

The Resurrection of my Buddhist Belief

The present age is a most unfortunate time for religious faith. Intellectual discipline you go through in various fields of knowledge is apt to give rise to a skeptical turn in your mentality which undermines a life of faith. The current cynical thought as manifested by such proverbial expression that “religion is opium,” or “a religious life is nothing but a state of intoxication,” creates conditions adverse to a life of faith. It is being exposed to disruptive forces from outside as well as from within.

A smattering of knowledge in geography you acquire at school is rather calculated to arouse doubts than to bring conviction. Many a sutra preaches that a world exists a trillion Do's (land areas) distant to the west, which is called *Sukhāvati*, the Land of Bliss. But no matter how far you may travel to the west, you are unable to reach the world which is called as the Land of Bliss in the Sutras. You only come round back to where you set out on your way, since the earth is a globe.

Suppose you make your way out in search for *Jōdo* (the Pure Land) in the west, towards the direction of a corner of the heavens, you are bound to end your travel in the same way. Even if you persuade yourself that this is the west pointing towards the direction where the sun sets at night fall, on the following morning you will end in realization that it is only on the same line with the direction which you call east by reason of the sun rising in that direction.

Whatever knowledge you may have of physiology will tell you that a man's mind can be identified with his brain cortex. When a man dies and is cremated, he is burnt to ashes, and in case of being interred, he returns to dust in time. If the mind is bound to be reduced to ashes or to dust with the brain cortex, it is impossible that the mind be admitted into the Land of Bliss or fallen into Hell in the after world.

The existence of either Hell or the Land of Highest Joy will

mean nothing to you any more and you could hardly bring yourself to devote your time to repeating the sacred name of Amida Buddha so that you may attain rebirth in *Sukhāvati*, the Land of Bliss. You will end in concluding that immortality of the soul, or Hell and Paradise are outdated notions grounded on an ancient legend, handed down from far back days previous to the development of modern science.

A rudimentary knowledge of psychology and psychiatry may induce you to put down a sight of the Pure Land and the Buddha, which one sees with one's mind's eye opened, as nothing but a psychiatric symptom. I shall cite an instance as evidence. In an insane asylum you sometimes witness a scene a mental patient makes, when extremely frightened by some unknown object. He shrieks out that a devil is coming upon him, while no such being appears in sight to the other sane people around him. If the devil was really there, he ought to have been seen by those who were near the patient.

In the light of such a case as I have now described, some may be led to wonder that a number of venerable holy men were psychopathic patients in a sense. Because they have said that they have witnessed the Pure Land and Nyorai with their mind's eye opened, when no others could.

And others may go so far as to suspect that a clear vision which the great teachers like Zendō Daishi and Hōnen Shōnin saw of various kinds of propitious omens by their mastery of the secret of Samadhi might have been in truth a phenomenon symptomatic of mental disease, a lunatic daydream or a state of hallucination, caused by their excessive absorption in the Nembutsu practice. I have been applying myself to the Nembutsu practice to the best of my limited ability since I was first tonsured at the age of eleven.

The religious faith I embraced then was of a futurist nature. For I shared the belief that one was able to attain rebirth in *Sukhāvati*, the Land of Bliss, after one's death by virtue of single-minded devotion to the repetition of the sacred name of Amida Buddha.

That mental attitude continued until I was eighteen, when quite unexpectedly a sudden change occurred in my mind, I could no longer devote myself to the Nembutsu practice, forsaking my faith of the Buddha, which I could not restore until eleven years later.

It all happened when I first read a book entitled *Seishin Keibi* (an attempt to penetrate into the gloom which surrounds the mind) written by Dr. Shūzō Kure, when he was a junior student in Tokyo University School of Medicine. The author, in describing the inter-relationship between the mind and the brain, identifies the soul with the brain cortex, and asserts positively that the soul is in no way imperishable, because it is part of the flesh.

He brings to light the fact that destruction of a fixed quantity of a certain section of the brain deprives him of his sense of colour and at the same time of all his memories and knowledge of colour and form acquired in the past. Thus citing instances from a number of experimentally ascertained facts as evidence, he argues that the immortality of the soul, and the transmigration of souls in the six realms of existence, *Rokudō rinne*, is an absolute impossibility viewed in the light of mental physics.

The impact of the author's cogent argument on me was so great that it undermined my Buddhist belief. I was driven to a conclusion that, even if Hell and Paradise exist in the after world as the Buddhism of today preaches, we would have nothing to do with the immortality of soul, since it is simply a product of imagination after all.

In the meantime, however, I was beginning to think better. For all that psychologists and physiologists had to say against the Buddhist faith, the Buddha is the Holy One of the highest virtue. Many thousands of his followers would prostrate themselves before him in worship three thousands years ago, and today a population of five hundred million embrace the faith of the Buddha all over the world.

Even accepting the facts corroborated by psychological as well as physiological evidence, I gradually formed a conviction that there

could possibly be no falsehood in the teachings of the most virtuous One, which all the Sutras faithfully convey to us. On the strength of my belief thus nursed I was able to recover my spirits with which to apply myself to repetition of the sacred name, and follow the path of faith without deviating from it, until I was admitted to the Jōdo Central Academy.

At that seminary, which is the present Taishō College, I attended a course taught by Dr. Anezaki, who in his lecture used to air his views on the Buddhist canon. He demonstrated that none of the Mahayanist scriptures, let alone the three Jōdo sutras, faithfully conveys the original teachings of the Buddha. Though shocked a great deal at first, I was deeply impressed with the soundness of his well-grounded argument, worthy of a distinguished philosopher that he was.

On learning through my professor's own lips that the Buddhist canon had little to do with the original teachings of the Buddha, and that above all the three Sutras of the Pure Land are nothing more than an imaginative creation by some later hands, which may rather be regarded as a Buddhist novel, I relapsed into a state of despair which drove me very near to giving up my last hope for redemption. Unable to fix my mind any more on devote service, I never breathed a word of the invocation of the holy name of Amida Buddha since then.

Indeed, as we recites the Sutras of the Pure Land, which count among the most important in the canon, we come across to descriptions which give occasion to doubt as to their authenticity. For instance it is stated in a scripture known as "the Sutra of the Buddha's teachings" —*Ko-on-sei-ō-da-ra-ni-kyō*— that Amida Buddha has their parents and children dwelling in the Pure Land. But according to another Sutra called *Mu-ryō-ju-kyō* (the Sutra of Boundless Life), no women are found in the Pure Land, for the reason that all females, simultaneous with their attainment of rebirth in the Pure Land, are reborn as males and enter the Land, priority being given them over the males who have accumulated

merits that qualify them for the attainment of rebirth in the *Jōdo*.

And again, *Kan-on-ju-ki-kyō* (Sutra of the Buddha's Discourses on Kan-non Bodhisattva) gives an account of the Bodhisattva, who attained Buddhahood in succession to Amida Buddha, when the latter entered Nirvana after enjoying rare longevity. On the other hand, in the *A-mi-da-kyō* it is stated that this particular Buddha is named Amida Buddha, because he is a Buddha of boundless life.

As for the number of the vows taken by the Buddha and the bodhisattvas in their previous life to save all sentient beings, it varies from twenty-four upwards to thirty-six and even to forty-six and forty-eight, according to the different sutras in which it is referred to. The text of the verse of vows also differs so widely not only in contents but also in wording with the sutras which carry it, that it is hard to accept them as the authentic records of the original vows which the Buddha took.

All the authoritative results of scholarly research into the Buddhist canon failed to bring to light the ultimate truth of the sutras, and ended only in alienating the religious minded from their faith in Buddhism. It was then that I began to ask myself what above all inspired the faith in the Nembutsu in Hōnen Shōnin eight hundred years before us.

If indeed he reached a conviction by following the authority of the Sutras, the soundness of the Reverend's mind is doubtful, I thought. I was impudent enough to conclude that Shōnin was possibly a double- or triple- faced character, or even a case of split personality. No longer able to trust the three Sutras of the Pure Land, I gradually estranged myself from religious life until I lapsed into total unbelief. With nothing left to rely on in life, I felt as forlorn and helpless as any one might do who lost his long-standing faith. But pulling myself together, I tried to think twice.

Logical reasoning might be right in putting down the Sutras as mere works of fiction, but at all events, so long as I stayed in that state of mind, I would never be able to relieve myself from the disquietude which grew upon me. So I concluded that way. And at

last I came to realize that the attainment of infinite life, permanent peace and perfect spirituality should be the ultimate goal for a human being to achieve.

I was determined afresh to seek for myself what is everlasting within me, counting on no one else for help. I became possessed by the thought to such a degree that I made up my mind to confine myself in a secluded inner room of a temple in Kanagawa, where I live now, to give my time exclusively to solution of the question which meant so much to me. Giving no more thought to preparation for the approaching examinations than necessary to get passing grades, I was absorbed in thinking over a possible means by which to locate what is imperishable within myself, in close reference to the ascertained facts.

Every day from eight in the morning till late at night I spent my time in turning the matter over in my mind even at the cost of my nightly rest, lying on my back and staring at the ceiling until I began to feel a pain in my head. Indeed as I wiped my head with a towel in the bath, locks of hair fell out sticking to the towel.

One day exactly eleven years later, as I did some writing in my study, it occurred to me all of a sudden that it was where I ran my pen with a strong stroke, just where my pen grated on the paper, that my mind, the unchangeable and imperishable self existed ; I came to realize that where the sun shines, my mind existed. On being awakened to this truth, I became aware that I had been so far possessed by the idea of looking for the abstract concept 'which the word "mind" conveys' instead of seeking a real existence called mind.

On an occasion, riding in a street car, I looked casually outside, as the carriage turned around at a street corner of Sudachō. Just at that moment I realized the entire sight unfolding itself before my eyes was a world of the mind. I still remember the joy I experienced to know that I was now able to perceive the rows of houses, the streets crowded with pedestrians, to be a world within my mind. I shall never forget all that happened on that day.

I was convinced that this was the absolute reality that Buddhism preached, and came to know for certain that I was right, after reading the seventy-third book of *Yu-ga-ron* (The Discourse on Meditation). Some time later, reading through the description of the absolute reality in the scripture, I was deeply impressed by the conciseness and accuracy of expression with which the true nature of the absolute reality was explained. The absolute reality that I was fortunate enough to get a glance at.

And I bowed with three kneelings and nine prostrations offering prayers of gratitude towards a corner in the heavens *Tusita Heaven* where I imagined Mi-roku Bodhisattva, the author of the Sutra, abided. In this way I was confirmed in my belief that Amida Buddha is the real self incarnate, which represents the absolute self of unending life.

And after that, I became more thoroughly awakened to the truths about Nyorai, under the guidance of Master Kaizen Miyamoto, my elder fellow-disciple and Ben-nei the Sacred.