

More Than Just An Encounter

In no way has Hisamatsu Sensei died, for in my opinion he was not that sort of person. In essence a man of no-birth-and-death, he himself realized that there is no need for a funeral, memorial service, or grave. He lived as the Awakened subject, as one who has died the One Great Death and gained new life after death, so it is hardly possible that he, again, has died.

I say this not out of blind faith like that of the Victory-for-Japan group in Brazil who closed their eyes to reality and stubbornly refused to believe that their Japan, "The Indestructible Land of the Gods," had indeed suffered defeat. If we deeply contemplate the real, formless state of all things, it becomes obvious that the old master Hisamatsu is majestically present here and now, and has not passed away in the least. He is "revealing" his True Self. It is as if all things in nature, even rocks, are bowing together in worship.

His existence is in no way something of the past. His place of being is the here-and-now of primal time-and-space. There is no occasion to be disheartened when we grasp the place of his leaving: Sensei is here, and, yet again, not here. Until recently, I had been thinking that I should get on the Shinkansen to Gifu or else I would never be able to see him again, but that sense of separation in time and space has long since vanished and his existence has now drawn closer to me than ever before. This is not just to say that I have locked eyebrows with him and am inquiring about Awakening. In a boundless realm, without even a hair's breadth between us, Hisamatsu Sensei comes forth and is one with my Original Face.

Sensei's physical body has certainly passed away, yet with this, contrary to what one might expect, why he originally was a person with no form has become all the more evident. Precisely because there is no grave anywhere, the monument to him, set up in the azure and deeply inscribed F.A.S., already stands in all places.

Even so, I cannot help but think of my heavy responsibility as an unworthy disciple. We are as dissimilar as Canicula and canine, as wide asunder as heaven

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and earth. How wonderful it is that I am one with him, though perhaps it is in the mode of an absolutely contradictory self-identity.

Forty years have passed since I first perused *Oriental Nothingness* beneath my lamp in the Welkin Dormitory of Toyama High School. In the world of the vicissitudes of formed things, of the mutually restrictive confrontation of being and nonbeing, that dormitory no longer has any shadow or form; it has turned into a thickly forested park. I, however, seem not to have developed or matured beyond the state of that primitive tribe of schoolboys who jumped wildly about stark naked, yelling "*Eins, zwei, drei!*" to the beat of a mammoth drum.

In those days long past, I would gaze at the three-thousand-meter majesty of the Tsurugi-Tateyama Range, usually cast in a rosy hue at dawn and dusk. Yet, through what karmic affinity was I able to come to the lofty summit of the pure spirit of the old master Hisamatsu? Of the hundreds of notebooks I have accumulated over the past forty years, few are those without some entry regarding Hisamatsu Sensei.

Like a blind turtle happening upon a floating log, I met that unprecedented great teacher, yet here I am, not gushing forth water from the bottomless depths of the earth, but splashing muddy water from a shallow pool. How long will I have to resign myself to such an infantile level of existence? Unable to awaken to my stupidity, ugliness, shallowness, and nearsightedness, in bitter regret I confront my lack of worth as a disciple.

But right now, let us return to the way of being with no thought of good or evil. When I was but a vast expanse of blackness extending to all ends of the world, I asked Sensei, "How can a dead man gain new life?" He immediately replied, "By going back to before his birth."

Merited here is a brief account of the events surrounding the time he first set to us the Way of subjective absolute-negation-*qua*-absolute-affirmation. On October 17, 1948, I stayed at Hōseki-an—Hisamatsu Sensei's residence in the Shunkō-in subtemple of Myōshinji—from one to six in the afternoon. It was a Sunday, a day for receiving guests. Six other people came and went while I was there, but I made no attempt to leave. Hisamatsu Sensei said to me, "For some years I have had in mind a new method for Awakening, but since its application requires due caution, I have kept it to myself." Continuing, he admonished me, "You must not give yourself up to despair; if you understand, it makes no difference if you die, but until you do understand, you must have a resolute spirit defying death." I told him how I had gazed too fixedly at death and had thereby fallen into a pessimistic view of life; I said that if I failed to awaken to the living Tathatā, I would be nothing but a self no longer worthy of life. Sensei nodded and said, "Rather than the Mu koan or the sound of one hand, you had better apply yourself to the koan about your Original Face."

Two months later, on the evening of December 17, the fifth day of the Rōhatsu Betsuji-gakudō at Tōkai-an in Myōshinji, Sensei flew into the zendō with awesome vigor and yelled, "Should one seek the Way with words? With the mind? With the body?" He snatched up the *keisaku* and carried it once around the hall. Stopping in front of FAS member Ikenaga Kiyoshi, he cried out, "Cut off all verbalization, extinguish all activity of the mind!" and immediately dealt him a blow. Lifting up the *keisaku* again, he chided us all: "It's like looking for fish in a tree!"

In my mutual inquiry with him that night, he confronted me with the Fundamental Koan: "Right now, if you must not do or be anything whatsoever, what will you do?" He thrust this at me as the first application of the method he had mentioned before, the Way of subjective absolute-negation-*qua*-absolute-affirmation. Before he presented this koan to me, however, he warned me that it would be of no use if I didn't have the will to apply myself to it for a very long time and carry it all the way through.

For the past thirty-two years, including the 100th Betsuji-gakudō held late last year, I have been continuously working on the Fundamental Koan as the first and last koan. I have come to realize the significance the establishment of this new method of Awakening holds for world history. In laying the groundwork for this method, we must thoroughly examine it in comparison with the traditional methods of Zen. Whether from the East or the West, all humans must be able to apply themselves to this new method at any time and in any place; neither the mediation of a particular Zen master nor the system of old-case koans is needed here. From our way of being at this very moment, we can firmly and directly enter the universal (rather than individual) samadhi. We must establish such a method for the immediate realization and practice of Awakening to the Formless Self. Right now, at the point where I inquire into Awakening with my whole body and mind, the old master Hisamatsu and I are constantly regarding each other. All such old-case koans as "Right now, Nansen passes away," or "Right now, Hakuun says that it's still not enough," contain this "right now." The functioning of "right now," however, is not limited to koans. I would like to solve all problems through the ability of this "right now" to freely give and take life with one stroke of the sword.

On October 14, 1955, I went to Tokyo University to hear Dr. Nishitani Keiji give a public lecture for the Religious Studies Society there. At the door of the classroom of the Literature Department, I met FAS member Doi Michiko. I said to her, "I started *sanzen* with Osaka Kōryū Rōshi at Hannya Dōjō. I've passed through fifteen koans in the past ten days."

"Ah, congratulations. That's really good," she replied.

"No, that's still not enough. I'd fall apart if I came face to face with Hisamatsu Sensei."

Just as I said this, Hisamatsu Sensei appeared out of nowhere. In that split second I was greatly astonished at what seemed to be a miracle.

During Sensei's stay in Tokyo, we went up to Nishida Sensei's former residence in Ubagaya, Kamakura. As we walked along, Sensei said, "I was born and brought up in the mountains, so the sea is especially delightful for me." He picked wildflowers at the side of the road, and offered them later that day at Sunshin's¹ photograph. That house is very nostalgic for me as the setting of an occasion never to recur in my life: a personal interview with Dr. Nishida on September 25, 1943. I felt like Sekitō, who, as a student monk, once "laid eyes" on the Sixth Patriarch.

On the morning of the 17th, I saw Sensei off at Tokyo Station. There on the platform, while expressing doubts about koan Zen, I asked him about the saying, "No Dharma exists apart from the Mind." Answering, "That depends on your way of applying yourself," he stepped right off the train and, with a terrifying expression, drew up so close that our noses nearly touched. The next spring I was shocked to know that Miss M., one of those who saw Sensei off that day, had committed suicide.

Thirteen years later, in September 1968, I completed the traditional koan practice at Hannya Dōjō and set off on a trip to Western Europe. Just before departure, I received a special delivery letter with the following verses and message from Hisamatsu Sensei:

ON THE OCCASION OF KITAHARA RYŪTARŌ DŌNIN'S
CROSSING TO THE WEST

Picking up a fish's eye
In the bottomless sea,
Disporting a bleary eye
In the limitless expanse.

Dreaming of mind-flowers
In endless kalpas,
Endeavoring
Yet no merit to be gained.

Discarding all trivialities
As the *hossu* [fly whisk]
and rope-bottomed chair

¹ Nishida's Zen name.

To go freely
 According to circumstances,
 If not the east
 Then the west.

Upon careful reflection
 Debt ends in no-debt,
 The repayment of debt
 In spite.

Be that
 As it may.

Fifty years
 the debt to kin;
 Ten years
 the debt to one's Zen master.

How can it be repaid?

With best wishes to your mother.

Respectfully,
 HÔSEKI²

September 19, 1968

I pondered his verses from the East to the West—as I gazed down across the blue ripples of the Bay of Bengal, watched the sun sink low over the desert, glided high up through the glittering expanse of stars in the Arabian sky, and arrived in the deep of night at Hellenikon Airport in Athens. His message, “If not the east, then [I shall return to] the west,” has become all the more vivid in my mind.

Two years ago, on the morning of July 22, I went up to Nagara in Gifu. My main purpose was to give Hisamatsu Sensei a report on the 96th Betsuji-gakudō, at which I had served as *jikijitsu*. That sesshin marked the opening of the Jutoku Gakuryō, a zendō constructed by FAS member Kawarabayashi Motoo in the Tamba Hills north of Kyoto. I visited Sensei for about an hour that day, and this proved to be my last inquiry with him in this life.

Dressed in white in preparation for his passing, he had physically weakened to the point where he could sit up only with the help of his nephew, Teiichi-san. He said to me, “Having met someone like you, it was worth being born.” This

² Hisamatsu's Zen name.

greatly moved me, for these were the very words I should have said to him.

"I'm counting on you to go and create Kitahara Zen."

"No," I responded, "it will be FAS, not Kitahara, Zen. From the place where verbalization is cut through and all mental activity is extinguished, I will, as FAS, freely function in every moment and in all places. There's not much I can do as far as the tea ceremony is concerned, but I will at least pursue the most fundamental point to its depths. All Dōgen Zen and Rinzai Zen aside, I will without fail bring your method of Awakening to fulfillment. Please rest assured."

Sensei continued, "My physical body will die before long, but I never will. I'll always be with you."

Supported by Teiichi-san, he finally managed to stand up and show me to the entry hall. How can I ever repay this great debt?

On the way home, I got out of the taxi near the east end of the Nagara Bridge. Much to my surprise, an old poet of the Hakushū Association happened to be there. In mutual surprise and joy, we descended some steps and proceeded to a nearby memorial stone engraved with a Bashō haiku. Strangely enough, towering up beside it was another memorial stone, with a Hakushū poem, that I had long been searching for ever since I had heard rumors of its existence. It faced away from Hōseki-an, and on it was engraved the twelve-line poem "Cormorant Fisherman," which begins:

Glowing in the crimson of torches
You, you are the cormorant fisherman.

I thought how I would gladly be the cormorant manipulated by the incomparable cormorant master Hisamatsu. That summer night in 1927, when my father Hakushū and I, age five, rode in a cormorant boat on the Nagara River, came back to life in all its vividness. For the first time in fifty-two years, I visited the Yōrō Falls where we had been descended upon and stung by a swarm of hornets. Water sprayed forth from the falls, and it was cool.

KITAHARA RYŪTARŌ