

## Zen and Shin

D. T. SUZUKI AND SOGA RYŌJIN

**SOGA RYŌJIN:** I heard your talk on the radio the other night.

**D. T. SUZUKI:** Then you must have heard me share some new thoughts I've had on the Tathagata's Original Vow and the notion of "returning to this world to benefit others."

**SOGA:** Shinran characterizes the Twenty-second of the Forty-Eight Vows as the Vow of returning to this world. T'an-luan, among others, discusses this notion, but not in this way. The *Avatamsaka Sutra* points out the danger of the abyss of Emptiness the seeker of the Way encounters when he reaches the seventh stage.

**SUZUKI:** "Emptiness" being . . . ?

**SOGA:** Emptiness being the emptiness of one's own existence, when one has nothing to look forward to in life. In other words, after the Bodhisattva who has cultivated the six paramitas is confronted with the seventh stage, where "above, there are no further awakenings to be sought; below, there are no living beings to be delivered" . . . .

**SUZUKI:** The six paramitas being charity, honoring the precepts, patience, perseverance, meditation, and wisdom.

**SOGA:** At the sixth stage, having completed all the practices required, the Bodhisattva attains the *prajñā*-intuition and knows in truth that "all things are empty." Thus, as a result of assiduous practice, the Bodhisattva comes to the stage where everything he has done up to now seems like a dream.

\* This exchange was originally published in Japanese as "Zen to Shin" [Zen and Shin] in the January 1959 issue of *Shinjin* (True Person). It was later included both in the *Collected Dialogues of Soga Ryōjin* (Tokyo: Yayoi Shobo, 1973), on which the present translation is based, and the *Collected Talks of D. T. Suzuki, Volume V* (Tokyo: Yomiuri Shimbun-sha, 1972). The translation has been edited for the present publication; subheadings supplied in the original article have been deleted, and redundant material has been removed or reworked. Footnotes are those supplied by the translators. We wish to thank the Matsugaoka Library, Kamakura, for permission to publish this translation of Dr. Suzuki's work, and Soga's son, Soga Nobuo, for that of his father.

SUZUKI: Or at least he is conscious of it as being such.

SOGA: Up to now he has trod the Bodhisattva path in earnest, picturing to himself a path unfolding endlessly before him, but now he has become disillusioned: above him, there are no higher awakenings to be sought; below him, there are no living beings to be delivered—this is the abyss of Emptiness of the seventh stage. In other words, with nothing to look forward to, he becomes deadlocked, and for lack of a path on which to proceed, is about to commit the same fatal error as those who hold to the notion of the Two Vehicles.<sup>1</sup> In this situation, the Bodhisattva must avail himself of the Skillful Means of All Buddhas universally.

SUZUKI: Then the problem is how to exit from that situation, how to exit from Emptiness.

SOGA: How to exit from Emptiness is the very problem for which the Bodhisattva, as an individual seeker, can find no solution. In this case, he needs to go beyond his own individual resources, to receive the encouragement of All Buddhas. Such encouragement takes the form of instructions the Bodhisattva must negotiate on his own terms—this is what is meant by Skillful Means. Herein, the *Avatamsaka Sutra* further extols four more paramitas for a total of ten: Skillful Means, the seventh; the Vow, the eighth; Virtue, the ninth; and Wisdom, the tenth. These latter paramitas are unlike the self-power orientation of the other paramita practices, for they point to the utterly “inconceivable” dimension of practice. It sounds trite to refer to them as Other-power practices, so let’s just say they are non-self-power practices.

SUZUKI: Is the Wisdom of the tenth stage the same as the wisdom of the sixth?

SOGA: That Wisdom is more . . .

SUZUKI: . . . absolute, perhaps?

SOGA: More than absolute, it is the Wisdom of the Buddha’s great compassion.

SUZUKI: And how is that different from the wisdom of the sixth paramita?

SOGA: The wisdom of the sixth paramita is the wisdom of ascent; its movement is an upward, ladderlike ascent from below. In such an approach, the wisdom of ascent appears the summit of all the Bodhisattva’s spiritual

<sup>1</sup> *Two Vehicles* 二乘 *nijō*. Those who hold to an inferior spirituality based on the dualistic notion of the Buddha way as being accessible only to a spiritual elite; in contrast to the Mahayana notion of the One Vehicle. In Soga’s presentation, the stage of the Two Vehicles forms a subtle turning point between Bodhisattvahood and Buddhahood, where the Bodhisattva must empty himself of his own virtues to follow the Way of the One Vehicle to ultimate Buddhahood; that is, only the emptied person can be the Buddha’s true heir.

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endeavors. With the Wisdom of the tenth paramita, though, it's no longer a question of ascending to higher levels . . .

SUZUKI: . . . but a wisdom of descent.

SOGA: Exactly. The world of descent appears . . .

SUZUKI: . . . through the Skillful Means of All Buddhas.

SOGA: Yes. While the seventh stage is that of Skillful Means, the eighth stage and above are, in the Avatamsaka system, the special fruits of Buddhahood. This means they are particular to the stage of Buddhahood. It is only with the stage of Buddhahood that these qualities are first extolled.

SUZUKI: And this becomes the Twenty-second Vow?

SOGA: In Vasubandhu's *Treatise on the Pure Land*, there is a passage that reads, "As for the Virtue of the Buddha's original Vow, none who encounter it shall pass it by in vain."<sup>2</sup> In his comments on this passage, T'an-luan states that the Buddha's "not dwelling in this empty world" is by virtue of the Buddha's original Vow. Here, the world of descent comes into existence, appearing of itself out of the world of ascent. This is the world of the Tathagata.

SUZUKI: I see.

SOGA: Up to that point the seeker dwells in the world of causation; beyond it lies the world of fruition, of Buddhahood. As a student of the Avatamsaka world view, T'an-luan no doubt grasped the significance of the Bodhisattva's seeking birth in the Pure Land. Nagarjuna and Vasubandhu were regarded as Bodhisattvas in their own day. Unlike us, they were men of saintly character, but even these sainted men made the vow to be born in the Pure Land, calling on the Other power to help them. Their example illustrates how Bodhisattvas seek to overcome the seventh stage's abyss of Emptiness by turning to the Pure Land. As such, the Twenty-second Vow is the vow showing us how to pass beyond the barrier of the seventh stage.

SUZUKI: What does the Twenty-second Vow contain?

SOGA: The text of the Twenty-second Vow is rather long, but here it is. [*Soga shows Suzuki a piece of paper on which is written the text of the Vow.*]

### THE TWENTY-SECOND VOW

If, upon my attaining Buddhahood, the Bodhisattvas of other

<sup>2</sup> The above passage is based on D. T. Suzuki's translation of Vasubandhu's *Gāthā on Birth [in the Pure Land] (Ganshō-ge)*, in Suzuki's "A Preface to the *Kyōgyō-shinshō*," *Eastern Buddhist* NS, 6,1 (1973), the full passage of which reads as follows: "As regards Buddha's original power of prayer . . . , it is such that there are none who, coming across it, shall pass by it to no purpose; for everyone of them shall have his great treasure ocean of merit instantly brought into its perfect fruition."

Buddha-lands who come to me to be born in my Country were not assured of ultimate Buddhahood in one birth—excepting those who, because of their own original vows to help all beings freely as they will, wear the armor of universal deliverance, go on amassing the stock of merit, deliver all beings to the other shore, go around to all the Buddha-lands, discipline themselves in the life of Bodhisattvahood, make offerings to all the Buddha-Tathagatas in the ten quarters, convert all beings numbering as many as the sands of the Ganga in order to make them all attain to the incomparably perfect Supreme Enlightenment, were not to rise above the ordinary stature, did not manifest the practices of all stages of Bodhisattvaship, and were not to practice the virtues of Bodhisattva Samantabhadra, may I not then attain the Supreme Enlightenment. (D. T. Suzuki trans.; slightly amended)<sup>3</sup>

SUZUKI: Bodhisattvas of the ten virtues freely work to benefit living beings, coming at will to lands like ours to help others. But, on the one hand, we have the Bodhisattvas who are “excepted” from coming to Amida’s Pure Land; these are the freely functioning Bodhisattvas carrying out the Vow’s work of delivering living beings. And, on the other, we have those who still require an additional lifetime’s training; they form another class of Bodhisattvas, who are yet unable to carry out the Vow’s work. This, if I am not mistaken, is the purport of the Vow.

In other words, Bodhisattvas who fail to qualify as bona fide Buddhas have to go to the Pure Land for further training. There are other Bodhisattvas, though, who are capable of working out the deliverance of living beings as they had vowed to do, and so, having their own Pure Lands, they do not necessarily have to go to Amida’s land themselves. This is how I understand the passage but I’m not quite satisfied with this explanation. This would mean that Bodhisattvas are of two different kinds. Here, what is meant by “excepted” is especially difficult for me to grasp. If there are exceptions, then the Bodhisattvas requiring another lifetime’s training are actually ordinary beings turned Bodhisattvas. I wonder if this makes sense.

SOGA: T’an-luan contends that the Virtue of Amida’s Pure Land is of the most noble kind, by virtue of which the seeker avoids the dangers of the

<sup>3</sup> The Twenty-second Vow, or prayer, is cited by Shinran twice in his *Kyōgyōshinshō*, once in the Chapter on Practice and again in the Chapter on Realization; in D. T. Suzuki’s translation of *The Kyōgyōshinshō* (Kyoto: Shinshū Ōtani-ha; 1973), pp. 65–66 and p. 184. Soga here explores ideas from his reading of related passages from the *Kyōgyōshinshō*.

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abyss of Emptiness of the seventh stage. This earns the praise of All Buddhas in every direction, countless in number, who urge others to seek birth in this Land of Peace and Happiness. Unless you are born in Amida's Pure Land, they exhort the seeker, you will not be able to undergo a further lifetime of training.

SUZUKI: I see.

SOGA: In the "Gatha to the Eastern Direction" in the latter half of the *Larger Sutra of Infinite Life*, All Buddhas exhort the Bodhisattvas to seek birth in the Land of Peace and Happiness. This expresses the Twenty-second Vow. And so, even if one comes to Amida's Pure Land with the intention of undergoing a further lifetime of training, one need not necessarily remain there. Although one may seek birth in the Pure Land with the original intention of receiving further training, it may turn out that, once there, one may make one's own vow and no longer desire to receive further training. Such persons are to be made an exception and should be allowed to pursue the fulfillment of their own vows.

SUZUKI: Then the awakening of living beings can be undertaken at a leisurely pace.

SOGA: Even taking things at a leisurely pace is a result of one's having come to be born in Amida Buddha's Pure Land, for it is an impossibility unless one is born there. And so, it is said that once one is born there, it is determined that one shall surely and ultimately undergo a further lifetime of training. But for those who do not make their own vows, if we ask whether they receive benefit from Amida Buddha's Pure Land, the answer would be affirmative, for they receive the benefit of Amida Buddha's vow, the first benefit of which is the further lifetime of training. But there is still another benefit—that there is no obligation for those who have no desire to undergo a further lifetime of training to do so. This benefit of leaving the person free to do as he wishes is also granted us by virtue of Amida's Vow.

SUZUKI: Then the Vow presents itself so that the seeker can avoid the abyss of Emptiness at the seventh stage.

SOGA: Not exactly. The abyss of Emptiness is a problem T'an-luan discusses in his Commentary to Vasubandhu's *Treatise on the Pure Land* . . .

SUZUKI: . . . in which regard I, unlike yourself, have little to offer by way of comment. How I would approach the issue would be as follows. Tell me what you think of this. This morning, a scholar of Greek philosophy came to see me. Knowing little about Greek philosophy, I asked him to explain to me the fundamental problem that it embraced. He answered that the fundamental problem in the philosophy of Socrates and Plato was that one does not know oneself.

I then asked in what regard we do not know ourselves. He replied that, as

best as he understood, the more light that was shed, the more our ignorance deepened. I then asked what that light was, where it came from, and how it affects us, and he told me it arose out of an unstinting love. This is what our young scholar had to tell us about Greek philosophy.

Next I queried him, saying, if we can talk about the light and unstinting love, then this is not ignorance, but something knowable to everyone. Our scholar could not respond. It is all well and good to talk about unstinting love, I told him, but what I want you to examine is the source from which that love issues.

I did not mention to my guest at the time my belief that love has its source in Emptiness. This Emptiness is not simply that which one sinks into or arises from, but an Emptiness that stands on a plane with Nothingness, or Mu. Though mathematics is not my forte, in my school of mathematics this Emptiness is the same as zero. Zero is the number of Infinity, hence zero stands on a plane with the Infinite. The Infinite is the same as zero. This, I contend, would be the content of Emptiness.

Emptiness is not that into which all things submerge—such Emptiness is only a convention. If we are talking about an Emptiness in the conventional sense, it may well be that things sink down and float up in it, but what is important is its Infinite content, the content of Emptiness. Arising out of the Infinite, for the first time Amida's Love becomes manifest.

Amida's Love is not the Emptiness of the abyss of Emptiness, but the Infinite contained therein. The Infinite is zero, zero is the Infinite. From that content arises Skillful Means. If that content were not the Infinite, Skillful Means would not arise therefrom.

How can I state this with any confidence? Did I go there and see this myself? No, that's not the case. It is when I become aware of my ignorance that this Love first appears. When I first realize that I am an ignorant being, therein lies a wisdom of sorts. Buddhism is remarkable in that it sets out to demonstrate to us what this wisdom is.

**SOGA:** In T'an-luan's *Commentary* we can find the following words: "True wisdom is ignorance. Because of our ignorance there is nothing we can know for certain."

**SUZUKI:** We must understand it in that sense. If we were to conclude that this is a case of plain ignorance, it leads us nowhere. What Buddhism wants to clarify for our edification is that true wisdom is the wisdom of the unknown. Through this wisdom, we know that zero becomes Infinity, Infinity becomes zero. Therein arises the Skillful Means of the Infinite. Skillful Means is not of one or two kinds, but appears out of the Infinite. This pencil in my hand is Skillful Means; the *ping!* sound that occurs when I strike this tea cup is Skillful Means; even Amida Buddha is Skillful Means. When

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that happens, we get firsthand knowledge of the source of the Amida Buddha Shin talks about. In other words, this Infinite is the Great Compassion.

The Great Compassion is the same thing as the Great Wisdom. Viewed from the perspective of wisdom, we may think we are falling into the abyss of Emptiness, but that is because we are seeing this with the eyes of our limited perception. Since the Infinite is at the source of the finite, if we are attuned to the Infinite's presence then at that point Skillful Means appears.

Amida's Vow, that is, the Great Compassion, has been set down as so many smaller vows, such as the Eighteenth and the Twentieth, but there are actually countless vows, such that the conventional enumeration of Forty-eight Vows can never do that singular Vow full justice. The Forty-eight Vows are only approximate, while the Vow itself emanates out of the Infinite. Though a more detailed explanation of these matters is beyond me, this more or less presents the whole of my understanding.

**SOGA:** What you describe is from the outset, well, the wisdom of descent, is it not? It's not the wisdom of ascent.

**SUZUKI:** But when one is in the process of ascent, the only thing that one knows is that one is steeped in ignorance. The knowledge that one is an unenlightened being is only possible by the enlightened being (Buddha) within.

**SOGA:** I agree. Without that enlightened being within, well . . .

**SUZUKI:** When one realizes that one is an unenlightened being, paradoxically that is the realization of an enlightened being.

**SOGA:** But there's more to the awakening to one's ignorance. Concomitant with the realization of one's ignorance are feelings of guilt.

**SUZUKI:** Then you would contend that a Buddha can never become an enlightened being without those feelings of guilt.

**SOGA:** One can never become an enlightened being without those feelings of guilt, but at the same time just feelings of guilt alone are not enough.

**SUZUKI:** I would agree with that.

**SOGA:** There are two sides. Without a sense of evil one does not qualify as a Buddha.

**SUZUKI:** In other words, without the afflictions there is no becoming a Buddha.

**SOGA:** Without them there is no necessity to become a Buddha.

**SUZUKI:** There is no necessity, and yet just as we are the Buddha appears in us.

**SOGA:** The Buddha issues where the Buddha thinks it necessary.

**SUZUKI:** It is because we only investigate the nature of the Buddha intellectually that there appears no desire in our hearts to seek the Buddha. That is why we can arrive at awakening only through the mental afflictions. Since it is impossible for us to divest ourselves of the afflictions to gain awakening, we are constantly doing things that are no good.

**SOGA:** Well, if you lay it all out in logical terms, but there is a part of us that can't be put down to logic.

**SUZUKI:** This has nothing to do with logic. I am only saying what I do because when I speak there is something that I want to get across, but the moment I open my mouth to speak it falsifies what I want to say. It falsifies it, and yet unless I speak I cannot get my message across. That's why it is said that even falsifications are Skillful Means.

**SOGA:** In that case, you are saying that Buddhism is all Skillful Means: Amida Buddha is Skillful Means, Zen is Skillful Means. All things without exception are Skillful Means. This is not a Skillful Means that tries to make do for the time being, but the Skillful Means of enlightened beings making and giving to others. It is the Dharma instruction that intends to rouse us from slumber.

The *Larger Sutra of Infinite Life*, from beginning to end, is the story of Amida issuing the Vows and practicing to fulfill them, and it explains the path by which Amida would save living beings such as ourselves. At the end, it has the words, "For that reason truly we must clearly believe in the supreme Wisdom of All Buddhas." What this shows is that the *Larger Sutra of Infinite Life* is merely a pathway of Skillful Means to drive home a message, that message being the supreme Wisdom of All Buddhas.

**SUZUKI:** Now what I would like to know is, when I believe, do I put this supreme Wisdom over there, at a distance from myself, or what?

**SOGA:** Well, in a way of speaking you would have to place it over there.

**SUZUKI:** When you do so, though, how do you know that it is there?

**SOGA:** How do you know? Well, that I cannot answer. In that regard we would have to turn to the teachings.

**SUZUKI:** Even if there are teachings, from where does the Faith to believe in the verity of the teachings arise?

**SOGA:** Where that Faith arises is not a thing that can be decided.

**SUZUKI:** If I were to answer that question, I would say it arises from the Other power. Through the working of Other power we can believe in what lies beyond.

**SOGA:** And why would the Other power be responsible for that?

**SUZUKI:** If I were to define what Other power is, the Other power at that time is self-power. Other power is what moves self-power. Whether Other power moves self-power or vice versa, it doesn't matter. What is important is that we go beyond self and Other. I am not talking about an Other power of Other as opposed to self, but Other power completely separate from self and Other. It is with this that we are able to believe in what is beyond.

**SOGA:** That's fine to talk about transcending self and Other, but the Other as Other is the Other in contrast to self.



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**SUZUKI:** That's what happens when we begin to talk about it. We talk about it as if it were over there.

**SOGA:** That's what Buddhism calls "sympathetic response." As a sympathetic response we feel, it is something that cannot be explained in words.

**SUZUKI:** In Christian terms, God is said to have created the world. From a higher dimension, though, what took the form of God who created the world? What compelled God to create the world? This was something moving within God. This something was God seeking to know himself. To know oneself is the same force appearing in the mind of Amida Buddha when he sought to deliver living beings to the Pure Land. This force is Other power.

**SOGA:** Buddhism talks about Dharma. The power of the Dharma of Other power . . .

**SUZUKI:** Christian theologians would call that Dharma Godhead. Through Godhead God expresses its basic functioning. That functioning at its basis is the Skillful Means we have just spoken of as zero is the Infinite. Behind that lies true Emptiness. However, ordinarily we think of things from a limited perspective, to produce ideas such as sinking into Emptiness. To describe Emptiness in such terms is of no consequence.

**SOGA:** Though, of course, we mustn't forget that the Buddha's teaching of sinking into Emptiness was directed toward his disciples.

**SUZUKI:** It's only because the rhetoric of Emptiness is being employed that one is said to sink into it. As zero is the Infinite there is no sinking into it.

**SOGA:** But, still, when you think of it with your limited wisdom, it is a sinking into Emptiness.

**SUZUKI:** That does not say everything, however, and that is a problem I want to get to. I would contend that when that is done you can know Shin. Amida is born from this zero is the Infinite, the Infinite is zero. Unless we ask where Amida is born from, we can never rest easy. As it turns out, what we call Amida's Vow is not especially what Amida has made, but the functioning of the Great Compassion itself. We can receive that Vow because we already have the Forty-eight Vows within us. Amida's Forty-eight Vows become my Forty-eight Vows.

**SOGA:** What you have said is all well and good, but if you explain everything in those terms it seems to me you assume the problem has been solved once and for all; and even if we accept that solution for the time being, there is still a matter left unresolved: that it is possible to paint a logical picture of the Way, but it is impossible to proceed on it in any practical terms. Therein lies a great problem.

**SUZUKI:** Now, Amida says that unless such and such a condition is met, then he will not attain Supreme Enlightenment, and that in order to attain Supreme Enlightenment the Pure Land was created. But, in my way of

thinking, in my way of believing, as it were, or you might say, in my experience—either one is fine with me—unless I attain Buddhahood, unless I realize Supreme Enlightenment, Amida does not attain Buddhahood.

**SOGA:** If you believe in Amida's Vow then it is possible to be born in the Pure Land.

**SUZUKI:** It is not enough to merely believe in Amida's Vow. When Amida's Vow becomes my Vow, the conditions for Amida's Supreme Enlightenment are fulfilled and the Pure Land comes into existence.

**SOGA:** That is, I admit, a difficult point. It's easy to talk about Amida's Vow becoming one's own Vow, but I detect a problem in that way of thinking. There is a problem whether or not it is possible to say that Amida's Vow is our Vow. If it is a question of having Faith, then without question one's Faith must be identical with the Vow; there must be a mutual correspondence that goes both ways. Since there is a mutual correspondence, Amida's Vow becomes our Vow, or a better way to express the same idea is to say that our Vow is taken up and assimilated within Amida's Vow.

**SUZUKI:** Shin studies does not discuss matters as I have just presented them—at least not scholars up to now.

**SOGA:** That's correct.

**SUZUKI:** What do you think of introducing the idea to the field?

**SOGA:** The idea you presented is not discussed, but the problem is whether or not it would be deemed acceptable to speak of it at present.

**SUZUKI:** And so you don't think it would be a good idea to move Shin studies in that direction?

**SOGA:** Presented in the terms you just stated, there would be no difference between Zen and Shin. I think it more important to preserve Zen as Zen and Shin as Shin, each striving to understand the other as partners in dialogue.

**SUZUKI:** Shin people will say that my explanation is a Zen version of Shin, whereas I am trying to be impartial in my presentation, siding with neither Zen nor Shin.

**SOGA:** Yes, I can see how you are making an effort to do so, but all the same I sense a problem here. "Amida's Vow has to become our Vow" is a notion that we often hear. But take that one step further and it would mean: our Vow has to become Amida's Vow, our Vow has to arise and be assimilated within Amida's Vow.

**SUZUKI:** And so the phase of "departure for the Pure Land" is the phase of "return to this world," "return to this world" is "departure for the Pure Land." There is no need to draw a distinction between the "departure" and "return" phases.

**SOGA:** It is possible to say that, since the "departure for the Pure Land" and the "return to this world" both take place within *Namu Amida Butsu*, the

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“departure” and “return” phases are entirely located within *Namu Amida Butsu*. The past and the future occur simultaneously within *Namu Amida Butsu*. But putting aside the “departure” as the “departure” phase and the “return” as the “return” phase, we can also say that we who are humans will in the next lifetime become Buddhas.

SUZUKI: I would agree with that.

SOGA: That pretty much sums up my thoughts on the question.

SUZUKI: Taking it one step further, I would contend that whether it takes one more lifetime or two, we are still on the way to attaining Buddhahood.

SOGA: That's thinking of Buddhahood as lying in the distance, is it not? When the Buddha summons us, we are brought to turn toward the Buddha. Since we are [constantly in the process of] being brought around, we can never become Buddhas as long as we live.

SUZUKI: Yes, and at the same time, since we are Buddhas-in-the-making, we are Buddhas. Those who are Buddhas-in-the-making are Buddhas themselves.

SOGA: That's the kind of Buddha spoken of in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, is it not? The *Avatamsaka Sutra* divides up the Bodhisattva path into fifty-two stages. The path is culminated the moment the Bodhisattva reaches the tenth stage of faith, where he becomes a Buddha. The Shin teaching emphasizes the unsurpassable Buddha and the unsurpassable Nirvana. It also speaks of the awakening brought about by the of-itself character of Non-becoming, awakening to the constant Joy of Dharmic being. Though the constant Joy of Dharmic being and the unsurpassable Nirvana are purported to exist, we ourselves are never said to be in this Insurpassable Nirvana—this is what Shin teaches. It asserts we are in the process of attaining Buddhahood, and though it doesn't deny the proposition it never goes so far as to say we are Buddhas per se. This apparent contradiction is explained by what Buddhism calls the Two Truths system, the Supreme Truth versus the Worldly Truth. What the plane of Supreme Truth asserts must be so is contradicted by the plane of Worldly Truth, which says the very opposite.

SUZUKI: In other words, we must return to the plane of Worldly Truth to talk [about Shin].

SOGA: From the standpoint of Shin, greater emphasis is placed on the plane of Worldly Truth.

SUZUKI: The Land of Supreme Happiness where one goes after death is said to be found ten thousand billion lands in the westerly direction.

SOGA: That is what is taught, but as far as we are concerned that is something we can never know for certain. Where it is, well, is something we can never know, but wherever it is, it doesn't matter. In other words, that's what is written in the sutras, and so if we wish to maintain the truly awakened Mind

of Faith we would have to see each person as standing on an extension of the Pure Land, would we not? We would have to be extensions of the Pure Land. Though we would not point out others as the site of the Pure Land, even then they are extensions of the Pure Land. But when we are unaware of the Buddha, we are extensions of Hell. When we believe in the Vow, though Shin never says that our ties to hell are cut, all the same we realize for the first time our ties to the Pure Land. When we become extensions of the Pure Land, even if our ties to hell exist they are as nothing.

SUZUKI: It seems that most Shin people treat them as if they did not exist.

Even if I were an extension of the Pure Land, I would contend that there is still a sequel in hell to follow.

SOGA: Even if there were such a sequel, it wouldn't matter.

SUZUKI: That attitude of detachment is important.

SOGA: To fear not.

SUZUKI: That is the most important.

SOGA: To fear no evil.

SUZUKI: One can never completely sever one's connection to the Pure Land. Then does one go to hell.

SOGA: It doesn't matter if one goes to hell.

SUZUKI: That's what is said in Shin, but I can't help finding it a little odd.

SOGA: Yes, it is odd, but it is also on the mark. Those who revere Shinran will recall his words: "Even were I to fall into hell, I would never have any regrets."

SUZUKI: What I object to is taking a stand on the basis of someone else's statement. That I find most objectionable. Let Shinran say what he will, I am prepared to meet my destiny.

SOGA: The problem here is you must find it in yourself to believe what Shinran says. To do so you must respond to his words sympathetically.

SUZUKI: This sympathetic response you speak of is something I often talk about. Look at the tea bowl, for example. When I look at the tea bowl, at the same time the tea bowl looks at me. That's what I mean by a sympathetic response. To be content to think, "If Shinran says so, then this must be so," is what I mean by a sympathetic response.

SOGA: If you don't mind my saying so, I'm finding your explanation a bit too logical for my tastes. I understand what you are driving at, but just to understand it [logically] somehow doesn't sit well with me. That's how I feel.

SUZUKI: You've just stated that you have no way of knowing where the Pure Land ten thousand billion lands distant is, that even if one talks of the westerly direction, there is no telling where that Pure Land is. If that is the case, if I take a step, like this, it is the same as if I were passing through the ten thousand billion lands, regardless of whether I have taken a step

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eastward or westward. If so, this would mean that even before I take that step I am already in the Pure Land. To take that step I would actually be distancing myself from the Pure Land. As we distance ourselves, it follows us from behind; as we take a step, the Pure Land moves beneath our feet. Because that is so, we take hell and the Pure Land with us wherever we go. Would you find that statement acceptable?

**SOGA:** Yes, but the Shin teaching does not come out and say it in so many words, and that's what makes Shin Shin. You are correct in saying that it all amounts to much the same thing, but leaving that point unexpressed is where Shin differs on affective grounds. When people feel different about it, the mode of expression they employ also differs. And so I understand quite well what you mean, and I cannot say that you are mistaken in your understanding, but all the same I cannot help but think to myself that this must be how a Zen man approaches the problem.

**SUZUKI:** A person like you who will come out and say he understands what I say is virtually nonexistent among Shin thinkers, wouldn't you agree?

**SOGA:** Shin thinkers understand quite well what a Zen person has to say. They understand what is given to expression in Zen, but they also feel that what is left unexpressed in Shin is where they find Amida's Vow.

**SUZUKI:** I have no problem with that.

**SOGA:** Zen people say more than is needed; from your perspective, though, Shin people do not say enough. "Why can't they come out with a clear statement," Zen people would say, but I do not think we do not say enough. Our approach is adequate in itself. Since it is adequate, I find nothing lacking in it, and therein lies the difference between Zen and Shin. That is the difference between self-power and Other power.

**SUZUKI:** I would agree.

**SOGA:** You understand the Shin standpoint; I understand the Zen position: Zen teaches the attainment of Buddhahood, just as Shin does, except that in Shin one does not immediately become a Buddha. Still, both share the same belief in the attainment of Buddhahood.

**SUZUKI:** Yes, that's one way to describe it.

**SOGA:** As to this belief in attaining Buddhahood, if you were to say you have already attained Buddhahood, we would not take issue with you, claiming that is not the case. But in the right to remain silent is where we find the Shin ethic. In other words, this silence is a sort of Shin methodology. And so, the Skillful Means is the Skillful Means of the Buddha's Wisdom.

**SUZUKI:** Since the Buddha has the infinite resources of the Skillful Means at his disposal.

**SOGA:** It is the unsurpassed Skillful Means. As T'an-luan characterized it: "To attain birth in the Buddha Land of Peace and Happiness is to gain the

Way leading ultimately to the attainment of Buddhahood through the unsurpassed Skillful Means." This is not a Skillful Means of mere expediency, but a Skillful Means creatively giving of itself.

SUZUKI: Would you clarify that distinction for me?

SOGA: "Creatively giving of itself" means that the Buddha guides us on the Way to *satori*. For that reason, we have to follow the Way. "Mere expediency" may be the gospel truth, but since we fail to understand its meaning, it has only a transient effect on us. They are a stop-gap measure we apply for the time being.

SUZUKI: Is that just for the meantime?

SOGA: It is, and that's why the Skillful Means creatively giving in its totality is Truth, whereas the Skillful Means of mere expediency is not.

SUZUKI: And which Skillful Means is Shin's?

SOGA: The Skillful Means creatively giving.

SUZUKI: And which is Zen's?

SOGA: Zen and Shin are both Skillful Means creatively giving.

SUZUKI: Then we have reached the end of our discussion.

SOGA: On the contrary, this is where our discussion begins. From a Zen perspective, where people always want to go one step further, you must find it tedious to talk with these absolutely slow-moving Shin folks. But that slow pace itself is what Shin is all about.

SUZUKI: Yes, that's one way to describe it.

SOGA: The Zen person is always in such a hurry that you can't tell where he will end up.

SUZUKI: But there are no Zen persons who see things as I do.

SOGA: When we talk of Skillful Means, it is usually conceived as the Skillful Means of mere expediency. But even if we call it Skillful Means what this implies is that Skillful Means is Truth. This is the Unsurpassed Skillful Means.

SUZUKI: I understand.

SOGA: In the *Tannishō* are these words: "Shakyamuni and Amida, father and mother of compassion and caring, brought forth good and efficacious Skillful Means of various kinds to awaken in us the unsurpassed Mind of Faith." The Skillful Means creatively giving are these good and efficacious Skillful Means of Shakyamuni and Amida.

SUZUKI: Shakyamuni and Amida being . . . ?

SOGA: . . . the Two Honored Ones, in the Shin tradition. In other words, Shakyamuni's teachings are divided into these two kinds of teaching.

SUZUKI: On which point I would concur.

SOGA: It might seem that one or the other would have served the purpose, but it must have been necessary to divide.

SUZUKI: What I would like to say is that this kind of thinking is not found in

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Christianity in the Western world. Soga Sensei, the popular consensus is that people find your talks difficult to understand.

**SOGA:** That's because I don't understand it completely myself. When you are dealing with something beyond comprehension there is nothing you can know for sure. What you are dealing with is beyond comprehension, but when you reach the point where it passes beyond comprehension there is something you can grasp about it. At any rate, I think it can be said that, looking at Buddhism in broad outline, the religion is fairly well characterized by these two teachings, Zen and Shin, and the rest we can do without.

**SUZUKI:** But rather than say we can do without the rest, it may be better to say the rest is tertiary.

**SOGA:** It doesn't matter if they are there or not, as long as these two teachings more or less capture Buddhism in broad outline.

**SUZUKI:** The Great Wisdom and the Great Compassion.

**SOGA:** Today, it is important for people to understand what Shin and Zen have to teach. It is also important for Zen people to understand the Way followed by the Shin devotees. This done, we can expect the unification of Buddhism to take place. But even "unification" [as a merging into one] is unnecessary, if they are unified as such.

**SUZUKI:** "To be unified as such, without unification"—exactly my sentiments. I most heartily concur with you on this point.

**SOGA:** It is unnecessary to have everyone in the world recite the Buddha prayer. Those who wish to do so, may do so; those who do not, need not. Each should do as he pleases.

**SUZUKI:** The other day there was a History of Religions conference held here. I heard a number of presentations by delegates from abroad. One of them was a German theologian named Heiler, who had studied under Marcel, who stressed that religions must approach one another in a spirit of mutual tolerance. A Japanese Christian spokesman got up and said that Christianity is not the spirit of tolerance, but rather of intolerance.

**SOGA:** I went to one session of that conference, and though I did not speak since time was running out, I actually did want to say something, though what exactly I don't know. Even though I made no presentation, people still came up to me to pay their respects. I suppose it's because they could sense the Buddhist spirit of tolerance. But is intolerance what people desire in religion? I think the spirit of tolerance is a wish all people hold in common. It is almost unnecessary to say that Buddhism is intolerant or tolerant.

**SUZUKI:** However, Christianity has shown a history of intolerance, giving no room to other religions.

**SOGA:** Even if past history has been such, [we must leave it behind,] otherwise there will never be any world peace on the horizon.

SUZUKI: But that is not what Christianity says. Christianity would subjugate Buddhism.

SOGA: If Buddhism is to be subjugated, then so be it. Buddhists will have to be content with a subjugated state. In short, all that interests Christianity is being victorious.

SUZUKI: Exactly.

SOGA: Buddhism knows how to deal with defeat, would you not agree? All people want to know is the world of victory, not the world of defeat, and here they make their fatal error.

SUZUKI: I agree.

SOGA: Buddhism also talks about being victorious, but, more than being victorious, it shows people how to deal with the world of defeat. That is the way to peace. And so, if Christianity is so keen on winning, so be it. We Buddhists will be content even in defeat.

SUZUKI: I would like to emphasize Buddhism victorious.

SOGA: It's all too human to want that, but nevertheless we must admit the taste of defeat—that is Buddhism.

SUZUKI: As for me, rather than sanctioning defeat, I believe that there is something in us that cannot be defeated. The only time we accept defeat is when we bring forth what is invincible in us. This is the other side of accepting defeat.

SOGA: You are referring to what Buddhism calls the vajra-mind.

But what's wrong with the world today is all we want to know is winning. There can be no World Peace without knowing the taste of defeat.

SUZUKI: My sentiments exactly.

SOGA: In his *Recorded Sayings*, Rennyō addresses Shin followers, saying, "Though you suffer defeat at the hands of men, make it an occasion to win faith."

SUZUKI: In China, Lao-tzu says, "Defeat is the practice of the Way." It could be said that the way of thinking of Eastern people is to turn defeat into victory—this sentiment has a wide hold on the people. By contrast, Westerners think winning is all, beating the adversary. This attitude is fundamentally different from the way Eastern people think and feel. Whenever I go abroad, I feel this ever more strongly.

SOGA: It's always a choice between either victory or defeat, either eat or be eaten, the two always set in opposition. But beyond the world of oppositions there is another path. While we now have the dialectical method, somewhat similar to it is what Buddhism calls the Middle Way. The Middle Way does not side with either Being or Nonbeing, but seeks a middle way between the two. Thus, Zen and other Buddhist schools speak of the notions of Not-being and Not-Nonbeing.



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**SUZUKI:** Yes, and those notions are why there is Existence and Nothingness.

**SOGA:** We cannot say that Westerners do not have their notions of Existence and Nothingness. What is different between Westerners and ourselves is that they do not have these notions of Not-being and Not-Nonbeing.

**SUZUKI:** I think that we can wrap up our talk. What can we say by way of conclusion?

**SOGA:** Let's conclude that Zen people say too much, while Shin people do not say enough.

**SUZUKI:** Fine.

*[After a while, both Suzuki and Soga are heard laughing.]*

AN ADAPTED TRANSLATION BY SATŌ TAIRA AND W. S. YOKOYAMA