

The Dharma Gate of Beauty

YANAGI SŌETSU

TRANSLATED BY BERNARD LEACH

Editors' Note

*The translator of this essay, the late Bernard Leach, was a close lifelong friend of the author Yanagi Sōetsu. His strong belief that Mr. Yanagi's writings contain a message of importance for the West as well led him to translate a number of his essays on folkart and aesthetics. The few hundred pages of Yanagi which have appeared in English are the result largely of his efforts. One of these translations, "The Pure Land of Beauty," we had the privilege of presenting in *The Eastern Buddhist* (IX, 1, May 1976). "The Dharma Gate of Beauty," we learn from the moving epilogue Mr. Yanagi appended to it, was written in the space of a single day following a sudden deep religious experience. It is the initial statement of the basic standpoint he was later to expand upon in a series of unique writings on Buddhist aesthetics. Mr. Leach's draft translation, which he worked on with his Japanese assistants over a period of years, was unfortunately left unfinished when he passed away earlier this year. In completing the translation and preparing it for publication, although we were at pains to preserve as much as possible of the original version, it became necessary, in the interests of improving the resolution of Mr. Yanagi's thought, to make a number of revisions in the text, some of rather considerable proportions. It seemed a shame to disturb Mr. Leach's graceful English style—we recognized the danger of putting the fire out altogether as we poked about the coals—still we believed in this case our policy of giving greater weight to accuracy, when that had to be the choice, is a standard Mr. Leach would himself have chosen.*

"The Dharma Gate of Beauty" was read at the second annual meeting of the Japan Craft Society in 1948, was published in a beautiful limited edition the following year, and has since become a classic of its kind—"a sutra of Buddhist aesthetics," in the words of the celebrated potter Hamada Shōji.

Some editorial footnotes were necessary; they are so marked. The rest of the footnotes were those attached to Mr. Leach's draft translation. The epilogue mentioned above, as it serves to set the scene for the main essay, has been placed before it as a prologue. Finally, we wish to thank the Japan Folkcraft Museum for permission to publish "The Dharma Gate of Beauty" here.

YANAGI

If even a single sentient being fails to attain birth in the Pure Land, the Buddha's attainment of right enlightenment must remain an empty dream.

Anjinkatsujōshō

The road that minds down the mountain is the road that leads up. While saving sentient beings, there are none to save.

Daichi Zenji

PROLOGUE

I shall shortly reach my sixtieth year, the end of one complete cycle according to the Chinese calculation. Having come full circle, I am taking the opportunity to arrange in a little better order some of my thoughts on aesthetics. In some ways I suppose it could be said to mark a culmination of those ideas, though truthfully I would rather that it be a fresh starting point from which to develop them further.

When we look back over the history of Buddhism we find that when the various schools endeavored to establish the objective foundations for their respective teachings, they almost invariably turned for support to their scriptures, the Buddhist sutras. Their founders did not try in an arbitrary manner to advance ideas of their own, but chose to commit the fortunes of a life's work, their entire religious thought, to the vehicle of the sacred words which had been instrumental in their own salvation. Each of the sects has its chosen scriptures. In Tendai and Nichiren, it is the *Lotus Sutra*, in the Kegon sect the *Avatamsaka* or *Kegon Sutra*. The Nembutsu or Jōdo sects use the Three Pure Land sutras, the Shingon sect the *Vairocana Sutra*. Even the Zen sect, which professes freedom from reliance on anything, places great store on the *Vimalakirti*, *Lankavatara*, *Diamond*, and *Perfect Wisdom* sutras. In short, the reason why each of the sects seeks a basis in scripture is because it sees there the essential truth of its beliefs. This also goes to explain the aura of unassailable authority which radiates from the sutras. A measure of the greatness of the sect founders may be said to lie in the profundity with which they read the sutras. For a religion to seek authority in such scriptural writings is inevitable.

Would it not be appropriate, then, for some such ultimate scriptural source to figure in the formation of a creed of aesthetics for folkcrafts? It is well known that the Nembutsu school which arose as a religion for the common man bases all its belief and teaching on the great vows of Amida Buddha, above all on the Eighteenth Vow, which promises salvation through the Nembutsu. This past summer, while I was reading the *Sutra of Eternal Life*, I was struck by something

THE DHARMA GATE OF BEAUTY

in the Fourth Vow. A thought flashed through my mind with an abruptness that seemed to shatter it free of a thick covering of ice. All at once I knew that this was the vow upon which the Dharma Gate of Beauty could be built. It was a sudden self-realization. My thoughts even it seemed in spite of myself were being developed by the words of this Vow which denies the duality of beauty and ugliness. Although normally I am a slow writer, this time I found myself writing an entire essay in the space of a single day. It was a rare experience for me. Of course it does not pretend to be more than a statement of the essential points, yet I do feel as though my thoughts, after many years of wandering in complicated ways, have finally reached a certain discernible stage. As I have said, I hope to make this a starting point from which to promote the Gateway of Beauty. My inner thoughts are as I have related them in the following essay, my intention the discovery of the basis of folkart in the Absolute Compassion of the Buddha.

To some readers I am sure this conception may seem strange and unexpected. For those not familiar with Buddhism immediate acceptance will be difficult. In such cases, however, they might want to replace the Buddhist expressions with equivalent terms more to their liking. For instance, in place of "Buddha attains highest enlightenment," one might equally say "God becomes Himself." Again, should you find the Zen expression "Unborn" strange you might recollect the words of Christ, "Before Abraham was I am." If you stumble over the word *nyo* meaning "suchness" you may take it as "things as they are." Some are apt to feel that the word Nothingness is remote or perhaps somehow old-fashioned; why not then use a word like Infinite or Ultimate in its place?

I have taken the liberty of using so many Buddhist terms for three simple reasons. First, I myself am a man of the East. Second, it is in Buddhism that Eastern thought has reached its deepest level. And third, it is in the Nembutsu, or Jōdo, schools that the "Other-power" way of viewing things is best represented. This is why the use of Buddhist expressions was for me the most natural. At the same time, inasmuch as Christianity is also an expression of the path of "Other-power," I cannot regard it as being unrelated to my thought. I only earnestly hope that those who read what I have written here will, in their understanding of it, remain free of any unprofitable sectarian attachments.

Formerly, all my energies were directed to a singleminded pursuit of religious truth. Then, midway, I became aware of the problem of beauty. My thoughts turned to concentrate on the folkcrafts. Moreover, I got caught up in the construction and establishment of the Japan Folkcraft Museum. I remember how I was taken to task by quite a few people, who questioned my forsaking of the realm of religion to spend all my time together with objects of a material kind. It was a remonstrance I would hear more than a few times. I was advised

YANAGI

to return as quickly as possible to my original goals. (In contrast, people I have become acquainted with more recently seem to find my erstwhile interest in religion odd.) But as far as I was concerned, I was merely looking up at the summit from a different angle, and my only reply could be, that I was really doing the same work I had always been doing. In any case, to bring together the concerns of faith and beauty is not at all strange. In fact, to me it seems rather late in the day for people to be recognizing the intimate kinship between them. The sacred religious words which tell of faith whisper in the same breath the inner meanings of beauty. No one can speak more profoundly, or more penetratingly, of the intrinsic nature of beauty than the words of the scriptures. How should they? Beauty, like religion, is a manifestation of the ultimate. At least apart from that ultimate, true beauty is inconceivable.

In philosophy, aesthetics is treated as a "value." As such, it must possess an ultimate nature and cannot remain something merely opposed to ugliness. Should it do so, its "value" would become merely relative. So long as it comes in touch with absolute value, however, it must be related to that which is eternal. It is this eternal that we call the "world of the sacred." That is why beauty too cannot exist without a close connection with the essential nature of religion. There is no way the laws of aesthetics and the laws of religion could be different.

It was also from my deep desire to establish a land of Beauty that I came to assemble these ideas together. The universal salvation of all beings must be one of the conditions for the actualization of such a kingdom. Whoever it may be and whatever he may make, everything must from the outset be contrived so that they all are embraced, just as they are, within this world of beauty. Above all we must identify the source of the principle that guarantees the salvation of articles of folkcraft produced in large quantity by unknown craftsmen, for without such an assurance how would a kingdom of Beauty be possible? Yet any number of concrete examples exist which prove beyond dispute that people of no apparent consequence can and do, without having to become outstanding artists, make things of beauty. Everything is saved just as it is in the actual condition it is in at present. What is to be hoped for without this? How many there are unable to escape their own commonness. But they can all accomplish extraordinary work just as they are. There is a way that enables them to. It is untrue that they cannot. The truth is that ugly things are no more than illusions, and unless we can see this with our own eyes, the world is indeed a dark place. This essay is a short declaration of my faith in that truth.

The reason the culture of folkart is always a culture of the spirit is because it inevitably has its roots grounded in religion. How could an authentic statement on folkcraft be formulated without it taking this taproot into account?

The Dharma Gate of Beauty

When I come to attain Buddhahood, unless all the beings throughout my land are of one form and color, unless there is no beauty and ugliness among them, I will not attain highest enlightenment.

The Larger Sutra of Eternal Life

i

In this fourth of Amida's forty-eight great vows are found words which can give us the basis upon which to erect an aesthetic.¹ Amida's declaration means that in the land of the Buddha the duality of beauty and ugliness does not exist.

As it is recorded that the Buddha did attain highest enlightenment, that the conditions in his vow stand fulfilled is unquestioned. In things' ultimate nature there are no dualities whatever. All things, in respect to their Buddha-nature, are of a purity that transcends relative oppositions such as beauty and ugliness. In the light of this original being dualism vanishes. For that reason it is sometimes described as "the essential part," "without birth-and-death," "pure and undefiled from the very beginning." It is also said to be "stillness" or "emptiness," to be "originally not a single thing," or "nothingness." Not merely nothingness which holds onesidedly to nothingness, but nothingness which transcends the duality of nothingness and being. If this realm is not entered and made our own, then nothing is true.

The land of the Buddha is a land of supreme existence, so not so much as a hint of beauty or ugliness is to be found in any corner of it. This same absoluteness is what sustains the original nature in us as well. No dualisms figure in our original nature either. For us, to dwell in form which is no-

¹ Briefly stated, the forty-eight vows of Amida Buddha, which appear in the *Larger Sutra of Eternal Life*, are variations of one basic vow: to save sentient beings from suffering by leading them out of their illusion to the Pure Land or Enlightenment, achieved in the practice of the Nembutsu. *Eds.*

YANAGI

form, is our true form. The forms of beauty and ugliness are but the provisional semblances of reality.

Where then does this "Dharma-gate" of beauty take us? What is it trying to teach and transmit to us? It says that dwelling in the inborn nature which transcends the duality of beauty and ugliness is to dwell in a condition of salvation, and this is true for whoever or whatever it may be. It tells us that as salvation is already promised, we should not immerse ourselves in profitless disputes over beauty and ugliness. Furthermore, it does not even ask that we be qualified to receive this salvation (how could faulted human beings possibly have such faultless qualifications?), for the Buddha is ready to welcome us into his land, having fulfilled all qualifications for us.

It teaches also that since salvation has been readied for us in this way, it would be inexcusable if we did not avail ourselves of it. Return to your intrinsic Buddha-nature which is beyond beauty and ugliness, apart from it there is no real or true beauty. This is what the religion of beauty teaches us.

ii

Let us return to the two words beauty and ugliness. They are, of course, opposing terms; if you have beauty you have ugliness, if ugliness, beauty. There is no beauty which does not suppose ugliness, yet neither is there any ugliness which is the same as beauty. Above and below, left and right, superior and inferior, far and near, good and bad, pure and impure, all partake of the same character of opposition. But why have these oppositions? Why divide into beauty and ugliness? And why do we favor the one? Why must we abandon ugliness and select beauty? Why praise beauty and damn ugliness? At the same time, why is that certain things exist which cannot become more beautiful, and most things become downright ugly? What is it that obliges the latter to be ugly? Unfortunately, the "forms and colors" of this world of ours are not "the same." Both the appearances of people and the shapes and colors of things are differentiated into the beautiful and the ugly. It is inevitable that they are. So we do our best to turn our backs on ugliness and to embrace beauty. Everyone struggles in various ways to become beautiful. But why must we shoulder such a burden?

It is unavoidable because our world is not the world of Buddha. It is a

THE DHARMA GATE OF BEAUTY

land of dualities, and it is our lot to have to make our way among the contradictions which result from this. The use of opposing terms is the inevitable outcome of an imperfect world. As these oppositions are anti-nomic, endless conflict is bred between them, and these in turn result in ever increasing contradiction. Man's whole life whilst in this world is suffering and sorrow, which reaches its extreme in the duality of birth and death and the breach between self and other. Can we say that all is well? Is there no way through this wilderness? No way of arriving at the one while remaining in the two?

iii

The Buddhist scriptures say that there is. Strangely, they do not say that arriving at the one is something that we will achieve in the future. They say that we have already arrived, that this is something that has already been accomplished in the infinite past. Insofar as the Buddha has already attained highest enlightenment, the transcendence of the duality of beauty and ugliness is already accomplished. And though the word "already" might suggest something over and done with, it actually points to an eternal event which is taking place beyond time. This highest enlightenment, far from being something lying finished in the past, continues to be alive at this very moment. Oblivious to its eternal working, we go on subjecting ourselves to suffering, disuniting things into beautiful and ugly, good and evil. That is illusion.

So we suffer even though we are really saved. It is not that we are given salvation because we suffer. On the contrary, when we are suffering, we are suffering amidst an accomplished salvation. There can be no suffering where there is no salvation. Amidst our suffering we find our salvation already prepared. This is the wonderful thing. An unaccountable providence. Yet it is only we, from our human viewpoint, who sigh at its incomprehensibility. From the vantage point of Buddha-wisdom, all is crystal clear.

Now, Amida's wonderful Fourth Vow makes known to us that all things in this relative world are embraced in a realm where beauty and ugliness do not exist; that all things are born there on the strength of the promise that they already lie within it. The difficulties stemming from the conflict between beauty and ugliness that beset our world are in the Buddha's Land unknown. There nothing exists by which to judge a thing beautiful or ugly. It is a matter worth marvelling at that Buddha did not act as

YANAGI

judge or arbiter, did not praise some and punish others. The absolute compassion he embodies envelops all. That is the way things are contrived from the very start.

But let us be attached to the yoke of this relative world and we immediately find ourselves caught inextricably in the feud between beauty and ugliness. Such is the fate of all that exist there. Nor as long as we remain in its entanglements have we any hope of avoiding birth and death. Contradictions, contention, and strife never cease, nothing is eternal, all is submerged completely in a world of limitations. This is the reason for the world's impermanence. To be unable to escape this impermanency is the destiny of all that resides in duality. Yet these impermanent and finite things are false and ephemeral. It is not their true form. They cannot be original things. They are naught but vain illusions of reality. The realization of this we may even say is itself religion.

iv

On consideration, then, beauty and ugliness are found to be creations of our own making, terms our discriminations draw into opposition. And as long as we engage in such intellection, they will continue to stand against one another. The logic that rules our thinking tells us that beauty is not the same as ugliness, that the two are always contradictory. Ideas such as "beauty is as such ugliness," "true beauty which is not opposed to ugliness," "neither beauty nor ugliness," are not permissible, for they outstep the bounds of logic. As long as we remain within the relative world the laws of logic hold. But is this the only world? Is there nowhere where unity holds reign, where even the power of logic is rendered helpless?

The language of Zen is brought to mind here. "Grasp the hoe with empty hands." "Hear the sound of one hand." "Play the stringless lute." And so on. Logic affords no help whatever in coming to terms with these. Why pose such odd questions, one may wonder. Is it really necessary? We may sense their deep underlying meaning, yet so long as we are walled up within the confines of discrimination, it is hopeless to try to come up with any response to them.

Zen sometimes asks, "How is it before the arrival of Bodhidharma from the West?" "What about the time before the lotus emerges from the water?" Here again the concern is with getting us to investigate the realm

THE DHARMA GATE OF BEAUTY

prior to the disunity of beauty and ugliness. The words of Amida's Vow, "Unless there is no beauty and ugliness . . . I will not attain highest enlightenment" suggest themselves once more. The Buddhist scriptures teach not only that this original realm prior to the separation of beauty and ugliness actually exists, but that all things from the beginning have this realm as their fundamental nature. The word "before" in these contexts means "not yet born." This not yet being born is the fundamental nature of things. The Zen master Bankei (1622–1693) is said to have handled all situations with the single word "Unborn." "Unborn" is what is original, what one comes into the world with. Bankei taught that we should all dwell in that unborn originality. Once we are able to do that, the conflict between beauty and ugliness ceases of itself.

One often sees these words written across the straw hats of Buddhist pilgrims making their way from shrine to shrine:

Really there is no East, no West,
Where then is the South and North?
Illusion makes the world close in,
Enlightenment opens it out on every side.

For East, West, North, South, we may substitute the words Beauty and Ugliness, Good and Bad.

v

What then are we to do? We are to remain just as we originally are where East and West are undifferentiated. Return to the original nature of "as-it-is-ness," or "thusness." Live in the purity that Heaven gave us. Be just as the Dharma makes you be, and all is well. That is the idea of *jinen hōni* Shinran (1173–1262) taught. The realm of *jinen hōni* or "natural suchness" is alone immovable and unchangeable. From it, we can learn what true beauty is, for truly beautiful things do not exist apart from it. One may equally say that true beauty is the form of this "suchness."

Suchness is oneness, non-duality or "not-two-ness." It belongs neither to beauty nor to ugliness, nor has it to do with choosing any one thing over any other. Non-dual beauty may be described as the beauty of beauty itself. Things which are beautiful because they are not ugly are limited to known heights. Theirs cannot possibly be true beauty. For as long as it is being set against ugliness it is just another illusion. Even clumsiness or

YANAGI

unskilfulness is not deprived of salvation so long as it is not opposed to skilfulness. What is commonly acknowledged to be beauty is subsequent to the bifurcation of beauty and ugliness. Our task is to discover the beauty that lies prior to that. And again, the words "before" and "after" do not refer here to a temporal sequence. "Before" indicates a timeless realm where past and future have no part to play. It is a place of birthlessness and deathlessness.

As ultimate, supreme beauty is liberated from all dualistic aesthetic considerations, we may call it emancipated beauty. Apart from this emancipation real beauty is not found. Amida is called the Tathagata² of Unimpeded Light. Actually, it is this unimpededness that makes him a Tathagata. True beauty cannot possibly emerge as long as ugliness is scorned and beauty hankered after. I would put it even more strongly, and say that such freeness is the only beauty. Only as I have said, it is an autonomous, not antinomical, beauty. Man deprives himself of freedom by his penchant for dividing things, making them into opposites. When that disappears, he is free. The Indian mystical poet Kabir (1450?–1518) was attempting to convey this same idea when he sang of the beauty of the "sound of the unstruck drum" and of the true dance as "dancing without hands and feet."

vi

Take as illustration a painting. If it is done on the assumption that skill is necessary to make it beautiful, it is bound to be wanting in beauty. The most one could say about it would be that it was not unskillful. For the painter to imagine that it will not be beautiful unless he makes it so, only proves his own unfreedom. What is wanted is a work that even though clumsy is beautiful in that very clumsiness.

Beauty which includes even imperfection is more profound than that which would shun it. There must be a way whereby the beautiful becomes so freely and naturally, heedless of whether it is beautiful or not. Beauty reaches its culmination when it is thus unimpeded. Getting involved in attempts to become beautiful belongs to a lesser dimension. That is why most people do not find their way to the path of unimpededness. They do not even give it any thought.

² A description of the Buddha as One Who Comes in Suchness.

THE DHARMA GATE OF BEAUTY

Bankei taught people that instead of trying to become a Buddha, it is better, and easier, for them not to *do* anything, and thus just remain a Buddha. This is an unsurpassed insight for the path of beauty too. Rather than attempting to make something beautiful we should just remain where beauty and ugliness have not yet appeared. Nothing can be made more beautiful than the beauty found there. Since the nature inherent in all things is prior to beauty and ugliness, if instead of striving for more beauty, everything stays within its original nature, there is no reason why anything should fall into ugliness. The nature of things is such that everything, however clumsy, is beautiful just as it is, even in its clumsiness. And yet, having inflated opinions of themselves, most people endeavor by their own means to work their influence on things. With ability enough, they may indeed be able to surmount even the deep-rooted conflict inherent in dualistic modes of being. But very few have that ability. By thrusting their small egos forward, dividing into beautiful and ugly as they pass judgment on things, they go out of their way to inflict difficulty and suffering on themselves. The haven of truth is thus reached by very few. Most fall by the wayside, their illusions unbroken.

But as we learn from the sutra, Buddha's attaining Buddhahood implies a promise to welcome all others in beauty. Salvation is the essence of Buddhahood. A Buddha saves not because he is a Buddha; salvation is Buddhahood. So if everything can be entrusted to his power, there should be no illusion or failure. Such a path already lies open to us, a manifestation of the Buddha's great compassion. Thus all the Nembutsu schools teach us to cast aside our small self and rely solely on the Buddha. That is their special message, showing us a path to spiritual peace that anyone may follow. Most fail to take much notice of it, however, and are left, together with their dualistic notions, in the world of suffering.

vii

Human beings brim with falsity to the end of their days. They cannot remain without imperfection nor avoid contradiction. But this is not something original in them. Originally they have no faults. This means not that they are perfect, simply that they are embraced in their imperfectness into a faultless world. Their faults are then, just as they are, no faults. On his own, man cannot rid himself from fault and become faultless, but all is originally so constituted that however a thing is made, whatever and

YANAGI

by whomever it may be, it can be embraced in beauty. The superior make things in superior ways, the inferior in inferior ways, and whatever they may draw, however they may carve, all is disposed so that they are included in true non-dual beauty.

This is confirmed in the Buddha's attainment of highest enlightenment. The *Sutra of Eternal Life* was written to relate the astounding influence his enlightenment worked. So, whether they are good or bad, believers or unbelievers, all of the works of all men are in receipt of his mercy. Illusion is left in only because this implicit promise of his does not get through to them, or else because they struggle against it. Ugliness, then, is an appearance which has been separated from its original and native state. In religion, this is called sin.

So it is up to us to get beyond the discrimination that sets beauty and ugliness apart. Let us return prior to that, to our original self, the original state of suchness, leave behind the artificial constructs of beauty and ugliness, and dwell in "everydayness." Making distinctions of beauty and ugliness is a mental disease. What we must do is regain the original well-being of "*buji*," where nothing "happens" to us even when we are at our busiest. To do this we must first discard our small ego-self, for if the slightest flicker of attachment lingers illusion will not leave. Then, we must not allow ourselves to be hindered by discrimination, for as long as we lean on our own judgments we shall never find our way free of the world of duality.

That is where purity and innocence come in. There is a more than small measure of truth in the fact that so many saints have extolled the quality of childlikeness. The Japanese priest Myōzen is said to have always taught that an infant's Nembutsu is best. Such statements endeavor to expose to us the shortcomings of discriminatory thinking. They do not mean that it is totally valueless, but unless it is broken through we can never go beyond duality. Hence the deep suggestiveness of the infant's innocent mindlessness. It is not a return to the cradle being recommended, rather an attainment of the realm of selfless and unimpeded freedom. Once there, nothing can go wrong; even though we err, the error remains just as it is, and is no longer error. We may say this is the virtue inherent in no-mindedness. Once detached from its realm, however, even those things which are not wrong fall into error. The very fact that they assert they are not wrong is the proof that they are. How often it is that things which the world boasts of as beautiful prove to be ugly.

THE DHARMA GATE OF BEAUTY

The problem, then, must not be allowed to turn upon beauty and ugliness. How effective could any standard for measuring beauty and ugliness be? Anything which could be so measured should never be spoken of as beautiful. True beauty is native to a realm which Buddhism calls "Mu" (nothingness). Nothing should be praised as beauty which has not reached the profundity of this realm of *nothingness*. (Beauty and ugliness are mere forms of *beingness*.) Fortunately, the essence of man does not reside in forms of being, and that is why his original estate is said to be innocent and pure. Impurity is the vestiges of the sins he has produced.

The Zen master Rinzai says, "Just don't strive!" For as long as the slightest ambition to make or to do remains, everything, both the beautiful and ugly, will be tainted by the ugliness of artificiality. Yet if "non-striving" or "artlessness" is then attached to, that will be just another form of striving. We find good substantiation of this in *raku* ware bowls, in which the effort to make beauty inevitably results in ugliness. As long as any such conscious effort or intention remains, the result cannot help being ugly.

viii

Were men all in their native purity where distinctions of beauty and ugliness have yet to appear, they could never fall into error, the error, for example, of creating differences between men. The commonsense view would say that the world of beauty is one which requires genius. The notion that genius alone can produce great art strikes most people as reasonable. But it is only a partial truth. The amount of talent people have, the distinctions of intelligence between them, are trifling and foundationless considerations fathered by a relative world. They only arise because everything which forms a part of that world works to breed distinctions between the superior and the inferior. Prizing the good and loathing the bad being the norm of that world, while we remain within its confines we have to comply with its laws. Respect for genius and reverence for sanctity would seem to be most commendable. But we must not overlook that they belong to the world of dualism. Once in the different dimension of the non-dualistic world, differences such as intelligence and stupidity, goodness and badness, hold very little meaning. Zen teaches the profundity of "not thinking good and not thinking bad." It tells us we should "Be careful not to do good"—for then there can be no rationale for doing evil. These voices come from a realm beyond duality.

YANAGI

So even with the differences between good and evil, a world exists in which those differences as such disappear, where contradictions as mere contradictions melt away. Nembutsu followers call this the Pure Land, but it might also be called God's Heaven. It is the land of equality, of freedom, of peace of mind, and harmony. There, where opposing principles do not exist, the contention of opposites never materializes and one could not see beauty and ugliness even if one wanted to. All things and all people are in a state of salvation. Whatever anyone might make, it cannot disturb the working of the Buddha's all-embracing compassion. The genius is taken in and so is the ordinary man. There are no ranks or distinctions at Heaven's round table. Those are the product of our discrimination. The Buddha's eye and our eye are not the same.

The belief that the artistic genius is the only one who can accomplish work of outstanding merit betrays an extremely narrow way of thinking. The ordinary man should be able to produce splendid work as an ordinary man. Did not the Pure Land teacher Hōnen (1133-1212) say: "If you cannot recite the Nembutsu as a priest, then recite it as a layman . . . The bad man should recite it just as he is"? The Pure Land is not a place ever to be attained through one's own power, a power in any case ordinary men could never boast of. But Self-power is not the only gate to salvation. Another, belonging to the Other-power, has been erected for him. Through it, everyone, however dull-witted, can make their way to safe haven on the "other shore." Not by working the oars, but by letting the wind swell the sails. Hōnen's brief "One-Sheet Document," which tells ordinary men in unmistakable terms how to attain the Pure Land, has in this sense an indeed wonderful message.

Those who enter by the Gate of Self-power may gain experience in the path of absolute self-dependence, though through it few are able to actually make their way to full attainment. The road is a steep one fraught with great difficulty. In contrast, those who travel the path of Other-power, placing all their trust in Amida and the promise of his Vow, reside in a realm of absolute dependence. A Way of salvation is given them despite their inferiorness. The reference to the Other-power teaching as the "Easy Way" (*Igyō-dō*) comes from this.

THE DHARMA GATE OF BEAUTY

IX

As I have said before, by their own power those of sufficient ability may eventually reach their goal. Their practice, based on the model of the Buddha's own wisdom, has from ancient times been carried through to completion by a few select monks. But what of the rest of mankind beyond number, incapable of saving themselves? It is their plight, falling under the Buddha's gaze, that arouses his compassion. Without the vow which issues from this compassion the salvation of ordinary men and women would be hopeless. He vows to save them because they are unable to save themselves. It is not too much to say that the compassion representing the fulfillment of his attainment of highest enlightenment was solely for the cause of such people.

That is why Shinran was brought to declare that the true object of his teaching was the evil man. That is an extremely audacious notion. At first it is difficult to comprehend. But if only we remember the depth of the Buddha's compassion, there can be no room for any doubt regarding its truth.

Involvement in discussions of talent or lack of talent comes to have little real importance in view of the way definitely promised by which even a talentless person can be saved just as he is. There is no overlooking the fact that many exceptional works of art have been made by nameless and illiterate craftsmen. Those Ido tea-bowls so highly praised by the great Tea masters are the best possible illustrations. We do not know the people who made them, but they were not the work of only one potter, or even several. Whoever they were they could only have been poor artisans. We can hardly suppose that each one of them was a man of genius. They were workmen of the most ordinary kind. They were making low-priced articles. They certainly were not giving any thought to making each piece beautiful. They threw them off simply and effortlessly. If the bowls are described as graceful, that was surely not sought by their makers. The bowls were allowed to follow their own ways into existence, naturally and inevitably. This accounts for the air of elegance with which they are so richly endowed. They are works untroubled by either beauty or ugliness, fashioned and appearing before the illness of illusion and doubt could arise. This freedom was gained precisely by virtue of their ordinariness and low cost. It is not something which could have been brought about by any ability in the artisans. The overall environment, the received traditions, the selfless

YANAGI

work, the simple way of life, the natural materials and unsophisticated techniques, all combined in the flowering of these bowls. When those Korean potters were making their wares they were merely doing matter of factly what was expected of them. Is that not the reason the bowls were saved? It seems to me that here a common ground forms naturally with the teaching of Self-power and its ideal of "everydayness." That is why the Ido bowls, though the outcome or work of the Other-power, are found to suit the tastes of Zen. Here one cannot help feeling the oneness of the Self-power and Other-power schools.

Let me add one further point. Has any genius in later times been able to produce works to surpass the Ido tea-bowls fashioned so effortlessly by those ordinary men? It would seem extremely doubtful. To paraphrase Shinran's words from the *Tannishō* quoted a few pages ago, "The genius can produce exceptional work, all the more so can the common man"—with the help of the Buddha.

x

Some people may still demur, and say that while universal salvation may indeed have been promised, what about all those mediocre people going around making this world progressively uglier. Why are they left unsaved like that? Was not the Buddha's Vow a glorious pipedream after all? How long must we be plagued by such people? And how long will we have to go on deploring this state of affairs?

The answer is simple and clear. It is because the minds of those mediocre people persist in asserting their own insignificant egos. Because, in imagining they can achieve something through their own power (a fundamental illusion), they becloud their originally pure nature. Ugliness is the color produced by this defilement. But the Buddha's Vow to save all beings never weakens because of this; in fact, it becomes all the more available to them. It is for them, the sinful and the mediocre, that the compassionate Vow continually rains down its benefits. It is one thing to be aware of one's sins, but one should not for a moment doubt that they are redeemed by the Buddha's great compassion. In the *Yuishinshō* ("On Faith Alone"),³ it is said: "You think it is impossible for you to be saved because of your guilt and sin, but do you realize how great the Buddha's

³ Written by a fellow disciple of Shinran, founder of Jōdo Shinshū Buddhism.

THE DHARMA GATE OF BEAUTY

power is?" Buddha's Vow is not swayed by the number of our sins. Despite the blessing such a favorable wind can provide, man foolishly insists on lowering his sail and rowing forward on his own—only to tire out in mid-journey. Ugliness comes into being when we place reliance on our own meagre self. So the Buddha tells us to abandon it.

In past ages of deep faith, people were more innocent and humble and closer to the truth. They could forget their self without much trouble. That was an advantage it would be difficult to overestimate. We in an age of deep scepticism see talented and untalented alike striving to understand things by themselves. That explains the separation of beauty and ugliness. It is not surprising those with little talent soon find themselves overwhelmed. Ugliness is a sign of their self-power's insufficiency. Why is it they do not realize and realize keenly their ignorance? Or is it their ignorance is so deep they cannot realize it. If they throw themselves into the contest between beauty and ugliness their work is cut out for them. They are digging holes and burying themselves in the process.

From here on, countless numbers of ugly objects will no doubt continue to be produced—just so long as the small self, greed, and discrimination prevail. But we may still cherish some hope. We may believe in the Buddha's attainment of highest enlightenment. We may place full faith in his all-encompassing Vow of salvation, which is a guarantee that everyone and everything is taken into a land originally prior to the beauty-ugliness duality. What hope would there be without this Vow? Salvation is not a mere possibility. Possibility assumes impossibility, and those are words in man's vocabulary, not the Buddha's. His compassion, to borrow Ippen's words, is "neither too little nor too much." It is only due to our own ignorance that we do not realize its wonderful meaning and thus lose out on its blessings.

Therefore, it falls upon those who have reached true faith to guide those who have not to the path to Buddhahood, even if that has to happen while they are still in the state of unbelief. They are to be guided so that even while they themselves are unaware of it, they dwell in the Buddha's Land naturally. They would be incapable of returning there even were they told to do so, yet they are guided back, their inability unchanged, in an environment in which they will at some time find for themselves that they have been dwelling in their native land all along. This makes us realize what an extremely welcome thing tradition is for people of lesser abilities. It comes to the aid of those who cannot stand on their own, like a great safe

YANAGI

ship that enables a small and insignificant being to make his way across vast ocean expanses. Tradition provides support for him in his frail individual existence. Indeed we should remember that many beautiful things in the world did not in themselves possess the strength to become that way. Their salvation is not owing to any specific qualifications on the part of the individuals who made them. Something greater than them is doing the work. Herein is hidden the disposition of the Buddha.

So although people say man creates beauty, that is not so. Buddha himself does the work. No, to make things beautiful is the Buddha's nature. Beauty means a Buddha becoming a Buddha. Creating beauty is an act performed by a Buddha toward a Buddha. Beauty is the product of Buddhas working together.⁴

Nembutsu is said to be man thinking or meditating on Buddha, or Buddha thinking of man, but, actually, it is Buddha thinking of Buddha. Quoting Ippen again, "It is Nembutsu doing Nembutsu." In Nembutsu, reciting the Buddha's Name, the Name hears the Name. All right and true things are events taking place within Buddha's activity. All lovely things are the forms of Buddha transferring merit to Buddha.

xi

When all is taken into account, then, is it not asking too much of ordinary men to place so much emphasis on faith? Faith implies a kind of strength too, and for those with scant power of any kind at their command, even that is hard to come by. Of course, once faith is attained and made secure, there is no "backsliding." In those who live lives of faith the depth of experience overflows speech. The testimony that "faith is all" is uttered by those with deep personal knowledge of its illumination.

But the sad fact remains that numberless beings, those incapable even of following the way of faith, are still left out in the cold. To demand that they attain faith is to ask for a strength they do not have. But to provide a way even for such people, was that not the very aim of the Nembutsu teaching? Just as the Nembutsu is not contingent on goodness or evil, intelligence or stupidity, neither should a true Other-power teaching turn

⁴ In the draft translation, Mr. Leach has the words "Truth reflecting truth: Beauty reflecting Beauty" in brackets. *Eds.*

THE DHARMA GATE OF BEAUTY

upon faith or lack of faith. Indeed Ippen may be said to have arrived at the ultimate Nembutsu teaching. In him the standpoint which made faith a fundamental requirement was finally transcended. "Do not speak of faith or lack of faith," he said. "Do not debate guilt or innocence; for it is Namu-amida-butsu itself that is born in the Pure Land."

This emphasis that it is Namu-amida-butsu itself, not human beings, that is born in the Pure Land has deep meaning. How can ordinary men and women be expected to deliver themselves by faith? Yet even that criterion is powerless to affect Namu-amida-butsu's birth in the Pure Land.⁵ Birth in the Pure Land is not subject to any of the impediments inherent in human life. Even before the origin of man, his birth in the Pure Land was already determined and a kingdom free of the afflictions of beauty and ugliness already stood in all its majesty. This is the Pure Land of Beauty. Here and here alone is the birthplace and native land of beauty.

Fortunately this homeland is close at hand. "Amida Buddha is not far from here," the *Meditation Sutra* says. Such a matchless land might be imagined to exist on a distant, unreachable "other-shore," but that "other-shore" is really this shore. There is no other-shore apart from this present world. The other-shore is the original body or form of this shore. The present world, "this shore," is only an illusory appearance. That is the reason for all the teachings telling us to live in the "real body." If we remain on this shore there will be no end to the contention between beauty and ugliness. But if we are in our original nature there is nothing at all to come into contention, no place for sin or ugliness to enter. That is the original, inherent form of things, what I call the beauty of "originality,"⁶ of things as they are originally. To be in the original nature of our primal being is to dwell in beauty—the beauty of the Pure Land.

In Zen they speak of *kenshō*, seeing directly into the nature of our original being. To attain this seeing is to attain Buddhahood. In the world of beauty as well this attainment is essential. Pure Land followers speak of "being

⁵ In the draft translation, the words "The will of God is not affected by His creatures until their prayer is God's own desire." appear in brackets. *Eds.*

⁶ Compare William Blake's *Auguries of Innocence*:

To see the world in a grain of sand
And Heaven in a wild flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
And Eternity in an hour.

born" in the "Land of Bliss," but this paradise resides in our original being and does not indicate any special place beyond it. Salvation, "birth" into that Pure Land, is not apart from our original being. Amida Buddha is its body. So salvation means our return to take refuge in Amida. And, in this way, Namu-amida-butsu "goes and is born" in the Pure Land. The birth of beauty is no different than this birth.

xii

They teach in the Self-power school that *klesha*, the evil passions, "is" (*soku*) enlightenment, that birth-and-death "is" (*soku*) nirvana.⁷ Their ultimate doctrinal statement is conveyed in such phrases. The key is in the word *soku* ("is"), no matter what terms come before and after it. The attainment of Buddhahood occurs in the *soku*. Without *soku* no Pure Land salvation is possible. It is *soku* that attains the Pure Land. In the Pure Land teaching the six Chinese characters making up Na-mu-a-mi-da-butsu are solely for the purpose of getting man to grasp *soku*. The Buddha's Name or *Myōgō*, as the six characters Namu-amida-butsu are called, effects the nondual relation of sentient beings and Buddha, and makes it so that the world of defilement "is" (*soku*) a place of tranquil peace. We must not, however, fall into the delusion that *soku* means the same as mere identity—how could the ordinary man and the Buddha be one and the same? And yet, implicit in *soku* is the teaching that man can become linked to Buddha even in his present condition where identity with Buddha is impossible. The Name does not discriminate between good and evil. The sinful man is joined to the Name as he is. In such a case his wickedness is not being condoned; it is the Name alone that is good. We cannot affirm evil, but even for those unable to be free of evil, if they can attain identity with the Name while remaining in their evil state, recite the Name, listen to it, and thus take their place among the ranks of those of immovable faith, then their salvation and birth in the Pure Land is assured. Salvation, then, does not happen to man but to the Name. In it man becomes man.

Taking this into account, we can see that beauty belongs to the Dharma

⁷ As used here, with the usual Buddhist significance, the word *soku* has no real equivalent in the English language. Usually, standing between two terms, it conveys the sense of their identity which is at the same time difference; that is, an identity which does not alter the fact of their particularity. *Eds.*

THE DHARMA GATE OF BEAUTY

world of *soku* as well. It too is unaffected by the individual in any way. The talentless and the ignorant are all, unexcepted, living in the midst of this Dharma world. Therefore if a person dwells in the truth of this Dharma nature he cannot help dwelling in beauty. Even simple or stupid men are affiliated to beauty just as they are. That is how it is for everyone. Not a single one is rejected. This is the significance of Amida's declaration of the transcendence of the opposition of beauty and ugliness.

To tell others about such a world of beauty, to let them know of the salvation or birth in that Dharma world, is the Dharma gate of beauty.

Written at Johana Betsu-in