

A Blessing of Floral Ginger

Meeting an old buddha
of ninety-one years—
A blessing of floral ginger

This haiku by Hisamatsu Shin'ichi Sensei is one which I shall never forget for two reasons. First, that "old buddha" was my maternal grand-uncle, Ashikaga Shizan Rōshi. Second, I was with Hisamatsu Sensei when he met that old buddha.

In the summer of 1949, I received a letter from Kōno Sōkan Rōshi of Daijōji Temple in Ehime. Hisamatsu Sensei, he wrote, had been invited to lecture at a meeting sponsored by the Ehime Buddhist Association, and I was urged to accompany Hisamatsu Sensei as Shizan Rōshi would be there as well. I duly obtained permission from Hisamatsu Sensei, and, as it turned out, Yanagida Seizan-san and I accompanied him on his journey.

In "The Record of Shizan Rōshi's Lingering Fragrance" (*Shizan Rōshi Ihōroku*), Hisamatsu Sensei related the events of that time as follows:

It was midsummer, four years after the devastation of the Second World War. At the kind invitation to lecture before the Ehime Buddhist Association, I set out on a pilgrimage which took me from [the haiku poet] Masaoka Shiki's favorite temple Shōshūji in Matsuyama to such famous temples along the Iyo coastline as Chōfukuji in Nyūgawa, Nyohōji in Ōzu, Ryōtanji in Kawanoishi, and Daijōji in Tatsuma. My path even lead me to Kongōsan Dairyūji in Uwajima.

At that time Shizan Rōshi happened to be giving a teishō on the *Record of Rinzaï* at a seminar for policemen being held at Bukkaiji in Ehime. I was asked to give a talk, and hence was blessed with the unexpected opportunity to meet Shizan Zenji. I had long been familiar with the name of this eminent Zen master. When Shizan Rōshi practiced in his younger days under Ogino Dokuon Rōshi, his fellow monk was Setsumon Zenji, who later was the master under whom my teacher Nishida Kitarō did traditional koan practice at Kokutaiji in Etchū. For this reason I felt a special closeness to Shizan Rōshi.

I had heard the anecdote about the teishō he gave at the home of a wealthy

* From *Daijō Zen* 679 (July 1980), pp. 30–31. Translated by Christopher A. Ives.

Kyoto family. A treasured mother-of-pearl sutra stand, apparently for use as a bookrest, had been set out for all to see. During his talk, Shizan Rōshi took up his staff (*nyoi*) and gave that family treasure a solid blow. He crushed all attachment to that object and made everyone present gasp in surprise at the sharpness of his Zen functioning.

Though I had admired the preeminent character of his Zen mode of awakening others, I had never had a chance to see him, much less the honor of meeting him. It was therefore the rarest of opportunities for me to encounter the living Dharma.

With his imposing stature and deep mellifluous voice, Shizan Rōshi presided, *shōgun*-like, over everyone present as he lectured that day on the *Record of Rinzai*. His was truly the lecture style of a Rinzai master; it testified that there really was something to that time-tempered old buddha and his ninety-one years of thundering "Kwatz!" and raining sticks down upon his disciples.

After the lecture, I entered his chamber. Arranged in the alcove was a large, pure-white ginger flower (*myōga*) such as I had never before seen. Its exquisite fragrance blended perfectly with that white-robed old buddha, who was sitting there as if carved out of ironhard Kunlun jade.

I could not help rejoicing over this unfathomable blessing (*myōga*) of being able to meet an Awakened one. This haiku

Meeting an old buddha
of ninety-one years—
A blessing of floral ginger

is my impression of that time. Perhaps this is that venerable old master's fragrance which will always remain with me.

* * *

On our trip Hisamatsu Sensei wrote the following haikus as well:

Resting in the bath
I bow to Hannya
Tattooed on a man's back.¹

No hot springs girls
But a nembutsu pilgrim
Did I meet at Dōgo Spa.

I would like to comment briefly on the latter haiku.

While staying at the Dōgo Spa, the three of us went for a walk near the resort

¹ Hannya, in Japanese, has a double meaning: it means wisdom (*prajñā*) and is the name of a ferocious she-devil.

and happened upon a wooden statue of [the nembutsu teacher] Ippen Shōnin at Hōgonji Temple. Having often heard Hisamatsu Sensei's criticism of Pure Land Buddhism, I was anxious to see what he would do in front of the statue of Ippen. In the back of my mind I expected him to take a shot at Ippen. With bated breath, I watched Sensei from behind. His hands pressed together before him, he stood for a while several meters from the statue. Suddenly, he uttered, "*NAMU AMIDA BUTSU*"—words which struck my ears like a hundred peals of thunder. I had wrapped myself up in my smug little concerns, which were in that instant completely swept away.

It was not this, which mattered though, for something far more fundamental had taken place. That utterance, "*NAMU AMIDA BUTSU*," seemed not to have issued from the lips of the person who stood before me. It had pierced me like a flash of light shot out from the very source of life itself. It had demolished my discriminating way of being—which had led me to expect something from Hisamatsu Sensei—and awakened me to an infinite opening right beneath my subjective existence.

The season of the ginger flower now approaches. Hisamatsu Sensei, Shizan Rōshi, and Sōkan Rōshi, have all passed away. This is a good time to savor the words of Daitō Kokushi:

Billions of kalpas apart
And yet not a moment separated.

KONDŌ TESSHŌ

Philosophy Worthy of the Name

It was my good fortune to encounter the thought of Professor Hisamatsu Shin'ichi precisely at that point in my life when I was beginning to ask serious questions about the limitations of Western philosophy. At that time I was most troubled by what I understood to be Western thought's difficulty in dealing with what I then called "the negativities" of existence. These "negativities" were not abstract categories but concrete and immediately relevant aspects of life—things such as loneliness, old age, death, the place of evil in our world, and negative expression in the arts. It suddenly seemed to me that all the philosophy I had read up to that