

Reverend Master Jiyu-Kennett

It is with great pleasure that we offer here a second selection from Roar of the Tigress, the first book of Reverend Master Jiyu-Kennett's oral teachings which has been published recently by Shasta Abbey Press. Taken from a body of more than a thousand of her lecture tapes, the book represents a three-year effort on the part of monastic and lay followers alike.

Zen Is a Religion.

I am sure you've noticed by now that I've been talking about Zen as a religion, and yet some of you may have heard that all of Buddhism, and especially Zen, is atheistic. It is not. You've heard this due to the fact that the Christian missionaries who brought back the Scriptures from the Far East either did not know of, or deliberately steered clear of, one particular Scripture spoken by the Buddha. In the *Udana Scripture* He says very clearly, "O monks, there is an Unborn, Undying, Unchanging, Uncreated."¹ This is what He found in meditation and which gave Him His enlightenment. In other words, He found That Which Is. What the Christians call "God" and Mohammedans call "Allah", the Buddhists call variably: That Which Is, the Lord of the House, the Cosmic Buddha, the Eternal, Amida Buddha, the Immaculacy of Emptiness, Vairocana Buddha, the Unborn, etc.²

The terms we use for It don't really matter: they're just labels, just concepts. Don't waste time thinking about what God is like. Whatever you imagine that It is, I assure you, is not what you'll—how can I say this?—I was going to say, "is not what you'll know", when you get self out of the way. That's not strictly true; what it comes down to is this: we always place upon ourselves our own personal concept of God or the Eternal—something that is much better than us. But we usually stop short at Something that just is *there*, and is such perfect love It can tolerate everybody in the world. I don't know if you ever saw that really great old comedy, "The Night They Raided Minsky's". There was

a lovely line in there where the old Jewish vaudevillian is speaking to the dour Amish father of one of his girls, and they both decide to pray together because, as one of them points out, “Only a God that could tolerate me could possibly tolerate you,” (laughter) Now you have to keep this in mind. How can you imagine Something that doesn’t just love, It *is* unquestioning Love? It makes the rain of compassion to fall on the evil and the good. What is evil; what is good? They are concepts in our minds. It is all right for us to have these concepts as long as we don’t try to put them on the Eternal. You cannot be judgmental: the most important thing for a Buddhist is not to judge other people. In other words, love God, do your own training; love the Cosmic Buddha, do your own training; love Allah, do your own training. Don’t worry about other people.

And do not suffer from the notion that Zen training will make you anything other than a human being. Accepting our own humanity is one of the hardest tests of all-acceptance. There is a great difference, you know, between thinking you *are* God and knowing that what is in you is *of* God. “I am not God, and there is nothing in me that is not of God,” is the way in which one has to think about it. The reason for Zen practice is to find the Eternal. On finding the Eternal, we call it “enlightenment”. To know the Eternal (and you really do know It once you have had this experience) is to know how infinitesimal you are in the scheme of things: to know that you are “no-thing”: even a grain of sand is miles too big. When you forsake self in this way, then you *are* the universe, and, if you’ve done it right, you might behave like it. In *The Light of Asia*³ by Sir Edwin Arnold are the words, “Forsaking self, the Universe grows ‘I’.” What a lot of people do not know, by the way, is that in Hong Kong there is a huge temple with probably the most famous secondary school in all of the Chinese area. That temple is dedicated to Sir Edwin Arnold, and his portrait is the Buddha upon the altar. When he went back to England and wished to publish *The Light of Asia*, they would only do it on the condition that he would pay lip service to Christian doctrine first, because

there was this funny little bit in the law in England that since the King or Queen is the Head of the Church of England, if you don't believe in that, then automatically you have committed treason. It is one of the rather more peculiar little bits of British law that isn't talked about much nowadays; in those days it was. And so the copy of the book has this introduction wherein he implies that he doesn't really believe in Buddhism. But he was actually a Buddhist; he is regarded as a Buddha in the Far East. His temple is magnificent, and he was a pioneer in girls' education, and it is still the finest school in English-speaking areas in the Far East. So, "forsaking self, the universe grows 'I'." Do you get the difference between that and the notion that "I" become "God"?

Perhaps it will help if I explain a bit about another foundation of our religion: all things change, the doctrine of anicca in Buddhism. Everything changes. There is a famous story of Winston Churchill who, although he had an excellent wit and got half of his response right, didn't make it fully so. A lady came up to him, when he appeared at a meeting somewhat tipsy, and said, "Sir, you are drunk; you are very drunk; you are very, very drunk." And he replied to her, "Madam, you are ugly; you are very ugly; you are very, very ugly. And I shall be sober in the morning." (laughter) He understood change, but he hadn't seen that, however ugly she was, there was the spark of the Eternal in her, the Buddha Nature, and that is the important point. It sounds funny; it is funny; but he should have been able to see the next bit on. If you would really study religion and understand the meaning of perfect faith, that's how you've got to look at people. He may be, or she may be, what you would call a "louse" right now, and tomorrow there could be an incredible change, there could be a total conversion. There could be a finding of the Eternal. Are you still going to carry around the fact that, once, he or she was a louse?

Not only do you look at other people with the awareness of continual change, you look at everything in this light. Everything is always changing; nothing stays the same. At first this is rather

scary, because if you think deeply about it, it means that there is no constant, separate thing you can call “me”: there is only an ever-changing flow of space-time-being. But soon it becomes enjoyable because it means that you are not alone in the universe, and that is a great relief. Do not think that anything whatsoever is separate from the Eternal: do not think, for example, that there was a time when the Eternal was Kanzeon (the Bodhisattva of Compassion) and another time when It was Buddha; indeed, there is a time when the Eternal is Kanzeon and a time when It is Buddha, but there was never a time or place when the Eternal was not present as the whole of the Eternal. If you think of Kanzeon as separate, of the Buddha as separate, of the mountain as separate, of the river as separate, and of yourself as separate—if you think in that way, you cannot understand the Eternal. If you know that you are the whole of the Eternal, and that Kanzeon and the Buddha are the whole of the Eternal, and that the whole of the past is present now, and the whole of the future is present now, that there is no other time than (and there will never be any other time than) now, in the real sense of the term, then you understand the eternal now, you understand the Eternal. Otherwise, you become a separate being in a body that is not the Buddha’s body, in a body that is not Kanzeon’s body, and the Eternal becomes a separate Being that is not your body. So you can see how the Eternal is thought of as flowing; It is the eternal flow; It is not static, nor can we truly say It is changing. The whole world must be seen as the Eternal, and not only must it be seen, it must be known to be the Eternal; the Eternal must be able to be felt, seen, smelt, tasted, touched in everyone and in everything. It is not a thing of yesterday; It is not a thing of today; It is not a thing of tomorrow. The Eternal is the eternal flowing, the non-static eternal, the “universe growing ‘I’”.

So this is what the Buddha found, and He explained It by what in religion is called the *via negativa*: He explained It by what It is not. It isn’t born, because It has always been there; It doesn’t change, because It is Eternal; It is not created; there is nothing

greater than It. The Buddha goes on in this Scripture to say if this were not so, then there would be no hope whatsoever for humankind. Now, it's just as good to say, to explain, what you know to be true by saying what you know the thing isn't, as it is to say what you know to be true by saying what you believe that it is. You can know what it is not; you believe what it is.

This approach is rather similar to the one taken by what I believe is known as Moravian Christianity. In Moravian Christianity, there is no God and no Christ until you know them; there is merely a Christian way to follow. Now, that is pure Buddhism: there is no Cosmic Buddha until you know the Cosmic Buddha, the Lord of the House. Because so few people take the trouble to get to know Him/Her/It, Buddhism has often become an atheistic or a non-God religion: just a way of life. But in the East they look at you: "Oh, you haven't met the Lord Buddha yet? Good heavens, you're an undutiful being! You're merely following the Buddhist way?!?" They look down on you, you know, almost withdrawing the hem of their garment from you, because you have not got to know That Which Is. Buddhism in its real setting is an incredibly uh ... "theistic" is dangerous, because the word "God" is wrong ... uh, "Supreme Being"-oriented religion, let's put it that way. And once you know the Lord of the House, then you can speak of It. So, Buddhism has a Supreme Being. Except that It's not a Supreme Being in the normal sense: It is That Which... *Is*. It's not a big daddy God who spanks you when you do something wrong. And "Being" isn't quite the right word either.

Now, since about the 1500s there has been an attempt on the part of the Shin, or Pure Land, School of Buddhists to say, "Let's not do it by the way of meditation because so few people ever bother to get any further than the 'way of life' attitude of mind." They decided to start a school of Buddhism called "Shin", which means the True Heart of Buddhism, which placed faith in and worshipped the Amida Buddha, the Amida Buddha being the equivalent of God or the Cosmic Buddha. Now, this has always

confused and confounded Christians and others who say, “Half the Buddhists are worshipping and half aren’t; what on earth is going on?” It was merely that one bunch said, “It’s useless to try and go on with people not really trying to get to know the Lord of the House, because Buddhism has just turned into a way of life, so why don’t we start saying that It really does exist and letting them worship It from that point of view?” And the other bunch said, “This is completely wrong, because they will enter into belief and worship rather than recognizing they have to find the Lord of the House within themselves.” And these two factions have warred for about four hundred years, and in 1924 in China the two of them came together and, since then, all the Buddhists in China became one big school: the Zenists openly admitting, “Yes, we place faith in the Amida Buddha” and the Shinists openly saying, “All right, we go by meditation.” Now, since I was ordained and did some of my training in Chinese Buddhism, you see the background from which I come to this.

This brings us to the importance of understanding the difference between perfect faith and absolute belief. In these little booklets we have for you there is an article on perfect faith which I want you to read over carefully because it is one of the best ways I ever put it, and I don’t want to detract from that.⁴ Perfect faith is a very different thing from absolute belief. Absolute belief insists that it’s right, and sometimes burns people at the stake and does other things to prove it, as we know from the Middle Ages. Perfect faith, because it is perfect, does not have to insist upon itself. Real truth does not have to insist upon itself; real trust does not have to insist upon itself: there is an incredibly beautiful interplay. It’s like a kaleidoscope: the faith is always there, the trust is always there, the certainty is always there, but you don’t have to beat each other up or damage other people to make them believe as you do. In order to have the courage to leap beyond the opposites, to let go of everything we have, want, and know, perfect faith is necessary in Buddhism—perfect faith in the fact that there is an Unborn,

Unchanging, Undying, Un-created: That which I call the Eternal, and what un--fortunately has been very badly translated in the main scripture of Zen Buddhism, *The Scripture of Great Wisdom*, as “emptiness”.

It is not Nietzsche’s kind of emptiness. In recent years, we have seen the translation and publication of many of the original works of those who took Buddhism to China, and these are making it very clear that the “emptiness” they are talking about is something that is so full it cannot be described. In that sense it’s very like the Jewish concept of God: That which you can’t put a hand on, you can’t feel, you can’t grasp. It’s beyond everything; It is Unborn, Undying, Uncreated, Unchanging. You know It’s there, but when somebody says, “Show It to me”, you can’t show It to them. Again, I am afraid it’s our Christian missionary friends who decided to first have It translated as “emptiness”, which turned Buddhism for many, many people into something that was very little more than a way of life, instead of a very, very great religion based on perfect faith, and you need to know this.

The fact that there is an Unborn and there is a role for faith in Zen upsets many Westerners, because they think that it means that they are required to have the same blind belief which they feel was required of them in their own religion. I can remember a British professor in Japan getting madder and madder by the minute because he felt that Zen training was deliberately putting him into a double bind so as to get him beyond the opposites, which he believed to be impossible. And I recall Koho Zenji looking at him and saying, “My good man, don’t you realize that there is Something that is beyond the opposites?” “Oh no, I’m not going to believe in a God!” “You are not required to” was the answer, “but there is a third position.” You are not required to believe in an “entity”, but there is That which is unborn, unchanging, undying. And in that Place one can take genuine rest and, there, one can get beyond the opposites. People try to flee from God, they try to escape from the “golden body of the

Buddha”, but it is only because we do not know what the golden body of the Buddha really is, only because our minds have been raped by theories, that we are afraid of It. When we know what It is not, we can then be free of concepts of what It is, and we do not have to escape. And, even when we are trying to escape, we are still in the flow of the Eternal.

I can remember being infuriated about the same thing when I was first in Japan, in Sojiji. I had gone over like every other Briton I'd ever met, “Oh how wonderful, I will be completely free; I will be supreme, you know; and there's no God that's going to be over me, nothing of this sort!” And the first thing I was told was, “Well, of course, Shin Buddhism and Zen Buddhism are exactly the same; they're the two opposite ends of a tunnel.” The point is, which is the “right” end of a tunnel? If you go all the way through, then does it matter which is the entrance and which is the exit? And I remember almost jumping up and down like a baboon with fury at that one, because, I mean, I'd gone fifteen thousand miles to avoid that sort of “Supreme Being idiocy”! And then I had a kensho⁵ and I saw they were right, and between joy and annoyance at having been proved wrong, I spent a very interesting week. (laughter) I was really annoyed at having been proved wrong, and that is one of the reasons you hear about people who have had kensho laughing and crying and getting furious and throwing things, because yes, there they were, sitting in the Buddha's hand all along and He was grinning at them. You can call it “God's hand” if you like. It doesn't matter what you call it, but in the end it's rather enjoyable just to be there.

Unfortunately, our concepts and beliefs have taught us that we, and time and existence, are somehow apart from the Truth, and thus we think that the golden body of the Buddha is not our body. And so we spend our lives trying to free ourselves from this very fact of being the golden body of the Buddha. We try to run away from the Eternal because we think of It as the golden body of the Buddha, with which we have nothing whatsoever to do and from

which we must get free. But that is wrong: if you know of the Place of the Eternal—which is beyond all opposites of right and wrong, past and present, etc.—if you know of That, then there is no need whatsoever to try to escape. One of the tragedies of so many Zen books is that they talk about getting beyond the opposites, but they do not explain that this is the Place of the Eternal, the “third position” beyond the two opposites.

Now, if you would study Soto Zen, or for that matter any form of Buddhism, you need three things. You need perfect faith in That Which Is, the Eternal. You need to know, to have the faith in and the willingness to go hunting for, that which will tell you about the Eternal. And you need to know that when you can't get the answers, there are people whom you can trust to help you. In other words, when you yell, “Help! I'm stuck”, there are people who are willing and able to help. These three things are what we in Buddhism call the Three Refuges: “I take refuge in the Buddha; I take refuge in the Dharma; I take refuge in the Sangha.” These three things are absolutely essential: perfect faith, the willingness to study, and to trust someone who says, “Well, let's talk; maybe I can help; maybe we can help each other; maybe I have a bunch of experience which I am willing to put at your disposal and see if it's any use.” Those are the three things you'll need if you are to study Soto Zen or any other form of Buddhism.

All the rest are beliefs which you have to prove true for yourself. The Buddha said very clearly, “Do not believe anything because I tell you. Only believe it when you have made it true for yourself.”⁶ Therefore, enlightenment is the making true for oneself of the reality of the existence, and the experience of the existence, of the Unborn. Again, remember that the word “enlightenment” has got muddled as a result of not understanding the importance of the Udana Scripture. When that scripture was first translated, incidentally, a number of people tried to pull it down saying, “Oh, it couldn't possibly be that the Buddha had found the Eternal!” You read a bit more, and if you do, you discover that this is the only

interpretation that makes sense in Buddhism. He definitely did, and it makes it into a real religion and not just a way of life.

Faith, study, and trust: if you think of the word “refuge”, what does it actually mean? To take refuge in something that you can neither see nor grasp nor feel, you have to have faith in it. When you start, perhaps you believe it, but you have to go on beyond belief: belief does not go nearly far enough. So often in religion people get stuck with belief. They think that is enough: it’s not. It has to go on to the certainty of faith, which is an absolute certainty but one which leads not to absolute belief and the hard-fisted type of certainty; it leads to perfect faith, which can allow everybody else to have their beliefs and not interfere with them, and know that when those people find perfect faith, whatever they happen to call the Eternal will be all right.

Notes

1. Translated by F. L. Woodward, “Udana: Verses of Uplift” from the *Minor Anthologies* of the Pali Canon, Part II, Chapt. VII, sec. iii (London: Oxford University Press, 1935) pp. 97 & 98.
2. At various times in her career, Rev. Master Jiyu used many of these terms to describe the ultimate aspect of our religion. For a discussion of her apparent identification of these terms here with the concepts of God and eternalism, please read on, and also refer to the Introduction.
3. Sir Edwin Arnold, *The Light of Asia*, (Los Angeles, California: The Theosophy Company, 1977).
4. See Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett, M.O.B.C., “Perfect Faith” *An Introduction to the Tradition of Serene Reflection Meditation*, 5th ed. revised (Mt. Shasta, California: Shasta Abbey Press, 1997), pp. 37---40.
5. Kensho (Japanese): to see into one’s own true nature. The experience of touching enlightenment; satori.
6. See F. L. Woodward, trans., *The Book of the Gradual Sayings* (Anguttara-

Nikaya). Vol. I, (London: Pali Text Society, 1979), pp. 171 ff.