

NOTES

Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, 1889–1980

Death will come, yet when it does,
I won't need help to reach Nirvana,
Nor funeral rites of any kind—
And when the body burns to ash,
Don't collect the ashes!

This is one of the poems Hisamatsu Shin'ichi left when he died, at the age of ninety, on February 27, 1980. His family faithfully complied with his wishes. There were no sutras chanted, neither incense nor flowers were offered. There was no funeral service at all. And although in Japan it is customary to do so, his ashes were not collected following the cremation. The unusual absence of ceremony seemed even more unconventional in the conservative rural area of Japan where he lived his last years. Yet for a man like Hisamatsu Sensei, physical death was not a matter of primary importance. Dying the Great Death, he lived the Great Life, fully awakened to his "Original Face." "I do not die," he had said, "what use is there for a funeral service for a person who is beyond living-dying?"

Hisamatsu Sensei was born in 1889 to a family of devout Shin Buddhists in Gifu in central Japan. In such an atmosphere, the Other Power faith came naturally to him. After being introduced to science and modern rational ways of thinking in junior high school, however, this faith was shaken irrevocably. He came to realize the necessity of critical judgement. Turning from religion, he began to study philosophy. He entered Kyoto University, where Nishida Kitarō was then starting to gain his reputation as Japan's outstanding contemporary philosopher. Although Nishida became his lifelong mentor, the young Hisamatsu discovered that philosophy by itself could offer only an objective, theoretical understanding of man and the world, and was no help in solving his own existential problem. He had lost the Pure Land belief that he had accepted almost

unconsciously from his earliest childhood, but the keen desire to find some ultimate truth upon which to base his life remained strong.

After eight years of academic study, he turned to Zen. On Nishida's advice, he went to Ikegami Shōzan Rōshi at Myōshin-ji to take part in the severe Rōhatsu sesshin held in December. He did not choose Zen merely because he wanted to do zazen or to try his hand at koan practice. Deeply disillusioned with both theistic religion and rationalistic philosophy, he threw himself into that first sesshin with all the energy he could command to resolve the crisis occurring within himself. He became, he said, one Great Doubting Mass, a "vast blackness that filled his entire being." In that very first sesshin, he achieved a breakthrough and awakened to his true Self. He described it in an autobiographical essay which he wrote in his later years, as "casting off the religion of medieval belief, turning to the philosophy of modern reason, breaking through the extreme limits of rational thought and its objective knowledge, and awakening to the totally unhindered and emancipated True Self."¹

His entire life from that moment forth was devoted to establishing a "religion of Awakening" which would be the practical self-expression of his realization. Simultaneously, he worked to create a "philosophy of Awakening" as its principal objective expression.

As a means of realizing this religion of Awakening, he organized with his students, in 1944, a practice group called Gakudō-dōjō (The Seat of Awakening), which emphasized the oneness of scholarship and religious practice. Its avowed aim was "to study and practice the true Way of human being and participate in the renewal of the world order."

In 1958, upon his return from a ten-month trip to America and Europe, the group was reorganized. It was given a new name, the FAS Society, in order to express the three essential dimensions of human existence: Self, world, and history. They are reflected in the mottos he formulated for the movement:

Awakening to the *Formless Self*,

the dimension of depth, the Self as the ground of human existence;

Standing on the standpoint of *All mankind*,

the dimension of width, human being in its entirety; and

Creating history *Suprahistorically*,

the dimension of length, awakened human history.

Traditional Zen has neglected to address itself to the problems of world and

¹ From *Gakkyū seikatsu no omoide* (Memories of My Student Life), in *Tōyō-teki Mu* (Oriental Nothingness), Volume I of his *Collected Works* (1969), pp. 415-34.

history, concerning itself mainly with only the first of these dimensions, the awakening to the true Self. Science (or scientism) and socialism, on the other hand, while more or less ignoring the problem of the Self, have dealt almost exclusively with the aspects of world and history. Hisamatsu Sensei was convinced of the insufficiency of both these approaches. He wanted to show the necessity of achieving a dynamic unity of these three basic dimensions of human existence.

Critical of existing koan practice in Rinzai Zen, he developed an entirely new koan, different from either Jōshū's "Mu" or Hakuin's "Single Hand." He phrased it "*Dōshitemo ikenakereba, dō suru ka?*" which means, literally, "When you can do nothing, what do you do?" This he called the "fundamental koan," for it fulfills the essential role of all koans: that of driving a student into a corner and forcing him to find his way through the Great Death to the Great Life beyond, where true life awakens to itself. He also originated, in place of the traditional forms of *sanzen*, a form of practice called *sōgo sankyū*, or "mutual inquiry."

In addressing himself to the question of how we are to reform the world and create true history, he formulated, in 1951, "The Vow of Mankind." This declaration of purpose he read together with other members of the FAS Society when they gathered at practice sessions:

THE VOW OF MANKIND

Keeping calm and composed, let us awaken to our True Self, become fully compassionate humans, make full use of our gifts according to our respective vocations in life, discern the agony both individual and social and its source, recognize the right direction in which history should proceed, and join hands without distinctions of race, nation, or class. Let us, with compassion, vow to bring to realization mankind's deep desire for Self-emancipation and construct a world in which everyone can truly and fully live.

Hisamatsu Sensei was highly critical of the concept of the nation-state, in particular its self-interested sovereignty, which he saw as being at the source of international conflict. He insisted that true sovereignty rested with mankind as a whole. Peace and world order, based on the construction of a global community, was one of his deepest concerns. In the last ten years of his life, he often used the term "post-modern." By post-modern, he did not refer to some future time, in a chronological sense, but to a time in which the ultimate basis of the modern age and all past time as well is fundamentally overcome and in which Self, world, and history are completely fulfilled. Proclaiming himself a

“post-modernist,” he believed that he embodied in himself the essential spirit of such an age.

Although Hisamatsu Sensei did not consider himself a scholar (he preferred to think of himself as a man of religion), he had a penetrating insight which he used to forge his own independent philosophical standpoint. His academic career began at the Rinzai Gakuin and Ryūkoku University. He joined the faculty of Kyoto University in 1932 as a lecturer, was appointed assistant professor of religion and Buddhism in 1937, and was professor of Buddhism from 1946 to 1949.

In what is perhaps his best-known work, “Oriental Nothingness” (*Tōyō-teki Mu*), published in 1939, Hisamatsu Sensei set forth the basic standpoint which remained unchanged throughout all of his subsequent writings. He rejected the theocentric, heteronomous perspective of medieval forms of religion on the one hand, and the homocentric autonomous standpoint represented by modern rational philosophy on the other. He adopted a standpoint of absolute autonomy, which, though atheistic, is deeply religious, and though religious, is never contradictory to rational autonomy.

This standpoint was a direct expression of his realization of absolute Nothingness, which is neither mind nor matter, divine nor human, being nor non-being, and is, at the same time, the most subjective self-realization of what Zen calls the “True Man without Rank,” the “Original Face before your parents were born,” or, in the terminology he preferred, the “Formless Self.” The originality of his standpoint lies in the fact that he awakened to this “True Man without Rank” by overcoming both theistic religious belief and rational humanistic philosophy, grasping the Nothingness of the Zen tradition, the root-source of all philosophy and religious creativity, as “active, subjective no-thingness.” His “religion of Awakening” and “philosophy of Awakening” were thus not different; they were equally Self-manifestations of the same profound existential standpoint.

In Hisamatsu Sensei, the self-expression of Awakening went beyond the bounds of religion and philosophy. He was an excellent calligrapher, an accomplished composer of Japanese *waka* and Chinese poetry, and an outstanding tea master. Being a direct expression of his profound and clear Awakening, his calligraphy, in its strength and deep spirituality, surpasses by far the brushwork of professional calligraphers. The same can be said of his poetry.

He looked with disfavor on the modern tea ceremony, in the forms into which it has fallen in modern times. In departing from the true spirit of Zen, he felt it had developed strong tendencies to mannerism. His role as reformer can be seen in the time and effort he devoted to the Shinchakai (Mind-Tea Society), which he organized in 1941 in an effort to infuse the tea ceremony with new meaning based on the spirit of Zen.

During a world trip he made from the autumn of 1957 to the spring of

1958, he visited Harvard Divinity School for a series of lectures on Zen and culture, arranged by Dr. D.T. Suzuki. The most significant event during his stay in Cambridge was a series of conversations he had with Paul Tillich.² It was a frank exchange of ideas between two highly distinguished representatives of the living traditions of Zen and Christianity. He spent the spring of 1958 travelling through Europe, England, Egypt, and India, meeting and engaging in dialogues with a number of prominent Western thinkers, including Martin Buber, Gabriel Marcel, Rudolf Bultmann, Martin Heidegger,³ and Carl Jung. At the end of his conversation with Jung, he asked whether even the Collective Unconscious wasn't something to be overcome. Jung's answer was affirmative. This surprised everyone in the room, for it seemed to be a denial of the very basis of his Analytic Psychology. But in the face of such a question, posed by such a questioner, Jung appeared unable to give any other response.⁴

One of Hisamatsu Sensei's favorite sayings was "Kill the Buddha, kill the Patriarch." The passage from the *Record of Rinzaï* is "Encountering a Buddha, kill the Buddha. Encountering a Patriarch, kill the Patriarch. . . . Only thus does one attain liberation and disentanglement from all things." In Hisamatsu Sensei's case, the existential realization of this was grasped as absolute autonomy or awakening to the Formless Self. Unlike Rinzaï and other Zen masters of the past, his awakening was achieved by overcoming both the theistic, heteronomous forms of faith, and the modern, atheistic autonomy of human reason. In the final years of his life, he often declared that "killing the Buddha and killing God is my religion." As a man who had attained great freedom at the extreme point of life-and-death and actualized the "samadhi of play" in all his daily acts and in the midst of the turmoil of human history, Hisamatsu Sensei is beyond living-dying forever. He said, in another poem written shortly before his death,

Awakened to the Formless Self,
Dying without Death,
Born in the Unborn,
I move throughout the Three Worlds
With utter ease.

² See "Dialogues East and West: Paul Tillich and Hisamatsu Shin'ichi," *EB* IV, 2 (October 1971); V, 2 (October 1972), pp. 107-28; and VI, 2 (October 1973), pp. 87-114.

³ The dialogues with Heidegger, together with short essays by Heidegger and Hisamatsu and a selection from their correspondence, were published as *Listening to Heidegger and Hisamatsu*, ed. Al Copley (Bokubi Press, Kyoto, 1963).

⁴ For a record of the dialogues with Jung, see "On the Unconscious, the Self, and the Therapy: A Dialogue—Carl G. Jung and Shin-ichi Hisamatsu," *Psychologia* 11 (1968), pp. 25-32.

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As we confront Hisamatsu Sensei's "arrival of life-death," it is not enough for us to enumerate his achievements or extol his Awakening. Did Hisamatsu Sensei really die or not? What is the unborn-undying to him and to us? How should we respond to his "death"? Unless we can properly cope with these questions, we do not truly mourn him.

ABE MASAO

The Writings of Hisamatsu Shin'ichi

The Collected Works of Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, in eight volumes (in Japanese) were published between 1969–1980. Volumes I and II, *Tōyō-teki Mu* (Oriental Nothingness) and *Zettai shutai dō* (The Way of Absolute Subjectivity), represent his philosophy of Awakening; volume III, *Kaku to Sōzō* (Awakening and Creation), the religion of Awakening; volume IV, *Sadō no Tetsugaku* (The Philosophy of the Art of Tea), and volume V, *Zen to Geijutsu* (Zen and Art), gather his essays on the tea ceremony, Zen painting, calligraphy, etc.; volume VI, *Kyōroku-shō* (Lectures on Buddhist Scriptures and Zen Texts), is a compilation of his talks on *The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana*, *The Vimalakirti Sutra*, *The Record of Rinzai*, *Tung-shan's Five Ranks*, and *The Ten Oxherding Pictures*; volume VII *Ninmun-shū* (Taking Things As They Come), is a collection of his own paintings and calligraphy, and his poetry in Japanese and Chinese; volume VIII, *Hasōai* (Broken Straw Sandals), is a collection of short essays, travel letters, and comments on current events. The book design, the embossed covers bearing his calligraphy of the character *Mu*, and endpapers, were done according to the author's specifications.

A second, supplementary series, with selections from transcriptions of lectures he gave during his forty years of teaching at various universities, is in the process of being edited, and should appear in print before long.

A number of the above writings have been translated into Western languages. The following is a fairly complete list.

"Zen and the Various Acts," *Chicago Review* 12, 2 (1958), University of Chicago.

"Le Zen et les Beaux-arts," *Arts asiatiques* VI, 4 (1958), Paris.

"Eine Erläuterung des Lin-dji (Rin-zai) Zen," *Nachrichten* 85–86 (1959), Hamburg.

"The Characteristics of Oriental Nothingness," *Philosophical Studies of Japan* II, Tokyo (1959).

"Zen: Its Meaning for Modern Civilization," *Eastern Buddhist* 1, 1 (September 1965).

"On Zen Art," *EB* 1, 2 (September 1966).

"Mondō, At the Death of a 'Great-Death-Man,'" *EB* II, 1 (August 1967).

"The Nature of Sadō Culture," *EB* III, 2 (October 1970).

"Satori (Selbsterwachen): Zum post-modernen Menschenbild," in *Gott in Japan*, Chr. Kaiser Verlag (1973), pp. 127–138.

Zen and the Fine Arts, Kodansha International, Tokyo (1975).

"Ultimate Crisis and Resurrection," *EB* VIII, 1 (May 1975); VIII, 2 (October 1975).

"Zen as the Negation of Holiness," *EB* X, 1 (May 1977).

"Ordinary Mind," *EB* XII, 1 (May 1979).

Die Fülle des Nichts, Neske, Pfullingen (1980).

Die Fünf Stände von Zen-Meister Tosan Ryokai—Strukturanalyse des Erwachens, Neske, Pfullingen (1980).

Calligraphy and Photographs

The frontispiece of Hisamatsu Sensei's calligraphy "Butsu" (Buddha) was provided through the kind cooperation of Professor Fujiyoshi Jikai of Hanazono College, Kyoto.

The "empty circle" calligraphy and the 1976 photograph of Hisamatsu Sensei were provided through the courtesy of Toeisha Publishing Co. These will be included in the *Hisamatsu Shin'ichi Iboku-shū* (The Calligraphy of Hisamatsu Shin'ichi), a large format, 400-page collection of calligraphy to be released in March 1982 by the Toeisha Publishing Co., 6-10-10den, Shinomiya, Yamashina-ku, Kyoto.