

On the Problem of Redemption: Further Thoughts

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We take the position as a fundamental assumption that no redemption problem lies beyond the possibility of resolution. This is not a statement of positive knowledge, but rather an attitude toward the problem. No doubt some problems are of superlative difficulty and will take all the resources that man, or even beings beyond man, can command for their resolution. And even though there have been in the past history, religious history, of the race, problems that have not been solved, yet we do not regard that therefore the problem is necessarily beyond the possibility of solution. Mayhap, as time continues and our resources grow it may be that that which once was impossible may become possible. So this is the attitude with which we approach the problem of redemption.

What is the significance of redemption? There are different interpretations of this question and different answers. We are here all familiar with the view of traditional Christianity, namely, that all of this humanity, conceived as the sons and daughters of Adam, became guilty in what was regarded as the sin of Adam in partaking of the fruit that opened the doors to knowledge of good and evil; that not only was Adam regarded as a sinner in so doing, but that all of his offspring as well are involved in that supposed guilt. It is further assumed in traditional Christianity that no man can redeem or save himself; that it depends upon a power outside him, and indeed the power that is supposed to be of a divine nature. Specifically, it is maintained that only by belief in the saving power of the Christ, which exists through his taking on all the guilt of the world and atoning for it by his death upon the cross, and then dedicating oneself to him, he can be redeemed from the sin with which he was born as the result of the supposed guilt of Adam. That is the familiar point of view. The redeemed or saved individual becomes by reason of this vicarious atonement sure in the attainment of an ultimate heaven world. The others, it is supposed, are lost for eternity. Incidentally, I repudiate this point of view, but I name it as a conception of redemption that has had a long history and a long acceptance in the West.

Now, even though a case for this view may be built up from the study of the Jewish and Christian bibles, that would be no compelling reason, as we see it, for its acceptance. The reason why we say this is based upon several considerations. The thesis that is commonly maintained by traditional Christianity is that the Christian and Jewish bibles are the word of the one and only true God. We do not find adequate reason for believing that there is here in these so-called scriptures any ground that is adequate for claiming that any word in the so-called bible or any other *shastra*, is the word of a known, ultimate extra-cosmic divinity. The idea of the reality of an extra-cosmic divinity is based, we believe, upon theological speculation and is not grounded in any essential basis of knowledge. First of all, we do not know anything just because it is written in a book other than the knowledge it is written in a book. We do not know that it is true just because it is found in a book. It may be in some sense true or it may be completely false,

but to determine whether it is true or not depends upon more than the fact that it is written in a certain book. Truth authority is something more fundamental than that.

First of all, how do we derive the material that is found in books that are called *sutras*, *shastras*, scriptures, or bibles? The words have been written down by men. They may be men of deep spiritual insight or they may be men of very limited spiritual insight; and it would seem that in some cases the words may have been written by men of something less than spiritual insight. At any rate, there is the question, how authentic, how deep is the insight upon which these writings are based? That's a critical question. How is the knowledge derived that we call the knowledge of the prophets, and the seers, the saints, and the sages? A book that contains the words of those who we have accepted as prophets, seers, saints, sages, Christs, or Buddhas, we have valued because we were taught to value them very largely in our childhood or because we had gone through an emotional experience called conversion. I submit this is no positive basis for any proof of an extra-human source.

It is a familiar principle that if you wish to know the value of any production in our collection of labors in the field of the sciences, the arts, the philosophies, the religious literature, it is the judgment of those who have had similar experience or are qualified in similar fields that is of most importance. The judgment of others is mostly a matter of merely repeating what they have been taught to repeat. Most people are Christian, Mohammedans, Buddhists, or belong to any other religion because they have been conditioned by their training and environment so to believe. And since this conditioning has as a matter of historic fact led to a great variety of religious and philosophical views, and not to any one exclusively, the question of the authenticity of any book is one that must be given very serious consideration. The fact that something is written in a book proves nothing beyond the simple fact that it is written there. The same is true even if it were a textbook of mathematics. We cannot say unequivocally that any theorem in a mathematical text is true just because it is written in the book. We must first understand the demonstration of the theorem, either read or worked out for ourselves, before we can say that it is true. To be sure, since the record of accuracy in mathematical texts is excellent, it follows that if a certain theorem is found in such it is very probably true, but that's only a question of probability. We cannot be certain of its truth until we have understood and assimilated the demonstration either by our reading or by our own work. And this principle, I affirm, is of universal applicability. There are texts that deserve a most serious consideration and deserve conscientious study, but there is no bible, scripture, *sutra*, or *shastra* that carries authority just because it is found in a book.

Now, a reason why *shastric* material has no right to unconditional acceptance arises in many forms. First of all, let us suppose that certain words were written down thousands of years ago by authentic prophets, sages, saints, *yogins*, and that a record of such written words came down to us. First of all there's the question, what has happened to these words in the process of translation? Do they communicate in our language the same meaning intended by the original writer or speaker? Do the images that are used have the same meaning today that they had then? Has there been no distortion of the record throughout those thousands of years by persons who either with good or ill will have submitted some degree of interpretation? This is a problem for ordinary criticism, and no scripture can claim immunity from such criticism. Secondly, there is a deeper

problem; in the passage of time the meaning of words changes. The images become different; and, in fact, in some very ancient writings, such as those of the *Vedas*, the very mode of picturing leads to a result that is essentially beyond our understanding. The images may arouse something very different in our minds from what they aroused in the minds of the day in which they were first employed.

But beyond these considerations there is a deeper one. Anyone who has penetrated deeply into mystical states of consciousness, or what we prefer to call yogic Realization or Enlightenment, knows that one enters into a type of consciousness which does not fit our conceptual language, nor does it fit exactly any symbolic language where we are employing ideas or images to communicate something which in its pure and raw immediacy does not conform to these forms of expression. Therefore, any such statement either in conceptual words or in the form of images involves a compromise, a distortion, even though the skill for such expression may be superior. So that in the final analysis, there is no such thing as a *shastra*, *sutra*, scripture, or bible that is true in the dead letter sense. Yet it may well be that any such scripture points to some truth beyond the range of our normal consciousness. The conceptions or the images are pointers to a truth, not containers of a truth. In the light of all this, bearing in mind that there is no such thing as a scripture that is true in the dead letter sense, no one is justified in building a doctrine based merely upon the dead letter sense of some real or supposed scripture. There is first of all the judgment as to whether a certain writing is scriptural or less than scriptural. And who can judge this effectively other than one who knows by direct Realization the fount from which those writings came? Now this has a bearing upon our problems, and bear in mind it applies just as fully to anything that I may say as it does to any other source whatsoever.

The view that is traditional in the Christian milieu is characteristic of only one of the religions. I shall not attempt to go through all others, but give other examples. Thus, for instance, in the *Advaita Vedanta*, based upon the writings and spoken words of Sri Shankaracharya, the view is held that man is in need of redemption because of a fundamental error that has affected his consciousness and general orientation. This error is due to a failure to discriminate between the real and the unreal or the true and the false; in part an error due to what we might call false predication, namely, a predicating as of the subject that which is only true of the object, or second predicating of the object that which is only true of the subject. The result of this state of confusion has produced a state of illusion or *maya*. Destroying the *maya* and awakening to the real and the true is a step into Liberation and that is redemption. It is equivalent to entering the state of *Moksha* or *Nirvana*. Redemption is therefore equivalent to this particular state.

The Buddhists take a position that is similar to this, only emphasizing that man has come into a condition of suffering as a result of craving, and destroying the craving is the key to release. He, too, is saved who has entered the state of Enlightenment which is a state of *Nirvana*.

There are other interpretations of the problem of redemption, but I wish not to list these but rather to suggest an interpretation that may be of value to us in our present day. We might call this a psychological approach and a psychological interpretation of the problem. First of all, assume for the present a thesis that has been developed to considerable extent in material that has been written and spoken that underlying our

relative consciousness there lies a deeper consciousness which sometimes has been called the collective unconscious. Accept further the thesis that this deeper consciousness is indestructible and eternal and that we are all embedded in and part and parcel of this deeper consciousness, although for most of us this is an unconscious fact. Assume further that somehow in the production of this universe and of the beings in it there was an involving of this Root Consciousness so that it lies, normally, in the background, but that the purpose of evolution is to bring this which is involved in the background up to the surface. As it comes up to the surface, it appears more or less as restricted zones of surface consciousness, sometimes called islands which may grow into continental proportions; that these islands or continents of outer consciousness, which is the consciousness with which we are ordinarily familiar in our philosophy, sciences, and psychology, is thus a growing structure based upon a hidden root. Then in the course of our development there has been lost the sense of the hidden root so that the surface consciousnesses seem to be, or even may actually be, separated islands broken away or hidden from their roots. Accept, further, the thesis that this is the condition of humanity at large, and because of this condition a problem of redemption is imposed. If the root underlying the surface consciousness does not itself become conscious, the man or the entity is in a state needing redemption.

Now, we have two possibilities. Generally the consciousness on the surface is tied to the underlying apparent collective unconscious by roots which are themselves unconscious, but there may be instances where the rooting becomes very weak and possibly severed so that we have a fragment of consciousness that really has lost its roots. That, we would say, is equivalent to the state of damnation. It doesn't carry the meaning that is usually attached to damnation as a condition of arbitrary suffering or of tortures imposed by an evil entity, but it's a state of being essentially lost—not because of anything arbitrary, but because of a failure on the part of any entity that reaps such a condition. The price of such a condition, if continued to the end, would be real extinction.

But in most cases our problem is not as radical as that. In most cases our problem consists in an unconsciousness with respect to the root; and this is where our problem becomes important. The root, the so-called collective unconscious but is better known as Root Consciousness, is eternal, unbounded by space and time, but the source of space and time. In that sense, all creatures from the simplest electron up to the highest Buddha, or God if you please, in that sense is naturally eternal. But this fractional consciousness on the surface has no guarantee of eternity. It is restricted and finite. There is, then, the problem of how that consciousness on the surface may be so united to its root that it participates consciously in the eternity of the latter. That, then, is the problem of redemption conceived from this point of view: so becoming conscious of the root that we participate in it knowingly. In the Tibetan terms that we have used so far, it is *shes-rig* uniting with *Rig-pa* whereby one becomes the *Dharmakaya*, or the Enlightened Buddha. That is redemption.