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street, having donned his wooden sandals and picked up an umbrella. Ignoring our entreaties to return home because of the inclement weather, the frail figure walked with us through the rain-swept night. Fortunately, it was not long before we found a taxi, the buses having stopped running many hours previously. Having said our final goodbyes, we bundled into the car and out of the rain. As the taxi turned around to drive off, we waved at the figure standing on the kerb. The umbrella tilted in silent salute. Watching raindrops fall upon the domed forehead of that true citizen of the cosmos, I wondered again about the dew that falls upon all earthly things.

Nishitani Keiji the Person

Sasaki Jōshū

My encounter with Nishitani Sensei marked an important turning point in my life. It was through two old friends of mine, Kataoka Hitoshi and Kanō Jisuke, that I met Nishitani Keiji. They came to visit me only two years after I had been assigned to our Los Angeles temple, the Rinzai-ji. "Do you know who Nishitani Keiji is? Have you read his book *Shūkyō to wa nanika? (What is Religion?)*," Kataoka asked. I confessed I did not know the name. They later sent me a copy of his book and even arranged for me to meet the professor. He stayed at our temple en route to a conference elsewhere in America.

When I met Nishitani Keiji in person, I told him how much I enjoyed his work, but to this he modestly replied, "Well, Roshi, I'd hoped you hadn't read it." This response puzzled me at first. I wondered what he meant. Is it unworthy of a roshi to read a book of Zen insight? Or did he think Zen masters were not philosophers and so had little to gain? I admit I am no scholar and am unfamiliar with philosophical terms, but I remember being greatly impressed by the second and sixth chapters of his book. While most people have difficulty expressing Zen in words, Nishitani Sensei had a wonderful gift for expressing his understanding freely. That's why I wanted everyone interested in Zen to read his book. When I told him I felt fortunate to have read it, he smiled and thanked me for the compliment, but I could tell he was rather embarrassed by what I had said.

We talked about friends we had in common, especially Kataoka and Kanō. Kataoka I knew from Hokkaido, when I was a novice monk at Zuiryō-ji temple in Sapporo. This was right after I had finished the eighth grade. I

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remember him as the *koji*, or layman, who had come every week to do *sanzen* with Jōten Miura Roshi. He later he went to Kyoto University to study Nishida philosophy, and there he met Nishitani Sensei.

Nishitani Sensei once told me:

“Kataoka was a generous man. During the period of food rationing, he’d often invite us over for dinner. Kanō, on the other hand, was always the serious one. At the *dai-sesshins* at Shōkoku-ji, I’d relax whenever I had the chance. But Kanō never did and always remained in zazen position, as the rules prescribe.

“One day Morimoto Shōnen was talking about his Zen practice with his teacher Ōtsu Rekidō Roshi. Kanō interrupted him, saying it wasn’t right to talk about such things. The whole room fell silent. Kataoka then stood up and, raising a glass of saké, said, ‘Gentlemen, let’s all drink to that!’ To which Morimoto added, ‘And put an end to all this talking with drink!’ Everyone laughed and felt at ease again. Kanō was always manifesting his Zen understanding in this way. . . . I really admire him for that.”

I talked to Sensei about my missionary work in America. I told him I was sure it would have turned out entirely different if I had a few good men behind me like Kataoka and Kanō with a true passion for Zen. As it turned out, with my limited command of English, I feel like a stranger in a strange land. People approach me out of curiosity: Is Myōshin-ji Tantric Buddhism? they ask. Many come to me believing I have the power to make tigers out of their rabbithood. With misconceptions of Zen they come to me demanding ordination, and when I refuse they claim I have discriminated against them, excluded them for no reason—this is a dilemma for Zen in the West.

Nishitani Sensei sympathized with me, saying, “As roshi, you have a difficult task ahead of you. The Japanese Buddhist temples in Hawaii and the mainland still do funeral ceremonies and memorial services just like in the old country, but you must never imitate the Japanese style. It is essential you create a new Zen culture. Otherwise, people in the West will not turn to Zen. As a scholar I am obliged to do what I can to help you in that task.”

It is essential for Westerners to have a better understanding of Zen from the outset of their practice, otherwise it will be extremely difficult for them to make progress and attain *kenshō*, Zen awakening. In this connection, I feel Nishitani Sensei’s *What is Religion?* provides many of the essential prerequisites for making the teaching of Zen effective. Hence my high esteem for it.

Nishitani Sensei had a chance to read the transcripts of my *teishō* (talks) on the *Blue Cliff Records* during his stay at the Rinzaï-ji. He was familiar with my approach, called Nyorai (Tathāgata) Zen—the view that all forms of ‘self,’ large and small, exist due to the dynamic Tathāgata activity filling the universe. I would even contend that the sole purpose of Śakyamuni’s forty-

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some years of preaching was to clarify that activity.

I take it as a sign of approval that he later invited me to present my interpretation of Zen to his class at Temple University in Philadelphia. As I gave my talk, I noticed he paid careful attention but made no comment. I felt that I had somehow passed the test. Professor DeMartino did a marvelous job as translator, but still there were places where he had to struggle to understand my thick Northeastern accent. Not only that, he was a disciple of Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, who had practiced alongside me at Myōshin-ji. As DeMartino might have noticed, we had different ideas about Zen, especially on fundamental points such as the relationship between subject and object. Back at the apartment where I was staying, Nishitani Sensei said, "Perhaps I should have translated your talk myself." He was always concerned about whether my message was getting across.

On the way back to Japan, Nishitani Sensei spent another ten days at our Center. He came along when I went to Berkeley to deliver a lecture and to Vancouver for a *sesshin*, and so in the process we had a chance to travel together to many places such as Yellowstone National Park and Idaho.

Nishitani Sensei's final visit to the States was for the 1979 Summer Seminar on the Sutras sponsored by the Rinzai-ji. During this seminar, Nishitani Sensei lectured in English daily throughout the entire four week session—an arduous task to say the least, but one that he pursued energetically. This was followed by another shorter session at our Jemez Zen Center in New Mexico.

Two years ago I visited Japan to pay a call on my dear friends, Kataoka and Kanō. Kataoka was nearly blind, but in good health. Kanō was in frail health, but his spirits would soar whenever the discussion touched on Zen. Once he exclaimed, "All that hymn-singing nonsense at Myōshin-ji!" If that's what's happening to Zen in Japan, well, it's no wonder Americans are confused as to what Zen's all about.

Kataoka and I dropped in on Nishitani Sensei at his house near Yoshidayama. As usual he ushered us into the small sitting room next to the entrance hall where he received guests. I noticed, though, that he was not as vigorous as he once had been. The vitality which he had shown in our previous discussions was gone. Once, in talks of long ago, I remember him arguing, "I'm neither a Shin man nor a Zen man: I'm a philosopher." But now, that ego-self that would assert, "I'm a philosopher," had melted away. Emptied of ego, he now fulfilled the prime condition for enlightenment. All that remained was the mellowed old man who no longer had need of philosophy. No regret about the past, no desire for the future, he was totally immersed in the awakened activity of the self listening to the self. His was a face that reflected inner contentment.

As we were leaving, he escorted us cane in hand to the street to send us off.

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A few tears rolled down his cheeks as we shook hands to say goodbye. Perhaps he knew this would be the last time we would be meeting in this life. He was still waving his hand, even as our taxi pulled into the distance.

I hope someone will help him home, I thought to myself.

Talks on the *Shōbōgenzō*

Sasaki Tōru

Professor Nishitani's talks on Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* appeared serially between the years 1966–1979 in a small Christian magazine named *Kyōdai*, published in Nishinomiya near Kobe. The talks had been given over a period of many years at the International Institute for Japan Studies in Nishinomiya. I was still in graduate school when I was given the task of transcribing the tapes of the talks and editing them for publication. It was no easy task to turn Professor Nishitani's often rambling contemplations into written form, but the long hours it took me to complete the work—more than ten times the actual speaking time—was a precious learning opportunity for me. The talks are based on Dōgen's text, but they encompass a wide range of other subjects such as the Mahayana foundations of Dōgen's thought, Western philosophy, and Christianity. The deep understanding Sensei conveys throughout the talks, spanning freely both East and West, past and present, is vitally informed by his entire being, such that one can perceive a firm conviction in even the simplest of expressions. I found even more marvelous that even though I reread the manuscript versions many times, each reading would bring a fresh, new impression.

So not only did I have the privilege of listening to Sensei's talks in person at the Institute, I also had an opportunity to study them in depth by listening to the recordings of the talks over and over again.

Nishitani Sensei told me that the invention of the tape recorder had made life much more difficult for him. Whenever he gave a lecture—and he gave many—his words would be recorded for eventual transcription and publication. Unless he himself took the time to revise the manuscript when the tape had been transcribed, it would end up in print just as it was. So it seemed to me that Sensei could not have been overly happy at the prospect of a task such as this, which promised to be particularly difficult. Of course I did what I could with dictionaries and other reference materials, but when something