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as the ultimate concern, Nishitani Sensei saw in Nishida philosophy that there was a place to which one should advance by taking that one more step that was not there to take. He even said that Nishida who was, after all, his teacher, was "intimidating, even now." I think that the interpretation that went one step beyond his teacher and the feeling that his teacher was intimidating were for Sensei one and the same.

In his biography of Abbot Suger of the Abbey of Sainte Denis, Panofsky, who is known for his lectures on "Iconology," celebrates those great persons of small physique who stand out in history. Nishitani Sensei would probably fall into that category. Yet that seems somehow inappropriate, for Sensei's physique, which is filled with his ideas about "emptiness" and filled with spirit, has something about it that goes beyond large and small. There is a phrase, "A small fish swallows a large fish." Sensei was a small fish that completely swallowed a larger fish.

Would he demand of us that we should go on and swallow this small fish? When a fish like me attempts such a thing, however, I can see already in its eyes the large bones, inedible however the fish is cooked, stuck in my throat.

A Tenacious Power of Thinking

Ôkochi Ryōgi

Toward the end of summer in 1973 Professor Nishitani stopped over in Heidelberg to visit his friend Professor Gadamer. He stayed in the guest room of the research institute, which was next door to where I happened to be residing.

One night the head of the institute, Mr. Fischer-Barnicol, invited us to his home for dinner. I drove Sensei to the house, which was in the suburbs. Mrs. Fischer-Barnicol served us a truly delicious meal, complemented by a fine German wine. Sensei seemed quite contented, and as for me, with the wonderful food, wine, and discussions that fluttered over them, it was a thoroughly enjoyable evening.

After dinner, we returned with wine glasses in hand to the living room, where the topic was shifted to difficult problems of philosophy and religion. This was only natural, since that was no doubt one of the main reasons for the dinner with Sensei. I participated in the discussions, but as the hours passed I

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became faced with a hard decision: whether in view of the drive back I should abandon the delicious wine, switch to water, and remain until the evening ended, or resist the pull of the exceptional company and fine wine and leave early. Since most of the people present were still in their thirties or forties, it would not be surprising if they went on deep into the night, perhaps even until dawn. As for Sensei, although he had already turned seventy, I had no doubt he would stand up to the questions of the younger people present and would be quite stimulated by them. Since I had business to attend to the next morning, I decided, with regret, to leave early.

Toward morning, I thought that I heard Sensei going into the next room. I arose a little after eight o'clock and was about to leave the institute to begin my usual daily schedule when I met Mr. and Mrs. Fischer-Barnicol coming in the door. I could tell from their faces that they obviously had not had a wink of sleep. The words that Mrs. Fischer-Barnicol uttered in a disheartened and astonished voice reverberate in my ears just as though it was yesterday: "Der Alte macht uns Jungen kaputt!" (That old man does us young people in!)"

The reason why the experience of that night has left such a strong impression on me is not merely because Sensei was so fond of discussing points of philosophy, nor because his mental and physical strength was so much greater than that of the people almost half his age, nor because he could carry on such discussions in English or German just as well as, perhaps better than, in Japanese, although any one of those reasons certainly warrants our admiration. It was rather because of the astonishment and awe I felt at the tenacity of Sensei's power of thinking. He was able to advance his thinking two or three steps beyond the point at which an ordinary person would stop. This is evident to anyone who has an opportunity to read his books. But I was privileged on frequent occasions to have been able to experience this extraordinary quality of his thinking at first hand. I would like to offer just one of those experiences by way of remembering him.

I am not certain whether it was when I was an undergraduate or after I was in graduate school, but I once attended a class Sensei gave in which we read Heidegger's "Letter on 'Humanism'." I have forgotten what the particular issue was at the time, but Sensei read a certain passage in the text in a way that seemed to me grammatically incorrect. With the intention of pointing out the mistake, I, a student whose knowledge of German did not extend much beyond grammar, presumptuously spoke up and said, "Sensei, shouldn't that be read this way?" He thought about it for a moment, and then said, "Umm. It could be read in that way too. But I think the way that I read it also possible." I persisted, and as there was of course no reason for Sensei to adopt my reasoning, that was how the matter ended on that day. But the following week, and again the week after, Sensei took up the problematic passage and

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never tired of examining my “grammatical” interpretation and comparing it with what was probably his own “philosophical” understanding. He was placing himself into the indecisive and unsettled state of mind experienced by a student like me at the places in the text about which I felt the least confident, and he was examining the problem from that vantage point. What I wish to stress here is the veritable awe I developed for that tenacity which enabled Sensei to endure being in a state of indecision and yet continue to advance his thinking.

There is little doubt that Sensei’s life was rooted in the Zen which he had long studied and which ultimately colored his way of thinking. This super-logical, so to speak, and practical Zen experience must have given rise to that marvelous tenacious quality of his thinking. In a sense, it is perhaps meaningless to speculate that if he had followed the path of Shinran or of Christ the nature of his thinking would have developed along different lines. I personally think that the thought he did articulate in his writings, while it was rooted in Zen, also embraced Christianity, Pure Land teachings, nihilism, and natural science, as well as any subject deserving to be radically questioned, and sought, moreover, to go beyond them.

“A citizen of the cosmos?—ridiculous!”

Graham Parkes

“If you’d like to pay him a visit, I’ll telephone today and you can probably see him before you leave for Hokkaido.” I had mentioned to Professor Takeichi, who had invited me to present a paper in Kyoto on my first visit to Japan in 1983, that I was interested in Nishitani Sensei’s work, but I had hardly expected that a meeting could be arranged so easily. When I saw him again later that afternoon he informed me that everything was set: I was to present myself at Nishitani’s home the following evening.

Having been enchanted by an earlier stroll through the neighborhood around the Yoshida hill, I had set off early to allow time for a leisurely walk through those fascinating streets that bend somewhat between intersections, causing many of the resulting angles to be anything but right. Knowing enough about the way addresses in Japan work not to believe that “#1 Yoshida” would be of much help, I was hardly surprised to find that following the directions I had taken such care to memorize was not bringing me to