

The Hachioji Seminars, 1976

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President Torao Obi visited the Hachioji Seminars this year to talk about the spirit of Buddhism, the leading principle of our university. The following are extracts from conversations with some of the students after his speech.

Uchida : Did you understand Mr Obi's lecture?

Student A : No, it was too difficult to follow, as the subject matter was so abstract. I got sleepy, too, because the delivery was rather monotonous.

Uchida : Do you suggest that the speech might have kept your attention more and been more comprehensible if it had been enlivened and dramatized with verbal illustrations?

Student A : Yes, that's what I mean. I'd have liked to hear illustrations from Mr Obi's personal experiences.

Uchida : Thank you. By the way, are you a Buddhist?

Student A : No, I'm not. I don't believe in that sort of thing.

Uchida : Well, is there any Buddhist here?

Student B : Yes, I believe in Zen.

Uchida : In his lecture Mr Obi talked mostly about Shinran of the Pure Land sect. As you know, Shinran preached complete reliance on the mercy of Amitabha. I think the Pure Land school is the Buddhistic version of Christianity, for sinners are saved after death and admitted into the Pure Land through faith in Amitabha. As a believer in Zen, what do you think about this idea of salvation taught by the Pure Land school?

Student B : The Pure Land school, Nichiren, Zen, and the other sects of Japanese Buddhism are Mahayana. They all preach the same truth. A famous song of meditation by Hakuin, the founder of modern Japanese

Zen, begins :

All sentient beings are Buddhas in disguise.

It is like ice and water :

Without water there can be no ice,

Where are the Buddhas but in all living things?

Uchida : Then, you interpret this poem to mean that all human beings are potential Buddhas even though they are not conscious of their Buddhahood. But Shinran says :

Though I seek my refuge in the true faith of the Pure Land,

Yet hath not mine heart been truly sincere,

Deceit and untruth are in my flesh,

And in my soul is no clear shining.

and again :

I, whose mind filled with cunning and deceit as the poison of
reptiles,

Am impotent to practice righteous deeds.

If I sought not refuge in the gift of our Father,

I should die the death of the shameless.

Student B : I interpret that the 'I' in Shinran's verses here represents the false 'I' which will be annihilated by the light of Amitabha. When the worshipper achieves the state of Amitabha, the light shines in him and he is at once in the Pure Land, just as in zen we realize Buddhahood through Satori. So they are not contradictory. They both point to the final truth. The Pure Land is a metaphysical dimension : it's right here and now, in us and among us. Jesus meant the same thing when he said, 'The Kingdom of God is at hand'. We're far from the truth if we think we will be admitted to the Pure Land only after death.

Uchiba : In the Diamond Sutra, it says :

The material universe has no reality.

What we see, touch, and hear does not exist;

Even our bodies and minds have no reality.

They are all vain and valueless...

Are you sure this philosophy of all-is-vain does not contradict your faith in the perfection and the ultimate reality of Buddhahood?

Student B : No, it doesn't. The material world and the phenomenal world have no reality, as the Diamond Sutra says. They don't exist; they only seem to exist. Reality is what really exists. In Buddhism it is Buddhahood, the Real-I which is eternal, omniscient, and omnipotent. It is the I-AM of the Old Testament.

Student C : While I respect your views, I'm sorry to say that I'm not really all that interested in Buddhism. I'd like to tell you, though, that I was very much impressed by Mr Obi's speech. I think I may have missed a few points, but I found him a very positive and magnetic personality.

Uchida : Yes, he is certainly a man of influential character and at the same time we mustn't forget he is a famous scholar of Buddhism. It was very interesting to talk to you all. Thank you very much.