

## BUDDHISM AND EDUCATION

TO understand the role of Buddhism in the history of Japan it is best to consider it side by side with Shinto. Shinto is a rather vague, ambiguous term, but we may take it in a most general sense, just as the Japanese talk about it in their loose way, that is, in the sense of state Shintoism, whatever this may mean.

The one great contrast conspicuously noticeable between Shinto and Buddhism is that Shinto is warlike, militant, and devoid of a loving spirit; while Buddhism is just the opposite, for it teaches all-embracing love which knows no enemy of whatever nature; it loves even the Devil and his large family and would convert them to do the work of the Buddha. Shinto is too conscious of oppositions. It is for this reason that when a war breaks out the commanding general goes to a Shinto shrine offering his prayers for victory; he would, however, never go to a Buddhist temple, for the Buddha or the Bodhisattva would never guarantee a victory. The Buddha and Bodhisattvas are not dualistically-minded, they do not make any distinction between foes and friends, both of whom are equally objects of love for the compassionate ones. The enemy is not hated and therefore cannot be made the specific target of annihilation. Shinto stands for power (*mirzu*) and Buddhism for a great loving heart. The Shinto gods are gods of wrath and destruction, but the Buddha is always weeping for all the ills that are harassing the world and mankind. The Buddha's loving heart in tears is ever contriving to cleanse the world of its evils, not by destroying them but by elevating them to a higher plane of thought.

When I say that the Buddha is always in tears, you may take him for an inane, futile, unprofitable existence. It is true that Buddhism is a religion of peace and passivity and of non-resistance, and that in the whole history of Buddhism it has never declared war or committed deeds of horror and blood-shedding. We must remember that this is the most remarkable fact in any history of religion, especially when it is compared with the horrors of the Inquisition and the wars that devastated Europe during the Middle Ages. They were carried out in the name of the Holy Church. There is no doubt that Christianity has something of the militaristic spirit. The European invasion of the Asiatic nations was often preceded by Christian missionaries. Some of the latter were quite aggressive in their propaganda and activities, and this incensed the natives to murder them; the political result is well-known and I need not enter its details here.

Buddhism is no doubt a religion of passivity, but this does not necessarily mean that it has been altogether inactive, doing nothing towards the enhancement of our spiritual welfare, for it still exists and is alive in Japan however feebly it has been asserting itself. My firm conviction is that if Buddhism held the Japanese statesmen, militarists, and people generally in its firmer grasp, that is, if Japan had been governed by Buddhism and not by Shinto as she has been until recently, there would have been no such war as the one whose most ignominious catastrophe we Japanese are all experiencing just at present.

That Shinto is always associated with war, and its gods are worshipped by war-lords who would never miss the chance to impose their thought and feeling upon the younger generations learning their profession at schools and colleges, is to be carefully noted and investigated

when the history of spiritual Japan is to be studied in connection with the development of militarism. It goes without saying that the latter was a very good student of the European power politics, especially of Prussianism or of "arrogant provincialism," to use Thomas Mann's terminology.

Buddhism generally comes after a war and takes care of the killed on the battle-fields. It looks after their spiritual welfare both of foes and friends, it does not discriminate the one from the other, it prays impartially for their ever-ascending spiritual development which it thinks they would have even after their deaths. The temples are built for foes as well as for friends.

Shinto is too conscious of the geographical boundaries existing between one nation and another. Shinto can never be transplanted successfully anywhere else. If it goes anywhere outside the soil of its own growth, it will insist on carrying the soil itself along with the cult, that is, everything that makes its thriving possible. This means politically that Shinto can have its life only where it is supported by military power. To establish Shinto, for instance, in Korea or in China or in Manchuria will mean the invasion of those countries and putting them under subjugation by armed force. And this is exactly what our arrogant militaristic party did everywhere. Militarism and Shinto and nationalism are logically bound up together, and go hand in hand. Shinto is a religion—if it is really so—of insularism.

Buddhism on the contrary is a world-religion; in fact, it goes further than that, because the world as is conceived by Buddhists extends even beyond that of our commonsense experience. The Buddhist conception is both electron-microscopic and astronomical, but what concerns Buddhists is an infinite number of living beings.

occupying all those innumerable worlds, for they are all the objects of the Buddha's all-embracing love and sympathy. But Buddhism does not subscribe to the idea of a transcendental God who rules the world from above, for the Buddha lives among us and with us and at the same time above us. He thinks of us as his friends, as his associates, as his children whose welfare and misfortune affect him in a most human way; Buddhists will not wage war, they are pacifists, even defeatists as I myself am. That they have turned soldier and fought on the battle-fields is due to the most high-handed measures taken up by the militaristic government. This Buddhist attitude of passivity towards things of this earth has been a great virtue and at the same time quite frequently an inexcusable weakness.

I do not think that it is due to this weakness so-called that Buddhism in Japan was never dragged into the political arena so as to be mixed up with the nationalistic movements as Shinto was. In fact, Shinto managed somehow to be at the head of such movement in Japan. For it is in the very nature of Shinto that it cannot alienate itself from the insularistic idea of self-importance which inevitably leads to an imperialistic assertion of its sovereignty over all the neighbouring nations. Buddhism has deeply entered into the various fields of Japanese life, and whatever cultural worth we can detect in it is generally found interfused with Buddhist ideas. Even with Shinto—when it aspires for a deeper philosophy for its own support, it looks to Buddhism. But, singularly, Shinto refuses to acknowledge its indebtedness and continues challenging Buddhism on the latter's frequent indifferent attitude towards nationalism.

To come back to the question of weakness, if it is

really so, on the part of Buddhism, this comes from its inherent nature, grows out of its non-dualistic world-conception. Buddhism does not view the world as made of matter. The so-called physical world made up of individual entities is an illusion in the sense that what is regarded as physical is not at all physical or materialistic or individualistic; in other words, the world cannot be described in terms of space and time as they are ordinarily understood. To grasp the world as it actually is, we have to abandon our long-cherished dualism and a logic based on it. But this is not the place to elaborate this idea, and I hasten to say that Buddhism teaches humility in its extreme form, for it refuses to resist, to defend, to justify, to judge, it submits itself to all kinds of treatment. This may be considered a kind of infirmity according to our commonsense view of life. When one cannot defend oneself in this world of eternal struggle, one does not seem to have any claim for existence, for such an existence amounts to a nonentity. When a nation is shorn of all sorts of the armed forces, it may be said that this means a death sentence as it is at the mercy of a possible enemy. In a sense it is. But I feel like pondering the matter from the Buddhist point of view.

Pascal's view of man as a thinking reed is well-known. Physically and dualistically speaking, we may regard the reed as symbolising the weakest of all existences, but the great thing about it is that it thinks, that it is conscious. Says Pascal: "By space the universe encompasses and swallows me up like an atom; by thought I comprehend the world." Yes, we shall be all blown up and completely annihilated by a physical (including intellectual) force more powerful than our feeble existence, and we can be conscious of the fact. But

if we do not go any further than this, we have not yet penetrated the depths of reality, for the Buddhists would say that we not only comprehend the world in thought but we create the world in thought. This world-creating thought is spirit and not thought as it is ordinarily understood. Spirit is infinitely greater than anything else in the world, for the world itself sinks into nothingness when compared with spirit. And the wonderful thing is that we all can be conscious of the fact, which makes the human reed of immeasurable worth. No physical force can ever contrive to destroy this worth. With all the material prosperity, intellectual cunning, and national aggrandisement one can command, what significance is there after all in all these shows of power?

The Japanese Shinto militarists have significantly failed to see this truth. They have ever been after gaining power and wielding it to the attainment of their selfish ends. For this the Buddhists too have to be blamed, I think, because their spiritual training has not been intense enough to make their brethren see into the folly of pursuing power just for the sake of mere power. Power is always allied to the concept of conquest and subjugation and enslavement. Power is also associated with hatred, and hatred always evokes hatred. The world thus turns on the axis of hatred and vengeance—a lurid picture of human life. But as we have broken the shackles of the physical and animal life by virtue of consciousness, can we not also in the same way, but this time in a far more significant manner, get rid of the shackles of human animality or animal humanity? The fact of our being able to become conscious of the truth that power and hatred and vengeance are not things we as human beings ought to hold dear, must make us all realise that we can rise from the filth of our

earthly life.

I am not sermonising here ; what I wish to do is to indicate where the aim of Buddhist education should lie. It consists as we can see now in instilling in the minds of the younger generations the idea of human unity and universal peace which can be achieved by non-resistance. Non-resistance, however, does not exclude our strongly protesting against inequity and rationally asserting justice and freedom. It also wants more positively to cultivate a great sympathetic heart not only among the Japanese themselves but all over the world including both conquerors and the vanquished. Moral justice alone is not enough to create a new world. We must endeavour to throw overboard all ideas based on power and superiority, mere intellection, nationalistic discriminations, and everything that can be described in terms of conquest and subjugation. The cultivation of fellow-feelings throughout the world will be most earnestly set on foot and encouraged in everyway possible. Especially Buddhists will endeavour to disseminate by all peaceful means and in a most friendly spirit a new-conception not based on dualism and its logic, for they think that the world has suffered a great deal from the dominance of the power-concept which is the political child of a dualistic prejudice.

I wish in this connection to touch on the notion of subjugating or harnessing Nature. In Japan this was not known until she came to contact with the West. (By the way I should like to say that the West no doubt gave us much of its good, but at the same time we also learned much from the West that was not good for Japan. For one thing, we are at present bitterly tasting the fruit of power-politics.) The idea of conquering Nature is based on the idea of a dualistic world-conception.

which makes Nature stand against us, always waging war on us. The scientists may regard the releasing of atomic energy as wresting it from Nature against her will. But can we not look at the whole process from the spiritual point of view and say with Christ, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you"? It is not by bombardment by force but by gently knocking at the door that Nature opens her secrets to the visitor. The door of truth will never be opened by force but by throwing one's whole existence at the Creator. When this reverential attitude is not realised by scientists, technicians, and by every one of us, the energy released will surely play havoc over the entire world. Science is religion as much as Buddhism and Christianity are.

What Buddhism has to do in regard to education is clear now I think. It wants first to educate the Japanese to break away with their traditional insularistic bias which unnecessarily and most harmfully circumscribes their purview of the world. Buddhism wants to open up the vista of the Japanese mind so that they can survey the world in its broadest possible aspect and also to make them see into the depths of reality. Buddhism wants to see the Japanese cultivate the virtue of non-resistance, not in the dualistic sense implied in the term, but positively and actively as issuing forth from an all-embracing heart of love and sympathy. Finally, Buddhism wants to co-operate with Christianity in the establishment of a spiritual super-state in which all the nations with all their varying prejudices, cultures, outlooks, and what not will joyfully join.

The other day I came across one of the American magazines in which I found this: "Civilisation perfected is fully developed Christianity." This is a fine saying.



I can say the same thing about Buddhism: Civilisation perfected is fully realised Buddhism. In this respect, Buddhism and Christianity are in perfect agreement. Why not then work together for the actualisation of the spiritual ideals so dearly cherished both by Christianity and Buddhism and hasten the day when there is peace on earth and glory in heaven? To my mind, all good Buddhists are good Christians and *vice versa*.

I wish to conclude this talk by the following stories recorded of the Japanese Buddhists Bankei and Sengwai. Bankei (1613-1690) once had a special session for the monks. One of them happened to have the bad habit of stealing, and they wished to have him ejected. Bankei refused. The monks threatened to break up the gathering. Said Bankei: "You may go anywhere you like and pursue your study of Buddhism. But that unfortunate monk you wish to ostracise will never find a chance to improve himself, and it is my wish that he should stay here with me." When the ill-reputed one heard of the master's determination growing out of his loving-kindness, he repented and became a model monk.

Sengwai (1751-1839) when weeding his garden used to offer prayers by repeating "Namu-amida-butsu". Every living being has the right to exist and is arrayed in more glory than the king of ancient days. This being so, have we the right to pluck it and throw it into a fire? Even when it is in the way of other plants we like better, are we honestly justified in our deed? What excuse can we make to our Creator who considers not only the lilies of the field but the nameless weeds too? Here is a great spiritual problem worth our serious pondering. Buddhist educators as well as the Christian will have to offer a solution for ourselves and for our pupils.

One of the monks under Sengwai was a bad man.

He would sneak out of the monastery in the night and come back before the gate was opened. The case came to the knowledge of the master. One night, or rather early in the morning, Sengwai went out of his room and hid himself by the wall over which the wicked monk used to steal back. The latter carefully climbed the wall from outside and attempted to set one of his feet on a stone which he used as a stepping-stone. The stone was not there but something softer and more or less yielding. He at once realised that it was his master's own head and shoulders. He at once prostrated before him and confessed all his misdeeds, vowing that he would never again commit them. He is said to have developed a fine monk.

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