

Is “Buddhism in her Crises” to be Man’s Basic Problem?

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The first of the three themes on which papers were to be read in a special meeting prepared by the members of the JAIBS in Aichigakuin University, where the 27th Congress of the Association was held last June celebrating its quarter-centennial and the centennial of the university, was “Buddhism in her crises.” The reason for their choosing it was that in the history of Buddhism in Asia this religion has suffered several deadly blows: at times by contemporary political powers, at others by Christianity, Islam, or Communism.

Since the way of thinking exhibited by this manner of choice seemed to me to involve serious problems for man, I decided to take it up for investigation in my paper. My view met with both disagreement and agreement: disagreement stated explicitly and agreement, I believe, expressed by silence.

I appreciate those members in charge who had chosen the theme because they had provided the participants in the meeting with an opportunity to think about problems involved in it. My point was that, although the theme might mean something of value within Buddhist orders, from the viewpoint of history or the total life of man it must remain only a particular problem far from being basic to man. Buddhism, in my understanding, ought to concern the basic way of being of man or history and to radically criticize it. Otherwise it will persist in one or another particular way of being in history, busying itself either with safeguarding special fields named Buddhist orders or with expanding its influences.

What on earth will it be that enables radical criticism of history and man? When a particular historical form insists on its own universality, that cannot but be an absolutization of the particularity. In this sense, that which radically criticizes history and man ought to be free not only from particularity but

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even from universality as well. If we want to think of Buddhism in terms of such radical criticism of history and man, we ought to consider it first of all not in the light of the crises of her orders but of the ultimate crisis of man and history.

In this connection, the age-long Buddhist view of taking refuge in the three treasures (ratna-traya, triratna), i. e. buddha, dharma, and saṃgha, seems to pose a problem to me. Ever since the time when Buddhist orders or the saṃgha came into being, it seems to have been customary for a novice to announce that he will take shelter in the triratna and that some sūtras and śāstras begin with the same announcement. In Japan Prince Shōtoku's constitutional order (A. D. 604) is best known:

"Be sincerely respectful of the triratna."

Notwithstanding, there are a few exceptions among Buddhist scriptures which examine the relative weight of each treasure. One of these is the *Śrīmāla-devi-siṃha-nāda sūtra*, an ancient commentary upon which is attributed to the Japanese Buddhist Prince (A. D. 574-621).

In the *Śrīmāla sūtra* the buddha-ratna is taken to be the dharma in Awakening, that is, the dharma-kāya or True Self, the ultimate refuge (śaraṇa-vara. samyak-śaraṇa, Tsukinowa text p. 112). Compared with this, the other two ratna, the dharma and the saṃgha, are regarded as secondary, non-essential, subordinate ones (aṅga-śaraṇa).

The sutra's interpretation of the dharma as aṅga-śaraṇa derives from its definition of the same term "the One-Vehicle Way proclaimed in words" (ekayāna-mārga-uddiṣṭa). This is also seen in its distinction of the two ways of proclamation of the content of the Buddha's fourfold truth (ārya-satya-artha): the way that there is proclaiming (deśanā-kriyā) of the truth and that there is no proclaiming (adeśanā-kriyā) of it. The former will mean that the fourfold ārya-satya as proclaimed in this manner has its limitations. The sutra states: (ibid. 126)

"It is impossible, upon another's exhortation, to know all the sufferings, to cut off the cause of all the sufferings, to realize the extinction of all the sufferings, and to actualize all the practices which lead to that extinction."

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On the contrary, the fourfold ārya-satya, when proclaimed in the latter way, has no limitation, because (ibid.)

“It is possible for oneself (ātmanas) to examine all the sufferings that are exposed to him, to cut off the cause of all the sufferings, to realize the extinction of all the sufferings, and to actualize the practices which lead to that extinction.”

The dharma which is proclaimed in the manner that there is no proclaiming of it is no different from the buddha, the dharma in Awakening. In a gāthā dedicated to the Buddha, Śrīmālā sings,

“I bow to you, the dharma beyond thought.”

(namaste acintyadharmāya. ibid. 10)

“He who comprehends the true dharma is the true dharma.”

(saddharmaḥ saddharma-parigrāhakaḥ. ibid. 48)

Thus, the dharma-ratna as verbal teaching and the saṃgha-ratna of the three vehicles, i. e. śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas, are subordinate refuges which ultimately should return to the buddha-dharma. They are treated there as non-ultimate refuges.

Should the saṃgha and the dharma as verbal teaching be presented by the saṃgha as ultimate refuges, the dharma will turn into “Law,” and the buddha “Lord” or “Law-maker.” This will bring about a heteronomous view completely different from the originally Buddhist one which is radically autonomous, where the dharma is the buddha, that is, Awakening as one’s True Self. When the saṃgha, with the buddha and the dharma turned into something particular, that is, an idol and a principle, presents itself to the world as one of the objects of worship, it will not so much become what produces activities to revolutionize history as reconcile with and blindly follow the established power-structures, and forsake the suffering of history itself.

I hope Buddhist orders will not have a tendency to utilize the view of “the dharma in decay in the latter-day world” so as to rationalize their own existences. The *Mappō-tōmyō-ki* (“The Record of the Dharma-Lamp in Decay”), quoted by Shinran (1173–1262) in his *Kyōgyōshinshō* VI, states,

“In the end of the world when the dharma decays, nominal monks become the respected teachers of the world.”

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This means that nominal monks will be looked upon as the true treasure of the world which has no means to come in contact with the buddha and the dharma. This way of thinking may reveal not so much the despair of the latter-day world as haughtiness and insolence on the side of the saṃgha which gives up realizing even the first of the fourfold ārya-satya, that is, to examine the deep-rooted suffering of history.

Now, coming across the theme "Buddhism in her crises," I cannot help wondering if Buddhism makes more of the crises of her orders than of man's crisis, and feel that this is her crisis. I think the crises of Buddhism become worthy of consideration only when they stand for man's crises. What we need to do, in this connection, is to re-examine the way of thinking which regards the saṃgha as a treasure-shelter. I do not mean to negate the existence of the saṃgha itself. Rather, I see the saṃgha come into being in the very attempt of history to have its own foundations shaken, and to be awakened to its own dharma-nature. History, resting on itself, tends on one hand to seek ease and comfort in its secularized way of being, absolutizing itself in arrogance, and on the other to humiliate itself into slavery under some divine power.

The saṃgha, therefore, in my understanding, arises from the agony of history that tries to transcend itself. In this sense, I believe that every saṃgha, no matter what form it may actually assume, has some basic question it asks of itself that reveals the present and future direction in which history should proceed. The basic problem that matters with us all in this regard is how to confront the root-source of history and be awakened to its dharma-nature in the midst of it. In asking this kind of question of ourselves, we must think about what structure the saṃgha should have as its original form.

It is in the structure of abhidharma that I would like to see the original form of saṃgha, for a dharma displays its activity in confronting another dharma. According to Vasubandhu,

"Etymology: dharma is so called because of keeping its own characteristics. Therefore, the dharma that confronts either the ultimate dharma, i. e. nirvāṇa, or the dharma that has some form, is the confronting dharma (abhidharma)."

"The confronting dharma is either the undefiled or the defiled body and mind."

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(*Abhidharmakośa* I)

Yaśomitra comments upon this: (*Sphuṭārtha*)

“By confronting is meant that a dharma confronts another dharma for the sake of recovering (*pratīlambhāya*), refusing (*pratiṣedhāya*), getting awakened to (*avabodhāya*), or awakening (*pratibodhāya*).”

The concrete situation of abhidharma is considered to actualize itself day after day; let me cite a *mondō* which took place in 1316 between Master Shūhō Myōchō (1282–1318) and Emperor Hanazono (r. 1308–18, d. 1348) as a typically original case of this confrontation. (Tsuji Zennosuke: *Nihon-Bukkyō-shi* III, p. 259)

Shūhō asked, “Billions of kalpas apart, yet not a moment separated; confronted the whole day, yet not a second met. As to this principle, everyone has it. What does this principle ever mean? Humbly I ask your favor to let me hear your view upon this.”

Emperor Hanazono: “In the third watch last night the outdoor pillar had already told it to you the revered master.”

Of such a concrete daily abhidharma-situation, it will be in making the confronted dharma alone the object of one’s concern that there take place the so-called abhidharma or scholastic views as of the *theravāda-sarvāstivādins*. It is only where and when the confronting dharma or the true subject of abhidharma is questioned, that no mere intellectual but an existential concern works. Here the question, “Who confronts the dharma” is the most basic question that brings the *saṃgha* into being.