

VIEWS AND REVIEWS

Sprinklings

HIROSE TAKASHI

“Looking back, my journey of 60 years was dreams, just dreams.”

It may amuse some to hear me speaking like an old man at the age of sixty, and to be honest I don't really feel all that old myself. Still, sixty marks a watershed of sorts, and looking back now I realize that these years have been neither short nor easy. I feel a renewed sense of wonder that this self of mine is still alive today. Thinking back on all that has happened, I can't say I feel much nostalgia—my reaction is more one of chills running down my spine. It is indeed a wonder that I remain alive—I, who should not be living, am still alive.

“The way of the Buddha is everyday life.” When I understood the meaning of this, I realized the fundamentality of simply being alive. And in this phrase I discerned the meaning of the words of Master Shinran:

Seeing the Power of Tathagata's Original Vow,
No man's life will pass in vain.¹

To me, the central fact of life is that it doesn't “pass in vain”; there is no possible mode of existence outside of this. It is not a matter of con-

¹ This is a translation of “Teki-teki-sho,” in the *Shindo* journal (Nagoya). Reprinted in *Monko*. No. 27; Oct. 26, 1984.

¹ *Nyushutsu Nimon Ge*. In the *Shinshu Seiten*, Higashi Honganji, Kyoto, 1987 (hereafter abbreviated as SS) p. 461.

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sciously striving for a meaningful life—the very fact of being alive is in itself the fact of life's "not passing in vain." Yet we pass our lives in futility, dreaming in the midst of reality.

There is a Buddhist term in Japanese, *futaiten*, indicating the Bodhisattva stage of "non-retrogression," in which the practitioner is assured of the eventual attainment of Buddhahood. Once, however, I heard the characters of this word reread in the sense of "experiencing the changes of life in the assurance of non-retrogression," or "not retrogressing, but experiencing change." I have to admit that I sympathize deeply with this interpretation. It expresses the point of view necessary if we are to see life not merely as the *place* of the Buddha Way but as the Buddha Way itself.

Of the sixty years of my life, the past ten or so have been the most bewildering. During their course I have had many occasions to speak, and this work is a short collection of my words. They are literally the mutterings of a deluded man; no one may have ever asked to hear them, and I'm fully aware that mutterings are no more than mutterings. The title, *Sprinklings*, thus seemed an appropriate one. I would like to keep adding to these "sprinklings" as long as I remain alive.

Sixty years—was it reality or simply a dream?

THE TRUE NATURE OF LIFE

"Because you lack the karmic necessity to kill even a single person, you do not commit murder. That is why you do not kill, not because you are good. On the other hand, even though you did not want to kill, it may so happen that you nevertheless kill hundreds or thousands of people."²

² *Tannisho* XIII. The following translations were used as reference for the *Tannisho* quotes in this article:

Tannisho: A Tract Deploring the Heterodoxies of Faith, tr. Kosho Otani et al, Kyoto, Higashi Honganji, 1961.

The Tanni Sho: Notes Lamenting Differences, tr. Ryosetsu Fujiwara, Ryukoku Translation Series II, Kyoto, Ryukoku University, 1962.

Tannisho: A Primer, Ryukoku University Translation Center, Kyoto, Ryukoku University, 1982.

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This is a frightening statement. Yet Shinran uttered these startling words because he saw them as an expression of the true nature of life. The insight they convey has the power to expose and eradicate discriminatory views rooted in outmoded values and superficial interpretations of human nature, and bring into view the horizon of true human equality.

Shinran's assent to this truth was not arbitrary, however. Quite the contrary. It arose from a thoroughgoing realization of the futility of his own efforts, as expressed in his statement in the *Tannisho*, "Every evil act, even one as minute as a speck of dust on the tip of a rabbit's or sheep's hair, is without exception caused by past karma."³ In these words are reflected a bottomless sense of karmic evil. Welling from the state of utter ignorance he existed in with regard to the nature of even his own acts of good and evil, this statement reflects his sadness and contrition, and his sense of tragic responsibility for not being capable of living in any other manner.

From this outlook emerged Shinran's heart-felt declaration, "Good, evil—I know nothing of these!"⁴ When he uttered this statement, he understood the mystery and wonder of his being alive. He experienced, in other words, the blessedness of being allowed to live in the embrace of the Infinite Vow.

EVILDOERS ATTAIN BUDDHAHOOD

The nembutsu followers gathered around Shinran over 700 years ago were held in contempt as criminals and outcasts, and accorded treatment little better than rubble in the street. Numbering himself among this group, Shinran said, "We are like stones, gravel, and broken tiles."⁵ He also states, though, "If you believe in the mysterious Vow of the Buddha of Unimpeded Light and the Name of Great Wisdom, you attain to supreme, unsurpassed enlightenment even while possessed of the worldly passions."⁶ In another work he adds, "No other vir-

³ *Tannisho* XIII.

⁴ *Tannisho* Postscript.

⁵ *Yuishinsho Mon'i*, SS p. 553.

⁶ *Yuishinsho Mon'i*, SS p. 552.

tue [than nembutsu] is necessary . . . no evils need be feared.”⁷ Finally, “The transgressor who trusts in Other Power is precisely the one who possesses the true cause for rebirth in the Pure Land.”⁸

These love-filled words must have lit a flame of inexpressible hope in the hearts of those condemned by the ethical and religious mores of their times to lives of fear, trepidation, and servitude. Freed for the first time in their lives from the dread of external things, both with form and without, they took their places as independent individuals and tasted the honor and joy of true humanity.

Accepting into their daily lives Shinran’s teaching, “The person of nembutsu treads the Direct Way of No-Hindrance,”⁹ they achieved the freedom to live as people of unsurpassed love, warmth, and magnanimity.

THE PATH TO REBIRTH IN THE PURE LAND

Shinran earnestly appeals to us, saying, “Your sole purpose . . . is to inquire about the way to rebirth in the Pure Land.”¹⁰

“The way to rebirth in the Pure Land” is the Buddhist Path for ordinary people, the path which sees the way to true salvation in Other Power. As Shinran states, “The transgressor who trusts in Other Power is precisely the one who possesses the true cause for rebirth in the Pure Land.”¹¹ This is decidedly not the Way of the great scholars, proud of their wisdom and learning. This path has no connection with them, not because the scholars reject it, but because the Way itself is utterly unrelated to the scholars’ academic views. This disavowal is firm and unyielding.

I once heard the following story:

A young child on his death bed with an incurable disease asked his mother, “What happens after we die?”

The mother, unable to contain her grief at the emptiness of her repeated words of comfort, said to him, as much in prayer as in answer, “Child, when we die we go to the Bud-

⁷ *Tannisho* I.

⁸ *Tannisho* III.

⁹ *Tannisho* VII.

¹⁰ *Tannisho* II.

¹¹ *Tannisho* III.

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dha's land. I'll join you later, so please wait for me there."

The child murmured, "I'll wait, Mother. Be sure to come."

Several days later the little child passed away. In the midst her grief over the child's premature death the mother thought, "I must keep my promise to my child. If I don't, I will be guilty of deceit."

Shinran appeals to us from the bottom of his heart, "Your sole purpose . . . is to inquire about the way to rebirth in the Pure Land."

ABOUT LIFE

"The pollution problem is a many faceted one, but even it, at heart, is concerned with how we view life and the relationship between man and nature. If we could just keep in mind the Buddhist truth that everything in existence, each leafy tree and each blade of grass, participates in the Buddha Nature, then the problem of pollution would never have arisen in the first place."¹²

Takahashi Kazumi (1931-1971), still revered as the conscience of the modern age by young people in Japan, wrote the above statement six months before his death. It rings like a testament to his lifelong, uncompromising efforts to clarify the direction of human endeavor. It echoes the appeal of Shinran:

"All sentient beings have been my parents, brothers, and sisters in the course of countless lives, and I must save every one of them when I attain Buddhahood in the coming life."¹³

Those who have realized, in the midst of their own lives, the interrelationship of all existence know the blessedness of having received life. But one mustn't stop there. Those who know the blessedness of having received life receive in turn the mission to give life. With the receipt of this mission we, in this existence, commence "the attainment of Bud-

¹² *Ningen To Shite*, Takahashi Kazumi, Chikuma Shobo Pub., 1971.

¹³ *Tannisho V.*

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dhahood in the coming life,"¹⁴ the true work of an active, positive human being.

WORDS OF ABSOLUTE LOVE

Even a virtuous person can attain rebirth [in the Pure Land],
how much more so an evil one!"¹⁵

This is one of the most famous passages in the *Tannisho*, but how many people are capable of sincerely accepting these words? Commentaries on the meaning of this passage are not lacking; there are, if anything, far too many. For some reason, though, an air of inadequacy surrounds them all.

There was once a young man of rather unruly disposition who gravely injured a companion during an argument at a bar. Tormented by the memory of his companion being taken off to the hospital, the young man fell into a state of despair. Finally, overcome with guilt, he attempted to take his own life. Strangely, though, what crossed his mind at that moment were the words, "Even the virtuous can attain rebirth [in the Pure Land], how much more so the wicked!" Remembering these words of Shinran, the young man came to his senses. He recalled his emotions at that moment in the following way. "I never realized that such warm words existed anywhere in the world. That passage was the first place I ever encountered an expression of pure love. It gave me the renewed will to live."

The power of these words of absolute love lies in the courage they impart to overcome one's karma and continue on with life. They impart this courage even to one in whom the desire to escape responsibility has pushed to the edge of suicide. Light was brought to my heart, too, by the deep healing words of this young man.

REBIRTH

My life, where did it come from?
Leaving, where will it go?

¹⁴ *Tannisho* V.

¹⁵ *Tannisho* III.

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Steadily and quietly I ponder this.
As I sit alone under my brushwood window.
But ponder though I may,
I don't even know the beginning, so how can I know the end?
The same is true of the present.

I am deeply moved by the profound insight into the nature of life which penetrates this poem by Ryokan. Truly, there is an inescapable element of passivity in our lives which our own wishes are powerless to influence. We are born completely independently of our will, we die regardless of what we desire. How could a lifetime bordered by such a birth and death possibly be compliant to our personal wishes?

If all human endeavor is ultimately empty and no way to escape this situation exists, then life is futile regardless of how we live. This is, in fact, a very important point to realize. The way to resolve this problem is the Way of rebirth in the Pure Land. The Buddha stated, "Achieve transcendence and be reborn in the Land of Serene Sustenance"¹⁶; Shinran concurred, saying, "Cut off the world of defilement, transcend the world of transmigrating life-and-death, and attain rebirth in the Pure Land of Serene Sustenance."¹⁷ "Rebirth" is the transcendence and severing of self-centered ways of living and the return to the original selflessness of the human spirit. When this way of life has opened to us, we are enabled to live, not with fatalistic passivity, but with a precisely appropriate amount of activity.

UNLIMITED LIFE

Obon, the Buddhist All Souls' Day, is celebrated on August 14th in my home town. It is a small mountain community where few young faces are seen anymore, but on *Obon* the place is alive with youngsters back from the cities. This year was different, though. Last March, a group of recent high school graduates went for a drive in two cars to some picturesque hills not far from town. On their way back after a day of sightseeing one of the cars lost control and plunged, with its

¹⁶ *Bussatsu Muryojukyo*, SS p. 57. Translation taken from *The Buddha's Discourse: The Sutra of Infinite Life*, translated by Hiroshi Suzuki (mimeo.).

¹⁷ *Songo Shinzo Meimon*, SS p. 514.

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four passengers, 100 ft. into a ravine. A girl was killed instantly, and the three other passengers suffered multiple fractures and bruises.

Upon hearing the news I rushed to the home of the dead girl. When I saw her mother, though, weeping as though insane and her father unable to control his tears, there was nothing I could say. I simply clasped my hands in prayer, knowing that any words would die upon my lips. When I returned to my temple I wrote the following quotation from Kaneko Daiei on a large piece of paper and posted it on the temple notice board:

Unlimited Life;
Though the petals may fall,
The flower does not.¹⁸

After the heartrending funeral the next day, the father of the girl paid a visit to the temple.

“You wrote those words on the notice board for me, didn’t you?” he said. “The petals have certainly fallen, but I must keep faith that the flower hasn’t. After all, my daughter has gone in marriage to the Pure Land . . .”

I, who had been unable to offer any words of comfort, found profound peace in this statement of his. His daughter had been a classmate of my second son.

WORDS

There are too many words. The modern age has seen a flood of them, most of which drift off, ignored, into nothingness. But are words that vanish unheard into nothingness truly worthy of being called words, regardless of how loudly shouted they may have been?

The misfortune of the modern age is its inability to distinguish true speech from mere loquacity. People will eventually cover their ears if surrounded long enough by an uninterrupted barrage of garrulity. But the more people cover their ears the more havoc the noise will wreak. Trapped in this vicious cycle, words become increasingly meaningless and people descend to a state of inhumanity. Human existence depends words; if words are lost, the entirety of our humanity is forfeited.

¹⁸ *Kuzukago*, Kaneko Daiei, Buneido Pub.

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Max Picard said, "Words are born of an overflow of silence."¹⁹ He then added, "Be quiet, the better that I may hear your words!"²⁰ We must retrieve words from the Maelstrom of loquacity. To do this, we must know silence, for only silence can open the world of true listening. There, for the first time, we come into contact with living words. We should deeply consider the teaching of the Buddha, speaking of those in the Pure Land: "Until attaining Buddhahood their sense of hearing is pure, and they are free from suffering and worry."²¹

PAST KARMA IS INSTINCT

Weakened and confused by illness,
A mother counts her children on her fingers;
One is missing.

This short poem appeared in the readers' poetry column of the *Mainichi* Newspaper. There is no way of knowing who wrote it or what circumstances inspired it. I imagine, though, that it was composed with a sense of reverence and devotion by the husband of a seriously ill woman when he recognised amidst her delirious, instinctive motions the maternal feeling at the core of her being.

Humans are said to be rational creatures. Perhaps. Our rationality, though, may not be quite as wonderful as many of us think. Fish swim freely through the waters without a trace of pride, birds fly in the sky day and night and feel no need to boast. Why is it that pride arises only when humans and their intellects are concerned? In my opinion, no matter how high above other creatures we place our rational human selves, it is in the end nothing but comical self-delusion. The foolishness of human beings who are blind to this fact is clearly indicated in the poem above.

When the strength of our precious intellects is broken the inner spirit which supports our lives is revealed in all its richness. The world of this spirit is the Land of Life to which we must return.

¹⁹ *Die Welt des Schweigens*, Max Picard, 1959. The English translation above is based on the Japanese version in *Chinmoku no Sekai*, Misuzu Shobo Pub.

²⁰ *Bussetsu Muryojukyo*, SS p. 35. Translation by Hiroshi Suzuki.

²¹ *Soga Ryojin Senshu*, Soga Ryojin. Vol. 1 p. 76, Vo.; V p. 135.

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I respectfully recall the words of Soga Ryojin, "Past karma is instinct, and through instinct all of life is in communion."²²

THE SINCERITY OF LIFE

My thoughts at year's end are but this:

Today too, this self-centered man is forgiven and alive.

Ahh, Namu Amida Butsu. . . .

There were painful times this year, and sad times and difficult times and lonely times, and even times when sudden feelings of happiness overcame me. This is the year which is now drawing to a close.

Even so, I am alive today. Transcending so many thoughts and cares, I remain alive today. But in order to keep me alive, how many living beings sacrificed their lives, without reward, without assertion, just silently, like the great earth. I quietly consider the fact of my being alive. As described in *The Sutra of Infinite Life*, the many kalpa-long training of the Bodhisattva Dharmakara was "With no sensation or thought of greed, anger, or harm."²³

Life, nurtured within the Infinite Vow,
Continues on today
Regardless of my unawareness.

IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME

Even though my body be sunk
In pain or poison
I will endeavor to fulfill my aspirations
Bearing all with no regret.²⁴

²² The statement "Past karma is instinct" (宿業は本能である) was first made by the Shin Buddhist scholar Soga Ryojin. In his view the drive to self-enlightenment and the salvation of others (自利利他) is one of the most basic of karmic urges, and is personified in the being of Dharmakara Bodhisattva. This karmic drive resides in the *alayavijnana*, the "seed consciousness" in which all instinct and sub-conscious mentation are stored, and which serves as the prime cause of things. There, through the medium of instinct, it communes with all sentient beings.

²³ *Bussatsu Muryojūkyō*, SS p. 27. Translation by Hiroshi Suzuki.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, SS p. 13. Translation by Hiroshi Suzuki.

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Dharmakara Bodhisattva made this vow in the full awareness of its implications. Deliberately choosing the world of pain and difficulty as his place of training, he undertook to save all beings. But there is something which in all due respect I wonder about. Have human beings been taking advantage of this vow from the time of its beginningless beginnings to shirk all effort and, at the same time, assume leadership of all creation? For such humans Dharmakara's "bearing all with no regret" is quite a comfortable and convenient arrangement. Invoking the banner of cultural development as an excuse for their activities, humans have ridden roughshod over the world of Dharmakara's vow to bear all in silence, though he be kicked, trampled, or stabbed.

Dharmakara's silence, however, should not be misconstrued as the submission of a weakling. It is the expression of his earnest desire to bring about, in the fullness of time, the salvation of all beings who seek rebirth in the world beyond the three evil realms [hell, hungry ghosts, and animals].

Dwelling amidst the karmic fires which well from the cracks in our greed-centered culture, we see now the approach of our own, of humanity's, of the world's final moments. We are reaping as we have sown, and have no one but ourselves to blame. But from the depths of this despair Dharmakara's silence rings out as a great voice of inspiration, declaring, "Come at once singleheartedly and singlemindedly!"²⁵ Hearing this call, will humanity find in it the true cause of its awakening? Indeed, "in the fullness of time."

SHAME

Looking up,
I am shamed by the birds;
Looking down,
I am humbled by the fish.²⁶

I encountered these words one day in an inn during a trip. Written in light india ink, they appeared on a scroll which, together with a single white camellia blossom, decorated the alcove of my room. As I sat

²⁵ *Kyogashinsho*, SS p. 220.

²⁶ Source unknown.

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alone facing the scroll in the alcove, I contemplated the feelings of the one who had written it. For some reason I envisioned someone standing alone upon the earth, lost in tears with head deeply bowed.

Human beings perish. On the surface are splendid actions; within can be heard the sounds of destruction. In their pride people remain unaware of this, preferring instead to place their hopes in activities devoid of inner reflection. Such foolishness is not merely self-destructive, it pulls all existence toward destruction as well. No trace of true humanity remains in such brazen audacity.

Oh Lord, Buddhas and the World-honored One are always preaching this: There are two purifying feelings which serve to save us [from utter ruination]—one is *zan* and the other is *ki* (or *gi*). *Zan* means “not to commit crimes of one’s own,” and *ki* means “not to make others commit crimes.” *Zan* is “to feel ashamed within oneself,” and *ki* is “to express one’s feelings to others.” *Zan* is “to feel ashamed toward fellow humans,” and *ki* is “to feel ashamed toward Heaven.” These feelings of shame are *zan-ki* (or *zan-gi*). Those who have no such feelings are not human; they are beasts.²⁷

In the face of these words Shinran always referred to himself as “the one without *zan* or *ki*.”²⁸ His sense of shame seems reflected somehow in the words of the hanging scroll. And he calls, “Humanity, where are you going?”

LIFE AND DEATH

Death. Is it a dark shadow which threatens life?
Or is it a transparent light which purifies life?

“It was Shinran Shonin who taught us to recognize life and death equally, and to accept life and death equally.”²⁹ These are the words of

²⁷ *Kyogoshinsho*, SS p. 257. Translation from *The Kyogoshinsho*, Daisetsu Suzuki, Kyoto, Shinshu Otaniha, 1973. Pp. 147-8.

²⁸ *Shozomatsu Wasan*, SS p. 509.

²⁹ Soga Ryojin.

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Soga Ryojin. Hearing them forces me to reexamine myself as I am today. Nameless fears have caused me to push the shadow of death far back into the realms of forgetfulness; in that regard I live now in a partially somnolent state. What, though, is this "death" which so threatens our sense of life? There is no way I can know anything about my own death. Why, then, do I fear it? "Death" of this sort is nothing but the materialization of my own fears and delusions. That, in turn, indicates that the "life" which fears this "death" is also nothing but delusion. I am, in effect, being troubled by a "life" and "death" created by the mechanisms of deceit. As long as this is the case there is neither true life nor true death, just drifting forms of illusion. In the words of Kiyozawa Manshi:

We cannot avoid death. But though we die, this is not extinction. Life is not the entirety of our being—death, too, is part of us. Life and death are equally ours.³⁰

It is only with an awakened understanding of the statement "life and death are equally ours" that we finally gain our true existence.

CONTENT IF I HAVE ONE THING

There are twelve months in a year—365 days. This, surely, comprises one of the most basic cycles of human existence. There is no foreseeing when in the course of this cycle the end will come; we know only that the processes of this once-only life of ours will cease one day without permitting a moment's delay.

Looking back, I wonder what in the world my life was about. That event, this incident, that occasion—all seem to have passed in a flurry of busy-ness and haste. But, now that it is all behind me, I feel no need to pass judgement on any of it. Like pictures drawn on flowing water, past actions vanish without a trace. Only the occasional vague memory stirs itself at the edges of my mind. Today I will pass through another scene of this journey in time.

People labor busily at their tasks,
Heedless as the days of their lives pass by;
Like lamps in the wind, never knowing

³⁰ *Seishin Shugi*, "Zettai Tariki no Daido," Kiyozawa Manshi.

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when the end will come.

The Six Realms are rest-less, and offer no abode.³¹

Zendo's *gatha* on transience penetrates to the core of our souls.

In those for whom impermanence remains a matter of vague sentimentality there is no true insight into impermanence, just dreams of unending existence. Only those who have gazed at the form of the [dream-devouring] tapir know what impermanence truly is. Impermanence is the present moment; people who live the present moment live impermanence. Such people would, no doubt, agree with the following words:

"All I need for contentment is this fire to keep me warm."³²

NATURALNESS³³

"Flowers are red, willows are green." This line is often used to express the "true face" of Zen. The Sung Dynasty poet and statesman Su Tung-p'o (1036-1101) also used this expression. How, though, can one receive into one's life the truth of this simple statement, conveying not just the essence of Zen but of the entirety of Buddhism? This question occupied me for many years. Recently, though, I chanced to hear the following Zen anecdote from a friend:

The Master was asked, "What is the Dharma World of One Taste?"

He answered, "Flowers are red, willows are green."

He was asked again, "How is the path to Ding Shan Mountain?"

The Master answered, "Sheer and unclimbable."

"And what of the practitioner who has scaled it?"

³¹ *Ojo Wasan, Shinshu Seikyo Zensho*, p. 657.

³² Santoka Taneda.

³³ Naturalness (自然, *jinen*) indicates a state of as-it-isness, a condition uninfluenced by human action. It can be divided into three aspects. 1) *Mui jinen* (無為自然), the naturalness of non-doing or non-activity: the ultimate, non-differentiated Buddhist truth, the world of satori. 2) *Ganriki jinen* (願力自然), the naturalness of Vow Power: rebirth in the Pure Land as the natural result of the workings of Other Power. 3) *Godo jinen* (業行自然), the naturalness of karmic law: causes lead to results in accordance with the workings of karmic law.

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“Like a knife-edged peak.”³⁴

Even without interpretation this short exchange moved me profoundly, and I felt as though a veil of darkness had been lifted from my eyes. These words are an indication, precious yet severe, of the unmoving silence which encompasses limitless motion. They are, indeed, “words of life.” They brought to mind the lines of a poet stirred to his soul by the sight of a flower:

Looking at a flower in bloom
I realize I cannot be satisfied with the way I am.
Flowers are frightening,
Truly frightening.
How earnest they are!
But then, they are just being the way they naturally are.³⁵

Shinran discovered within the Power of the Vow the actualization of naturalness in accord with the Dharma, and realized that it is through the working of the Vow that all existence has its becoming.³⁶

³⁴ *Tensei Koto Roku.*

³⁵ Author unknown.

³⁶ Implied in this statement are several insights about the working of the three aspects of *jinen* mentioned in note (33). *Ganriki jinen* is the working of *mui jinen*, and is actualized in the world of *godo jinen*, where it functions as a connection between *mui jinen* and *godo jinen*. Through the encounter with *ganriki jinen*, all beings become aware that their existence is within the world of *godo jinen* and, at the same time, within the world of *mui jinen*.