

The Huang Po Doctrine of Universal Mind

This little booklet was published in 1947 by the Buddhist Society of London. It covers the teaching of Dhyana Master Hsi Yun as recorded by P'ei Hsui, a noted scholar of the T'ang Dynasty and was translated by Chu Ch'an. The translator gives a short description of Buddhism and then discusses the Dhyana or Zen sect.

He states that neither "meditation" nor "concentration" are proper equivalents of **dhayna**. Yet he also says "the Dhyana Sect is historically almost the further removed of the Chinese sects from Sakyamuni Buddha, but this fact is in itself not sufficient to warrant our regarding the teachings of the sect as being contrary to the spirit of Buddhism or our dismissing the claim that they preserve the highest form of Buddhism.

The problem is a semantic one. Where did this word "Buddhism" originate? The Buddha presented **arya dharma**. His basic teachings are those of the Eight-fold Path. There have divisions of interpretation of this Eight-fold Path through analytical methods which naturally lead to varying conclusions. There is no such division of interpretation; instead of analysis, we employ synthesis, prajna, and samadhi—which is generally not done.

In the Questions of King Milinda the analytical method is run into the ground proving there is no basic "soul" or "substance." Most Buddhists accept the conclusions but adhere to the very methods which lead nowhere. The result is a tacit assumption of approaches quite contrary to those, let us say, which are found in **Tevigga Sutta**.

"The true Samana, he who is seeking the way to the Brahma World, lets his mind pervade all quarters of the world with thoughts of Love; first one quarter than the second quarter, then the third quarter and so the fourth quarter. And thus the whole wide world, above, below, around, and everywhere, does he continue to pervade with thoughts of love, far-reaching, beyond measure, all-embracing." pg. 71 *A Buddhist Bible*.

Majjhima Nikaya, pg. 140: "This, verily, is the highest, holiest peace: appeasement of greed, hatred and delusion."

"I am is a vain thought; I am not is a vain thought; I shall be is a vain thought; I shall not be is a vain thought. Vain thoughts are a sickness, an ulcer, a thorn. But after overcoming all vain thoughts one is called a silent thinker. And the thinker, the silent One, does no more arise, no more pass away, no more tremble, no more desire. For there is nothing in him that he should arise again. And as he arises no more, how should he grow old again? And as he dies no more, how should he

tremble? And as he trembles no more, how should he have desire?” (Ibib. pg. 59)

When one studies Euclid he finds certain principles in effect, governed by a type of Logic. When he studies Fourth Dimensional Geometry, these principles and effects no longer hold; the Logic is untenable. So it is when we apply karuna, prajna and samadhi or dhyana—what we get is not Buddhism, but **arya dharma**.

The writer continues (pg. 8): “Sir Reginal Johnston, in his *Buddhist China* suggests that the doctrines of this sect have much in common with those of the Christian mystics and mentions by name Blake, Eckhart, W.R. Inge, G.R.S. Mead and others, but I am not sure if he is right in regarding dhyana as a form of mysticism.

This is a question again of semantics and definition. Psychologically the above persons were mystics of sorts—Eckhart was a real one. Prof. Charles Morris has presented the International Order of Semantics with papers tending to show that the language of true mysticism—and he includes Zen in this—is of another order, bearing a relation to common speech more or less of the same type as Fourth Dimensional teachings bear to Euclid. And the Zen monk, Nyogen Senzaki often quotes Eckhart. This position becomes clearer in an incident:

Nyogen Senzaki: “Tell me, o Murshid, is the light of the sun and the moon and all those stars we see, one light?”

Sufi Inayat Khan: “Good-night, Mr. Senzaki.”

Here we find the roles reversed, Senzaki-san using Sufic terminology and Inayat Khan Zen. Unfortunately we have had “territory” presentations of Zen (given by men who have had training and even realization) against “map” presentations of Sufism, i.e. scholars who have been trained primarily in linguistics and secondarily in philosophy, without the corresponding “esoteric” disciplines. It is more to the point as to whether mystics, be they Christians, Sufis or otherwise, could or would agree to the conclusions presented by either the author or translator.

Chu Ch’an says, “Universal mind, therefore, is something to which nothing can be attributed. Being absolute, it is beyond attributes. If for example, it were to be described as infinite, that would exclude from it whatever is finite¹, but the whole argument of the book is **that universal mind is the only reality** and that everything we apprehend through our senses, is nothing else but this mind. Even to think of it in terms of existence or non-existence is to misapprehend it entirely.” pp. 8-9

“The problem of existence and non-existence therefore resolves into this. Everything, in its absolute aspect, is held to be one (Universal Mind), hence the objects which we perceive with our senses do not exist absolutely.” (pg. 9)

The translator further discusses meditation and the Dhyana transmission. Sufi Inayat Khan said:

“An hour of meditation is worth a year of study; **an hour of attunement** is worth a year of meditation.” If there is Universal Mind, actually, this is the whole thing and therefore Chu Ch’an is correct in refusing to accept the limitations of the English word **meditation** as a translation for **dhayna**. Neither does this word “meditation” apply to **samma samadhi**, nor can we make mirrors by polishing bricks.

In P’ei Hsiu’s commentary (pg. 15), one finds in quotes: “I esteemed it as a direct transmission of the Doctrine.” These words “direct transmission” are most important. In Greek mythology, Atlas placed the universe on Hercules’ shoulders while he went off to Esperides to get the three golden apples. This was a “direct transmission.”²

¹ In mathematics, for example, Synthetic Projective Geometry excludes the finites, but Mathematical Philosophy does not and it has aspects of the infinite which do not exclude the finite. I am wondering if Chu-Ch’an entirely understands the Nirvana-Samsara “Relationship.”

² The “esoteric” explanation of Greek myths would require considerable attention, and may be included in the final paper.

On page 16 we read:

“Hsi Yun’s Doctrine as Recorded by P’ei Hsiu”

(1) The Master said to me: All the Buddha’s and all sentient beings are nothing but universal mind, besides which nothing exists. This mind, which has always existed, is unborn and indestructible.”

The first words of the Hebrew Bible may be transliterated:

Bereshith bara Aelohim eth-ha-shamaim w’aeth-ha-aretz. This is popularly rendered, “In the beginning God made the heavens and the earth.” Actually it says nothing of the kind. The word **bereshith** can be broken down in several ways, but for our purpose it may be be-rash-ith. The **be** is practically the preposition “in.” But the root **rash** means **head, thought, leader**, etc. Thus, in Ethiopia, the duke (leader) is called **ras**. The head itself in Hebrew is **rash** or **rosh**.

The Targums say that these words mean “with wisdom” or “with thought,” or even “inside the sphere of thought” for there are two letters in the Hebrew language Qeph and Resh, corresponding to our letters Q and R, representing respectfully the back and front of the head. Some of the Indo-Germanic words for head, like **cephela, caput**, etc, resemble the Hebrew Qeph and are reflected—in Latin for instance—in words from which we get our **captain** and other indications of leadership.

Fabre D’Olivet, to whom I am partly indebted for the above, translates the first words of the Bible: “At first in principle.” He then quotes Saint Augustine: “It is said; in principle, God made heaven and earth; not that this was in effect, but because this was in power of being; for it is written that heaven was made afterward.”³

³ pg.14 “The Hebrew Tongue Restored.”

One may next examine such words as **princip**-le and **princip**-al. The root here is **cip** derived from the Latin word for head and head functions, allied to the Hebrew Qeph. That is to say “within the sphere of thought.” Therefore we may say, whether we turn to the Hebrew and allied languages or to Latin and allied languages, we get the preposition of **mind** being the absolute arena of phenomena.

One cannot rightly comment on the Huang Po Doctrine without missing the point if one adds innumerable derivative or parallel points. The Zen teaching is that the emancipated man can write **Sutras**. From the strictly Sanskrit point of view this is a Sutra, just as the writings of Shankara are called “Vedanta Sutras.” The fact that there may be may not be popular or theological acceptance has nothing to do with it.

The whole purpose of this writing is to confirm what has been laid down in Udana: that there is a universal reality beyond ordinary description and certainly beyond attribution, from which phenomena appear to emanate. In discussing the Wheel-of-Life we have to accept and respect this basic teaching.

Every student in biology is given lessons on the handling of the microscope. It is only at a certain focus that he can see anything. On either side of this he goes off “into the void.” Is this void empty? Is it full? Is it real? Is it unreal? Millions of people have had this experience, but as the philosophy-of-science remains too largely a system of paying emotional respects to science like the theologians pay homage to religion, there is as yet no true universal philosophy closely connected to the actual teachings included in the world of science.

A century ago the great physicist Faraday made innumerable discoveries. After his time the English mathematician Clerk-Maxwell came along and by applying his mind to these discoveries came up with the theory that light, electricity and magnetism were closely related. Our eyes, for example, respond to certain vibrations which we call “light.” Now we know that our ears do not respond to the same vibrations which the bat or the fly sense; we have fully recognized that there are different ear-tunings and this has now even been accepted in clinics which are correcting physiological disorders in this sense-sphere.

But we have not yet fully appreciated that the fly, or the bat, may also be sensitive to entirely different “light” vibrations than the human being. Bergsen has discussed the difference between the physiology of the eye in vertebrates and mollusca and we know that insects see differently. But when an Austrian Dr. Reichenbach, in the last century, indicated that he had experimentally, in the laboratory, found that people are sensitive to different portions of the “complete light spectra” and that many “insane” people **saw** differently, he was declared a charlatan.

What do we **see**? What do we **hear**? What do we **sense**? What do we **feel**? Is there not **silence** to the ear when the calculated number of vibrations in a given period is too high or too low? Is it not

also true that beyond the range of **colors** we find ourselves facing regions which for the **eye** and the **eye**-consciousness have no meaning—but which from the time of Clerk-Maxwell down through a host of geniuses to the present day, have more and more meaning?

Is this universe of the physicist any different from that of the Dhyana Master or the Taoist? Are there several things or fields of phenomena we may call “nature” or is there only one? And if there is only one is it possible to find some universal conscious appreciation and apprehension of it? Is there not more to this focusing of the microscope in a single experiment than we may have considered?

Take the first approach to physics, which in some ways is the most basic and pure science. Who does the approaching? And why is it that being given the three principles: mass, movement and force, **one** of them has to be accepted intuitively or a priori? How can this be done? What is it that does the examining? Here we fall right back into Universal Mind. If there were not this mind there could be:

1. No experimentation
2. No declaration of principles either **a priori** or **a posteriori**
3. There could be no communication.

For we intuitively assume the possibility of understanding and the transmission thereof and do not give any thought to it.

But there are two opposite fields in science also which drive us right back into Universal Mind, and to the nearly related teaching of **ji-ji-muge**, the basic tenet of the Avatamsaka school.

All “things” in this world have their ultimate constituency in atoms and all atoms in this world have their ultimate constituency in “electrons,” “positrons,” etc., **the nature of which is the same for everything**. It is only by focusing and tuning (for example, as we find in Moseley’s law) that there are differences. These are differences in phenomenalistic behavior and not in ultimate construction.

So as we go down deeper and deeper into the infra-world, our differential-microscope of mind gets out of focus and we find the **void**, that is to say, the area where no differentiation is experienced.

But at the other end of the mental exploratory venture we now find a group of cosmologists who are trying to explain the universe, and the further and further they go—their mental and sensual microscopes getting out of focus—they find themselves more and in **the void**, the area where no differentiation is experienced.

This appears in the Huang Po Doctrine:

“(21) People are often hindered by their sense perceptions from perceiving their own minds and by phenomena from perceiving (underlying) principles, so they frequently try to escape the former in order to still their minds and reject the latter in order to preserve their grasp of principles. They do

not realize that this is to obscure sense perception with mind and to obscure phenomena with principles. If only the mind is allowed to become void, perceptions will become void of themselves and, if only a stop is put to the stirrings of (underlying) principles, the phenomena (to which they give rise) will cease of themselves. Mind should not be used in a perverted way." (p.36)

If we were to stop here we would find ourselves in complete agreement with what has been called "the nihilism of Nagarjuna." But Hsi Yun posits the Trikaya. Not only that but he maintains a semantic clarity and purity and does not move out of a denial of "self" to posit "elements" or denial of "elements" with the tacit assumption of "self."

Sufi Inayat Khan said: "What limits God? His name."

Hsi Yun said: "Even mind is not mind really."