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RECORDED, AND WITH NOTES ON BUDDHISM, BY DOUGLAS G. HARING

JAPANESE BUDDHIST RITUAL / ETHNIC FOLKWAYS LIBRARY FE 4449

JAPANESE BUDDHIST RITUAL

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: LARGE TEMPLE BELL MORNING PRAYERS (Hokke Kyo) Normanji Temple Voice and Wooden Gong GONGS AND DRUM Normanji Temple

Band 3:



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## JAPANESE BUDDHIST RITUAL



Buddhist Ritual : Nomanji Temple. Rev. Mr. Saseki & congregation singing hymns.

### NOTES ON BUDDHISM by D. G. Haring

Many forms of Buddhism are observed in many lands. Doctrines and practices are innumerable, often contradictory. In the course of 2500 years Buddhism has spread throughout India, Burma, Ceylon, Thailand, Sumatra, Malaya, Indo-China, Tibet, China, Korea, and Japan. India and Sumatra no longer accept Buddhism despite persistence of Buddhist ideas and practices. The protean forms of modern Buddhism stem from thinkers in every part of southern and eastern Asia. Often the teachings of the founder are submerged beneath doctrines evolved in subsequent centuries. The numerous sects and divers doctrines, however, still are recognized as Buddhist despite the fact that it cannot be said of any one doctrine or ritual, "This and only this is Buddhism."

The spread of Buddhism over Asia provides one of the great sagas of human history. Zealous missionaries from India carried the doctrine, the philosophy, and the art to every part of the vast continent; their influence transformed many a savage tribe into a civilized people; they imparted the mysteries of writing and opened the gates to learning, while their new ideals of human worth won support. Regional isolation fostered the rise of diverse Buddhist traditions; the Tibetan Lama contrasts with the Buddhist of Ceylon, and both differ from Buddhists in Japan.

Thus there arose two main streams of Buddhist tradition: the Hinayana or Southern type, reminiscent of the doctrine and practice of early Indian Buddhism; and the Mahayana or Northern type, kaleidoscopic in diversity, endlessly subdivided into sects, and prolific of doctrines of which many diverge from the original teaching.

Some superficial comparisons of Buddhism and Christianity may facilitate understanding, although all such comparison is difficult, perhaps misleading. The following statements should be read in the light of a strong caution against acceptance of simple generalizations; any Christian will feel that Christianity is misrepresented, just as any Buddhist will feel that the picture of Buddhism is inaccurate. In general, both religiouns originated in the teaching of individual founders; both subsequently developed doctrines concerning their founders. Both religions have exhibited strong ascetic tendencies, and both have holy orders of monks and nuns. Buddhists and Christians alike utilize ordained male priests; both religionshave held general councils; both depend on written scriptures, believe in heavens and hells, conduct such rituals as the Mass and administer sacraments; both make use of incense, prayer beads, priestly vestments, sacred relics, images of saints, sacred chants and hymns. Buddhism further resembles Christianity in the acacceptance of a doctrine of a sacred Trinity, doctrines of a miraculous birth, and emphasis upon the value of mercy, charity, and good works. Both religions claim universal validity and conduct missionary enterprises; both have carried noble traditions of art and architecture into many lands. Among the sincere devotees of either faith there are numbered thousands of admirable individuals - men and women of integrity whose devotion and good will command universal respect. In an address in Tokyo many years ago, Dr. Masaharu Anesaki (Professor of Religion, Tokyo Imperial University, and sometime lecturer at Harvard) remarked: "If by some miracle, Jesus of Nazareth, Gotama the Buddha, and China's Laotzu could talk face to face, each of the three would meet for the first time two companions who understood him."



Rev. Mr. Sasaki before altar.

When comparison of Buddhism and Christianity is carried further, conspicuous differences appear. Some Buddhists believe in many gods, other Buddhists follow the example of the founder of their religion and regard all gods with a measure of agnosticism, and a few Buddhist sects are clearly atheistic. Religious attainment through human effort is the central emphasis in Buddhism. Christianity, on the other hand, has insisted upon belief in one supreme deity upon whom all human welfare depends. Furthermore, Christians usually insist upon doctrinal consistency – a demand that has spawned bitter sectarian divisions – while Buddhists regard doctrinal inconsistencies with complacency and often argue that if any doctrine is true, its opposite may be equally true.

The general pattern of Buddhist worship involves visits to temples for individual prayer, together with recurrent mass festivals; Christians, however, favor congregational assemblies on a fixed day of the week. Buddhist scriptures are numbered in the thousands and the canon continues flexible: Christian scriptures are confined to a small body of writings with very few disputed marginal items. Rarely if ever have Buddhists developed a single unified, powerful hierarchical organization; Christianity has a long history of total inclusion of believers under a single earthly hierarchy. Christians teach that a man lives but once, and that his soul subsequently passes eternity in heaven or hell; Buddhists teach that all living creatures undergo endless rebirths and deaths on earth, in heavens or hells, and the goal of their religion is escape from this round of rebirths. Buddhists exalt a doctrine of moral cause and effect: every happening is caused by some moral act in a past or present life, and any act or wish has its inevitable consequences in the future. Even gods are finite, subject to death and rebirth after aeons of time. Christians usually regard human events as contingent upon human choice, and conceive of the Deity as an omniscient, omnipresent, eternal Creator and Judge who rewards good and evil conduct in a future existence of the soul.

The two religions naturally differ in cultural background and classical traditions. Buddhists look to India as the homeland of their faith and the cultural milieu of their religion retains numberless tokens of its Indian origin. Christianity stems from Hebrew monotheism, and its external forms bear the stamp of the Hellenistic period of the Mediterranean world. All of these superficial differences and resemblances should be accepted tentatively, for more careful study will reveal the inaccuracy of simple general statements.

Historically, Buddhism originated in northeastern India at the end of the sixth century B.C., in the teaching and practice of a minor noble of the Sakya clan, whose personal name was Gautama. Pious Buddhists reverently avoid this personal name; they refer to him as Sakya Muni (i.e., Teacher of the Sakyas; in Japanese, <u>Oshaka Sama</u>); as the Buddha (i.e., The Enlightened One), by his own term, Tathagata (Truth-Revealer), and many other titles. "The Buddha" is confusing as a designation of the founder because there are many Buddhas; anyone who achieves complete enlightenment becomes a Buddha.

Manifold legends cluster about this great founder - stories of wonders such as a miraculous birth, simultaneous conversion of thousands of disciples, previous and future incarnations, and volumes of alleged teachings written centuries after his death. Certain facts are clear: a remarkable person lived in north India in the sixth century B.C., and much of the teaching attributed to him bears the mark of a master. There is general agreement that in his youth he knew comfort, perhaps luxury; that after some happy years with a wife and child he renounced all comfort for the hardships of a wandering ascetic. Years of self-torturing discipline convinced him. that neither luxurious indulgence nor ascetic rigor could attain his spiritual goal. He turned his back on both extremes and sought a more wholesome way of life. The current doctrine in Hinduism stressed the evil aspects of existence, and Sakya Muni was oppressed by the problems of human suffering, disease, and death. Hopeless pessimism is inevitable when the belief that all existence is misery is coupled with the doctrine of endless rebirths into the same unhappy world. Like many thoughtful Indians of his day, Sakya Muni sought escape from this bleak dilemma. Meditating under a bo tree, he suddenly attained enlightenment and thenceforth proclaimed a way of escape from sorrow and suffering, from endless rebirths and misery. To his contemporaries as to other millions of Asiatics in later centuries, this doctrine came as glad tidings of release from what Occidentals call "Oriental Pessimism."

Sakya Muni's solution centered in a new insight into the Hindu doctrine of <u>Karma</u>. Loosely and inadequately translated "fate," <u>karma</u> denotes the principle of rebirth in a form determined by one's past deeds. Pondering the cause of rebirth, the Tathagata concluded that the ego is not born repeatedly, and he denied the reality of an ego-principle. Rebirth, he asserted, is effected by the desires—good or bad with which man continually plagues himself. Death cannot terminate the causation set going by desire, and uncompensated desires bring a new ego into existence. In turn, the desires of the new ego effect yet another birth and so the chain of misery continues. But if one eliminates all desire, the necessity for a subsequent birth vanishes, and the enlightened one achieves a blessed state called <u>Nirvana</u> devoid of ego-attributes.

Respecting Nirvana, Sakya Muni refused to be bound by words and their limitations. Since that state transcends human ability to think, nothing that man can say about it is true, nor is any human statement respecting it false. Words and human concepts are not pertinent, since they are products of a consciousness that has no part in Nirvana. Nirvana involves complete release from the cycle of death and rebirth and from the sufferings of individual existence. Attainment of enlightment does not coincide with death, for Nirvana transcends living or dying. But the person who achieves Buddhahood automatically lives as a virtuous, helpful, reasonable, kindly, intelligent person—he cannot attain bliss merely by conforming to rules of morality or by being good in order to win a reward, for such aspirations constitute desires that hold one to the cycle of death and rebirth. The self-discipline and profound insight that achieve Nirvana, however, inevitably and effortlessly bring about virtuous conduct.

Sakyamuni is credited with founding an Order of believers who took the threefold vow, "I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the Law, I take refuge in the Order." Doubtless this vow came into vogue after the death of Sakya Muni, although the Order and Vow date from the earliest years of Buddhist history. The threefold Vow symbolizes the Buddhist trinity—not a triune deity, but a faith with three aspects. Buddhism became the dominant religion of India, and under King Asoka in the third century B.C. trained missionaries were sent out to spread the teaching in all directions. The subsequent eclipse of Buddhism in India and the development of Hinayama Buddhism in Southern Asia cannot be included in this brief statement.

Mahayana Buddhism took form in North India, Tibet, and China in subsequent centuries. The prestige of Indian learning, enhanced by Buddhism, facilitated acceptance of varied Hindu philosophies in Tibet and in China; simultaneously architecture and the arts of those countries incorporated Greek elements that had come to India with Alexander's invasion and had found a place in Buddhist tradition. Some of the doctrines that Buddhism introduced to Tibet and China included the very teachings against which Sakya Muni had rebelled; ultimately Mahayana teachings came to include almost the entire gamut of human speculative thought. Prominent in Mahayana is Bodhidharma, Indian Buddhist patriarch, who is credited with introducing the faith into Tibet. He is the central figure in the legend of the heavenly origin of tea; whatever the role of Bodhidharma, monks certainly used tea to keep themselves awake during night-long vigils of prayer and meditation. In recent times, Bodhidharma's face, reduced to a cartoon, adorned Japan's tobacco shops as the patron saint of the weed. (Japanese name: Daruma San)

Mahayana Buddhist sects include some that worship various saints, especially Amida (Amitabha). The intellectual and moral fiber necessary to attainment of Buddahood appear to lie beyond the capacity of ordinary folk, and the doctrine of Bodhisattvas aimed to meet this situation. A Bodhisattva is a saintly person who attains enlightenment almost to Nirvana, but who clings to one last desire-the salvation of all living beings. He vows to remain in the universe of birth and death until the last soul is saved, and becomes a divine being with power to save those who manifest faith in his merciful benevolence. Amida-probably a mythical figure-is deemed the greatest of the Bodhisattvas and is classed as a great Heavenly Buddha by his worshippers. To his Western Paradise he gathers in the souls of all who call upon his name in faith. Thus the Amida sects exhibit analogies to Protestant Christianity: "Salvation by grace" and "justification by faith" antedated in Amida Buddhism the Protestant Reformation in Europe by some centuries. Some Mahayana sects practically dispense with Sakya Muni in favor of Amida or some other Bodhisattva, and the founder of Buddhism appears in their systems as one of the Heavenly Buddhas. Fortunately, there has been little or no political conflict or persecution within Buddhism.

By the sixth and seventh centuries A.D., when Buddhism began to filter into Japan from Korea, centuries of development had enriched, altered and obscured the original orientation of Buddhism. In the absence of historical criticism of source documents it was almost impossible to discriminate among the sacred writings and separate the original contributions of Sakya Muni from the vast bulk of Buddhist literature. A few of the early Japanese sects followed Hinayana teaching, which was not unknown in China and Korea. Subsequently the various Mahayana sects appeared in Japan. More than once, a Japanese ruler has dispatched loyal monks to China to find some new type of Buddhism that would not indulge in political intrigue. In each instance, the outcome was the establishment of another Mahayana sect in Japan. In addition, several indigenous Japanese sects of Buddhism also developed. Despite sharp controversies within sects, there has been a minimum of hostility between the many sects. In modern times the stronger Buddhist sects actually contribute to the maintenance of temples and ritual that represent weak sects, lest these monuments to Buddhist history perish.

Following are condensed excerpts regarded as closely approximating the original teachings of Sakya Muni. Thus abbreviated, the doctrine is barely indicated, perhaps distorted. (From the "Sermon of Benares")

The Three Conceptions:

The <u>Impermanence</u> of all <u>Individual</u> <u>Existence</u>. Change and decay are inherent in the universe.

<u>The Universality of Suffering inherent in all Individuality</u>. Individuality implies ignorance, hence sorrow and suffering; all effort leads to suffering.

<u>The Non-reality of an Ego Principle</u>. The self is but a fleeting form, like a raindrop that disappears in the ocean. Its passing is not annihilation, but the disappearance of a transient form in a greater reality.

The Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path:

"There are two extremes which he who has gone forth ought not to follow: habitual devotion on the one hand to the passions, to the pleasures of sensual things ...; and habitual devotion, on the other hand, to self-mortification ... There is a Middle Path discovered by the Tathagata – a path which opens the eyes, and bestows understanding, which leads to peace, to insight, to the Higher Wisdom, to Nirvana. Verily, it is the Aryan Eightfold Path; that is to say, Right Views, Right Aspirations, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right Mode of Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Rapture.

"Now this is the <u>Noble Truth as to Suffering</u>. Birth is attended with pain, decay is painful, disease is painful, death is painful. Union with the unpleasant is painful, painful is separation from the pleasant; and any craving unsatisfied, that, too, is painful. In brief the five aggregates of clinging (the conditions of individuality) are painful.

"Now this is the <u>Noble Truth as to the Origin of Suffering</u>. Verily, it is the craving thirst that causes the renewal of becomings, that is accompanied by sensual delights, and seeks satisfaction, now here, now there — that is to say, the craving for the gratification of the senses, or the craving for a future life, or the craving for prosperity.

"Now this is the <u>Noble Truth as to the Passing Away of</u> <u>Pain</u>. Verily, it is the passing away so that no passion remains, the giving up, the getting rid of, the emancipation from, the harboring no longer of this craving thirst.

"Now this is the <u>Noble Truth as to the Way that leads to</u> the <u>Passing away of Pain</u>. Verily, it is this Aryan Fightfold Path." (see above)

This excerpt, attributed to Sakya Muni himself, probably represents one of the abiding elements in Buddhist teaching. It would not be surprising to discover Buddhists who never had read this passage; again and again, however, the doctrine of the Three Conceptions, the Four Noble Truths, and the Eightfold Path recurs as a vivifying emphasis in Buddhist history. Despite the frequent episodes of corruption and decay within various Buddhist groups, the ethical trend in Buddhism is unmistakable, and the corruption of priests or monks has served only to throw the central emphasis into bold relief.



Tenri-kyo : Prayer session with hand motions.



### Nomanji : Rev. Mr. Sasaki reciting morning prayers. Left hand at kin. Moku-gyo in foreground. THE TENDAI SECT.

The later years of the eighth century A.D. were notable in Japan for the work and influence of two outstanding Buddhist leaders: Saichō (posthumous title: Dengyō Daishi. "Daishi" is roughly equivalent to "Saint.") and Kūkai (posthumous title: Kōbō Daishi). Both studied in China. St. Dengyō (767-822 A.D.) returned to establish in Japan the Tendai sect (Chinese: T'ien T'ai), while St. Kōbō established the Shingon sect (Chinese: Chen-yen). Since the ritual recorded is that of Tendai, Shingon is not discussed in these notes.

Both Tendai and Shingon provided for the salvation of common folks-a feature that had been lacking in the older Japanese Buddhist sects. As a youth, St. Dengyo established a monastery on Mt. Hiei. This holy mountain played a major role in subsequent Japanese history, for the Emperor Kwammu established the capital city of Kyoto in its sacred shadow. Ultimately, no less than three thousand temples and monasteries were built on this mountain. The Kaidan (Ordination Center) on Mt. Hiei witnessed the consecration of Japan's most noted priests. Gradually, however, Mt. Hiei became a retreat for defeated warriors who shaved their heads and lived as monks while biding their time and plotting to retrieve their domains. Inevitably these soldiers of fortune became embroiled in the riots and political intrigues of the capital; finally, in the sixteenth century, vengeful political powers razed the entire array of magnificent buildings. Since then Mt. Hiei has played important roles in Japan's religious life, though its former glory has not been restored.

St. Dengyō did more than found a monastery. He inspired the scholarship that survived even Mt. Hiei's darkest days; he founded a school of art; and his Tendai sect provided the inspiration of several great Buddhist sects that broke away from Hiei. Many other sects follow the lead of Tendai in extolling the <u>Hokke Kyō</u> or Lotus Scripture. The ritual of morning prayer recorded herewith is the <u>Kannon Kyō</u> (<u>Kannon</u> Teaching) from this Lotus Scripture. Some of the recorded hymns are attributed to St. Dengyō; even if he did not write them, they are ancient and have glorified his memory.

In modern Japan Tendai no longer holds the preeminent place that it maintained in the ninth and tenth centuries. The "reformed sects" of  $J\bar{o}d\bar{o}$  and  $J\bar{o}d\bar{o}$  Shinshū, established in the twelfth century and devoted to worship of Amida, claim the largest numbers of adherents. The Zen sect, imported from China in the latter years of the twelfth century, wields great influence; and the indigenous sect of Nichiren, which dates from the thirteenth century, is popular in eastern Japan. To the average Japanese Buddhist, however, sectarian distinctions mean little; he generally worships at any place that is deemed holy and is careful not to miss any Buddhist temple or Shintō shrine when on a pilgrimage. As one educated gentlemen commented, "You know, some of them might have power; it is best to worship all of the gods."



Japan : Buddhist temple bell, at Mt. Koya

### NÕMANJI TEMPLE AT KAWASAKI

Perhaps in any country the common people know little about the formal doctrines of the religion they profess. To them holy places, ceremonies, and familiar rituals symbolize aspirations and afford solace in time of trouble. For this reason, the accompanying record presents the ordinary rituals of an ordinary Buddhist temple; that it happens to be a temple of the Tendai sect is less significant than its position as a time-honored place of worship for its neighborhood. Any of the greater temples of historic fame might have afforded better-drilled choirs or more elaborate ceremonies.

Nomanji Temple, in the outskirts of the industrial city of Kawasaki (situated between Tokyo and Yokohama), is about six hundred years old. A generous endowment explains the excellent state of repair of the building and its beautiful altar. The Reverend Mr. Ryokaku Sasaki, priest of Nomanji, is an intelligent, progressive gentleman who cooperated generously in arranging for the recording of services and the taking of moving pictures. His wife and daughter joined with him to provide delightful hospitality that cannot be conveyed in the bare record of services and ritual. It is noteworthy that during the past quarter-century a major reform has quietly spread among all sects of Japanese Buddhists; formerly priests never married, except those of the Jodo Shinshu sect; today nearly all Buddhist priests are married.

Prior to the recent World War, large bronze bells hung in separate bell-towers at most Buddhist temples. Many of these were sacrificed to the wartime demand for metal; hence there was no bell at Nōmanji to round out the record. The sound of the big bell, therefore, was recorded at another temple.

### THE RECORD

The morning prayers, recited daily with or without an attending congregation, are based on the Lotus Scripture (<u>Hokke</u> <u>Kyō</u>) and are performed by the priest, who kneels at a lectern before the altar. At his left is the <u>kin</u>, a large gong which he sounds at intervals; at his right is a wooden drum (<u>moku-gyo</u>) that is beaten in time with the chant. When worshippers are present the recital is followed by a brief period of worship during which the congregation, one by one, light incense and bow before the altar. Before the service, offerings of fruit, grain, or vegetables in season are placed on the altar.

On special occasions of congregational assembly, hymns are sung. Typical hymns are recorded. There is no choir of trained voices; the singers are ordinary members of Nōmanji's congregation. Thus the record presents what may be heard thoughout Japan in a thousand temples where common folk assemble. Each person holds a <u>rei</u> (small silver bell) in his hand and these are sounded in time with the music. On the floor before each singer is another tiny silver gong that is sounded with a stick at appropriate times. On the record, the morning prayers are followed by the names and sounds of the various kinds of gong used in the temple: these include the <u>hansho</u>, a community alarm; the <u>kei</u>, a hanging brass gong; the <u>kin</u>, the <u>rei</u>, the <u>moku-gyo</u>, and the <u>taiko</u> or large drum that is beaten during festivals.

The hymns that follow all are sung by the Reverend Mr. Sasaki and his congregation. They include two of the "Five <u>Sambutsuka</u>" or <u>Wasan</u> <u>Goeka</u>, followed by one of the two hymns of Mt. Hiei known as <u>Dengyō</u> <u>Daishi</u> <u>no</u> <u>Wasan</u> (St. Dengyō's hymns).

### MEMORIAL SERVICES

Buddhist families observe memorial services in honor of recently deceased relatives on fixed days after the death. Often these services are conducted in the home by a priest, monk, or nun. The accompanying chant that is central in many such services was recorded at a home in Wakayama City, by Miss Betty Lanham. The chant is recited by a Buddhist nun accompanied by the women of the household. This chant is called Hannya Shingyõ.



### TENRI-KYO: A SHINTO CULT

<u>Tenri-kyō</u> is a sect of Shintō, quite independent of the former State Shintō. It was founded by a woman, Miki of Yamato (1798-1887) and has attained considerable vogue. Miki taught that divine charity dwells in human beings but is hampered by greed. One must rid himself of every "stain" on the soul and restore the pristine purity that leads to happiness. Faith-healing often occurs among Tenri-kyō believers. Tenri-kyo is perhaps the most aggressively missionary of all Japanese cults. It is in no sense Buddhist, although its doctrines and ritual show traces of Buddhist influence.

The chant that accompanies the <u>Okagura</u> (Dance Before the God) was recorded in the remote island of Amami Ōshima in the Ryūkyū Islands; it is typical, however, of Tenri-kyō throughout Japan. Mr. Kaseda, then Mayor of Naze City and President of the local Tenri-kyō congregation, courteously recited the chant for recording. It embodies a sort of confession of faith in ten articles.

### PRONUNCIATION OF JAPANESE

Every vowel ends a syllable (except for an occasional syllable that ends in "n"). If several vowels succeed each other, each is a separate syllable: thus, <u>Goeka</u> is <u>Go-e-ka</u>. In general, syllables are stressed equally.

Consonants approximate the English sounds. Vowels are pronounced uniformly with the soft European sounds, thus:

- a as in father e as in bed i as the first e in eve o as in both
- u as in brute

A bar over a vowel doubles the length of time it is held: thus the name of the city of <u>Osaka</u> (meaning "Big Hill") differs from that of the town of Osaka (Little Hill).

A doubled consonant indicates a glottal stop; thus <u>Hokke</u> is <u>Ho-k-ke</u>. Pronounce each consonant in such cases: <u>Hok-ke</u>.

> Photos by Douglas G. Haring Editor - Harold Courlander Production Director - Moses Asch



Buddhist priests, Memorial Day Procession, Wakayama City

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