

Words that Remain in the Heart

Yagi Seiichi

I don't remember exactly when it was, but once, when I was visiting Professor Nishitani's home to talk with him, he said to me: "We cannot do without the state of mind that says, 'It is fine just as it is.' "

"What is the 'it' that is 'fine just as it is'?" I asked.

"Anything and everything."

"Do you mean that any and every existing state of affairs in our world is fine just as it is?"

"That's right."

I have heard a number of astonishing statements in my life. Hisamatsu Shin'ichi's "In me there are no moral afflictions," for example, which was far more shocking to me than another statement he often made: "I will not die." Professor Nishitani's "It is fine just as it is" gave me a similar shock.

As far as I can recall he made the statement at the beginning of the 1970's when the storms of the anti-establishment movement were still violently blowing. It was a time in which words and deeds that affirmed the system, or even were perceived to do so, became, without any examination or investigation of their content, targets for censure and denunciation. There were in Japan no instances of "reactionaries" actually being put onto vehicles and paraded through the streets as happened during the Cultural Revolution in China, but I recall that I, too, in printed criticisms that left no room for debate, was labeled with a similar classification as a spokesman of the establishment. It was an atmosphere in which an intellectual might well see his career ruined, be ostracized from academic society, by the mere fact of having been labeled as pro-system.

Although now with the decline of communism the pendulum of history has swung in the opposite direction, the tendency of society has not changed. Not a day goes by without criticisms, censures, denunciations, warnings and demands being voiced on television and in the newspapers and other publications. To sum up politics, economics, culture, education, social life, or the life of the individual, the statement "The way that it is now will not do" is, so to speak, an axiom of good sense. It is what is right. No one doubts its validity.

Nonetheless, Professor Nishitani says "Anything and everything is fine just as it is." The statement came while we were recording some conversations

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which were later to be published. I had turned off the tape recorder and we were drinking tea and chatting during a break. Since we then resumed the previous topic of conversation, I did not have an opportunity to pursue the statement.

It was quite some time after this when his words came back into my mind. I was thinking about the structure of Christ's thought, and the saying in Matthew that God "causes his sun to rise on the bad as well as the good, and sends down rain to fall on the upright and the wicked alike." We must treat this statement with caution. While Jesus did preach an eschatology of the coming Kingdom of God, and did preach about the ethics of the Kingdom of God, here both eschatology and ethics are transcended. The general eschatological view is that at present good and evil are struggling, and before too long good will triumph over evil and destroy it. But if, as above, the opposition of good and evil is transcended, the eschatological process has no room in which to take place. Jesus is thought to have been a critic of the times and system in which he lived. There seems little doubt that he did have such a side. When he spoke about "God," however, he preached absolute affirmation. Anything and everything, good and evil, morality and immorality—just as they are—are affirmed, accepted and embraced by God. How do this affirmation and this criticism of the times relate to each other? When absolute affirmation based on God is clarified, man comes to live "on his own accord" as "controlled by God" (Mark 4: 28).

In total contrast to the meaning that that is how things appear to be when you have a look at them, the statement "Anything and everything is fine just as it is" contains the complete destruction of the ego. On its own the ego busies itself with making arbitrary determinations such as: "The world is this sort of thing and not that sort of thing. I am this sort of thing and not that sort of thing." Or, "For us, reality should be like this and not like that. I should be like this and not like that." This busy-ness, similar to righteousness, goodness and progress, is, in fact, all too often the magic, protective cloak of egoism and a willful assertion of the self. In contrast to this, the reverse side of the way of life that says "Only God does as he pleases" is the abandonment of this sort of ego-assertion. Therefore, that is where, when the ego has been destroyed, the state of "It is fine just as it is" should appear. That state is, of course, not a mere affirmation of the status quo, because when the ego has been destroyed a "spontaneity," that comes from God, is achieved. The words and deeds of Jesus came about in this way—including his "criticism of the status quo."

In thinking about these matters it occurred to me that Professor Nishitani, too, had been saying that "We cannot do without the state of mind that says 'It is fine just as it is.'" In times like these the words of those on whom we rely

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can provide us with truly wonderful hints in addition to giving us support. Professor Nishitani's relaxed personality, too, was probably not unrelated to an understanding of existence that says, "Anything and everything is fine just as it is."

The Eternal is the Transient is the Eternal: "A flower blooms and the whole world arises"

Yusa Michiko

To know Professor Nishitani Keiji ought to be one of the nicest things that life has to offer. I'm sure I'm not the only one who felt that way. I was first introduced to his work in graduate school by Professor Raimundo Panikkar, my dissertation advisor, then in the Religious Studies Department at the University of California at Santa Barbara. Later, in the summer of 1977, when I was preparing to visit Japan, Professor Panikkar urged me to go and meet Nishitani.

I do not usually keep a diary, but July 29, 1977 was an exception. I wrote: "Saw Professor Keiji Nishitani for the first time." I was a student, a complete stranger, but when I telephoned him, he invited me to come right over. In half an hour, I found myself seated in the small guest room of his house, only two blocks away from the large red torii at the entrance of the Yoshida Shrine. I wrote: "I've heard he is 77 this year, but the voice I heard on the phone certainly didn't sound that old." My visit lasted about two hours, during which we talked about the general subject of the East-West encounter.

I remember him saying how much he admired the philosophical efforts that Christians were making in attempting to face the challenges of modernity and science. The problems Christians have to deal with will become more acute if Christianity remains within the "framework of the Bible." On the other hand, Buddhism, especially Zen, in the sense that it is free from "dogma," does not face the same problems. But Buddhists cannot afford to be complacent. Precisely because Christians are dealing with those challenges, they are in a better position than Buddhists to overcome the problems in a truly meaningful way.

This was the gist of his talk. Even today, I think that this is a nice reflection of Professor Nishitani's basic philosophical posture. He understood the prob-