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REMINISCENCES

On My First Coming To Meet Dr. Shin'ichi Hisamatsu

It was July of 1952. I was in Japan in the city of Kyoto in the company of Dr. Suzuki Daisetz and Mr. Cornelius Crane. Dr. Suzuki had returned to Japan recently after having been in America for three years, ever since June of 1949, when he went to Honolulu to take part in the Second East-West Philosophers' Conference held at the University of Hawaii. Following that summer conference, he stayed on at the University of Hawaii to teach the fall semester. He then went to the Claremont Graduate School in southern California, where he taught two semesters, and in 1952 was teaching at Columbia University in New York City. I had been with Dr. Suzuki all that time, having met him in Japan at the Engakuji Zen monastery compound in Kita-Kamakura in March of 1947, when I first began to study with him.

While in New York City, along with his teaching at Columbia University, Dr. Suzuki had given a series of public lectures. Through these lectures he had come, in 1951, to meet Dr. Karen Horney, the renowned American psychoanalyst, and Mr. Cornelius Crane, an eminent American businessman and nephew of Mr. Charles R. Crane, who had once served as America's ambassador to China. Dr. Suzuki had known Charles R. Crane rather well, and had even, in 1938, dedicated the book *Zen Buddhism and Its Influence on Japanese Culture* to him.

When Dr. Horney began to express an increasing interest in Zen as a consequence of her contact in 1951 and 1952 not only with Dr. Suzuki but also with Dr. Kondō Akihisa, a Japanese psychiatrist with his own Zen background who was professionally trained in Morita therapy and was at that time studying in New York at Dr. Horney's American Institute for Psychoanalysis, the idea of a group visit to Japan during the summer of 1952 was suggested. Cornelius Crane, who shared Dr. Horney's heightening interest in Zen, strongly supported this idea, and through his kindness and generosity did much to make it possible. Thus it was that in the summer of 1952, Dr. Suzuki and Dr. Kondō were again back in Japan as part of an informal group that included, among others, Dr. Horney and Mr. Crane. I, too, had been invited to be with them.

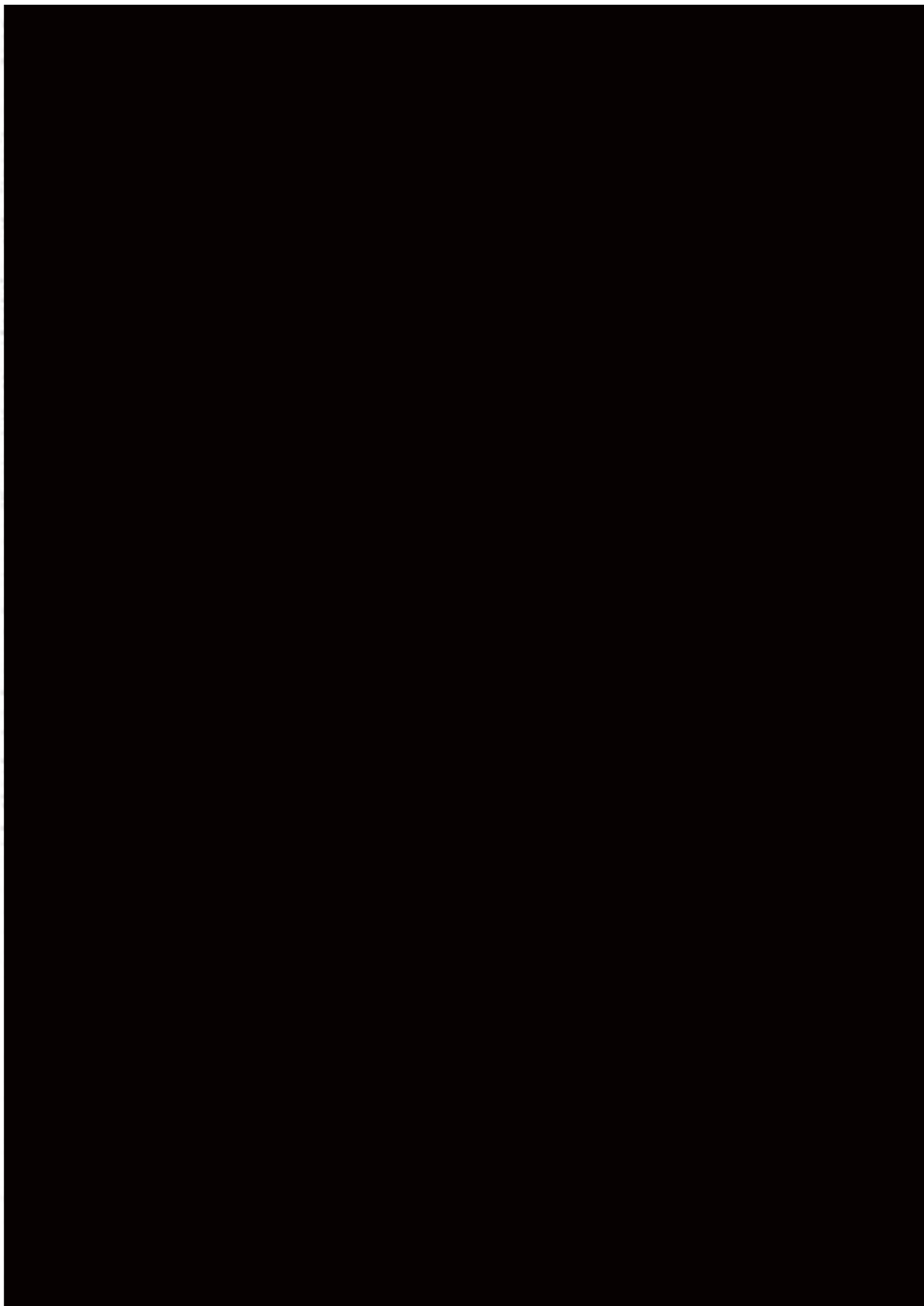
During the five years (1947 to 1952) that I had been studying with Dr. Suzuki

both in Japan and in America, he had repeatedly said to me that one day I must study with Dr. Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, who, as Dr. Suzuki put it (speaking in English), was a Zen master (albeit a layman—as was Dr. Suzuki himself) who “knew the modern mind.” So toward the end of July of 1952 when we were in Kyoto and Dr. Hisamatsu's Zen group (then called the *Gakudō-dōjō*) was conducting its summer retreat (or *betsuji*) at Yamada Mumon Rōshi's temple, Reiun-in, in the Myōshinji Zen monastery compound in the Hanazono section of Kyoto, it was arranged for Dr. Suzuki, Professor Furuta Shōkin (Dr. Suzuki's assistant), Mr. Takaaki Yukawa (the 1949 Nobel Prize winner in physics Yukawa Hideki's second son, who, in 1952, was studying as an undergraduate student at Columbia University), Mr. Crane, and myself to participate in the final *zazen* period of the retreat. At the termination of that period, which marked the end of the entire retreat, Dr. Hisamatsu, as was his custom, led a memorial service in the particular garden of Reiun-in that contained one of the burial spots for his beloved teacher and Dr. Suzuki's life-long friend, Dr. Nishida Kitarō. It was there at the conclusion of that service that the accompanying snapshot was taken (see photograph on the facing page).

Although Dr. Suzuki introduced me, along with the others in the party, to Dr. Hisamatsu at that time, and although Dr. Hisamatsu graciously invited us all to accompany him back to his residence at the Shunkō-in temple within the Myōshinji compound for an extremely pleasant visit, under the circumstances it was natural that the visit was quite short and purely social. But it did result in an agreement that most of us would be the dinner guests of Mr. Crane a few evenings later at the famous Japanese “tea-style cuisine” restaurant, Hyōtei, located outside the main gate of the Nanzenji Zen monastery compound in the Keage section of Kyoto. It was at that restaurant that my first real meeting (or, as it actually turned out, lack-of-a-real-meeting) with Dr. Hisamatsu took place.

For reasons that I am unable to recall, the dinner group at the Hyōtei restaurant finally came to consist of just Dr. Suzuki, Dr. Hisamatsu, Mr. Crane, and myself. After we were all settled in our seats on the straw-matted Japanese *tatami*, and after some general preliminary pleasantries, Dr. Hisamatsu on his own initiative (as was his wont) turned to me and asked in a most cordial (but, as I was soon to experience, most probing) manner, how it was that I had come to have an interest in Zen. I tried to explain to him in Japanese that at college I had been a student of history, and that as a result of a paper I had written for a contest open to graduating seniors in history on “The Causes of The American Civil War,” I had been plummeted into the problem of historical causation. For despite the fact that my paper received first prize, I remained bothered by the question, exactly when did the American Civil War begin. Was it in 1861 with the firing on Fort Sumter? Was it in 1859 with John Brown's raid? Was it in 1820 with the Missouri Compromise? Was it in 1619 when the initial contingent of

c.1976



FAS Sesshin, July 1952

**FRONT (l to r): Furuta Shokin, Yukawa Takaaki; STANDING (l to r):
Richard DeMartino, Yamada Mumon, Suzuki Daisetz, Hisamatsu
Shin'ichi, Cornelius Crane.**



ABOVE: Calligraphy. "Within absolute nothingness, there is an absolute store"—Postmodernist (1976). BELOW: Tea ceremony (c.1950).

black captives brought over from Africa as slaves landed at Jamestown, Virginia? I then related how, after graduating, when I found myself serving in the United States Navy during the second world war, this same problem of historical causation extended to that war. What caused World War II? And when did World War II really begin? Was it in 1941? 1939? 1919? 1914? 1870? or when? This led, ultimately, to the problem of the "first cause." When did history itself begin? And this led, inexorably, to the problem of time. When did time begin? I indicated that I continued to ponder these questions throughout the war. After the war, as a member of the American Occupation Forces in Japan, I came, in March of 1947, to meet Dr. Suzuki, and began to visit and to talk with him about these matters. Even though I could not fully comprehend what he was saying, I somehow sensed that the answer to this problem of time—as well as the problem of the first cause—could perhaps be found in Zen.

Dr. Hisamatsu's instantaneous reaction to this was at once sympathetic and incisive: "Is the problem of time a problem of history or a problem of yourself?"

I stated that I had indeed, since then, come to realize it to be a problem of myself and of history.

This prompted him to ask: "Which comes first, history or the self?"

Not yet grasping the true import of the question, I replied, "The two are interrelated. Without the self there would be no history; but, conversely, without history there would be no self."

It was his next question that suddenly struck home: "Which self are you talking about?"

The wind was abruptly taken out of my sails. With one stroke the question had cut through not alone to the self that I was "talking about," but also to the self that was "talking." Feeling as if a gaping hole had been opened at the very core of my being, my response was hollow even to me: "Of course, the relative self."

Dr. Hisamatsu pressed on, ever gently but ever firmly: "What other self is there?"

Like a boxer jolted by a powerful blow who nevertheless still struggles doggedly to maintain his stance, I answered, "The Absolute Self."

Then came what was in effect the coup de grace: "And where does this Absolute Self come from?"

At that moment the waitress who had initially ushered us into the room, having returned with the "welcoming tea" that invariably greets every guest in Japan, was kneeling on the *tatami* to my left side, and was in the process of pouring the tea into four cups on her tray. I reached over, took from the tray one of the cups that had already been filled, slid it along the *tatami* in the direction of Dr. Hisamatsu, made a slight bow, and said: "Won't you please have a cup of tea?"

Never disengaging his gaze, which was focused directly on me, his retort was terse but trenchant: "You learned that from a fine person" (*Sore o ii kata kara naraimashita ne*). Whereupon Dr. Suzuki, who had been silent all this time, immediately added, speaking in English, "That's it . . . that's it."

As the waitress began to distribute the other three (by then) filled cups, Dr. Suzuki, reverting to Japanese, began to converse with Dr. Hisamatsu. I leaned back, totally drained, turned to Mr. Crane, and said (in English), "Well, Cornelius, I guess I just had my first *sanzen*."

The entire episode took no more than about ten minutes—during the brief interval between the time we arrived and the time the "welcoming tea" was served, but its effect continues to this day.

In my subsequent relation with Dr. Hisamatsu, there were numerous similar incidents. For example, once when I was in a *betsuji*-retreat and feeling profoundly despondent, I went in to see him in a *sankyū* (or *sanzen*) interview and asked, almost plaintively, "Why can't I?" (*Naze dekimasen ka?*). His answer was characteristically uncompromising: "Because you have not, you can not" (*Sō nararemasen kara, dekimasen*). There was nothing left for me to say—and yet, I was no longer despondent.

On another occasion, during an exceptionally cold winter *betsuji*, when I was freezing, tired, hungry, in much physical pain, and, because of all this, in a generally furious mood (though never with regard to Dr. Hisamatsu), I went in to the *sankyū*-interview, and, after the formal greeting, pounded my fist on the *tatami* and shouted, "What is my greatest weakness?" (*Watakushi no ichiban no ketten wa nan des'ka?*). His simple but rapier-like reply was, "Asking that question" (*Sono shitsumon o suru koto desu*). My fury, tiredness, and sundry aches were all somehow completely undercut. Once again, he had taken everything—or almost everything—away from me.

Although there were these as well as a number of other such "expurgating" encounters, it may be said that it was the overall impact of my first meeting—or lack-of-meeting—with Dr. Hisamatsu in the restaurant that initiated not simply the "shaking" but the total collapse of my "foundations."

And now Hisamatsu Sensei is dead. But, of course, now—for those who did or did not "meet" him, Hisamatsu Sensei is not dead. Born, he died. Unborn, he is undying.

eternal pine
formless self
there then
here now

RICHARD DEMARTINO