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Thoughts During Imprisonment

Uchiyama Gudō

Oct 26, 1909

It is government suppression. It is tyranny.

Even until now, I am unable to give a viewpoint on whether the ending of a human life is a good or bad thing, regardless of someone giving me a good or bad name for it. Daring to be brief about whether or not to end a human life, I am neither for nor against either choice, because I am for the sake of everybody's happiness, with an unshakeable faith to stand on the impossible conviction of working for the freedom of any or even all people.

I wish that I will behave in accordance with the demands of reason and not based on the demands of immediate emotions or instincts based on material desire. If this course of action is in accordance with the demands of reason, it is unfortunate. Our work is left unfinished and my discouragement is like tears on the chopping block while the moment continues to fade away. I am able to remain detached though, and have the audacity to even smile. Otherwise, I think it is just something I do sentimentally. And this probably isn't going to lead to any favorable change, for the time being

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taking a stand leads to adversity. A person cries with bitterness to the heavens unable to escape this suffering, and I sympathize with this.

In any case, how does one act in accordance with reason? Many ordinary people want to believe that if they were scholars it would be very easy, but this isn't the case isn't it?

Incidentally it is perhaps unknowable. However, when it comes to acting in accordance with reason, and the infinitely various ways of doing so, as great scholars are great scholars, and middle schoolers are middle schoolers, I believe that even the uneducated can act appropriately according to reason remorselessly and with belief in their actions, which I would like to speak on and consider below.

So what is reason? Well it's about as complicated as a six sided square, but how much progress could humanity make if it were more familiar? Let us briefly examine this.

To begin with from the standpoint of health, don't we want to ensure that all have enough of the three necessities of life, i.e. food, clothing and shelter? Now that doesn't mean everyone gets to live in a marble tower. Nor does it mean wearing a 1,000 yen sash. Nor does it mean wishing to always attend banquets, eating portions that cost 100 yen per person, but rather working 10 hours a day and exercising at least once a week, striving for our ideals even in the cold weather, moving towards those ideals one step at a time; this is a person's duty. And so, the proper course of action is to examine one's situation in life and look at its place in the current state of the world today.

Why don't we collectively envision a world in which we can be properly clothed in the heat, properly nourished when we are sick, and pursue educational entertainment and religious cultivation as we like on resting days? This is not necessarily only my wish. This is the wish of all peoples. But what is today's world like? There are people who build houses for 300 yen per tsubo (~3.3sqm) on land that costs 100 yen per tsubo, renting a six tatami (~10sqm) room for 3 yen a month, some fitting a family of six into an old tene-

ment house, and more and more and more; aren't these conditions the case for laborers? Even that is impossible to live in for some, in this society there are people who must spend even the coldest winter nights after their daily labors under the eaves with the stars as friends for consolation. There are also people who can afford to wear clothes that cost 1000 or 2000 yen a piece, while others bear through the winter, working in just a thin haori (traditional winter coat). So this is the state of the laborer today, with even their infants having to be wrapped in soiled rags.

Compulsory education is shouldered for six years. We should be immensely grateful for this favor that the magnificent imperial government has lain on us, but for the heimin (commoner social class) worker, they feel as though their lives are cruel, painful and bitter. Heimin children are born into a harsh life, where by the time they are age 9 or 10, they must start working in one way or another in order to support their parents. When parents compare this to the young men, innocent in the ways of the world, who have the privilege of deferring conscription and can just go to school until they are 25 or even 30, it must be infuriating.

What kind of fate can it be that there are richer folk who can afford meals worth 5 or 10 yen but bemoan over poor digestion while working folk subsist off of bentos worth 5 sen (1 sen = 1/100th of a yen)? My father, who is over 60, has been lying in bed with an illness since February. Workers are unable to even buy non-prescription medicine, let alone receive a medical examination from a doctor. And yet there are many medical teachers and students at the university. No matter how many towering hospitals reach to the heavens, they are not for the benefit of the worker.

So, one could accept that there is no other way to live in this world and must abandon hope, sleeping and waking in a pigsty, surviving on other people's leftovers, living a life worse than that of a rich man's dog; or year after year, with just a thin hanten coat, without a family, living alone the life of the low born laborer; or rather one could be that of the most courageous of men and seek

out the roots of this unfair world and attempt to reform it. Our lives are halfway abandoned as it is. There are those who absorbed the solutions studied by scholars from all times and places, those who embark to bring them into reality, and even the strong-willed enduring the pain of prison amidst their misfortune; let us eradicate countless common peoples agony directly like the direct appeals to the shogun of Sakura Sogoro who was crucified for it, or like the meritorious deeds of Oshio Heihachiro, who, during unprecedented famine and resenting the inhumanity of the shogunate magistrates, destroyed the rice storehouse in Tenma, Osaka, satisfying the hunger of numerous poor people; this unshakeability of people's belief that motivate action, truly this is what should be called people's happiness.

The religious figure Gautama Buddha abandoned his throne to take on a life of begging. Diogenes the philosopher lived his entire life sleeping and waking in a tub. And so these two people made a living with such joy that no monarch could ever steal from. Even Christ died on the cross unconcerned, gladly even, saying that he had done so in order to pay for the sins of all people. In this way, those who act according to reason are joyful.

So, isn't it the case that in this world today that taking even one or two steps in various directions, to the best of one's abilities, in order to equally provide the necessities for life for all that people desire them, not the act of acting in accordance with reason?

Because they acted in accordance with reason, even though they are left like tears on the chopping block, even when suffering the humiliation of the cross, even when subjected to the bone chilling wind of an underground dungeon in the northern sea for half one's life, they are able to remain calm and self-possessed. This is called happiness in one's life.

And if that's the case, what's the method?

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Gudo