

**Practice, Samādhi, Realization:
Three Innovative Interpretations
by Nishitani Keiji**

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This issue of the *Eastern Buddhist* is a memorial to Nishitani Keiji, an occasion to remember the man, his life, his thought. A memorial is meant to be a tribute to him, but in effect it is as much about us who memorialize, for it is a recollection of our being with him. Perhaps our memories expose us, myself included, more than they reveal him.

We all, I think, connect Nishitani Keiji to Zen. Before I had any experience with Zen, I envisioned it as a way to connect everyday bodily existence with philosophical reflection. My vision soon proved to be short of reality. My first experience with Zen practice, during a seven-day sesshin, shrank the entire world to a body of intense pain and left no room for philosophical thinking. On the other hand, my first readings of "Zen philosophy" were either baffling old Chinese anecdotes (kōan) or abstruse, highly abstract speculation (Nishida philosophy), both far removed from my everyday life. Later I tried to make the connection by spending days struggling to read an essay, "The Standpoint of Zen,"¹ at a time when I could read it only once removed, by translating it. When I first met the author of that essay, Professor Nishitani Keiji, at his home at the foot of Yoshida mountain in Kyoto in 1978, I began to understand that the connection between everyday existence and philosophical reflection cannot be contrived, but must be lived. Nishitani Sensei showed me this indirectly, by directing attention away from his life, to the matter of his thought.

¹ "Zen no tachiba." Published in translation in *Eastern Buddhist* xvii, 1 (Spring 1984), pp. 1-26.

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The connection between philosophical reflection and everyday activity is traditionally signified by the word "practice." This term has a complex history in western philosophy but often a simple connotation. Practice is the application of a principle or theory to a concrete activity. By practice we apply what we think to what we do. And what we do usually has a certain intent or goal. Through practice we become "good at" something; and something is practical if it is "good for" something else. In common usage, then, practice takes its meaning from something outside of practice: the theory or principle to be applied; the objective or goal to be attained. Furthermore, practice is understood as a kind of activity that only human beings can engage in, insofar as only humans are capable of willful intention.

Taking this understanding of practice for granted, I was immediately baffled when I read in an essay by Nishitani that clouds moving across the sky, water flowing, leaves falling, and blossoms scattering are all forms of practice. They are, more exactly, "forms of non-form," that is, of selflessness. To practice is to adopt the form of non-form as the form of the self.² Nishitani's text, *Religion and Nothingness* in English translation, formulates the point carefully. It does not present these examples of practice as an analogy, as if to say that when we truly practice, we are "like" moving clouds, flowing water, falling leaves, scattering blossoms. Such an analogy would compare, but at the same time differentiate between, human activities and natural occurrences. Rather, Nishitani suggests that their form and our form are in practice the same "form of non-form." Here again, the text does not simply repeat the Buddhist teaching that such natural phenomena in themselves are empty, devoid of *svabhāva* or self-subsistent being, nor does it say that by practicing we come to see the emptiness of things. True to the point he is making, Nishitani's language here makes no distinction between us and them; it posits no forms as things outside the self. It does use verbal parts of speech and focuses on activities in its examples: clouds moving, water flowing. In this respect it would seem to make some connection with the ordinary notion of practice, which after all is a kind of activity. But the activities in Nishitani's examples neither arise from a willful self nor are they directed toward

² *Shūkyō to wa nanika* (Tokyo, 1961), p. 220; *Religion and Nothingness*, translated by Jan Van Bragt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 200.

something else, and so they run counter to the usual instrumental understanding of what practice is. Clouds moving and water flowing are themselves without will and intent, and are not aimed at any goal.

Perhaps the discrepancy arises because we are trying to convey two different meanings with the same word, "practice." In his discussion, Nishitani is clarifying a passage by Hakuin, who in turn uses the cited examples in a comment about the occurrence of the word "practice" in the Heart Sutra: Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is engaged in the practice of deep *prajñāpāramitā*. The relevant word is 行 (*gyō* in Japanese; *hsing* in Chinese), a term literally meaning "going" that is often translated as practice in Sino-Japanese Buddhist texts. The opening passage of the Heart Sutra speaks of Avalokiteśvara "moving in the deep course of the Wisdom which has gone beyond," as Edward Conze literally translates the Sanskrit text.³ Conze equates this practicing with contemplating emptiness or nirvana. To be sure, the Bodhisattva is compassionate and does not enter final nirvana, but Conze's reading suggests that to be engaged in the practice of this wisdom is already to realize nirvana. Although Nishitani refers neither to the Sanskrit text nor to Conze's interpretation, he too suggests a sense of practice that includes realization. Hence in his interpretation of the opening of the Heart Sutra he can cite passages by Dōgen that play upon the simultaneity of practice and realization (修證 *shushō*). It would appear, then, that Nishitani's notion of 行 is confined to some very particular instances and hardly represents the kind of practices that are applications of a theory or are directed toward a goal.

In fact, many Buddhist texts use the term 行 to denote a practical activity or exercise engaged in by a person (or personified being) in order to gain something other than the activity itself. Thus many traditional occurrences of the word seem to have the instrumental sense of the English word "practice" that is conveyed by the modern Japanese term 実践 *jissen*. Nishitani himself initiates the discussion of the standpoint of practice earlier in his book by using the terms 実践 and 行 interchangeably.⁴ His language there at first suggests a method to "get di-

³ Edward Conze, *Buddhist Wisdom Books* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1958), p. 77.

⁴ *Religion and Nothingness*, pp. 120–2; *Shūkyō to wa nanika*, pp. 137–8. Jan Van Bragt's revised translation usually renders 行 as "observance," to distinguish it from 実践, "praxis"; see his glossary, p. 300. On page 121 of the translation, however, where

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rectly in touch with the reality of things.” He then raises the question of how such a method or practice could be possible as long as it involves a [willful] subject trying to reach an objective world, or as long as its theory reduces both of these to merely material or merely ideal existence. He then presents the possibility of non-instrumental practice, an “action of non-action,” that opens “a field where things would become manifest in their suchness.” But Nishitani is not contrasting different kinds of practices and determining which of them affords access to the reality of things. Rather he proposes that there is a “field” (場 *ba*) wherein all things *and* practices become manifest as they are, and this he calls the “field of emptiness.” He implies that tacit metaphysical presuppositions such as the subjectivity, objectivity, materialism or idealism of self and things are what determine our understanding of activity or practice, even social praxis. Hence, it seems to me, Nishitani is talking not about two different kinds of practice but about various understandings of practice, one of which presents (but does not represent) religious exercises and clouds moving, or water flowing, in the same light.⁵

Nishitani’s interpretation of religious practice has a precedent not only in Hakuin’s comment but also in statements by Dōgen that Nishitani does not mention. In the *Sansuikyō* chapter of *Shōbōgenzō*, for example, Dōgen writes that “because water practices and confirms water, there is a study where water expounds water” (水の水を修證するゆえに、水の水を道着する参究あり). In this passage, Dōgen’s word for practice is the first half of his famous compound 修證 “practice-confirm” or “practice-realize,” and so it already indicates an understanding of practice that does not posit a separate goal. Confirmation/realization is already incorporated in practice. Indeed this notion of non-dual cultivation can be traced back to early Ch’an texts in China, alongside texts that clearly retain a goal-oriented sense of religious practices.⁶

Nishitani’s text shifts from 実践 to 行, Van Bragt retains “praxis” for both.

⁵ I have elaborated on the non-representational and non-instrumental view of practice in an earlier article, “The Hermeneutics of Practice in Dōgen and Francis of Assisi,” *Eastern Buddhist* xiv, 2 (Autumn 1981), pp. 30–32.

⁶ For a penetrating analysis of Dōgen’s conceptual heritage and of problems concerning the description of the non-dual Ch’an dharma that transcends the distinction between theory and cultivation, see Carl Bielefeldt, *Dōgen’s Manuals of Zen Meditation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), especially pp. 161–63.

Yet it is still startling to read in Dōgen of water practicing-confirming itself, for water is usually represented as a substance incapable of self-cultivation. It is incapable of anything except being water, by virtue of all other things—and perhaps that is Dōgen's point. Similarly, Nishitani may be using Hakuin's examples of the formless forms of practice to give our expectations a jolt. With these precedents in mind, we see that there is nothing original in Nishitani's extension of practice to forms not ordinarily covered by this concept. What is innovative in Nishitani's exposition is the view that the different senses of practice must be clarified in terms of the respective fields in which they emerge, and that the standpoint of emptiness provides the field wherein all others, and all senses of practice, become manifest for what they are.

Nishitani's exposition can throw light on many questions of practice that he does not expressly consider. Indeed, his mention of both Hakuin and Dōgen in the same context clarifies a basis common to two Zen figures whose views of practice are usually contrasted with one another. In the usual interpretation, Hakuin reviles mere sitting in zazen and insists on the breakthrough of *kenshō*, seeing one's true nature; whereas Dōgen is the champion of *shikantaza*, just sitting, with no mind or intention to gain enlightenment. Which, one may ask, is the true practice of Zen? Nishitani's text displaces this question by pointing out the quality of practice common to both Hakuin and Dōgen, the quality we might call non-contrivance. For neither is practice (行) to be taken as a form contrived by the self. Stepping beyond the boundaries of the Zen tradition, I wonder whether one might revisit the meaning of Shinran's denial of practice in light of Nishitani's emphasis. Shinran denies the efficacy of any practice that is self-motivated, and so raises questions about what sort of practice the recitation of the *nembutsu* is, if it can be called practice at all. For Shinran, only the enlightened mind of the Buddha has saving power; one practices to no avail. In general, the Pure Land Buddhist way of "other power" (他力 *tariki*) is sharply contrasted with Zen's way of "self-power" (自力 *jiriki*). Notwithstanding the historical consequences of this perceived difference, the quality of non-contrivance suggested by Nishitani's interpretation would seem to provide a common ground for understanding both ways, specifically both Shinran's denial and Dōgen's and Hakuin's advocacy of practice. I think this would be an "ecumenical" avenue worth exploring. The question to be asked of

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both sides is: Who practices? Who recites the *nembutsu*? Who practices zazen? Nishitani's interpretation again displaces this question by implying that self is not foremost the practitioner but rather what is practiced.

Practice involves the question not only of who practices and what is practiced, but also of the place of practice. Here Nishitani's language directs our attention from the physical location of practice to its place in the scheme of things. This ontological place he also calls the place of "self-joyous samādhi," invoking Dōgen's use of a Yogācāra term. Nishitani's understanding of *samādhi* in general is another example of his innovative thinking.

Samādhi is a practice central to Buddhism. The term actually applies to a large number of different practices that have to do with mental concentration. It is common to think of all the various samādhi as states of mind, sometimes as trance states. Traditional descriptions in both the literature of Buddhism and pre-Buddhist Yoga support this understanding. The Buddha sitting under the Bodhi tree is said to have progressed through four such states, technically *dhyānas*, immediately before his enlightenment, and numerous arhats, bodhisattvas and masters are depicted as entering one samādhi or another.

It is true that many descriptions make it difficult to think of someone, some self, as being in a particular state. In the third dhyāna of the Buddha's progression, for example, both self-consciousness and concentration on external objects have disappeared; and in the fourth dhyāna there is said to be no trace of self at all. The fourth state is thus aptly called the body of the Tathāgata, but it is also considered a state of equanimity, which in some sense still implies a mental state. If there is no self in such states, the implication is that at least there is some mind involved. Philosophically, that assumption also turns out to be problematic in some literature, for the disappearance of any consciousness directed to self or things would seem to rule out speaking of a mind. There is even a state of "cessation," whose attainment (*nirodhasamāpatti*) in an eighth and final dhyāna eliminates all mental functions.⁷ Some texts depict the Buddha attaining this state before his

⁷ For an analysis of problems related to the "attainment of cessation," see the investigation of Paul J. Griffiths, *On Being Mindless* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1986). That this thorough study remains uncritically bound to a language of "altered states of consciousness" is an indication of how radical and revealing Nishitani's refor-

parinirvana, although they question the value of this and other trance states for the attainment of liberation. Notwithstanding these difficulties, however, the traditional descriptions, particularly when read in contemporary translations, overwhelmingly give the impression that the central practice of samādhi in its various forms refers to someone entering a mental state of concentration, meditation, or trance. This impression is not diminished by the Buddhist schemes that place samādhi as the eighth part of the eightfold path to liberation, or as the fifth *pāramitā* or perfection. There too samādhi seems to refer primarily to a state of mind, enjoyed by beings with mental capacity.

It is therefore somewhat startling to read in Nishitani's *Religion and Nothingness* of burning fire being in its fire-samādhi, or of a falling leaf, flying bird, or swimming fish, as manifestations of "samādhi-being."⁸ Samādhi is not ordinarily attributed to things like fire, birds, and fish. Nishitani's text softens the surprise a bit by playing on the traditional Sino-Japanese character for samādhi, 定 *jō*. The Japanese verbal compound 定まる (*sadamaru*) has the meaning of being settled in a position. For Nishitani this meaning naturally suggests being gathered together or concentrated, not scattered, as the mind would be in a state of samādhi. The meanings associated with the character 定 thus allow Nishitani to interpret a state of mind as a state of being. Samādhi-being is the mode of being or form of something as it is, determining it as the definite (定まった) thing it uniquely is. Accordingly, it designates the "sheer definition (定義 *teigi*) of the selfness of a thing."⁹

There are three points to notice regarding Nishitani's notion of samādhi-being. First is the active character of his examples: a fire burning, a leaf falling, a fish swimming, a bird flying, all exemplify things in activity. A thing's "being settled in its own position" paradoxically takes the form of the distinctive activity of the thing; it "is" itself by "doing" something. Secondly, what a definite thing does, it does not do to itself, and thus it can be itself. Fire does not burn fire and therefore it can burn other things and be fire. This formulation alludes to the *soku-hi* 即非 logic made famous by D. T. Suzuki, and would seem to apply only to activities that are expressed by transitive verbs

mulation of samādhi is.

⁸ *Religion and Nothingness*, pp. 128; 139; *Shūkyō to wa nanika*, pp. 145, 157.

⁹ *Religion and Nothingness*, p. 129; *Shūkyō to wa nanika*, p. 146.

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such as burn. Despite this grammatical delimitation that neither Suzuki nor Nishitani take into account, the point here is that a thing can be itself only in interdependence with other things, and can be defined only in reference to other things. Nishitani's examples suggest therefore that a thing in its samādhi-being, its "own home-ground," is neither settled in a static position nor does it exist independently "in-itself". This second point connects Nishitani's notion to samādhi as the concentrated state in which ego or self is forgotten, although he emphasizes that samādhi is an ontological concept and not simply a psychological one.¹⁰ Thirdly, this active state of being can define the true (formless) form of things because it includes the full range of their manifestations. Thus, for example, the psychological self is not always concentrated, but "no matter how dispersed the conscious self is, its self as it is in itself is ever in samādhi," or more precisely, "that dispersed mode of being, such as it is, is samādhi."¹¹ Hence Nishitani thinks of samādhi not as a state of mind that one enters into, as if from the outside, but as the state of being that allows all psychological states of mind to manifest themselves. One cannot "enter" that within which one already is. On the other hand, many Zen texts and sermons suggest that the self actually emerges from a state of samādhi, and that one breaks "out of" samādhi. But Nishitani's language seems to say that both "entering into" and "breaking out of" occur within one's samādhi-being.

Are there precedents to Nishitani's notion of samādhi-being within Buddhist literature? D. T. Suzuki cites an example which could be taken to illustrate the third point above. Around 723 C.E., Zen Master Tai-yung visits Master Chih-huang, who is renowned for his ability to enter into a samādhi. Yung questions Huang:

"At the time of such entrances, is it supposed that your consciousness still continues, or that you are in a state of unconsciousness? If your consciousness still continues, all sentient beings are endowed with consciousness and can enter into a samādhi like yourself. If, on the other hand, you are in

¹⁰ I use the term "ontological" guardedly; it covers not only Nishitani's "field of beings" but also the fields of nihility and of emptiness.

¹¹ *Religion and Nothingness*, p. 165; *Shūkyō to wa nanika*, p. 185.

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a state of unconsciousness, plants and rocks can enter into a samādhi.”

Hung replies: “When I enter into a samādhi, I am not conscious of either condition.”

Yung says: “If you are not conscious of either condition, this is abiding in eternal samādhi, and there can be neither entering into a samādhi nor rising out of it.”¹²

This passage continues to speak of Buddha-nature as all-inclusive, and Suzuki himself uses it to make the point that meditation must be understood as non-dual, not a means to the end of emancipation. This point ties in with the non-instrumental view of practice mentioned above, but I think this dialogue also undermines the prevalent notion of samādhi as a state of mind that one can enter and exit. To be sure, the term 入定 (*nyūjō*), or entering samādhi, does occur in Buddhist texts, but there are other usages of 入 that might better be rendered “to be enlightened to,” such as 入法界, enlightened to the *dharmadhātu*, where this last term indicates the whole universe in which we already are.¹³ This sort of example might therefore serve as textual evidence for the third part of Nishitani's interpretation of samādhi. There is nothing new in the second point concerning the interdependence and selflessness of things, or the first point defining things in terms of activities; both of these points are amply illustrated in Zen dialogues and kōan, among other Buddhist texts. What is new, to my knowledge, is the designation “samādhi-being” and the ontological shift it occasions.

Nishitani's neologism is more than a metaphoric extension of a state of mental concentration in which self is forgotten and the practitioner is “like” a fire burning, a fish swimming, a leaf falling. Presumably, whenever we talk about samādhi, we are still referring to a state or states of mind cultivated by people (or personifications). I think that Nishitani's innovative term “samādhi-being” challenges this presump-

¹² D.T. Suzuki, *The Zen Doctrine of No Mind* (London: Rider and Company, 1969), pp. 34–35. I have not been able to locate this story in other sources.

¹³ An example of a shift from the meaning of “enter” to that of “be enlightened to” in the context of samādhi can be found in a Northern Ch'an School document translated by John McRae in his *The Northern School and the Formation of Early Ch'an Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), pp. 186–87.

tion by exposing the metaphysical priority that underlies it. We naturally presume that first of all there exist people, or representations of people, who subsequently achieve a certain state of mind. That transitory state might then be compared to things that we experience—a fire burning, a leaf falling, etc. Nishitani would consider this sort of description an objectification, a kind of representational thinking from a particular and limited standpoint. There is no reason not to presume instead that a samādhi is a be-ing and that people and other things are manifestations of that be-ing. Nishitani's "samādhi-being" or "position" is meant to represent, in his own words, "the non-objectifiable mode of being of a thing as it is in itself."¹⁴ In effect, his terms represent this by *not* representing things as self-sufficient identities, that is, by unsettling beings from their place in a substantialist metaphysics, and by unsettling our expectation that samādhi is foremost a psychological state. Fire too is "in" samādhi by burning, but not burning itself, i.e., by not being fire.

Nishitani applies his ontological understanding of samādhi particularly to passages from various fascicles of Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō*. He identifies Dōgen's "Samādhi that is the King of Samādhis" with samādhi-being, and again implies that this King Samādhi refers not primarily to a mental state cultivated by sitting practice but rather to the activity of the actual world. Dōgen himself expressly identifies the King of Samādhis as sitting crosslegged. It is easy to read his text simply as an exhortation to practice singleminded "crosslegged sitting" to the exclusion of all else. The impression that even Dōgen considers this King of Samādhis a state of mind is strengthened when he writes that at the very time of sitting you should exhaustively examine (参究すべし) various matters, and that "if you wish to realize samādhi, if you wish to enter samādhi, put all your wandering thoughts and various discords and disorders to rest. Practice in this way and you enter into realization of the King of Samādhis Samādhi."¹⁵ It is true that this impression is challenged by other statements in the text, that there is a difference between mind sitting, body sitting, and sitting with body and mind cast off, for example. And Dōgen implies an ontological under-

¹⁴ *Religion and Nothingness*, p. 189; *Shakyō to wa nanika*, p. 210.

¹⁵ *Shōbōgenzō Sammai Ō Sammai*, translated as "The King of Samādhis Samādhi" by Norman Waddell & Abe Masao, *Eastern Buddhist* vii, 1 (May 1974), pp. 118, 121.

standing in his statements that this crosslegged sitting is a total realm 盡界 (hence not a particular psychological state), and is the body of suchness, the mind of suchness, the buddhas and patriarchs in their suchness, etc. (直身、直心、直仏祖). But Nishitani undermines the psychological interpretation more clearly in his mention of "crosslegging the King Samādhi" in which there is "neither mind nor thing nor Buddha."¹⁶ To support his reading further, he might also have referred to Dōgen's *Kaiin zammai*, "Ocean Reflection Samādhi," whose opening statement might be translated: "All the buddhas and patriarchs, just as they are, are without fail the ocean-reflection-samādhi."¹⁷ Thus there clearly are precedents to Nishitani's ontological interpretation of a Buddhist practice often taken to be simply a matter of mental concentration. Nishitani's neologism "samādhi-being" articulates this interpretation in modern terms and presses us to examine our own psychologistic assumptions in translating certain texts. I think that it would be fruitful for scholars to explore further whether and where the ontological understanding of samādhi helps to clarify Buddhist texts and practices.

Consonant with Nishitani's interpretations of practice and samādhi is his view of realization. In the context of discussions of Buddhist practice, we often take "realization" to mean the awakening of the practitioner, an achievement of the individual or at least something that happens to him or her. Nishitani subverts this usual impression in the first chapter of his book. There he is concerned with explaining his approach to understanding religion, an approach in terms of the "self-awareness of reality" (実存の自覚). By this he means "both our becoming aware of reality and, at the same time, the reality realizing itself in our awareness."¹⁸ Writing in Japanese, he draws upon the dual meaning of the English "realize" (to actualize and to understand), in order to clarify his point. When we understand something in Nishitani's sense, we appropriate it such that it realizes (actualizes) itself in us. On

¹⁶ *Religion and Nothingness*, p. 189; *Shūkyō to wa nanika*, p. 211.

¹⁷ Hee-Jin Kim emphasizes the ontological dimension even more in his translation: "The manner in which buddhas and ancestors exist is necessarily ocean-reflection samādhi." He notes that "samādhi in Dōgen's thought is preeminently ontological and soteriological, not psychological." See his *Flowers of Emptiness: Selections from Dōgen's Shōbōgenzō* (Lewiston/Queenston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1985), pp. 167, 171.

¹⁸ *Religion and Nothingness*, p. 5; *Shūkyō to wa nanika*, pp. 8-9.

the other hand, Nishitani would not say that we who appropriate are prior and privileged subjects on whom reality is dependent. He is not advocating philosophical idealism. Quite the contrary: subjectivity is realized in one way through the realization of its nihility. The term for “realization” here, 自覚, primarily connotes awakening and recognition. But Nishitani adds the second sense when he writes that “realization of the self itself” (自己自身の自覚) involves *becoming* that nihility, “and in so doing becom[ing] aware of itself from the limits of self-existence.”¹⁹ Subjectivity is actualized in this kind of radical questioning. Such existential (実存的) questions return to reality our attempt to understand religion, from Nishitani’s perspective.²⁰

Nishitani takes up the theme of the self-realization of reality again when he speaks of samādhi-being and practice. Things are “manifest in their suchness,” and “realize themselves nonobjectively” in their samādhi-being.²¹ It is not that they are manifest to a subjective self, for Nishitani could as easily say that self is manifest to things. Later he quotes Dōgen’s famous line from the *Genjōkōan*: “To forget one’s self is to be confirmed by all dharmas.”²² In an ontology where “all things come forward and practice and confirm (修證) the self,” neither the subjective self nor objective reality are recognized. Nishitani calls this place the point where the “world worlds,” alluding to Heidegger’s phrase that undermines any idealism or realism. He might also have mentioned Dōgen’s water that practices-realizes 修證 [itself as] water. And doubtlessly, his talk of the self-awareness (or self-realization) of reality reflects the philosophy of his teacher, Nishida, who wrote of a self-aware (自覚的) place and world. Nishitani’s view once again has precedents. But his interpretation is distinctive for its power to expose subjectivist assumptions about the meaning of religious realization.

¹⁹ *Religion and Nothingness*, pp. 16–17; *Shūkyō to wa nanika*, pp. 22–23.

²⁰ Despite his existential interests, Nishitani does not locate the essence of religion in “the individual’s experience,” as his critic Paul Griffiths would have it (“On the Possible Future of the Buddhist-Christian Interaction,” in *Japanese Buddhism*, ed. Minoru Kiyota, Tokyo/Los Angeles: Buddhist Books International, 1987, p. 155). On the contrary, Nishitani’s view of realization suggests a critique of subjectivistic and experiential reductions of religion. If we are to follow Griffiths’ agenda and test the truth of Nishitani’s propositions, we need first to pay heed to the meaning of their terms.

²¹ *Religion and Nothingness*, p. 163; *Shūkyō to wa nanika*, p. 183.

²² *Religion and Nothingness*, p. 199; *Shūkyō to wa nanika*, p. 219.

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In its own way, his philosophy contains parallels to contemporary western critiques of psychologism and subjectivity. Yet unlike them he holds that existential concerns, not conceptual dead-ends, give rise to the philosophically important questions. These questions then must be returned to the reality of pressing personal issues if the subject is to be truly negated.

Nishitani Keiji, as I knew him, was a man who never appeared pressed for time. He took things as they came, moment by moment. In seemingly endless hours of discussion with him, he never made me feel as if my questions were unwelcome. What scant understanding of his notion of "the absolute present" I have, I have from sitting in his presence. To speak of him is to speak of the past, but not simply because he has passed away. He always turned the talk away from himself, to the issue at hand. If my questions were existential, he returned them to me; if they were academic, he turned them into existential questions. What could be less fitting a tribute to the selflessness I experienced in him than a eulogy of his person.