

Thoughts on Shin Buddhism

PART II

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Let me continue my talk of yesterday. I mentioned that great compassion and great wisdom can be conceived of as *kāya*, or body. I am not referring to “body” in its usual sense, as one of the elements of the triple aspect of things: body (substance), form, and function. “Body” here is not that which is opposed to form and function, but rather great wisdom and great compassion functioning as one organic unity. The term “one organic unity” tends to make us imagine a kind of independently existing entity, but this is not what I mean; in this “body,” great compassion and great wisdom are inseparably bound, functioning one as two, two as one.

When we think (and man is obliged to think), there is no end to it, and from this act of thinking all our problems arise. Hence not to think is best. The state of non-thinking, that is, of non-discrimination, is best. When Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, there was no thinking, no discrimination. Some people may conceive of non-discrimination, with no distinction between this and that, one and two, black and white, as being a state of complete chaos, but it is not; in the Garden of Eden, a serpent was a serpent, an apple was an apple, Adam was Adam, and Eve was Eve.

Incidentally, I would like to add that people often visualize the Garden of Eden as being a particular place, containing specific entities like Adam and Eve, a serpent, apples, God, and angels, but this is not what it

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actually is. Eden is no different from this world of ours, embracing all things—in Buddhist terms, all the numberless Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, sravakas, and pratyekabuddhas. The truth is that the inhabitants of Eden are merely representative of all other beings. If someone asked me if I know that for a fact, I would answer that I do, and even if someone were to accuse me of lying, I would deny it. And this is all right since I am speaking of the realm which is free from all discrimination. But when one gives rise to doubt, complications are bound to follow, since doubt is always accompanied by discrimination.

Man is doomed to think, and he is doomed to suffer because of his thinking. This is hell, isn't it? "To be or not to be, that is the question"—the place from which this "question" arises is hell. If we knew that we were going to fall into hell and suffer, and faced that fact directly, then there would be nothing to concern ourselves about. It is when we start thinking about suffering and about the kind of pain we would have to undergo that the suffering increases. It is the same with thinking about the pleasures of Paradise. Far better it is to go to hell than encumber oneself with such pleasures.

II

Hence we have the contradictory situation of man having to think and at the same time of having to suffer because of his thinking. Actually, if we could take this contradiction simply *as* contradiction there would be no problem, but unfortunately the matter does not end there. Suffering arises, the suffering which is the first of the Four Noble Truths (suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, the way leading to deliverance). The second of these truths, "the cause of suffering," deals of course with the origin or accumulation of man's suffering, which I think is best understood as lying in the arising of thought. When thought arises, suffering appears. Thus if there is no thought then there is no suffering either.

For example, when one tries to kill a snake—and when I was young we took it for granted that snakes should be killed whenever seen—it writhes and tries to escape. A fish, too, struggles when caught. Thus we assume these creatures are suffering, but I wonder if they suffer in the same way that we humans do. Generally speaking, we feel pain because of the presence of the nervous system, but this is not all that is involved—there

is a consciousness which recognizes pain when the nerves have been stimulated, and this is when pain is first really felt. Since suffering involves this element of consciousness, I am uncertain that the mere fact that a fish struggles when caught means that it is truly suffering. A human being, for example, when tormented by pain during a serious illness is often given an anesthetic drug out of compassion, since one no longer suffers if the nervous system is dulled. Pain is not felt as such when there are no cognitive functions, as there is no longer any consciousness of the pain. Consciousness is the ground of all thought, so with the annihilation of consciousness comes the cessation of all suffering. Therefore the state of no-thought and non-discrimination is best.

Man, however, is concerned not only with his own suffering, but through that suffering becomes aware of the suffering of others and awakens the desire to help them in some way. This too becomes a source of suffering. Though man, seeing the suffering of other people, comes to feel that suffering as his own, in this there is no loss of the recognition of the difference between self and other. Nevertheless, there is a transcendence of this distinction in the realization that others are suffering in the same way as oneself.

Because there is discrimination suffering arises. If the suffering that arose were only one's own it would be endurable, but when the suffering of others is seen one is compelled to do something to help. It might be said that nothing can be done about the suffering of others, but if the one who is suffering is a friend or relative or even a pet animal, then the desire to go to their aid inevitably arises. This also gives rise to pain; there are bounds to human ability, and man suffers through his attempts to transcend the limits beyond which he cannot go.

Thus Shinran Shōnin said, "No matter how much pity and sorrow we may feel for others, it is impossible in this world to help them as much as we would like" (*Tannishō* IV). There are many conditions, social, psychological, and otherwise, which we call karma, and bound by these karmic conditions we are unable to help others as much as we would like. How did Shinran view this problem from the temporal standpoint? Did he believe that it would be impossible to save a certain group, say impoverished Japanese or Orientals, within a given period of ten years, one hundred years, or even one thousand years? Despairing, did he thus desire to enter the Pure Land so that he could save all of humanity at once? The *Tannishō* does not provide us with the answer to this problem.

When the question of time is taken into account, the qualities of patience and perseverance become of great importance. There would be no problem if we could tackle the task without any slackening of diligence and perseverance, but unfortunately that is very difficult to do.

III

It was Descartes who declared, "I think, therefore I am." We might turn this around and say, "I am, therefore I think." At any rate, our problems are caused by the arising of this consciousness of "I am." How, then, should this "I" be considered?

Without the "I" no thinking is possible. If there is no thinking does that mean it is all right to limit the scope of suffering to only that which one receives oneself, with no consideration given to the suffering of others? Even if this were so, an element of dissatisfaction would still remain. What, then, is the "I"? The cause of our problems is thinking—when we think all kinds of things arise. Nevertheless, we cannot help thinking. What, then, is this "I" which cannot help but think?

This is a very difficult question, and constitutes the central problem of Buddhism. At first glance, Buddhism seems to be most concerned with the concept of change and impermanence, as expressed in such doctrines as the Four Noble Truths (suffering, the cause of suffering, the extinction of suffering, the way leading to deliverance) and the four forms of existence (arising, abiding, transforming, and perishing). Buddhism, however, sees the immovable in that which is ceaselessly moving. It is because we take the ever-moving self, stop it for a moment and try to understand what it is that we run into difficulties. It is best to leave moving things in motion, viewing self too in this way.

In reference to his own faith and belief, the Japanese religious thinker Kiyozawa Manshi (1863–1903) declared, "'Self' is none other than Absolute Other Power. . . ." Or, to use the words of Shinran's *Kyōgyō-shinshō*, self is "the Power of the Tathāgata's Original Prayer." The self is that which, carried along by this Power, arrives naturally at the present moment through the agency of karmic causation.

However, mere knowledge of this fact is not enough to acquaint us with our real selves. Separating the self and the Tathāgata, we place the Tathāgata somewhere "over there" and imagine that we receive everything from him. But what is this self which receives? Thus we are right back

where we started, eternally forced back to the problem of the nature of self.

There is no end to the cyclic process in which we think "I am such," "What is it that thinks thus?" "What is it that asks this question?" etc. This being repeated eternally, we find ourselves brought back to the starting point where the question "What is this 'I'?" was first asked. If so, surely it would be better to stay right there, without embarking on the endless process of questioning. As I mentioned the other day, the Buddhas pervading the ten directions are the same as the Buddhas who are right now dancing on the tip of my tongue. Let them congregate right here—we don't have to go off ourselves to some distant place.

IV

In the Bible there is a passage in which Moses climbs Mt. Horeb and first meets God, who appears in the form of a burning bush. Moses is given many messages which he is told to convey to the people of Israel, but wishing to know who it is that speaks he asks, "Who are you?" God's answer can be expressed in English as "I am that I am." It is said that the original Hebrew does not mean the same thing as the English "I am," but as this is the way it has been understood in the hundreds of years since the English translation was first made I think we may take it in this way. Incidentally, there have been efforts made in recent years to translate the Bible into more modern usage, and in one of the modern-English versions—there seem to be several, not just one or two—this passage is rendered as "I am the God who is." Here, too, the expression "I am" remains unchanged, only with the word "God" inserted.

At any rate, when asked by Moses who he was, God answered, in effect, "I am I." To say this, however, is in a sense meaningless: to define a word using that word itself, like saying a cat is a cat or an apple is an apple, does not help us at all when we want to know what a cat or an apple actually is. We ourselves are often guilty of making this kind of statement, of course, but we have to admit that saying something like "I am I" does not make very much sense.

During my first stay in America I was once sent a large sum of money. When I went to receive it the bank clerk said to me, "It is written here that the recipient is a certain Mr. Suzuki. Are you Mr. Suzuki?" I answered, "Yes, I certainly am Mr. Suzuki"—in other words, "I am I." The bank, however, would not give me the money unless there was someone to

testify to this fact. If somebody known to the bank had come forward and said "This is Mr. Suzuki," then I would have been accepted as I. But as long as it was I myself who insisted that I was I, they wouldn't accept me as such. Fortunately I had a friend there who knew about these things, so I was able to receive the money.

In Japan, small hand-carved seals are used for personal identification in place of written signatures. I sometimes wonder, though, whether signatures wouldn't be better. In old Japan such personal signature marks, called *kaō*, were widely used, a custom which seems to have had its pluses and minuses. A seal is convenient in that it can be used for identification purposes even when the owner himself is not present, but on the other hand nothing is more certain than the statement "I am I." Then again, nothing is more *uncertain* either.

I remember reading about a person who succeeded in gaining acquittal after insisting for fifty—or was it thirty?—years that he was innocent of the crime of murder. This case couldn't be decided without fifty years of insisting "I am I!" Not only his own efforts but those of many others, and great amounts of money as well, were spent in this endeavor. Even so it is said that the court was reluctant to accept his plea. Such a thing is unimaginable in the world of religion.

In the world of religion, "I am I." Even though people tell us that this is unacceptable, that we have to get someone as a witness or guarantor, religiously speaking there is nothing more certain. As Sakyamuni declared when he leapt from the body of his mother at birth, "Above the heavens, below the heavens, I alone am revered." It is the same with the Bible's words, "I am that I am." We must reach the point where we can see the truth in these words.

V

Turning to the Bible for a moment, it is written that in the beginning there was darkness, that is to say all was formless and void. God then said, "*Let there be light*," and there was light—light separated itself from the darkness. Later comes the story of the dialogue between God and Moses on Mt. Horeb, which we were just discussing.

In the case of this dialogue, there was a man present, Moses, who could write down what was said in a pocket notebook or something and thereby enable us to know what had happened. Who was present, though, to bear

witness to the first words of the Book of Genesis, that in the beginning all was formless and void? Since it was "in the beginning," it was that time when even God had no awareness of Himself as an entity. God became God when he said "*Let there be light,*" and light separated itself from the darkness. In this sense God was not God when all was void, with light and darkness not yet distinct. Thus who was present to hear and to see, so that the words at the beginning of Genesis could be written? If this point isn't clarified, it could then be claimed that the Bible has its inception in a lie. As a matter of fact, there are any number of people who say just this.

It is my impression that nothing is more unreliable than history. Historians are people who shuffle old moth-eaten documents around, examining them with magnifying glasses or scientifically testing the paper they are written on. Who knows, though, how many documents have been lost? In fact, those which have survived may amount to only a small proportion of those which haven't. Historians take this tiny proportion and with it try to make up for all that has been lost.

Long ago I was on the faculty of a school affiliated with the Imperial Household Agency. At that time faculty members could not attend ceremonial functions unless they wore formal court dress. This was very expensive, however, quite beyond the means of us poorly-paid teachers, so few of us owned such attire. Thus on ceremonial occasions we had to excuse ourselves with notes to the effect that "Mr. So-and-so is unable to attend because of illness." What if these notes survived through the years? What would historians a thousand years from now conclude if they found one of my old notices of absence? They would most likely think, "Since this was written by Suzuki himself, surely he must have been ill then!" One would have to present other evidence to convince them that pleading illness was a customary ploy for impoverished teachers who owned no formal court dress. But as one would never write down anything like that there is no way such evidence could remain.

Similar situations occur all the time—one doesn't have to wait a thousand years for them to develop. Suppose there is a fight. Depending on the witness, opinions differ as to who struck the first blow. I don't know what it is about our eyes, but even if someone there films the beginning of the fight and shows it in slow motion, each of us tends to interpret what he sees in a different way.

A recently deceased French poet once declared, "In the beginning there was fiction." In the beginning, there was not fact but fiction, that is, legend or myth—if we say, "In the beginning there was myth," then all becomes clear. People take this myth as is and accept it as truth, looking upon that which is written in the Bible as beyond all doubt, as the "gospel truth."

Thus we have the Biblical tradition that in the beginning God said, "*Let there be light*," and light separated itself from the darkness. A belief to this effect has existed among the Jews for at least four or five thousand years, although no one knows exactly when it started. At any rate, this tradition has held the belief of the people throughout the ages and continues to do so today, so it is somehow difficult to consider it as "mere myth." There is something about it that makes us view it as truth, that causes us to accept it into our hearts.

We could even say that fiction of this sort has more truth than so-called "undisputed fact." We should not over-concern ourselves with whether something is objectively true. What is important is the subjective—it is only through our subjectivity that the certainty of objective truth is recognized. This does not mean, of course, that it is enough if I alone am satisfied—there has to be an affirmation by everyone else as well. But here, too, the very expression "everyone else" implies a subjective viewpoint, that is, "all other people as viewed by me." Everyone has an independent individuality, and it is in this personal subjectivity that each person makes his affirmation. In this lies the meaning of Sakyamuni's declaration "Above the heavens, below the heavens, I alone am revered."

Though this might appear to go against everything that I have just said, from the objective viewpoint we can say that there is nothing to be called self. For example, there is Rev. Kiyozawa's statement that all is *tariki* (Other Power). Since all depends on the Tathagata's Other Power, I am free from all responsibility. Whether I do good or evil the Tathagata will bear all consequences, so although no one actually recommends that I do evil it really doesn't make any difference one way or the other. There is a problem here, I think. What caused Rev. Kiyozawa to make such a statement?

He says, "I am free from any responsibility, and entrust everything to Amida's Other Power." Hence the very "I" which entrusts everything to Other Power must itself be none other than Other Power. Still, though,

we can't speak about Other Power without referring to this "I." How did this come to be?

For example, it could be that since our being born here in this world had nothing to do with our own volition, it is not our responsibility. "I can kill my parents, I can kill anyone, I can do whatever I want. Filial piety is a lot of nonsense—my parents gave birth to me without my having any say in the matter, so it would be more proper if my parents showed filial piety to *me*." This way of thinking is possible, of course. And one's parents could say the same thing about their parents, and so on up the line until I guess final responsibility was laid at the feet of God. We could say to Him, "It's your responsibility that we have to suffer so much," and conspire to kill Him, but as we would have to admit that even this act originated from God, I don't know where this would finally leave us. At any rate, even though we say that the self is nothing, that everything is karmically formed, still we somehow end up thinking of self.

When I think of my ancestors going back for a hundred or two hundred generations, I somehow find it hard to conceive of myself as a separate entity. Nevertheless, I always end up thinking in terms of "I" and "me." What causes this? When the point where there can be no self is reached, there we find that self inevitably appears. This being so, we find ourselves thinking such things as: "Filial piety is necessary," "All beings in the world, plants and animals alike, must be on good terms with each other," "It is not God, but I who am responsible for the evils of this world," "I take all responsibility upon myself."

Some people, however, view the matter differently, believing that the only important thing is whether they are well off themselves. But where did that self which is well-off come from? If we probe into the nature of that "I," our final conclusion can only be, "I am that I am."

Where does this "I am that I am" come from? This "I" is not the self of duality, the self of "self and other"—it is self unseparated from other. In a sense it is the absolute self, and as such is the same as Absolute Other Power, which being absolute lies at the root of all. But even when dealing with Absolute Other Power the self cannot be left out of consideration. It is we ourselves who must recognize the absoluteness of Absolute Other Power, and even though it is through Amida's Other Power that we are enabled to do this, still the self inevitably appears in the process. The self we are now speaking of is not the self which stands against Other Power, but the self which has become one with Other Power. Here self is other

and other is self, since one is two and two is one.

Consequently, God's declaration "I am that I am" may sound rather mystical, but it is the ultimate truth, clear and beyond all doubt. This ultimate truth is called Supreme Enlightenment. I said in my talk of yesterday that Supreme Enlightenment is light, but it is more commonly referred to as *satori*. It can be called *satori* or Faith.

VII

A concept of great interest in this regard is that of *nyūman-shin*, that is, softness or flexibility of heart (a concept which may be of especial value to present day studies in the fields of psychology, psychoanalysis, and psychopathology). Softness of heart, a term appearing in such Buddhist scriptures as Vasubandhu's *Treatise on the Pure Land*, is also called softness of body. Either way, though, what is being referred to is the mind of non-duality.

In the *Treatise on the Pure Land*, softness of heart is given as a characteristic of the Pure Land. The nature of the Pure Land is described in various ways, but it can be summed up in the one word "purity." This word purity is called the "One Dharma" of the Pure Land, and when this purity is accepted into our hearts softness of heart is achieved. Thus there is a close connection between softness of heart and the Pure Land, with all its twenty-nine kinds of adornments. In this matter of softness of heart there is something of great interest, something poignantly close to us.

When Dōgen Zenji returned to Japan after completing his Zen training in China he was asked what he had learned. He answered that he had attained softness of heart. What Dōgen called softness of heart was the life of "body and mind dropped off, dropped off are body and mind." Thus even in the Zen sect the term softness of heart is used. We usually think of Zen as something rigid and tense, with people wielding sticks and shouting in loud voices, but in regard to this aspect of softness of heart, Zen is like a rubber ball, rolling in any direction it is pushed. A ball returns to its original shape even when crushed, and in this we can appreciate the wondrous working of softness of heart.

In the "Entering the Dharmadhātu" Chapter (*Gaṇḍavyūha*) of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, there is a passage where Sudhana calls upon the Bodhisattva Maitreya for instruction. Maitreya takes Sudhana and shows him his world, which is completely different and cut off from this limited

world of ours. The doors close tightly behind them as soon as they enter, symbolizing their passage from the finite world to the infinite world. Actually, such doors could never be closed, but since this is a story let's leave it that way. In the world of the infinite there are many Bodhisattvas, and it is written that they all possess softness of heart.

Then there is a passage in the *Larger Sutra of Eternal Life* where the inhabitants of Amida's Pure Land are described. In that description appears these words: "Their bodies are of emptiness; they know no limitation." Prior to this passage it is also mentioned that these inhabitants all have softness of heart. Hence it seems to me that softness of heart is one of the conditions by which we become inhabitants of the Pure Land.

Nevertheless, when someone bumps into us we still get angry and bump him in return. When we are children our egos seem to be especially strong. I am reminded here of something that happened in my own childhood, early in the Meiji period (1868–1912). Where I grew up, in Ishikawa prefecture, little boys used to swagger around with their chests stuck out, and if any kid they didn't know came along they used to bump into him. The kid who was bumped would get angry of course, and a fight would always start. These fights would turn into battles between the kids of one village and those of another. First they would cut long pieces of bamboo, six to ten feet long. Then they would line up on two sides facing each other, and strike the ground with their sticks. They would go on like this, keeping to their own zones—there would always be a distance of about ten feet between the two sides. Occasionally, one of the tougher kids would duck through the poles and start swinging away at close quarters with a shorter stick. If one or two of these kids appeared then the other side was already beaten. It was the strangest thing—if there was even one tough kid who found his way through a gap in the other side's line then they were defeated and everyone would run away. Once they had started to flee nothing could stop them. It was my first lesson on the nature of mass psychology.

At any rate, when we speak of the disappearance of this kind of tension and of everyone possessing softness of heart, one might think that we would all be left spineless and ineffectual, but this is not true—in softness of heart "I am" exists. This "I am" is not a tension-filled "I am," nor is it a flaccid "I am" lacking in strength; "I am" has the flexibility and resilience of that which pervades the ten directions, and as such can accept everything that exists. That is the nature of "I am."

Thus whether we say "I am that I am," or "I am the God who is,"

either way it means the same thing as “Above the heavens, below the heavens, I alone am revered.” This is the same as the Name of Buddha.

VIII

“I alone am revered” is the Buddha-Name. Although it is a much longer way of saying it, the Name, expressed in terms other than those used by the Pure Land tradition, is the same as the declaration “Above the heavens, below the heavens, I alone am revered.” Amida Buddha, it is said, vowed that if his Name did not resound throughout the ten quarters he would not attain Supreme Enlightenment. His Name is Amitābhāya Buddhāya. When we say it, we add a “*Namo*”: *Namo Amitābhāya Buddhāya* (I take refuge in the Amida Buddha).

When a thing has no name, it is almost as if it isn't there. When a name is given to something, it emerges clearly, separating itself from other objects. Without names, the distinction between one object and another object is lost.

This reminds me of something I read long ago about Helen Keller, the woman who was blind and deaf. Her teacher must have been quite a great person. She tried to teach Helen the names of things, but Helen, of course, couldn't understand. Then one day she pumped some water from a well, and when the water gushed out of the spout Helen felt its coldness and jerked her hand away. It was then that her teacher taught Helen what water was. But how was she able to teach her, since Helen neither saw nor heard? In any event, she succeeded in getting Helen to understand, “Ah, that was water.” Thus Helen realized that all things have names, and with this realization the world appeared clearly before her eyes—her eyes were sightless, of course, but anyway she saw—and it became meaningful to her. Until then, hers was a world of blindness, a world devoid of things.

Animals like maggots have the sense of touch, but they lack the other five senses. What does this mean? Theirs is a world of darkness, which being devoid of names is a place where satori is impossible. And yet, in that world the Name appears, and when it appears it becomes light, light by which the understanding of things can be attained. Therefore when Amida said that he would not attain Supreme Enlightenment until his Name resounded throughout the ten quarters and was praised by all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, he did not mean that his Name would simply echo about the world. The Name isn't simply a kind of universal

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fame—the Name is the same thing as Helen Keller's reaching out and grasping the reality of water. We must reach the point where we understand the Name in this sense.

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