

TRANSLATIONS

Seimei, Sei, and Inochi: Three Japanese Concepts of Life

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Translators' Introduction

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“SEIMEI, SEI, AND INOCHI” (*Seimei to sei to inochi* 生命と生といのち)¹ was presented by Ueda Shizuteru 上田閑照 (1926–) in October, 1988, at Kiyomizudera 清水寺² in Kyoto. This lecture can be found in a collection of Ueda’s lectures and essays from 1978 to 1988 entitled *Ikiru to iu koto: Keiken to jikaku* 生きるということ：経験と自覚 (Living: Experience and Self-consciousness).³ Ueda is a third generation Kyoto School philosopher, and the last major voice of this line of Japanese thinkers, going back to the founder, Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎 (1870–1945).⁴ Ueda first studied with Nishida’s student, Nishitani Keiji 西谷啓治 (1900–1990) at Kyoto University,

¹ These three Japanese words in the title have been left untranslated because the title in English would provide the reader with no clear meaning. Literally, Ueda’s lecture would be rendered in English as “Life, Life, and Life.”

² Kiyomizudera is a popular Buddhist temple and pilgrimage site in the historic city of Kyoto. As the “Pure Water Temple,” pilgrims mainly travel here in order to drink from the water that flows down from the hillside in order to benefit from its medicinal powers. Ueda was invited to the temple in 1988 to participate in a lecture series that had been originally started by Ōnishi Ryōkei 大西良慶 (1875–1983) in 1915. The traditional form of lecture given here is *gyōten kōza* 暁天講座, presented at temples throughout Kyoto in the morning hours of the summer and fall, and mostly concerned with topics in Buddhist philosophy.

³ Ueda 1991. The translators have added some explanatory footnotes.

⁴ A Japanese collection of his work has been recently published in eleven volumes: Ueda 2001–3.

and then in Germany, working with Ernst Benz at Marburg University where he earned his PhD in 1965. His main philosophical interests have been in the thought of Meister Eckhart, Martin Heidegger, and Nishida Kitarō. Although Ueda is an important contemporary Japanese philosopher, offering a unique interpretation of Nishida, and essentially providing us with the final chapter of the Kyoto School of thought, very few of his writings or lectures have been translated into English.⁵

This particular lecture, “*Seimei, Sei, and Inochi*,” has been selected by the translators for a number of reasons: First, while focusing on important themes found in his written works, it gives readers an opportunity to experience the particular style of Ueda’s oral presentations, providing a distinctive and valuable contrast with his essay material. Second, his audience in this case is a non-academic, Japanese audience. Because it is a non-academic audience Ueda presents the complexities of Buddhism and phenomenology in personal, direct language, turning to examples of everyday experience and Japanese poetry. Because he is speaking to a Japanese audience, he attempts to relate the particularities of experience in the Japanese world, discussing how he understands the notion of human life not only as a scholar and a Buddhist, but also as a Japanese person. In this sense “*Sei, Seimei, and Inochi*” serves as a distinctive example of cultural philosophy, revealing how Ueda understands the ways Japanese people dignify the meaning of living through the use of these three interrelated terms.

The lecture moves through a series of themes, all constructed to unearth a particular way of human living advocated by Ueda. He begins with the phenomenological interrelatedness between human beings and the larger experiential world, including our bodily experience, and then discusses the problems of arrogance and self-centeredness that ordinarily arise due to the particular human orientation of standing erect in this world. He contrasts this standing orientation with the kinds of sitting practiced in Japanese culture, and how they relate to the practice of *zazen*. Ueda then explains how this change in orientation towards the world and our place in it are grounded in the recognition of the interdependence of *sei* 生, *seimei* 生

⁵ *The Eastern Buddhist* has provided almost all of the available English publications of Ueda’s work. The journal included twelve Ueda essays in issues between 1971 and 1996—mainly works concerned with Zen Buddhism and Ueda’s comparisons of Meister Eckhart and Zen. Ueda has written in both Japanese and German, and there has been more interest in his work in Germany than in the United States, including the first book-length study of his work—see Steffen Döll (2005), *Wozu also suchen? Zur Einführung in das Denken von Ueda Shizuteru*. München: Judicium.

命, and *inochi* いのち. Although one could argue that *sei* and *seimei* have English equivalents, *inochi* is a concept that is particular to the Japanese, and Ueda devotes most of the latter portions of his talk to revealing the meaning of *inochi* as it is expressed in examples of Japanese poetry, and in the human relationship with the natural world.

Seimei, Sei, and Inochi

Ueda Shizuteru

I

Good morning. With this greeting it makes us feel like it is really morning. The morning is the beginning of the day, but generally when we get up, the day has already started, so we tend to already find ourselves in the midst of it. This morning I got up at 4:30, and waking up early like this really makes me feel like it is a “good morning.” It is in this way that the days start from the morning. Saying that the day starts from the morning signifies that the morning precedes the beginning of everything else. . . .⁶

The following is a story about an experience I had quite a few years ago. I was going to Osaka for business, on the first train out of Keihan Sanjō 京阪三条 station. The line was familiar to me, but on that day I had a totally different impression. It seemed to be a completely different morning; the city was sleeping, wrapped within a morning glow. Here was a beautiful world before the beginning of the human world when people do all of their various activities in various ways, or it was the human world wrapped within this beautiful world. However, we live without knowing it. Every morning the dawn comes and the new day starts, even though we do not realize this, yet we are living within it. It might be expressed like this in words, but I remember feeling this intensely, and was really moved. Today I had that special feeling as well. Likewise, it is truly the beginning of a new day, the brand new day of a new life. Day after day it is a brand new day of life.

This “day after day” means every day; it seems ordinary, but it is very precious . . . there is no way to live out our lives but to live everyday life as every *single* day of life. Saying, “to live out a life” sounds as though there is a great deal to it, but this is not so. We get up in the morning, do various things, then the night comes and we go to sleep. This is the only way we can spend the time in our lives, the irreplaceable continuance of life for

⁶ Certain portions of the lecture have been edited out when the material was found to be tangential or did not add important details to the flow of the presentation.

every single person. It might sound like an exaggeration, but getting up in the morning is very hard to do, and quite important as well. Living each day anew does not mean thinking about living anew. I am not talking about living life in the ordinary sense, I am talking about living our lives in a fundamental all-encompassing sense. For example, the morning naturally connects with our sense of true living. It may sound as if it is nothing special, but it is actually very important.

Earlier I used the phrase “day after day,” but to be more specific, this really means “today.” The decisive factor of “day after day” is in living fully today. People have been living with a deep sense of this since long ago. It is often stated, “the Buddhadharmā is this very moment.” [However,] we cannot decide how today will go by our own will. Of course we are living within it, but we cannot control it however we like.

In the words of Dōgen Zenshi 道元禪師 (1200–1253):

Do not live your days in negligence
I practice the Way to avoid the ways of myself⁷

“Do not live your days in negligence”: You know what this means. It means living day by day—this is the only way to live. “I practice the Way to avoid the ways of myself”: “The ways of myself,” means living selfishly. It means to make something my own (*watakushi suru* わたくしする). There was a time when I was uncertain about this, but now I know that people should not live selfishly. We may be living like this, but actually, we do not live selfishly by ourselves. Our lives live, and all lives are connected with each other, so we cannot control them according to our own ways. Of course we live our lives, therefore we have to take responsibility for our lives as well. However, living like that cannot allow you to touch the true meaning of life.⁸

In short, there is life before our living in this world, and we do not know to what extent our lives are connected with others. It is truly a vast, unlimited, and deep connection.⁹ One time I had an interesting experience. While I was talking to someone outside, I suddenly felt something wrong with my right arm. Then, after saying goodbye, I tried to open the door, but I could

⁷ From the second “Gyōji” 行持 (Conduct and Observance) fascicle in Dōgen’s *Shōbōgenzō* 正法眼藏, written in 1242. See Dōgen 2000, p. 368.

⁸ Here, Ueda is describing the existential implications of the foundational Buddhist teaching of dependent origination (Skt. *pratītyasamutpāda*, Jp. *engi* 縁起).

⁹ A reference to the *Kegon* 華嚴 (Ch. Huayan) description of phenomenal interdependence, symbolized in the diamond lattice of Indra’s net.

not because of a pain in my right arm. After that, I went to a doctor and learned I had an inflammation of the muscle that had come on suddenly, and I could not use my right hand. Consequently, I was not able to do a number of things, like opening the door, using chopsticks, holding the phone and turning the pages of books. I was surprised, because moving an arm is nothing special when we are able to do it, and it is too little a matter to pay attention to, or to really care about. However, once it is impaired we realize there are many things that need to work together in harmony in order to make moving our hand possible. This is not only about hands. When I thought about this it seemed very strange. In the first place, just standing like this is a very big matter. It would be terrible if you were not able to stand. A while ago I had become so sick I was literally bedridden for three months. I saw everyone else standing and walking freely, and I wondered how they could do such things.

By the way, standing means standing up straight, which only humans can do. All the things we want, do, and think are constructed and connected to the way we are, and standing up straight is the way we are. Long ago, people used to say, “*chokuritsu hokō*” 直立歩行 (walking tall). Walking tall means we are equipped with a special way of existence, and this used to be thought of as the superiority of humans. We can tell the differences between humans and other creatures based on this point. Actually, animals like the chimpanzee can stand up and walk for a while. So according to present-day thinking, it is the feature of standing up straight that is specific to human beings. It is not standing up straight for a while, but maintaining this posture, and all the particular ways of being human are connected to this. For example, standing up straight allows humans to use their hands freely and they can change the environment with their hands. Also, when they are changing the environment, they think about how they can change it from a wide-ranging point of view which standing up straight gives them. However, they cannot work alone, and as people came to work together the necessity of communication arose. Therefore, the necessity of language, thinking, and all kinds of [human activities], are connected to standing up straight, and they construct the basic features of being human.

Standing up itself is very hard to do, but thinking about the meaning of standing up leads to the meaning of human existence. Standing up straight is the superior condition of being human—this is true. Standing up straight allows humans to use our hands freely, and simultaneously gives us a more open view; so [we could say] an “open view” is opened. In the case of animals, they cannot do this; we could say they are limited to their environment.

Each animal, each organic species has its own environment. Roughly speaking, for example, fish are in the water, and birds are in the sky. Every single species has its own native environment in a one to one relationship, and they cannot go beyond it.¹⁰ However, humans have a view that goes beyond their environment, and standing up straight gives them a place to belong to, which includes an open view. In this open view they are able to ponder various things, follow their ideas, and change the environment around them. As a result, the situation we are experiencing now has occurred. The repercussions of using tools and changing the environment are becoming apparent in various phenomena today. The most common example is environmental pollution, but this is not the first time it has happened. Humans stand up and change the environment as they please, but there has been a problem behind this. First using tools, then using machines—now, erasing a mountain is not so difficult for humans, and mechanization has been spreading at tremendous speed. After all, everything around us in our lives now is an artifact [an object for our use]. We are surrounded everywhere by artifacts. Originally, nature is supposed to be connected with human life, but the natural world has been broken and is losing its naturalness. It is comfortable for humans to live, but it has become an artificial environment. This is terrible. Speaking graphically, while we have been conveniently remaking nature, we have become trapped in a great cage without noticing. We have no contact with real living things. As a result, our existence has become quite empty; we tend to seek extravagant, artificial objects that have no content. Moreover, artificial objects have been steadily produced one after another. This is what has occurred.

The immense problem of the contemporary age is to break through the thick wall of artificiality that we have created, and touch something real and natural. A new life begins from there. Wondering if we can touch the spring of a natural new life is the emerging issue. The idea of going to a mountain for a time of leisure comes from this issue. However, if you go to the mountains or the sea, it is hard for you to touch real nature in this day and age. There are artificial things everywhere, for the people bring artificial things along with them. If you go to places where people gather, even in the mountains, you will find huge loudspeakers. Therefore, we have to find a way to break the artificiality and touch something simple and natural, or our lives

¹⁰ In Dōgen's "Genjokōan" 現成公案 fascicle written in 1233, he states, "When fish go through water, no matter where they go, there is no end to the water. When birds fly through the sky, no matter where they fly, there is no end to the sky. Even so, there has never been a time when fish and birds have left the water or the sky." See Dōgen 2000, p. 58.

fade away. This kind of situation is occurring everywhere. In this day and age, waking up early as I did this morning is simple, but it can be a way to see the true sense of morning—the beginning of the day.

However, today the situation is getting worse and worse. Not only are humans surrounded by an artificial world and losing their connection with nature, a more basic issue is natural destruction. Artificial things of immense scale are inserted into nature by force, bringing disorder to ecological systems. Warnings have been pointed out over and over, and people have been attempting to solve the problem. However, these attempts have been basically controlling technology with technology, and consequently, it leads to an endless environmental disruption. So we have to revise the fundamental way of being human.

Now, going back to the topic of standing up straight—actually this is the fundamental condition for human beings' superiority. Nevertheless, looking back on what has happened because of our standing up straight, it is hard to avoid stating that it has been a big problem. I mentioned that by standing like this, human beings get a more open view beyond their environment, but at the same time it means that people have placed themselves at the center of the environment. Standing and seeing like this, we can get a wide view, but simultaneously, it indicates we are at the center [of the world]. So, changing the environment is completely limited to human beings. Selfishness is ultimately contained in this problem; moreover, setting the "I" as the origin, and putting oneself in the center of the world is confirmed in modern philosophy.¹¹ This is a big problem. People tend to change the environment into whatever they like without noticing. They use the environment selfishly, leading to various distortions in the world. Essentially, this is based in selfishness. Furthermore, the problem is not limited to the environment alone, but also the conflict between the selfishness of one and the selfishness of another; individual against individual, group against group, nation against nation, and bloc against bloc. It has brought on all the distortions of human life. This is not limited to moral or ethical selfishness. Although it is obvious that selfishness is the problem, overcoming selfishness is not so easy. The origins of selfishness do not come from the self, but like I said, it comes from a basic way of existing in the way humans place themselves in the center of the world. Therefore, the most important point is

¹¹ Ueda's critical reference to modern philosophy is mainly directed at the dualistic theories of René Descartes (1596–1650), in the latter's separation of the mind as *res cogitans*, from materiality as *res extensa*. Descartes's philosophy has been the primary object of criticism among Kyoto school philosophers.

to detach from egocentricity. But you do not have to consider becoming a sage or a priest. If you think like that you will end up concluding that this is impossible for human beings. That impossibility results from our consciousness of sin. There is a way to discard selfishness by entrusting oneself to God, but this is not easy to accomplish because selfishness does not allow for it.¹² So the main point is whether or not you are able to rid yourself of a selfish way of existing, or at least, confront your selfishness. Originally the issue of selfishness was religious, however the religious import was forgotten and so the issue became a serious matter of the everyday world.

II

Since long ago the Buddhist teachings have used the term *zenjō* 禪定 (Skt. *dhyāna/samatha*, concentration/calming).¹³ *Zenjō* is the same as *zazen* 坐禪 (seated meditation). In saying “*zazen*” people are apt to regard it as the practice of Zen Buddhism. The root of *zazen* is *zenjō*, in other words, *samādhi* (*sanmai* 三昧). *Zenjō* has been the most basic form of practice in Buddhism. It has continued since the time of the Buddha. The so-called Southern Buddhism, as well as the Mahayana, especially in Indian, Tibetan, and Chinese Buddhism, have changed form in various ways throughout history. But the most important foundational teaching has always been calming and concentration. For a long time it has been a common Japanese custom to simply call this “sitting,” so that just saying “sit down” in a way signifies doing *zazen*. This “doing *zazen*,” has been considered the simple and concrete way of removing one’s self from living selfishly. In the European studies of religion, by comprehending calming and concentration in Buddhism as corresponding to Christian prayer, Buddhism was confirmed as a religion.¹⁴

¹² This fundamental problem of religious life has been given a great deal of consideration in the history of Japanese religious traditions, mainly in the contrast between practices of self power (Jp. *jiriki* 自力) systems like Zen, Shingon, and Tendai, and the other power (Jp. *tariki* 他力) system of Pure Land Buddhism founded by Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212) and Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1262).

¹³ According to available Pali materials the earliest system of Buddhist meditation was based in various forms of calming meditation (*samatha*) like mindfulness of breathing employed to limit the fluctuations of the mind and lead to deep levels of concentration, including four *jhānas* (Skt. *dhyānas*) of form and four formless *jhānas*. While in these higher states of concentration, insight or *vipassanā* could be applied to gain a deeper realization of impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anattā*).

¹⁴ Identification of Buddhism with *shūkyō* 宗教, “religion” is more of a European interpretation—the term is mainly associated with doctrine in Japanese and can be distinguished

Zazen is literally equivalent to the Japanese word for “sitting down” (*suwaru* 坐る). *Za* equals *zen* (sitting equals meditation)—meditation as sitting down, and sitting down as meditation. So sitting down is very important. The reason is that standing up straight means a great deal to a human being—so in contrast, you calm standing up by sitting down; the traditional Japanese way of sitting down is to sit on the floor. Sitting down makes standing up straight go back to zero (*zero ni modosu* ゼロに戻す), and this has great significance. It is the discarding of the superiority of the human being, or the predominance of human existence. Furthermore, it is not only discarding this superiority, but also forgetting the fact that it has been discarded. I think these meanings are implied in sitting down.

You can see various forms of sitting down in our everyday life. Normally the way Japanese people sit down is in *seiza* 正坐 or *agura* 胡坐, and the third is the lotus posture (*kekkaifuza* 結跏趺坐).¹⁵ The interesting thing about sitting down is that for example, moving from *seiza* to *agura* clearly changes the way you feel. How you sit itself, contains its own particular meaning, and it is the posture of the concrete way you are in the world. There are some occasions where *seiza* is proper;¹⁶ in ancient times people sat in *seiza* to read, and there are some times when you can sit in *agura*. Sometimes it is more natural to sit in *agura*, providing a relaxing experience. There are other situations where you cannot do *agura*. In *seiza* there is a greater sense of concentration, so when you read or meet someone in a proper situation you must sit in *seiza*. Today, we say sitting down even when we sit in a chair, but originally this did not mean sitting down in Japan. In the Japanese language sitting in a chair means leaning back (*koshi o kakeru* 腰を掛ける). Leaning back means an unsettled position, and this connotation is always included in our everyday language. For example, “That guy is doing a job,

from *dō* 道 or “Way” as in *butsudō* 仏道, “the way of the Buddha.” *Dō* implies a path taken in order to cultivate a particular technique or skill, so that *butsudō* is associated with Buddhist practice while *bukkyō* 仏教, “the teaching of the Buddha” is associated with Buddhist doctrine.

¹⁵ In *seiza* the knees, lower legs and insteps form a base along the ground, while the torso is upright, and one sits down on the heels. *Agura* is a simple cross-legged sitting posture, with the buttocks on the floor, torso upright, and the legs crossed in front, the knees pointing outwards and slightly up off the floor. The lotus position is the traditional Indian meditation posture where one sits upright with the instep of each foot placed on the thigh of the opposite leg so that one forms a highly stable triangular base, providing solid support for the back and allowing for greater focused concentration.

¹⁶ *Seiza* literally means “proper sitting.”

but he is only ‘leaning back’” [i.e., he is just putting in time]. This means he is unsettled, and does not have a steady job he can really throw himself into; he is only there for the time being. What is interesting about leaning back in a chair is that doing so cannot calm you because [your sitting indicates] you will need to stand up again soon.

On the other hand the lotus position includes both the relaxation of *agura*, and the concentration of *seiza*. Crossing the legs is very demanding and while you are sitting you might feel uncomfortable, with pain in your legs. However, the lotus form of sitting does provide a level of comfort. This is indeed true. Since long ago, *zazen* has been said to be the dharma gate of freedom. Actually, sitting this way leads to relaxation after a while. Also you straighten your spine when you sit, allowing you to concentrate. It is mysterious that both concentration and relaxation co-exist in this form of sitting. When practicing *zazen* you concentrate on the movement of your breath going in and out. A psychologist experimenting with a Buddhist monk in meditation found that data indicative of both deep sleep and intense concentration was present at the same time. But this data does not really mean anything, and knowing about [*zazen*] does not come from running experiments. Since ancient times, people have been experiencing this directly.

As I said before, *zazen* is a seated meditation, where standing up straight returns to zero, and you are removed from the center of the world. When you practice it, you cross your legs and fold your hands. This is indeed quite interesting. In *zazen* we do not use our hands. We are not using the most concrete and remarkable features of human life, neither the hands nor the legs. You do not have to run around chasing after something. The other important thing is that you do not close your eyes when practicing *zazen*. Closing your eyes is locking yourself into your own darkness, so you open your eyes while seeing nothing. You open your eyes, remaining in the brightness of an open view, but not putting yourself in the center of the world. Actually, crossing the legs and folding the hands is a way of existing devoted to nothing. In religion, joining the palms together obviously means devotion to something special, as when you are devoted to Buddha or God. But *zazen* is not devotion to anything. It is not only against nothing, it is also devoted to nothing, so it is naturally without self. The form of *zazen* returns us to before the arising of self and other. The form of *zazen* not only represents a person being selfless, but also entry into the Buddha’s practice of concentration, putting oneself in the mode of the Buddha doing *zazen*. Entering into the depth and profoundness of *zazen* is practicing *zazen*.

Nevertheless, one does not have to keep sitting in *zazen* for good. In Buddhist terms, there is the word *nyūjō* 入定 (“entering meditation”), and its opposite *shutsujō* 出定 (“emerging from meditation”), which means to stop sitting in *zazen* and stand up. Once you stand up you will face something. When you stand up and face something, you put your palms together and pray. At that moment, how do you encounter the thing you face? That is correlative to the deepness of *dhyāna*. When you stand up from deep *dhyāna* you might be facing Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Then, within this relationship between self and other, standing up after emerging from the place of no self or other, the world of selfishness has already been relinquished. Even if you are against something, the fundamental way you relate to the other will become like new. It is as though the business of others is your own—you are clear about the meaning of togetherness; you and the other are one. Tenderness towards the other is born from here. Once you apprehend the meaning of togetherness, you can also appreciate the difference between yourself and others, and approve of uniqueness.¹⁷ And so this will become a very rich world. In order for the world to become rich, you have to remove yourself from the world where you are in the center. It may be said that all this is anticipated in the way of doing *zazen*.

The method of reaching *dhyāna* through the practice of *zazen* has great meaning, and the form of *zazen* epitomizes this meaning concretely. So before you try to figure out what you are thinking, you should make the posture with your body. At that moment, your body will take on the form of *zazen* like I explained—that is what meditation is.

Although I have been advocating *zazen*, people might think that everything I claim is just an ideal, and nothing but an ideal. Even though it is just an ideal, how seriously people take an ideal can influence human life in a decisive way. It is no small thing. Well, I did not even talk about an ideal, because there is already a concrete thing to do; the matter is just practicing *zazen* or not. The significance of Buddhist life is in this, and the way of practicing is not in taking action to make something come true, but walking on the path of things as they really are.

¹⁷ Here, Ueda presents the advanced realizations of *Kegon* by turning to the simplicity of everyday human relationships. Because of the emptiness of all beings, there is no obstruction between persons, as if we were all separate, isolated individuals—so we realize the relational interdependence and unity between ourselves and others. But this does not mean that persons are somehow absorbed in an undifferentiated oneness—each human being, in their unobstructed interdependence with others is unique in the particularity of their relational life. This is the fourth and highest level of realization in *Kegon* philosophy.

Referring to the diary of Nishida Kitarō Sensei, he had practiced *zazen* very devotedly for about a decade when he was young, and there are some brief references to the practice in some of his diary entries. For example, in one entry he says, “In the morning, sitting *zazen*, in the afternoon, sitting *zazen*, in the evening, sitting *zazen*, the moon, beautiful,” and this is all for the day. You can see he practiced *zazen* all day and, “the moon [was] beautiful.” I don’t think this means that he was lucky to see a beautiful moon on that day; his statement indicates something more than that. The moon in this case, is not the same as the one generally seen by whomever, when they look up at the sky and say, “Today’s moon is beautiful.” Rather, through sitting in *zazen* in the morning, afternoon, and evening, the world, which is distorted by self-centeredness, is purified, so that the moon became beautiful in his eyes. It was simply one line in his journal, but it made a great impression on me. Also, there is another entry like this: Someone sent him a rude letter and Nishida wrote, “I was really indignant. That feeling prevented me from being calm, even while I was in the middle of sitting in *zazen*, and I was ashamed of myself.” This is quite interesting. He received a rude letter so he says, “I was really indignant.” He was very upset, and his concentration was disturbed while he was doing *zazen*. Nevertheless, he sat in *zazen* and temporarily removed himself from anger and indignation. That made his world change.¹⁸ . . . In this case, it is not a matter of the anger becoming calmed or not, but rather disassociating from the anger through sitting, yet still feeling the anger during practice. There is a big transition in this. He escaped the situation of being captured by anger, and then felt the anger while in the midst of *zazen*. As you can see, focusing on feeling angry, he reflected on it by saying, “That feeling prevented me from being calm, even while I was in the middle of sitting in *zazen*, and I was ashamed of myself.” This reflection was from Nishida himself, and it might be correct. However, the basic point is that the transformation of his situation occurred. He had been captured by anger, and then he escaped from that situation and was angry while practicing *zazen*; this transition is like cutting roots. The next day he felt the same as well. This feeling finally disappeared on the third day. It is not simply the feeling of anger disappearing in a natural way, but it was the way he lived in the midst of openness gained

¹⁸ Although a common human emotion, anger (Pali, *dosa*) was identified in early Buddhism as one of the three unwholesome roots (*akusalamūlani*) along with greed (*lobha*) and delusion (*mōha*). It was argued that these were the primary impediments to liberation, and so their karmic roots needed to be cut off through ethical and meditational practices.

through *zazen*, and he was calmed. So this was more than the feeling of anger simply disappearing.

III

Today, I entitled my talk “*Seimei*, *Sei*, and *Inochi*.” . . . When this title first entered my mind, I was attempting to figure out what we mean by “living.” In the English language, only the one word, “life,” signifies the concept of “life.” This does not only occur in English, but in other languages as well. There are a number of words in the Japanese language like *sei*, *seimei*, and *inochi*. For example, there is the word *sei* 生 used in *jinsei* 人生, meaning “human lifetime,” and also in *seikatsu* 生活, meaning “living.” Although the single word “*sei*” does not work as a commonplace word, it does work in the academic fields, for example in the phrase “*sei no tetsugaku*” 生の哲学 (Philosophy of Life). Saying “*sei no tetsugaku*” means analyzing the unique structure of cultural human life, as well as comprehending the structure and meaning of living through living itself. This is the standpoint of “*sei no tetsugaku*.” So we Japanese people have at least three words for representing life, and having different words for this one concept means we have a variety of nuances in the awareness of our own lives.

It is impossible to explain or define the usage of each word, but generally we all know the implicit meanings and unique directions of each when we say *seimei*, *inochi* or *sei*. So I have tentatively classified how we use these words. Saying “*seimei*” implies living things generally, which includes all creatures as in the contemporary field of the life sciences. This concept can be the object of science. On the other hand, “*sei*” specifically represents the eminent and very humanized cultural life. “*Inochi*” has a different connotation, and is sometimes used in, “Buddha’s *inochi*,” or “everything has *inochi*.”¹⁹ The following poem by Saigyō Hōshi 西行法師 (1118–1190) represents the significance of *inochi* very well as a classical example, and it goes like this:

I never expected
To cross Mt. Nakayama again,
But yet I was here, still alive.

¹⁹ It is interesting to note that *inochi* is generally written in kana as “いのち.” Even though there is the kanji for *inochi* 命, it is rarely, if ever used. The association of kana with early female writers gives this form of writing a feminine quality. So the meaning of *inochi* could be said to have a feminine structure in the sense that it does not have a clear, conceptual meaning and relates to one’s sensitivity to the fleeting nature of existence.

When Saigyō was young he crossed the Tōkaidō 東海道 and traveled around, and then at the age of almost seventy, he went across Saya no Nakayama 小夜の中山 again. Saya no Nakayama is located in Shizuoka Prefecture, and this poem represents his emotions in that moment. What we call life—that moment, this moment, and this now; all are different, yet they are related as well in a single life. Saigyō was a so-called Northern Samurai who belonged to Taira no Kiyomori 平清盛 (1118–1181) when he was young, and he must have witnessed many deaths in a number of wars. He may have placed his failures, his evanescent grief, and feeling of wandering all together, saying “my life” in the poem.

Next I will quote a poem written by a soldier returning home after the defeat in World War II. I saw this poem in a newspaper long ago and I forgot to write down the soldier’s name. But this is a poem not to be forgotten.

I was able to keep my life (*inochi*) somehow.
 On my way back home I looked up at Mt. Fuji.
 It was painted in a sad crimson red.
 I will never forget it.

This “*inochi*” is what I am talking about, and this poem represents it very well. The word sad (*aware* 哀れ)²⁰ is very profound and effective. His feeling of sadness is dedicated to the many dead soldiers who died next to him. He experienced grief and said, “I was able to keep my life somehow,” and [Mt. Fuji], “was painted in sad crimson red.” Let me quote one more poem, a famous *waka* written by Saitō Mokichi 斎藤茂吉 (1882–1953).

I can see a road, painted in red by the dusk.
 On this road is the way I will walk.
 This road is the way I live.
 This road is my life (*inochi*).

Seimei, *sei*, and *inochi*: each of these three words represents a meaning of “What living is,” but how do they connect to one another? That very connection is nothing but “what living is,” and you can see these connections, as I will explain.

From all creatures in general, to human and cultural life, each represents the enhancing of life. Looking back on the significance of the history of life (*seimei*), one by one, this occurred as a creative evolution. Therefore, if you

²⁰ The notion of *aware* has been pervasive throughout the history of Japanese aesthetics, and is related to the emotions human beings experience when confronted with the ephemeral nature of all things.

grasp the significance of clothing, food, and shelter, you can easily understand how all creatures are related on a basic biological level. But the biological level of human beings is far wealthier than any other creature in food, clothing, and shelter. Not only is it wealthier than other creatures, but it needs to be wealthier because human beings need to create their own environment. However, the meaning of human life also includes other nuances, so that when we think about our lifetime, all the things related to human life come up, such as failure, happiness, agony, mercy, love, fate, decisions, and patience. These are present in distinction from food, clothing, and shelter, and they exist instead in what we call “*inochi*.” So human life, living, and lifetime together compose culture, especially human high culture.

The rise of human and cultural life to *inochi* is not the same as the successive rise of biological life to human life, which I have already discussed. Rather the rise to *inochi* occurs by leaping to another phase, which is distinct from any successive development. [We could say that] the opposite of wealth is poverty, but I am not simply talking about economic poverty. In Buddhist terms, it would mean *hin* 貧, or “there is not a single thing” (*mu ichi motsu* 無一物).²¹ Also, there is the opposition of life and death. However, *inochi* can be born in the moment when the stream of life as creative evolution is cut off. Hence, in order to comprehend the true meaning of *inochi*, one needs to comprehend death, or needs to know poverty. Natsume Sōseki 夏目漱石 (1867–1916) experienced a serious illness in his later years, and said, “Death is more precious than life.” The way of living where “death is more precious than life” allows us to touch the true meaning of *inochi*. Through the experience of death, self-centeredness, or the desire to place oneself in the center of the world is undermined. Therefore death is more precious than life.

²¹ The distinction made here between economic poverty and the Buddhist sense of poverty reflects a distinction between common views of poverty and an uncommon view, grounded both in Buddhist wisdom and in the particular insight of Japanese culture concerning the existential realization of *inochi*. The former view is primarily measured by one’s material acquisitions and the personal limits that result from a lack of material wealth. Buddhist poverty is not a matter of lacking material possessions, but rather the recognition of poverty in all existence, which is grounded in the teaching of the three characteristics—namely that all phenomena are impermanent, without an abiding identity, and therefore, ultimately unsatisfactory. The Buddhist teachings were absorbed by Japan during the medieval period, but its religious ethos had been formed up to that time primarily through indigenous ways of relatedness to the natural world. The recognition of *inochi* in Japanese culture has arisen out of these indigenous sensibilities that were further confirmed and deepened by the appropriation of Buddhism.

We just took a brief look at the consciousness of living related to these three words, *seimei*, *sei*, and *inochi*. In relationship to fields of study, *seimei* is the subject of natural science, which is nowadays advanced beyond imagination, with the emergence of molecular biology and genetic engineering. In the case of *sei*, typically there is so-called “*sei no tetsugaku*” or the philosophy of life. Also, comprehending *sei* and *seimei* intermediated by natural science, the philosophy of life emerges from the concept of the natural universe. You can say that *seimei* is objectified from the standpoint of natural science and *sei* is automatically subjectified from the standpoint of philosophy. On the other hand, *inochi* cannot be found in a field of study. In the fields of literature, art, and especially religion, the self-consciousness of *inochi* is accomplished. Although there is no study of *inochi*, there are studies of its products. It is impossible for us to discuss *inochi*. All we can do is hear the words that *inochi* speaks. The words of *inochi*, reverberate with *inochi*, and awaken *inochi*. I have already quoted some poems, but let me introduce some more. In the ancient Buddhist teachings of “life, aging, sickness, and death,” how does *inochi* live in this statement about the critical situation of human beings? I have already introduced poems about life, so now I would like to introduce some poems about aging, sickness, and death.

Living life quietly
 This body lives with illness
 The days feel longer
 Longer than they are

Yasuda Ayao 安田章生 (1917–1979)

Here in this poem we can see *inochi* in the very vast and empty space created while undergoing an illness. It is not a poem about meditation, but Yasuda entrusted his body to the illness itself. He states, “living this life quietly” and it represents the sense of time in, “This body lives with illness,” and he states that the days feel “Longer than they are.” In this world people are too busy every single day, but through becoming ill they become removed from everyday life and are forced to live in a different vast and empty time. Time is experienced as an eternity, but this experience cannot be distinguished from ordinary time; it is already an abstraction. Rather, it is like eternity within time and it makes ordinary time seem eternal. In this poem, “the body with illness” experiences the days and months, and time becomes the concrete measure of universal time. Nevertheless, even though you are in this condition, it is true that you feel the busy days are “longer than they are.”

I have been taught something—
 What waiting is.
 I am getting older,
 My hair is gray.

Katayama Hiroko 片山広子 (1878–1957)

Usually, “waiting” is the hardest thing for us to do. We calculate our time, and make our own schedules, and we try to get things done as soon as possible to start our next plan. Also, it seems to me that we have to do so, and we are forced to do so. We have to make hope and expectation come true as soon as possible; but Katayama says, “I have been taught something—What waiting is.” It does not mean she learned it from someone else, but she learned it from her own life, going through various things, and her hair turning gray. She had lived a long life with a number of experiences. She is old and has gray hair—now she can be patient. What is so profound about this poem is that in addition to being taught “what waiting is,” waiting was the only thing she could do—it could not be avoided. So she has been waiting and her hair is gray—this poem is quietly suggesting that she is waiting for death. The fact is that once you realize that life is waiting for death to come, it will be easy for you to be patient. Waiting is a way of patiently living. . . . Finally, I will talk to you about death.

I feel like I am going back
 To somewhere, someday—
 Every single thing in this world
 Gives me a feeling of nostalgia

Yosano Akiko 与謝野晶子 (1878–1942)

Through realizing one’s own death, life is simplified. “I feel like I am going back to somewhere . . .” This somewhere cannot be specified, and you do no need to specify it. The only way of arriving at this “somewhere” is just by heading towards death, and a sense of belonging to this “somewhere” gives you an affinity for every single thing in the world. This is very profound. When “somewhere” and “this world” coexist and “living” becomes correlative with them, death will be real death and simultaneously, an affinity with living will emerge.

We have been discussing the word “*inochi*,” but in the first place, “living” is the relation between *seimei*, *sei*, and *inochi*. I already talked about the core of that relationship briefly. We are living. Yes, surely we are living. Nevertheless, if we are asked the question, “Are we really living?”—we would

have to wonder to ourselves. This shows us that living is such a big issue for people. The question, “Are we really living?” is rooted in living itself, and so this very fact is living. Living is *seimei*, *sei*, and *inochi* and their connection. It is not organized objectively, but the subject of living is aware of this connection and creates its quality. Only by considering this connection and quality can we say that human beings are “living.”

However, it seems to me that nowadays the stability of living known as the relationship between *seimei*, *sei*, and *inochi* has become distorted. . . . If it is true, this is a very serious problem. I already mentioned this problem, but I still need to discuss it a little more. Speaking candidly, hypertrophied human cultural life including technology, civilization, business, industry, and the media information culture has brought about fatal damage to *seimei*, *sei*, and *inochi*. It is obvious that the environmental problem is one example of this, and it is terrible that people can easily see this in their everyday lives. The movement and the effort to protect the environment from the destruction of nature are practiced through a variety of methods. The solution to this problem, however, is ultimately related to another unremarkable but most significant element, the relationship between human life and *inochi*. According to Miyazawa Kenji 宮沢賢治 (1896–1933), arrogance is the sickness of the contemporary world. Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker (1912–2007) says the only way to save humanity is by watching ourselves from a different point of view, and not by doing the things we are able to achieve with our technology.²² Although, in the first place, denying human life enables us to touch *inochi*, extreme hypertrophied cultural life has closed off the path to *inochi*. In addition, human beings have started doing everything for the sake of humanity alone—this is what I meant by “arrogance.” Although Weizsäcker presented, “from a different point of view,” he did not mean we should save nature in order to maintain an environment for human beings. The idea of seeing nature as the environment of human beings has accelerated the unlimited remodeling of nature through the abuse of technology.

²² Weizsäcker was a German physicist and philosopher who was part of a team investigating nuclear fission for Germany during World War II. Weizsäcker claimed after the war that the team never intended to produce a nuclear weapon, although a number of historians have contested his assertion. Nevertheless, he became an influential anti-nuclear activist in Germany during the 1950s and was a Christian pacifist in the later years of his life. His most highly regarded work was concerned with a unifying theory of science and religion, which led to Weizsäcker being awarded the 1989 Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. Ueda does not specify what text he is referring to here, but most likely it is Weizsäcker’s most influential work, *Die Einheit der Natur* (The Unity of Nature), 1971.

Conversely, restraining the desire to use technology must come from an alternative notion. In order to clarify what is going on in today's world, I will show you some instances of humane relationships with things.

In the current situation, people are manufacturing products through chemical processes with unrestrained waste in order to manage an industrial economy. In these circumstances, what type of human beings are we going to be? These circumstances cause people to change in ways beyond their imagination. To contrast this condition of today, I will provide you with a completely different story as an example. By examining this story, you will be able to understand which direction we are heading to, and how far we have come up to this point. This story is from the life of Ishida Baigan 石田梅巖 (1685–1744).²³ One day, Baigan's servant changed an old rope from the well by throwing it away and replacing it with a new rope. By chance, Baigan witnessed the servant throwing away the rope, and he admonished him not to waste it. I have read that Baigan disciplined his servant saying, "You cannot dispose a worn out rope as casually as that. You burn it with wood as fuel for boiling bath water, and then spread the ash as fertilizer on the field." This is not a lesson in economic thrift; rather it is originated in the notion not to waste things. In short, all the things in this world have their own significance and infinite dignity, so people are not supposed to use and waste things as they please. For example, even though the rope's life as a rope is ended, burning it for boiling water makes the rope come back to life again as a fuel. In this sense things attain eternal life through death. Becoming ash does not signify the end of life for the rope. After becoming ash it is spread on the field, and this gives the ash a new life as fertilizer. Things have their own eternal significance of *inochi* through the process of death and rebirth. This is *mottainai* 勿体無い.²⁴ Therefore you cannot use and waste things with your selfish intentions, but instead discard your selfishness and follow the eternal *inochi* of things. The eternal process of *inochi* becomes universal through death and rebirth. You can neither live by the human desire to live conveniently, nor through self-interest, but rather you must follow the greater universal circulation of the *inochi* of things.

²³ Ishida Baigan was an Edo period Neo-Confucian scholar who, in 1729, founded the Sekimon Shingaku 石門心学 movement, centered in the city of Kyoto. *Shingaku* 心学, or "heart learning" was a system of ethics based on Confucian principles, as well as Buddhist and Shinto influences, designed for the wider populace.

²⁴ Refers to wastefulness in general, whether in time or material. But *mottainai* has a deeper implication in wasting things of high intrinsic value, wasting what is inherently sacred. So the term also implies a kind of costly indifference or carelessness.

Also, this way of thinking is linked to the idea of thrift, but this thrift is not from the point of view of human beings. If this idea of thrift were from the point of view of human beings, it would suggest that one could waste things as one pleases as long as there is enough available, like keeping the lights on when no one is around. Keeping the lights on does not sound like a big deal, but if we think about it, this represents the way we human beings act in this world—this is a very dreadful problem. It is horrible that we can do these things without remorse while having this attitude towards our relationship with things—we do not even think about it. Today, this way of thinking reigns over every aspect of our lives, and it is awful. Seeing a young child who is forced to wear fancy shoes suggests to me a strange, impending future; it gives me a foreboding of the future.

In the first place, cultural life contains unnaturalness, because human “living” is not naturally natural. But following the great circulation of *inochi*, and the connections between *seimei*, *sei*, and *inochi* allows the unnaturalness of human life as a human being to return to the natural way. Nevertheless, this connection of life as *seimei*, *sei*, and *inochi* has started to collapse. The multiplication of extreme hypertrophic cultural life has been destroying natural life, while closing off *inochi*. In addition, the great progress of cultural life makes people forget about the arising of this problem. How can we resolve this problem?

... I have heard that this Kiyomizu Temple sermon has been presented since the fourth year of Taishō (1915), and I was born in the fifteenth year of Taishō (1926). Now my own speech is being included in the history of preaching at this temple, which has continued since the fourth year of Taishō. This also has a significant connection with *inochi*. Things are not only happening during the period one is living, because there is a long history that continues within this time. You are not the only one who is living. I strongly believe that if you want to live with real meaning, you have to consider this connection between your self and history. In addition, the preciousness of time, its infinite significance, and the connection between oneself and the flow of time, are related to something important in the notion of living.

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