

Purpose, Method, and Policy of this Work

Part 8 of 15

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Concerning the purpose of this work. After an introductory statement occupying more than seven hours, we are prepared to formulate the purpose underlying this work. Stated in simplest terms, it is this: the contribution of what we are able to produce toward the redemption of all creatures. But we must first understand the sense in which we here employ the term 'redemption'.

First of all, it is not to be understood in the sense in which it is used in Christian theology. We reject the idea that all men are born in sin, or the idea that because Adam is said to have eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil against the command of the divinity, that therefore all men are guilty through his guilt, if guilty it was. This is a tradition, no doubt, that has had enormous influence in the history of Christendom, but we conceive it to be an erroneous interpretation. First of all, when man conceives a child, he is not bringing to birth a new spiritual entity that did not exist before. He is but producing an animal vehicle which may be occupied by a spiritual entity. No doubt there is some *karmic* tie between the parents of a child and the entity which occupies this childish body, but the conception of such a body is not the beginning of a new entity in the world. The true entity, as we conceive it, is a Monad which issued long ago from the Root Source of all that is, and has throughout enormous ages passed through all kingdoms of nature: the mineral, the vegetable, the animal, and finally into the human kingdom where it has partly completed the journey as a human being. No, we do not regard anyone as guilty because of the guilt of a progenitor. To be sure, he may suffer a certain disability because of the guilt of a progenitor, but he is responsible, ultimately, for only his own guilt and merit.

The sense in which we conceive of the problem of redemption is quite different. It is more closely related to certain facts which have become evident to us by our present investigations of depth psychology. We may say that man is in a certain sense separated from his Root, but not wholly separated; else he could not exist for one moment. He is, as we know him today, united to his Root through that which our psychologists call the "unconscious." Although, as I have elsewhere insisted, this unconscious should be regarded as another way of consciousness; but, it certainly is true that this other way is not known to the consciousness of the surface in our present mankind.

I am introducing here another parenthetical statement not particularly related to the purpose of this work. The latter will be continued later. This parenthetical statement is related to the subject of the stupas. I have recently dipped into a work produced by Lama Anagarika Govinda entitled *Psycho-cosmic Symbolism of the Buddhist Stupa*. Certain thoughts were inspired by the perusal of this work which I think will be of interest to us.

The author directs our attention to certain statements purported to have been uttered by the Blessed One in which he directed that stupas or a kind of monument should

be erected in certain spots, particularly at crossroads, in honor of certain entities of superior importance to the end that the memory of these entities should be preserved so that their influence might continue to work for the benefit of mankind. There were three classes of entities listed in the quotation from the Blessed One.¹ These were: outstanding kings or rulers; second, the *Tathagatas*, or in other words, Buddhas of Compassion; and third, to the *Pratyekas*.

One thing that impressed me in this connection was that the *Pratyekas* were so valued by the Blessed One that he felt monuments should be raised to them. Now, a *Pratyeka* Buddha is discussed to some extent in the *Theosophical Glossary*. It is there said that a *Pratyeka* Buddha is one who achieves the breakthrough without aid of others and in turn gives no aid to others. In other words, the *Pratyeka* is one who seeks redemption for himself and has the ability to make the breakthrough; but having made the breakthrough, he accepts the *nirvanic* withdrawal and can no longer be a contributing factor to the redemption of all creatures. It is said in the *Theosophical Glossary* that those who follow the path of the Buddhas of Compassion do not approve of this course of action and regard it as an expression of spiritual selfishness. It is for that reason that when I read the portion of the quotations from the Blessed One in which he recommended the raising of stupas to *Pratyekas*, I felt somewhat surprised. But there is this point to bear in mind, that any entity who has the power to achieve the breakthrough by his own efforts alone without the aid of a guru, without special initiation by that guru, is an entity of outstanding ability; and, in fact, in the very breakthrough itself, he does achieve a certain good that extends beyond his own personal self-interest. He is, thus, an entity worthy of honor to this extent; but it is maintained that among those who follow the path of the *Tathagatas*, their way is not regarded as the most noble of ways.

He who takes the Kwan-Yin vow or follows the way of the great renunciation enunciated in *The Voice of the Silence* has rejected the path of the *Pratyekas*, and we for our part recommend this way: the way of renunciation and of the Kwan-Yin vow as the nobler of ways. It is not enough that the redemption of one's self should be achieved, but rather that the redemption of all creatures should be achieved; and in so far as an aid can be given, namely, insofar as *karma* permits aid, that should be rendered in order that there may be a universal redemption. This is a point of particular importance. I know that in the study of Shankara's writings, he does not seem to include this particular step, that he urges the qualified individual to seek the breakthrough so that he is liberated, and I have not found there any advocacy of the return for the aid of creatures in this world. For that reason, I regard Buddhism as taking a step beyond that defined by Sri Shankaracharya.

Returning to the subject of the stupas. While there is some variation in the design of these stupas, there is one pattern which seems to be the predominant pattern underlying the variations. This is given in diagrams in the book where this particular pattern is emphasized, and it was from the study of this particular pattern that a certain insight broke into my mind. The pattern has this essential, simple form. First, there is built on the ground a cube. It may be more or less distorted or it may be variously ornamented and it may enclose an area where the *sadhakas* may meditate or certain

¹ Lama Anagarika Govinda, *Psycho-cosmic Symbolism of the Buddhist Stupa*, (Emeryville, Calif.: Dharma Publishing, 1976), 4. There are actually four listed who are worthy of a stupa, the fourth being “. . . a true hearer of the Tathagata . . .”

objects may be housed that are of religions value. Above the cube there is a sphere. And above the sphere, at its highest point, there is a cone. There are various elaborations upon this basic design, all of which has one or another of symbolic meanings. But I shall direct your attention to the simple basic design, for it was in connection with this design that a certain correlation with my own thought burst into my consciousness.

What is the meaning of the cube and the sphere, first of all? This is a three-dimensional representation of the relationship between the circle and the square in two-dimensional geometry. It therefore suggests the same symbolic meaning only in a completer three-dimensional form. We have, then, the ancient problem of the squaring of the circle, which let me remind you is not be taken only in the narrow geometrical sense, but in a broader symbolic sense. In the most general terms we may say the squaring of the circle, or the cubing of the sphere, is the rendering explicit and articulate or manifest that which is implicit and inarticulate in the sphere or the circle. It involves a crossing over a zone of incommensurability, which is symbolized by the transcendental number π , namely, 3.1415926, and so forth. The actual value of the portion of the number to the right of the decimal point can never be completely determined. The decimal is known to be non-terminating and non-repeating. It is a number that is of a special sort. It is called a transcendental number and has many mysterious properties. In fact, this particular transcendental number along with another transcendental number known as e are said to be so important that someone once remarked that a universe in which these two numbers did not exist could not be. Some who would not go quite so far did acknowledge that without these numbers we could not understand the universe, at any rate. In any case, here is something that involves mystery and is of profound interest. It seems to have been the number to which the Great Pyramid of Giza was dedicated, and that implies that it was considered to be of prime importance in those ancient days. So, this whole problem reappears in the stupa.

Now, I will suggest certain thoughts in connection with this relationship between the circle or sphere on one side and the square or the cube on the other side: that the cube and the square represent the state of manifestation, which considered in terms of cognition, is formulated truth, truth represented in concepts, rendered definitive and graspable. It also corresponds to that state in the evolution of consciousness where man is oriented primarily, if not exclusively, to the object; in other words, to the realistic stage in philosophic thought where all of the emphasis is placed upon the objective component. And by the objective component, I mean all possible contents of our consciousness; and that means the world, and the cosmos, and also our system of ideas. All of those tendencies in our psychology and in our philosophy which give primacy to the object, to the thing in ordinary materialistic orientation, are represented by the cube or the square.

Still in our world today there is a predominance of orientation to the object of consciousness; in other words, to the cube or the square. If it is a matter of trying to change state of consciousness, the predominate effort, even in much of yoga, is placed upon that which is the object of consciousness: upon a drug, upon posture of a body, upon breath exercise, which is an activity of a gross physical organism, an object alone. We have not yet risen even to the level of predominance of ideation, which is a subtle object; but we still orient predominantly to the gross or sensuous object, and we so often seek to change our consciousness by manipulation of the object. And to some extent effects upon consciousness may be so produced. That is admitted. But fundamentally this

is a trying to affect the antecedent by manipulation of the consequent, to manipulate that which precedes by that which follows; and some effect can be produced, but this is not the masterly approach. The masterly approach is by direct action upon consciousness, or by the use of the subtlest forms of objects rather than the gross forms of a sensuous sort, so as to change the domain of the object by the direct action in terms of consciousness itself. We still are in a world where that form of consciousness symbolized by the cube predominates. The first step inward is to shift one's orientation from the cube to the circle; in other words, a movement which I may call not squaring of the circle, or cubing of the sphere, but the reverse operation of circularizing the square or of sphericalizing the cube. That is the movement towards Realization. That is the movement towards spirit.

Now, let us look at the primary meaning or significance brought out by the two figures of the circle and the sphere. The circle is defined as the locus of a point which is at a fixed distance from a given point, the given point being the one which ultimately is the center. What the circle, and the sphere along with it, emphasizes particularly is centeredness. A uniform distance from a center gives to the center prime importance. This means giving to the *subject* to consciousness prime importance rather than giving prime importance to the *object*, which is represented by the square and the cube. It would give to the subject prime causal position rather than to the object. It would see the self, or center, as the prime fact, as the prime causal fact; and then the object can be manipulated from within.

This shift is represented in the history of our philosophy. In the earlier stages of our philosophy the orientation, rather naturally, was oriented to the objective component, to the object, to the world about, to the cosmos, to the idea as an object, rather than to the subject itself. But the great Copernican change initiated by Immanuel Kant was a shift from a primacy of orientation of this sort, to primacy of orientation to that which is conscious, in other words, the subject. And that led to the Idealistic development—a pattern which, while differing in many respects in detail from the Vedantists point of view, nonetheless, approaches the Vedantists point of view and is in essential agreement though differing in detail.

The yoga of self-realization, when successfully accomplished, would be equivalent to the transference of one's self-identity from the square or cube to the circle or sphere where the prime orientation is to the center, in other words, to the *Atman*. This is the yoga of Shankara as I understand it from his writings; and this is the penultimate stage of yogic attainment, but which has often been viewed as ultimate, though I now know it is but penultimate. But the circularizing of the square is this transformation. And once one has entered into the consciousness symbolized by the circle, he has achieved the *nirvanic* withdrawal.

That is what is represented, I suggest, by this portion of the stupa. But on top of the sphere there is a cone, and this fact caused a bell to ring in my consciousness, as it were. It perhaps would not happen to one who did not have a fair grounding in mathematics, but this is a matter of a considerable interest. What does the cone suggest? That is our next step, and it represents a further step in the ascension of the yogic Realization, as we shall see later.

The cone on top of the sphere, in the case of the stupas, is built of material substance and is therefore a finite and delimited figure. But for one who knows

something of the conic sections, this suggests the ultimate cone, which is infinite in extent and is necessary for the complete understanding of this figure. I shall therefore first define the true mathematical cone. Take a point in space above a plane surface; on the plane surface draw a circle with a central point; draw a line from the point in space through the center of this circle so that that line is perpendicular to the plane surface; pass through the point in space a line of infinite extension; have that line rotate through the circle, in other words, the line passes through some point in the circle and then is rotated around the circle generating a cone which extends infinitely downward and infinitely upward. That is what is known as a right circular cone. There are other types of cones, such as that which would be passed through an ellipse, and so forth. We shall consider only the right circular cone. Also, conceive of this cone as not solid, but simply as a sheath, a surface which has no thickness.

Now, there are many figures that are based upon this cone. They are known as the conic sections. They were studied to considerable extent by the Greek mathematicians and are still an important part of our academic practice today. There are five conic sections. First, pass a plane through the vertical line that was drawn from the center in space to the center of the circle which is vertically below it; through that line, pass a plane. That plane will intersect the cone in two lines. Those lines will be generally at an angle other than right angle to the surface of the horizontal plane. This represents the simplest case of a conic section. Now pass a plane through the cone at some point other than its vertex, the plane being at right angles to the axis line, the vertical line. The intersection with the cone will be a circle. Pass a plane at some angle other than right angle to the vertical axis through the cone. That will give a cross-section which is an ellipse. Pass a plane that is parallel to one side of the cone, but which does not pass through the apex of the cone. That will give a parabola. Now, then, pass another plane parallel to the axis of the cone, but not coincident with that axis, and that will intersect the two napes of the cone in a curve which is called a hyperbola. These are the five conic sections and they have many important properties. But I direct your attention to the last of these five, the one that is called a hyperbola.

Now, we may design the cone in different shapes by increasing the distance between the point that is in space above the point in the center of the circle or by decreasing the distance of that point from the point in the center of the circle, and we'll have a series of different cones that generate different angles on the plane which passes through the axis of the cone. Among these there will be one in which the plane which is parallel to the axis, but not coincident with the axis, will generate a hyperbola which is known as the equilateral hyperbola. This has peculiar special properties. From this point, we step over to the *mandala* which I generated. I shall repeat the process of generating that *mandala* again to remind you of its character.