

Two Thinkers on Shin

Selections from the Writings of Soga Ryōjin and Kaneko Daiei

TRANSLATED WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY W. S. YOKOYAMA

WHEN WE LOOK at the development of contemporary Shin thought, we find there were three thinkers whose efforts had a significant influence on how the religion has been understood in the present century. They were D. T. Suzuki (1870–1966), Soga Ryōjin (1875–1971) and Kaneko Daiei (1881–1976). In their professional careers, they were colleagues at the same Buddhist college in Kyoto, present Ōtani Daigaku. The positions they held were the result of their involvement in Mahāyāna Buddhism, especially the Shin school founded by Shinran (1173–1263). Some of Suzuki's Shin works are readily available in English.¹ Soga and Kaneko, however, are essentially unknown in the West, hence in this section we will focus on these latter two thinkers.²

It is in the pages of this journal that editors D. T. Suzuki and Beatrice Lane first brought the names of Soga and Kaneko to the attention of the Western

¹ Among Suzuki's representative Shin works, see his *Mysticism Christian and Buddhist* (1957); his translation of Shinran's *Kyōgyōshinshō* (1973), and *Japanese Spirituality* (*Nihonteki reisei*, 1944) translated by Norman Waddell in 1972. See also the first article of the present issue, "Reflections on the Pure Land" (1961). It should be noted that Suzuki was first and last a Zen man, and it is as such that he brought critical new insights to Shin.

² There are few rigorous studies on Soga and Kaneko. Yasutomi Shinya, presently professor of Shin studies at Ōtani University, Kyoto, has contributed long entries on Soga and Kaneko in *Kindai nihon tetsugakusha-shisōka jiten* (Contemporary Dictionary Japanese Philosophers and Thinkers; Tokyo shoseki, 1982). In them he points out the historical significance of the two works in the present selection.

world. Over the years the journal has carried three articles by Kaneko (1927, 1951, 1965) and one reconstructed essay by Soga (1965). With the important exception of the first chapter of Soga's *Shinshū no ganmoku* (The Core of Shin, 1978) translated by Jan Van Bragt in the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* (1984), these materials are virtually all that exist of Soga and Kaneko's works in Western languages. The selections included in this issue thus represent a significant increase in the number of writings available to the Western world.

Nishitani Keiji explains that Soga lived in an age when the wave of Western culture flowed into that of the East.³ Feeling the impact of Western civilization, the thought of Soga, as well as that of Kaneko, can be seen as the result of this historic meeting of two worlds. It is notable, then, that one task they set for themselves was to establish the Pure Land as a world where the tension between East and West was resolved. Their concept of the Pure Land was thus not simply the next world as a realm distinct from the world of the living, but a higher world subsuming East and West without eradicating the distinctiveness of each. Actualizing such a world remains a keen desideratum in a century characterized by world conflict and strife of unprecedented scale.

With its emphasis on the individual, Western thought presented a stimulating contrast to contemporary thought in Japan. At that time, there was a growing emphasis on the social self in service to the state at the expense of the inner life of the individual. Against this devaluating trend, the writings of religious philosopher Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945), inspired by Western philosophers such as James and Bergson, as well as Schleiermacher, made an early and lasting impression on Buddhist thinkers. It is from this time that Buddhist thought mediated by Western philosophy came to be a characteristic feature of contemporary thought in Japan. Notable also in this connection is Soga's early mentor, Kiyozawa Manshi (1863–1903), a pioneer religious philosopher who explored the implications of Western philosophy for Buddhism.

Though influenced by the Western standpoint initially, Soga and Kaneko ultimately had to come up with their own formulations. As sons of Shin temple families, they were the products of the Shin Buddhist tradition. At the same time, for the greater part of their careers, Soga and Kaneko were not simply Shin believers, but functioned more precisely as thinkers *on* Shin, as was Suzuki. They aspired to be creative philosophers in their own right who engaged the Shin religious tradition in ways that would have relevance beyond their own sect. Keenly interested in the problem of history and religion, histo-

³ Nishitani's views may be found in "Soga Sensei no jidai to sono shisō" (Soga's Age and Its Thought; 1973), in the *Collected Works of Nishitani Keiji*, Volume 18:289–307. It was originally presented as a memorial lecture one year after Soga died.

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ry in their view was shaped and informed by the religious impulse (Soga) and the eternal dimension (Kaneko). This we see in their interpretations of the Tathāgata and the Pure Land. To Soga, the Tathāgata was not important as a savior per se, but as the agent bringing the Original Vow to fulfilment. It is not a question of whether Amida Buddha is a historical entity or not, but of perceiving the working of the Original Vow as it presences itself in history.

Kaneko's contribution was a subtle yet remarkable notion: to establish the Pure Land as humankind's true mode of existence in the Absolute. Whether the Pure Land truly exists or not is beside the point; what matters is whether we can grasp what it means to truly exist in the Pure Land's infinite mode of being. In both we can see the rejection of the historical materialism of the age, and an affirmation of a historical spiritualism, as it were. In their view the all-embracing activity of the Original Vow is behind every real event's presencing in history. History itself was defined as the unfolding of the Buddha mārga, or spiritual path, on the plane of time. It is these highly original views developed especially in the early years of their association that must have caught Nishitani's attention, who appreciated the contributions they sought to make.⁴

At times their formulations did not always endear them to the Shin Church. It is not difficult to understand why the Church was concerned and felt its credibility was being undermined. In 1928 Kaneko was dismissed from the college and excommunicated on grounds of heresy. One of the works singled out was *Jōdo no kannen* (The Concept of the Pure Land, 1925), the first chapter of which is translated here. Kaneko was reinstated over ten years later, and toward the end of his long and productive life was awarded for his unstinting service to the Church. His works are now accepted as articulating the orthodox Shin position. While all ended well, it should also be stated that Kaneko was a man of firm convictions whose faith remained unshaken even in this dark period of his life. In his view, the good life, as economic security brings, may vanish, but never the Awakening of the spirit;⁵ in that knowledge he rested assured. In the years that followed, Kaneko continued to maintain the same position concerning the Pure Land in the face of harsh criticism.

Soga also suffered the same fate of dismissal and excommunication for his open support of Kaneko, only to be reinstated some years later. In 1936, he

⁴ Nishitani's appreciation of Kaneko's contributions are seen in a short speech made at a celebration dinner on Kaneko's eighty-eighth birthday in 1968. Nishitani points out that Kaneko's Buddhist works, evincing solid scholarship, have long served as a basis for the higher understanding of Buddhism among scholars, and that he expects they will continue to do so even in the centuries to come.

⁵ He expressed this in a poem composed shortly after his dismissal: "The petals may fall, the flower remains."

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gave a series of lectures on the occasion of his sixty-sixth birthday, called "Shinran's Concept of Buddhist History," the first lecture of which is included in this issue. In it he presents the idea that we must return to the point before all things came into existence in order to truly experience our own being. As Buddhists we must return to the point before Buddhism came into existence so as to experience the birth of Buddhism for ourselves. Nishitani has compared this to the Zen kōan, "To see one's original face before one's parents were born." Soga is sometimes said to be Zen-like in his outlook and was no doubt influenced by Nishida's Zen-inspired philosophy. These views reflect his strong interest in psychology and epistemology, which he shares with the early Nishida. Some Soga followers will baldly assert that Soga was a thoroughly original thinker who was not influenced by anyone, although Soga himself acknowledges his indebtedness to Kaneko in the early days of their collaboration.

In the postwar era, seeing how the devastation of the war weighed heavily on the hearts of the people, Soga and Kaneko underwent a reversion of roles. Plunging back into their work as Shin ministers, not philosophers, they took it upon themselves to restore the spirits of the people, beginning with their own sect. Thus, what registered as a gain for their own sect may well have worked out as a loss for world religious thought. At times, though, embers of that "spiritual youthfulness," as Nishitani once called it, flares up even in their later writings and talks. While Soga and Kaneko are highly regarded in their sect for their contributions to Shin thought, their significance extends beyond the sect. In seeking to define how Pure Land Buddhism presents the world with a religion that manifests the all-subsuming character of the Original Vow, hence goes beyond the distinction of East and West, they, along with D. T. Suzuki, may have earned themselves the status of world-class thinkers. It is with this thought in mind that the following translations have been made.⁶

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⁶ We wish to thank Soga Nobuo and Kaneko Hiroshi, the sons of these two great teachers, for their kind permission to translate the works presented here. A more detailed treatment of these three thinkers on Shin will form the topic of a longer study to be published elsewhere.

The Concept of the Pure Land

KANEKO DAIEI

I. THE PURE LAND THAT EMERGES IN THE AWAKENING TO SELF

I HAVE BEEN ASKED to speak on the topic of the Pure Land, an issue that has riveted my attention these past several years, and although I have devoted much thought and research to it I cannot say I have done enough research to reach any definite conclusions. I plan to speak, however, on an aspect I feel confident I have understood. At the same time I should also ask your consideration since I shall in the course of my talk also touch on points about which I still have doubts. As you may know I was born to a Shin temple family, and so from the time I was a child I heard talks about a place called the Pure Land, recited the nembutsu, and did the Pure Land rituals. But at the same time I could not understand what the Pure Land was all about. I thought all the talk about the Pure Land and hell was some kind of pedagogic device conjured up by the ancients to instruct us on certain matters, a view I held for quite some time. As the discussion of faith among those around me became more intense, my thoughts too began to dwell on this question, but my thoughts were centered around the Buddha, who to my mind was an ambiguous figure though I felt he must exist in some way.

As to the Pure Land, well, I must admit this was still unclear to me. Further, as far as my religious life was concerned, the question of the Pure Land was not an important one at all; what was important was the Buddha. As long as we could understand what the Buddha was, that was enough, [or so I told myself,] and my thoughts hinged on my belief centered around the Tathagata. To me, a faith centered around Pure Land rituals was a mistaken belief, a mere expediency, for the

* This is an adapted translation of the first chapter of Kaneko Daiei, *Jōdo no kansen* 浄土の観念 (1925 [Taishō 14]), pp. 1-25.

truth was that it was the Buddha, not the Pure Land, that took priority; anything else was just not good enough. Someone told me what Rennyo (1415–1499) had said about the Land of Bliss being a place we should look forward to with anticipation; those who wanted to go there needed only to make their request to Amida who, though he was not a Buddha himself, would turn them into Buddhas.

As I listened to this story I thought to myself that this Pure Land teaching was a belief in the compassion of the Buddha. But it also inclined me to think it didn't matter whether or not one understood what the Pure Land was. But that Pure Land has, on the basis of my belief, come to be reactivated in me. It seems nowadays there is a growing tendency for people to think that religion and religious belief can do without such thoughts associated with the Pure Land. As for myself, I found this situation unsatisfactory, and so my thinking placed priority on determining what possible meaning the Pure Land holds for us. This desire for us to determine what possible meaning [the Pure Land] holds for us, pushed one step further onto a broader plane, is for us to grasp what possible basis there is [for our existence] in the nation, in society, in the religious world. This led me to conjecture that, if there is such a basis in the background, then it is one to which man cannot fail to aspire should he perceive it. I felt that these were matters we must bring ourselves to consider in a complete and satisfactory way; these were the thoughts governing my heart. These points taken together, the question of the Pure Land, as I mentioned above, is one that in recent years has gripped me heart and soul, and so on the present occasion I would like to share some of my thoughts with you, ordinary though they may be.

The talk I will now give, to reiterate what I have just said, is firstly to explore in simple terms the dimension of what meaning the Pure Land—through our Awakening to self as individuals—holds for us. Actually I had first thought of relating my personal impressions in detail, remarks as I opened my talk with, for there are a great many things I ought to clarify about myself, but what happens when one does that is one ends up relating all sorts of personal events [to no purpose], so I will limit those remarks to what I have already mentioned, and instead focus in detail on the concept of the Pure Land in the Mahāyāna sutras. Originally I had intended to talk simply on the Pure Land as a theme, but a postcard message from our friend Mr. Fujinami suggested

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the present theme, and that is how I came to settle on it. Now, as to the theme of the concept of the Pure Land in the Mahāyāna sutras, we must ask what meaning the Pure Land has come to hold. As with my earlier discussion focused on the theme of religious bodies as far as the Buddhist world and congregation are concerned, I intend to focus the discussion on how the Pure Land was understood in the Mahāyāna teachings. Here my views will border on the subjective (*kyakkanteki*), and I should say “necessarily subjective” as I intend to speak out of my own Awakening to self, that is, my own spiritual understanding (*etoku*) of matters, outside of which I cannot utter even a single word. Firstly, as to the meaning held by the so-called Pure Land in terms of the contents of an Awakening to self, I wish to discuss how the following passage from the Mahāyāna canon is explained.

THE CONFESSION FOUND IN VASUBANDHU'S TREATISE ON THE PURE LAND

First, standing on the basis of my Awakening to self, I will begin the discussion by exploring the meaning of the Pure Land as seen in this extremely simple expression that opens Vasubandhu's *Treatise on the Pure Land*:

O World-honored One, I with One mind
Take refuge in the Tathāgata of unimpeded Light
Filling [the universe] in every direction,
And I pray to be born in the Land of peace and happiness.¹

Vasubandhu's confession appears at the very beginning of the *Treatise on the Pure Land*. Expressed in the simplest of terms, while predating us by some two thousand years, it expresses perfectly our feelings, expresses what we ought be saying. To analyze this simple statement, there are three terms we must look at closely: first, the “I” [the

¹ Vasubandhu's *Treatise on the Pure Land* (J. Jōdoron; T. 1524), with a well-known commentary by T'an-luan (T. 1819), that figures importantly in Shin theology. For a translation of the former, see Vasubandhu's “Gatha on a Birth [in the Pure Land]” (*Ganshō-ge*), in D. T. Suzuki, “A Preface to the *Kyōgyōshinshō*,” *The Eastern Buddhist* NS 6-1 (1973), pp. 1-24, where the present passage of which is rendered: “O World-honored One, I pay homage single-mindedly to the Tathāgata whose Light reaches unimpededly to the end of the ten quarters. I pray to be born in the Land of Peace and Happiness” (p. 21).

Self, i.e., the seeker], second, the "Tathāgata" [the Buddha] and third, the "Land" [the Pure Land]. In my discussion I will refer to these as the Three Principles. The Land, called the Land of peace and happiness, is the Pure Land. Though there is meaning to the confessional appeal to the World-honored One, we will have to pass this over for the time being. And so, starting with our [first] term, "I" or the Self, this appears as the I with One mind that takes refuge in the Buddha of unimpeded Light filling the universe in every direction; herein also our next term, "Tathāgata," for the Buddha, appears; and finally, in the desire to be born in the Land of peace and happiness, or the Pure Land, we find our third term, "Land." Thus, from this we can surmise that unless we have all three—the Self, the Buddha and the Pure Land—then we cannot establish a true religion. From the perspective of the Self as the believing constituent, the Self is what believes and the Buddha is what is believed in; the Self takes refuge in the Buddha and so proceeds to the Land of that Buddha. All three elements appear at the very beginning of the confession. Now if any one of the three did not exist, then it would seem as if [this magnificent edifice] would all come tumbling down, and so if we consider it from that sort of perspective, whether there is a Pure Land or not lies beyond our knowing. Our thinking there is a Pure Land would seem to derive from the emotive powers of what our [spiritual] ancestors have thought, but actually it would seem [to us] the Pure Land so-called does not exist. Here, first of all, although the Pure Land crumbles away, we tend to feel, as I said before, the Buddha somehow exists. But when we start to ponder the question as to where [that Buddha] exists, since we have already decided that [the existence of] the Pure Land is inconclusive, then [the existence of] the Buddha also becomes inconclusive. Thus, if we do away with the Pure Land, we do away with the Tathāgata, and what we are left with is the Self. While the vast majority of people give not a thought to whether this Self exists or not, Buddhism takes this issue as its very starting point. And so we are left completely in the dark as to what is knowable.

But there is another set of terms we should also take notice of: the Taking of refuge and the Desire for birth. I take refuge in the Buddha of unimpeded Light pervading every direction, hence there is a Buddha and a Self, and the Self takes refuge in the Buddha. [Logically speaking,] unless the Buddha and the Self exist as two [independent entities],

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this would make the movement of one taking refuge in the other an impossibility. But, if the Taking of refuge were to emerge at the point where we arrive at an Awakening to self as to the lives we pursue, through that praxis of taking refuge we would be [standing] at the very nexus where on the one hand the Self so-called presents itself to us and on the other the Buddha so-called presents itself. I will explain these matters as we go along, but when we are in [that defining] situation where we feel compelled to bow our heads in complete humility, it is at this juncture that the Taking of refuge emerges. The praxis of taking refuge then is a further entering of the depths [where the Self and the Buddha emerge simultaneously]. Since [at this juncture] there emerges the Self in the act of taking refuge and the Buddha in the act of being taken refuge in, the Taking of refuge assumes the form of a single praxis. On the basis [of that single praxis] we can sense [the presence of] the Self and [at the same time] we can sense [the presence of] the Buddha. The same would apply to the heart expressing the Desire for birth. Different from the heart or mind as we ordinarily understand it, it is the praxis of heart or the mind of praxis. Can we not say this praxis of heart and mind, known as the Desire for birth, is what brings the Self and the Land to presence themselves [simultaneously]? In my discussion, when speaking of the Taking of refuge and the Desire for birth, I will refer to them as the Two praxes.

THREE PRINCIPLES-TWO PRAXES-ONE MIND; ONE MIND-TWO PRAXES-THREE PRINCIPLES

Now, while the Taking of refuge and the Desire for birth are completely [different] praxes, were we to go one step further and peer truly into [the hearts] of our own Selves, our hearts of taking refuge would be borne toward the Desire for birth. Were we to shift the direction of that heart with which we turn to the Buddha, with which we take refuge in the Buddha, it would as such be [transformed into] the Desire for birth. When that happens, do not the praxis we designate as the Taking of refuge and the praxis we designate as the Desire for birth come to be governed by the so-called One mind? It is at this juncture that there emerges the configuration described in Vasubandhu's [treatise]: the Three principles-Two practices-One mind, or the One mind-Two practices-Three principles. Were we capable of under-

standing the configuration the One mind—Two practices—Three principles assumes, were we capable of understanding clearly the mode in which it emerges into our [lives], we would naturally come to an understanding of the so-called Pure Land. The unhindered Light filling the universe in every direction is descriptive of the Tathāgata; peace and happiness is descriptive of the Land; when deprived of these [descriptive] designations, we tend to regard the “I,” the “Tathāgata” and the “Land”—that is, the Self, the Buddha, and the Pure Land—as three [separate] entities that have to be linked by the praxis of taking refuge or by the praxis of desiring for birth. But this heart of ours, ruled as it is by our fact-filled heads, is not like this, for it proceeds—does it not?—by ascertaining [matters from the beginning,] from the One mind and then on to the Two praxes; from the Two praxes and then on to the Three principles; and peering [dimly] in that direction, seeks to pursue the way it perceives.

And so, from the [harmoniously] commingled “O World-honored One, I with One mind,” we can derive the Self and the Tathāgata and the Land. Placing the one most familiar to us—the Self—at center and juxtaposing the others to this Self, we proceed to ask: what is the Taking of refuge, what meaning does the Buddha hold? Yet, what in the world is it we are referring to as the Self? As I mentioned above, we may have doubts about the Pure Land or about the Buddha, but the vast majority of people never entertain any doubts about the Self; they assume the so-called Self exists. But the truth is that the Self is an extremely complex issue. To explain what it is, let us suppose the Self is the same as Man. If so, then what is this we call Man? If we proceed from this point, all of us, however vaguely, hold to some ideal concept of Man. There are the words of a plainsong that has been around for ages that goes: “Even among crowds of men, there is a Man unlike other men; aspire to become that Man and other men will aspire to be a man like you.” In this song the word Man appears many times, saying, as if to contradict itself, that while there are many people yet there is no one. But, when you understand the meaning of the poem, it is simply saying that when you are just another face in the crowd, you are just another person indistinguishable from other people; but when you become a man uncommon among men, you become a person unlike the rest; you become a model human being. What is intended by a model human being I cannot tell, but this is the person all people aspire

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to become. In Vasubandhu's *Treatise on Buddha-nature*,² he discusses the question of Man. Actually he employs a Buddhist term, "sentient beings," that has broader and deeper implications than Man, but I will, for the present purposes, render it simply as Man. We may ask: Is Man [just] one who possesses the faculties [of sight and hearing and so on]? Or is Man one who is in possession of [Buddha-]nature? Merely to be a limited being with [the ordinary human faculties], with eyes horizontal and nose vertical, does not [necessarily] make him Man: [the distinguishing characteristic is] to possess the qualities of buddhas [called Buddha-nature]. This ideal concept, says the *Treatise*, is what defines Man, as set forth, in effect, in the plainsong above. The "crowds of men" refers to Man possessed of the [human] faculties, the uncommon man refers to Man possessed of the qualities a Buddha possesses. If we think about this concept of Man, although we may not be asked to state it at this very moment, all of us hold to an active concept of Man in our minds. [At a preliminary stage in life] when this concept is not operative, a person knows nothing of the matter of reflecting on oneself. But, at some point, this concept becomes active at the very center of one's being, and one gradually becomes able to reflect on oneself. Once informed of our self-worth, we come to ask ourselves whether we are doing our part [in life] or not. As such reflection gradually deepens, we become conscious of the sorrow[ful nature of life] and the evil [karma of living]. In that phrase, "O World-honored One, I," what is that "I," or Self, that is awakened to? It is Vasubandhu himself gaining a true insight into the actualities of the Self. Here I always recall the words, "As for me, Shinran," in *Notes Lamenting Differences*, section two. Whenever I read this passage, I insert my own name, "As for me, Kaneko," to give it stronger impact—for, what others think I know not, but as for me. . . . Though it might just have been a conventional phrase [for him to express himself in that way], in that phrase, "As for me, Shinran," I feel he did not wish to dispense with the topic so simply. In that one phrase he is bringing forth his Self in its entirety. As he sits before an audience of serious-minded fellow seekers who, to inquire about the Way, have had to journey across the barriers of twenty provinces, he [discloses himself,] bringing forth his Self in its totality in this one phrase, "As for me, Shinran," with all the

² Vasubandhu's *Treatise on Buddha-nature* (J. Busshōron; T. 1610).

various kinds of sorrow and evil that burden his soul. The "I" of "O World-honored One, I" is not the first person singular of grammar. Reflected here, rather, is the totality of Vasubandhu's Awakening to self, here revealing itself is the sorrow and evil of the Self—all in this term "I" or Self.

[THE TRANSITION] FROM DISTRESS TO TAKING REFUGE

With the disclosure of this Self burdened with evil and sorrow, there emerges a praxis; this is none other than the praxis of Taking refuge. Here, setting aside the academic question of whether or not there is an ego-self, we encounter what Buddhism calls the Impediments and the Delusions in the form of various kinds of sorrow and evil. On first impression, we may make light of the Impediments and the Delusions as so much mind-dust or uncleanness of the heart. There are some religions that think it only necessary to remove this uncleanness of the heart and to eradicate the mind-dust [and all will be well]. When we hear such an opinion, we are at first inclined to agree with it, but Buddhism does not take such a light view of these matters and points out to the seeker in strong terms that [a round of suffering in] hell or as hungry ghosts [are the fates that await those who dally in self-complacency]. It is not as if some dust or grime is dripping onto something beautiful; in the internal environment of the heart, Hate, Lust, Jealousy, Malice wear down what little is left of this part of ourselves. In other words, it is as though our Self had been thrown headlong into the clutches of these malevolent forces, where it is left to their caprices. Here, where this part of ourselves is tormented by Malice, Jealousy and so on, one might aptly describe the situation by use of the Buddhist terms *hell* and *hungry ghosts*.

What Śākyamuni called *suffering* and, as the cause of suffering, *attachment* I have referred to with the words *evil* and *sorrow*, but [whatever the difference in terms] the reality that evil and sorrow define makes its presence felt. When I truly confront this Self in reality, the thought of taking refuge emerges in me, I bow my head naturally [in true humility], placing my palms together in prayerful repose. When I do this, in response to my experience of taking refuge, what we call the Buddha presences itself to me. Thus, as I stated above, in my experience of taking refuge, there appears to me on the one hand

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the Self sunk in evil and sorrow, and on the other hand there appears the Buddha of unimpeded Light who sheds his light on me.

That is to say, it is not that we know from the first that the Buddha is there and so we take refuge in him; in my experience of taking refuge there emerges in me a certain attitude, and at the same time, in the experience of this [experiencing] subject, the Buddha makes its presence felt in me. This being the case, as far as we are concerned, when we come to a pure understanding of Self, when in our own experience we carry out the praxis of taking refuge, there is no question of whether or not the Buddha exists, or approaching the problem from the other side, the very terms by which we express whether the Buddha exists or not become problematic. When we say that the Buddha exists, what do we normally mean? It usually means that from out of somewhere there arises to our mind the image of a great humanlike figure who, seeing our suffering, takes pity on us and rescues us, and so we take refuge in this Buddha. This is clearly an irreproachable sentiment, and it of course allows no room for the possibility that the Buddha does not exist. If the Buddha exists, then we can believe in him; if the Buddha does not exist, then it would be ridiculous to think we could believe in him. But, in this attitude of wanting to confirm first the existence of the Buddha and then believing in him, there enters a sort of impureness [of spirit]. When, in true cognizance of the Self, we put our palms together in [our experience of] taking refuge, the Buddha that appears to us at that point is not what we ordinarily refer to as "existing"; not stopping with the question of existing or not-existing, it transcends [the duality of] being and not-being to assume its being. I use the term *pure subjectivity* to describe this situation, and the reason is that our always insisting on the existence of [the Buddha] does not manifest a pure subjectivity. In the word for "existing" as conceived by our human mind, in which connection we need not be reminded here of Kantian philosophy, the concept of our existence, as where we are, is comprised of numerous factors such as time-space and cause-result. While these go to determine the Self, what is determined in this way can never be a pure subjectivity. A pure subjectivity is the transcending of our thinking in terms of existing and not-existing, and it is there, as we place our palms together in the experience of taking refuge, that the Buddha reveals itself.

And so, the question of whether or not the Buddha exists is, to me,

one of rather secondary importance. Of greater importance is whether one has gained a true insight into this part of ourselves. Or, if there is as yet no understanding of the Self at the outset, what is important is to know that this is what I have come to be, to know why this has come about as a prelude to self-reflection, and to become cognizant that the one engaged in self-reflection is sunk in evil and sorrow. When one's mental outlook matures to the point of taking refuge, for the first time the Self presents itself, in response to which the Buddha, shedding its light, comes to the rescue out of deep concern for one's welfare. In this sense the Buddha is what discloses itself in the paradisiacal realm of my Awakening to self.

Is the Buddha what transcends us, or is it what is immanent, lying within us?—this is a question that has long been discussed [among Buddhist thinkers]. But these words *transcendence* and *immanence* are tricky, for people are often remiss in their usage of these terms and will go about declaring out of hand that this is transcendent or that is immanent. For those of us who have had the pure [experience of] taking refuge, though, when we think of the emergent Buddha, the Buddha is [both] transcendent and emergent. To be [both] immanent *and* transcendent is not necessarily as contradictory as it sounds. From the standpoint of the pure subject I transcend myself, but in my transcendence of myself I am all the same descending into myself. That is, when I pray to the Buddha, the more earnestly I pray, in a sense the more further afield the Buddha moves from me, and as the awareness of the great distance between the Buddha and myself grows all the stronger, all the same I am in the end assimilated into the Buddha. When I think the Buddha is standing before me, suddenly he appears from behind; when I think the Buddha is standing behind me, suddenly he appears before. In regard to this [unexpected nature of the Buddha] the great teacher T'an-luan, among others, has an extremely interesting explanation, which I will present here in brief outline. In his gloss on the invocatory phrase, "O World-honored One, I with One mind take refuge in the Tathāgata of unimpeded Light filling the universe in every direction," he says its correct understanding turns on the words, "I, with One [mind]." As long as I truly [experience] the Awakening to self, the Taking of refuge in the Tathāgata of unimpeded Light filling the universe in every direction is an event that comes about naturally.

Now, when we inquire about the significance of the Desire for birth

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in the Land of peace and happiness, here too the Self becomes problematic. Up to now the Self immersed in evil and sorrow was explained as a completely individual affair, but [by the term "individual"] it is not as if we were simply talking about some complete stranger when discussing this part of ourselves. At the same time, this part of ourselves is actually operating in abundance in the background [of the lives of many people]. I have parents, brothers and sisters, and friends, and all these various people around me are the ones who, taken together, make up my age and generation. And so when I speak of the Self, I am speaking [collectively] of those around me, those who make up my age and generation. In Buddhist terminology, this [collective] Self would be expressed as the sentient beings everywhere that populate the real world.³ Prior to this real world is the Self. Since the Self is of this [nature], when the Self takes refuge in the Tathāgata, at that very moment we are forced to recognize [the existence of] a sort of paradisiacal realm, the world of that Land of peace and happiness transcending the real world. Thus, when we discern the real world—behind which lies this part of ourselves—where the many beings comprising sentient beings live, at precisely this moment there appears the Buddha who discerns this "I" of ours, and in the same way there appears his Land, his world of the Other shore, the Land of peace and happiness that shines its Light on this real world. It is from this [experience] that the desire arises in us to proceed to that Country.

And so, if we think in terms of the One mind or the Self, the Tathāgata is the Light that shines on the reality of the individual Self, the Land of peace and happiness is a dimension or realm of sorts that shines [its light] on the real world represented by those surrounding the Self, hence, brought to expression by the Self. Seen from the other perspective, when we become truly conscious of the reality of the Self, at that point emerges the Tathāgata to be taken refuge in; if we can truly discern the way of being of this world, and wish to proceed to that Land, it is only natural that the desire arises in us to be born in that Land of peace and happiness. As regards this point, then, the matter of our taking refuge in the Buddha and desiring to proceed to the world of the Other shore arises of itself, as long as we can attain to that Awakening of self in which we become truly conscious of our ego-self. Thus, it is not a matter of first determining whether or not there exists a Land of peace and happiness or a Buddha; rather, it exists on the basis of the

fact that, as I pray to the Buddha, in my person the desire to go to the Pure Land arises in me directly.

In that I have merely reiterated here what I have said on other occasions, I am afraid my talk may have been difficult for many of you to sit through, but I wished to clarify in simple terms the significance the Pure Land holds in relation to the content of my Awakening to self.

I have explained these matters at the outset in simple terms, since I think it will affect how you understand my explanation of the topic of the Pure Land in the Mahāyāna sutras. There may be those among you who will feel I have been overly intuitive in describing my case, but this is not so, and what I wanted to point out in the course of my talk was that here lies a great Way.

As I stated before, there is a wondrous place where we enter the depths, but how is this explained in the sutras? And as we read the sutras why must we perceive it in that way? These are matters I hope to clarify in my talk on the Pure Land as understood in the Mahāyāna sutras.

TRANSLATED BY W. S. YOKOYAMA

Shinran's Concept of Buddhist History

SOGA RYŌJIN

LECTURE I

OWING TO MY OWN karmic contingencies as well as the blessings of the Buddhas and patriarchs, this year I enter my sixtieth year, an event so wondrous I find it hard to believe. All of you have gathered from far and near, taking time from your busy schedules to celebrate this event with me. As you can see, thanks to you all, I am in the best of health, and even to be able to say this leaves me truly at a loss as to how to express my gratitude to you for honoring me in this way. I am most grateful to my good friend Kaneko Daiei for his salutary message, but I must admit I was not a little bit embarrassed by his words of praise. Though at present I do not intend to explain my reasons why, in the past year or so I have felt it imperative to stress the fact that I have never had any special penchant for "learning" or "research," those very words having little bearing on my career to date. And so when I announced the theme of my talk, "Shinran's Concept of Buddhist History," it was not intended to be a presentation of my research findings—

* This is an adapted translation of the first lecture of Soga Ryōjin (1875–1971), *Shinran no bukkō shikan* 親鸞の佛教史観 [Shinran's Concept of Buddhist History; 1935], in the author's twelve-volume *Selected Works*, volume 5 (1970), pp. 385–471. It was originally presented as a series of five lectures on 10–12 May 1935, in Kyoto, in celebration of the author's sixtieth birthday. Edited and supplemented by Soga, the lectures were published as a book of that title in December of the same year. In 1949 it was compiled with other of Soga's works in a five-volume series, and in 1983 reissued as a single book by the Shinshū Ōtani-ha, Kyoto. Information on the circumstances surrounding this work, including the salutary address by Soga's close colleague Kaneko Daiei (1881–1976) mentioned in the opening paragraph, can be found in the afterword contributed by *Selected Works* series editor Matsubara Yūzen, appended to the same volume. Portions of the original work have been condensed; notes have been provided by the translator.

certainly not—but rather to share some thoughts that have come to mind from time to time, fragments of which I may have presented elsewhere, but which I wish to review on this occasion; this, at least, is what I propose to do.

As for the theme of today's talk, "Shinran's Concept of Buddhist History," since many of you are followers of the Shōnin,¹ I suppose it may strike you as rather commonplace to hear a talk in which "Shinran" forms a central element. But, when I contemplate this element, it takes me back years, to May 1st, 1917, the place: the Main Lecture Hall of Ōtani University, then known as Shinshū Ōtani Daigaku, where a commemorative ceremony for the founder Shinran's birth was being held under the sponsorship of a university fellowship group. I had first heard of this function about a month earlier when travelling in Kyushu with a friend who invited me to be a speaker. I cannot quite recall what the theme of my talk was, but when I assumed the platform this is what I said: "As of today I shall not say 'Shōnin' when I speak of Shinran, nor shall I say 'Shinran' when I speak of the Shōnin." In other words, I declared it my policy never to use the words "Shinran Shōnin" together. There have been times when I have strayed from this policy, but generally speaking I have stuck to my decision to use either one or the other term. As to when to say "Shinran" and when "Shōnin," I think you can generally infer its usage, and so I will not go into it here.

It is customary for people to refer to the religious figures of their own tradition as saints and teachers; these are terms of respect we all employ, calling them Great Teacher, Saint, or Zen Master so-and-so. However, when referring to the religious figures of traditions outside their own, these same people will drop the honorific language and call them merely by name, saying "Nichiren said . . ." or "Hōnen said . . ." My position on this matter is diametrically opposed to theirs. As an ordained Shin minister, I will refer to the religious teachers outside of Shin as Nichiren Shōnin, Hōnen Shōnin, Zen Master Dōgen and so on. The patriarchal teacher who has truly guided me, who constantly presents himself before me preaching the Dharma here and now, I refer to simply as "Shinran." This in a nutshell is my policy. As to how I apply this policy, I think it requires no special explanation.

¹ *Shōnin*. A term commonly used when referring to a Buddhist master.

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Seventeen years have passed since then, and although I cannot expect all people to approve of my policy, I would assert that it is correct as far as etiquette goes and is one all people can follow naturally, and in this regard it is generally the line of action I take today. And so when deciding today's theme, I did not want people to think it was just another priest from some sect who was saying all this; I wanted people to know that here was a person who truly revered Shinran and held him in the highest regard; that here was a person who, if he can be credited with just one thing, was able to put into practice his resolve, his feeling this was the right thing to do.

My proposing the theme "Shinran's Concept of Buddhist History" may be seen in light of the common knowledge that Shinran is the patriarchal teacher who established the Jōdo Shinshū. But, in this world there are various strains of thought, and there may well be those who take issue with the assertion that Shinran indeed sought to establish the Jōdo Shinshū, who will ask where Shinran makes such a statement of intent. To get around this, some will argue that Shinran revered his teacher Hōnen Shōnin so deeply that when Hōnen told him to establish the Jōdo Shinshū he did so without question, and so it was in this way that Shinran came to do what he did. While it is difficult to refute such views, whenever I hear such arguments somehow they all sound so plausible that I do not find them to be very convincing.

It doesn't take much to argue intelligently about whether the Jōdo Shinshū was intentionally established or not; this is to inquire as to what went into the establishing of the Jōdo Shinshū [as a religious institution]. But, more than that, what exactly is this Jōdo Shinshū [as a religious teaching]—this so-called True Teaching of the Pure Land—what is it all about?² Concrete answers to what comprises the contents of that teaching are what we should seek. Left unresolved, the question of whether the Jōdo Shinshū [institution] was founded intentionally or not remains at the level of asking whether one has left the gate open or not; we know where the gate is, and so it is an easy matter to verify whether it is open or not. But what the Jōdo Shinshū [teaching] comprises is not something we can resolve so easily, for when we do not

² Here Soga makes a play on words with "*Jōdo Shinshū o hiraku*," placing emphasis on Jōdo Shinshū as a teaching that unfolds (*hiraku*) in history, rather than on the Jōdo Shinshū institution as a historical development (*hiraku*).

know what the teaching *comprises*, we can only respond uncritically when asked whether or not we know what it reveals. In broad outline, then, these are some of the thoughts that have occurred to me.

Recently, while earnestly reading the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, I ran straight into that very problem: What is this Jōdo Shinshū [teaching]? And suddenly, from out of nowhere, the thought came to my mind that the Jōdo Shinshū so-called was the innovative concept of Buddhist history experienced by Shinran.³ Shinran had gleaned insight into the true form of Buddhist history, that is, the tradition and revelation of Buddhist history, to clarify the true spirit of the Buddha *mārga*.⁴ And so, what goes by the rubric of Jōdo Shinshū represents Shinran's insight into Buddhist history. Shinran received the teaching of the nembutsu of the Original Vow from his teacher Hōnen Shōnin, and, of course, from that time on this select Original Vow, as the principle of his concept of Buddhist history, was perceived by Shinran, however vaguely, as the fundamental spirit underlying Buddhist history. From the spring of his ninth year when he rapped on the gate of the Tendai prelate Jichin's abode, Shinran could find no resolution to the problem of how to free himself from the cycle of birth and death that plagued him first and last. Through the help of Hōnen Shōnin, however, aided by the teaching of the nembutsu of the Tathāgata's Original Vow he was able to resolve this problem. Led by the tradition of the Buddha *mārga* that flowed from the saintly personality of Hōnen Shōnin, moreover, Shinran was able to travel steadily upstream to the source that lay behind his teacher's religious instructions. Tracing back some two thousand years, Shinran searched for the core of Buddhist history in its panoramic sweep of two millennia from its origins to the present day. There he saw Buddhist history in its myriad forms, its hundred flowerings, each vying with the rest in beauty, woven together into a rich brocade—this was the history of the Buddha *mārga*, magnificently outfitted with the treasures of eighty thousand Dharma repositories. What, then, lies at the core of these two thousand years in which Buddhism developed historically? Through the eternal interplay of factors by which the Dharma participates to benefit life, Shinran, for one, was by this means finally allowed an ancient insight into history, that is, he was

³ We may see this as an instance of Soga's intuitive approach.

⁴ *Buddha mārga*. The path leading to spiritual awakening.

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able to have his spiritual eye opened inwardly to the root cause of Buddhist history. This insight into history is, itself, none other than Jōdo Shinshū so-called.

In recent times, the Pure Land teaching seems to be beset by a multitude of problems of various kinds. Further, as a topic of research, the intellectual world being what it is today, criticism of the Pure Land teaching is of course being voiced, this especially yielding newfound significance [for the teaching]. But criticism of the Pure Land teaching has been with us for quite some time. The Pure Land teaching has been the object of criticism and ridicule ever since its early origins in India and China, and in the past these instances, instead of abating, have increased in number. For, the more the Pure Land teaching flourished, the more it was subject to tremendous criticism and censure. In other words, when I say that the doubts and criticism of the Pure Land teaching were rife, this is direct testimony to the viability of the Pure Land teaching.

There is a saying of Shinran's: "When you abide in the cause of faith and propriety, you make neighbors with the condition of doubt and deceit."⁵ . . . What exactly is meant by the original terms for faith and propriety (*shinjun* 信順) and doubt and deceit (*gihō* 疑謗) is unclear, but here in this saying they are juxtaposed to show the necessary relationship they maintain; that is, doubt does not appear where there is no faith, nor is there a life of faith where there is no voicing of doubt. There is of course no arising of faith in the doubting mind; when presently faith arises, doubt is allayed. Yet in spite of this, where there are those of earnest faith, there will always be those with deeply entrenched doubt. An uncomplicated, detached faith is established in response to the fierce doubter, and it is to those believers who exhibit an air of detachment that there throng the doubting multitudes. And so we might say that the history of the Pure Land as our true and sincere pursuit of the way is the history of the constant struggle between faith and doubt. As our true and sincere pursuit of the way the history

⁵ Adapted here is a passage from the closing pages of the final, sixth chapter of the *Kyōgyōshinshō*. For a recent translation, see Dennis Hirota, trans., *The True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land Way: A Translation of Shinran's Kyōgyōshinshō: Volume IV*, in Shin Buddhism Translation Series (Kyoto: Hongwanji International Center, 1990), p. 617.

of the Pure Land is not only a matter of the perpetuation of the faith; it is where faith and doubt are locked in perpetual combat that the holy working of the magnificence of the Pure Land undergoes infinite unfolding. This configuration is what lies at the heart of Shinran's perception of Buddhist history; that is, it was this configuration that Shinran perceived as operative in Buddhist history, hence it was on this basis that he established the teaching revealing this truth known as the Jōdo Shinshū. This, in any case, is what my thoughts lead me to assert.

As I was saying, Shinran surveyed the two thousand years of Buddhist history that preceded him. For us it is now closer to two thousand five hundred years, close to three thousand. What, then, is the core of the Buddha mārga undercurrent to this span of Buddhist history?

According to modern Buddhist studies as it has come down to us in the past sixty or so years since the Meiji era (1868–1911), there was, firstly, the pure form of the basic Buddhist teachings propagated by the founder Śākyamuni. After his passing, the Theravāda Buddhist disciples he left behind compiled the Buddhist Tripiṭaka, the so-called three baskets, which spawned numerous schools of thought, giving rise to a narrow form of Buddhism focused on individual salvation and a subjective understanding of the teachings. To offset the excesses of this trend, a kind of revivalist, return-to-Śākyamuni movement occurred, known as Mahāyāna Buddhism. This movement initially had its inception in the desire of seekers for the world-savior future Buddha, Maitreya, to appear in this world; next to come into vogue was the belief in attaining birth in the eastern Pure Land of Akṣobhya Tathāgata; and finally there arose the belief in the western Pure Land of Utmost Bliss of Amida Buddha. And here it is thought that the impetus behind the Mahāyāna Buddhist movement, having run itself out, had reached completion. Now all of this sounds very plausible, and though to call it *plausible* may seem so rude as to be insulting, my making silly emotional shows of my foolish self is how I respond whenever I have no way of confirming the truth of such matters as these, plausible though they may be. This plausible explanation of matters, set forth with an air of certainty even, as if all the facts were all but certain, has come to be acknowledged as conventional. I do not intend to take that explanation apart one by one. Instead, let us proceed first by regarding that explanation as one version of Buddhist history. But, by creating a Buddhist history along such a point-to-point itinerary, Buddhism becomes the

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object of a historical materialistic view of history.

Let us say it is acceptable to speak of a historical-materialistic concept of Buddhist history. While that would doubtless be *one* version of Buddhist history, would not such a historical-materialistic version of Buddhist history be limited to being only that and nothing more? Indeed, can a historical materialism that refutes the spirit of the Buddha mārga be the situation we truly desire? If a person like myself, a man of little learning and less merit, were completely misguided in setting forth this line of argument, he would end up the laughing stock of the community and the statements above would stop there. But, as I see it, the greater part of Buddhist research as presently pursued tends to subscribe to the line of reasoning I describe above. Thus, as a result, Buddhism as a consistent body of truth is, as it were, nowhere to be found. If Buddhism is pursued on the basis of historical materialism that has no underlying spirit of the Buddhist mārga to unify it, soon the only thing left will be a banal Buddhist history of academic stamp. To be certain, this example of Buddhist history is also a variety of Buddhist historical concept, I will grant you that. However, a Buddhist history that takes as its basis a religion-denying materialism is a historical materialistic concept of Buddhism that aims to explain the extinction of Buddhism. While admitting it is a variety of Buddhist historical concept, I would think we must define it more precisely as applicable only when elucidating Buddhism as a past phenomenon. Beyond this I have no further claims to make. Indeed, the precise standpoint that we take is important, and should we at first, unwittingly, take the standpoint of historical materialism, it should be sufficient merely to have this pointed out to us, in order to remedy the situation. In the past it may well have been there was only one [standard] version of Buddhist history, but with the gradual sophistication in historical research, assumed or unconscious elements have been brought to light. Although I have no idea what novel concept of Buddhist history has now come into vogue, from what I gather from the lively discussions among the newer students to Buddhism, there is a fresh, new concept of historical materialism in the making. If this is true, I believe it a welcome sign.

With regard to Shinran's concept of Buddhist history, the majority of people would not be opposed to such a concept of Buddhist history. Those people could be counted as being on our side. . . . Generally speaking, though, people these days imagine that the Truth Buddhism

teaches did not exist prior to Śākyamuni, that Śākyamuni was the one who suddenly discovered that Truth, and that Śākyamuni is fundamentally the patriarchal founder of Buddhism. These points are of course irrefutable, and I have no differences with those points. Śākyamuni is the patriarchal founder of Buddhism. The Buddhist teachings in this sense could with little difference be called Śākyamuni's teachings. And so when the Buddhist teachings are mentioned, they are understood to mean the teachings explained by the Buddha, that is, the teachings comprising the statements made by the Buddha. Thus, as the realization [of the enlightenment] the Buddha, the Buddhist teachings are the teachings through which the Buddha explains what that realm [of enlightenment] is like. And so the Buddhist teachings are generally thought to be the Dharma as the recorded testimony of the Buddha or as the recorded statements of the Buddha. However, the Buddhist teachings according to Shinran are not merely the teachings explained by the Buddha or the teachings the Buddha realized. Shinran's Buddhist teaching is the teaching that one directly becomes a Buddha oneself, it is the teaching of the nature of the Buddha. It is the teaching of how the Buddha, while truly living in accordance with the Buddha mārga as such, at the same time [discloses the path for] the ordinary unawakened being⁶ to live in accordance with the Buddha mārga as such. What the Buddha bestowed upon us through his realization of enlightenment as a true Buddha was the revelation of the causal path by which all humankind could equally attain Buddhahood. The method of research applied by the Buddhist scholars of today regards Buddhism so-called as the teachings explained by the Buddha, and so scholars are only interested in determining whether it is what the Buddha taught or not. Although their chosen problematic of determining what is and what is not the Buddha's teaching is a highly important one, an even more important issue is that the Buddhist teaching so-called is the teaching of how to become a Buddha, the teaching that explains the nature of the Buddha.

Ultimately, the Buddhist teaching according to Shinran is the teach-

⁶ The ordinary unawakened being refers to "sentient beings," who form the target of the Buddha's awakening activity. Soga here expresses the Mahāyāna Buddhist principle that the true Buddha is one who not only attains the goal of awakening for himself but also demonstrates the path of awakening for all living beings; unless that contingency is met, true awakening is not achieved.

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ing of one's realization of one's own Buddhahood, the teaching of one's own explanation [of the nature of the Buddha]. Otherwise expressed, it is the teaching of the Buddha actively being realized and actively explaining [that experience]. It is important to clarify where one stands in terms of this active-passive distinction.⁷ However, recent Buddhist scholarship has stripped away this aspect of how to become a Buddha, of explaining the nature of the Buddha, and seeks to determine only what the Buddha taught, and so working on the hypothesis of approaching Buddhism through what the Buddha taught, it has limited itself to what it assumes is the path shown by these statements of the Buddha's realization. Or let me put it this way. There are those of us whose research deals with the problem of determining solely what the Buddha taught. Since we may be said to engage in such research out of the belief that, were we to put into practice what the Buddha teaches, we too, like the Buddha, would surely become Buddhas, there is no necessity for us to voice our thoughts on these matters, and we might even be reprimanded were we to attempt to do so. To be reprimanded for my views is, for me, a matter of course and does not disconcert me in the least. Though not disconcerting, I must admit I am surprised to find people today who, though they acknowledge the problem, still persist in their outmoded way of thinking. . . . Setting as their sole criterion whether it was the Buddha who said it or not, they ignore the matter of whether they will become Buddhas or not by putting that teaching into practice.

Thus, I feel it necessary to ask ourselves whither such Buddhist research is headed. Aged as I am, there may be those who do not want to listen to the advice offered by the elderly, but I truly feel the present situation to be regretful. There are many who say that Buddhism today is undergoing a revival, that this is a golden age for Buddhist research, but these people are like the empty barrel that rattles the most. Once a barrel has been emptied of all its wine, the drunken revelers pound the

⁷ The active-passive (*nōsho* 能所) distinction is one found, among other places, in Shin theological discussions. It generally can be understood as the actor (*nō*) and the ground acted upon (*sho*), or as the acting subject (*nō*) and the object acted upon (*sho*). Soga introduces it here to distinguish different kinds of relationships that exist in the study of religion, where the active form of the Buddhist teachings would be Shinran who "lives" Buddhism, while the passive form might be identified with the empirical approach of Buddhist scholars who talk "about" Buddhism.

barrel, dance, sing and make merry. But, while it may only be natural that they should beat the barrel and sing in their drunken dance once all the wine has been drunk, I suspect that there are those who, even without the influence of drink, would still go about performing their silly song and dance. This is the kind of doubt I have about such people. . . .

Returning to our topic, Buddhism is the path by which one becomes a Buddha. When Śākyamuni became a Buddha, he contemplated within himself⁸ the way he became a Buddha, and clarified that path by which all living beings could equally become Buddhas. On the basis of having realized enlightenment for himself, whilst actively realizing enlightenment, actively explaining his realization he strove to bestow on us the truth that ordinary unawakened beings could also become Buddhas. In explaining how to become a Buddha, though, he did not merely give people superficial advice as to how to do it, but putting himself in the place of one pressing forward along the path he extolled how to become a Buddha, clarifying the true way of practice leading to Buddhahood; this total phenomenon is Buddhism. To speak of a Buddhism that truly and sincerely has bearing on our lives, there must be an undercurrent of the unfolding of the Buddha mārga.

As regards Buddhism, in its large literary corpus a few of the works are thought to be Śākyamuni's exhortations. There are those who become attached to the single criterion that they are the Śākyamuni's teachings, but this is merely materialism, the materialistic foraging in history for suitable documents. The Buddhist canon, in that it is comprised of documents written on paper, is of material form, and as a material thing is no different from this cup on the table. The materialist examines the Buddhist canon seeking to determine when this material document came into existence. While the fact the documents are material is not mistaken, the teaching-of-the-Dharma appears on the basis of the material, through the material, by transcending the material, by

⁸ The phrase "contemplated within himself" (admittedly somewhat redundant) is intended to render the term "*naikan*" 内観, lit. "introspection," a key word in the Kiyozawa lineage of Shin thought to which Soga belongs. It was used by Kiyozawa Manshi (1863–1903), a religious philosopher of the Meiji period, who emphasized spiritualism, in contrast to the materialism of his day. Soga's early essays exploring Shin spirituality can be said to reflect the influence of Kiyozawa.

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preceding the material, for here we find the spirit in concrete form. What that form is, is not the problem, but when researchers merely analyze the document as a thing, we must ask what kind of philosophy such thinking engenders. Applying a concept-driven system to analyze a document, they ask when this canon appeared and proceed to do research. When they pursue research in this vein they arrive at foregone conclusions. The only problem here is the questionable methodology they apply.

Generally, man's philosophical systems go from simple to complex. Applying the so-called theory of evolution, the founder Śākyamuni should have gone no further than teaching a simple and vivid path of praxis contemplated within oneself. Śākyamuni was a person of profound philosophical bent of mind, who lived a rather humble life style. He had about him an aura of energy and profundity that was difficult to describe in words, but to what one can attribute the source rippling with such energy and profundity I have no idea. At any rate, whenever he explained matters what he said was so extremely persuasive that anyone who heard it found it reasonable, the path he described being extremely lucid and simple. What he explained was not the so-called theoretical or mystical path, but a moral and practical path that anyone could proceed upon with assurance. As the religion gradually became increasingly philosophical and mystical, this gave rise to what is known as Mahāyāna Buddhism. This I relate as my own thoughts on the subject.

Conceived in this way, [though,] there is absolutely no allowance for a notion such as ordinary unawakened beings becoming Buddhas. Those who follow that line of thinking would feel that this offers conclusive proof that the problem of becoming a Buddha was absent from the beginning. With this fundamental problem missing from the outset, [their approach has as much life to it] as stale beer, for it paves the way for treating the documents [empirically] as so much material. To treat what is material as material would seem entirely proper, but while that may be so, they make no effort to determine the nature of that so-called material by contemplating within themselves its contents; to them it's just [so much empirical] material and nothing more. Applying this kind of superficial, abstract, generalized treatment, they know nothing of the material either inwardly or concretely. There is a way of looking at things by categorizing them. Since, as far as the

method goes, it is no different from the method applied in the natural sciences, this would mean looking at the Buddhist canon in the same way that natural science looks at the material world. If we scientifically analyze the water in this cup, we end up with hydrogen and oxygen molecules, which are completely different from the original water; the original water is completely gone. When we think of how the Buddhist canon is being treated, we soon recognize that Buddhist research as it is presently being pursued is unmistakably burdened with the same method of research. But, when things turn out this way, I think it doesn't take much thought to realize what kind of results to expect.

The Buddha mār̥ga sought by our Shinran, that is, [the heritage of] our spiritual ancestors, the so-called two thousand five hundred to three thousand years of Buddhist history, is not like that. The Buddha mār̥ga is what each of us, as the ordinary unawakened being lost in delusion, must seek over and over again, until finally, we realize the attainment of the long-sought goal as a history-changing event in our lives.⁹ Our spiritual ancestors, with mind-at-one [with the Buddha], sought for that path, trod it with unwavering concentration, to create the history of the Buddha mār̥ga as a place of practice. Never once did our spiritual ancestors ever conceive of the history of the Buddha mār̥ga as some sort of evolutionary development starting from fundamental Buddhism and going to Theravada/Hīnayāna Buddhism and then to Mahāyāna Buddhism and Ekayāna Buddhism, or from jiriki Buddhism to tariki Buddhism. As far as our true and sincere involvement in the Buddha mār̥ga is concerned, the evolutionary view is a denial of the history of Buddhism. The true and sincere unfolding of Buddhist history is properly the historical process making Buddhas out of ordinary unawakened beings, that is, the historical process of bringing the Buddha mār̥ga to fulfilment. Out of a desire "to devote himself to the holy cause of Buddhism and to increase the spiritual welfare of all beings"¹⁰ is history thus made over a period of three thousand years by

⁹ "A history-changing event in our lives" renders Soga's term, *rekishi-teki jishō* 歴史的事証, lit., "the realization of a historic event."

¹⁰ From the opening passage of *The Life of Shinran Shōnin* (*Godenshō*, 1295), which describes Shinran, age nine, deciding to abandon the secular world for monastic life on Mount Hiei. For the translation used here, see D. T. Suzuki and Sasaki Gesshō, trans., "The Life of Shinran Shōnin" (1911), in D. T. Suzuki, *Collected Writings on Shin Buddhism* (Kyoto: Shinshū Ōtaniha, 1973).

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the countless Buddhas and bodhisattvas beginning with Śākyamuni who have trodden this path. I am sure my statement is not mistaken.

And so, when the modern Buddhist scholar asserts that Mahāyāna Buddhism was produced out of the theorization and mystification of Theravada/Hīnayāna Buddhism, this deprives the religion of the kind of factual, real life aspiration [whereby a person devotes himself totally to the resolution of the religious question]. If we were to think of a simple argument [to refute my claim], it would not be impossible for us to conjure up some argument [that would do so]. But, when we imagine the consequences of such a schema, there is no argument that we can make [that would justify] interrupting the three thousand years of Buddhist history. From the beginning, where there was a Buddhist congregation, there was Buddhist history so-called. Where there is no Buddhism, is not Buddhist history, as it were, simply a dream, a subjective notion? Of what possible significance would it be to create a history of Buddhism stripped of the fact of Buddhist experience? Truly, it is when Buddhism as the object of our investigation is made vivid by the experiences of one's very ancestors that the methodology of what we call Buddhist history is established. In other words, what we call Buddhism and what we call Buddhist history, which are respectively the object and the methodology, are one. This being the case, caught in the flow of time while transcending time, we refer to the former as Buddhist history while we call the latter Buddhism. These two are none other than the same phenomenon seen from two different perspectives.

To clarify what I mean by Buddhism, as an easy-to-understand example of what I mean, I have on numerous occasions introduced the problem of Nippon-seishin ("the Japanese spirit"), once known as Yamato-damashii, which is a slogan we hear chanted incessantly these days.¹¹ But where exactly do we locate this Nippon-seishin? As a country Japan is said to have come into existence with the reign of Emperor Jimmu (660–585 B.C.); that is, the history of Japan is said to begin with the ascension of Emperor Jimmu. But the real Japan does not begin with Emperor Jimmu. Although there is little so-called historical information on the period preceding Emperor Jimmu, prior to this founding of the nation by Emperor Jimmu, the origins of Japan go deep

¹¹ Around the time Soga wrote these words (1935), the notion of *Nippon seishin* 日本精神 was the centerpiece of the militarist and rightwing ideology.

[back into the past]. And it goes without saying that those inexhaustible sources even today gush forth uninterrupted.¹² It is here, in this unique historical fact truly and sincerely [presenting itself], that the Spirit of Japan (Nippon-seishin) is to be found. Now, to clarify the significance of the Spirit of Japan, one must go back before Emperor Jimmu as recorded in the legendary account of the *Kojiki*, for this is where you find the wellsprings of the Spirit of Japan. As to the chronology given in the *Kojiki*, whether one looks at its temporal or spatial aspects, it should strike one as a dubious account in that all the emperors reigned for such long periods of time and all ruled over such wide domains. It is like hearing a fantastic story. It may be fantastic, but we must verify the account, view it with reasonable doubt, in order to arrive at the hard facts. For I will not allow even a drop of doubt to be mixed in when it comes to historical fact. . . .

Once again turning our attention to the problem of Buddhism and Buddhist history, it has long been thought and said that Buddhism begins with Śākyamuni, but in my view the position accorded Śākyamuni would be exactly like the one accorded Emperor Jimmu. Generally speaking, there is no call for anyone to make radical statements such as this one, but if you give any thought to the matter I think you will arrive at a similar conclusion.

If we wish to truly understand Buddhism, we must look at the situation prior to Śākyamuni's arrival on the scene. For Śākyamuni to truly assume the role of the Buddha, Śākyamuni cannot merely be Śākyamuni the man, and yet as Śākyamuni the man he truly assumes the role of the Buddha Śākyamuni. Prior to Śākyamuni, there must have been countless living souls who assumed the role of Buddhas and were worshipped and revered as such, but what proof is there of this? Here we come upon an issue of central importance.

While the Jātaka stories of the previous lives of Śākyamuni abound in Mahāyāna Buddhism, they are also found in the Theravāda canon in considerable number. But are these to be considered merely simple tales as might be told to children? What significance do these stories

¹² The imagery of the inexhaustible wellspring gushing forth is a recurrent one in Soga's writings and draws its inspiration from the Earth-sprung Bodhisattva of the *Lotus Sutra*.

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hold? It might be well, I feel, to let our thoughts dwell on this matter at length.

In the *Avatamsaka Sutra* legend of Sudhana, relating the process of his spiritual search, at each place he visits he encounters many spiritual teachers—what can we surmise from this? In the revelation of the Original Gate in the *Lotus Sutra*, there are the earth-sprung bodhisattvas; the great earth splits open and out of it springs a stream of bodhisattvas infinite in number—what significance does this hold? Letting them engage our thoughts, what do these stories tell us? In the *Larger Sutra of Infinite Life*, there is the account of Amitābha Tathāgata who, though enjoying the stage of the highest fruit of awakening, takes the name of Dharmākara Bodhisattva to abide in the stage of causation [where he must work out his salvation]—what does this story tell us? Is there not in the offing an especially important problem that we should take time to ponder? Buddhism starts from Śākyamuni, the history of Buddhism starts from Śākyamuni—it is correct to say that Buddhist history so-called begins with Śākyamuni. However, the wellsprings of this Buddhism go back to even before the beginning of Buddhist history. Ever distant the source, ever extending its flow, might well describe this case. Only when our thoughts become one with the flow can we understand for the first time how distant is the source.

As to the Jātaka tales of Śākyamuni's previous lives in Mahāyāna Buddhism, such legends are found in the *Prajñāparamitā* and *Avatamsaka Sutra*s, but were all these legends composed after the Buddha's demise, as commonly accepted? Could it be that that such a vast collection of stories was produced in just a few hundred years after the Buddha's death? Or were those stories actually the traditions handed down for several tens of thousands of years before the Buddha? This is a matter we should deeply ponder. While it goes without saying that such pursuits apply to those who seek truly and sincerely to pursue the Buddha mārga, even for those who only casually wish to study Buddhist history as an academic study or who are doing empirical (materialistic) or intellectual research, I think we can say there is some value for them to let their thoughts dwell on these matters. Even were they to view them materialistically, I think they would agree they are materials of extremely high value. The vast, boundless world of the *Avatamsaka samādhi* has come down to us in the form of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, and I think it an extremely valid research topic to determine how many

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years after the Buddha's death the *Avatamsaka Sutra* literature was compiled, and I would also approve of studies to determine the dates of the *Larger Sutra of Infinite Life*, and I have no doubt in my mind that what Buddhist scholars are saying today is true. I know we have no right to stick our noses into their business. Ours, though, is not a problem of form, but a problem of content. To ignore the content while arguing about the form—that is like a caterpillar going round and round the rim of a potted plant; it goes around in circles, like the circle of transmigration, until, its life force spent, it dies, having accomplished nothing. This, at least, is what I think.

End of Lecture I.

TRANSLATED BY W. S. YOKOYAMA