

10-2-'62 (late)

Dear Sensei,

Mr. Lewinson told me of the meeting you and your group will be having with the delegates from Japan. He also told me that you suggested I might write something. At the present time, even if I had time to write a well thought out paper, I don't have ^{the} competence to do so. For a long time I have been avoiding the difficult task of grappling with the problems which Buddhism presents for me: problems having to do with the organized and "religious" nature of Buddhism. All I can offer are some confused and scattered comments which it would be ^{presumptuous} of me to present in any kind of formal way. However, perhaps my thoughts and feelings on these matters may be of some use to you so I will tell them to you in the form of a personal letter — very personal!

There is hardly any chance that this letter will reach you before the group from Japan leaves San Francisco, but just on the chance that it might I'll write it. I was going to write last night but instead I went to see Kurasawa's IKIRU again.

Mr. Lewinson mentioned three different

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topics which you intend to discuss. I won't deal with these in order or even separately, but will instead, put them all together and shake well.

Last Sunday ^{morning} I went to the Soto Mission. It was my good fortune to happen to be there on the day of the ordination ceremony for Rev. Hunt, but except for this the day was disappointing. They have a little organ on which they play songs and the people come to sing songs about the "Holiness" of the Buddha and the like. The Buddha may be "spinning in his grave" over this. But probably not! He wouldn't be surprised because he predicted that his teachings would be misunderstood and would fall into decay. This singing of songs one girl Sunday school teacher considers to be one of the best ways of propagating Buddhism. She is a music teacher I believe. It may well be a good way of propagating what she thinks Buddhism is, but I can't see how it has anything to do with Buddha's teachings. In fact, if I remember correctly, he is reported to have advised his followers not to even listen to songs or watch entertainments because they are distractions. On this point I believe a compromise is in order for I wouldn't want to see music completely abolished from my life.

No doubt some concessions must be made 3
to the local people and such a devotional
and simple-minded approach as I've seen
here must give them some comfort, but there
seem to be no serious Buddhists here (I hope
I'm wrong) nor any interest taken to
encourage them. There are services and all
sorts of activities for these people but they have
been only one morning a week. The girls I met
were more interested in their hairdos than in reading
discussing Buddhism for that was the topic of
conversation Sunday evening just before
Bishop Swannett, Rev. Kongo et al came in. I
hope that Buddhism is not encouraged to
take this form in the rest of the United States
because the people who have a serious interest
in Buddhism will be repelled by it and, to
be very harsh and rude, I don't think the
people to whom it appeals are important.
If too many concessions are made to the
tastes of the lowest common denominator,
it will drive away those who will otherwise
be drawn to Buddhism.

In general, I think that your way of
teaching Buddhism is the best way for America
and that it is only because of you that such
a group as exists in San Francisco was made
possible. Most of the people there seem to be
sincerely interested in learning how to sit in
Zen and there are probably many such people
in other parts of the United States. The only
reservation that I have so far so inoperative

Buddhism is with regard to the chanting of sutras and the seemingly devotional touring and praying. You show more must to make these more palatable to me, but I believe the American nature will have a difficult time in accepting very much of this. If and when Buddhism becomes an important force in America, I predict that not all the rituals and chants will be retained. It is not hard nor disagreeable to learn the *hannya Shingyō* sutra, but to expect people to want to learn all the others as well is unrealistic, especially since not every serious American Buddhist will want to learn Japanese. And English doesn't do so well! Americans are suspicious of chants and rituals because they are thought to have undesirable ^{hypnotic} effects on people. If these practices do have great value, I think it should be made clear what that value is. Otherwise, the seemingly "religious" (in the worst sense of the word) nature of Buddhism may drive people away.

As for the question of a "moral code," I think most intelligent Americans admire the person who does "I need to depend on me and is able to make decisions according to the particular requirements of the circumstances in which he finds himself. According to my understanding of Buddhist morality

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the ^{moral} rules are part of a means to an end and, although the means is indispensable, it is the end which is of ultimate importance. Unlike most forms of Christianity, where moral principles are considered to be eternal truths revealed by God, Buddhism is not primarily an ethical religion. Once this end has been ^{attained} the means are no longer useful. The Four Noble Truths have been described somewhere as the Buddha's ^{2 1/2, 3 1/4} diagnosis of the disease which afflicts mankind (his analysis of the human situation) plus his prescription for its cure. Other prescriptions might work also, but this one Buddha had investigated and tested by his own experience and he knew it worked. It seems to me that the rules of conduct set forth in the 8-Fold Noble Path are not merely for the purpose of ^{the end goal} altruism, but that they are undertaken for the sake of a final "liberation of the spirit" (I realize this manner of expressing it is inadequate and misleading but I'm in a hurry). These rules constitute ^{a part of} a method of discipline towards the attainment of perfection and, though he carried his teaching to all men this did not mean that the Buddha was interested in social reform. "Enlightenment" is only for the individual, not society and, although

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it is theoretically the destiny of all sentient beings to enter Nirvana, few actually do so in any age. So the morality of the monk moves on a level far above, ^(different from) conventional morality and is not attractive to or possible for most men. I think it wise to refrain from setting up codes of morality for the lay person who is only mildly interested in Buddhism. I think only an intense longing for liberation (enlightenment, Nirvana, Satori, moksha, the Tao, Brahman or whatever you want to name that which can't be named) could motivate a person to follow all the rules which constitute Buddha's cure. The ethical parts of the 8-Fold Path are only preparation for the last parts and after the last steps have been taken there is no longer any need of the earlier parts (the means). To lay stress on the means is like concentrating on the finger instead of the moon at which it is pointing (a way of expression I picked up somewhere!) Unless the end is stressed, I think the moral precepts and duties will seem to be ^{petty} and senseless regulations to most Westerners.

One good example is the Buddhist attitude towards the taking of alcohol. Asian people don't care much for wine or other alcoholic drinks but in the West there

is great appreciation of ^{them} ~~the~~ and even a reverence when it comes to wine. Euripides said, "where there is no wine there is no love." Of course, drinking doesn't mix with zazen and one would expect not to drink while leading a monastic life, but for the layman complete restriction on alcohol must seem unreasonable and puritanical.

I was going to say something about Buddhism in the contemporary world: about the need for a little socio-political protest on the part of Buddhists, about a need for a modernized interpretation of the Karma doctrine, together with a playing down of the doctrine of rebirth. But I think you can guess what I feel about these subjects and, since this letter is overlong already, I'll spare you anymore tedious reading.

Please excuse the disorganized and generally slovenly ⁱⁿ nature of this letter. There wasn't time to make it otherwise.

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As the sun is setting outside of my window I will grow even more personal. Lack of time and busfare and laziness (I'd best add) kept me from coming to the Temple often, but at least you were there - a few miles away. Now that you are thousands of miles away I lament my lost opportunities. But I suppose the Buddha would say that this is an unhealthy attachment. Though what I have said in this letter, ^{and at times in the past} may seem on some points to be grossly irreverent, please believe that I shall always have the utmost gratitude to you for what I have learned from you.

With sincerest regards,

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