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# Memories of My Academic Life

HISAMATSU SHIN'ICHI

## INTRODUCTION

"Memories of My Academic Life" was published originally in the October 1955 number of the monthly journal *Shisō*, as one of a series of essays written under that title by prominent scholars in various academic fields. In it the eminent Zen thinker Hisamatsu Shin'ichi (1889-1980) describes the process through which his unique religious personality was formed.

The title notwithstanding, it becomes clear when reading the essay that Hisamatsu did not consider himself primarily an academic. His basic standpoint and overriding interest was always religious. While academic study strives for complete objectivity, religion is by nature subjective. In Hisamatsu's case, this subjective bias was particularly strong. For him, as for many religious thinkers, the struggle to resolve the deep existential problem within himself became the basis for his way of thinking and is inseparably connected with his philosophy. Without a proper awareness of this religious background, one cannot arrive at a legitimate understanding of his thought.

The process of his spiritual quest which led him to discard the Pure Land belief of his parents for the rationalism of western philosophy, and ended finally with his awakening to what he came to call the True Self, provided him with a criterion for evaluating various religious and philosophical systems.

The sharp distinction in his thought between "religion of faith" and the more genuine "religion of awakening," and his strong emphasis on the importance of Great Doubt and Zen awakening as the "religio-nomy of the absolute Self," are clearly traceable to the personal experiences of his student days. And one should not overlook, despite his definite later emphasis on self-awakening as the authentic way of human being, his sensitive and painful awareness of his own sinfulness, as seen confessed in the letters quoted here to

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\* The original essay, "Gakkyū seikatsu no omoide," is included in *The Collected Works of Hisamatsu Shin'ichi*, Volume I (Tokyo: Risōsha, 1969), pp. 415-434.

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his teacher Nishida Kitarō.

When Hisamatsu turned to Rinzai Zen and traditional koan practice under the guidance of Ikegami Shōzan Rōshi at the Myōshin-ji, it was not merely for the sake of practicing Zen, but in order to achieve the self-transformation of his existence—to solve the total existential problem which was pressing in on him so strongly at this time. When his attainment came, it came not as “faith,” but as “awakening.” He devoted the remainder of his life to establishing a religion and philosophy of awakening—for him, there was no distinguishing between the two.

Finally, Hisamatsu's essay reminds us how important it is for anyone who is concerned with the ultimate problems of human existence to encounter an authentic teacher, and how necessary it is for the student then to devote himself singlemindedly, and self-critically, to his quest for the meaning of human life.

ABE MASAO

### I

HIS ACADEMIC LIFE was quite unlike that of an ordinary scholar.<sup>1</sup> Most scholars pour themselves wholeheartedly into their research and strive for scholarly achievements. He does not qualify as a scholar in this sense. Throughout his life he devoted himself to living absolute truth, rather than pursuing academic research. Even when he did engage in research, his goal was to live truth, not merely to study it and know it as in the academic discipline of philosophy. He aspired, then, to be a religious person, not a scholar of religion per se.

This concern was fostered in his youth by the religious atmosphere of his home, and it developed gradually over the years. Of course, he occasionally drifted from his fundamental path, but these driftings were nothing more than momentary whims. Indeed, his earnest desire to become a person of religion runs consistently throughout his development.

It was his grandmother who most strongly—and in substance—supported his higher education, despite the opposition of his parents, who

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the essay Hisamatsu refers to himself in the third person, “he” or “his.” This is sometimes translated as “the student.”

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worried about his weak constitution. She wanted him to become a physician. Afraid of restricting him, however, she never said as much. After he graduated from college, she jokingly disclosed, "You know, in the beginning I thought of making you a doctor." He was amazed to hear this, but even if she had divulged this secret hope earlier, he probably would not have pursued a medical career.

Most of his middle-school<sup>2</sup> friends wanted to become physicians, and some wanted to be career soldiers, businessmen, or teachers. Anyone not from a temple family who aspired to be a religionist was considered feeble-minded or at best slightly odd. But this did not affect his lack of interest in one of the favored careers. At times, he was swayed by political concerns. During the peace negotiations after the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), he became displeased at the way negotiations were going. He went to his family's Shinto shrine and vowed he would become a diplomat. On another occasion he dreamt he was thrown in jail during a revolution; when he awoke at his mother's side, he burst into tears. But this leaning toward politics was only temporary. Deep within him his religious concern prevailed.

This religious concern was still passive and lacked spontaneity in his childhood, for it derived merely from the external influence of his family environment. From birth he was nurtured in his parents' piety, and was especially steeped in the Pure Land faith of his grandparents, who were orthodox Shin Buddhists. Through that influence he became a steadfast young believer. He even aspired to become a monk, and planned to enter the Buddhist university (now Ryūkoku University) of the Nishi Honganji Temple in Kyoto.

As he advanced to the higher grades in the middle school and acquired more and more scientific knowledge, he began to sense contradictions between that knowledge and his faith. He came to harbor doubts about Shin doctrine, and sought their resolution in the Shin scriptures and in the writings of Maeda Eun (1857-1930), whose noble character he admired. But his doubts only became deeper and more complex. By his fourth year in the middle school, he reached an impasse, and his indestructible iron faith, of which he had been so proud, eventually crumbled.

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<sup>2</sup> Middle school in the old Japanese educational system was for youths ages twelve to sixteen.

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In retrospect, his was a "leave-it-up-to-the-Almighty" type of faith which avoided all doubts. When his doubts did appear, they were not so serious as to be deemed hopeless, but at the time they constituted an *aporia* for him through which he could not break—an inescapable wall which will inevitably confront any modern person possessed of scientific knowledge, or more generally, baptized with the modern realization of the human situation.

He thus underwent a conversion from the naïve, medieval form of religious life which avoids rational doubt, to the critical attitude of modern man that is based on autonomous rational judgment and empirical proof. The most certain thing to him was not the Buddha or the Pure Land believed in by discarding all discretion and removing all doubts, but the self-conscious person as a rational agent, and the actual historical world grounded in reason and verified through experience. Though his rational awareness of sin further deepened and the desire to be rid of it became acute, he neither thought he was destined for hell because of his sin nor longed to be rescued from hell and reborn in paradise. Accordingly, he did not turn to a Buddha who lifts up to paradise those otherwise destined for hell; rather, to him, such a Buddha was a sham, functioning like a roof on the roof already over his head.

The problem he confronted, then, was that of ridding his outlook of any mythological coloring, pursuing humanity based on reason, and arriving at a rational solution to his dilemma. He finally decided to leave religion behind and turn to philosophy grounded in reason. This was the first step in his life as a student of philosophy. He thought that philosophy lay at the base of religion, and that issues insolvable through religion could be solved by philosophy. Surely, to him at that time, religion meant Shin Buddhism in its popular form, as he had come to know it over the years through sermons and the scriptures of the sect; and philosophy was merely the academic discipline in which one solved the human problem at its roots through rational means. The aspect of philosophy that intrigued him most was its rationality. This was only natural for one who had become so skeptical of religion as to be compelled to deny it altogether.

When he graduated from the Gifu Middle School, he asked the principal, Hayashi Kanezō, which would be better for studying philosophy, Tokyo University or Kyoto University. Hayashi was tall and

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plump, stood with a bit of a stoop, wore thick glasses which complimented his large features, and had a long gray beard which extended from his jowly cheeks to below his jaw. In all, he had a calm, dignified demeanor. He had graduated from Keiō University, and in all likelihood had studied under Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901).<sup>3</sup> Hayashi was also in charge of the fifth-year Ethics course, and lectured on "The Theory of the Ten Principles of Personality."

Hayashi's answer to the question was, "How about Kyoto University?" Although Tokyo University was a prestigious institution with a relatively long history, many famous old professors, and complete facilities, he felt that for these reasons it lacked freshness. Kyoto University, on the other hand, was newly established and still incomplete, but had a faculty of gifted young scholars and a youthful enthusiasm that indicated a bright future. Hayashi told his student that the head of the philosophy department at Kyoto University was Kuwaki Genyoku (1874-1946), the most famous philosopher of the time. Also teaching there was a young philosopher whom Hayashi considered a genius: Nishida Kitarō (1870-1945). Hayashi said, "He's not that famous yet, but he's a great one. He's got quite a future ahead of him."

The young student had known of Kuwaki, but it was the first he had heard of Nishida. The name of this wizard-like philosopher was deeply engraved in his mind. Looking back, he would marvel at the remarkable turn of fate through which he first heard of Nishida Kitaro, the mentor to whom he in time became so deeply indebted. Considering that *A Study of Good*<sup>4</sup> had not yet even been published, it is puzzling that Hayashi was able to foretell Nishida's future so accurately. If it was mere chance, if Hayashi had heard about Nishida from someone else, or even if he had divined it by inspiration, it would not have been so surprising, but if Hayashi had read Nishida's essays preceding *A Study of Good* and on that basis surmised Nishida's potential, his sharp eyes deserve utmost respect.

After Hayashi left his position as principal of the Gifu Middle

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<sup>3</sup> A leader of the modernization of Japan after the Meiji Restoration (1868); founder of Keiō University.

<sup>4</sup> Nishida's pioneer work, published in 1911, through which he became famous in Japanese philosophical circles as an original thinker.

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School, he returned to Keiō University, and is said to have moved to Hokkaido after that. It is truly regrettable that the student lost contact with him and was never again able to discover his whereabouts.

### II

He decided to follow Hayashi's advice and set his sights on Kyoto University. After he graduated from the Gifu Middle School, he left for Tokyo to prepare for the entrance examination of the Third Higher School in Kyoto. Since this was the first trip he had made on his own, he did not even know how to go about purchasing a train ticket, and had to have his father buy it for him. He was such a bumpkin that he had never eaten beef; in fact, he was later scolded once at his Tokyo rooming house for burning some sukiyaki to a carbonous black.

It was his first experience studying away from home. He left Gifu brimming with the spirit expressed by the saying, "Setting his goals in life, the boy leaves his homeland." His motto was, "To lead sentient beings to goodness—for this purpose I was born into the world." He wrote this in gold ink on a dark-blue scroll and kept it deep in his chest pocket.

In Tokyo, he and Kawaji Toshiaki, a close friend and classmate from middle school, encouraged each other as they prepared fervently for their exams. Their hopes were realized; they managed to scrape through the exam and entered the Third Higher School.

At that time, the Third Higher School was known for its emphasis on individual freedom for its students. It was true to its reputation. The principal, Orita Hikoichi, exerted his influence on the boys in an informal manner. This liberal atmosphere was probably at its climax, for after Orita retired and Sakai Sukeyoshi took over, the discipline tightened up and military training was intensified. It was as if the earlier freedom had been shackled in armor. In this way, unbeknownst to many, measures were being implemented in preparation for the First World War.<sup>5</sup>

While at the Third Higher School, his great pleasure lay in reading books on philosophy rather than doing his regular schoolwork. Even

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<sup>5</sup> After this sentence the original text reads: "At school, the student learned English from Kuriyagawa Hakuson, Shima Kasui, Hirata Tokuboku, Yoshimura Tomoyoshi

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though his knowledge of German was rudimentary, he went to the school library and, while constantly looking up words in the dictionary, tried to read the original German text of Windelband's *History of Philosophy*. This, of course, he could not possibly have understood, given his ability in German and his understanding of philosophy. Nevertheless, he was able to gain some familiarity with philosophical literature for his efforts, and in the process came to feel he was starting to understand it.

In January of the forty-fourth year of the Meiji era (1911), Nishida Kitarō's *A Study of Good* was published by Kōdōkan in Tokyo. He went right out and paid the one-yen price for a copy, and soon became engrossed in the book. It was his last year in the school, and as he read it over and over, he found after a while that he was coming to understand it a little. He focused on the fourth section, "Religion." Here he discovered a religion quite different from the faith that had crumbled through the exercise of reason; he found a religion that was not contradictory to reason, but compatible with it. After an interval of four or five years, his interest in religion had revived. At the same time, the ability to apply himself to the study of philosophy seemed to appear spontaneously within him. And yet no matter how many times he read Nishida's book, he could not comprehend its fundamental idea, "pure experience." He had no other choice than to wait until his understanding deepened. As he pursued these studies, the goals of his Higher School life became clearer to him: to enrich his learning and cultivation, and to gain enough preliminary knowledge to undertake the university philosophy program without too much difficulty.

During the five years from his second year in the Higher School to his graduation from the university, he lived in a tiny four-and-a-half-mat room in a rooming house called Rakuyōkan. The house stood just outside the east wall of Shōgo-in Temple, and his room on the third floor faced north. At that time, the northeast section of the temple, visible from his room, was the residence of Prince Kayō. In the early spring the prince's mother, the dowager princess, would take her charming grandson and granddaughter out to the grove of paulownia trees

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and others; German from Naruse Mukyoku, Hirata Motokichi, and Hashimoto Seiū; Law and Political Science from Niho Kamematsu; and Economics from Kanbe Masao. It was at this time that Kuriyagawa Hakuson's 'Ten Talks on Modern Literature' was being lectured on as an extracurricular lesson."



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to pick field horsetails. There were then few homes in that area of Kyoto. From Shōgo-in up past Yoshida Hill to the northeast, he could see numerous vegetable fields, in some of which were cultivated the famous Shōgo-in radishes. At the bottom of a hill named Kaguragaoka sprawled a swampy area where fish and waterfowl could be seen. In the summer children found it a good spot for fishing. From his north window he could see Mount Hiei and the Kitayama range in the distance; from his east window he could see Mount Daimonji and Mount Nyakuōji rising up behind the Kurodani pagoda. With the spring growth, fall foliage, and winter snow, he was blessed with a beautiful view throughout the year.<sup>6</sup>

### III

Brimming with hope, he entered Kyoto University, located across the way from the Third Higher School, in the first year of the Taishō era (1912). He elected to major in the philosophy course in the philosophy department of the College of Literature (now the Faculty of Letters). The department was rather new; his was the fifth class to enter.<sup>7</sup> As in the other majors, in philosophy, until around the tenth year of Taishō (1921), only two or three students graduated each year.

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<sup>6</sup> After this sentence the original text reads as follows: "In his class of the Higher School were several people who ended up with him on the Kyoto University Faculty of Letters, including Omodaka Hisataka, Naha Toshisada, and Nakamura Naokatsu. Also in his class were Watanabe Hiroyuki, who became a businessman, Manabe Masaru, who became a Diet member, Takakura Teru, who became a writer, Ōba Yonejirō, currently a professor at Ōtani University, and Takakura Chikai and Inazuka Takeshi, two classmates who died young. Takakura's early death was especially regrettable, for he was greatly interested in philosophy and, with his exceptional ability, competed with Yamauchi Tokuryū for the highest honors in the class. Also in another class were Takigawa Kōshin and Kawahara Shunsaku. The nostalgia these names arouse is overwhelming."

<sup>7</sup> After this sentence the original text reads as follows: "In his class were Oikawa Eizaemon, a unique man who became a disciple of Uchimura Kanzō (1861-1930) after graduation but died in middle age, and Morimoto Kōji, currently Morimoto Shōnen, who became a Zen monk after a long period of practice under Hashimoto Dokusan and then Yamazaki Taikō at the Shōkoku-ji monastery. A class ahead of him were Yamauchi Tokuryū and Katsube Kenzō, and two classes ahead of him were the brilliant Nozaki Hiroyoshi and Kubo Yoshio who died young. Kanetsune Kiyosuke graduated from the first class in the Philosophy Department, while Amano Teiyū and

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In 1912 the faculty of the College of Literature consisted of an impressive array of vigorous young scholars,<sup>8</sup> each with his own distinctive character and field of scholarship. The student attended the regular lectures and sat in on optional special lectures. He was exhilarated by the university atmosphere. And yet because of the speed at which the lectures were delivered, and the many unfamiliar technical terms, he found it difficult to take notes. Thanks to his earlier perusal of philosophical writings at the Higher School, however, he found that by consulting reference books he was able to put his notes in order and grasp what was said.

The chairman of the philosophy department was Kuwaki Genyoku. Tomonaga Sanjūrō, an assistant professor, was studying abroad. The man the student had admired for some time, Nishida Kitarō, was an assistant professor in charge of the Ethics course. Nishida's appearance was just as Hayashi Kanezō had described it to him, and left little in his mind that Hayashi had actually seen Nishida somewhere. Nishida was only forty-three at the time, but he had a receding hairline and his hair was cropped close. His eyes shone sharply from deep behind his thick glasses. His nose was thick, his ears rode high, and his lips were closed in a straight horizontal line. He usually had a stubble of beard. Over a lean figure, resembling a leafless tree on a frozen crag, he wore a faded Japanese half-coat bearing his family crest, and wore shoes rather than the usual sandals. Tapping the ground with his cane, as he walked firmly ahead, engrossed in thought, he gave the impression of a mountain ascetic, or an Arhat. The austere simplicity of his appearance—befitting a philosopher unconcerned about his personal looks—and his lectures, were both inimitable. It was only natural that he captivated students.

In the second year of the Taishō era (1913), Nishida became a full

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Abe Seinosuke graduated from the second. Okano Tomejirō and Shinohara Sukeichi were in the class following the student in question here."

<sup>8</sup> After this sentence the original text reads: "In the Literature Department were Ueda Bin, Fujishiro Sadasuke, Fujii Otoo, Naitō Konan, Shinmura Izuru, and Sakaki Ryōsaborō; lecturing in the History Department were Uchida Ginzō, Hara Katsuo, Sakaguchi Kō, Kuwabara Shitsuzō, Ogawa Takuji, Yano Jin'ichi, and others; and teaching in the Philosophy Department were Kuwaki Genyoku, Kanō Naoki, Matsumoto Bunzaburō, Matsumoto Matatarō, Tanimoto Tomi, Fukada Kōsan, Nishida Kitarō, and Yoneda Shōtarō."

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professor, and was put in charge of the religion courses. The lectures he delivered in religion at that time are included in the fourth appended volume of his complete works.<sup>9</sup> This was the only time in Nishida's life that he gave introductory lectures in religion, for in the following year, Professor Kuwaki switched to Tokyo University to replace Professor Raphael von Koeber<sup>10</sup> (1848-1923). Nishida, became Kuwaki's successor, and after he took over the introductory courses in Philosophy and History of Philosophy, he stopped giving introductory lectures on Religion.

After the student entered the Philosophy Department, he attended a wide range of lectures by an assortment of professors. Striving to secure proper food for his mind, he cultivated the general knowledge prescribed in the philosophy program, and on his own read classics and new publications on philosophy and religion. In the three years he was in the program, it was Nishida's course in religion that aroused the deepest interest in him. It gave a fairly distinct form to the internal demand that had persisted in him, though in a latent, undeveloped state, all those years. His philosophical interest in religion, first aroused by his reading *A Study of Good* several years before, came concretely and vigorously to life through the words—or rather the whole being—of the author, who expressed a penetrating philosophical insight and deep religious experience. Through that course, the student's religious eyes were philosophically opened.

Just prior to his graduation, however, after studying philosophy for eight years, he ran head-on into a variety of existential problems. They drove him to critical self-reflection, and made him wonder if he would achieve his original goal. For him—one who through the study of philosophy had become accustomed to considering things from the particular to the universal, from the peripheral to the fundamental—the concrete problems he confronted at that time became the “moment” for his most basic problem. While he dealt with individual problems one by one, he would eventually dig down to the universal source of all problems. The problem turned inward, from the objective

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<sup>9</sup> The lectures are found in *The Complete Works of Nishida Kitarō*, Vol. XV (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1952, repr. 1979), pp. 223-381.

<sup>10</sup> A German philosopher who taught Western classics and philosophy (1893-1914) at Tokyo University. His influence was long felt in Japanese academic circles.

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to the subjective. However profound any philosophical knowledge might have been, insofar as it remained objective cognition, it was completely unable to solve the total, existential problem before him. Faced with this dilemma, he could do nothing. Eventually, he attempted, existentially and fundamentally, to transform himself. That is to say, his great concern at that point was neither the objective pursuit of reality nor even the objective realization of his own true way of being, but the self-transformation of his own existence through practice.

### IV

He thus came to despair of the powerlessness of philosophy to solve his fundamental problem. He lost all interest in graduating from the university, though he had not yet defended the graduation thesis he had submitted. He spent days up in his room, lost in silent thought. His behavior at the time seemed so bizarre that an older student in the department of medicine from his hometown, assuming that he had developed some psychological abnormality, proceeded to telegraph his father. He was indeed in a highly abnormal state, but it was not the kind of problem for a psychiatrist. He considered how he might solve his existential *aporia*, and finally resolved to break through it by means of Zen. At that time he did not consider giving up, forgetting about his problem, diverting his mind from it, committing suicide, or abandoning himself to despair; nor did he consider seeking salvation from some God or Buddha. If anything, he abhorred such responses. Though he despaired of reason, he could no longer return to a standpoint unable to withstand rational criticism. The knowledge of Zen and of its way of life that he had gained from reading Zen texts and listening to Zen discourses since his higher school days, and the Zen influence he received from Nishida, acted in concert with his state of mind at that time, and from within he spontaneously began to turn toward Zen. When he parted from so-called theistic religion and despaired of philosophy based on objective knowledge, the path he then chose had to be subjective knowledge grounded in practice and practice grounded in subjective knowledge, not mere religion or mere philosophy. It was as such a path that he chose Zen.

As a meditation hall (*dōjō*) for practice, he chose the Mampuku-ji monastery, a tranquil Ōbaku Zen temple south of Kyoto, set apart

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from the noise of the world. On June 16th in the fourth year of the Taishō era (1915), he made his final decision to go there. In the middle of the night he slipped out of the rooming house, and on his way went to tell Nishida Kitarō, the professor who would be most able to understand his situation. Nishida lived near the university, on the outskirts of Kyoto, in Tanaka village, just north of the Seifūsō villa of Duke Saionji Kinmochi (1849-1940).<sup>11</sup> The long, two-story house had many rooms, and sat in a field. Nishida's study was on the western end of the second floor, with a window facing south. Nishida was surprised at this sudden visit, and admonished him for acting rashly:

I understand well your state of mind, but you are about to take the oral exam for your thesis. Finish that first. It won't be too late if you go to the temple after graduation. You should pursue the Way with composure. It's not right to be reckless and impatient. And if you choose the wrong place for practice, you won't reach your goal.

Stymied from the start, he returned despondently to his rooming house. The following day he reflected quietly about himself, and the next day he wrote Nishida a letter, conveying again his state of mind:

Please accept my sincerest apologies for suddenly visiting you without an appointment the other night.

At that time you wondered if my excitement might be pathological. After hearing your words, I realized the seriousness of my behavior, and so I returned to my room, regained my composure, and thought quietly. But the more I calm myself down and reflect deeply, the more clearly I hear myself cry out in the self-awareness that I have been living a false life. Whenever I hear it I cannot help shivering with fear and shame.

I entered the university to pursue academic studies and cultivate my character, and at present I am endeavoring to master philosophy. But can I positively claim any success?

I have led a strict moral life. But is this something that arose from a free internal demand of my self? Was there not

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<sup>11</sup> Born into one of the highest noble families, he was an outstanding diplomat and politician of modern Japan.

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impure blood running through the veins of my hands when I acted? Was there not an outrageous devil lurking behind my clothes and hat, sticking out its red tongue? Why do I comb my hair, shave my beard, take baths, or wash my face? In my desk I have a mirror—why did I buy it? In trains have there not been times when I haven't given my seat to the very old or the very young, out of fear that someone would think I was making a show of my good acts, even though I felt sorry for those who needed my seat? And despite this, have these not also been times when I have actually paraded good acts in front of others?

And if I were to put all of my daily acts in a test tube and analyze them, would any of them show up without a poisonous element? How frightening this is! I will never find peace even for a moment if I do not completely eliminate this poisonous element from my actions. A devil, a false I, is hanging on me with its strong black hands, not leaving me for a moment. It shuts up my true self in the darkness at the bottom of an old well. The limbs of my true self are firmly shackled with iron chains. As for action, my true self has almost no freedom. Only the tongue is free—ridiculing, reviling, admonishing, and scolding. While doing this, it has no power. It is merely an impotent voice. Moreover, now even this tongue is about to be tied. I have thus lost all freedom; the false I can only run rampant in its arrogance. If I don't remove the restricting shackles and begin breathing new breath in a universe of freedom, I will become more and more choked by the clinging web of the spider of sin, and find the grave opening up to me in this prison.

At present the poisonous fangs of the spider are continually piercing me, paralyzing me, and the footsteps of death engrave their oppressive sound in my ears. How shameful this all is! I must find a way to escape from this sickle of death as soon as possible.

When I visited you, the sad scream of the true self had reached a peak, and I could endure the pain no longer. I thought about my graduation. But at that time I could see no value in graduating. Should I listen to the appeal of the true

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self closing in on me, reject it, or wait until after my exams? I could detect no suitable reason to leave this problem to later. So I resolved to discard my past completely and attain a new truth. And yet even then the false self haunted me. By chance your words encouraged this false self. I thus consigned the appeal of the true self to oblivion.

Yesterday I visited the monk at Senju-in (Uemura Hōrin) you had introduced me to. What I heard from him was merely a moral perspective based on normal worldly, social ethics. I want to rid myself of my present dilemma, and turn my daily life into an outflow from the pure, clear spring of the true self. I want to find new significance in all of my actions—from such daily acts as getting dressed or wearing a hat to putting morality into practice, doing social work, and serving humanity—and to be able to live in the realm of sacred light. Until I realize such freedom, all of my acts will be sinful.

A few days later, Nishida summoned the student and advised him to read some Zen texts and begin preparations for Zen practice. Soon thereafter the student responded with a short letter.

*June 23*

Dear Sir:

I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to visit you the other day. I thank you very much for lending me the umbrella at that time, and offer my apologies for not having returned it yet.

The sky that evening resembled my own state of mind: the dark clouds of the binding passions flew from east to west, the gale blew in all directions, the rain poured down, the lightning of sin flashed all about, and the thunder of suffering shook the mountains and fields. The path is pitch black; not a step can be taken forward. Nor can I brave the storm with the frail umbrella. I feel regret because I depend on that umbrella, for I have lost my freedom. In reality, an umbrella is useful only in an ordinary rainstorm.

In accordance with your suggestion, I purchased Hakuin's *Collected Writings* and am now reading *Orategama*. I also

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purchased *Zenmon hōgo-shū* [a collection of Zen talks and writings]. There are many things I have never heard or thought about before, and many things to learn.

With utmost respect.

So, he gave up the idea of going to Mampuku-ji, and found himself thrown out in the wilderness without a path to guide him. Waiting for instructions from his teacher, he passed empty days. The entries in his diary were scrawled out like verses:

Ah! The summer heat.  
My heart  
Burning with sin.

Waiting to view the moon  
I take shelter in a Jizō hall  
The rain pouring down.

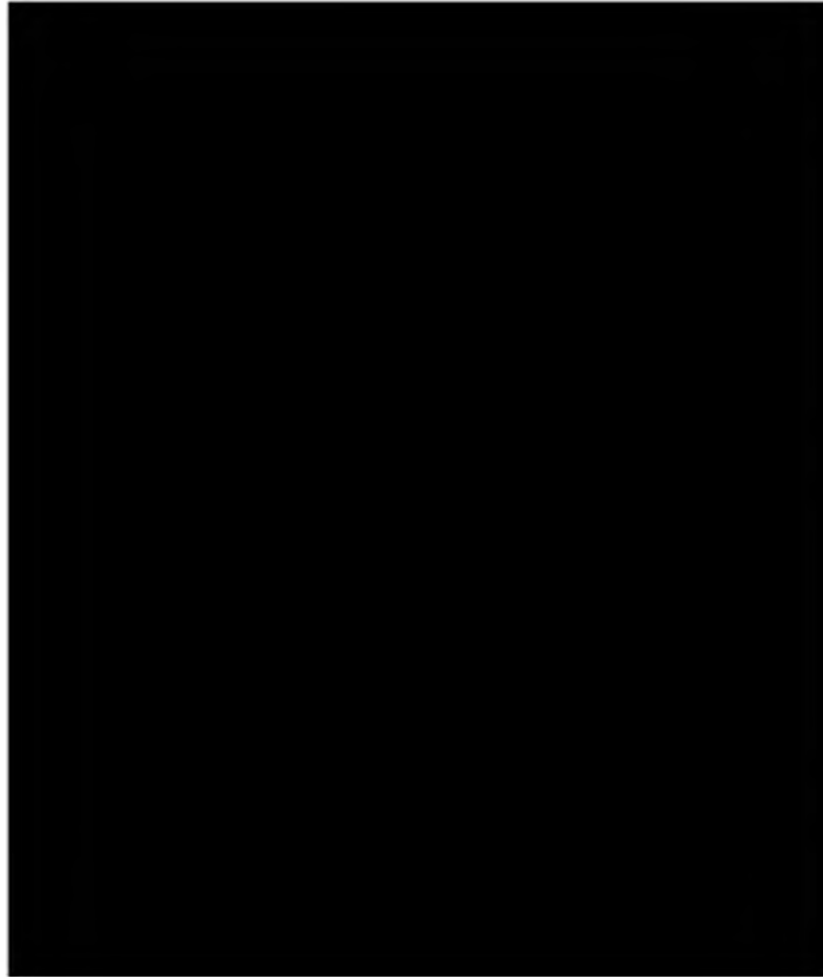
In the fall of that year (1915), Nishida contacted Uemura Hōrin, the priest at Senju-in in western Kyoto, who had been a friend of his since the time he practiced at Myōshin-ji. Through him he asked Ikegami Shōzan, the Zen master at the Myōshin-ji monastery, to work with the student. Nishida's name as a lay student of Zen was "Sunshin," and he had practiced for many years under the priests Kokan at Myōshin-ji, Kōshū at Daitoku-ji, and Setsumon at Kokutai-ji in Etchū. Since he knew much about the world of Zen at that time, he thought carefully about which master he should send his student to. He said to the student:

As for Zen masters in Kyoto, in Nanzen-ji there are Toyota Dokutan and Kōno Mukai, in Kennin-ji there is Takeda Mokurai, in Tōfuku-ji there is Bessho Kyūhō, in Shōkoku-ji there is Hashimoto Dokusan, in Tenryū-ji there is Takagi Ryōen, in Daitoku-ji there is Kawashima Shōin, and in Myōshin-ji there is Ikegami Shōzan. I think either Shōin or Shōzan would be good. Perhaps Shōzan would be best for you.

He thus recommended Shōzan Rōshi. Shōin, he said, was like a diamond-sharp sword, while Shōzan was like a rusty old battle axe.



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*Ikegami Shōzan Rōshi*

Nishida's perception and guidance were certainly remarkable.

On the fifth of November, with an introduction by Uemura Hōrin, the student went to the Myōshin-ji accompanied by Ueki Giyū. There for the first time he met Ikegami Shōzan. As a preliminary, he was allowed to attend the master's talks on the sayings of Zen master Daiō.

What first impressed him about Shōzan was his immovable composure as he sat there, like a ball of lead, his worry-free ease, his tranquility, his detachment, his simplicity free from any artificial knowledge or affected goodness, the warm intimacy which flowed out of his imperturbable dignity, and a beauty like that of tarnished gold. All in all, he had a complex and profound bearing which is difficult to express in words. The True Face of Shōzan which impressed him so deeply at this first meeting was just like the idea or image the student had cherished in his mind. He now encountered this image in the flesh. It was right before him as an actual existence. But his attitude was still only subjective, autonomous, and independent. He could not be satisfied with merely watching, contemplating, admiring, yearning after, believing in or imitating this actual existence objectively. This accords with the Zen admonition not to seek the Buddha or Dharma outside oneself. To

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become the actual existence seen objectively before him, to awaken to Shōzan's True Face as his own True Self—this was the great aspiration he staked his life on.

He heard a Zen talk (*teishō*) for the first time, but its delivery and content differed markedly from the university lectures he had heard. He found it quite extraordinary. It was not a matter of explaining something objectively as at the university, but of expressing Zen subjectively through a discussion of Zen records. Shōzan's True Face, which was vividly and subjectively self-expressed through the talk on the text, jostled the True Nature that lay dormant deep within the student. Right after hearing the talk the student wrote the following:

*November 5*

Through the introduction of Uemura Hōrin and Ueki Giyū, I heard Shōzan Rōshi's talk on the sayings of the Zen master Daiō at the Myōshin-ji monastery. I have lost the trail up the great mountain of human life. My clothes have gotten snarled in the branches, obstructing my progress, and my path has been broken by a rock wall rising up in a thousand-foot cliff to heaven. As I proceed to the left I return to the right; when I advance I retreat, and when I retreat I advance. For ages I have hesitated, confused all the while. Now the blood in my veins has soured, my heart is weak, and I feel as if death were upon me. At this time, a gateless gate appears before me. Sadly enough, my introspection is still shallow, and when I try to pass through the threshold, suddenly the mountain gate vanishes and a bottomless abyss opens up beneath me. Mustering up all my vigor, I try to leap across the gaping abyss, burst through the mountain gate, dash to the Buddha-palace on the other side, kill the monks, slay the Buddha, ascend the throne myself, burn incense, send the fragrant smoke across the cosmos, and embrace the universe.

But he felt dissatisfied merely listening to the master's talk. It was like scratching his itching foot through his shoe. Right then it was time for the *rōhatsu sesshin* to begin.

On December 1st he was allowed to have a personal Zen interview with the master and do zazen in the Zen hall. In the chamber for Zen in-

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terviews Shōzan was totally different than usual: he seemed solitary and unapproachable, like a perilous mile-high cliff. One could not avoid feeling wonder at the thoroughgoing expediency in Shōzan's way of encountering others.

This was the first time the student had done zazen in the prescribed monastic manner and had done a *sesshin* in accordance with the guidelines for monks. Moreover, it was the *rōhatsu sesshin*, the most severe retreat of the year, and he began to experience more physical and mental pain than he had ever experienced before. He was terrified by the extreme tension in the hall, the merciless *jikijitsu* (the supervising monk) striking students with his wooden staff of encouragement, and the icy winds blowing in through the open windows. Since he was not used to sitting zazen, the pain in the full-lotus position and the stiffness in his neck, shoulders, and waist increased with each passing moment. He grimaced and clenched his teeth. Fortunately, he was able to maintain his seated posture; his endeavors were directed almost entirely toward staying in that position, rather than grappling with a koan. On the other hand, with the pressing schedule of personal and group interviews with the master, he was driven willy-nilly to grappling with the koan; his mind and body were thus pushed closer and closer to the brink. With each meeting, Shōzan increasingly became a silver mountain, an iron wall, defying all attempts to climb over it, and his white one-eyed glare became killer rays of light.

By the third day of the *rōhatsu sesshin*, the student had no path to escape, not even one small enough to fit through the eye of a needle. His body became a dark mass of doubt, and he was pushed into an absolute, life-and-death crisis. It was not that he had reached an impasse while trying to solve objectively some particular problem. Nor was it that he had failed to solve objectively some particular problem. Nor was it that he had failed to solve objectively an all-encompassing universal problem, which then became a great doubt in his mind. Rather, he himself had totally become a single Great Doubting Mass, in which the doubted and the doubter were one. This one block constituted his entire being. Like a mouse entering a bamboo tube only to find itself trapped there by a snake, or like being at the top of a hundred-foot pole and unable to go forward or backward, he had reached a total impasse and could not longer move.

Right at that moment, in the manner of "being cornered, changing;

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changing, passing through," the Great Doubting Mass crumbled apart and melted like ice from within. That imposing wall, Shōzan, also crumbled away without a trace, leaving not even a hair's space between the student and the rōshi. Awakened to his formless, free True Self, he gazed upon Shōzan's True Face for the first time. Here he realized that the words of Mumon were no lie: "I join hands with all the patriarchs of the past and walk with them; as our eyebrows intertwine, we see with the same eyes and hear with the same ears."<sup>12</sup> In the manner of the saying, "One cut cuts all; one attainment attains all," each and every one of the problems he had been unable to solve for so many years were solved at their root, and he felt a great joy unlike anything he had ever experienced. He had awakened to the truth of "no-birth-and-death" which is beyond being and nonbeing; he had realized the meaning of "no-thought-of-good-and-evil" which is apart from value and antivalue.

He expressed this awakening with the following verses:

With the breaking up  
Of rain and cloud,  
Even clearer  
The moon in the great sky.

The intimacy:  
The sound of a waterfall  
After the downpour  
Breaking the quiet night.

In this way he had cast off the religion of medieval belief, turned to philosophy grounded in modern reason, broke through the extreme limit of rational philosophy based on objective knowledge, and awakened to the free and unhindered True Self. From then on, he devoted himself to two inseparable matters. First, living this True Self, he acted in accordance with subjective knowledge, and thus expressed the Self in all facets of existence. In doing this he initiated the "religion of awakening." Second, by the True Self being conscious of itself objectively, grasping even the self in an objective manner, and thereby attaining objective knowledge of the self, he established a "Philosophy

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<sup>12</sup> *Mumonkan* (Gateless Gate), Case 1.

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of Awakening.”

The completion of this Religion of Awakening and Philosophy of Awakening was his primary concern, and his eternal task.

**TRANSLATED BY CHRISTOPHER A. IVES**