

THOUGHTS OF YOUNG BUDDHISTS

— Four English Orations —

I

THE SIX BLIND MEN OF HINDUSTAN

Keiichi Inoue, Ryūkoku University

There were six men of Hindustan
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see an elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by touch of hand
Might satisfy his mind.

So begins the story of the six blind men who went to see what an elephant was like. I am certain that all of you know the story. What I would like to say today is that to me it is not simply a story describing what six blind men were content to believe after their very limited observations, but is a story which truly describes my personal everyday state of affairs. It is a story which tells me that I am like each of the six blind men.

Why do I say I am like each of the six blind men? When each of the blind men described the elephant, he did so only to the extent that his individual knowledge carried

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him. In other words, each described the elephant only to the limited extent that he knew it. For example, the man who touched the tail had no doubt that the elephant was like a rope; the one who felt the leg thought the elephant to be like a tree. Each described the elephant as he imagined it to be and each thought he was correct in his judgement. In this same way, though I may not always realize or admit it, I also make such judgements. For example, in judging another person I say that he is an honest, a fair, a bad, or some other kind of person, and when I have said such things I firmly believe I have given an account of him. Extending this to a concrete example, were I to look at one of you and formulate in my mind that you were such and such a kind of person, my thoughts about you might very well be completely wrong. You might not be the kind of person I thought you to be. You might be completely different. The same, I feel, may be said of everything I think about or see. Should I think of reality, of my parents, or of anything else, each of my thoughts could only extend to the limitations of my knowledge. My thought determines how deeply I can consider a matter and the consideration of a matter is limited by the depth of my thoughts.

May I summarize everything in a Buddhistic way? The fact that I always make incomplete judgements may be called erroneous discrimination. My discrimination is erroneous because it is always based on my attachment to self. Due to this selfish attachment, I cannot make accurate discriminations. I cannot know the whole elephant because

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I only have hold of its tail. As a teaching, however, if Buddhism stopped at this point, there would be no way to reach Buddhahood, the goal which each of us seeks. Therefore, Buddhism further teaches that if one wishes to gain Enlightenment, or if one wishes to know Universal Truth, one must realize the erroneousness of his discrimination. Only then will one be able to see the elephant in its entirety. This can be gained only by accepting the import of the teachings which the Buddha left.

I believe Saint Shinran has most aptly expressed this feeling in the *Tannisho*. It is written there, "On reflecting on the vow established by the five kalpa contemplation practices, I find that it is for me Shinran alone. Wonderous is the Original Vow in which the Buddha intends to save even the person bound by a number of karma."

II

LET'S WATCH OUR STEPS!

Kaien Kitazaki, Ryūkyoku University

I often hear it said that we modern people have surely a lot of worries. I can safely maintain that we Japanese are worrying about materialism, and, on the other hand, Western people, especially Americans, are now interested in spiritualism. We can understand the reason for it, if we look back through the history of both peoples.

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In the case of Japan, we Japanese dashed into the opening toward modern society and the development of capitalism with the Restoration of Meiji Era begins in 1868 after the long reign of an isolationist policy.

But as you know, until the end of World War II, there were lots of so called feudalistic features in Japan. After the war, Japanese capitalism was changed on the basis of dissolution of the big financial combines, reformation of the farm-land system, and the establishment of the right to labour.

Although we are, by and large, much better off now than during postwar days, we cannot deny that Western people are enjoying more material advantages than we are. Compared with the living conditions of Western countries, there is little difference from that of Japan, regarding clothes, furnitures or appliances in their outward appearances.

However, to my regret, I cannot but deplore that most of the Japanese people are contented with poor food everyday. Watching television, I sometimes view programs about the reformation of our dietary life. This kind of program represents the true aspects of our Japanese people, suffering from the burden of material unbalance.

How about Western countries? In the latter part of 18th century, in Europe, especially England, the Industrial Revolution broke out for the first time, and made up the type of capitalism as is now commonplace all over the world. Capitalism gave the Western people materialistic prosperity, and that, perhaps, people of every could equally enjoy this

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benefit. Thus they become tied down to the desire for material gain thinking it as a final purpose of life.

At present, it seems that they do not know the place where their materialistic development will end, making nuclear tests, developing their moon rockets or missiles, while they believe that they need a large amount of money.

Then for what reason is such wonderful materialistic civilization now giving them trouble? In order to understand this reason, it becomes important to know something of Christianity which cannot be separable from them. In Christianity, "Love Thine Enemy" is taught. Perhaps their troubles are caused by the conflicts of their ideology and actual conditions!

The present attitude between the Soviet Union and America shows that so far as we are human beings, we cannot absolutely "Love Thine Enemy." This reason, of course, must not only depend upon the circumstances of our time, but also upon our need for self-preservation.

In Buddhism, Buddha teaches us that we must cut the ties of worldly passion which is the sole cause of troubles. After the war American people have been trying to understand the Buddhist term, "Enlightenment," because of their need to search for something useful in solving their mental struggles. For good example, I know an American, Mr. X, who has been in Japan for almost sixteen years devoting himself to Zen Buddhism and Buddhist study. And to their surprise, they have found that any love must be started from the state of "Enlightenment." This is a great discovery for American people! But, how

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about the present situation of Japanese Buddhism which created the significant word, "enlightenment."

Restricted by old systems and fixed teachings, most of the Japanese priests seem to have forgotten the principle that Buddhism is practice itself.

It is known that Buddhism has various unique points in the field of its teachings, but Christianity should be more appreciated by us for their eager attitude toward practice. For this, we Japanese must wipe out the gap between Oriental and Western ways thinking, becoming more acquainted with all nations of the world, and also we have to grow into such cosmopolitans as to have pride and self-confidence in being Buddhists!

III

LET'S MAKE BUDDHISM MORE FAMILIAR TO US

Mutsuko Fukuda, Komazawa University

I recall one day when I was a girl, I was forced to sit before the Hotoquesama which is a Japanese household shrine, put my hands together and pray asking to make me a good girl and to make me get good grades in school work. This was my first experience with religion.

The father of the family who lived next door, arose at 6.30 every morning and started praying before the

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Hotokesama, murmuring something which I could hear clearly in my room. I asked my friend, who was the daughter of this man, "Do you know for what he is praying?" She replied, "I've been listening to him every morning, but we can't understand what he is saying," I wondered at once why the father did not explain to his daughter what he was praying about.

From these two experiences, I conceived the idea that Buddhism consists of sitting in front of the Hotokesama, putting the hands together and saying something which is difficult to understand.

I had the fortunate opportunity to meet a student from the United States and we became good friends. This young student from the United States once told me of an incident which happened to her while she was in America. Once she was invited to a church meeting at one of the churches. After having a nice time dining, talking and playing together, she was put in a car whose owner she didn't know. There were three children, two boys and a little girl who appeared to be about two years old. The stars and the moon, seen through the windows of the car, were beautiful in the dark sky. The little girl exclaimed unconsciously, "How beautiful!" Then the mother asked, "Who made those beautiful twinkling stars and the moon?" "Jeus made them," the little girl answered, This trivial conversaton seems to be heard in American daily life very frequently according to my friend, and it impressed me deeply since I was very much interested in this matter.

In America, religion is passed from generation to

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generation, from grandfather to grandchild, and parents who have strong beliefs in their religion are willing to tell the religious stories which they were taught by their own parents.

The youth of Japan, today, are not aware of Buddhism very much except the sons or daughters of monks or Buddhist priests. I quote this from the statistics of high schools. The reason is because they are not interested in it and furthermore it is not required in daily life in Japan. Good Buddhists and students who are learning about Buddhism diligently at school know the philosophy of it and try to understand difficult sutras more and more. They always seem to be frowning, worrying, worrying, and thinking deeply.

The philosophy of Buddhism is difficult. Buddha taught what he deemed was absolutely essential for one's purification and was characteristically silent on questions irrelevant to his noble mission. Incidentally, he forestalled many a modern scientist and philosopher. The moral and philosophical teachings of the Buddha are to be studied, to be practised, and above all to be realized by one's own intuitive wisdom.

Children should be encouraged by somebody to begin the study of Buddhism. There should be preparations which lead children to acquire and interest in Buddhism and which encourage its study and practice. Whose responsibility is it to do so? I believe it is the family's. I believe children should get some knowledge about Buddhism in their own family. I'm not saying that parents should teach their children about the doctrine of the Buddha and things

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which lead them to become Buddhists, but to encourage their interest in the stories and happenings which are told from ancient times in Japan and mythology in which many children are sure to be interested.

When they grow up and become old enough to think about this world, and their own insignificance, I'm sure they will become interested in Buddhism and will be anxious to learn more about Buddhism that they have been taught since childhood. There will be no person who can make them Buddhists but themselves.

Let's make Buddhism in Japan more familiar to us.

Don't you think there are many interesting stories in Buddhism?

IV

THE EMPTY BIRD CAGE

Akiko Ōtsuka, Ōtani University

I heard that birds have epics and lyrics, that is, words and songs by which they express their mind. And there is intercommunication between birds and men. We can understand what they feel and they can understand what we think.

It was not long before that I had two little birds. When I woke up in the morning, they used to sing a clear and lovely song. I would say to them, "Good morning. How are you?" and they would sing to me, Good morning. How are you?" When I was absorbed in thought, they

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looked at me apprehensively, with their little heads tilted to one side, as if they wanted to know why I was so troubled. When I came home from school, they welcomed me in a sweet, lovable voice. They were so lovely that they became my consolation and encouragent.

Last summer, however. I am sorry to say, they died, and I was empty in my mind as the cage was empty on my desk. As it could not be helped, I wrapped them up in a white handkerchief, and put them in the Kamo River to flow away with the memory of time. I missed them.

The empty cage has now become the source of remembrances for me. Whenever I look at it, I feel as if birds are singing and talking to me. My first thought when I enter my room is always to talk with little birds. When I am studying, it seems to me they still peck at my pencil and ask me to play with them. This may sound strange, but to me those birds are still living, though they are not found in that cage.

Now, friends, this experience has reminded me of the words of Buddha put in the Sutra of the Wonderful Law, telling us of the Buddha eternal and omnipresent, living beyond the world of life and death. The text roughly runs as follows:

“I will tell you my brothers. After my body is gone, if there are people who wish to see the Buddha, I will show myself here on the Mount of Vulture and speak with them. The Buddha shall never pass into Nirvana, but abides here forever. If there are people in the other world who cherish a desire to see the Buddha, I shall show

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myself there and teach the Supreme Law to them. The Buddha exists in every place, and is always watching the welfare of every being. Therefore, if you are suffering, you should always think of the Buddha, the Eternal One.”

In these words, the Buddha tells us that even after his death, that is, even though he comes to nothing, still he lives eternally, and shows himself according to people's desire to see him. And we feel that there is a world other than that in which we live, a world beyond life and death, which I should like to call “the world of meaning.”

Friends, in this present world, we have much suffering, which we must bear. Buddha taught us there are eight kinds of pain in this world, namely pain of birth, of old age, of disease, of death, of parting with loved ones, of meeting what one dislikes, of not obtaining what one seeks, and of the five powerful elements.

In short, this is the world where various kinds of suffering are triumphant. Therefore, it is necessary for us to turn our eyes towards the world of meaning where the Buddha abides forever. Otherwise, we shall not be able to free ourselves from the bonds of this suffering, and achieve true happiness,

Kanji Glossary

Fukuda, Mutsuko 福田睦子	Meiji 明治
Hotokesama 仏様	Ōtani, 大谷
Inoue, Keiichi 井上敬一	Ōtsuka, Akiko 大塚秋子
Kami 神	Ryūkoku 竜谷
Kamo 賀茂	Shinran 親鸞
Kitazaki Kaien 北崎契縁	Tannishō 歎異鈔
Komazawa 駒沢	Zen 禪