

No image! No Likeness! Hakushi!

“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness (of anything) that (is) in heaven above, or that (is) in the earth beneath, or that (is) in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them . . . “¹

Thus we read in Exodus 20.4.

According to the Bible, these are the words of God, spoken to the ancient Israelites at Mount Sinai. No doubt, only Divine Consciousness, Enlightened Consciousness can demand such a thing.

For it is clear that this command is not a death sentence on art, on artistic creativity, on statues and pictures, as the iconoclasts erroneously believed.

This prohibition concerns a general activity of our ordinary human consciousness. With regard to this activity of the consciousness, the iconoclasts are image-and-likeness makers par excellence.

It is not the Russian icon glowing with warmth, not the graceful Gothic statue in the shadows of a niche, and not the stained glass window with its deep and brilliant colours that are forbidden to us as “image” and “likeness”. An expression of religious experience, forbidden by God? The Bible itself is such an expression. It depends on us, on our consciousness, whether these expressions are “image-and-likeness” or not. And so it is with everything. It is up to us, to our consciousness, whether we regard ourselves and with us the world as objects, as “image-and-likeness”; or whether we experience us-in-the-Reality: the Bible, the picture, or statue, the flower, the stone, or the bird, the house, the pot, the lamp, or any other thing or creature, one by one: Reality only.

The sad fact is that in our ordinary consciousness we are totally unable to see, to do, to be Reality. It is not a matter of ill will. We know no other possibility. We simply cannot help making images and likenesses – and that unceasingly. Given to names and figures, to objectified truths, never having discovered the unobjectified Truth, the Reality “within” us, we are unable to discover the Reality “without” – anywhere. Thus, whatever we see or imagine “in heaven”, or “in the earth” or “in the water”, we turn into “image-and-likeness”: God – image-and-likeness; the tree – image-and-likeness; our body – image-and-likeness, the fish – image-and-likeness. Whatever we see, hear, smell, taste, touch, or do: image-and-likeness. Whatever we think, believe in, wish, or hope

¹ Quoted from the Concordant Bible. The words in brackets don't exist in the original.

for, dream, conceive of, or say: image-and-likeness only. We do not experience our-Self, so we do not experience the Thing, but only something “about it”, something “like it”. But what is “like it”, or “about it”, is not the Thing. It’s just a picture, an image. And such an image bearing likeness is as far from Reality as earth is from heaven. Taking it as real, we are deceived, we rely on a lie. It is this lie that we live in throughout our ordinary consciousness. Christians may call this lie “sinfulness”, Buddhists may call it “ignorance”; but whether it is sinfulness or ignorance, the plain fact is that in this state of mind we are slaves of image-and-likeness, we are image-and-likeness; we are not free in Truth, we are not Truth.

Fumbling around with image-and-likeness, we cannot hear the voice of the Truth, of the Reality: “I am the Lord, your God!” We have our image-and-likeness gods, made up by our deluded consciousness. We live in an unreal world. We make an unreal world. We make an unreal God. We are unreal.

Thus: Whether we, whether the world is Real or not depends solely on our state of consciousness. Our consciousness being image-and-likeness, the world is image-and-likeness; our consciousness being Real, the world is Real.

The command “No image! No likeness!” therefore can be truly heard, fully obeyed only by an enlightened consciousness. Thus the words at Mt. Sinai amount to nothing less than: “Change! Go out of your ordinary consciousness. Get liberated, get fully enlightened! Do not cling in any way to those images, made by your sinful, ignorant mind. Do not become their servant. Do not bow down to them. Do not cherish the poor likeness you produce by your limited, deluded consciousness. Leave all this lie and falseness behind. Throw it away!”

The instruction given by all Zen-masters of old and of present is congruent with the instruction of God. Ceaselessly, patiently, irrevocably, energetically they tell, scold, persuade, and command their disciples: “Whatever thought, idea, imagination, concept, belief, or opinion there is, it has to go. As long as there is anything written, drawn² in the head, you cannot find enlightenment. Throw it all away. Your mind must be as empty, as blank as a sheet of pure white paper: hakushi!”³

Whether now we hear the Japanese “Hakushi!” in Tokyo today, or whether we hear the Hebrew “No image! No likeness!” at Mt. Sinai three thousand years

² The Japanese „kaku“ means: to write, draw, paint, etc.

³ Hakushi (Jap.): haku = shiro = white; shi = washi = paper; hakushi = white paper.

ago, it amounts to the same thing, it leads to the same state. And the one who brings himself to fulfil the demand “hakushi”, if but for a moment, he has obeyed the words of God for once. There will be no doubt in his heart about this fact. The very instant his mind is empty, a total vacuum, while fully waking and aware; that same instant he experiences the first ray of enlightenment: Zero, ku, the “Ungrund”.⁴

But this is only the beginning. The state of “no-image-and-likeness, hakushi” is not yet gained permanently. To do so is a formidable task. But with this first glimpse the rest of our doubts about the command of God, the rest of our scepticism in regards to the order of the Zen-master is dispelled. Now we know by experience that the world of “no image, no likeness, hakushi” exists. Now we have come to see the falseness of our prior state and the thorough insufficiency of our present one. For the rest of our life we are incessantly stirred to come to live in this forever, i.e. to Live-in-Truth.

We begin to grasp that without full enlightenment there is always some idolatry in our veneration of God, Christ, or the saints, in our veneration of the Buddha, or the Bodhisattvas: We venerate an image bearing the likeness of our consciousness. Now, to enter and follow a religious path it is good to venerate, no matter how poorly; and it will be the better the less we think of the one whom we venerate – we are just drawn towards the Unknown. We must forget everything: past and future, give up all memories and hopes, forget the men and things of our present as far as possible in daily life, concentrating on the work right under our hands. We must forget God, Christ, or the Buddha; the Bible, or the Sutras; all saints and sages, all dogmas and doctrines, ourselves – everything, everything. All those thoughts are nothing but image-and-likeness. Away with them!

When reading the Bible or the Sutras in our ordinary consciousness, we are reading information about facts outside of us. But the Bible from beginning to end is the dramatic account of the dramatic events within our human consciousness up to the highest Consciousness. So are the Sutras nothing but an expression of inner experience up to Full-enlightenment. Without undergoing those inner events, those experiences, we can neither understand the Bible nor the Sutras. And without forgetting the outside information, we cannot undergo these experiences, we never can break the spell, the curse of

⁴ Ku (Jap.) approximately equal to: Emptiness, Void. “Ungrund”, as Jakob Böhme calls what Ku is in Japanese. But neither “Emptiness”, nor “ku”, nor “Ungrund” can express that experience.

as such image-and-likeness. But we have to! We are not content with information about God! We are not content with information about Christ! We are not content with information about the Buddha!

We have to forget, to “kill” the historical Christ, so the Living Christ can be resurrected within us. We have to forget all names and figures to experience That without names, figures, colours, without any qualities – Zero.

There is nothing wrong with the Bible. There is nothing wrong with the Sutras. But there is something deeply wrong with us. Like a violet flashlight our consciousness shows us everything in a false light. So we have to switch off the flash light first. Now everything is dark – we forget, lose everything including ourselves – Nothing – by that we find it all again – in a totally changed light.

Having undergone the experience of complete loss, of “no-image-and-likeness, hakushi”, resulting in en-lightenment, our mind is suddenly in tune. Now when reading the Bible we recognize it as our own experience. Now when reading the Sutras we recognize them as our own experience. Our experience is still lacking in depth, but it is of the same kind. Now we have gotten “behind” the Bible, and we can unroll it from the other end: from the end of experience instead of from the end of hearsay-information. Now the Bible has become “our Bible”. Now the Sutras have become “our Sutras”. The words of the Bible, the words of the Sutras are our creation – as if nobody ever before had ever written such a thing. The Bible, the Sutras, they are my-Self.

This great gift is ours by obeying “no-image! No likeness! Hakushi!” The struggle for this state of emptiness is the condition sine qua non for the experience of liberation, may we now call it divine union, salvation, or enlightenment. Without this experience we can live a rather good moral life in the social realm, but we cannot come to be-in-Truth without it; we cannot live what IS:

This fact is well known to the Japanese Zen-masters. In the Christian world it seems to be forgotten. The Catechism, even “A new Catechism” does not mention anywhere this fundamental necessity on the way to liberation. The paragraphs on prayer, meditation, and contemplation do not once remind us. Empty yourself of everything! In the Christian world we find this advice only with the mystics: Meister Eckehart, St. John of the Cross, Angelus Silesius, the anonymous author of “The Cloud of Unknowing”, Jacob Böhme, and others. The ordinary Christian, whether priest or layman, and moreover the

Church as such, seems to be oblivious to this basic demand. Instead we read in “A New Catechism” (p.307) on the Eucharistic prayer. “...the solution is not to withdraw entirely. It is better to try to enter into the minds of the others – why they are so and why they act so.” It sounds so lovingly, but it is nothing but fake. Our Thoughts being image-and-likeness, the “others” as separate entities distortedly get deflected in our defiled consciousness. In Truth we meet the “others” only in the depth of our own heart-mind. But first we must reach this depth by enlightenment. That social psychology to which we are encouraged by the Catechism for the time of prayer in common is the greatest damage we can do to ourselves, which is damaging our “neighbour” just the same. The only way to find, to help the others”, is to forget them completely. No image! No likeness! Hakushi!

Question:

The Bible says ‘graven image’, but throughout the word ‘graven’ has ignored here. Does it not mean ‘engraved’ in a material like stone, wool, etc.?

Answer:

It may be read as such. But the Bible is not a book on arts and crafts; it is a book on consciousness, on, or better: of the heart-mind. So, ‘graven’ means: engraved our mind.

When the Japanese Zen-masters say nothing should be ‘painted, drawn, written’ (Jap. = ‘kaku’) in the head, they often add that fleeting thoughts are not so dangerous, but that fixed ideas, that opinions, beliefs, Weltanschauungen, etc. engraved in the mind are most serious obstacles on the way to liberation. For enlightenment, however, finally all has to be thrown out, fleeting and fixed engraved thoughts alike.

Question:

The Western mind has developed to such a degree that the ancient demand of ‘no-image-and-likeness’ may no more be appropriate to us, - not to talk about the Japanese who are so different from us. We cannot become as thoughtlessXXX as a dull animal any more. A dog, a cow may not have any trouble with ‘no image-and-likeness’, or ‘hakushi’; but is that state desirable for us today?

Answer:

When reading the books of Meister Eckehart, St. John of the Cross, or any other mystic we hardly get the impression that the author is a dull cow. And yet, every one of them has undergone to the full the experience of ‘no-image-and-likeness’, of ‘hakushi’, of ‘the dark night’ as St. John calls it. When meeting present day Japanese Zen-masters we find no resemblance with dogs in them. Yet they have undergone this experience.

Those Westerners of today having experienced enlightenment by emptying their mind of all and everything are no fools either.⁵ So we know that ancient demand is as valid today as ever.

There may be two methods to bring about the vanishing of all thoughts (see under ‘Gespräch and Chinmoku’ and ‘Concentration and Absorption’), but whether we take the one or the other to make thoughts disappear, disappear they must.

Question:

But how do those enlightened people live if they don’t think? How can they perform their work? Or, as a Japanese Zen-master does one not have to think? Is it just like the work of an unthinking shepherd? And should we throw away all our science then?

Answer:

When suddenly a truck appears around the corner in the street you are just crossing, do you then think: “This is a fast running truck. If I don’t hurry, I’ll be run over. So, I better move.”? No! You run. If you started to think first, the truck would be upon you before you had halfway finished your thought. You have no time to make images and likenesses. And whether you are a shepherd or a second Einstein does not make the slightest difference. Nor does it make any difference whether you are a European or a Japanese. No thought, direct action! While ordinary people only now and then under great pressure react directly, spontaneously by instinct, the enlightened one throughout his existence reacts, acts directly, spontaneously by intuition.⁶ No thoughts are between him and his work. A bridge between the doer and the thing done is not necessary: there is no ‘between’, there are not two. That is the state of ‘hakushi’, of ‘no-image-and-likeness’ in permanence.

⁵ See examples of enlightenment experiences of contemporary Westerners e.g. in “On Having No Head” by D.E. Harding, The Buddhist Society, London S.W.1, and “The Three Pillars of Zen” by Ph. Kapleau, Beacon, Paperback No.242, Boston, 1967.

⁶ ‘Instinct’ and ‘Intuition’ see under: “The First and the Second Naturalness”.

An enlightened one can well be a scientist. If he has come to live ‘no-image-and-likeness’ objects of science are as little removed, separated from him as anything else. His false view having been restored to a truly healthy sight, there are no objects, he is no subject.

The state of ‘hakushi’, of ‘no-image-and-likeness’ should not be mixed up with stupidity; it has nothing whatsoever to do with the categories of stupidity and intelligence. Living in this state of consciousness, the enlightened one experiences the world, each one of the multitude of phenomena, identical with Emptiness, with Nothing, with Zero. For him Zero is not different from the multitude: ZeroMultitude! Inseparable! Not: the multitude here, and over there Zero. No! ZeroMultitude here! One by one, each thing and phenomenon: ZeroMultitude. Laughter: ZeroMultitude, ZeroLaughter; Pain: ZeroPain; Solemnity: ZeroSolemnity, Eating: ZeroEating; Working: ZeroWorking; this book: ZeroBook, - - not Zero and Multitude united, not Zero and Multitude identical – total Sameness! A cry! A blow! A drop! Beyond any explanation – laughterLaughter – painPain – solemnitySolemnity – eatingEating – workingWorking – bookBook – cryCry – foolFool – sageSage - Zero is not “” the multitude. The multitude is not “playing” on Zero. Often it is said that the multitude is like the moving pictures of a film, Zero being like the empty screen. But even that is misleading. The very pictures are: ZeroPictures – the very screen: ZeroScreen. Both, each one: ZeroMultitude. And there is nothing else – picturesPictures – screenScreen – multitudeMultitude – zeroZero – ha! – Period! - - - periodPeriod!

Every single thing, every single word down to the last comma: commaComma! Such is the result of permanently living in the state of ‘no-image-and-likeness’, of ‘hakushi’. Naturally this state does not exclude science. It does not exclude one thing of the universe.

A deeply enlightened person thus lives on a very different level of consciousness. In our ordinary consciousness we can by no means know what it is, or how it is. To know this we must become deeply enlightened ourselves. No description of ‘red’ will make the blind man understand what red is. We have to open our eyes and see: Red!

All this sounds very confusing. For us, to get at least a bit of an idea what is meant, can you not give us an example, I mean something they say or do . . .

We are not supposed to “get ideas” – that’s just the wrong way. But certainly there are many instances of living Zen-masters that are revealing. Moreover,

there are books with written accounts of what they say or do. However, it's just as with the Bible . . . But well, let's try:

“A monk asked Ikan Zenji:⁷Does a dog have Buddha-nature?

Ikan Zenji replied: Has.

Monk: Does the abbot⁸have Buddha-nature?

Ikan Zenji: I have not.

Monk: Every sentient being has Buddha-nature, how is it,
that the abbot does not have it?

Ikan Zenji: I am not every sentient being.

Monk: If the abbot is not a sentient being, is he a Buddha
or not?

Ikan Zenji: I am not a Buddha.

Monk: Then after all, what kind of thing is the abbot?

Ikan Zenji: I am not a thing.

Monk: Am I to see it, or think it, or not?

Ikan Zenji: It is beyond thinking. Therefore it is called

‘fukashigi’.”(=impossible to think, implying also: wrong to think).

Question:

You said they don't think. But “I am not this”, “I am not that” – that is a thought, a concept . . .

Answer:

There we have it! It was said before: It's just as with the Bible. We read according to our state of consciousness.

Now we must start all over again:

“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness . . . “

See page one to five.

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(Brigitte D'Ortschy)

⁷ Ikan Zenji lived around 800 A.D. as the abbot of Kozan Temple in Choan/China.

⁸ The direct address in the third person is used in Japan even up to today when talking to a person of a higher rank.

