

## THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

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!"

## REMINISCENCES

Before and after our work, and also during the breaks, we would talk. The relaxed way in which he would in conversation accommodate himself to the other person, whom he would treat more or less as an equal, and the way he would every now and then take the interlocutor quite into his confidence, had something compellingly humane about it. It had the effect of making one forget the differences in heritage, intellectual ability, and even in age. I trust that the following excerpts from my diary will convey something of the sovereign nature of the man, of his good-heartedness, his humor, his energetic *Gelassenheit*.

28.VII.78

After a brief conversation about the ancient province of Kaga, where both Professor Nishitani and his mentor Nishida hail from, we get down to business. The English "awareness," for example, captures what is meant by the original Japanese term better than does the German *Bewußtsein*. And yet how is one to express in German the distinction between "consciousness" and "awareness"? There is certainly a relation between "awareness" and Goethe's neologism *Gewahrnis*, which I came across in one of his essays on natural science, but the term never gained general currency.

26.V.79

In the study, surrounded by of piles of books and collections of small stones brought back from his walks on the nearby hill of Yoshida. Above a tower of books, in a frame, is a dedicatory poem by Heidegger:

4 April 1972

To the songs and thoughts there blooms unicity:  
The mutual owing of sudden suggestion  
from the darkness of fate.

I ask: "Is that a poem?" The response: "For Heidegger it was."

During one of our breaks I read in Dürkheim's book *Hara*: a Japanese visitor to Germany in 1938, on hearing the exhortation "Stomach in, chest out!" said, "A people like this can't have long to go"!

19.VI.79

Sensei says that when he was a student in Kyoto he often longed for the Tokyo of the time before the great earthquake. Nowadays there was nothing in Tokyo that reminded him of his childhood any more. He wondered whether that was something specific for "historical" thinking.

"The good fortune of Europe," he said, "is its capacity for rejuvenation, renewals, renaissances."

## THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

3.VII.79

During one of our breaks, we discussed problems of hermeneutics. I search for words for this face.

“Bald”?—“open”!  
Ears: wide open to  
Emptiness.  
The eyebrows: power of the earth.  
Dante’s nose.  
The profile: sharp, softened  
by the narrow, *red* lips of the old man.  
The reflective wonder, as when  
turned to the side, he converses  
with a cigarette between his fingers.  
Suddenly laughing like a child,  
“without a sound.”

24.IX.79

On the difficulty of the concept of “the subject.” In Paul Tillich: “the ego-self.” For Nishitani: instead of the “I”—: “the self.”

16.X.79

Invited to dinner again. His wife, already eighty years old: in serving the food, how nimbly she kneels on the tatami—and how quickly she then stands up again!

On the popularity of Yoshitsune, Saigo Takamori, whose statue stands in Ueno Park.

A problem in translation: *ba*. According to the context: place, standpoint, level, plane, situation, sphere, dimension, horizon.

6.XI.79

Sensei talks about Shinran’s *Tannishō*. Little known even fifty years ago, the work had not been canonical in the Middle Ages, and had in fact been banned for a long period.

13.XI.79

On Max Stirner’s motto: “I have founded my affair on nothing.” I point out the origin of this line in Goethe’s poem “Vanitas! Vanitatum vanitas!” In opposition to Wieland, who had reproached him for a lack of patriotism in the struggle against Napoleon, Goethe had with sovereign *sangfroid* called this poem *his* “battle song.” Goethe’s line is in turn a parody of a pietistic hymn, the first line of which runs: “I have founded my affair on God.”

## REMINISCENCES

28.XI.79

Because of an illness that threatens to prevent me from visiting Sensei for a period of months, I am anxious that our collaboration will be interrupted. But he simply comes to our house—all the way to Nishijin! Today he appears as an ambassador from another era! On the magnificently domed head, a hat with a wide brim. The dark coat of heavy cloth dates, I am later told, from the mid-thirties. And beneath this, traditional wooden sandals. With a broad smile. Sensei reports that the taxi driver had asked him if he was going to be in a film about the early Showa era! His calm, his decisiveness, his humor!

We correct a few pages. During the break the talks of his life in Germany over forty years earlier. In a village inn in Thüringen he had been asked whether he came from Königsberg! As a good Kantian he had naturally replied in the affirmative!

Undated

Sensei at our house again in the weavers' quarter (Nishijin). Difficulties with the translation. Frau Fischer-Barnicol wants to insist on the concept of God's *Personalität*, an idea that comes from Catholic theology. Sensei comes down in favor of the Kantian locution of God's *Persönlichkeit*: "How could one object to God's '*Persönlichkeit*'?" My feeling is that one will object that *Persönlichkeit* was the *human* ideal of the new humanism of the time of Winckelmann, Goethe, Schiller, and the brothers Humboldt.

9.XII.79

Sensei is concerned about my health. He sends me to a specialist.

28.I.80

A conversation about the "sensuous" character of the Japanese language. *Akaki kokoro*: a red, bright heart. *Kana giri koe*: a voice like a metal saw. *Waregane* the voice sounds like a cracked bell.

Miso soup. Good for smokers, according to the chain-smoker. Earlier it was used for cleaning *kiseru* (tobacco pipes).

30.I.80

Problems with the translation. "Reality" (*Realität*) or "actuality" (*Wirklichkeit*)? In opposition to the translator, Sensei insists on "actuality" on the grounds that the German expression retains the actual moment, the "acting" (in the sense of "effecting").

On the chronological sequence of the influence of European philosophers since the beginning of the Meiji period: Schopenhauer, Bergson, Rudolf Eucken—and only then Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche!

## THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

12.II.80

Heidegger had predicted to him (when was that?) that within a decade German philosophy would be dominated by analytic philosophy.

In doing the translation there is the constant difficulty of finding German expressions that do not assign the statement exclusively to either the subject or the object. Instead of "One sees the bird," Sensei would rather say: "The bird is to be seen." The terms "aspect" and "look" should contain both: seeing and being seen.

19.II.80

On the basis of Luther's translation of *kenōsis* as *Entäußerung*, Sensei understands the well known sentence, "[He] laid aside his mighty power and glory" (*Philippians 2,7*) as "[He] emptied himself out." He sees an analogy here with "the primordially empty and formless Buddha." A recent German translation avoids such problems of interpretation by rendering the expression blandly as "[He] gave up everything."

22.II.80

I say how much I admire the conciseness and the accelerating tempo of the second chapter. Sensei replies casually that during the writing he noticed that he was rapidly approaching the length limit set by the journal, and *that* was the reason he was compelled to express himself ever more concisely and pointedly!

I brought back from Germany for him an annotated edition of Mōrike's *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*. He is familiar with this classic from my homeland of Swabia. He inquires about the meaning of *fremdend* in Mōrike's poem "Erinna an Sappho."

25.II.80

On Mōrike's "Urach" poem. The line, "And the roses shine forth higher" reminds him of the use of "shining" in the *Amida Sutra*: "In the Pure Land radiant (shining forth of *its own accord*) white, radiant red." Sensei is surprised that in the poem "Auf die Nürtinger Schule" only Schelling among the pupils is called a "genius," and not also Hölderlin. I suggest that at that time the latter's genius hadn't been noticed. Even Mōrike, who published posthumous poems by Hölderlin, was apparently blind to the singular genius of that poet.

The *Vimalakirti Sutra*: "I am ill because all sentient beings suffer from illness." This is the response of the Buddha's "Great Compassion" to the illness of all living things (chapter 2).

On the "Last Word" poem of Gasan Jōseki (1275-1366), the Sōtō Zen master. I suggest translating it as follows:

## REMINISCENCES

Haut und Fleisch zusammengefügt,      (Skin and flesh, fused together,  
Einundneunzig Jahre ist's her.      Ninety-one years have passed.  
Diese Mitternacht lieg' ich, wie immer,      This midnight I lie—as  
In den Gelben Quellen.      ever—in the Yellow Waves.)

Dinner together. Sensei swallows something the wrong way, coughs violently, and then says that such a thing has never happened to him before in his whole life.

19.III.80

On the scholar and statesman Sugawara no Michizane (845-903). The unjustly banished man wrote the following lines celebrating his beloved grove of plum trees, now so distant:

Even if the cold wind should blow,  
Exhale your fragrance, plum blossoms!  
And even if your master is not there,  
Do not forget the springtime!

The plum trees are in blossom at the Kitano Shrine right now. Sensei says: "Very old trees, producing only a few blossoms any more. But the fragrance!"

15.IV.80

The literary-theoretical concept of the "empty place" (Wolfgang Iser's notion of the *Leerstelle*). Sensei: "In comparison with Nagarjuna's differentiated conception of emptiness, the 'empty' of 'empty place' is not well thought out." In Kawabata's *Sound of the Mountain*, for instance, the mountain is "empty," in the sense of "open for . . ." There nothing is "distributed" or "left empty," *precisely so that* it may be "filled."

I think of his intimate relationship with the Yoshida hill. For decades now he has lived at the foot of this thickly wooded, over-green, many-shaped hill, so rich in sacred places. If ever I should have occasion—and I hope not to have—to write an epitaph for him, it would go:

He knew what  
is right: to hear evermore  
Yoshidayama.

22.IV.80

Sensei on his visit to the old Wilhelm Gundert in Ulm. Gundert had told him how Daisetz Suzuki had presented him with own copy of the *Blue Cliff Records*, covered with marginalia. Sensei: "In Japan that is called *shutakubon*: as familiar as the back of one's hand." This had given Gundert encourage-

## THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

ment in translating this major work of Zen Buddhism. (Two volumes: Munich 1964.)

### 2.v.80

How is one to translate the central Buddhist concept of *torawareru*? "To be connected with things and oneself," "cleave to . . .," "be entangled with . . .," "be caught in, ensnared in, bound by . . ."—how bloated all that sounds!

### 3.vi.80

Sensei was at the cremation of one of his best friends from his student days, the author Karaki Junzō. We eat dinner in silence.

He gives me a copy of his latest book. It contains essays, some from his youth. Among others, there are studies of Bashō and Mōrike, and an account of his visit to Gundert. At my request he writes something in it, starting out with a felt-tip pen. When the ink begins to penetrate the paper too much, he finishes the dedication with a brush.

### 10.vi.80

Sensei asks, out of the blue: "Why is there no uprising in East Germany?" I reply that I really don't know, since I don't know the country myself. Twice I drove through the corridor to Berlin, without being able to leave the Autobahn. Apart from a few children, I saw hardly a human face. "They waved at me from the edge of the wood." Sensei: "And then?" "Tears," I replied.

"Difference between . . ." or "difference from . . ."? He asks, joking, if one can say "*The different*" without "from" or "between."

Gabriel Marcel once visited him in Kyoto. Marcel told him how Heidegger, who is well known for his idiosyncratic use of language ("The thing things"), had felt mocked by Marcel's joke, "The apple apples."

### 22.vii.80

An expression of Dōgen's: "A bird flies and looks like a bird." On its central significance for Nishitani's understanding of "being oneself."

### 5.viii.80

This year it seems as if the rainy season will never end! The longest since 1904, as far as Sensei can remember!

### 6.viii.80

On Chinese logic. *Mujun*: contradiction, literally: "spear-shield"—a spear that can pierce any shield and a shield that no spear can pierce.

### 16.viii.80

Professor Ueda Shizuteru drops in. I follow the conversation. Sensei leans

## REMINISCENCES

back and smokes a cigarette, listening attentively. He looks quite the urbane intellectual. Jan Van Bragt, the translator into English of *Shūkyō to wa nani-ka?*, comes to visit. His powerful joviality contrasts with Sensei's more relaxed demeanor; his downright infectious laughter!

12.IX.80

Is there a "royal road of philosophy"? Napoleon's impatience on learning from a scholar that Kant's principal ideas could not be summarized on one page. Sensei tries, half in jest, to encapsulate the philosophy of his mentor Nishida: "The logic of the self-identity of the absolutely self-contradictory." He wonders about the *logos* of this logic. He thinks Nishida's first work, *An Inquiry into the Good*, is the most accessible.

The Six Worlds (or Ways). How to translate *gaki-dō*? "World of the hungry ghosts" or "of the hunger-ghosts"?

21.XI.80

Sensei speaks with reverence of Professor Bollnow, whom he had met again recently at Professor Ueda's house. But now he finds him too "restless"! For his part Bollnow told me that Nishitani had "become quite old." These youthful old men!

22.XI.80

Sensei speaks of his first visit to Germany over forty years ago. At that time Eduard Spranger had just been in Japan, and Sensei had read his report in a Freiburg newspaper. Spranger was especially amazed by two things in Japan: that even in villages there were large and well kept public schools; and that even in Tokyo women could walk on the streets at night alone. Sensei: "It amazed me that one could be amazed at such things!"

10.I.81

We begin the sixth and last chapter of the book: "Emptiness and History." An aphorism in Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*: "If you look into the abyss for a long time, the abyss also looks into you." A Zen saying: It is like when a donkey looks into a well: the well looks back at the donkey."

A painter brings his New Year's gift: a picture of a hen, symbol of the new year. The hen, seen from behind and below, looks overpowering, with legs covered with hair: the effect is that of an ostrich.

Sensei comes back to his first visit to Germany. He had been struck by the prevalent envy of rich Jews, and had suggested that Jewish intellectuals be invited to Japan.

26.I.81

During Sensei's stay in Freiburg, Heidegger had read some of the writings



## THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

of Daisetz Suzuki. There were only four Japanese at the University at the time: besides himself, two students of medicine and a diplomat. He had a fall while skiing on the Schauinsland.

27.1.81

On the idea of *alaya* (Sanskrit), or "storehouse": that which is hidden in all consciousness.

Sensei recounts some of his childhood experiences on the Noto peninsula. When he went swimming there at night one time, he came out of the water glowing with *yakōchū*, those micro-organisms, invisible individually, that cause that magical phosphorescence in the sea.

30.1.81

"Immortality" and "infinitude": the latter would not apply to the Greek gods, since they were *born*. The infinite entanglement in karma of all things. I quote the words of the earth-spirit in *Faust*:

Thus I work at the rushing loom of time  
Rush and weave divinity's living garment.

On *Faust* and F. T. Vischer's parody, *Faust, the Tragedy: Part Three*. Sensei asks what is being parodied, and I reply that it is first of all Goethe's "old man's style." "What is an 'old man's style'?" The charming youthfulness of the man bridles against such silly expression!

10.11.81

Just before the Great Earthquake, the sky over Tokyo was as bright and clear as in a picture by Hiroshige. At the time of the catastrophe he had been with his mother in Nagano. From there it then took him a full week to get to Tokyo! The house of his parents had hardly been touched: just a few cracks, and the staircase had been shifted.

16.11.81

Sensei recalls his German classes in high school. He was introduced there to works by Gerhart Hauptmann, Wagner's *Parsifal*, Schiller's *Maria Stuart*, and some things by Theodor Storm.

The obituary of Adorno by Georg Picht, whose son Robert I came to know recently in Kyoto. Sensei says that under Nishida and Tanabe the Kyoto School also tried to reach the level of experience by way of Hegel and Kant. Hegel had a great impact on Buddhist-influenced Japanese philosophy, especially with his dialectic of Being and Nothingness.

Sensei's criticism of Adorno, whose writings he has been grappling with recently: there is no sign in his work of the basic question of Christianity and religion in general, without which European philosophy would be

## REMINISCENCES

inconceivable. When Adorno speaks of *Geist* (spirit), he never distinguishes between exposition and his own position. There is also none of the *radicality* of questioning that one finds in Nietzsche. However, I disagree with this estimation of Adorno.

Sensei: "Where is there in Germany, after the death of the great figures, any real philosophy?" I: "The spirit bloweth where it listeth." His laughing reply: "In Japan too?"

A passage in Rinzai: "If you meet the Buddha, kill him!" Sensei: "Thus the Buddha is only . . ." [stroking the top of his head with his hand] "a bald-head, and the holy scriptures are good for nothing more than . . ." [points in the direction of the W.C.]!

19.vi.81

The noble Frau Nishitani has again prepared a delicious dinner. New to me is *shōnai-mai*, a rice dish from Yamagata prefecture.

19.vi.81

The limits of understanding: "all is the same" and "every thing is distinct." Sensei: "I have the hope that some day understanding will be possible without any 'as' or comparison." I ask in return: "If one presupposes the 'as-structure' of all understanding, can one still speak of understanding what is new and foreign at all?" (The rest of my notes, made while standing in a crowded train, were only partly decipherable:)

On [Gadamer's notion of] "congenial understanding": "After my death, my remains will be divided up. Part will lie in Kyoto and part in the place I was born. [With a chuckle:] I shall then be 'divided' and yet the same: here and there. It is perhaps the same with 'genius': at work both here and there."

"What is a foreigner?" I say, "One who has his own coast *behind* him." Sensei: "When I stood one time on the coast of America, the idea came to me: You are now on the *farther* shore! I had my own coast *before* me!"

"The locus of genius is there where the extremes touch, the extremes of the most general and the most particular; thus where comparison is impossible. This isn't comprehensible from a Hegelian standpoint, since he *proceeds* from the absolute."

21.vi.81

Sensei speaks of the Grimm's tale "Hans in Luck." He is amazed by how close it is to the story of the boy in the Buddhist tale, "The Ox and its Herdsman," where the boy returns home empty-handed. I mention something Professor Tsujimura said in similar context: "It belongs precisely to 'home-ness' (*das Heimische*) that one doesn't need to give anything to it."

## THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

6.VII.81

Sensei recalls having seen, in the prehistoric museum in Sigmaringen Castle, a pair of scissors just like traditional Japanese scissors, with the "point of force" (*Kraftpunkt*—he coins the word himself) at the end rather than in the middle. In Nürnberg he was struck by a sculpture of a seated monk driving a needle into his thigh. There were similar images in ancient China. We talk about the 'original' sameness of human nature, in spite of all cultural differences.

14.VII.81

Final reworking of the final chapter of *Was ist Religion?* At my suggestion Sensei reads Büchner's *Lenz* and finds the descriptions of nature strongly reminiscent of Japanese painting.

6.XI.82

Visit Sensei together with the Swiss writer Adolf Muschg, who presents him with a copy of his book *Liebesgeschichten*. In reply to his question of how to explain the strong influence of Zen on the West, Nishitani argues that with the rise of European nihilism an undercurrent that had always been there in Western thought had come to the surface. That surfacing had prepared the ground for the reception of East-Asian thought.

The advantages and weaknesses of Christianity as an "established" religion. Muschg: "The most consequential mistake of the Church was its hostility to the body. The pedagogy of the Enlightenment did nothing to overcome this, but rather only made it more radical."

Undated

Conclusion of the work on the translation. Sensei presents me with a lyrical work about Kyoto by an Australian poet.

8.XI.81

We talk about an epitaph for a Japanese poet:

He was an extraordinary human being  
Who loved extraordinary things,  
Did extraordinary things  
And died an extraordinary death.

Sensei remarks that it would be better if the last line ran: "And died an *ordinary* death."

4.XII.82

His amusement as he tried to clarify for Frau Fischer-Barnicol's Introduction the issue of who exactly belongs to the Kyoto School, and in what ways its

## REMINISCENCES

individual representatives are to be arranged. One name and another are now shunted into this group and now into the next. Not only does he not take exception to my remarking disrespectfully that the whole thing reminds me of a shunting yard, but he breaks into what Herr Fischer-Barnicol referred to as his laughter "without a sound."

Undated

In speaking of his translation of Goethe's essay, "On Granite," Sensei mentions that one passage made a particular impression on him. He leaves the room, as I hear him climbing the stairs. He returns with the opened volume of Goethe in his hand, makes himself comfortable, lights a cigarette, and reads: "Sitting on a high, bare mountain peak overlooking a wide vista, I can say to myself: Here you rest directly upon a piece of ground that reaches down to the deepest layers of the earth . . ."

3.1.83

A memory of his childhood on the Noto peninsula. Still vividly present to him is the image of the delicate twilight after the snow stops falling.

## Anecdotes that Now Seem Ancient

Shimomura Toratarō

Around the time we graduated from Kyoto University, Nishida Kitarō, Tomonaga Sanjūrō and Tanabe Hajime were professors in the Philosophy Department of Kyoto University. Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, Kimura Motomori, Kōsaka Masaaki, Nishitani Keiji and Tosaka Jun were students in the senior class. I think that the so-called Golden Age of the Philosophy Department was a result of being blessed not only with fine teachers but also with excellent students such as these.

At that time it was customary for the students to address professors using the polite suffix "san," and for senior students to address each other as equals, using the polite suffix "kun." Kimura Motomori, who was magnanimous and outspoken, always addressed Nishitani Keiji as "Oshō" ("Priest" or "Abbot"). Nishitani had that sort of personality even in those days.

Nishitani always dressed in the Japanese style. It was about the time when it was decided that he would go abroad to study in Germany that he started wear-