

DIALOGUE

Shinran's World

PART III

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THE LOCUS OF THE ORIGINAL VOW

Shin Buddhism and the Demands of the Age

NISHITANI: Dr. Kaneko, the Forty-eight Vows of Bodhisattva Dharmākara are given in the form of conditions for enlightenment: "If (the chosen conditions are not satisfied), then may I not attain supreme enlightenment." Is it possible to say that the prayers of sentient beings are included in these conditions?

KANEKO: Yes, as Shinran says, "All of the vows and practices of sentient beings are already fulfilled (by means of the power of the Original Vow)."

NISHITANI: In these Forty-eight Vows the prayers of sentient beings are described in considerable detail, but among them we do not find all the prayers of people today. For example, one major concern is the elimination of nuclear weapons and the achievement of peace for all humanity. Another which has gained a great deal of attention recently is the desire for a society free of class conflict and oppression. There may be others, but these are today's prayers. Can they be added to

SHINRAN'S WORLD

those given in the *Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra* (Larger Sutra of Eternal Life)?

KANEKO: I feel they can.

NISHITANI: Then we can see today's prayers and vows as extensions of the Forty-eight. Conversely, the various contemporary concerns such as world peace are ultimately included in the Forty-eight. Each new age will give rise to its own prayers expressing its own ideals. In this infinite succession we can see, as Dr. Suzuki says, that the number of Vows may be regarded as innumerable.

KANEKO: That may be so, but let me give the traditional Shin Buddhist interpretation of "Vow," or "*negai*," which is the indigenous Japanese rendering. Etymologically *negai* is said to come from the noun "*ne*" which means "sound" or "voice"; the original meaning of "*negai*" is "to summon with one's voice," or more simply "call."

Who is being called? "The sentient beings in all quarters of the universe." This phrase only appears in the Three Vows, namely, the Eighteenth, Nineteenth, and Twentieth. All the other Vows express a desire for some ideal realm or for sentient beings to be possessed of certain abilities or qualities. But the Three Vows differ in that they are Amida Buddha's direct call to all sentient beings. Actually, Amida's call is to himself in the second person. In these three Vows, Amida calls to each and every sentient being as his second self.

On the other hand "*chikai*" means "promise," just as it's given in the *Tannishō*. It means that Amida will always be with us. It originates with Amida's Vow: "If there is anyone who does not attain rebirth into my Pure Land, then I will not attain supreme enlightenment." In order to help sentient beings realize Buddhahood, Amida tries all kinds of prayers, but in reality we are hopelessly lost. The only way we can be saved is through the fundamental vow that Amida will refuse enlightenment if there remains even a single being who does not attain birth in his Land. My feeling is that the promise of the Pure Land teaching is ultimately realized in the Eighteenth Vow.

NISHITANI: That's fine. So. . .

KANEKO: I would like to hear what each of you thinks about human ideals in light of this basic vow. The path I have followed is best exemplified by a passage from the *Tannishō*:

There is a difference in compassion between the Path of Sages and the Path of Pure Land. Compassion in the Path of Sages

DIALOGUE

is expressed through pity, sympathy, and care for all beings, but truly rare is it that one can help another as completely as one desires. (*Tannishō*, Section IV, trans. by Taitetsu Unno)

This phrase, "as one desires," reveals that one somehow wishes to do something for others. In contrast to this one is struck by the profundity of the statement, "Truly rare is it that one can help another." This expresses the realization that all contrived efforts are useless. The direction that Shin Buddhist thought will take in the future remains to be seen. But as to whether the Pure Land teaching should be confined to this standpoint or go beyond to embrace the prayers of all generations, my view is that there must be the awareness of finitude. Rather than thinking that I can respond to the various demands of the age, I wish to listen for the real voices of the people and ask if the Shin teachings might not be helpful. There's nothing that can be done if they are judged to be useless. I often hear of the need to respond, but Shin Buddhism takes the opposite approach of appealing to the conscience or religious heart of the people of each age. This seems to be particularly characteristic of Shin Buddhism.

NISHITANI: Yes, that may well be.

KANEKO: I will leave whatever else can be done to others. There's no need to oppose them. I'm quite willing to say that what they are doing is fine, but there's no need for me to try to do everything.

Resignation

NISHITANI: Would you say that the most basic element is enlightenment?

KANEKO: Yes, the Pure Land teaching does not hold any hope in the merely human way of life. I don't like the word despair; perhaps it is a kind of radical resignation. The *Nembutsu* teaching emerged through resignation. This can be seen in the *Tannishō*.

NISHITANI: That's true of the *Tannishō*.

SUZUKI: Dr. Kaneko, what is the "ne" of "negai"?

KANEKO: What did you ask?

SUZUKI: This "ne." What is it?

KANEKO: According to the scholars of Classical Japanese, "negai" means summoning oneself in the second person. This means to impart

SHINRAN'S WORLD

one's innermost feelings to another, from "I" to "Thou." This is Amida's call to all sentient beings, "I will always be with thee." "I" is Amida Buddha. "Thee" is the practitioner. Pure Land Buddhism is characterized by an awareness of oneself in the second person; one discovers oneself as "thou." The one who directs this call to us is named Amida Buddha. Our age seems to want to attain transcendence directly in this world. The Shin Buddhism we learned teaches resignation. We can talk about the Pure Land teachings only after this resignation.

NISHITANI: This is not peculiar to the Pure Land tradition, but characterizes Buddhism as a whole. The religious character of Buddhism does not become apparent unless one passes through resignation. Then what emerges out of the resignation?

KANEKO: I don't know. In any case, I don't wish to go too easily beyond resignation.

The Vow Which Transcends This World

NISHITANI: No, I don't know either, but. . . Dr. Soga, you were saying that Bodhisattva Dharmākara went to the Tathagata Lokeśvararāja.

SOGA: Bodhisattva Dharmākara called his vow the Original Vow because he realized that his vow to save all beings was not merely a personal affair. This is why he said, "I don't know what the vow is because it is beyond my world."

Although the Tathāgata Lokeśvararāja said, "You ought to know what your own vow is," it transcended Dharmākara. This is why he needed someone to teach him.

NISHITANI: Does this mean that the Original Vow was that of the Tathāgata Lokeśvararāja?

SOGA: The Tathāgata existed within the mind of Bodhisattava Dharmākara. The latter was a human being. Hence the Tathāgata who transcends the human existed within the mind of the human being. The desire to realize the Original Vow of the Tathāgata in his own being was Bodhisattva Dharmākara's Vow which transcends this world.

NISHITANI: In that case, is it all right to understand this term for Buddha, "Tathāgata," as "*Tatha-āgata*," "the one who has come from suchness"?

SOGA: Yes, one can explain it in those terms.

DIALOGUE

NISHITANI: I see. The Original Vow of the Tathāgata was within Bodhisattva Dharmākara and somehow. . .

SOGA: It is within, and it must be resolved by oneself, but it transcends one. That's why one cannot understand it through one's efforts alone; here is the reason for the appearance of Tathāgata Lokeśvararāja. Dharmākara sought someone who could teach him the Vow. Upon meeting him Dharmākara thought, "I'll be able to understand my Vow if I ask this sage; I can't understand it by myself."

Dharmākara had a Vow which transcended him, went beyond his capacities. He didn't know what the Vow was, so he asked Lokeśvararāja to teach him. The latter said, "The nature of the twenty-one billion Buddha Lands, the strengths and weaknesses of the humans and gods inhabiting those lands, and all the details of these lands are. . ."

He went on to describe the various Buddha-Lands where beings are reborn and the good and evil characteristics of the inhabitants. There were innumerable Buddhas and their Vows, and having heard Lokeśvararāja's descriptions, Dharmākara made his selections. These were the Vows that transcended him. He selected forty-eight of his own conditions after examining the innumerable Great Vows of the Tathāgatas, and then declared his Forty-eight Original Vows.

Selection

NISHITANI: Is it correct to say that Dharmākara selected his Vows from among the innumerable. . . ?

SOGA: . . . among the Vows of the Buddhas of the twenty-one billion Pure Lands.

NISHITANI: What I want to ask is if they were already in existence.

SOGA: Yes, they were already there in a sense.

NISHITANI: And he chose from among them.

SOGA: Yes, he chose them.

NISHITANI: But didn't Dharmākara contemplate the Vows for a long time and then establish his own which did not previously exist?

SOGA: They did not exist among all the other Buddhas.

NISHITANI: He set forth vows which did not exist before?

SOGA: Yes.

NISHITANI: What is the relation between selection and the new vows which he set forth?

SOGA: Hōnen has explained this in his *Senchaku hongan nembutsu shū* (The Collection of Passages Concerning the Nembutsu of the Selected Original Vow), beginning with Dharmākara's very first Vow.¹ The existence of the Vow, the Vow of the Pure Land without the Three Evil Realms, implies the existence of the Pure Lands with the Three Evil Realms. That is, among the Pure Lands of the various other Buddhas, there are some which contain the Three Evil Realms. Dharmākara wished to establish a Pure Land to compensate for this, so he declared the Vow of the Pure Land without the Three Evil Realms. In this manner Hōnen relates the nature of each Vow.

Now we come to the Eighteenth Vow of Amida Buddha. Birth in the Pure Land of one of the other Buddhas is attained by performing the meritorious act of giving. There are other Pure Lands in which one attains birth through other acts, such as practicing forbearance and exerting oneself on the path of the Buddha. Dharmākara examined each of these. There were also Pure Lands that one attained birth in through *shōmyō* 称名, calling the Name of the Buddha. This does not refer to *Namu Amida Butsu*.² There were other Names besides *Namu Amida Butsu*, the Name of Amida Buddha, and the other Buddhas promised to welcome the practitioner into their Pure Lands if he intoned their names. The Buddhas of each of the Pure Lands had his own Name, and the intoning of the Name of some of these was the proper cause to be reborn there. There were numerous other causes for rebirth in the Pure Lands of the other Buddhas, each established as the result of fulfilling different vows.

In his Eighteenth Vow, Dharmākara promises to save all those who

¹ The First Vow reads, "If, when I attain Buddhahood, there should be a realm of hellish existence, of hungry ghosts, or brutish creatures, then may I not attain supreme enlightenment." These realms are called the Three Evil Realms.

² Amida Buddha is the name of the Buddha of the Pure Land in the West, but when those wishing to be born in his land call to him, they use the Name, *Namu Amida Butsu*, which means, "I take refuge in Amida Buddha." This is his true name, because Amida Buddha's very being is embodied in the voice of the practitioner who single-mindedly entrusts himself to the Buddha of Infinite Light and Eternal Life by intoning, "*Namu Amida Butsu*."

DIALOGUE

intone his Name. In the Seventeenth Vow, Dharmākara selects the characteristics of this Name: "If, when I attain Buddhahood, the innumerable Buddhas in all the quarters of the universe do not intone my Name in praise of my virtue, then may I not attain supreme enlightenment." It is Shinran Shōnin who teaches us that "my Name" is "*Namu Amida Butsu*." He says that all the Buddhas of all quarters exalted the intoning of *Namu Amida Butsu* and authenticated the nobility of the Name. This is at the basis of Shinran's notion of "The Vow of the Ocean of the One Vehicle" (*Seigan ichijō kai* 誓願一乘海). This was originally Master Shan-t'ao's term, but Shinran gives his interpretation in the *Kyōgyōshinshō* in the chapter on "Act" (*Gyō* 行). He quotes passages from all of the Seven Patriarchs of Pure Land Buddhism and the spiritual successors of Shan-t'ao; he even quotes the masters of other sects. Then he gives his own interpretation of Other-Power (*Tariki* 他力) and the Ocean of the One Vehicle.

NISHITANI: The Vow of Bodhisattva Dharmākara which you just mentioned is one's own vow, but at the same time transcends oneself and is the Original Vow of the Tathāgata.

SOGA: That's right. It's not a personal prayer, but that of all the Buddhas. It is the vow at the source of the vows of all the Buddhas; it transcends them. This spirit of the Seventeenth Vow is called the Ocean of the Vow of the One Vehicle. This is *Namu Amida Butsu*. In the "*Shōshinge*" (Gathas on True Faith) Shinran states,

If a single thought of joyful devotion is awakened in one's heart, then Nirvana is attained without severing the passions. When fools, sages, sinners, and abusers of the Dharma all alike turn and enter the ocean of Amida Buddhas' Vow, then it is like water from many different streams entering the ocean of one taste.

This is also the Ocean of the Vow of the One Vehicle.

NISHITANI: In one sense this Vow is new and did not exist among the vows of the other Buddhas.

SOGA: Yes, a new vow which all the other Buddhas join in praise and agreement. It is as if they said, "We didn't realize it before, but now that we have heard this Vow, we can clearly see that it is our true Vow." The Buddhas came to know this Vow for the first time in this

way. It is a manifestation of "The Buddhas' mindfulness of each other." This is its origin.

The Ocean of the Wisdom-Vow

NISHITANI: The "Tathāgata" in the "Original Vow of the Tathāgata" cannot be exhaustively described by referring to those Buddhas who made their appearance prior to Amida because this Tathāgata transcends the others.

SOGA: There are numerous Tathāgatas, each with his own vows; having fulfilled their vows, each has his own Pure Land. But if it stops here, there is a lack of universality. The Vow of the One Buddha Vehicle (*Seigan ichibutsu jō* 誓願一佛乘) saves all beings equally since it has one cause and one result. There is a clear result and a clear cause. "Fools, sages, sinners, and abusers of the Dharma all alike turning and entering the ocean of Amida's Vow" is this one cause. "It is like water from many different streams entering the ocean of one taste." This is the single result. Both the cause and result belong to the One Vehicle. Amida Buddha had vowed that there would be a single cause and a single result (*in-itsu ka-itsu* 因一果一). Birth in the Pure Land of the other Buddhas has various results. If one views Amida Buddha's Pure Land with the same eye with which one sees the other Pure Lands, it appears as simply one among many. But Shinran Shōnin says this is mistaken: "Since the pure Original Vow of the Tathāgata leads to the birth of no-birth, there are no differences between the nine classes of beings who attain birth" (『高僧和讃』曇鸞和尚二六). In the *Jōdo ron chū* (Commentary on the Treatise on the Pure Land), T'an-luan gives his interpretation: "(Amida Buddha) made his Vow and said, 'My Land which has the one taste of the Mahāyāna shall have the one taste of equality.'" (卷上. 總說分觀察門) The Pure Land of Amida Buddha belongs to the world of the One Vehicle because it was established through the fulfillment of the One Vehicle Vow.

NISHITANI: Bodhisattva Dharmākara vowed to fulfill the Original Vow of the Tathāgata. The Vow being spoken of here is not that of the various Buddha-Tathāgatas, but more fundamental. . .

SOGA: The Buddhas whom Dharmākara heard about from the Tathāgata Lokeśvararāja were already in existence. They lacked unity

DIALOGUE

because each had his own particular character. The real Tathāgata who Dharmākara had in mind is the one who unites.

NISHITANI: Dr. Suzuki previously spoke about the origin of the Vow of Bodhisattva Dharmākara, and now we can perhaps say that it emerges from the Tathāgata who fundamentally unifies. . .

SOGA: The various Buddhas established many different Pure Lands according to their various vows. These Buddhas had manifold realizations, but their vows lacked universality. They had different practices which led to different results. In contrast Dharmākara brings all beings to the realization of the one taste of equality. This is the Ocean of the One Vehicle. Shinran also refers to this as the Water of the Ocean of the Wisdom-Vow: "When the water of the entrusting of Other-power enters the Water of the Ocean of Amida's Wisdom-Vow, blind passions and enlightenment come to have the same taste in the True Land of Recompense."

One returns and enters (*kinyū* 歸入) the Ocean of Amida's Wisdom-Vow. This expression appears in the chapter on "Act" in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*. The term "*kimyō* 歸命," "to take refuge," may be more familiar, but here we have "*kinyū*." To return and enter is the cause. When one returns and enters the Ocean of the Original Vow, one obtains the result which is equal for everyone; this is the Pure Land. The attainment of the result which is equal for all sentient beings is itself the Pure Land; the equal cause for attaining this equal result is the Ocean of the Tathāgata's Wisdom-Vow.

First There Is Act

NISHITANI: There is the expression, "the Ocean of the Wisdom-Vow." Earlier on Dr. Suzuki gave his interpretation of *gan* as emptiness which begins working. I wonder how these two. . .

SOGA: Emptiness is act; it is not simply *prajñā*-wisdom. Emptiness may be regarded as a philosophical principle, but true emptiness must be the act of emptiness.

SUZUKI: What do you mean?

SOGA: Emptiness is act, right?

SUZUKI: Emptiness is act?

SOGA: Yes, act.

SUZUKI: Ah, yes.

SHINRAN'S WORLD

SOGA: I don't know about Zen, but in T'ien-t'ai Buddhism emptiness is regarded as a principle.

SUZUKI: Principle?

SOGA: The principle of emptiness. But in Shin Buddhism we speak of the act of emptiness. Emptiness is universal.

SUZUKI: That's correct.

SOGA: An act equal for everyone, since everything is equal in emptiness.

SUZUKI: Yes.

SOGA: The call of Amida's Buddha's name, "*Namu Amida Butsu*," is the act of emptiness.

SUZUKI: Yes, yes.

SOGA: This is the way it must be; your thinking returns to this point as well.

This is why Shinran entitled his work, "*Kyōgyōshinshō*." In general the Buddhist path may be characterized by the phrase, "*Kyōrigyōka* 教理行果," the sequence of teachings, principle, act, and realization. The term, *ri*, principle, does not appear in the title, "*Kyōgyōshinshō*."

SUZUKI: No.

SOGA: What do you think, Dr. Suzuki?

SUZUKI: That's right.

NISHITANI: In the *Kyōgyōshinshō* Shinran himself states that *Namu Amida Butsu* is this act.

SOGA: "That which is called Amida Buddha is none other than this act." (「行巻」『觀經疏』引文)

NISHITANI: Dr. Soga, please elaborate on the meaning of *gyō*, act.

SOGA: *Namu Amida Butsu* is the act:

The Great Act is the call of the Name of the Tathāgata of Unhindered Light. This single act contains all the good teachings and the root of all virtues; complete and perfect, it is the actualization of suchness, the great treasure-ocean of virtues. These are the reasons why it is called the Great Act.
(「行巻」)

That's why the title, "*Kyōgyōshinshō*," begins with "*Kyōgyō* 教行," "teaching and act." There is no principle; there is act in conformity with the teachings. Then there is "*shin* 信," true entrusting, and "*shō* 証," realization, both corresponding to "*ri* 理," principle. The act

DIALOGUE

comes first, and then the principle becomes clear. This is what is meant by, "Hearing this Name [*Namu Amida Butsu*] one attains the joy of faith-awakening." T'ien-t'ai Buddhism also recognizes the failure of principle without act: "The three thousand dharmas understood as principle is ignorance. Once they are realized as the fruit of enlightenment, they are called 'constant joy.'" (attributed to the T'ien-t'ai master Tannen 湛然.) Once the fruit ripens, all dharmas bring eternal joy. "Dharmas" refer to all existence, even that of a hungry spirit or hellish realm. There is joy even if one goes to hell. Our founder Shinran Shōnin states, "I have nothing to regret, even if I should have been deceived by my teacher, (Hōnen Shōnin), and saying the *Nembutsu*, thus fall into hell. . . hell is my only home." (*Tannishō*, II.) There's no fear of hell. In any case, principle without act is nothing more than an illusion. That's why act comes first, not principle. This is the meaning of the title, "*Kyōgyōshinshō*."

Where Are All the Buddhas?

NISHITANI: Dr. Soga, your notion of "emptiness as act" seems to be in accord with Dr. Suzuki's explanation of Vow as dynamic emptiness.

SOGA: I think so.

SUZUKI: Dr. Soga's notion of act is really interesting.

SOGA: You are referring to the act of emptiness?

SUZUKI: The act of emptiness.

SOGA: Act refers to the enlightenment of the Buddha. First of all, the enlightenment of the Buddha is manifested in the form of "act." There is not enlightenment without act. Right faith (*shōshin* 正信) is based upon act. True enlightenment is attained only when there is right faith.

SUZUKI: That's right.

SOGA: That's why the act is so important.

SUZUKI: I agree, but have had one lingering doubt all along. Earlier on you mentioned the Vows of the various Buddhas and their praise of Amida Buddha. Then there was a reference to sentient beings. What is the relationship between the Buddhas and sentient beings?

SOGA: The Buddhas and sentient beings are not separate. They are two and yet not two. In your terms, Dr. Suzuki, this is the logic of *sokuhi* 非, wherein A is A precisely because it is not-A.

SUZUKI: Let's leave that aside for now. In the Pure Land sutras the

SHINRAN'S WORLD

various Buddhas appear quite often. Are the Buddhas over there and sentient beings over here? Is it correct to say that, from the standpoint of all the Buddhas, all sentient beings are none other than Buddhas, and from the standpoint of the sentient beings that all the Buddhas enter the realm of the former?

NISHITANI: From the standpoint of the Original Vow of the Tathāgata, it seems to me that Amida has broken through to a more fundamental reality than the various other Buddhas.

SUZUKI: That's right.

NISHITANI: In other words the other Buddhas are varied and limited. It might be a poor choice of words to say that Amida transcends the other Buddhas, but I would like to say that the true form of the Tathāgata must be free of multiplicity, of the characterization, "various."

SUZUKI: That's it.

NISHITANI: We can say that the Tathāgata's Original Vow transcends the various other Buddhas. That's why the other Buddhas praise him and exalt his Name.

SUZUKI: At this point don't the sentient beings also appear and praise Amida Buddha in agreement with all the Buddhas?

NISHITANI: From what we've just heard concerning the various Buddha's praise of Amida Buddha, is it correct to conclude that the Original Vow of the Tathāgata Amida transcends them?

SUZUKI: I feel that transcending the various Buddhas at the same time implies a descent.

NISHITANI: Transcendence of the various Buddhas simultaneously implies that the Vow enters them, but this doesn't account for the sentient beings. The Original Vow of the Tathāgata enters the Buddhas from a standpoint which transcends them, but must also enter sentient beings. Can we say that they are united through the Vow of the Tathāgata which transcends both?

SUZUKI: That may be the case, but I would like to know where all these Buddhas are.

SOGA: In the *Commentary on the Treatise on the Pure Land*, T'an-luan states,

The various Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have two types of *Dharmakāya* (Body of Truth), the *Dharmakāya* as Dharma-

DIALOGUE

in-itself and the *Dharmakāya* in its manifested form. While the two types of *Dharmakāya* are different, they are inseparable; while they are one, they are not identical.

SUZUKI: Where are all these Buddhas and Bodhisattvas? Where are they?

SOGA: What?

SUZUKI: I don't care about scriptural passages; where are they?

SOGA: The various Buddhas are right here.

SUZUKI: Where?

SOGA: Here, right here.

SUZUKI: Where's that? They're right here, aren't they?

SOGA: Yes, right here. "Here" refers to this room. In the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra* all the Buddhas are said to be in the Dharma Hall of the Layman Vimalakīrti.

SUZUKI: Everyone enters this room including you and I.

SOGA: Yes, and all sentient beings and Buddhas also enter the Dharma Hall of Vimalakīrti. That's the way it is.

SUZUKI: But in the *Larger Sūtra of Eternal Life* there are innumerable Buddha-lands, and the various Buddhas and bodhisattvas do this and that, all of which is very difficult to understand. I wonder if we can't just. . .

SOGA: It is incomprehensible to humans. It is the Ocean of the Tathāgata's Wisdom-Vow. . .

SUZUKI: Isn't it a human being who is saying that it's incomprehensible to humans?

SOGA: It is a human being, but one who is seeking to grasp something beyond his comprehension.

SUZUKI: No, that's not it. One understands when one sees that which cannot be understood as incomprehensible.

SOGA: One isn't satisfied with understanding. (laughter) It is human nature to seek understanding of that which is beyond understanding.

SUZUKI: Certainly.

SOGA: So one can't say, "Don't make incomprehensible statements." Human wisdom will come to a halt if we cease to utter the incomprehensible.

SUZUKI: That's right, but. . . (laughter)

SHINRAN'S WORLD

SOGA: Human wisdom becomes limitless through seeking to know the unknown.

The Form and Content of Wisdom

NISHITANI: I don't understand this very well, but it seems to me that the Tathāgata is that which is present.

SOGA: In Hua-yen Buddhism, it is said that each of the Three Periods (past, present, and future) contains the Three Periods. The past contains all three, and the present and future as well. These are referred to as the Nine Periods. The nine together constitute the Great Present. Counted separately, the Nine periods and the Great Present are called the Ten Periods.

NISHITANI: Perhaps this Great Present is what I'm talking about.

SOGA: All nine together constitute the present.

NISHITANI: Yes.

SOGA: The one who realizes the present as the synthesis of the nine is called the Buddha.

SUZUKI: That's right.

SOGA: The Buddha. We humans cannot understand this.

SUZUKI: It's useless to say that we can't understand, since we have this understanding, don't we? (laughter)

SOGA: No, we actually don't understand, but we remain unfulfilled as long as we don't.

NISHITANI: Dr. Suzuki asked where the various Buddhas and bodhisattvas were. This "where" also refers to the Great Present. . .

SOGA: The Absolute Present.

SUZUKI: Yes, the Absolute Present. What is our conclusion, then? Do we understand or not? We already understand, don't we?

SOGA: I know you would like to conclude that we do understand (laughter), but this desire to understand has been grasped only schematically. We've only seen the scheme. We haven't seen the contents, just the form.

SUZUKI: We've grasped its form, but not the contents. . .

SOGA: Not the contents. Only the Buddha grasps the contents.

NISHITANI: I suppose that's true.

SOGA: Humans think they understand when they see merely the form,

DIALOGUE

but this does not constitute true understanding. This is acquired for the first time when the entire contents are grasped. This failure to understand the contents is described in the scriptures: "(To grasp) the three thousand dharmas in terms of principle is ignorance." This is the realm of *avidyā*, ignorance (laughter). Humans feel that they understand when they see the form, but this is just ignorance.

NISHITANI: But the form must somehow be related to the contents. Unless the contents are included in some way. . .

SOGA: One may say that the form must already include the contents, but these are just words, and the contents are not really contained in mere understanding.

NISHITANI: That's what happens if we are only concerned with humans.

SOGA: The Buddha contains everything. (laughter) "Act" is established for the first time when the contents are included. When the content has been grasped, it is realized as act. Not principle, but act.

SUZUKI: This is *Namu Amida Butsu*, right Dr. Soga?

SOGA: Yes.

SUZUKI: Does each utterance of the *Nembutsu* constitute this act, or are they really just form?

SOGA: The *Nembutsu* is act.

SUZUKI: Act, but one by one, correct?

SOGA: It is simply act. In the "Chapter on Act" in the *Kyōgyōshinshō* it is described as "Great Act."

SUZUKI: Act.

SOGA: Great Act.

SUZUKI: Great Act, right?

SOGA: It embraces all acts.

SUZUKI: All acts. . . In that case, everything is grasped by *Namu Amida Butsu*.

SOGA: What do you mean?

SUZUKI: Everything is understood by one utterance of *Namu Amida Butsu*. All the Buddhas exalt it, don't they?

SOGA: That's right. Everything is grasped, but only in principle.

SUZUKI: Not just in principle. You already understand, don't you? When this is done (Dr. Suzuki places his palms together in *gasshō*), all the Buddhas are already singing in praise.

SOGA: That's true, but faith is the essence. Actually it is faith-

SHINRAN'S WORLD

knowledge (*shinchi* 信知). One knows in faith.

SUZUKI: Yes.

SOGA: One doesn't simply believe, but knows in faith. It is knowledge.

SUZUKI: Yes, faith-knowledge.

SOGA: Deep knowledge in faith, not simply belief. There must be the knowing in faith.

SUZUKI: Faith-knowledge. . . Our viewpoints seem to differ somewhat, but they are really the same. What I find. . .

SOGA: In the end what we are really saying amounts to the same thing, because we are human. I have to say, however, that whoever created this term "faith-knowledge" was rather advanced.

SUZUKI: Yes.

SOGA: There's no question that those such as Shan-t'ao were a step ahead of where we stand. I came across this term for the first time in reading his writings and would never have come upon it otherwise. In Buddhism faith is faith-knowledge, knowledge of everything in faith.

SUZUKI: Indeed.

SOGA: To know everything. We can say that to know the Tathāgata is to know everything. It is all-embracing wisdom.

SUZUKI: That's right.

SOGA: To know the Buddha is all-embracing wisdom.

NISHITANI: I wonder if it's all right to say, instead of "knowing," that one lives in the Ocean of the Tathāgata's Wisdom, the Ocean of the Great Wisdom (*daichikai* 大智海), or the Ocean of the Wisdom-Vow which was mentioned earlier.

SUZUKI: The Ocean of Wisdom.

SOGA: One returns and enters (*kinyū* 歸入) the Ocean of Wisdom. The "ki" of "kinyū" is the same as the "ki" of "kimyō," "to take refuge."

SUZUKI: Yes, the "ki" of "kimyō." And "nyū" means "to enter."

NISHITANI: It was said that to know actually means that one does not know, but this leads to the conclusion that we are ignorant.

SOGA: That's not true. . .

NISHITANI: However, if *Namu Amida Butsu* is the return and entrance into the Ocean of Wisdom. . .

SOGA: The act, *Namu Amida Butsu*, is the act of returning to and entering the Ocean of Wisdom. This Ocean is ultimately the Pure Land. The Pure Land is the result of the Ocean of Wisdom.

DIALOGUE

NISHITANI: Since one returns to and enters this Ocean, the Ocean of Wisdom must know. . .

SUZUKI: That's correct.

SOGA: Yes, it is the Ocean of Wisdom which knows. *Namu Amida Butsu* is itself this Ocean. The Ocean of Wisdom creates the Pure Land as *Namu Amida Butsu*. The Pure Land is borne forth. It is born, created.

Translated by Mark Unno and Satō Taira