



Buddha's Psalms of Enlightenment: Philosophy of a New World View

S Yamabe, Stephen Ashley

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BUDDHA'S PSALMS OF ENLIGHTENMENT. Philosophy of a New World View. Translated from the Japanese. The truth is that Buddhism, like Christianity, in every country where it has sowed its seed and reaped its harvest, developed along the lines indicated by the mind of that people. The Buddhism of Japan differs from that of Tibet as profoundly as the Christianity of Abyssinia from that of Scotland—yet both have conserved the essential principle. Buddhism was not a dead abstraction, but a living faith, and it therefore grew and changed with the growth of the mind of man, enlarging its perception of truth. As in the other great faiths, the ascent of the Mount of Vision reveals worlds undreamed, and proclaims what may seem to be new truths, but are only new aspects of the Eternal. Japanese Buddhists still base their belief on the utterances of the Buddhas, but they have enlarged their conception of the truths so taught, and they hold that the new flower and fruit spring from the roots that were planted in dim ages before the Gautama Buddha taught in India, and have since rushed hundred-armed to the sun. Such is the religious history of mankind, and Buddhism obeys its sequence. The development of Mahayana Buddhism from the teaching of the Gautama Buddha has been often compared with that of the Christian faith from the Jewish, but it may be better compared with the growth of a sacerdotal system from the simplicities of the Gospel of St. Mark. That the development should have been on the same lines in all essential matters of symbol and (in the most important respects) of doctrine, modified only by Eastern habits of thought and environment, is a miracle of coincidence which cannot be paralleled in the world unless it be granted that Christianity filtering along the great trade routes of an earlier world joined hands with Buddhism in many unsuspected ways and places. Evidence is accumulating that this is so, and in a measure at present almost incredible. And if it be so—if it be true that in spite of racial distinctions, differences of thought and circumstance, the religious thought of East and West has so many and so great meeting-points, the hope of the world in things spiritual may lie in the recognition of that fact and in a future union now shadowed forth only in symbol and in a great hope. This, however, is no essay on Buddhism, either earlier or later, and what I have said is necessary to the introduction of these Jodo-Wasan, or Psalms of the Pure Land, which are a part not only of the literature, but also of the daily worship and spiritual life of Japan. Their history may be briefly told. Buddhism passed into Japan from China and Korea about 1320 years ago, in or about the year A.D. 552. It adapted itself with perfect comprehension to the ideals of the Japanese people, inculcating among them the teachings of morality common to the great faiths with, in addition, the spiritual unction, the passion of love and sympathy, self-devotion, and compassion, in which Buddhism and Christianity are alike pre-eminent. The negative side of Buddhism, with its passionless calm and self-renunciation, is the only one that has been realised in the West, and the teachings of Mahayana which have borne fruit and flower, visible to all the world, of happiness, courtesy, kindness in the spiritual attitude of a whole people, have never received the honour which was their due.

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