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Buddha.

Bodhisattva Samanta Bhadra.  
Representing the principle  
of particularity or  
love.

Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī.  
Representing the principle  
of universality or  
wisdom.

Ānanda.

Mahākāśyapa.

A TYPICAL REPRESENTATION OF THE MAHĀYĀNA FAITH.

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AÇVAGHOSHA'S DISCOURSE

ON THE

# AWAKENING OF FAITH

IN THE

MAHÂYÂNA

大乘起信論

TRANSLATED FOR THE FIRST TIME FROM THE  
CHINESE VERSION

BY

TEITARO SUZUKI



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PUBLISHER'S PREFACE.

AÇVAGHOSHA is the philosopher of Buddhism. His treatise on *The Awakening of Faith* is recognised by all Northern schools and sects as orthodox and used even to-day in Chinese translations as a text-book for the instruction of Buddhist priests.

The original Sanskrit text has not been found as yet, and if it should not be discovered somewhere in India or in one of the numerous libraries of the Buddhist vihâras, it would be a great loss; for then our knowledge of Açvaghosha's philosophy would remain limited to its Chinese translation.

Açvaghosha's treatise on *The Awakening of Faith* is a small booklet, a monograph of the usual size of Chinese fascicles, comprising in its Chinese dress no more than about 10,800 characters, and may be read through in a few hours. But the importance of this monograph stands in no relation to its brev-

ity, and it is very strange that no translation of it has appeared as yet in any European language. I was therefore exceedingly glad that Mr. Teitaro Suzuki, a Japanese Buddhist and a disciple of the Rev. Shaku Soyen, the distinguished Abbot of Kamakura, who was one of the delegates of the Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893, undertook the work of rendering Aṣvaghosha's monograph into English form. I watched the progress of his translation and my interest in the work increased the more I became familiar with the thoughts of the great philosopher of Buddhism. Not only is my own interpretation of Buddhism, as stated in the *Gospel of Buddha* and elsewhere, here fully justified, but there are striking similarities between the very terms of Aṣvaghosha's system and expressions which I have used in my own philosophical writings. The main coincidence is the idea of Suchness, which is pure form, or the purely formal aspect of things, determining their nature according to mathematical and mechanical laws.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This coincidence of some salient points need of course not exclude disagreements in other important matters.

Suchness, according to Aṣvaghosha, is the cosmic order or *Gesetzmässigkeit* of the world; it is the sum total of all those factors which shape the universe and determine the destinies of its creatures. It is the norm of existence and is compared to a womb in which all things take shape and from which they are born. It is Plato's realm of ideas and Goethe's "Mothers" of the second part of *Faust*.

Suchness which in its absolute sense means the total system of the abstractly formal laws, including the moral order of the universe, is contrasted with the realm of Birth and Death. This realm of Birth and Death, is the material world of concrete objects. While Suchness is the domain of the universal, the realm of Birth and Death is the domain of the particular; and it is characteristic of the Mahayana school that the bodily, the particular, the concrete is not rejected as a state of sin, but only characterised as impure or defiled, imperfect, and implicated with sorrow and pain, on account of its limitedness and the illusions which naturally attach to it.

Suchness and the realm of Birth and Death

are not two hostile empires but two names of the same thing. There is but one world with two aspects describing two opposed phases of one and the same existence. These two aspects form a contrast, not a contradiction. Suchness (or the good law, the normative factor) dominates the realm of Birth and Death, which latter therefore, in a certain sense, belongs to Suchness throughout in its entirety as well as in its details.

But sentient beings are apt to overlook the significance of the universal, for the senses depict only the particular. Thus to a superficial consideration of sensual beings, the world presents itself as a conglomeration of isolated objects and beings, and the unity that consists in the oneness of law which dominates all, is lost sight of. It is the mind (or spiritual insight into the nature of things) which traces the unity of being and learns to appreciate the significance of the universal.

Universals, i. e., those factors which constitute the suchness of things are not substances, not entities, but relations, pure forms, or determinants, i. e., general laws. Thus

they are not things, but ideas; and the most important one among them, the suchness of man or his soul, is not a concrete self, an âtman, but "name and form."

It is well known what an important rôle the denial of the existence of the âtman plays in the Abhidharma, and we need not repeat here that it is the least understood and most misrepresented doctrine of Buddhism.

Thus the essential feature of existence, of that which presents itself to the senses, is not the material, but the formal; not that which makes it concrete and particular, but that which constitutes its nature and applies generally; not that which happens to be here, so that it is this, but that which makes it to be thus; not its Thisness, but its Suchness.

Particularity is not denounced as evil, but it is set forth as limited; and we might add (an idea which is not expressed in the Mahâyâna, but implied) that the universal would be unmeaning if it were not realised in the particular. Absolute Suchness without reference to the world of concrete Particularity is like a Pratyekabuddha, and the Pratyeka-