

A MODERN JAPANESE BUDDHIST'S FAITH

An interview with

Professor Fumio Masutani

Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

Prepared and edited by Yoshiro Tamura

Introduction

Young men today appear to have become decadent and nihilistic because they have become sceptical regarding moral and religious authority and have lost sight of the significance of life. They are, indeed, at a loss as to how to live, and are asking religious leaders very fundamental questions. Consider, therefore, if you please, that you are being asked these questions today by a young man who regards you as his spiritual advisor.

The Meaning of Human Life

Q Competition among students in this age is intense. Young men and women have to study day and night in order to get ahead. They work like machines. Then one day they ask: "What is the use of all this hard work? Isn't death the end?" Whatever the reason, the meaning of life has gone. What do you think of this?

In the past people generally tried to find some significance in life by picturing to themselves their rebirth in the Pure Land or paradise. The present generation, however, is no longer deceived by such talk. It is impossible to lead young people by ascribing the significance of life to such an ideal. Which is better, to lead people to another world, or to some ideal in this life? As a modern, I think that it is better to set up an

ideal in this world. This is the Buddhist way of life.

Buddhism does not have to have the ideal of a paradise in order to exist. Originally Buddhism was more advanced, more practical, and more worldly. In Zen^a Buddhism, for example, we find, the expression, "Do not rely on the future.^b" This idea of concentrating on the present is firmly held today. In Jōdo^c Buddhism we can find the idea of another world, but this is losing its attractiveness.

The essence of Buddhism consists in making every possible effort in this world. If Buddhism has anything to teach young people today, it can do so only by emphasis on this essence. Only in this way can Buddhism guide them. Japanese Buddhism in the past has taught about another world. But, if Buddhism returns to its true character and teaches the significance of utmost effort in this world, it will certainly move the minds and direct the lives of young people.

Q Young people today are generally inclined toward realism but at the same time, it seems that they cannot find anything in realism on which they can rely, anything they can regard as an aim or as their spiritual support. In this sense, is the essence of Buddhism which you have just mentioned sufficient for them?

Support is not something that comes from outside. Regardless of whether Buddhism can or cannot give young people ready-made support, religion at present has none to give. Buddhism teaches that the way for them to find a support is in aspirations. When we understand clearly to what we aspire, we can exert ourselves and have support.

a. 禪 b. *Goji o sonsuru nakare* 後時を存するなかれ c. 浄土

Buddhism stresses aspirations. This is indeed important and should be given more consideration. In Buddhism there is a saying: "It is very difficult to be born as human beings, but we are already born as such." This is an abstract expression which means that, since we have already been born, we have to lead a life worthy of the name. This is our aspiration.

Aspirations are none other than ideals. Some people's aspirations may be abstract, while others prefer a more concrete form. In the *Daikichijō-kyō*^a there is a passage which reads: "The greatest happiness of a man is to be filial to his parents, to take good care of his wife and children, and to be engaged in a respectable occupation." This reveals the highest of all human aspirations. It is the desire to lead an ordinary but significant, pure life.

If a man does not have this aspiration, he will see no significance in filial duty, care of his wife and children, daily hard work and money-making; and he may think that all these are just for the purpose of eating. Everything depends upon whether or not a man has any aspirations. Our aspirations are betrayed and obstructed every day; but when one has definite aspirations, and leads one's life with these always in sight, life becomes meaningful.

We might be said to be scholars splitting hairs. If we did not have aspirations, we would regard what we are doing as meaningless. The same can be said of the young people who are looking for work. They secure positions about the way they buy lottery tickets. But if in a given position a person does not do his utmost with genuine aspiration, his life becomes

a. 大吉祥經, Mahā-maṅgala-sutta, (Pali).

quite meaningless. His work hours are only exchanged for money, while other hours are spent in thinking of drinking and recreation. This is because he has no aspirations in his life.

Jōdo Buddhism speaks of the original vow of the *Nyorai*.^{*} When we speak of aspirations, we human beings are the subject. I think it is a matter of great importance to speak of our aspirations, our ideals, in Buddhism. Buddhism teaches us how to grasp, set up, or produce these aspirations. Buddhism does not give them to us ready-made.

Ineffectiveness of Religion and Social Reform

Q You have just mentioned job hunting. Some young people are sceptical about the effect of religion or faith. For example, the desire to study is not satisfied because poverty prevents studying at a university. Furthermore, it is impossible for them to find a good job, even though they desire to work hard.

The desire to give alms to the poor is not fulfilled because they lack the means. Thus, they come to think that their aspirations are not possible of attainment by means of religious faith. Indeed, young men say that the suffering and evils of life should be taken care of by society, that is, they should be handled by social reform. They ask if it is not deception to try to bring religion into the picture in such a case. What do you think of this?

The present political trend is toward changing the social system first. If, however, we look carefully at the political world itself, we notice the existence of a problem which needs our further thought. The question is why the political world cannot attain its many ideals. It boils down to the problem of

* 如来, Tathāgata (Skt.), the title of the Buddha; one who has arrived at and come from the truth.

men. In short, there can be no hope if we leave political matters in the hands of the present members of the Diet. I feel definitely that nothing can be attained by those who take the helm of political affairs with only their own interests in mind, though they keep up appearances.

If the social system has to be changed, effective, righteous, and thorough reform depends upon men. This being the case, which is more important, social systems or man? After careful thought, we realize that man is the problem. But further thought on the subject leads us to the problems of the social system, while still additional thought on the social system brings us back again to the problem of man. Thus the problem is that of man. It is, after all, because of our way of existence. We are individuals and at the same time social beings. In other words, man can lead a better life by means of reform both within and without.

Concerning the appeal of youth to the effect that, although they have the will, they can do nothing; if they would reflect for a moment, the idea that they are neglecting the development of the individual would naturally come to them.

In Buddhism the fable of "The Gem*" is often quoted. When the jewel is put in mud, the surrounding mud is purified. This is quite the opposite from our idea; but I believe we can find similar examples around us. For instance, the surroundings of a respectable man are purified. Therefore, one should not take a passive attitude and say that unwholesome surroundings make man helpless.

* *Mani-hōju* 摩尼宝珠

As is said in the *Hokku-kyō*^a, a religious life is to live without malice among people with malice, to live without pain among people with pain, and to live without avarice among people with avarice. A man who complains about life and leaves everything to others or to his environment, is leading a life without aspirations. I am of the opinion that a man should make life worth living; that is, he should live a life of aspiration by drawing upon religion. Buddhism is not a religion given from outside but a religion by which one can create light within oneself. If a man recognizes the necessity of leading such a life, he may be regarded as a Buddhist.

The Cause of Misery—Karma and Fate

Q We often find cases where an assertion is made to the effect that a certain belief has some efficacy or leads to the cure of illness. This, I think, means that in human life happiness in the ordinary sense is somewhat eagerly sought for. For example, there are people who are so weak that they often become ill, people who can never find jobs or are always poor, and people who, despite hard work, fail to get good positions. Those people feel their misery all the stronger when they compare their lot with the happiness of others. In such cases, they are blamed for their insufficient effort. But they themselves feel that their efforts never help them to get out of their misery. Some of them, therefore, become fatalistic, that is, they are reduced to thinking that they are helpless, that they cannot do anything.

From the Buddhist point of view, such misery is said to be the result of one's karma, that is, what one has sown. Therefore, one cannot ever escape the karma of his past.

In this connection, there are in this world those who, though doing wrong, are apparently living very happily, while there are those who, though doing good and working hard, are not finding life easy and are consequently unhappy. There must be many such cases. Thus, we are often asked if the Buddhist law of causality is contradicted here. The law teaches that good deeds

a. 法句經. Dhamma-pada (Pali)

bear good results and wrong deeds bear wrong results. This is, I think, related to the problem of karma. What is your opinion?

The accepted idea of karma is mistaken. When we study Buddhism as taught chiefly in the Agon Suttas* we know karma is not to be understood in this way. According to the young men, their karma is behind them. However, karma, as treated by the Buddha in the Āgamas, is a matter of the future. If stress is placed on the law of cause and effect, as related to the past only, the idea will be very similar to predestination. There is, however, a great difference between the teaching of Buddhism and predestination.

To place karma behind means a passive attitude. The Buddha placed karma ahead in the future. In other words, he regarded karma as a self-formative principle. The greatest cause for the misunderstanding of Buddhism in any age is to consider it passive. Buddhism then becomes quite the opposite of what it should be.

We must always look at Buddhism from a positive and active point of view. When karma is accepted passively or negatively, the concepts of a fatal karma (*shukugō*^b) or sinful karma (*zaigō*^c) are born and Buddhism becomes what it was not originally. However, in the history of Buddhism, as you know, great stress was placed on thinking of karma fatalistically. Such an idea will be accepted when a man's energy is failing him, but it will not attract or help active young people.

The Buddhist idea of karma can be of use to young men only when it is regarded as a matter of the future and is self-

a. 阿含, Āgama (Pali, Skt.), canons of primitive Buddhism. b. 宿業
c. 罪業

formative. In that case, the present deeds of the physical body (*sh.n^a*), speech (*ku^b*), and will (*i^c*) are made central. The Buddha taught us that it is not by birth but by karma, that is, deeds, that we become saints or are degraded. To surrender to a fatalistic idea of karma is not the original attitude of Buddhism; but after the Buddha's time karma was often understood this way and it became the basis for oriental withdrawal. For example, in Buddhism there are many misused terms which have resulted in oriental retrogression and our negative way of living. Originally the idea of karma was progressive. We must concentrate on the karma of the future.

In spite of this scholars of the *Yuishiki**, for example, are attracted by the fatalistic view of karma. Some people appear to even advocate the theory that the essence of religion lies in the fatalistic idea of life expressed by the oriental concept of karma. This is what old people may say, but we think of karma as a principle that gives encouragement. In the Buddha's interpretation of karma it is clearly shown that men become saints not by birth but by karma, that is, deeds.

Q Buddhism teaches that an effect needs not only a cause (*in^d*) but environment (*en^e*). Then the question is whether or not the concept of environment is the same as the idea that one's own efforts are of no use without the improvement of social conditions. What is your opinion?

First of all I should like to say that it is a mistake to separate the cause from the environment. Cause and the surrounding circumstances mentioned in Buddhism mean conditions

a. 身 b. 口 c. 意 d. 因 e. 緣

* 唯識 Vijñapti-mātrata (Skt.), Pure Consciousness.

(*jōken*).* So by *engi*^a, that is, dependent origination, or the chain of causation, we mean a life affected by conditions.

There are two types of conditions, one betters life and the other makes life worse. From this point of view Buddhism is in no sense idealism.

It even has a materialistic tendency. Therefore, such an idealistic expression as "The three worlds are nothing but a matter of the mind,"[†] is a later, far-fetched theory.

In adjusting conditions it is necessary to take into consideration both inner and external conditions. The inner conditions (*in*) are, as the Buddha often emphasized, avarice, hatred, and ignorance. Along with these inner conditions, the Buddha always considered external conditions (*en*). He always enquired into the principal external conditions. In view of this I doubt the propriety of separating a cause from environment. The effort to adjust and change conditions should sometimes be directed inward and sometimes outward. I think this is Buddhism.

Q It is often said that Buddhism is idealism. Isn't it dangerous to use this expression without careful thought?

Yes, it is. Such an idea is not only dangerous but also very far from Buddhism. The *Yuishiki* school had idealistic concepts and in extreme epistemology such concepts are employed. Examples of this can also be found even in European

a. 縁起

* 条件. This expression is unique with Dr. Masutani.

† *Sangai yui isshin* 三界唯一心: The three world are the worlds of desire-driven beings, the world of beings with forms, and the world of beings without forms.

schools of philosophy. Such concepts naturally appear when psychoanalysis is carried to an extreme; but the existence of matter is never denied on that account.

Creation by God

Q With respect to the problem of happiness, there arises a question which conflicts with the Christian way of thinking: if God created man why didn't he make him more fortunate? Christians will laugh it off, but they cannot neglect the question since a considerable number of people ask it.

When we compare Buddhism with Christianity we can find many similarities as well as differences. But the most basic question is, after all, that of creation, which you have just mentioned. In Christianity man is a creature, that is, something created. In my opinion, however, the concept of man as a creature is almost non-existent in oriental thought. What, then, is man? He is *sattva*,* the equivalent of the Greek *on*, that is, existence. There is a fundamental difference between the idea of existence (*sonzai*^a) and that of creation (*sōzō*^b).

The Greeks thought of man as an existence. When Buddhists think of man, he is always an existence. I think this is the most fundamental difference between Christian ideas and ours. Hence arise many other differences. Of course, there are many resemblances but even so, there are shades of difference. When we pursue the shades of difference, we notice the disparity between the idea of a creature and that of an existence.

a. 存在 b. 創造

* (Skt.) being, *ujō* 有情 (Jap.)

When we think of matter, including man, there are three aspects. They are : who created it, what constitutes it, and how it changes. As a representative example of European ideas, Christianity answers the question of who created matter, and the early Greek philosophers tackled the second question of what it is constituted. After Heraclitus the Greeks began to think of the changes in matter. Buddhism considers man an existence and teaches that he is impermanent.

On the other hand, the Japanese, generally speaking, are lacking in the consciousness of being creatures even when they embrace Christianity. This is, I think, the reason why they cannot be real Christians. If I had the consciousness of being a creature, I would be a Christian, but I can never have it.

Illness and Faith—Incantations and Sin

Q Next, let us treat the problem of illness. When a man is taken ill he is often advised by religionists to embrace some faith; but he is usually sceptical about the effect of faith on his illness. Moreover, on the ground that the illness is a manifestation of his sin, he is sometimes advised to get rid of his sin by means of faith. If a person has been reckless and his illness is the result of recklessness, he will surely have a sense of sin. But, if his is a case of an unavoidable illness, like leprosy or a congenital deformity, is it not cruel to tell him that his disease is a manifestation of his sin? What is your opinion?

Religion cannot neglect illness since it is one of man's greatest evils and the cause of his suffering. The problem of illness needs careful consideration. The reason why the question is taken up here is that recently we have seen many new religions become prosperous because of faith-cures.

Now we must think seriously of illness. To answer the

question, first of all let me say that it is a mistake to think that religions should not be engaged in the treatment of illness. If a religion takes an attitude of indifference to illness merely as a reaction to those religions solely engaged in curing illness, such a religion goes to an extreme in the opposite direction.

When we consider the assertion that religion can cure illness we assume mainly an idealistic point of view. As I have said, we must realize that idealism is not Buddhism. The basic attitude of Buddhism is to adjust to existing conditions.

Illness can be regarded as the cause of sin or evil, or as a natural phenomenon. In view of the nature of the physical body, of course, it is a natural phenomenon. A natural phenomenon takes place of itself and is not punishment or something caused by a supernatural being such as God.

The oriental expression, "disorder of the four elements," is indeed very good. It means that illness is caused by the rupture of the harmony of the four elements: earth, water, fire, and air. Buddhism takes this condition into consideration. Therefore, I think that to ascribe everything to the mind is a big mistake which Buddhism does not approve. However, this does not mean that in adjusting to conditions the mind is not essential. One's mental attitude is naturally a necessary element in adjusting to conditions. The question is to what extent the mind affects illness. The truly Buddhist attitude is to carefully observe and analyse conditions as well as the mind. Buddhism is not a religion which becomes idealistic by an excessive emphasis on the mind.

Now I should like to treat the problem of longevity. Although there are very few exceptions, most of the great priests lived

long. The Buddha lived to be eighty years old despite bad surroundings. Shinran* died at ninety and Hōnen† at eighty. I think there is a secret in Buddhism which prolongs life. In the case of Buddhism, adjustment to external conditions is accompanied by an adjustment to inner conditions. Taking nutrition and perfect medical treatment cannot guarantee longevity, if a man has avarice, hatred, and ignorance. Thus, the great Buddhist priests can be regarded as giving us lessons concerning illness and a long life-span.

Q We should like to discuss now the relation of sickness and incantation. For example, in the case of illness and accidents great stress is placed on incantations by the Shingon^a and Nichiren‡ sects. What do you think of this?

To tell the truth, I do not know much about the incantations of Nichiren Buddhism. In Shingon prayers and incantations are often used. We can only say that there is no knowing the effects. I think that the various sects themselves, and society in general, misunderstand Shingon Buddhism. We should direct our attention to the fact that esoteric Buddhism places emphasis on the subconscious and that this suits the modern way of thinking. And, because of the emphasis placed on the subconscious, it can call up things in the subconscious by more primitive and simpler methods than the system of wisdom in Southern Buddhism.

Also Shingon adopts the method of moving what is in the deeper recesses of the subconscious by something thrillingly

a. 真言

* 親鸞 (1173~1262), the founder of Jōdo Shin Buddhism.

† 法然 (1133~1212), the founder of Jōdo Buddhism in Japan.

‡ 日蓮 (1222~1282), the founder of Nichiren Buddhism.

mysterious. This is the true aim of these sects. If we put the Shingon sect on the same level as other exoteric teachings we cannot grasp its real significance. For a long time I did not like Shingon. I thought it almost worthless. But as I looked at it closer I came to know that it aimed at moving the self lurking in the depth of the subconscious.

Here, I believe, lies the significance of incantations. In Nichiren and Shingon Buddhism incantations are used for curing diseases. My own interpretation is that this is a method to move what is lurking deep within oneself.

Q We have referred to illness and sin. Would you please elaborate on this matter a little more?

It says in the Bible that "the wages of sin is death." In this case it is not illness but death that is mentioned; but there is a similar idea that illness is an indication of the existence of sin. I do not think that Buddhism has a similar concept. I should rather say that Buddhism does not have a concept of sin, at least, not primitive Buddhism. What we find is not sin, but concern about the sufferings and limitations of human beings. This is the basic point of Buddhism. Disease is never considered as the price of sin, though in ancient society the price of sin was often thought to be disease and death.

Q Doesn't the assertion that Buddhism does not possess a concept of sin, especially the Christian idea of man's original sin, lead to the criticism by Christianity that Buddhism does not have much of a religious spirit?

At present, since Christian concepts have entered into the Japanese mode of thought, I consider such criticism to be ap-

appropriate. We find religions with little idea of sin, first in India and then in Greece. The equivalents of Christian sin are Greek vice and Indian suffering. It is a Christian way of thinking to say that the absence of the idea of sin means the absence of a religious nature. The idea of sin appears only when it is accompanied by the idea of the punishment of the sinner. Of course, we can find the idea of sin in primitive Buddhism; but in that case the precepts are indicated. Only the violation of such precepts is regarded as sin.

The punishment of sin is not compatible with the nature of Buddhism.

In later Buddhism, however, the idea of sin became rather strong. In Jōdo Buddhism stress is laid on the grave sins. But even in this case, in its nuances the idea is quite different from the Christian idea of sin. After all the idea that a religion with little concept of sin is shallow arises because that religion's value is not recognized by a different religious system.

Incurable Disease—Death

Q Here is a question concerning disease and death.

A man has been told by his doctor that he has an incurable disease. He is now weak and his doctor has given up hope of the patient's recovery. However, the patient desperately wants to be well again or to commit suicide if it is impossible to become well. If, however, he has to kill himself, he is still afraid of death. How should we take care of his sentiments in such a case?

One of our well-known scholars was recently diagnosed as having cancer. Practically, he was given a death sentence. The reaction at such a time depends upon the plan of life and

the religion of the man. This scholar said that when he was told that he had cancer, he was unable to console himself by the expectation of rebirth in paradise. He said that he relied on the belief that he had done his best. I told him with a smile that he had a Buddhist faith. Anyway, the question is whether a man is prepared for death or not. To make the decision at the very moment is too late; but I do not mean that it is absolutely too late, because one can start making preparations any time.

Immortality of Souls

Q Here is a question concerning death and immortality. The youths who ask questions usually refer to the problem of the immortality of the soul. They say that the Buddha denied the immortality of souls, that is, the idea that bodies decay but souls continue to live. However, at present, in Japanese Buddhist circles, memorial services are held as masses for the repose of ancestral souls. This is because the existence of souls is recognized. If not, the services lose their significance. Therefore, they ask, "Is not the attitude of the Buddha contradicted by these ceremonies for the ancestors? And if the Buddha denied the immortality of the soul, what does happen after death? Does it mean the end of everything? What is your opinion?"

Sakyamuni denied the existence of the soul (*reikon*²). This was because his theory was based upon dependent origination (*engō*³). In other words, everything changes according to conditions. This is the unique attitude of Buddhism. From this point of view, it is a contradiction to recognize the soul as the center of a self which is static and never changes. Sakyamuni denies this.

a. 靈魂 b. 緣起

Some may say that this will lead to the nihilistic idea that nothing remains after death; but this is not correct. I think it is very difficult to understand the original Buddhist standpoint based upon the denial of the continual existence of souls. The fundamental idea of Buddhism is the Middle Way. This is very difficult to understand, and it is because of this that later Buddhism came to adopt the ideas of karma, masses for the dead, and other ceremonies which were based upon the existence of souls. This trend was especially strong in China. Then later it was introduced into Japan and gave birth to doctrines based on the existence of the soul. This may have been historically inevitable. But, although Buddhism denies the soul, the religion may still be interpreted as a religion presupposing the existence of souls. However, the fundamental attitude of Buddhism is a denial of the fixed existence of souls. The original way of thinking of this religion is centered in the ideas of karma and *santana**, that is, succession. Herein lies the rationality of Buddhism.

Q To pray for the repose of the souls of ancestors is an adaptation to human desire. From the original point of view of Buddhism, masses for the ancestors contradict the teaching. Is that what you mean?

The masses for ancestors, that is, considering them as souls, is not in line with Buddhism. Our human sentiment is, however, to remember parents and other ancestors because we inherit their karma. In this case, we need not think of the existence of souls.

* Pali (*sōzoku* 相続 Jap.)

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Q It is often asked in regard to the religion of karma and self-consciousness whether the self follows the karma that continues its existence after man's death.

Sakyamuni told us that the ego does not exist and so the existence of the fixed self has to be denied although karma remains.

Q Then do you mean that karma is not of the self because the self disappears despite the existence of karma?

Herein lies a contradiction. But it is because you presuppose the existence of a fixed self. If you could have the dynamic idea that the self does not exist, you must feel joy toward the karma you leave behind. Even if the self is decomposed, you must feel delight.

Q Then I might say that if the self which feels the delight is gone, the remaining karma is nothing,

This assertion is made because of nostalgia for the conventional theory of souls. Some people try to make the utmost effort in this life instead of being desperate because of the expected extinction of their lives. In short, their idea is to do their best although nothing remains. To think that everything depends on the existence of souls is to be deceived. Buddhism gives the people the idea that they have to work hard in this life because they were fortunately born as men.

Q Buddhism does not accept the idea that after death nothing remains, nor that souls are immortal. The idea of karma transcends both these view points. Is this correct?

Yes. Anyway the will to do one's best in this life does not depend upon the existence of the soul. It depends on the existence of ideals, the sense of righteousness and aspirations.

Buddha and God—The Pure Land after Death

Q Here is a question concerning the world after death. In Buddhism the existence of the Buddha in the Pure Land after death is mentioned. For example, Kuon Shakamuni-butsu^a and Ryōzen Jōdo^b are mentioned in Nichiren Buddhism and Kuon Amida-butsu^c and Saihō Jōdo^d in Jōdo Shin Buddhism. Now the question is do such Buddhas exist as transcendental beings with a personality something like the God of Christianity, and does the Pure Land exist as a real world where we go after death?

In original Buddhism, there is no transcendental deity, such as there is in Christianity. Buddha means an enlightened man. Therefore, we ourselves can become buddhas. Buddhas who are other than ourselves and who have transcendental personality do not exist. What exists is ourselves who are to be buddhas.

In Buddhist preaching an illustration is always given with the ability of the person who is listening in mind. For example, an explanation is sometimes based on reason and sometimes on allegory, which is somewhat like mythology. The contradiction you have pointed out disappears when you understand the various kinds of explanations. Allegories and the theory of destiny are mythological interpretations. The difference is the difference in the ability of the seekers.

A buddha is an ideal man. Man tries to become a buddha. When we read the sutras, we come across many buddhas and tathāgatas.

Some sutras tell us that there are various kinds of buddhas,

a. 久遠釈迦牟尼仏 the eternal Sakyamuni Buddha. *b.* 靈山淨土 the Paradise of Vulture Peak, the Pure Land of Sakyamuni Buddha. *c.* 久遠阿彌陀仏 the eternal Buddha Amida. *d.* 西方淨土 the Paradise in the West, The Pure Land of Amida.

or even that the world is filled with numberless buddhas. This is quite natural for Buddhism. The ideal becomes materialized in various forms. The son of a greengrocer has the ideal of becoming a great greengrocer. A scholar has his own ideal. Scholars of different fields have their respective ideals in order to solve different problems. The ways in which ideals are conceptualized are numberless, and so a buddha takes numberless forms. Each type of humanity has its own ideal man and a buddha is nothing but an ideal man. Kenji Miyazawa's* poem "Not to be defeated by rain or wind . . ." describes his own ideal man. He concluded the poem by saying "I should like to be such a man." The man is his buddha.

Because the poet was a man of the modern age, he described his ideal very concretely. However, since there are many people who cannot understand an ideal as it is, it is necessary to explain it in mythological terms based on allegories. For this reason, many oft-changing things appear in Buddhism.

Q In Christianity, God is a personal being who exists as an absolute existence beyond man. From the Buddhist point of view, is preaching this idea called expediency (*h.benu*)?

Christianity never thinks of expediency. The starting point is quite different. As I have already said, we begin with the idea that man is an existence. Christianity starts with the idea that man was created. First there was God. God is not an expedient, but a fundamental being. If God is regarded as an expedient, this religion would become Buddhism. In that case

* 宮沢賢治 (1896~1933), a famous writer of juvenile stories who had faith in the Lotus Sūtra.

a. 方便

God is no more the God of Christianity. The God of Christianity must be the God of Abraham and Moses. The God of Christianity is that from which everything originates. The Buddha Amida has definite characteristics of an expedient being.

Also a bodhisattva* is the expression of an ideal. Herein lies the essence of Buddhism. However, the God of Christianity is quite different.

Q A very devout Christian said: "The fundamental sentiment of human beings is to seek for such a transcendental existence. This sentiment arises because of the existence of God." As for Buddhism, Nichiren Buddhism, for example, speaks of the attainment of Buddhahood in this life and identifies the Pure Land with this world; yet it preaches that men are reborn in the Pure Land where they meet the Buddha. This shows that man is attracted by the idea of an existence beyond him and this world. Believers of Pure Land Buddhism chant *Namu Amida-butsu**. Unconsciously imagining the Buddha Amida as a personal being transcending man, they try to go to him for help.

It is a basic problem of human psychology. Nichiren's ideas include many contradictions and foreign elements. It is a mistake to think of his ideas as perfectly organized. The fact that many of the new religions developed from Nichiren Buddhism shows that there still remain contradictions and foreign elements.

Non-killing and Capital Punishment

Q Next let us take up questions related to laws and government. One is concerning capital punishment. In Buddhism stress is laid on non-killing. What is the bearing of this on capital punishment?

* Skt. (*bosatsu* 菩薩 Jap.), one who seeks enlightenment (*bodhi*, Skt. *bodai* 菩提 Jap.) not only for himself but for others.

† 南無阿彌陀仏 Adoration to the Buddha Amida.

A MODERN JAPANESE BUDDHIST'S FAITH

That we should not kill living things appears to be quite self-evident, but in fact it involves many contradictions. For example, does one allow a mosquito to stay on one's body? It is also related to the eating of meat and killing in war.

I myself have felt the contradictions in this matter for a long time, but recently have arrived at a conclusion. My way of thinking is similar to Gandhi's interpretation of non-injury (*ahimsā*). In other words, it depends upon whether or not one has a cruel mind. One should not be cruel in war, in killing a mosquito, or in eating meat. I believe if one kills a mosquito with a cruel mind, the cruelty is not limited to the dead insect but is reflected within oneself. In this sense, one should attempt to abandon a cruel mind. When one faces an enemy, one has to fight, but even then one should do so without a cruel mind. Gandhi said such must be the spirit of *ahimsā* for the people of to-day. My solution is the same.

The problem of capital punishment can be solved in the same way. The members of the family of the victim of a murder should not think of the death sentence as given to the convict in revenge. That a man who by nature kills other people should remain in society as he is, is a problem which requires deep thought. Certain religions take definite attitudes toward capital punishment. In Buddhism, however, the general situation has to be taken into consideration and the matter must to be treated as a legal question.

One should not say thoughtlessly that Buddhism is absolutely against capital punishment. For example, in a society where murder occurs, if circumstances require, a legal system such as capital punishment may be necessary. At any rate, the problem

depends on the general and correct evaluation of present social conditions. The abolition of capital punishment should not be carelessly advocated.

Buddhism and the Emperor System

Q Now in regard to the emperor system, how is the emperor system to be interpreted from the Buddhist point of view? Generally speaking, Buddhism is said to regard the state as a matter of contract. From such a point of view, a king should be elected by the people. Isn't it a mistake to think of the Emperor as absolute? What do you think?

With respect to this point, I think Buddhism has some legendary elements. The system of government in which original Buddhism existed was that of a republic. On the other hand, such a kingdom as that of Magadha had also been established; but it was really a communal tribal states. Therefore, it is quite natural that we find the theory of state contract in Buddhism. However, we cannot draw a definite conclusion from the teachings of the Buddha concerning the attitude of Buddhism to the state.

In short, the Buddha thought that each individual was the highest existence. Therefore, in an emperor system, kingdom, or republic, the idea must be maintained that the value of each individual is highest. If, therefore, the emperor system is interpreted as one in which people have to die happily for the sake of the Emperor, the system has to be disapproved from the Buddha's point of view.

I am of the opinion that the present emperor system may remain as it is, but the idea of dying for the sake of the Emperor is not necessary. Man does many things through symbols.

Language is a symbol. The carving of images of the Buddha is also a symbol. When these are used for good purposes, they are good. The Emperor is a great symbol. If it is used well without sacrificing the value of the individual, we need not think of the abolition of the emperor system.

World Peace and Buddhism

Q Finally, there is a question concerning world peace and religion. It is related to the helplessness of religion. From time immemorial, religion has existed but war has not gone out of existence. On the contrary, the trends are in the opposite direction. How much of a contribution has religion made to world peace? Where can we see the effects of religion. Isn't it true that religion does not have the power to go into the inter-relations and conflicts of nations? What is your opinion?

If you think that peace will be realized on earth if Buddhism plays its role, you are too optimistic about human history and destiny.

Sakyamuni, who was the great preacher of Buddhism, was able to prevent the armies of the surrounding empires from attacking his own country three times, but finally he failed. The role of Buddhism is to calm and purify the human mind and to guide people to have aspirations for progress. It is unreasonable to demand that Buddhism, Christianity, or other religions eradicate war with one stroke. When we consider the role of Buddhism, Christianity, and other religions, we know that the problems of humanity are eternal. For example, Buddhism despises avarice, but this vice never disappears. Prejudice, although despised, never goes away. The annihilation of avarice, hatred, and ignorance has been advocated for 2,500 years since the day of the Buddha, but these vices still exist.

But it may be said that religions are playing their role if even to a very small extent they are directing people to the destruction of such vices. The improvement of man is the eternal duty of man. People think that the appearance of the Atom Bomb will mean the end of wars, but, nevertheless, hostilities flared up in Suez and Hungary. Now people say there is the possibility of atom bombs being used. Each age has had its counterpart of the Atom Bomb. We must see the function of religion to be in its power to lead human beings only little by little toward a better course.

Prayers in front of shrines and preaching at temples will not bring about peace at one stroke. Therefore, it is a mistake to regard religion as helpless. The work of religion consists in attempting to bring human beings back to the right road when they are heading in the wrong direction. Thus, religion saves man from destruction. Although regarded as powerless, religion effectively performs its role. In the Japanese way of thinking, the work of religion is *mu*² (nothing) but mighty like the tide of the sea.

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