

OUTLINES
OF
MAHÂYÂNA BUDDHISM.

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BY

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PREFACE.

The object of this book is twofold: (1) To refute the many wrong opinions which are entertained by Western critics concerning the fundamental teachings of Mahâyâna Buddhism; (2) To awake interest among scholars of comparative religion in the development of the religious sentiment and faith as exemplified by the growth of one of the most powerful spiritual forces in the world. The book is therefore at once popular and scholarly. It is popular in the sense that it tries to expose the fallacy of the general attitude assumed by other religionists towards Mahâyânism. It aims to be scholarly, on the other hand, when it endeavors to expound some of the most salient features of the doctrine, historically and systematically.

In attempting the accomplishment of this latter object, however, the author makes no great claim, because it is impossible to present within this prescribed space all the data that are available for a comprehensive and systematic elucidation of the Mahâyâna Buddhism, whose history began in the sixth century before the Christian era and ran through a period of more than two thousand years before it assumed the form in which it is at present taught in the Orient. During this long period, the Mahâyâna

doctrine was elaborated by the best minds that India, Tibet, China, and Japan ever produced. It is no wonder then that so many diverse and apparently contradictory teachings are all comprised under the general name of Mahâyâna Buddhism. To expound all these theories even tentatively would be altogether outside the scope of such a work as this. All that I could or hoped to do was to discuss a few of the most general and most essential topics of Mahâyânism, making this a sort of introduction to a more detailed exposition of the system as a whole as well as in particular.

To attain the first object, I have gone occasionally outside the sphere within which I had properly to confine the work. But this deviation seemed imperative for the reason that some critics are so prejudiced that even seemingly self-evident truths are not comprehended by them. I may be prejudiced in my own way, but very frequently I have wondered how completely and how wretchedly some people can be made the prey of self-delusion.

The doctrinal history of Mahâyâna Buddhism is very little known to Occidental scholars. This is mainly due to the inaccessibility of material which is largely written in the Chinese tongue, one of the most difficult of languages for foreigners to master. In this age of liberal culture, it is a great pity that so few of the precious stones contained in the religion of Buddha are obtainable by Western people. Human nature is essentially the same the world over, and

whenever and wherever conditions mature we see the same spiritual phenomena; and this fact ever strengthens our faith in the universality of truth and in the ultimate reign of lovingkindness. It is my sincere desire that in so far as my intellectual attainment permits I shall be allowed to pursue my study and to share my findings with my fellow-beings.

In concluding this prelude, the author wishes to say that this little book is presented to the public with a full knowledge of its many defects, to revise which he will not fail to make use of every opportunity offered him.

DAISETZ T. SUZUKI.

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