is for this reason that painters ever and again represent Bodhidharma tearing up and throwing away the sutras, the sacred texts and the writings of the school. And yet there are masters and pupils. And this relationship is of the utmost importance. The pupil is not to be instructed in that which is incapable of being taught, but he is to be led as it were, or better *shoved* until intuition breaks in. That which helps him thereto is manifestly first of all the witnessing of the effects of experience which are listed in 3. In their union vividly experienced they must awaken a preparatory conception in the *a priori* of the receptive person, and in that way prepare the breaking through. There are in addition drastic actions of an unusual pedagogy which must appear to us as mad, but which evidently attain their end with the disciple summoned. Suzuki relates the seemingly very little enlightening story of the enlightenment of Hakuin by his master Shoju. Hakuin considers himself already deeply versed in the Wisdom of Buddha and parades his wisdom in front of his master. "Stuff and nonsense"—answers the master when he has finished. Hakuin vindicates himself. Thereupon the master boxes him many a time, throws him out of the house, so that he falls into the mud, and scolds him: "O you denizen of the dark cavern!" Hakuin comes another time firmly resolved to bring his master to speech. This time the master throws him over the veranda, and he falls to the bottom of the stone wall. And while he is lying half-senseless below, the master laughs scornfully down at him. Hakuin now wants to leave the master. Then as he is going about begging in the village, the miraculous happens: a trivial occurrence—as the glittering of the can in the case of Böhme—gives the impulse which suddenly opens his eye to the truth of Zen. Boundless joy overcomes him, and half beside himself he returns to his old master. Even before he has crossed the front gate, his master recognises him and beckons to him, saying: "What good news do you bring? Quick, quick! Come right in." Hakuin tells what he went

through, and the old master tenderly strokes him: "Now you have it; you have it now." Lectures serve as other aids, the strangest lectures, I suppose, which were ever delivered to salvation-thirsting souls. Their laconic, sometimes literally monosyllabic, statements are not instructions. They are seemingly often quite nonsensical, but in reality they conceal a point which is only not wasted on such as have become accustomed to this enigma-solving through previous training. They are rather a kind of edifying cuffs (knocks) for the soul in order to box it ideographically in a given direction. Imagine "conversations" like this one between Ummon and his pupil: What is the (mental) sword of Ummon?—Hung!—What is the one straight passage to Ummon?—Most intimate!—Which one of the three Kayas of the Buddha is it that will sermonise?—To the point!—What is the eye of the true Law?—Everywhere!—What is the way?—Forward!—How is it that without the parents' consent one cannot be ordained?—Shallow!—I do not understand that.—Deep!—How do you have a seeing eye in a question!—Blind. Or a sermon like the following: Ummon is sitting on the master's seat. A monk comes and asks for an answer to questions. Ummon calls out aloud: "O monks!" The monks all turned towards him. Then he arose and left the pulpit without a word.

5. In quite paradoxical utterances, acts, or gestures the utter Irrational and even the quite paradoxical are presented. It shows in an especially remarkable feature its paradoxical and at the same time its completely inner nature, which in the end is contrary to all outer appearance and ostentation. The experiencing of it should be and should remain entirely inner, which withdraws from the realm of the conscious, discursive, uttered into the deepest Inwardness. One should have the matter as completely within oneself as one has one's health, of which one only becomes conscious when it has fled, and as one has one's life within oneself, of which one knows the least and says the least when it is the strongest and most lively. From

this spring the seemingly offensive statements of the masters. They do not want to hear anything of the Buddha or of Zen even. When these two have first come into consciousness, they are no longer possessed in their originality and genuineness. When one reasons about them, they are no longer there.

“When the Soul speaks, then—alas!—it is no longer the Soul which speaks.” Just as nobility which is conscious of its being noble is no longer nobility, so is Zen, when it speaks of itself, no longer Zen. Goso says to his disciple Yengo; “You are all right, but you have a trifling fault.” Yengo asks repeatedly what that fault is. Finally the master says: “You have altogether too much of Zen.” Another monk asks him: “Why do you especially hate talking about Zen?” —“Because it turns one’s stomach,” says the master. He is annoyed when one wishes to speak of that which cannot be spoken of, which can only be lived and possessed in the soundless depths. And from this attitude spring apparently impious actions, as when a master warms himself on a cold day by burning Buddha-images, or when conceptual objectifications of religion are spoken of contemptuously. As Rinzai says: “O you followers of Truth, if you encounter the Buddha, slay him; if you encounter the Patriarch, slay him.” And one day Ummon draws a line in the sand with his staff, and says: “All the Buddhas as numberless as sands are here talking all kinds of nonsense.” Or another time: “Outside in the courtyard stand the Lord of Heaven and the Buddha discoursing on Buddhism. What a noise they are making!”—But then the talk may on occasion swing completely around and proceed in quite another tone. The discourse may gently point out the still speech of the things about us, waiting until it becomes intelligible to the disciple himself. Just as one day Ummon is going to the lecture hall when he hears all at once the deep tone of the temple bell. He says: “In such a wide, wide world, why do we put our monkish robes on when the bell goes like this?” And Buddhist painting, especially, has

taken up such methods of instruction. For example, the last words of Ummon return directly painted in the picture, "Temple Bell at Evening." There is the wide, wide world. One sees half disappearing the cloister. The accompanying strokes suggest the ringing of the bell, which one thinks one hears. That is not nature-sentiment; that is Zen. And Zen is also the paradoxical of so many pictures which people to-day would like to class as immature Oriental expressionism—those peculiar impressive landscapes on which a few flaws, at first glance almost completely undecipherable, like a Zen laconism, comprising an entire microcosm and spiritualising it into an ideogram of the Ineffable-Intransmissible. Here Nirvana becomes in fact visible in Samsara, and the One Buddha-heart as the depth of things pulsates with such plainly audible beat that respiration halts. But both are too much "said."