

Kiyozawa Manshi's
The Great Path of Absolute Other Power
and
My Faith

Translated with Introduction
by
BANDŌ SHŌJUN

Introduction

MODERN Japanese Buddhism produced at its very start a great but truly tragic figure. Kiyozawa Manshi¹ was born in 1863, and died in 1903. Though it was only for forty years that he lived on this earth, his original thought commanded a special prominence even in the Meiji Period (1868–1912) when numerous new schools of thought flourished. His short life as an exemplary Buddhist, moreover, had vital significance as signaling a turning point in the history of modern Buddhism. In 1888, after graduating from Tokyo Imperial University where he studied religious philosophy, the twenty-six year old Kiyozawa was requested by authorities of the Higashi Honganji Order of the Pure Land Shin Sect to which he belonged to return to Kyoto to take up the task of educating young priests. To ready himself, he embarked on a life of asceticism, which he called "Minimum Possible," for a period of four years. This "experiment," carried to the utmost of his human capacity, caused him to fall victim to consumption. But it also enabled him to gain a profound understanding of the finite limits of human ability, and brought his spirituality to full maturity. He felt that Shin teaching could achieve a far-reaching mission. At the dawn of the Meiji Period, Shinran's teachings were scarcely noticed by philosophical circles, being simply regarded as a belief of ignorant country

1. 清澤滿之

people. It was, nevertheless, this religious teaching on which Kiyozawa based his hopes, not merely for the Japanese people, but for all mankind. Commanding an overall view of the faltering fortunes of his own Otani Order, loaded down as it was with the heavy burdens of a rigidly organized feudal society, Kiyozawa's inner aspirations for revitalizing Buddhism could not help but burst out in the form of an attempt to reform the Order.

His attempt in this direction, however, proved an utter failure. The vigorous reformation movement lasted for two years but failed to realize any noticeable results. During this time he suffered repeated hemorrhages of the lungs, caused by an aggravation of his chronic disease. He was finally excommunicated by the Order, and rejected by those around him. Family complications then occurred which vexed him even further. Returning to his home temple, he was led to thoughts of suicide. He remained at home in complete silence for two years, hoping to recuperate from his illness. It was during this time that he experienced an epoch-making conversion.

Ever since the failure of his reformation movement, he had devoted himself to repeated readings of the Agama Sutras. One day he felt he had for the first time encountered the true spirit of the Buddha. He happened to read the Greek Stoic philosopher Epictetus,² and his mind underwent a further transformation. The teaching of *nil admirari* ("Do not be affected by anything") advocated by Epictetus provided the struggling Kiyozawa with a profound peace of mind. He describes this as being not a fragmentary happiness, or a mere sense of satisfaction, but something absolute, a state in which living itself means unconditional happiness.

In 1899, aged thirty-seven, he had become so highly regarded by the Shin authorities (who had by then reinstated him) that he was entrusted with the project of setting up a new college in Tokyo. This college, named *Shinsbū Daigaku*,³ was the forerunner of the present Otani University in Kyoto. Ailing as he was, he went to Tokyo and began his work. At the same time there formed around him a small gathering of youths who admired and respected his noble character, known as the *Kokodo*⁴ group. The activities of this group attracted more world attention than any of the other Buddhist groups in the Meiji Period. They published a monthly organ, *Seisbinkai*⁵ ("Spiritual

2. (60 ?—120?) 3. 東京大學 4. 涪々洞 5. 精神界

World”), which became one of the most well-read and influential Buddhist magazines throughout the Meiji and Taishō Periods. Through this magazine, Kiyozawa kept expressing his faith, and his movement became known as *Seishin sbugi*⁶ (“Spiritualism”), in keeping with the journal’s name.

*Zettai Tariki no Taido*⁷ (“The Great Path of Absolute Other Power”) was written first in Kiyozawa’s diary, *Rōsenki*⁸, and initially published in the *Seishinkai* in a slightly edited form by Tada Kanae, one of his disciples. The original Japanese text, which is known by heart by many Shin followers even today, is marked by the nobleness of its sentiment and elegance of its expression. It may be said to be a concise expression of the author’s sincere religious faith, the record of the outpouring of his religious inspiration as he arrived at final resolution of his religious quest.

In autumn, 1902, he resigned all his posts and in ill health returned to his temple in Aichi Prefecture. Half a year later, on 6th July, 1903, he passed away at the youthful age of forty-one. A week before death, he wrote an article entitled “*Ware wa kaku no gotoku Nyorai o shinzu*”⁹ (“I Believe in Tathāgata in this Way”), summing up his lifelong search for the Way. The editor of the *Seishinkai*, in which the work first appeared in June of 1903, changed the title to “*Waga Shinnen*”¹⁰ (“My Faith”), which had been the subtitle, and that is the title by which it has become known. In it he expresses in full detail the process of the development of his unadulterated faith in Tathāgata. This article has earned the reputation of being one of the most outstanding confessions of religious faith of modern Japan. Kiyozawa acknowledges repentantly his utter ignorance and incompetence in the presence of Tathāgata, and records his deep sense of gratitude and heart-felt praise of Tathāgata for the wondrous fact that he, by virtue of the faith granted him, should be enabled to live in a peaceful and calm state of mind amidst this turbulent world so full of suffering.

I have used the text found in Professor Terakawa Shunshō’s edition of Kiyozawa’s selected writings, entitled *Waga Shinnen*¹¹ (Bunmeidō : Kyoto,

6. 精神主義 7. 絶対他力の大道

8. 風扇記; *Rōsen* (“a fan in winter”) was a pen-name of Kiyozawa’s.

9. 我は此の如く如来を信ず 10. 我信念 11. わが信念

THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

1971, pp. 41-50). I am also indebted to Professor Terakawa's remarks accompanying the text as well as to his unpublished article, "Kiyozawa Manshi," for the information in this Introduction.

The Great Path of Absolute Other Power

(text)

I

THIS my self is none other than that which, following the way of suchness and entrusting itself to the wondrous working that is absolute and infinite, has settled down of itself in the present situation.

By entrusting myself to the absolute and infinite, I am beyond fears of the problem of life-and-death. And with the problem of life-and-death beyond our fears, how much more so problems of lesser importance! Banishment is welcome. Imprisonment is bearable. How should we be concerned with censures, rejections, or humiliations? Rather let us enjoy above all else what has been accorded to us by the absolute and infinite.

II

The infinite variety of the myriad phenomena of the universe belongs to the wondrous workings of the one great mystery. And yet we simply take it for granted, regarding it all as a natural phenomenon, paying no respect or regard to it. Were we not endowed with any knowledge or sensibility, there would be no problem. But we are in fact endowed with them, and we remain insensitive to them. How then can we avoid being termed perverted?

The reflection of a single color, the fragrance of a single scent, can never appear of themselves. The appearance of all these phenomena is without exception caused by the power of that one great mystery. Not only color and scent, what of the arising of our "selves"? No matter where the self's original source or final destination may lie, nothing lies within the domain of our own will. Not only are our previous lives and our after-lives not subject to our own will, the appearance and disappearance of our thoughts at this very moment is not a matter at our own dispensation. We are absolutely within the hands of the Other Power.

III

We are bound to die. But even if we die we shall never be reduced to extinction. We are not made up of life alone; death belongs to us as well. Our existence is composed of both life and death. We are not to be dependent upon life and death; we are spiritual beings existing beyond life and death.

Nevertheless, life and death cannot be decided by our own free will. They are solely dependent for their being upon the wondrous working of the Other Power that transcends our thought. We should, therefore, never be swayed by joy or grief in the face of life and death. And not only then; we should conduct ourselves likewise in the face of all the other occurrences. We should rather admire the wondrous workings of the infinite Other Power as manifested in the infinite variety of occurrences in the universe.

IV

Do not supplicate. Do not demand. What is lacking in you? If you feel any lack, does it not testify to your unbelief? Has the Tathāgata not given you all that is necessary for you? Even if what has been given is not sufficient, is it not true that there could be nothing else truly satisfying to you? If you suffer in the thought that something is lacking in you, then you should cultivate yourself all the more and learn to find peace in the Tathāgata's great command. It would be mean and low to expect something of others, an insult to the Tathāgata's great command. Although the Tathāgata is untouched by any insult, what about your own suffering?

V

Where is the infinite Other Power? It is visible in all your receiving, which is a manifestation of the infinite Other Power. Revere and cherish it, and thus be thankful to the Tathāgata's enormous blessing. Yet in order to satisfy yourself you are running after external things, following others, without seeking satisfaction within yourself. Are you not mistaken?

THE GREAT PATH OF ABSOLUTE OTHER POWER

Chasing after external things is the source of greed. Following others is the source of anger.

VI

What is the way to cultivate oneself? You should better reflect and examine yourself. See into the great Way. If you see into the great Way, you will never feel any lack no matter what is given to you. And then you will never seek anything in others. When this happens, you will never quarrel with others. Being content in oneself, not demanding anything, not quarrelling—can there be anything in the world more powerful? Can there be anything on earth more comprehensive? Thus, not until we attain this can we manifest a great cause of independence and freedom. Such an individual self is never hurt by external things or by other people. One who harbors apprehensions of being hurt is utterly deluded. One should rid himself completely of illusion and delusion.

VII

An independent man must always stand atop the rock of life-and-death. He must as a matter of course be prepared for annihilation or for death by starvation. He should accept food and clothing, if at all, only when he is thus prepared. If all is exhausted, he should calmly go to death. A man with wife and children, however, should give priority to their food and clothing, give all he has to them. He should take himself only what is left. He should not worry how they will be fed and clad if he should die. A firm faith in the great path of the absolute Other Power is more than enough against such apprehensions. The great path will never disregard them. Someway or other they will be able to find a way of subsistence. If by chance they cannot find it, it means the great path is commanding them to die. They are simply to accept their lot. Socrates said: "When I was in Thessaly, away from home, Heaven was gracious enough to sustain my family through the magnanimity of others. Even if I were to go to a far-away land now, how could Heaven fail to look after them?"

My Faith

(text)

I should like now to dwell a bit on the ideas of "faith" and "Tathāgata," to which I often refer, in order to clarify what they actually mean.

I should hardly have to mention that my faith refers to the mode of my belief in Tathāgata, which is made up of two factors: belief and Tathāgata. Outwardly these two appear to be two different things, but for me these two are one. What is my faith? It is to believe in Tathāgata. What is the Tathāgata to which I refer? It is Reality, upon which my faith is based. In dualistic terms, it has two aspects; the believer and what he believes in. It might be said that in me the former is my faith, and the latter is Tathāgata. In other words, it is a matter of distinction between the believing *ki*¹ and the *bo*² which is believed in. I shall not be concerned any longer with technical terms such as *no-jo*³ (subjective aspect—objective aspect) and *ki-bo*, since they are liable to obscure what should be made clear.

There are a number of problems to be clarified: what is meant by "I believe"; why I attempt such a thing as belief; what benefit it has; and so forth. First, as for the benefit, my agony and suffering are eliminated by the act of believing. This I might call the salvational benefit. Be that as it may, when this faith arises in my mind as I agonize and suffer from various influences and circumstances, I immediately acquire peace and tranquillity. In other words, when my faith makes an appearance, it permeates my mind, taking the place of all other illusory thoughts. When this faith is there, though I suffer incursions of any influence or circumstance, I can never be provoked into agony or suffering. Such a susceptible, over-sensitive fellow as I have become on account of my illness could never be free from acute agony and suffering were it not for this faith. I am convinced this kind of faith is essential even for those who, though healthy, are beset by suffering. Should I express the joy and

1. 機 2. 法 3. 能所

MY FAITH

gratitude of my religious feeling, it would be none other than to call it the joy in the actual experience of having all my agony and suffering swept away by virtue of my faith.

Second, as to why I attempt to believe in this Tathāgata, I would answer: because it involves the benefit mentioned above. But there are other reasons. The benefit comes only after the act of believing. Before, no one can know if benefit will follow. Of course, there is no reason one could not believe in the testimony of others, but a belief based on hearsay remains uncertain. A conviction in the presence or absence of real benefit appears solely in one's own experience. My faith in the Tathāgata, however, is not necessarily based on its benefits but upon certain other grounds of great import.

You may ask what they are. My faith in the Tathāgata may be traced until the ultimate limits of my knowledge. Without speaking of the time I lacked serious resolve concerning the question of human life, once I came to tackle the problem more soberly, I felt compelled to inquire into the meaning of life at all costs. This quest finally reached a stage where I found life's meaning to be inscrutable. This experience brought about my belief in the Tathāgata. There may be room for suspecting that my following this course was not accidental, for the need for such an inquiry is not necessary in order to have faith. For me, however, such a course of events was necessary. It is an integral part of my faith to believe that my self-power is useless. In order for me to believe that my self-power is of no avail, it was necessary to exhaust the entire resources of my knowledge and devices, to the extent I could no longer hold up my head. This was a process most trying for me. Even before this final apex was reached, a number of temporary conclusions were drawn from time to time as to the nature of religious faith. But one after another they would invariably be undermined. One can never escape this calamity so long as one is hopeful of establishing religious faith by way of logic or learning.

What good is, what evil is, what truth is, what untruth is, what happiness is, what unhappiness is—none of these are finally within our grasp. The most vital point in my faith is that I came to give myself up entirely to the Tathāgata upon realizing that everything is after all beyond my grasp.

Third, what then is the nature of my faith? It consists in believing in the Tathāgata. It is Reality, in which I am capable of believing and in which I

cannot help but believe. The Tathāgata in which I am capable of believing is the fundamental potential, which quickens this helpless self, whose ability is nil and who is incapable of becoming independent, to realize its true individuality. That is to say, the Tathāgata in which I believe is the basic potentiality that enables me—who am utterly incapable of discriminating between good and evil, truth and untruth, happiness and unhappiness, and therefore unable to make even a single move in any direction, left or right, forward or backward in this world fraught with discriminations of good and evil, truth and untruth, happiness and unhappiness—to live and die in this world dispassionately and calmly. Without putting faith in this Tathāgata, I can neither live nor die. I cannot help but believe in this Tathāgata. This is the Tathāgata in which I feel compelled to believe.

The above is a general outline as to the nature of my faith. From the first point of view, the Tathāgata is for me infinite compassion. From the second, the Tathāgata is for me infinite wisdom. From the third, the Tathāgata is for me infinite potentiality. Thus my faith consists in believing in the reality of infinite compassion, wisdom, and potentiality.

First, because the Tathāgata is infinite compassion, the Tathāgata deigns to give me calm and peace as soon as my faith is established. The Tathāgata of my belief renders me great happiness while in this world, even before the advent of an after-life. I am not incapable, however, of attaining some measure of happiness from certain other things. But no happiness is superior to the happiness accorded by faith. Therefore, the happiness deriving from faith is the greatest happiness of my life. It is the happiness I acutely experience day and night. I shall not speak of happiness in the next life here, since I have not yet experienced it myself.

Second, because the Tathāgata is infinite wisdom, the Tathāgata always deigns to illuminate and protect me and to deliver me from bondage to the illusions of evil knowledge and views. One is apt, owing to his common custom, to fall unawares into vain reasoning in supporting his study and inquiries. At times, we even go so far as to attempt to prove the infinite, compassionate Reality by way of finite and crude speculations. With the establishment of faith, however, even if we fall into such deluded states for a while, we are finally induced to renouncing all such reasoning, and to reflecting upon our unreasonable attitude. The awareness expressed in the maxim, "Know-

MY FAITH

ledge consists in knowing that one does not know what is beyond his knowledge," is indeed the pinnacle of man's knowledge. Nevertheless, we cannot easily rest assured in it. I myself have held most presumptuous opinions. But, thanks to faith, I can now respectfully acknowledge and appreciate the confessions of "Hōnen, an ignoramus," and the "foolish, bald-headed Shinran," and I can truly rest assured with this ignorant self. Personally speaking, I formerly found it most difficult to escape from the delusion of attempting to inquire into the perfect standard or the infinite reality by way of finite, imperfect, human knowledge, while declaring myself to be finite and imperfect. Formerly, I also used to feel the whole universe crumble and all society reduced to chaos when I lost sight of the standards of truth and morality. But now I am convinced that the standards of truth and morality could not possibly be raised by human knowledge.

Third, because the Tathāgata is infinite potentiality, the Tathāgata deigns to accord me a great potentiality through faith. Ordinarily, it is customary for us to decide our action or attitude through our own deliberation and discrimination. But once confronted with an event more complicated in nature, we find it less easy to maneuver our deliberations and discriminations. It is for this reason, as we gradually proceed to attempt studies and inquiries with a view to finding the standard and the reality, it becomes increasingly difficult for us to make decisions as to our actions, and we are finally cornered, at a loss what to do. To be prudent in speech and actions, not to break the law, not to violate the moral codes, not to lose one's decorum, not to be unmannerly; obligations, to oneself and to others, at home, in society, to parents, to the lord, to husbands, to wives, to brothers, to friends, to the good, to the wicked, to the superior, to infants, and so forth, even obligations deriving from mundane ethical teachings—these are never very easy. If we attempt to observe them faithfully, we are bound for the grief of "impossibility." I have experienced a great deal of suffering, confronted with this impossibility. If I had had to suffer endlessly on its account, I might have committed suicide long ago. Thanks to religion, however, I was able to escape this suffering, and now I no longer feel the need to commit suicide. That is, by placing faith in the Tathāgata of infinite compassion I remain today in peace and tranquillity.

How then does the Tathāgata of infinite compassion accord to me such peace? He delivers me by assuming all responsibilities for my sake. No sinful

THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

act can cause any hindrance before the Tathāgata. There is no need for me to discriminate between good and evil, just and unjust. No matter what they are, I can simply follow my own will, my own aspiration to do anything. Whether they are errors or crimes, I do not worry at all over my actions. The Tathāgata deigns to assume entire responsibility for all my acts. I am able to rest in continual peace by simply putting my faith in this Tathāgata. The Tathāgata's potentiality is infinite. The Tathāgata's potentiality is supreme. The Tathāgata's potentiality is at all times omnipresent. The Tathāgata's potentiality comprehends the ten directions and acts freely and unrestrictedly. I take refuge in the wondrous power of the Tathāgata and receive great peace and calm. Surrendering the great matter of life and death to the Tathāgata, I never feel any unrest or dissatisfaction.

A proverb has it: "Death and life are the decree of Heaven; wealth and rank depend upon the will of Heaven." The Tathāgata in which I believe is the basic ground for the decree and will of Heaven.