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groping at random in the dark. Our lives are sustained by a universal force which holds things together, a motive power which urges us to abandon ourselves to the abyss of nihilism, knowing that nihilism is transformed into a new world. He made it perfectly clear that he could never become a Christian, but whenever he referred to Christ he spoke in love, as a friend and disciple of the great Master.

As a philosopher he could not avoid philosophical categories and abstract language—sometimes it was difficult to grasp what he was trying to express. As a man of faith, however, he became most eloquent when he spoke the language of the soul: in poetry and symbolism, anecdotes and legends, mythology and parables. Even in his philosophical works one can hear the voice of the preacher who witnesses to the light he had seen, urging others to see.

It is puzzling that philosopher who is so critical of Christianity appealed so strongly to Christians. Apart from his personality and the power of his philosophical approach, I think one of the reasons for this attraction is that his criticism was nurtured by a flame of love—also for Christ and his Way. His critical questions were not raised from a standpoint outside faith, but emerged in a process of search into the foundations of faith.

I never heard Nishitani speak about his disciples. He probably had more than he was aware of. And many of them were Christians.

### Thinking of Life

Tsujimura Kōichi

As anyone who has visited Nishitani Sensei knows, neither in his seminar room at the university nor at his home was there anything like visiting days or visiting hours. Except on occasions when a guest was already present, one could visit Sensei at almost any time. The number of people from all walks of life who have been shown into the three-mat sitting room in his house is probably beyond calculation. Sensei's door was always open to everyone who came.

One time I asked him about this. He said, "The idea of having visiting hours seems too formal and academic. One must be free, like Suzuki Daisetz." Since sometime after the war, a piece of Daisetz's calligraphy inscribed with the words, *byōjōshin*, "ordinary mind," hung so as to face the visitor entering Sensei's house. For me, each and every time I crossed the

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grounds of the Yoshida Shrine next to Sensei's home, I had to overcome my reluctance and summon up great resolve before I entered his gate. It was exactly like the moment before one goes into a roshi's room for sanzen.

Sensei, it seems to me, was a great philosopher whose learning literally extended from East to West, ancient to present—one of the most profound thinkers the twentieth century has produced—because he was neither an academic nor one who was trapped in academic stereotypes. Yet all of Sensei's extensive learning was perfectly assimilated. According to Mahayana Buddhism, learning is but "subsequent knowledge," but in Nishitani Sensei subsequent knowledge and "fundamental knowledge" became one and functioned as living wisdom. Not only had this living wisdom become the background for his own thinking (and in personal conversation it would, operating together with his extremely keen sensitivity, inform his actions, facial expressions and words, flashing out with the suddenness of lightning), it could pierce to the heart of the person with whom he was conversing. For me, talking with Professor Nishitani in a one-to-one situation was at once fearful and joyful. For Sensei, it was the ordinary mind itself.

Sensei's thinking was as open as the gate to his home. There was nothing about it that was close-minded or restricted by systems of any kind. Sensei did not reject systematic thinking as such, but his thinking was never a matter of laying out a plan beforehand and then conforming to it. Sensei's important work *What is Religion?* is comparatively well organized, but even it does not follow a deliberate design. It is, after all, a work in which the act of investigating the living aspects of the problem all the way to their ultimate roots assumes, naturally, a systematic character that is vital and open. Life, especially human life, abhors rigidity.

If we were to describe Professor Nishitani's thinking in one phrase, we could say it was always "concerned with life" or "thinking of life." "Life," in that case, would extend from minute organisms, plants and animals, through humans to the "life" of gods and buddhas. In that respect, Professor Nishitani's philosophy resembles Bergson, but to my mind Bergson's elucidation of the life of the mystic at the conclusion of *Les Deux Sources de la Morale et de la Religion* cannot compare with Professor Nishitani's treatment of the subject. Professor Nishitani's "thinking of life" encompasses the scientific, that is to say objective or biological study of life as something that elucidates one aspect, but encompasses another aspect, which is nonobjective in the sense that it comes before being taken as an object of scientific study. That other aspect is, for example, the basis for immediately intuiting the life of the universe in the blossoming of a single flower.

For Sensei, life, including his own life, was experienced in the sense of "all living beings." But "life" in this sense is identified with "birth-and-death"

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itself, and Professor Nishitani's thinking demands that this "life" be understood to include death, evil, and nihility. This demands that we thrust ourselves all the way to the very roots of life. Life thus experienced is the life of Buddha, where there is neither creation nor destruction. But like the front and back sides of a sheet of paper, it is also the reverse side of our relative existence. Professor Nishitani's thinking continuously urges his readers to arrive at this realization so as to change the quality of their lives.

This is nothing less than Sensei's "thinking of life" being revealed from its root-source, itself going out in search for life, and life awakening to life. Such was Sensei's "thinking," united with life, and one with a "life of thinking." As Sensei's thinking tapped the root of life in emptiness, his "life of thinking" bloomed forth endlessly. It calls to mind the lines in the *Cold Mountain Poems*: "I search to the end of the sourceless source. The source is exhausted, but the water is not."

Keeping his door open to all visitors and participating actively in various study groups were of course aspects of this "life of thinking." They are what is referred to in Mahayana Buddhism as "the samadhi of enjoyment for others." From late at night to early in the morning Sensei read, contemplated, and wrote. This was his "thinking of life"—"the samadhi of enjoyment for self." Sensei was "free to come and go" in both of those directions. And it was that which characterized his "person" (*nin*).

The following lines on Socrates by the German poet Hölderlin seem to have been composed with precisely this "person" of Professor Nishitani in mind:

*"Wer das Tiefste gedacht, liebt das Lebendigste."*

"Who the deepest has thought, loves what is most alive."<sup>1</sup>

### Reminiscence

Ueda Yoshifumi

Although I had no direct connection with Kyoto University, I visited Professor Nishitani both at his office there and at his home and learned a great

<sup>1</sup> "Socrates and Alcibiades," translated by Michael Hamburger, *Friedrich Hölderlin, Poems and Fragments* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 66-67.