

ARTICLES

FEATURE:

KIYOZAWA MANSHI CENTENNIAL

Kiyozawa Manshi and the Revitalization of Buddhism

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THE Meiji period (1868–1912) was a time of great change as Japanese society encountered Western culture. The relentless pressure of modernization called for resourceful leaders to respond to its repercussions throughout the society and culture. Such a man in Buddhism was Kiyozawa Manshi 清沢満之 (1863–1903).

Japanese Buddhism was strikingly affected by these changes. It not only had to respond to the challenge from Christianity with its missions and educational institutions, but also to counter negative social criticism and political reactions which led to the physical destruction of temples and images.

Reacting to these challenges, some scholars promoted nationalistic interpretations of Buddhism, maintaining strongly that Buddhism had benefited Japanese society and culture through the centuries. Others attacked Christianity as unsuitable for Japan, employing resources drawn from modern, western critics. Yet others, influenced by western critical methods in the study of religion, engaged in scientific research on language, texts, translation, and the history of ideas. Another approach can be seen in Kiyozawa Manshi, who sought to revitalize Buddhism as a living, personal faith.

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Kiyozawa graduated in philosophy from Tokyo Imperial University, where he had been a student of Ernest Fenollosa (1853–1908) and had learned the dialectical philosophy of G. W. Hegel. Kiyozawa was greatly influenced by numerous western philosophers such as Spinoza, Hegel, Fichte, Schelling, Leibniz, Spencer and Lotze. After becoming a Shinshū priest, he loyally served the Ōtani branch of Honganji in various educational roles. In 1890, he was principal of the Middle School and lectured at the Shinshū College in Kyoto on the history of western philosophy and religious philosophy. His *Skeleton of a Philosophy of Religion* was developed at this time. Later he became the tutor for the young abbot-to-be. He combined the roles of scholar, priest, educator and reformer.

During his career, he attempted to reform Honganji through advocating the awakening of religious consciousness or subjectivity, and commitment to the teaching of Shinran beyond institutional forms and rituals. As a leading intellectual of the time, he also believed that it was necessary for Buddhism to respond to contemporary western philosophical currents.

Though Kiyozawa lived a very short life, pursuing his ideal of reform for some eight years, his seriousness, determination and insight have influenced generations of followers far beyond his limited lifespan. While he was living, he advocated high Buddhist ideals, which he attempted to fulfill in his own life. Rather than becoming a cloistered monk, he combined a practical approach to Buddhism with an active life in society. Awakened to religious faith, he explored the depth of his own psyche and the field of religious experience. Not being a person given to halfway measures, he experimented with extremes of self-denial and austerity.

Following his death in 1903, his legacy endured, challenging future Shinshū leaders, as well as other Buddhists, to take up the cause of reform by his example. He stimulated modern interpretations of Shin Buddhism, exemplified by the work of Sasaki Gesshō 佐々木月樵 (1875–1926), Soga Ryōjin 曾我量深 (1875–1971), Kaneko Daiei 金子大栄 (1881–1976) and Akegarasu Haya 暁鳥敏 (1877–1954). The impact of his seminal insights extend to our own time.

Kiyozawa's understanding of religious faith is relevant not only for Shinshū followers, but for all Buddhists who struggle to make it meaningful in modern society. This is also true for people in the west who have recently encountered the diverse styles of Buddhism that have taken root there.

Kiyozawa Manshi stressed the fundamental importance of personal religious experience for the survival of a tradition. He faithfully served the Ōtani

denomination in many ways from a sense of obligation, after being supported by it for his education. However, realizing that he had not attained a living faith within himself, he set out on a grand experiment to challenge his own spiritual capacity by living an extremely ascetic life. He transformed himself from a modern, intellectual gentleman to a monk-like individual with stubble hair, coarse robes, geta and eating only meager food. Following a self-power (*jiriki* 自力) path of “the minimum possible” life, he tried to experience the spirit of Buddhism. However, he learned the meaning of Other Power when he reached the end of his physical and spiritual resources through the deterioration of his health, tragic deaths of his wife and two sons and the failure of his reform movement. In his extremity he had to rely on the Buddha, which he termed the Infinite, for the outcome of his life and on the support and care of his friends. He gave expression to his understanding of Other Power (*tariki* 他力) in his “Waga shinnen 我信念 (My Faith)” written a few days before his death.

While his efforts for reform did not succeed, he published periodicals, such as *Kyōkai jigen* 教界時言 (Timely Words for the Religious World) and *Seishinkai* 精神界 (Spiritual World), the publication of his reformist organization. In his residence which he named Kōkōdō 浩々洞, he gathered his disciples and instructed them.

For the occasion of the World’s Parliament of Religions in 1893, he had written *Shūkyō tetsugaku gaikotsu* 宗教哲学骸骨 (Skeleton of a Philosophy of Religion), which had been translated into English and was disseminated at the conference. Though the impact of the text is not known, it is significant as it showed Kiyozawa’s concern for the integration of Buddhism into the modern intellectual and spiritual environment by placing it in a universal context and interpreting it without using the traditional terminology unfamiliar to non-Buddhists.

In this text, Kiyozawa distinguishes sharply between the Infinite (*mugen* 無限) and the finite (*yūgen* 有限). The Infinite, which is an abstract term, reflects Amida 阿弥陀, which also means the “Infinite” in the original Sanskrit. The Infinite or Absolute is not something separate from everything else, but as the Infinite, it must include and be the essence of all things. Thus he took issue with the western concept of God and theories of monism, as were taught by Spinoza, considering them inadequate for spirituality. The relation between the individual and the Infinite was based on correlation not identity as in monism. Further, the subject-object distinction cannot be avoided in thought but must be accounted for in relation to reality. While

everything is known through a mind, knowledge is subjective or known by the mind. However, both the subjective and objective realms exist in an organic unity within the context of the universal subjectivity of the Infinite Absolute.

In the process of religious awakening, one moves from attachment to ordinary views of objectivity to awareness of the subjective, inner realm and finally transcends the subjective (small self), arriving at an awareness of the Absolute (large Self) which embraces and transcends the subject-object dichotomy. This process provides a rational basis for the principle of Other Power. Thus, a person cannot find satisfaction only in pursuing things in the objective world such as money, possessions etc, but discovers the inner world which is cultivated through various practices. However, the assurance of salvation and satisfaction is not reached simply through restraining the self. Finally, after exhausting one's efforts to attain the goal, one becomes aware of the Infinite as the source of satisfaction and spiritual peace. This process mirrors Kiyozawa's own experience.

Another significant point about this process is that the individual is not locked into his own subjectivity, but finds his relation to the whole. This is important in our modern mass society where people are likely to feel isolated. It fits well with the contemporary ecological perspective that we are all connected and must respect and support each other and the environment.

Kiyozawa was, in large measure, reacting to the growing dominance of the principle of scientific objectivity in the modern world, which claimed that only objective knowledge is true. However, he also rejected any thought which stressed subjectivity while dismissing the objective world as simply delusion. Kiyozawa believed that Buddhism could be integrated with scientific thought. Where science and religion conflicted, religious thought would have to be revised to harmonize with science. Further, he held that religious reality could not be verified by an appeal to objective facts, since religious faith is a subjective reality. His effort anticipates much of modern thought in trying to harmonize faith and reason, religion and science. His solution provides a basis for a vital religious faith, while maintaining a critical scientific perspective.

With respect to religious subjectivity or religious consciousness, Kiyozawa does not mean mere subjectivism in which only what I experience is true. Rather, beyond the ordinarily understood subject-object dichotomy, true subjectivity means the discovery of the Infinite as my True Self, thereby linking myself to all other beings. Behind his expression is the Mahāyāna

Kegon philosophy, which teaches that we are all one as the manifestation of the Buddha-mind. Attaining the experience or awareness of this truth becomes the basis for religious faith and commitment.

This perspective also provided the basis for understanding true individuality. He was inspired and influenced in establishing the religious foundation for concrete individuality by the Greek Stoic philosopher Epictetus along with the Theravāda *Āgamas*, and the *Tannishō* 歎異抄, for which he is given credit for the revival of interest in this long-observed text. His interpretation of the significance of individual awareness of the Infinite implied that clergy and lay are equal and the religious life is a matter of choice. He believed that the focus of religious faith was on the development of the human spirit as a present subjective reality and not merely a postmortem matter. Along this line, he rejected the dichotomy between eternal truth and worldly truth as traditionally taught in Shin Buddhism. Religious morality exhibits the gap between ourselves and the ideal and reveals our need for Other Power, rather than serving the secular needs of the modern state.

Though Kiyozawa was a man of his time, his thought points forward and remains a guidepost for the contemporary revival of Buddhism.