

The Philosophical Research Society, Inc.

3910 Los Feliz Blvd. - Los Angeles, Calif. 90027 - 663-2167

MANLY P. HALL
President - Founder



HENRY L. DRAKE
Vice-President

CONTRIBUTORS' BULLETIN - December 1968

Dear Friends:

As the Christmas Season approaches, we would like to express to our friends everywhere the sincere hope for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Although conditions in the world seem to have departed from the code of Christendom, we know by inner conviction that hundreds of millions of human beings are strengthened to live good lives by the Christian message. The man who walked along the shore of Galilee nearly 2,000 years ago has not been forgotten. His influence upon civilization continues and will make possible the final victory of light over darkness for the people of the Western world.

In the spirit of better relations between the religions and philosophies of mankind, I would like to mention briefly an experience that happened to me over forty years ago. Even then Christianity had a faithful following among the Japanese people. An acquaintance of mine in Kyoto, a devout Buddhist, annually played the role of Santa Claus for the children of a small Christian Mission. A story based upon this unusual circumstance appeared some time ago in our Journal under the title "St. Nicholas Nakamura".

By recourse to certain basic concepts of Mahayana Buddhism, we may be able to give a deeper and more inspiring interpretation of the Santa Claus folk legend, which has for centuries brought joy to the hearts of children and as a result, has brought happiness to countless parents. We can therefore ask the question "In terms of Japanese Buddhism is there a Santa Claus?" Long ago Mr. Nakamura answered this question in the affirmative.

There is something strongly reminiscent of Santa Claus in the Buddhist concept of Bodhisattvas. Most of these gracious beings are considered to be projections of the minds of the believers. Some may have had a remote historical foundation, but this has contributed little to the widespread veneration for these blessed comforters of mankind. It is believed, for example, that Monju Bosatsu may have originally lived in Nepal, but such speculation has slight practical value. To the devout he is the ever present personification of divine wisdom. It is also reported that Kannon Bosatsu was actually a Chinese Princess, martyred by her own father because of her determination to renounce the world and become a Buddhist Nun. This semi-historical background has no vital meaning to modern believers, for whom Kannon will always be the Lord of Infinite Compassion. Miroku Bosatsu has been given some biographical support, for he has been associated with the Honorable Pu, a rotund Monk

who lived in the Tenth Century and carried his worldly possessions and countless toys for children in a huge calico sack. In this roly poly aspect, venerable Pu comes very close to the Santa Claus image. There has been some study of the historical Monk, but for the devout, Miroku Bosatsu will always be identified with the Maitreya Buddha, who is still a Bodhisattva until he incarnates to become the next World Teacher.

There is no question that Santa Claus can be traced by the hesitant finger of tradition to St. Nicholas of Myra, a very good man who lived long ago and was especially honored by the Eastern Christian Church. He practiced secret charity and the gifts that he left were ascribed to the benevolence of God, and the ministry of his angels. It may be safe to say that good St. Nicholas did not resemble the department store Santa Claus presiding over the toy department.



Buddhism has long taught a doctrine called Hoben. This actually means that the human mind, striving to understand the mysteries of the spiritual universe, falls inevitably into a process of personifying the aspects of the divine power. This imagery is found in most religions and is not absent from Christianity. Prophets and Seers speak of the Eye of God as seeing all things, the Hand of God bestowing justice, the Heart of God forever merciful, and the Voice of God as Moses heard it on the peak of Mt. Sinai. These must certainly be considered as figures of speech, because very few even devout persons actually believe that God exists in the appearance of a human being. Of course, it is quite proper to realize that deity does abide in the human heart, but it is also proper to consider him as dwelling in the winds and the sky and the water, and the dark earth beneath our feet. Even such

pronouns as He and Him when applied to God must be accepted as expressions of Hoben. Because we cannot venerate properly that which is totally formless, and cannot understand that which creates no image in our own inner consciousness, we must always give some kind of shape, proportion or dimension, to the abstract truths we strive to worship and understand.

Bodhisattvas are such personifications. They represent various aspects of infinite wisdom, love and strength, made conceivable to our faculties through gracious and luminous forms. If then we should ask does Kannon exist, we might answer does compassion exist, for the Bosatsu is merely man's way of trying to experience unselfish love through creating an image of this love within his own nature.

In the same way we can ask does Santa Claus exist? Is he merely a folk image or is he part of a symbolism relating to "the Bestower of Life"? Does the desire to bring happiness to children actually exist? Does the beautiful concept of secret giving have a reality? Does the jolly, happy old St. Nick, in his red coat, trimmed with white fur, high black boots, tassled cap, and luxurious white whiskers, have a meaning long neglected and generally overlooked. If father and mother or some

...doting aunt become the agents of the generosity of Santa Claus, is it not because his spirit exists in them. If they did not love to bring laughter to their children and surround the Christmas Season with festivity and joy, there could be no Santa Claus. All such symbols are the visualizations of human beings. Think of all the children who on one special night of the year visualize Santa Claus with great hope and intensity. If thoughts are things, then Santa Claus is very real on Christmas Eve.

Like all such psychical images, ordinary problems in no way damage the folk lore. If there is no fireplace, Santa Claus is not thwarted. And in this day of rapid transit, the problem of going around the world in a single night, in a sleigh drawn by reindeer, causes no anxiety. Like the Bodhisattvas, Santa Claus can be anywhere and everywhere and always. Like them he can be infinitely multiplied until he is a veritable legion. Yet actually there are no facsimilies and no impostures if the spirit is right. The Santa Claus ringing the bell on the street by the Salvation Army kettle, the Santa Claus bringing food baskets to the poor, the Santa Claus who listens to the requests of small children in a toy shop, are all real, genuine and valid. Like the venerable Pu, Santa Claus abides in the young of heart, the generous of soul and the kindly of mind.

Another East-West parallel is most intriguing. Santa Claus is supposed to live at the North Pole, a bleak and inhospitable region, where it is dark for nearly half of the year. This certainly must be another instance of Hoben. In ancient India the great polar mountain of the earth was Meru or Sumuro, the axis of the world. On the sides of this mountain dwelt the Hindu Immortals and in the course of time the Buddhist contemplation images were given the same abode. From this mountain were sent streams of life that made all the world fertile. Here were the treasure palaces from which streamed forth blessings upon all living creatures. What more fitting place could be found for the workshop of Santa Claus, for are we not also children, dependent upon the generosity of a divine plan for our very existence?



Yet another analogy seems pertinent. In these speedy days, Santa Claus still depends upon a team of reindeer to bring his heavily laden sleigh across the sky and into the lives of believing children. The deer has long been a Christian symbol to signify by its gentleness the gracious patience suitable to the devout believer. The deer is also one of the earliest and most important symbols of Buddhism. It was in the Deer Park at Sarnath, near Benares, that Gautama Buddha preached his first sermon. Here for the first time he "turned the wheel of the Law", revealing to five Monks the doctrines of reincarnation and karma. Everywhere in Eastern painting and sculpturing, the deer attends Buddha, usually kneeling near the base of the Lotus upon which

the Great Teacher is seated. In some cases the deer is actually substituted for Buddha. A recent example of this process is a postage stamp of Thailand, in which the deer takes the place of the Buddha image.

Because man can neither understand nor apply to himself completely dimensionless abstractions, a pattern of accommodation images arise so that to each believer the eternal truth presents itself in a comprehensible form. On the level of moral instruction, we have a parable in which a transcendent concept is clothed in comprehensible form, as in the Parable of the Prodigal Son or the Good Samaritan. No one asks if these persons ever existed, for the simple reason that they do exist everywhere, always. There will be prodigal sons for a long time to come and their stories will be like the one set forth in the Bible. There will also be Good Samaritans because they represent an imperishable quality of human consciousness.

For these and other reasons we say there is a Santa Claus, but we also point out that he depends for his reality upon us. We make him real, or perhaps more correctly, we reveal the qualities in space which make life better and happier.

We hope that you and yours will receive into your own hearts the full glory of the Christmas Season. When Santa Claus, as the symbol of Universal Benevolence, bestows his gifts of grace and insight, may we all be impelled, even compelled, to assist him in his benevolent labors. As we bestow our love, encouragement and blessing upon those with whom we come in contact, we will be rewarded with greater personal happiness and well-being. May your Christmas be truly a mystical experience.

Always sincerely and gratefully yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Manly P. Hall". The signature is written in dark ink and has a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

MANLY P. HALL