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Edited by Frances W. Pritchett. Editing has generally been limited to adding section numbers and correcting minor typographical errors. Annotations within square brackets are those of Damle and Zelliott. Italicized remarks in parentheses are descriptive phrases inserted by the Marathi newspaper account. The translation of the Pali passage in Section 37 was provided by Prof. Indira Peterson.

Why Was Nagpur Chosen?

In Nagpur, after leaving the Hindu religion and accepting Buddhism on 14th October 1956, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, on the morning of 15th October, 1956, made an explanatory, spirited, inspirational, and historic speech, which is given below in its entirety.

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1 == All Buddhists and guests:

Thoughtful people perhaps may find it difficult to accept the order [literally place: *stan*] of the Buddhist conversion ceremony taken and given on this spot yesterday and this morning. In their opinion, and in mine also, yesterday's program should have been today, and today's yesterday. It is necessary to inquire: why have we taken this work on ourselves? What is the necessity? What will come from it? Only if we gain understanding will the foundation of our work be strong. We should have gained this understanding before the act itself. But some things simply happen spontaneously. This ceremony, it is true, has happened as we desired. Therefore changing the day doesn't really spoil anything.

2 == Why was Nagpur chosen?

Many people ask me why Nagpur was decided upon for this work. Why didn't the conversion take place in some other city? Some people say that because the great batallion of the R.S.S. was here in Nagpur, we took the meeting to this city in order to lay them flat. This is completely untrue. This program was not brought here to Nagpur because of that. Our work is so great that even one minute in a lifetime cannot be wasted. I don't have enough time to make an ill omen for others by scratching my nose!

3 == The Nag People's "Nag"-pur

The reason for choosing this city is different. Those who read Buddhist history will come to know that in India, if anyone spread Buddhism, it was the Nag people. The Nag people were fearful enemies of the Aryans. A Fierce and fighting war went on between the Aryans and non-Aryans. Examples of the harassment of the Nags by the Aryan people are found in the **Puranas**. Agasti Muni helped only one Nag man to escape from that. We spring from that man. Those Nag people who endured so much suffering wanted some great man to raise them up. They met that great man in Gautam Buddha. The Nag people spread the teaching of Buagwan Buddha all over India. Thus we are like Nag people. It seems that the Nag people lived chiefly in Nagpur and the surrounding country. So they call this city Nagpur, meaning city of Nags. About 27 miles from here the Nag Nadi river flows. Of course the name of the river comes from the people living here. In the middle of the Nag habitation runs the Nag Nadi. This is the main reason for choosing this place. Nagpur was chosen because of this. In this matter, there is no question of a lie to provoke someone. This is not such a mental twist. The reason of the R.S.S. did not even come into my mind, and no one should take that explanation as true.

4 == The opponents' useless cry

Perhaps one could oppose [this choice] for other reasons. I have not chosen this place just out of opposition, I tell you. This work that I began was criticized by various people and newspapers. The criticism of some people is hard. In their opinion, I was leading my poor helpless Untouchable people astray. They say, "Today those who are Untouchables will remain Untouchables, and those rights gained for the Untouchables will be destroyed," and some people among us are bewildered. To the unlearned people among us, they say, "Go by the traditional path" [*pagdandi* (Hindi), "footpath," suggests that the Mahars should use an inferior path]. On some of the old and young among us, they may be influential. If doubt has been created in the minds of people because of this, it is our duty to remove that doubt; and to turn back that doubt is to strengthen the foundation of our movement.

5 == The propaganda at that time in **Kesari**

Earlier we people had had a movement against eating meat. The touchables thought a bolt of lightning had hit them. They should drink living buffalo's milk; but, when that buffalo died, we should carry that dead cow on our shoulders. Wasn't this a strange practice? We tell them, if your old woman died, then why not give her to us? If you ought to give us your dead cow, then you ought to give us your old woman also, shouldn't you? At that time, some man wrote in **Kesari** that in certain villages every year fifty cattle die, so that five hundred rupees can be earned from their hide, horns, hooves, meat, bones, and tail. Leaving aside the matter of meat, these people will be deprived of all that profit, so the letter appeared in **Kesari**. Really speaking, what was the necessity of giving an answer to his propaganda? But our people used to feel that if our lord [Babasaheb] does not give an answer to this thing, then what does the lord do at all?

6 == The profits of dead animals' hide, horns, hooves

Once I went to a meeting at Sangamner. An arrangement for eating in the evening after the meeting had been made. At that time a note was sent me by a **Kesari** reporter, and he asked me, "Say, you tell your people not to remove dead cattle [from the village]! Look at their poverty. No sari and

blouse for their wives, no food for them, no fields for them. When their circumstances are so difficult, why do you say, throw away the 500-rupee profit every year from hide, hoof, and meat? Is this not a loss for your people?"

7 == "You remove the dead cattle and take the profit!"

I said: We will answer you. Shall I answer here on the veranda, or in a meeting? It is good if this critical question comes before people. I asked the gentleman, "Is this all you have to say, or is there more?" The gentleman said, "Whatever I have asked you, answer that much." I asked that man, "How many children and dependents do you have?" He said, "I have five sons and my brother has five or six children children also." I said, "Then your family is large. You and your relations should certainly remove the dead cattle from the village and get that 500-rupee profit. Besides that, every year I myself will give you 500 rupees on top of that. Whatever will become of my people, whether they will get food and clothing or not, this is my affair and I will look after it. But are you putting aside such a successful thing? Why do you not take it on? If we do the work and get the profit, won't there be a profit if you do it? Why don't *you* remove the dead cattle?"

8 == "Become Mahars and get reserved seats!"

Yesterday a Brahmin boy came to me and asked, "In Parliament and the Assemblies, your people have been given reserved places. Why are you giving those up?" I said to him, "You become a Mahar and fill that place in Parliament and the Assemblies. If there is a service vacant, then that place fills in no time. How many applications from Brahmins and others come for that place! As places in service are filled in that way, why don't you Brahmin people, as Mahars, fill those reserved seats?"

9 == Honor is dear, profit is not dear

If *we* have suffered a loss, why do *you* weep? This is my question to them. Truly it means honor is dear to mankind; profit is not dear. A woman of good qualities and good behavior knows that there is profit in prostitution. There is a locality of prostitutes in our Bombay. When those women get up at eight in the morning, they order breakfast from a nearby hotel and say (*Dr. Ambedkar at this time, giving an imitation in a different voice, said*): "Suleman, you bring a pound of bread and a plate of minced meat." That Suleman brings it. Besides, he brings tea, bread, cake, and other things. But my depressed-class sisters do not even get ordinary chutney-bhakri. However, they live with dignity. They live piously.

10 == Leave aside childishness; be mature

We are fighting for honor. We are getting ready to lead mankind to perfection. For this, we are ready to do any sacrifice necessary. These newspaper people (*turning toward them*) have pestered me for the last forty years. How much criticism have they given me, even up to this day! I say to them, however: Think! Today, leave aside immature speech; use mature speech.

11 == We will certainly get our rights again

If we accept Buddhism, even then I will get political rights. I am absolutely sure of this (*Cries of "Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar" and loud clapping*). I cannot say what will happen on my death. Much important work must be done for this movement. What will happen because we have accepted Buddhism? If difficulties come, then how can they be removed? What strategy, what preparations should be made? --To all this I have given much thought. My bag of tricks is full of all kinds of things. How it got to be full, I know very well. I myself got those rights for my people. The one who got those rights in the first place will be able to get them again. I myself am the giver of those rights and concessions, and I will get those concessions again, I am sure. At least for the present, you should continue to have faith in me. I will prove that there is no truth in the opposing propaganda.

12 == Delivered from hell

I am surprised at only one thing. Much discussion has been going on everywhere. But not even one man has asked me, "Why did you accept Buddhism?" Putting aside all other religions, why was this religion accepted? In any movement to change religion, this is the main question. When one makes a change of religion, one has to test: which religion [should we take]? Why should we take it? The movement to leave the Hindu religion was taken in hand by us in 1935, when a resolution was made in Yeola. "Even though I was born in the Hindu religion, I will not die in the Hindu religion" --this oath I made earlier; yesterday I proved it true. I am happy; I am ecstatic! I have left hell --this is how I feel. I do not want any blind followers. Those who come into the Buddhist religion should come with understanding; they should consciously accept that religion.

13 == Karl Marx's sect and we

Religion is a very necessary thing for the progress of mankind. I know that a sect has appeared because of the writings of Karl Marx. According to their creed, religion means nothing at all. Religion is not important to them. They get a breakfast in the morning of bread, cream, butter, chicken legs, etc.; they get undisturbed sleep; they get to see movies; and that's all there is. This is their philosophy. I am not of that opinion. My father was poor, and therefore we did not get comforts of that kind. No one has ever lived a life as hard as mine! How hard a man's life can be without happiness and comforts, that I know. I agree that an economic elevation movement is necessary. I am not against that movement. Man must progress economically.

14 == Buffalo, bull, and man

But I note an important difference in this matter. There is a difference between buffalo, bull, and man. Buffalo and bull must have fodder daily. Man also must have food. But between the two the difference is this: the buffalo and bull have no mind; man has, along with his body, a mind. Both have to be cared for. The mind should be developed. The mind should become cultured, and that culture has to be developed. I want no sort of relationships with people from a country where it is said that there is no connection between man and his cultured mind except for his body. I do not need any such relationship. Just as a man's body should be healthy, the mind also should be cultured.

15 == The origin of energy [*utsah*] is a cultured mind

Why is there illness in man's body or mind? The reasons are, either there is bodily pain, or there is no energy in the mind. If there is no energy in the mind, then there will be no progress! Why is there no energy there? The first reason is this: man is kept down in such a fashion that he does not get an opportunity to come up, or he has no hope of climbing. At that time, can he be ambitious? He is a diseased person. A man who gets the fruit of his own work will be energetic. Otherwise, in school, if the teacher begins to say, "Hey, who is this? Is this a Mahar? And will this wretched Mahar pass with a first class? Why does he want first class? Stay in your fourth class! To get into first class is Brahmins' work!" --in these circumstances, how can that child be ambitious? What will be his progress? The place of creation of energy is the mind. The person whose body and mind are healthy, who is courageous, who feels that he will overcome all circumstances, in that kind of person energy will be created, and that kind of person alone excels. In the Hindu religion, such an extraordinary philosophy is found in the writings that one can't get any sense of possible achievement at all. If a man is left for a thousand years in poor circumstances, discarded, made hopeless, then at the most they will have no more ambition than to fill their stomachs with a minor job. What else can happen? There must be a big clerk to secure the protection of these little clerks.

16 == I put on a *langoti* and got my education

Man's spirit is created in the mind. You know the owner of the mill. He appoints a manager over the mill, and through the manager the work in the mill gets done. These mill owners have a few bad habits. The culture of their minds has not been developed. We had to think actively with our minds,

so we started a movement. At that time education was started. I put on a *langoti* [the scantiest possible Indian garment] and began my education. In school I did not even get drinking water. How many days dragged by without water! Also in Bombay, even at Elphinstone College, conditions were the same. If the atmosphere is like this, how will different conditions be created? Only clerks will be created.

17 == Hindu, Mussalman, and we

When I was on the Executive Council at Delhi, Lord Linlithgow was Viceroy. I told him, "You spend the normal budget, and in addition you pay three lakhs of rupees for Aligarh University for education for the Moslems." Then Linlithgow said, "Write out a memo about that and bring it in." Accordingly, I wrote a memorandum. That memorandum is still with me. European people were very sympathetic. They accepted what I said. But the hitch was that they didn't know what to spend the money on. They thought, our girls are not educated: education should be given to them, their boarding should be arranged, and the money should be spent on that. But if our girls were to be educated and taught to cook different foods, where at home was the material to make those same dishes? What was the end result of their education? The government spent the proper amounts on other things, but the amount for education was not spent.

18 == Men sitting on the pinnacle of the palace

So I went one day to Linlithgow and said, concerning the expense of education, "If you will not get angry, I want to ask a question. I am equal to fifty [high school] graduates, am I not?" He had to agree to that. Then I asked, "What is the reason?" He said, "I don't know the reason." I said, "My learning is so great that I could sit on the pinnacle of the palace. I want such men. Because-- from the top, one can survey everything. If our people are to be protected, then such sharp-eyed, able men should be created. What can a mere clerk do?" Immediately my words convinced Linlithgow, and that year sixteen students were sent to England for higher education. If those sixteen, some came out raw and some mature, just as some water jugs are half-baked and some are finished... leave aside the consequences. Later Rajagopalacarya cancelled this plan for higher education.

19 == A thousand years of hopeless conditions

In this country, the situation is such that we can be kept in a hopeless state for a thousand years. As long as such conditions prevail, it is not possible to begin to produce ambition to progress. We have not been able to do anything about it by staying in the Hindu religion. The Chaturvarna is found in **Manusmriti**. The hierarchy of the Chaturvarna is very dangerous for the progress of mankind. It is written in the **Manusmriti** that Shudras should do only menial services. Why should they have education? The Brahmin should get education, the Kshatriya should take up arms, the Vaishya should do business, the Shudra should serve-- who can disrupt this precise arrangement? There is profit in it for the people of the Brahmin, Kshatriya, and Vaishya castes. What of the Shudra? Can any ambition develop in the lower castes? The Chaturvarna system was not created haphazardly. It is not just a popular custom. It is religion.

20 == Chaturvarna, Gandhi, and bad religion

There is no equality in the Hindu religion. One time when I went to see Gandhi, he said, "I respect Chaturvarna." I said, "Mahatmas like you respect the Chaturvarna, but just what is this Chaturvarna? (*Dr. Ambedkar stretched out his hand horizontally, and then turned it over, so the four fingers were in vertical order.*) Is this Chaturvarna up or down? Who created the Chaturvarna, and who will end it?" Gandhi did not answer the question. And what could he say? Those people who destroyed us will also be destroyed because of this religion. I do not accuse this Hindu religion without reason. Because of the Hindu religion, no one can progress. That religion is only a destructive religion.

21 == If we were allowed to use arms...

Why did our country go under the domination of another? In Europe, there were wars until 1945. Whenever a soldier was killed, a recruit took his place. No one said, "We have won the war" [before it was won]. In our country, everything is different. If Kshatriyas are killed, we are doomed. If we had been allowed to bear arms, this country would not have gone into slavery. No one would have been able to conquer this country.

22 == Progress will come only through the Buddhist religion

Remaining in the Hindu religion will bring no kind of progress to anyone. For some, the hierarchy of the Hindu religion brings profits; this is true for the superior classes and castes. But what of the others? If a Brahmin woman delivers a child, from then on her vision is on any high court judge's place which might fall vacant. If one of our sweeper women is brought to bed, her vision turns toward the place of a sweeper. Such strange arrangements the Hindu religious class system has made. What improvements can come from this system? Progress can come only in the Buddhist religion.

23 == Buddha's message on equality

In the Buddhist religion, 75% of the Bhikkhus were Brahmin; 25% were Shudra and others. But Bhagvan said, "O Bhikkhus, you have come from different countries and castes. Rivers flow separately in their own countries, but do not remain distinct when they meet in the sea. They become one and the same. The Buddhist brotherhood of monks is like the sea. In this Sangha all are equal. It is impossible to know Ganga water from Mahandi water after both have merged in the sea. In that way, after coming into the Buddhist Sangha, your caste goes, and all people are equal. Only one great man spoke of equality, and that great man is Bhagvan Buddha.

24 == Mine is a great responsibility

Some people say, "Why did you take so much time to get converted? What have you been doing all these days?" This question is important. The task of teaching religious understanding is not easy. It is not the work of one man. An understanding of the task will come to any man who thinks about religion. No man in the world has as much responsibility as I. If I get a long enough life, I will finish my appointed task. (*Cries of "Long live Dr. Babasaheb!"*)

25 == As Mahar Buddhists, don't defame us

"If the Mahars become Buddhists, then what will happen?" Some people will speak this way. They should not, I tell them. It will bring calamity upon them. The superior and wealthy class will not feel the necessity of religion. Among them, those having offices have a bungalow to live in, servants to do all the work; they have money and wealth and respect. Men of that sort have no reason to give thought to religion, or to be anxious about it.

26 == Religion is necessary for the poor

For the poor, religion is a necessity. Religion is necessary for people in distress. The poor man lives on hope. 'Hope!' [in English]. The source of life is hope. If this hope is destroyed, then how will life go on? Religion makes one hopeful, and to those in pain, to the poor, it gives a message: "Don't be afraid; life will be hopeful, it will be." So poor and distressed mankind clings to religion.

27 == What does the history of the Christian religion tell?

At the time the Christian religion entered Europe, the condition of Rome and the neighboring countries was one of utter distress. People didn't get enough to eat. A simple dish of rice and pulao was distributed to poor people [to keep them alive]. At that time, who became the followers of Christ? Poor, miserable people only. In Europe, all poor and inferior people became Christians. This Christian religion is for beggars, Gibbon has written. How this Christian religion became the

religion of all Europe, Gibbon is not alive today to tell us. If he were alive today, he would be required to answer that question.

28 == The world respects only the Buddha

Some people will say, "This Buddhist religion is a religion for Mahars and Mangs." Brahmins used to say, "Hey, you!" [*Bho Gautam*] to Bhagvan. Brahmins thus spoke slightly of the Buddha. But if they take their images to a foreign country to sell them, they will find not many images of Ram, Krishna, Shankar will be sold. But if they take images of the Buddha, not a single image would be left. (*Loud clapping.*) There has been enough talk by the Brahmins about India. They should show their worth outside! Only one name is proclaimed throughout the world, and that name is "Buddha." How can the Buddhist religion be stopped from spreading?

29 == Our way is the way of the Buddha

We will go by our path; others should go by their path. We have found a new way. This is a day of hope. This is a way of success, of prosperity. This way is not something new. This path was not brought here from somewhere else. This path is from here, it is purely Indian. The Buddhist religion has been in India for two thousand years. Truly speaking, we regret that we did not become Buddhists before this. The principles spoken by Bhagvan Buddha are immortal. But the Buddha did not make a claim for this, however. There is an opportunity of making changes according to the times. Such open-mindedness is not found in any other religion.

30 == Milinda and Nagasena

The chief reason for the destruction of Buddhism is the Moslem invasion. The Moslems in their onslaught broke and destroyed images. They at first encroached on the Buddhist religion in this way. Fearing the invasion, the Buddhist Bhikkhus disappeared. Some went to Tibet, some went to China, some went wherever they could go. For the protection of religion, laymen are required. In the Northwest Frontier state there was a Greek Raja. His name was Milinda. This king used to hold discussions regularly. Great delight was taken in these discussions. He used to say to the Hindus, whoever is an expert at debate should come to these forums. Many were at a loss for an answer [when they participated]. One time he thought he should have a discussion with Buddhist people; and he said, any Buddhist expert at debate should be brought to him. Therefore Buddhist people asked Nagasena to go: "You should take up the cause of the Buddhists." Nagasena was learned. He was a Brahmin. The discussion that took place between Nagasena and Milinda is famous throughout the world as a book. That book's name is **Milinda Punha**. Milinda asked this question: "Why does religion languish?" Nagasena gave three reasons in his answer.

31 == Three reasons for religious decline

- (1) The first reason is that some religion is immature. In that religion, the basic principles have no depth. That makes for a temporal religion, and the religion will hold fast only if it suits the times.
- (2) The second reason is that there may be no learned men to spread the religion. If there are none, the religion languishes. Learned men should preach religious wisdom. If the propagandists of a religion are not ready to hold discussion with opponents, the religion will die.
- (3) The third reason is this: [if] religion and religious philosophy are only for the learned [, the religion will not survive]. For common ordinary people, there are temples and shrines. They go there and worship supernatural power. [If this is the case, the religion languishes.]

32 == The only generous religion

We should remember these reasons as we take the conversion to Buddhism. No one can say that Buddhist principles are temporal. Even today, two thousand five hundred years afterwards, all the world respects the principles of Buddhism. In America there are two thousand Buddhist institutions. In England, at an expense of 300,000 rupees a Buddhist temple has been build. Even in Germany there are three or four thousand Buddhist institutions. Buddhist principles are immortal.

Nevertheless the buddha did not make the claim that this religion is from God. The Buddha said, "My father was a common man, my mother was a common woman. If you want a religion, then you should take this religion. If this religion suits your mind, then accept it." Such generosity is not found in any other religion.

33 == The work of Buddhism is to lessen the suffering of the poor

What is the original foundation of Buddhism? Other religions and the Buddhist religion are very different. In other religions, change will not occur, because those religions tell of a relationship between man and God. Other religions say that god created the world. God created the sky, wind, moon, everything. God did not leave anything left over for us to do. So we should worship God. According to the Christian religion, there is, after death, a Day of Judgment, and all depends on that judgment. There is no place for God and soul in the Buddhist religion. Bhagvan Buddha said there is suffering everywhere in the world. Ninety percent of mankind is distressed by sorrow. Suffering mankind should be freed from sorrow-- this is the basic work of Buddhism. What did Karl Marx say that was different from the buddha's sayings? [However,] what Bhagvan said, he did not say via a crazy, crooked path.

34 == My brothers' work

Brothers, what I have had to say, I have said. This religion is fully formed in every way. There is no stain on it anywhere. The principles of Hinduism are so peculiarly arranged that it is impossible to create happiness from them. From thousands of years ago until just the other day, not even one man from our society could be a graduate or a learned man. I do not hesitate to tell you that in my school was a sweeper woman. She was Marathi. She would not touch me. My mother used to tell me, "Call a grown-up man 'Mama'." I would call the Postman, "Mama." (*Laughter.*) In childhood, in school, once I was thirsty. I told the master. The master, for my protection, called a chaprasi and told him to take me to the tap. We went to the tap. The chaprasi then started the tap and I drank water. Usually all during the week at school I did not get to drink water. Later I was given some service as a District Judge. But I did not get stuck with that sort of binding job. Who will do the work of my brothers? This was the problem before me, so I did not get stuck in that bondage.

35 == The burden on your head

Nothing is impossible for me as an individual in this country. The burden [a word meaning a graduated series of pots carried on the head] on your head-- the burden of Vaishya, Kshatriya, Brahmin-- how that burden will be tumbled down is the true question. It is my duty to give you in all ways knowledge of this religion. By writing a book, I will remove all doubts and suspicions and will try to lead you to a stage of full knowledge. Today at least you should place faith in me.

36 == Regenerate yourself and the world

Your responsibility, however, is great. Your actions should be such that other people will honor and respect you. Do not believe that this religion means we have got stuck with an albatross [a word meaning the burden of a corpse] around our neck. The Indian earth today is of no account, as far as Buddhism is concerned. We should be determined to observe the Buddhist religion in the best way. It should not happen that the Mahar people would bring Buddhism to a low stage. We should make a firm decision. If we accomplish this, then we save ourselves, we save our country-- and not only that, but the world also. Why? Because the Buddhist religion will be the savior of the world. As long as the world does not achieve justice, there will be no peace in the world.

37 == Make a decision to give a twentieth part of your earnings

This new way is one of responsibility. We have made some resolutions, have expressed some desires. The young should remember this. They should not become only petty officers for the sake of their stomach. We should make this decision: "I will give at least one-twentieth of my earnings to this work." I want to take all of you with me. In the first instance, the Tathagat gave initiation to

some individuals, and gave them this advice: "Spread this religion." In that way, Yesha and his forty friends were converted to Buddhism. Yesha was from a wealthy family. Bhagvan said to him, "What is this religion like? It is [in Pali:] '*for the welfare of many people, for the friendship of many people, for compassion for the world; dhamma is welfare in the beginning, welfare in the middle, conducive to welfare in the end*'." In the conditions of that age, in that way, the Tathagat made ready the way for the spreading of his religion. Now we also must make ready the way [a word meaning mechanism]. After this function, each one should give initiation to each one. Every Buddhist man has the authority to give initiation, this I proclaim. (*Applause. In this way Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar finished his two-hour speech.*)

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