

IS THERE MORE THAN ONE BUDDHISM ?

IN REPLY TO THE REV. DR. ELLINWOOD.

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I HAVE READ with interest the controversy between the Rt. Rev. Shaku Soyen, Dr. Barrows, and Dr. F. F. Ellinwood in *The Open Court* of January. It is evident that Dr. Ellinwood is a student of Buddhist translated literature, judging by the quotations he has freely made in defence of the position adopted by Dr. Barrows with reference to the theory that Nirvâna is annihilation.

Dr. Ellinwood speaks of Buddhism as "a system which is one thing in Ceylon, quite another in Tibet, and still another in China and Japan." Just so, Christianity is one thing in Russia, quite another in Rome, and still another in Germany, England and America, where the Presbyterian and Universalist live side by side.

I grant that Buddhism has undergone phases of transformation. Many changes in the outward superstructure have been made according to the conditions of the countries where the Good Law was preached, yet amidst all these vicissitudes the doctrines of Buddha remained unchanged.

Here lies the wonderful vitality of the doctrine that he preached twenty-four centuries ago. Nepal is the only country where a Hinduised form of Buddhism exists, which, however, from the earliest times has been regarded as heterodox and heretical. But the Buddhism of Tibet, China, Japan, and of the countries of the Indo-Chinese Peninsula preaches fundamentally the same doctrine. By Indian Buddhist Bhikshus, says Samuel Beal, "a new literature was produced—a literature essentially Indian—and therefore Aryan. . . . The Buddhists of India brought about all this, and much more than this, for what occurred in China happened also throughout the regions beyond, and in due course Corea, Japan on

that side, and Mongolia and Tibet on the other, were converted and made obedient to *the same faith.*"¹

What, then, is Buddhism? What is it that all Buddhists, if they are genuine Buddhists, hold in common?

Every Buddhist knows the four noble truths; every Buddhist knows that they have been proclaimed by the Tathâgata, and they are the foundation of his religion.

The first noble truth states that there is misery, implying the need of a religion of salvation. The second noble truth states that we must blame ourselves for our own misery, not any other man nor any demon or god: the cause of misery is desire, lust, ignorance, and hatred. The third noble truth points out that the removal of the cause of misery will lead to the removal of misery itself; and finally the fourth noble truth, pointing out the way of purity, is the logical outcome and practical application of the other three noble truths. This fourth noble truth is the essence of all Buddhism. It proclaims that not by asceticism, not by methods of the Brahmanical yoga (hypnotical trances), not by looking out for our happiness, but solely by walking on the noble eighth-fold path of righteousness can Nirvâna be obtained.

There is no genuine Buddhist who does not accept the four noble truths, and every one who does accept them is a Buddhist, whatever else he may be in addition, a philosopher, a scholar, a Christian, a Mohammedan, a Theosophist, a believer in superstitions, or what not, and any one who walks on the noble path of righteousness, leading a pure life, will in time rid himself of his impurities and errors as a silversmith, little by little, blows off the dross from the silver. (See Dhammapada, verse 239.)

Buddhism, or the Dharma, is thus defined in the *Chullavagga* (x, 5): "Of whatsoever doctrines thou shalt be conscious, Gotami, that they conduce to passion and not to peace, to pride and not to veneration, to wishing for much and not to wishing for little, to love of society and not to seclusion, to sloth and not to the exercise of zeal, to being hard to satisfy and not to content, verily mayest thou then, Gotami, bear in mind that that is not Dhamma, that that is not Vinaya, that that is not the teaching of the Master. But of whatsoever doctrines thou shalt be conscious, Gotami, that they conduce to peace and not to passion, to veneration and not to pride, to wishing for little and not to wishing for much, to seclusion and not to love of society, to the exercise of zeal and not to sloth, to content and not to querulousness, verily mayest thou then

¹Beal's *Buddhist Literature in China*.

bear in mind that that is the Dhamma, and that is Vinaya, and that the teaching of the Master." (Translation by Rhys Davids.)

Another definition of Buddhism as formulated by the great Arhat Moggaliputta Tissa, chief of the third great Asoka convocation, runs thus: "It is a Dhamma which follows all Dhammas, and yet all Dhammas descend into or follow that Dhamma."

From the earliest times of the history of Buddhism it has never been correctly understood by hostile critics. The Brahmans called it *Nāstika*, the nihilistic, because Buddhism rejects their speculations concerning the *âtma* and ignores the authority of the Vedas; the Jains called Buddha *Mâyāvadi*, the holder of the doctrine of non-reality.

Buddhism is not a creed, for it discards all belief that must be taken for granted. It is called the *Vibhajja vāda*—the religion of observation and analysis. Truth is the touchstone of Buddha's religion. All dogmatic theorising is abandoned as a "jungle, a wilderness, a puppet show, a writhing, and a fetter," and is "coupled with misery, ruin, despair, and agony, and does not tend to aversion, absence of passion, cessation, quiescence, knowledge, supreme wisdom, and Nirvâna."

The worldly-minded, in their passions, are not in a condition to realise Nirvâna. Only the perfectly unselfish, those freed from all error and dogmatism, can attain the sinless state. None else, neither god nor man, can know the condition of the emancipated Holy Ones who have reached Nirvâna. Descriptions and explanations are of no avail; it is a state to be experienced. But one thing is sure, Nirvâna is the highest bliss attainable, and we Buddhists are confident that there is no better way to Nirvâna than the noble eightfold path taught by our Master, the Buddha.