

# Kiyozawa's Living Presence

## A 1963 Commemorative Lecture

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LAST YEAR MARKED the seventieth anniversary of Buddhism's introduction to America. The occasion for its introduction was the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in connection with the Columbian World Exposition. When the Parliament of Religions opened, some Westerners were heard to protest the Parliament policy of placing Christianity, which they regard as incomparable, alongside other non-Christian religions such as Buddhism. If we look back, in the seventy years that have since elapsed I think we can detect a clear difference as to how Buddhism was regarded then and now. When Pope John XXIII had an audience with Buddhist representatives at the Vatican last year, he announced, "In this age of anxiety, all religions must join hands and work together for world peace and human welfare"—a statement which, compared to the situation seventy years ago, marks a vast change in the Western attitude toward Buddhism.

I once read W. E. Griffis's *Mikado's Empire* (1876), in which the author says that Buddhism is idol worship and urges that such idolatry be done away with. Today, the view that Buddhism is idol worship and should be abolished is, I believe, one that finds no takers, at least not in Christian circles. This year, Dom Aelred Graham, a Catholic, wrote

\* This is an adapted translation of "Kiyozawa Manshi wa ikiteiru," in *The Complete Works of D. T. Suzuki* (Tokyo: Iwanami), Vol. 27, pp. 206-220. It was originally a lecture delivered by D. T. Suzuki in 1963 on the centennial of Kiyozawa Manshi's birth. Kiyozawa was the founding president of what is now Otani University, Kyoto, and is often regarded as the first person to demonstrate a truly modern Buddhist understanding. We thank the Matsugaoka Library, Kamakura, for permission to publish it here.

a book called *Zen Catholicism* (1963) and a few years ago J. M. Dechanet published his *Christian Yoga* (1960). The latter work intends to have Christians take up the practice of yoga, which is now enjoying a boom in Europe. The other book, *Zen Catholicism*, encourages Christians to take up the practice of Zen, so as to concentrate their thoughts on God. Even if it is not quite zazen (sitting meditation) as practiced in the Buddhist contemplative tradition, the conclusion reached by Christian practitioners is that zazen, as would be expected, is conducive to religious life.

In the Roman Catholic Church, strict rules apply when it comes to publishing books such as these, and unless a priest can get dispensation from his superiors vouching for the accuracy of the work, it will not get published. In addition to the two works I mentioned, there is another similar work by a Catholic father with whom I am familiar. I have never met him in person, but we have corresponded, and in his case as well he had to obtain dispensation to publish his work. Among such writers was a brilliant scientist who failed to receive authorization, and so his work could not be published until after his death.

When I was in America, the school I attended would sometimes invite priests for afternoon socials. On these occasions, if we confronted them with a question about religion, they'd respond by saying, "I'm afraid you'll have to wait for an answer until after I return home to discuss the matter with my superiors." They were reluctant to venture their own opinions on the spot. This may have been done out of scrupulous attention to regulations or dislike of heresy. But it seemed that the church hierarchy placed regulations on what they could think and say. I do not know if that is good or bad, but today those who are under similar restrictions have become more tolerant toward Buddhism and now regard it as "good"—a far cry from the situation a half century ago.

I am not from a Buddhist temple family, and in fact I come from a family background somewhat distant from Buddhism, but my teacher Shaku Sōen (1859–1919) was planning to attend the Parliament of Religions, and since he was scheduled to make a presentation there, I remember him coming to see me about getting his paper translated into English.<sup>1</sup> At that time, Kiyozawa Manshi's (1863–1903) *A Skeleton of a*

<sup>1</sup> One of the addresses Shaku Sōen delivered at the Parliament is included in the

*Philosophy of Religion* (1893) was out. I have no recollection of what it contained, but I do remember thinking it an odd title for a book! Kiyozawa was, I believe, the first to write a book looking at religion as a whole (regardless of whether it was just a skeleton or not), and to take up the discussion of the subject. That was the first time I heard his name, but I never had a chance to meet him in person.

Soon after, in 1897, I left for America and did not return to Japan until the year Emperor Meiji died (1912). It was in that year that I met Sasaki Gesshō (1875–1926), one of Kiyozawa's finest disciples, whom I knew from my younger days. Sasaki was concerned about translating Shin books into English. This was, if I remember correctly, just around the 650th anniversary of Shinran's death. Akegarasu Haya (1877–1954), another Kiyozawa disciple and later an important Shin church administrator, had come out with a handy, pocket-sized version of three Pure Land Buddhist texts, the *Tannishō*, *Rennyō Shōnin's Sayings*, and *Anjinketsujōshō*. Though I was born in Kaga, where Shin flourishes and which is well-known for its many Shin temples, these works were new to me and I remember saying to my friend Sasaki how pleasantly surprised I was to discover there was more to Shin than just a finger pointing to a paradise in the next life. Thus, through reading those works my interest in Shin deepened significantly.

Recently, the *Tannishō* was translated into English by the young abbot Ōtani Kōshō of the Shinshū Ōtani-ha—and from what I hear, the work seems to have been well received. In it there is a passage which reads, “When I reflect deeply on the Grand Vow issuing from five kalpas of Amida's meditation, I am convinced it was made utterly and solely for my sake.” Shinran is saying, in other words, “I am sure it was for the sake of my salvation alone that Dharmākara Bodhisattva underwent religious practices lasting five kalpas.” I feel that those words, “it was made utterly and solely for my sake,” penetrate to the very core of religious faith.

Today, in commemoration of Kiyozawa's birth, I have been asked to come forward to share what I know about his philosophy, but I must admit I find myself rather hard pressed. Though I tried to follow as

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translation section of the present issue. Suzuki also translated other writings by his teacher and is considered one of his leading disciples, although he remained a layman, and was technically outside his master's Zen lineage proper.

best I could what Nishitani Keiji (1900–1990) was saying, I'm afraid you'll have to excuse me if what I have to say has little connection with his talk, since I've grown rather deaf in my old age. Now, just before Kiyozawa died, he wrote an essay called "My Religious Convictions" (*Waga shinnen*). I read it long ago but, having since forgotten its contents, I borrowed a copy from a friend. Actually, I planned to bring it along today. I thought I put it in my pocket, but it's not here! When you get old like this, you become forgetful, you can't hear well, you can't see well—and that's how you end up. I should be making my final exit, but it's not my time yet.

If you read Kiyozawa's essay, you will find that, in it, he discusses the Infinite and the finite. I am sure all of you have heard this before, have read the book, and know all about this, but in those days it was revolutionary to talk about Shin in such terms. While it is fine to talk about the finite turning into the Infinite, or the crosswise leap from the finite to the Infinite, Kiyozawa went so far as to speak of our absolute surrender to the infinite Other-power, of leaving all to the working of the Vow, with emphasis on that Self who, today, here and now, is caught up in the process of living and dying.

I remember that, in those days, one of the issues frequently encountered in religious and philosophical works and talks was Friedrich Schleiermacher's (1768–1834) concept of absolute dependence. As I remember it, absolute dependence—to turn to the Absolute or to put one's life in the hands of the Absolute—was thought to characterize religion in its essence. Though I'm not sure this was the point Kiyozawa sought to express in his essay, his expression "absolute Other-power" (*zettai tariki*) would certainly suggest a parallel. To my mind, for Kiyozawa to have made such a remarkable declaration meant he had to have a clear understanding of what religion was all about. More than a mere "idea" of religion, Kiyozawa had experienced in his own being what religion was. Religion is what appears in one's total being. Since it calls up a total response in a human being or the human personality, it cannot be simply ascribed to discursive knowledge, philosophy, ethics or psychology. To reiterate: religion is what sets our entire being in motion. When we are moved to the depths of our being, *that* is religion.

We are prone to label religion, calling it philosophy or theology, and saying that this or that is what religion is all about. While such research is important, it is secondary to the meaning religion holds for us. We

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have to put aside the questions of whether religion belongs to philosophy or theology or religious studies and encounter religion in our own being, just as we are. To express this experience in words, we might call it "absolute dependence," that is, to surrender ourselves absolutely or entirely.

Kiyozawa died at a relatively young age. Generally speaking, people like that are the intelligent ones. I had a childhood friend like him who was quite brilliant, but who also died of the same kind of illness. Those with quick minds tend to be somewhat impatient, and some say that makes them indecisive. At any rate, there are those who are indecisive by nature who like to confront matters, for whom even illness can be a matter of contemplation. A religious experience for such people can be deeper than for the ordinary person. This characteristic I think we can find in Kiyozawa.

There is an old saying, "At thirty, one sets out in life; at forty, one lives free of delusions." That period between the ages of thirty and forty is a crucial time of life. That is when a person comes into his own as a human being. In our twenties and thirties we are in a state of fermentation, so to speak, but by the age of forty or fifty the mold of our life is cast. As we get into our sixties, seventies and eighties, this "mold" gets increasingly refined. Seeing that most of you in the audience have yet to reach the age of forty, I'd say your time has yet to come! At any rate, around the time Kiyozawa died at age forty, I think we can say he had reached the peak of his spiritual development. But it would have been even more interesting had he lived longer, to my age for instance. On the one hand it is unfortunate that this did not come about, but on the other we can only accept it as good in itself.

In his book, Kiyozawa writes, "What is good, what is evil, I know not." But in our case, even if we say things to the same effect, what now appears to our mind as good we call good. We say we know not, but what appears to us as good we conclude must be good. If we really do not know, we should just stop worrying about it. And if we have to change our minds suddenly, it is no great matter. In the *Analects*, it says, "The Prince is not merely a container." That is, the Prince is not just a thing that fits a certain mold; what we call the Prince changes. Thus, "If the Prince makes a mistake, it can be seen by all." That is, the Prince has nothing to hide. But at the same time we could also say that he is acting irresponsibly. He could never say, as Kiyozawa does,

“I know not right from wrong, and so I place all responsibility for my life in the hands of Amida-sama to do with as he wishes.”

As mentioned earlier, when Shinran says, “When I reflect deeply on the Grand Vow . . . , I am convinced it was made utterly and solely for my sake,” we must look at the words, “solely for my sake.” Since the absolute Other-power originates in Amida’s Vow, it is to the Vow that we surrender ourselves. In other words, we must entrust ourselves to the absolute Other-power. Whether we call it surrender or entrusting, it means receiving the Vow with our total being. When it comes down to it, though, I think it is very difficult for people to be absolutely passive when receiving with their total being; in the act of receiving, there must be a receiver. Though we may talk of an absolute Other-power, then, what exactly can it be?

If we examine Kiyozawa’s writings, we will notice he always speaks in terms of the Self, in phrases such as “I (the Self) entrust myself to the absolute Other-power,” and “I who rest in the power of Amida.” This Self is not the ego of self-power, but the Self awakened to the Other-power. This point has to be clearly recognized. The phrase, in effect, “solely for the sake of myself,” highlights this “Self” who receives. It does not mean we should merely live to benefit ourselves. Shakyamuni is said to have declared, “Heavens above, heavens below, I alone am the honored One.” Whether he actually said this or not is beside the point. These words that someone has taken and made the words of Shakyamuni arise from the depths of religious experience that all of us possess. I believe it important to look closely at this “I,” this Self.

In recent times, the term “Other-power” has taken on the meaning of “resignation,” but to resign oneself is unworthy, a negative attitude that can never bring forth the Self in us. In the plant and animal world, a tree is a tree, a cat is a cat. For instance, when you plant a pine tree or bamboo, we can imagine the pine tree saying, “Since I am a pine I will grow up to be a pine,” and the bamboo saying, “Since I am a bamboo, I will become a bamboo,” and thus they grow. The bamboo, of course, does not say this, but becomes itself, of itself. Then again, the bamboo does not say, “I am a bamboo, not a pine,” making a distinction between the bamboos and the pines, and insisting, “I am *bamboo!*” The pine is a pine, the bamboo is a bamboo, and without as much as saying so, they grow to be such. Herein is expressed the self-awakening

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of the bamboo as bamboo, the self-awakening of the pine as pine. Setting aside the pine, even without the pine the bamboo expresses its self-awakening; it awakens to itself as bamboo. But in fact these arguments do not hold water; they do not hold together logically. The pine tree does not owe its existence as a pine to the bamboo or to the mountain. There is a place where the pine as a pine exists in solitude apart from all the rest of creation, where the "Aha!" experience of self-awakening takes place. That self-awakening is what we call religious experience. That is what is meant by "myself." This "myself" is what we awaken to. That Self we awaken to is not something separate from all other things, but our awakening to our Self. We can call that Self the absolute Self or the absolute Other-power, beyond the distinction of self and other. That is where religion is to be found—this we must recognize.

Westerners have recently taken an interest in Buddhism, but if you listen to them, they are in effect saying things like, "As for us, we are incapable of surrendering ourselves in our entirety, of giving ourselves over as such, as you Asians are so fortunately able to do." Or, "We think in terms of our self and decide on that basis our sense of responsibility, our sense of morality, our sense of right and wrong, and can't follow the lead of you Asians." This is the psychology of Westerners in general. While that is fine in itself, I would like to ask where they locate that self to which they refer, that self they establish on a relative basis? I am not inquiring as to where it appears, but how it comes to appear where it does—this we must take into consideration. It is there that the Self (*nin*) of human being (*ningen*) appears. Some may quibble over whether this is human being in its entirety, or the totality of human being, or only an aspect of it. But however onerous the task, we must face up to the challenge without flinching. We must follow it to its source where it doesn't matter how that Self expresses itself, whether it is in the form of philosophical statements or paeans of joy. Once we have had a glimpse of the source, then we can say, as Shinran does, that "the Grand Vow was made utterly and solely for my sake." But in the case of absolute Other-power, how can we be sure there is no mistake in understanding? A mistaken understanding is not a misperception, but simply a failure to notice what is there. That Self implied in "solely for my sake"—where does that Self come from? The Self in the Western mind is grasped as the individual self, the self of the relative

world, where “this” is distinguished from “that.” That is not the Self referred to here. This is a true Self that can only be known by penetrating to the source from which it appears.

Although Mahayana Buddhism does not make much ado about the Self, in the *Dhammapada* there are two gathas on the satori experienced by Shakyamuni, which go as follows:

Through many a birth I wandered in samsara, seeking, but not finding, the builder of the house. Sorrowful is it to be born again and again. (153)

O house-builder! Thou art seen. Thou shalt build no house again. All thy rafters are broken. Thy ridge-pole is shattered. (154a). (Nārada trans.)

What is referred to as “Thou” in this translation is the Self.

The portion of the gathā that now follows is most important. I don’t remember how the Chinese translation went, and cannot recall the Tomomatsu translation of the *Dhammapada*. In the original Pāli, though my Pāli is not very good, it reads:

*Visaṅkhāragatam cittam tanhānam khayam ajjhagā.*

My mind has attained the unconditioned. Achieved is the end of craving. (154b)

Breaking the passage down into its constituent elements, the term *sankhāra* in *visaṅkhāragatam* refers to the aggregates; *visaṅkhāra* means the breaking off, or falling off; *gatam* is what has come to pass; *cittam* is the mind. In other words, the mind that is fixated falls off. This is precisely what Zen master Dōgen (1200–1253) referred to when he spoke of his satori experience under the Chinese master Ju-ching (1163–1228) as a “falling off body-mind, body-mind falling off.” Dōgen’s “falling off body-mind” corresponds precisely to this passage from the *Dhammapada*.

In the next phrase, *tanhānam khayam ajjhagā*, the unwholesome desires, *tanhā*, or afflictions are vanquished. A person becomes like a barren tree on a wintry crag, but this should not be understood to mean everything has become nothing. While the unenlightened desires of the ego-self vanish, the enlightened desire to serve other beings still remains. To put it in modern terms, this means that the bodhisattva



does not enter nirvana to become a Buddha. The bodhisattva does not enter nirvana until the culmination of the Buddha's supreme enlightenment, but remains in the stage of bodhisattvahood to work for the benefit of living beings. That the bodhisattva puts off entering nirvana to work among us is one of the most important ideas in Buddhism. Once Buddhahood is achieved, the Buddha has nothing more to do with us. To our thinking, the relationship between the Buddha and the bodhisattva may not be very clear, but those who have made a pressing inquiry into the matter will conclude that the implication behind the bodhisattva not entering nirvana and not becoming a Buddha, is to have us understand that we are all Buddhas, we are all bodhisattvas.

I think of myself as an unenlightened person. You too may say you are unenlightened, but from my standpoint, all of you appear as Buddhas and bodhisattvas. By the same token, I cannot say that I appear in your eyes as a Buddha, nor can you say you appear to yourself a Buddha. At any rate, in my eyes all of you are Buddhas and bodhisattvas. In that case, all of you, in that "falling off of body-mind," would become nothing, you would become "hollowed-out," so to speak. What then? In that hollowed-out state, even that "hollowed-outness" has to be emptied of itself. As long as that "hollowed-outness" remains, human being has not been emptied of itself. When that last shred of us is gone, then I become I, you become you, the pine becomes the pine, the bamboo becomes the bamboo. In that way, the Pure Land becomes this dirty world, this dirty world becomes the Pure Land.

At any rate, all living beings everywhere are the object of the Tathāgata's wisdom working on their behalf, here not to attain Buddhahood, but to break what the *Dhammapada* called the *gahakāra-ka*, the house-builder, that is, the Self. It is not a negation to shatter the ridge-pole and break the rafters; the shattering of the ridge-pole must be seen as an act of affirmation. In the shattering of the ridge-pole, not as an act of negation, there is the realization of absolute affirmation. In the realization of absolute affirmation we uncover the so-called totality of human being. Now, love of living beings (*maitri*) and compassion for those in suffering (*karuṇā*) are the two pillars of Buddhism, and together they form the totality of loving compassion which, as such, exhibits qualities found in neither one nor the other. This is a matter of prime importance. This can be called absolute affirmation or absolute Other-power.

As I have mentioned elsewhere, among the poems of the myōkōnin Asahara Saichi (1850–1932) is one that reads: “The Other-power I experience is not self-power, it is not Other-power. *All* is Other-power. *Namu amida butsu, Namu amida butsu.*” Saichi was unlearned, and though he managed to master the basic letters, he wrote down his own words, making his work even more interesting. But he did not record what he heard at sermons. He wrote down, rather, thoughts that came to him out of his own experience. In the above poem, this “All” is the absolute Other-power. So saying, he writes, “*Namu amida butsu, Namu amida butsu.*”

In Saichi’s notebooks, the words “*Namu amida butsu, Namu amida butsu,*” are scribbled everywhere. Some pages are literally written over with these words. At first I thought it was “*Namu amida butsu*” in the ordinary sense, but in Saichi’s case he had become *Namu amida butsu*, and so he doesn’t say “*Namu amida butsu* is Other-power.” Saying, “*Namu amida butsu, Namu amida butsu,*” he becomes *Namu amida butsu* itself, and in that *Namu amida butsu* Other-power appears in its totality. In this experience, am I Amida or is Amida me?—this I cannot tell, but Amida is Amida, and I am I. When Saichi was planing down wooden clogs, he mused, “Is it Amida who is doing the planing or is it me?” This he could not tell, but at the same time it was Saichi who was doing the planing. That Self is the absolute Other-power: therein the Self presences itself; therein Kiyozawa-sensei’s human being appears in its totality. I have called this talk “Kiyozawa’s Living Presence” to point to the fact that, therein, Kiyozawa-sensei is still very much alive and with us today.

Now, if you, as individuals, were to fail to become *Namu amida butsu* in the place where you are, what do you think would become of Buddhism as a whole? If it continues on the same trajectory it has up to now, I predict that Buddhism will not last another hundred years. It does not matter if that comes to pass, but what an immense loss for humankind! At the same time, we cannot demand of Westerners, or the rest of the whole world, that they too become Buddhists. Here, I think it important that we understand Buddhism for ourselves and establish it in our lives as our own religious faith.

TRANSLATED BY SATŌ TAIRA AND W. S. YOKOYAMA