

## THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

A few tears rolled down his cheeks as we shook hands to say goodbye. Perhaps he knew this would be the last time we would be meeting in this life. He was still waving his hand, even as our taxi pulled into the distance.

I hope someone will help him home, I thought to myself.

### Talks on the *Shōbōgenzō*

Sasaki Tōru

Professor Nishitani's talks on Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* appeared serially between the years 1966–1979 in a small Christian magazine named *Kyōdai*, published in Nishinomiya near Kobe. The talks had been given over a period of many years at the International Institute for Japan Studies in Nishinomiya. I was still in graduate school when I was given the task of transcribing the tapes of the talks and editing them for publication. It was no easy task to turn Professor Nishitani's often rambling contemplations into written form, but the long hours it took me to complete the work—more than ten times the actual speaking time—was a precious learning opportunity for me. The talks are based on Dōgen's text, but they encompass a wide range of other subjects such as the Mahayana foundations of Dōgen's thought, Western philosophy, and Christianity. The deep understanding Sensei conveys throughout the talks, spanning freely both East and West, past and present, is vitally informed by his entire being, such that one can perceive a firm conviction in even the simplest of expressions. I found even more marvelous that even though I reread the manuscript versions many times, each reading would bring a fresh, new impression.

So not only did I have the privilege of listening to Sensei's talks in person at the Institute, I also had an opportunity to study them in depth by listening to the recordings of the talks over and over again.

Nishitani Sensei told me that the invention of the tape recorder had made life much more difficult for him. Whenever he gave a lecture—and he gave many—his words would be recorded for eventual transcription and publication. Unless he himself took the time to revise the manuscript when the tape had been transcribed, it would end up in print just as it was. So it seemed to me that Sensei could not have been overly happy at the prospect of a task such as this, which promised to be particularly difficult. Of course I did what I could with dictionaries and other reference materials, but when something

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was still unclear, I had to go and ask Sensei directly.

One of the main problems I encountered was the discrepancy which often exists between the spoken and the written word. When I would write down a passage just as he uttered it, the meaning would sometimes be rather difficult to understand or else sound unnatural. I read and reread Sensei's writings and tried very hard to grasp his ideas and style to the point where I could say, "Sensei would probably express it this way." I tried my best to convey something of the relaxed atmosphere in which the talks had been given.

As a rule, the talks at the Institute began at about three o'clock in the afternoon and were followed by an evening meal. Since it was well over a hour by train back to Kyoto where Sensei lived, he would occasionally spend the night at the Institute. On nights when he did not stay over, I would sometimes accompany him part of the way on the train. At such times, I heard him discourse on many extremely interesting subjects. Sometimes the talk would continue even after we reached the transfer station and, rather than have it end in midstream, I would stand on the platform listening to Sensei finish his line of thought.

Once, Sensei left the Institute before me to return home. When I went out into the vestibule of the Institute, I found my shoes were gone. Everyone agreed that Professor Nishitani must have worn them home. When I called his house, it turned out that was in fact what had happened. Without noticing, he had simply put on the shoes that the person who saw him out had set down for him.

More than one person has remarked on the difficulty of getting one of Nishitani's books into print. It was quite an accomplishment even to proceed as far as galley proofs. In his later years, things became a little easier, but even so, *Zen no Tachiba*, published in 1986, took two years after the first proofs appeared. Since the *Shōbōgenzō* talks were a transcription, and edited by someone else, I was doubtful about receiving his permission to publish them at all.

On one of my visits to his house, however, Sensei, who was in the habit of chatting a little before going into more important topics, greeted me and said straight off that he had something to ask me. His publisher Chikuma Shobō had asked him to be sure to tell me that he wanted me to revise his talks on *Shōbōgenzō* for publication. I felt a strange mixture of astonishment, joy, and uneasiness. I said that I would be glad to undertake it, but felt obliged to warn that the style of such a work would end up being very difficult from his own. Sensei laughed and said that he could not spare the time necessary to revise it himself.

I telephoned Chikuma Shobō to find out more of the details. Since it had long been my desire to get more—even one volume more—of Sensei's writings

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out to the public, and to do this while Sensei was still healthy, I sent the publisher a prompt reply of acceptance. Before long, I was listening to what were sometimes very old tapes, and began the work of editing and revising the talks. They dealt with Dōgen's life, and the *Bendōwa*, *Genjōkōan*, *Ikka Myōju* (One Bright Pearl), and *Busshō* (Buddha-nature) chapters of *Shōbōgenzō*.

The first and second volumes of the work, which was titled *Shōbōgenzō Kōwa* (Talks on the *Shōbōgenzō*), were published in March of 1987, and the third and fourth volumes in July of 1989. Just after the last two volumes appeared, I paid a visit, for the first time in a long while, to Sensei's home. He had been in a traffic accident, sideswiped by a small truck. And, as he was in his late eighties, the injury he sustained turned out to be unexpectedly serious. He was using a cane to get around even inside the house, yet the color in his face seemed so healthy that he looked much younger than his years.

Sensei would sometimes inscribe his books for friends and students. He took *Shōbōgenzō Kōwa* in his hand, pondering as though he were gazing at the innermost recesses of his heart, and then wrote on the inside cover, "Shōbōgenzō Kōwa, volume three. Owned by Mr. Sasaki. Revised by Layman Nishitani Keiji." I started on my way home, deeply grateful for Sensei's kindness, turning the meaning of his words over and over in my mind.

**“Sitting on a high, bare mountain peak  
overlooking a wide vista”**

**Eberhard Scheiffele**

It was clear from the beginning to the German translator of *Shūkyō to wa nanika?*, Frau Fischer-Barnicol, as well as to the publisher, that a translation of the English translation of such a difficult Japanese text would be bound to diverge from the original in unforeseeable ways. And so the author was asked to give the German version a careful reading, with the help of a native German speaker as a collaborator. Professor Takeichi of the Philosophy Department at Kyoto University recommended me. It was thanks to this coincidence that I had the opportunity to get to know the unique human being that was Nishitani Keiji—one of the most fortunate strokes of luck in my entire life. "I shall not look upon his like again!"