

BUDDHA AND MAN

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Each religion has something basic upon which its believers thoroughly rely. To them it is more than merely something; they say it is the absolute which alone can bring them spiritual peace in this life. There are, however, quite a number of religions in this world, each of which claims its own absolute. Thus there is a plurality of absolutes.

We have in Japan a saying that even the head of a sardine can be an object of faith. The head of a small fish is potentially an absolute to those who put their faith in it, although no others will admit its absoluteness. In this sense such an absolute is relative, and in the strict sense of the term a *relative absolute* is not an absolute at all.

The absolute we need must be universal. It must be beyond the limits of time and space. In view of our human nature it must be admitted that we are always biased in constructing ideas or isms with our intellects and in regarding them as absolutes. Such an ism can always be denied by others; it is never accepted as a universal truth. The absolute we need, therefore, cannot be found in anything *created* by the intellect. It must be sought in the *uncreated*.

There is, however, a different way of approach to and of dependence on the *real absolute*. A typical example may be found in comparing God and Buddha. God is the Creator and

man sees Him through the agency of Jesus Christ. (Apparently Jesus is not a man, that is, a created being.) In Christianity it is very inappropriate to say, "I am God," or, "I will become God." In Buddhism, however, quite the contrary to this, the absolute is seen in man, and anyone who has realized the absolute is called a buddha. Śākyamuni Gotama, a historical person, became the Buddha (i.e., "the Enlightened One") when he attained enlightenment. Even after his becoming the Buddha he still continued to be a human being. Buddhahood is not an existence outside of man. Those who become buddhas cannot be other than men; the buddhas are none other than we, ourselves. If this is so, then, how can we find buddhahood in ourselves who are full of illusions and sufferings?

The religious and philosophical quest for the reality of man has been pursued ever since the long history of Buddhism began. Of the many investigations, what interests me most is to be found in the discussion between a Buddhist *bhikkhu* (monk), Nāgasena, and a Greek king, Menander, who lived in the third century B.C. Being asked, "What am I?" Nāgasena replied by asking him, pointing to each part of the king's body, "Is your head you? your nose? your hand? your heart?" etc. The king's answer in each case was in the negative, and in the end he could not find anything in himself of which he could say, "This is I." In Hinduism, the soil in which Buddhism originated, they say that the reality of man is *ātman*, i.e., the soul. But the Lord Buddha founded his teaching on the negation of the *ātman*, i.e., *an-ātman* (*an-attā*). Buddhism says there is no substance or entity in man that is eternal and indestructible. Even when we say, "I," in the ordinary sense of

the term, the "I" is a mere name, a mere figment of the imagination without anything real to it.

Since we cannot find the reality of man in any substantial form, it must necessarily be sought in *the way of being* of man, which, in Buddhism, is explained by using the term, "law of causation." All things that exist (including man) are not created by an absolute being such as God. They are just the concurrence of "cause" and of "conditions" that enable the cause to become actualized. For example, a grain of rice is the seed, the cause, whereas the various factors which help it to grow, such as man's efforts, soil, water, the sun and many other things are collectively termed conditions. Furthermore, there is a fullness of time in the existence of all things. Master Dōgen, the founder of the Sōtō Zen denomination in Japan, says, "I come across a man, a man comes across a man, I come across myself. This cannot have happened without the fullness of time." Therefore there is nothing that is purely independent and exists by itself. All things exist interdependently.

Suppose I take hold of a finger. This is a very simple act that seems to be of little meaning. Some say that I do it because I will to do it. This is true. But my will alone is not sufficient to make me hold a finger. The finger must be in the condition that permits itself to be held. If my finger is frozen or hurt, it cannot be held. I too must be in the situation where no one disturbs me in doing so. Furthermore there must be some motive that makes my will hold my finger. Why do I have to hold my finger? Probably I wished to communicate something to somebody. Then why was he here and why was

there something to communicate? The reasons go on and on endlessly until it is futile to add any more. It is sufficient only to note in the fact of holding a finger that there are many underlying factors which have nothing to do with my will. The will is not the only factor; it is just one factor. We can say that all the universe participates in my holding a finger. It is not *my* act alone, but a fact that has universal meaning. This is of great significance. In fact, holding a finger was the answer of a Zen master when he was asked, "What is the Buddha?"

If I become a little more theoretical, I must ask what makes my will work. It is obvious that the *working of the will itself* is not caused by my will. The working of my will is innate to the nature of my life and is never under the control of my will. There is *life* prior to the functioning of the will.

Let us look at this from a little broader viewpoint. In our human existence there is not only the will, but many other elements, such as the intellect, desires, instincts, senses, etc., that are also functioning. That is why there is joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, happiness and unhappiness, etc. Judgement, ism, thought, philosophy, etc., also are created. So our *ordinary life* may be said to consist of the complex of all these things which are always working in the dichotomy of subject and object. It may be termed as the "life of discrimination" and in the life of discrimination there can be nothing absolute. The absolute is to be sought in what exists prior to, or supports the life of discrimination. And tentatively I want to call it the "fact of life." Since there is life, the will works, the intellect functions, we discriminate, we feel, we breathe, our hearts beat.

All these physiological phenomena are facts of life which have nothing to do with our will or intention. We do not breathe because we wish to breathe. Our hearts do not beat as the result of our intention. We do not feel hungry because of an intention to feel hungry. And our wills do not work because we so *will*. All these things function as the inevitable result of the concurrence of causes, conditions, and time. Since there is no discrimination nor interpretation, everything is here because it has to be here. This is *tathatā*, i.e., “such-ness,” “is-ness,” or “as-it-isness.” There is here no name, no value, and no meaning, for which our discrimination is responsible.

The relation between the fact of life and all physiological phenomena may be compared with that of the whole and the parts. Or, we may speak in this way: the former, that is, the whole, is an ocean and the latter are waves, that is, parts. Since there is an ocean, waves occur, both being of the same essence. Similarly, since there is life, the will, discrimination, the heart, etc., function, but these are not different things. The waves are all the time moving in action in the ocean, but the ocean as a whole is quiet and calm. In the same way our life as a whole is very perfect and quiet, whereas physiological phenomena are uninterruptedly working and together they constitute reality. If the stress is put on the latter, the reality of man is seen in the fact of “the vigorous working of discrimination.” Again, if the life as a whole is considered, it is expressed, as many Zen masters have done and still do, by drawing a circle in the air.

Now life is a fact; hence it cannot be grasped or defined through the intellect. It can somehow be described. Indeed,

attempts have frequently been made to describe it by using various interpretations each of which has a special connotation. One such explanation has used the terms "Real Self" or "Original Self," which are intended to show the real or original that underlies our ordinary self. But the Real Self should not be mistaken as something substantial. It is merely a designation for the *fact of life*. Zen sees the Self, i.e., the reality of "I," in the fact of life. Master Rinzai, who is regarded as the founder of the Rinzai denomination in China, spoke of reality in this way: "Over a mass of reddish flesh there sits a *true man* who has no title. He is all the time coming in and out from your sense organs, etc." (tr. by Dr. D. T. Suzuki).

It is again called the Non-self (small self; *mu-ga* in Japanese) because no room is left for self-consciousness or, to use a better expression, the *ordinary self* which is constructed by our discrimination. We must be careful, however, to note that the Non-self is just a name for the way of being of man. It is not a word that shows the purpose of our practice by insisting on killing the self or self-consciousness. The self is, as we have seen already, the fact of life and can never be annihilated.

"No-mind" (*mu-shin*) is an expression that implies that reality has nothing to do with the working of the mind in the division of subject and object. It is also called the "Uncreated" (*mu-i*), meaning that human existence itself is something which is not created by someone nor conceived through the intellect. The Uncreated is in contrast to the "Created" (*u-i*) which implies our ordinary life. Now again, if the emphasis is laid on the way of being of reality, i.e., the fact of life, it is called the "Real Way of Being." There is also another famous desig-

nation which puts the stress on its way of being. It is *Śūnyatā*, i.e., relativity.

The reality of all existence is also expressed by the word, "Buddha Nature." Since the way of being as *tathatā* is common to things as well as to man, it is said that "mountains, rivers, grasses, trees (i.e., all things including man) possess the Buddha Nature." But the word *possess* is rather misleading, because the Buddha Nature is not something fixed but is the fact of existence; it is never *possessed* by anything. The implication is that all things in existence *are* manifestations of the Buddha Nature. It is, however, too hasty if we say that a thing, for instance, a tree, *is* a buddha. Actually Buddhism went even so far as to say that mountains, rivers, grasses, trees are buddhas, but the phrase means that we, men, see a buddha in all things. It is not that a tree is objectively a buddha, but that a man who has realised *tathatā*, i.e., who is a *buddha*, *sees a buddha* in a tree. The buddha is only seen by a buddha.

The same must be understood in regard to man *becoming a buddha*. It is often said that we are originally buddhas, and that illusions are *satori*; but we remain, after all, ordinary men unless we realize the truth. Illusions are never at once equal to *satori*. Only a buddha sees illusions as real, as *tathatā*. In this connection the following admonition of Master Dōgen is significant. He once taught some monks as follows: "Śākyamuni said that when the morning star appeared he had become the Buddha *along with all beings on the earth*. Now, what does this mean? If you really realize (the truth) Śākyamuni may be ashamed of (having uttered such words). Why (did all beings become buddhas with him and why

must he be ashamed)? Now say quickly, say quickly.” (*Eihei-kōroku*, vol. 1., *A Collection of Dōgen’s Teachings*.) Whether or not Śākyamuni really uttered the words does not matter here. It is traditionally believed he did and Dōgen made use of the story as a means of expounding his teaching. However, it is contrary to our ordinary way of thinking to say that, when Śākyamuni reached enlightenment, *all men at once became buddhas*. In spite of his *satori* we are still suffering and far from buddhahood. But we must know, as roughly touched upon before, that all words of Zen masters are spoken *from the buddha’s standpoint*, not *from the standpoint of our ordinary life*. What is implied here is that on his *satori* he saw that all things and men have been buddhas since the beginningless past, although he had not noticed it. Here the word “see” never means seeing anything like an image of the Buddha, nor does it mean intellectual understanding. It is a realization that comes from within his whole existence.

The contents of this realization, however, are quite beyond the reach of words. Words come through the intellect, and the intellect always conceptualizes facts. Therefore when the Buddha says that all are buddhas, it is but a concept constructed by his intellect. It is like “a rice-cake drawn on paper.” A concept is naturally something. It has its own value in our life. However, so far as *satori* is concerned, the most essential thing is *the fact of becoming a buddha*, which has nothing to do with its conceptualization. One may describe *satori* in the form of a concept, but it is useless from the viewpoint of Zen. Dōgen is very strict in this and criticizes Śākyamuni for the futility of speaking of all beings becoming buddhas. He said that it

would have been better if Śākyamuni had remained silent and that he must be ashamed of it.

We really feel that the more we try to speak of *satori*, the farther we are away from the reality. It is certainly possible to construct a philosophy of Zen, but the philosophy is utterly dead in the sense that it is not a fact, that is, it is not Zen itself. Transmission of reality, i.e., the Dharma, is never possible through any intellectual means. Therefore we have the expression : "Special transmission outside the doctrinal teachings ; no dependance on letters and words." None, however, are more talkative than Zen masters. How is it, then, that they accumulated a vast quantity of writings on reality and on *satori* which is by nature beyond any expression ?

All Zen masters are teachers of life and are not supposed to be philosophers. When they once reach the stage of realization, their compassion towards man overflows in the form of preachings or writings in which attempts are made to induce monks to attain realization. Consequently they always stand on the Buddha's side and endeavour to show, through either their acts or words or both, what reality is like. Their words do not necessarily conform to the ordinary way of thinking. It cannot be helped that we are unable to apply our logic to the reality of things. Therefore the criticism of Zen as illogical is itself illogical because it applies logic to what falls under a heterogeneous category. When Joshu replied to a priest that a dog had the Buddha Nature, he wanted to show, as we have seen, that the existence of a dog was, if seen from the Buddha's side, a manifestation of the Buddha Nature. But he also answered another priest by saying that a dog has no Buddha

Nature. This was because, knowing the priest's disposition, he tried to destroy his ignorance in taking the Buddha Nature as something substantial. If we say this was illogical, because these two answers uttered by the same person were contradictory, it indicates a confusion of the Buddha's standpoint from which Zen masters see things and that of our ordinary life. We have to sharply separate these two.

The *kōan* is similar. It was invented as a way to induce monks to get *satori* by taking materials from the acts and words of various Zen masters. As is well known, the Sōtō school does not give as much weight to the *kōan* as the Rinzai school does. There are, however, *kōan* in Sōtō. The *Shōbō-ganzō*, the main work of Master Dōgen, itself is regarded as a great *kōan*, and one of its 95 volumes is in fact named *Genjō-kōan*. Putting this volume at the very beginning of his works, Dōgen tried to make clear the basis of Zen. Now, *kōan* is customarily translated as *problem*. But the *problem* is not as proper in Sōtō as in Rinzai. In the latter *kōan* is given to a student as a *problem* which he struggles with and, in a sense, tries to *solve* although the solution never involves intellectual understanding. It must be noted, however, that reality, i.e., the fact of existence of things and man as *tathatā*, is never an object of *solution* of any kind. The word *kōan* was originally taken from Chinese secular terminology, *kō-fu-an-toku* (its Chinese pronunciation is *kung-fu-an-tu*), which meant a sort of government notice. It is an authorized "paragon," "model," or "pattern" which was shown by the government and was to be followed by the people. It was in no sense a *problem*. It had to wait till the Sung dynasty when the *kōan* was adopted

as a *problem* by means of which *satori* was to be attained. The meaning of *kōan* in Sōtō, however, is rather nearer to its original sense. It means something authoritative, or, to state it better, absolute, reality itself. For instance, the *Genjō-kōan* referred to above means that “the fact of existence, here and now, of all existence (*genjō*) itself is reality (*kōan*).”

As long as reality is thought of as the fact of existence, it cannot be an object of thinking or seeking. We are always inclined to create thought or seek something to get some result. That we cannot help thinking or seeking is inevitable; it is the fact of life. But they are not in themselves the whole fact of life. How then is it possible to grasp (see, look into, realize, etc., whatever our provisional selection of words might be) reality as a whole from only a part of it? What remains for us here is “becoming the fact of our existence,” which in fact is the central problem of Zen study.

This brings us to Zazen, or better, “Only-Zazen” (*Shikantaza*). Zazen is usually translated as meditation, or more literally, sitting in meditation. But this is very misleading. When we say meditation, there is one who meditates and something to be meditated upon. Hence it is an activity in the realm of relativity. In fact the word Zen (its Chinese pronunciation is *ch’an*) was taken from the Indian word *jhāna*, a vulgarized form of the Sanskrit, *dhyāna*, which precisely meant meditation. The Indians meditate on the supreme god or the holy letter *om*, which gradually leads them to unity with the absolute. The more he practices, the deeper he goes into the state of trance, and in its extremity his mind becomes *aware* of something in the nature of a mystical union (*unio mystica*).

He cries out in joy, "I saw god," "This is That," etc. Zen is not the direct descendant of Indian mysticism. As Dr. Suzuki rightly pointed out, Zen had its origin in China. Although the sitting posture for Zazen is similar to that of the Yoga practice of Hinduism, the meaning implied is quite different.

While doing Zazen, we do not meditate on anything nor create thoughts. All physiological phenomena work normally. Sounds come to the ears, but they are gone at once. We smell, see, feel a breeze, etc., but these sensations do not remain long. Even the thinking mind works — a sort of germs of thoughts are all the time appearing like bubbles in a kettle. But they are left as they are without being formed into ideas. Here is no past nor future. The individual is here each moment just as he is. He is living in the present. Zazen is the act that makes him *return to his Real Self*. Therefore from the standpoint of the Buddha (Sōtō Zen always stands on this), when one does Zazen he is at once a buddha. Conversely speaking, Zazen is the act in which *a buddha sits as a buddha*, which is in opposition to the viewpoint that *an ordinary man becomes a buddha* by means of Zazen. The essential difference between Rinzai and Sōtō may be found right in this attitude. The former starts from the side of an ordinary man and urges him *to become a buddha*, whereas Sōtō all the time sticks to the Buddha's standpoint that *a man is originally a buddha*. Therefore Zazen is nothing but the buddha's act. It is everything and there is nothing to seek for any more. This is the reason for the expression "Only Zazen." In this connection it will not be out of place to quote the words of Dōgen, "Dedicating one's whole body and mind, and putting absolute Faith in the buddha, one

should practise Zazen, the buddha's act. Then, without any effort or intention, he at once *is* a buddha who is free from the bondage of Birth-and-Death."

It is now obvious that Zazen for the beginner and for the advanced is the same. In each case the participant is performing the buddha's act as a buddha. Yet there is a difference between these two. Seeing our human nature, how is it possible without any mental resistance to put faith in "Only Zazen"? If Zazen is a *mean* to get some kind of awareness or intuitive insight, it is very understandable for us. We may hopefully endure the difficulty of practising Zazen with some purpose in mind and, once grasped, we may cry, "At last I have it." But "Only Zazen" means Zazen without any purpose — purpose here meaning satisfaction of any kind. During and after Zazen no awareness comes. If it comes, then such Zazen gets down to our ordinary activities; it is not the act of the buddha. Right here we find the difference between the beginner and the advanced devotee of Zen; the former engages in Zazen with many doubts and with desires to get something; the latter practises Zazen smoothly, as one who is "familiar with" or "at home in" the experience.

This difference is important because it involves the creativity of Zen in our daily life. Notwithstanding his strong advocacy of purposeless Zazen, Master Dōgen, whose study of Buddhism started with the question of "why we should do Zazen in spite of our original enlightenment," finally declared that "this vitally important problem had been solved." This was, as a matter of fact, the declaration of his realization. But we should be careful that it never means the *awareness of grasping some-*

thing, but the *realization of the absoluteness of "Only Zazen."* Temporarily I distinguished *realization* from *awareness* for the sake of discussion. There is never an *awareness of satori* in Zen but the time for *the realization* comes after a long course of study.

I now have used the word study, but some explanation had better be added. As is well known, Buddhism (and Zen) is primarily a teaching on how to live. Therefore the study of Zen is not on the same level as that of studying techniques or science, or drawing, for example. One may be enthusiastic and spend all his time in studying drawing; yet, however hard he may study from morning till night, his study has nothing to do with all the other aspects of his life, such as washing his face, eating, walking, etc. Contrary to this the purport of *Zen study* lies in how to lead his whole life, including washing, eating, walking, and drawing, as *tathatā*, i.e., the *buddha-life*. In other words, *Zen study* means how to turn our whole ordinary life to the buddha-life. So when we say that "the realization comes after a long course of study," it means not only doing Zazen but leading our whole life by becoming our Real Self.

Our ordinary life, however, is being led under the constant influence of discriminations and the working of discrimination itself is the Buddha Nature. Then how can we live accepting its working as it is and yet getting rid of its influences? Zen study, i.e., Zen life is quite far from the ordinary life, although the place in which both lives are lived is one and the same.

In this connection the necessity of the Right Master and the Right Faith must be insisted upon. The Right Master is the

one to whom the Dharma is handed down by his master and who lives the buddha-life. The disciple who strongly aspires to religious truth, completely rely upon his Zen master. The disciple must follow the master's teaching and conduct. Various questions can be put to him and his answers may be logically convincing, but they may also sometimes be illogical. Yet, under the influence of the master's guidance in words as well as conduct, the disciple becomes gradually accustomed to the buddha-life. Putting Right Faith in his master and in the *absoluteness of "Only Zazen,"* even though his doubts are not entirely gone, he studies life. In this way his way of thinking and his conduct gradually become ripened. Finally he comes to realize the true meaning of "Only Zazen" and goes to his master for verification. If the master recognizes his realization, which may be shown by words or acts or both, as right, he approves of the disciple. Now the true Dharma has been transmitted. He now does Zazen with ease in his realization, and his conduct, i.e., his life as a whole is the buddha-life. Whatever he does, everything is in accord with the Buddha's Dharma, even though he is not intending to do so. He has now become *familiarized with Zazen* and feels "*at home*" in the buddha-life. Thus, from the viewpoint of our ordinary life, we may say that he has become a buddha, but he may say, from the buddha's standpoint, that not only he but all existences *are originally buddhas*. Nay, to say such words is superfluous. In living his daily life, he is just leading the life of *satori* with Zazen in its center, without knowing that it is *satori*.