

Message and Medium – 'Shutairon' 1950

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i.

Every systematic approach to the Buddhist teaching has to have a *message* and a *medium*. The message, the essential element of the systematics being expounded, is the principle the seeker must constantly bear in mind. The medium is the wisdom to actually implement that principle in real life. In the Shinshu approach, the Tathagata's Vow is the message, the Buddha Name the medium.

For Shinshu to deserve being called a teaching of Truth, it must reveal the Truth of religion. To demonstrate that it does just that calls for some general concepts. Eternal Truth, we could say, represents the message aspect, and worship, the medium aspect. These notions of eternal Truth and worship are seen throughout the Buddhist religion and were praised by Shotoku Taishi (573-622). For him, to embrace Buddhism was none other than to abide constantly in the Truth; to worship was an expression of taking refuge in that Truth. To constantly abide in the Truth is, in Shinshu, located in the Vow of great Compassion issued by Amitabha Buddha. Thus, it is said that the Tathagata as Truth revealed the Vow as the teaching, practice and realization of the Truth.

When we say that a religion of Truth opens our eyes to its respective religious truth, this suggests a broad continuum of religions in general, inclusive of religions of empty truth as well as those of provisional truth. But, again, these latter are stages we must expect to pass through in our search for religious truth. In what we generally refer to as religion, then, it is rather pointless to look for some single underlying concept that all can subscribe to; for, at length, that boils down to believing in the irrational, or dabbling in paranormal experiences, or acquiring unusual powers and abilities. And so, in what people label vaguely as religion, the learned are able to sift out consistent underlying concepts. While this acumen may have its place when it comes to discussing certain phenomena occurring in society, as far as our religious quest is concerned it contributes little of substantial value. What we ought to seek for simply is the Truth of religion; hence, it is only natural that we pass over those approaches not possessed of Truth. [1]

ii.

Even were the eternal Truth to abide in the message of a systematic Buddhist approach, that still raises the questions of how that eternal Truth would be expressed in our lives, and how we would assimilate that Truth into our lives. It is here that we find the positions dividing the various forms of religion. When we examine the ways in which a person engages the presencing of eternal Truth, we can categorize them into three kinds: 1) supplication (*kigan*), 2) meditation (*zazen*), and 3) *nenbutsu*. [2]

Among them, supplication as a form of medium is abundantly in evidence, such that religion itself may be defined as the medium of prayer. In that case, *zazen*-meditation and *nenbutsu* would not qualify as religions, which, in a sense, may not be far from wrong. Put the other way round, one could say that supplication, while not particularly Buddhistic, is closely

identified with religion, so much so as to become virtually identical with it. At the same time, even in the religions of prayer we find forms that closely approximate Zen and nenbutsu. Further, in those who follow the way of nenbutsu, there are those who are close to Zen in spirit, and whose practice contains a modicum of prayer. In this sense, the differences in the three types of seekers are not merely categories of religions, but reflect, rather, facets of self-awareness of the religious seeker, and should be understood as such.

The religion of prayer is vast, and harbors a wide gradation of values, were one to critically evaluate them in terms of human knowledge and divine power. Even the educated who laugh at superstitions, even the wise who properly observe the true faith, may well belong to the religion of prayer; for, rather than the form, we must look at the content of prayer. We cannot place those who pray to ward off illness and disaster in the same league as those who pray for the happiness of humankind. We place a strain on credibility when we fail to see a difference between those who vow to ward off evil, and those who pray to purify the world of klesas, the imperfections of human nature.

Putting aside the content for the moment and looking only at its form, it would seem the praying self aspires to move the kami-gods and Buddhas by its entreaty. Or, it may well be that the praying self is following the will of the divine, as is sometimes explained in the psychology of prayer. But, it is always assumed that there is a union between human happiness and divine power; that is, in this union, the sincerity of the praying self has earned the favor of divine intervention of the kami-gods and Buddhas. Unless the praying self is sincere, there is no benefit forthcoming.

And so, that sincerity must be absolute and the heart of the supplicant must be prepared, in order for the correspondence between man and god to occur. Unless these conditions are fulfilled, the religions of supplication cannot be established. The supplicant makes his entreaty with all earnestness, and when no benefit comes, lays it down to his own lack of sincerity. And so, the supplicant is led by his praying self to a heightened self-awareness, thus deepening his understanding of the principles of the way.

Seen from another perspective, it is the kami-gods and Buddhas who favor the praying self, by visiting the seeker with their divine revelations. Scholars in religious studies who affirm this aspect say that the gods and humankind have evolved together. In Buddhism, it is similarly said that the Tathagatas in response to the pleas of ordinary people assume human form to appear in this world.

It is necessary here for the praying self to do some serious soul-searching before the supplicant can make good his request. And so, one limitation of such soul-searching is that, whatever prayer one may make, one has to deny the human emotions that compelled one to turn to religion in the first place. Hence, the divine revelation in response to the requests people make can never be the true Tathagata; and so the praying self to a certain degree can never bring us into contact with the true Tathagata. To bring ourselves in communion with the true Tathagata, we must leave behind prayer for another mode of medium that appears at this juncture: zazen, or sitting meditation. The purpose of zazen is not to have a vision of the Buddha, but to have one's own experience of the Truth. One does not aspire to move the Buddhas through prayer, but to become as one with the Buddha.

Buddhism at this point goes beyond religion, to become what might be called a sort of philosophy, or borrowing the name of the monastic way of life that makes the practice of zazen its essential focus, we might refer to it as the Path of Self-Perfection. The Path of Self-Perfection is the practice of the path of contemplation (shikan). Putting a halt to one's delusory thoughts and notions, one contemplates the principle of the Tathagata way---such was the life of contemplation practiced by the learned monastics in Buddhist India and China. Buddhism's higher world view also developed from out of this pursuit of the way. For

its pursuants, there was nothing else other than to attain satori, to achieve the breakthrough to a great awakening.

Now, the sphere of contemplation was not a prayerless state. While the monastics may in effect have turned a deaf ear to the pleas of the ordinary people, the aspirations of the Buddha consumed their attention. Contemplation (vipasyana) meant becoming as one with the Buddha. In other words, one stilled the mind together with the Buddha, one's every movement was done as an adjunct to the Buddha. To move as one with the Buddha thus depended on knowing the Buddha's aspirations. One might say that the goal of the Path of Self-Perfection was to truly make the Buddha's aspirations one's own.

Thus, the Buddha-marga, as expounded in the Mahayana Buddhist literature, is identified with the desire to fulfill the Bodhisattva practices. This is explained as the desire to attain Buddhahood. The aspiration to become a Buddha and the aspirations of the Buddha cannot be said to be different from another. As far as aspirations go, it is clear they both express the same desire for Buddhahood. If it is an aspiration for the Truth, that in itself is the Buddha's aspiration. In the aspiration to become a Buddha, one is inspired in turn by the desires of the Buddha -- that is, contemplation. And so, for one to fulfill the conditions of contemplation, one must strive to make the Buddha's aspirations one's own. If that were not the case, if contemplation were an end in itself, such persons may be philosophers, but never seekers trodding the Buddha-way. In Buddhism this self-seeking attitude is associated with the sramana, or unimaginative listener, who lacks the great compassion of the Bodhisattva.

But, even if we were made privy to the Buddha's aspirations through contemplation, it remains a question whether, through that means, we would be able to negotiate the Way such aspirations demand. The act of prayer itself places a sharp limitation on what we are capable of becoming. When we are denied that option, there is nothing we are capable of doing, nor can we muster the strength to become something other than what we are. But, there is one path remaining to us, that one prayer that can never be quashed, and that is the path of rescue of those in suffering through the power of the Buddha-vow.

It is not our prayer that moves the Buddha to act; it is the Buddha's aspiration that moves in us. It is not that we who cultivate the aspiration of the Buddha through receiving it as our own; it is the Buddha-vow that takes us as the recipient of its aspiration and fulfills its practice. In this believing self the medium that absorbs them is the Way of the nenbutsu.

And so, the Way of the nenbutsu is to listen to the Buddha-vow with a heart ready to comply. Accordingly, the follower of the nenbutsu-way is the unenlightened, ordinary person, not the monastic. The monastic would feel uncomfortable about being rescued along with all the others by anything as mundane as the world-rescuing Buddha-vow. The follower of the nenbutsu-way, by contrast, is rescued by the Buddha-vow along with the rest of the world, and in fact has no choice but to be rescued along with the rest. Herein we find the message and medium of Shinshu.

iii.

Now, those who take up the nenbutsu-way as their medium are obliged to take up the Vow as their message. But, when we look at the form it manifests, it seems little different from the path of prayer followed by those believing in the kami-gods and Buddhas. And so, if we were to clarify the difference, rather than dealing with three types of medium, we must learn more about how the kami-gods and Buddhas manifest themselves. In Japanese Buddhism, these are the three theories of Buddha-body, Buddha-mind and Buddha-vow.

When the object of one's supplication is the Buddha, it is quite natural that one's practice takes the form it does. That is because one seeks to receive tangible benefits through supplication. Unless real proof of such benefit is obtained, the religion of supplication cannot be established. And so, real proof is seen in the benefits obtained by the practitioner through the ritual practices done before the gods and Buddhas. "Pray for happiness in the present life, vow to establish the welfare of the world." To fulfill that prayer-vow, the kami-gods and Buddhas have to invest their faith in you. And so, when that happiness has been lost, when that better life can nowhere be found, the kami-gods and Buddhas in that unseen world also mourn the situation. In this case as well, when we critically consider that long sought-for happiness, when we do some soul-searching prayer for the truth, this helps to usher in a new age of spiritual rejuvenation, and through that means a purification of religious beliefs. But, there are also problems that attend this view, among them the existence of the gods and Buddhas, and their personifications.

The existence of God and His personifications are themes constantly discussed among Christian theologians. Rather than fundamentally refute the existence of God, they affirm it and try to provide explanations of the various faces of God. In this regard, it would seem that Shingon mikkyo, or esotericism, is no different from Christianity. We are reminded, of course, that mikkyo is pantheistic, while Christianity is monotheistic, but if different rites were assigned to the various personifications possessed by this one God, it would closely approximate the numerous deities of the mikkyo pantheon. It is said that those who pray will earn the grace of God; this is similar to the mikkyo notion that love can work bodhisattvic wonders.

Indeed, even jealousy as an aspect of God can be regarded as something divine. The wrath of the deity, as a means of arousing the dormant seeker in us, for instance, is something we are obliged to accept in our pursuit of the spiritual life. After all, what we have been calling the character of the divine is nothing more than the divinization of the human character. It is said that the unenlightened ordinary person has 84,000 klesas against him, while the Buddha has 84,000 merits -- these to transfer to man. Were this not the case, there would be no real proof of any salvation for humankind. And so, even for those who devoutly observe the teaching, there has to be manifested real proof of salvation in this world. This defines the character of the community of faith.

We have already explained the notion of divine personification. High regard is given not only to the physical performance of practices before the kami-gods and Buddhas, but also how the practitioner comports himself in mind and speech. And so, in the religion of supplication, the content of wisdom and compassion become problematic; for, there is also high regard for divine revelation and the explication of the Buddhas' vows. But, all of these can be reduced to the problem of the existence of gods, or God, and Buddhas and their personifications, as aspects of the religion of supplication. By contrast, in the religion of zazen-meditation, the existence of the Buddha and his personifications do not pose a problem.

The Buddha is not regarded as an Other, but is spoken of as our Original Self. The Buddha, beginning with Shakyamuni, is nothing other than the patriarchal lineage of spiritual masters that has transmitted the sublimely Awakened mind down through the ages. The face-to-face transmission from patriarch to patriarch is the face-to-face transmission from Buddha to Buddha. There is no Buddha-wisdom outside the Buddha-mind, there is no Buddha-body outside those who possess the Buddha-mind. The path we pursue is to know as a Buddha knows, to become as a Buddha becomes, to do as a Buddha does; other than that, there is nothing to trouble oneself over concerning the existence of the Buddha.

In the religion of zazen-meditation, neither the existence of the Buddha nor the personifications thereof, constitutes a problem. The Buddha-wisdom arises out of original

emptiness; the Buddha-mind, apparent in all things, is nowhere to be found. And so, the practices a person would do are utterly negated; even the acts of speech are given no place to take hold. Though the notion of attaining Buddhahood in this existence is common to both Zen and mikkyo, we can perceive a clear difference between the two. In mikkyo, it is said that "we are empowered by the Buddha, the Buddha is empowered by us."

This is what is acquired in this existence, in this body, by performing esoteric mikkyo practices. In contrast, the Zen satori is that "the Buddha is this very mind of ours." Because this very mind of ours is Buddha, we attain Buddhahood in this existence. Of course if "mind and body are as one," then there is no mind to speak of distinct from the body, no body to speak of distinct from the mind. Truly, it is because of that oneness, that "the Buddha is this very mind of ours." And so, Zen has no need to experience the grace of the Buddha or to seek for salvation. As that realm of awakening is the sole property of the adherents of the Zen way, we cannot help but detect herein a mystical element to this approach.

In the Teaching of the medium of nenbutsu, however, the message governing it is Amitabha's vow. It is often said in mikkyo that all the countless Buddhas have their own vows, but, as mentioned before, owing to the fact that these Buddha-bodies are outfitted with all sorts of features, these vows do not represent the quintessence of Dharma. By contrast, in the Shinshu revelation of Amitabha's Vow, the Original Vow represents the true essence of Dharma. When that Vow becomes the object of our devotion, our path becomes the Great Way unfolding in every direction. And so, just as the Buddha-body is matured in the Buddha-vow, so too can we grasp the essence of the Buddha-mind through the Buddha-vow.

iv.

The Original Vow is the Buddha-word, and is, for that reason, an expression of the Buddha-mind. Thus, it is said, "The Buddha-mind is the Great Compassion." And so, it is only natural that the Original Vow should be understood as an expression of the Great Compassion. At the same time, there has to be a revelation of that Word of the Vow as the truth of Great Compassion. Here we encounter the Way of nenbutsu as medium seen in Shinshu.

And so, I think we can say there are three sources of compassion. Love as understood in the religion of supplication puts considerable emphasis on a living beings-generated compassion. All of the human emotions undergo divinization in the name of the kami-gods and Buddhas. Herein, even though there is a sense of indebtedness and gratitude, it involves no satori, no awakening. This we can attribute to the emphasis placed on achieving a satisfactory comportment of Life, an approach that precludes in a process of religious awakening the greater Life-and-Death paradigm as the essential turning point in our life.

In the religion of zazen-meditation, by contrast, we can detect a Dharma-generated compassion. To attain satori, one leaves behind the world of loving kindness, and never looks back. Here, we can detect a sense of sternness. But, this alone is not enough for those who seek for a true satori, a true awakening. For that alone fails to manifest the deep sense of concern one has for one's friends and foes who comprise the world of living beings. In other words, it is out of this deep sense of concern for the world that one must transcend that world. However that is achieved, it is nonetheless a religion of the chosen few, a religion for the sagely.

In contrast, the Tathagata's Original Vow is said to be an expression of the Great Compassion. That is, the Vow does not distinguish between friend and foe among living beings, and from that enlightened perspective, possesses a deep concern for all. Further, the Vow is obliged to work out the Ascent to Birth of all beings to have them take refuge in

that Dharma realm where all are as one in Suchness. In this sense the Original Vow is indeed the Dharma that all living beings can truly take refuge in. Hence, the vow of Compassion is also regarded as the vow of Wisdom.

And so, those who take credence in the Original Vow accept their own rescue as turning on this Dharma working out the rescue of all living beings. This universally-manifested Great Path is thus found in the individual testimony to that path. This Buddha-kindness, especially deep since it comes when we least deserve it, ushers in a satori prompted by compassion, which is a satori not limited to the wise and sagely. Herein we see the reason why it is called the Great Compassion of the Original Vow.

Here, it is not a question of our knowing the Great Compassion, of our thinking the Original Vow; rather, we are informed of the Great Compassion through the agency of the Vow. Were it not for the Vow, the Truth of Compassion would be something we could never understand. If the Word of the Vow did not make a deep impression on us, if we were not made aware of the heart of Great Compassion, the result would be that our practice would either be a living beings-generated or a Dharma-generated model of compassion. Without the Original Vow to serve as message the practice of the nenbutsu-way would wind up as either meditation or supplication -- a fact well testified to in the history of Buddhism. That fact also is seen now in Shinshu believers who have forgotten the Original Vow. To them, the Great Compassion is no different from love or satori.

Of course, not all who hear the Vow will be moved by the Buddha's heart of Great Compassion. That is because when "Dharma" is spoken of, their minds dawdle over the literal meaning of the term, and they fail to grasp the living force behind that word. And so, although they have heard of the Original Vow, they have not truly lent ear to what it says. To listen is to perfectly match the explicit expression of the Word with an ear to its implicit meaning. In that sense, the Original Vow is no different from the Great Compassion; for, the Original Vow is nothing other than the throbbing of the heart of Great Compassion.

Nembutsu is the wisdom to integrate this principle of the Original Vow into our lives. For that reason, those who tread the Way of nenbutsu pay reverence to the boundless Light; they are moved by the boundless Life they discover in the Tathagata's Original Vow. That boundless Light and boundless Life they refer to by the name of Amitabha, the Infinite One. Nembutsu is thus the expression *Namu Amitabha Buddha*, "May all take refuge in the Infinite Buddha." Unless this were so, even if there were an Original Vow, it would not be a universal Dharma expressive of the Great Compassion. Here, since it is only through conscious belief in the Truth of the Original Vow that our hearts are moved by the Buddha-body of Amitabha; in that Name of Amitabha lies the reason we are able to integrate the Truth of the Original Vow into our lives. Further, however else we may testify to that fact, however else we may come to that believing self of ours, those kinds of Buddha-body are all provisional buddhas, hence cannot go beyond being provisional existences expressing provisional truths.

For that reason, in the religion of nenbutsu, the existence of the Buddha does not become the fundament for our believing self. That is because the existence of the Buddha is what is felt intuitively in the Original Vow. And so, where the nenbutsu is found, therein exists the Buddha. That Buddha, however, is not our so-called true Self. Those who tread the Way of nenbutsu, as they stand before the Light of the Buddha, discover their own imperfections. To have an intuitive awareness of one's own existence does not point to the presence of an indwelling Buddha. Does this mean the Buddha that dwells in our minds is equally to be found outside ourselves? Or, that the Buddha we intuit to exist within ourselves is also to be found outside our minds? In either case, the religion of nenbutsu does not seek for proof of the Buddha outside ourselves, while rejecting at the same time the man-equals-Buddha formula.

Accordingly, no personification of the Tathagata is to be sought for, outside the Original Vow. Even the myriad kinds of infinite virtue at length are reduced to the Virtue of the Light and the Life; so too are the effective merits of the Pure Land solely to reflect the karmic impediments of human life. Thus, by turning to the Original Vow rescuing us from such karmic impediments, even the merits of the Pure Land are ultimately reduced to the twin Virtues of the Light and the Life.

v.

The problems of the existence and personification of the kami-gods and Buddhas have a profound relationship with the problem of human existence and the nature of man. In religion, man and the divine are related, as seen in the encounter between ordinary, unenlightened man and the Tathagata. And so, the existence and nature of one side has certain implications as to how the other side corresponds with it. How that correspondence is conceived is seen in the problem of immortality; that is, the assumption that since I exist, therefore I should seek for immortality.

Those who assume so and who thus affirm the search for immortality belong to the religion of prayer. In their way of thinking, only what actually exists is designated as Life, to which Death is but a passing state. So-called immortality of the soul is based on that search and that way of thinking. Various proofs of the immortality of the soul are based on that belief, but faith itself is not based on those premises; for, faith that is constantly in search of proof is faith in a constant state of turmoil. And so, strong beliefs are distinguished by their constant anxiety.

For that reason, the religion of supplication is of little consequence when it comes to answering whether the soul is truly immortal. One may well ask, though, whether the immortality of the soul is desirable or not. Our lives are not ever-happy ones. Were our unhappy lives, owing to the immortal soul, to continue beyond death, would that not be rather distressing? Buddhism explains life as a constant transmigration in suffering. Seen in this way, Buddhism regards the immortality of the soul as undesirable. This is no different in the religion of god. The soul who turns its back on God has to undergo suffering wherever that soul may go. But, however unhappy our lives, we can never abandon our Life-hope. In that Life-hope, our hope for true happiness is pinned to our desire for immortality. Herein is expressed our desire to attain the eternal world through our belief in God. Even the desire to obtain Ascent to Birth in the Pure Land should be understood in this sense.

But, Buddhism was originally not like this. The state of Nirvana Shakyamuni spoke of, more than an intellectual denial of the immortality of the soul, was rather a self-awakening to that rare aspiration to extinguish forever the suffering of future births -- so profoundly had he endured the suffering of human existence. And for that reason he took no delight in the existence of an immutable self. Selflessness and Nirvana are the true knowledge that man awakens to. From that perspective, Buddhism has been thought to celebrate death. But, those blessed with life do not welcome death. The fundamental principle of Buddhism is not to desire a life that is of no consequence, but to discover complete satisfaction with the life given. But that is not always so simple, because death constantly threatens our life. And so, what we should seek is a way of Life not constantly threatened by death.

What we must demonstrate to ourselves is that living and dying are as one in Suchness, that there is life in death. This is what is attested to in the religion of zazen-meditation. And so, when the existence of God does not pose a problem, neither does the immortality of the soul. That is because those caught in the cycle of life-and-death in this life have no desire to seek for immortality in the next. For, immortality is not a continuation in another, wholly different life, but an extension of the life we are experiencing now. The liberation of the soul

caught in the life-and-death cycle is to enter into a realm where one is unborn and undying: that realm is Nirvana.

In this sense, the life-and-death cycle is no different from Nirvana. We who know nothing of what takes place after death would as well reflect on who we were before we were born; for, before birth, as after death, ultimately is Absolute Nothingness. Our present cycle of living-and-dying takes place on the stage of Absolute Nothingness; and so our present cycle is also the actual existence of the Absolute. If our living-and-dying were dependent on anything for its existence, it would to that degree be a relative existence. In order for the religion of zazen-meditation to unveil the existence of one's true Self, it must negotiate the problem of the immortality of the soul.

Accordingly, the Life-and-Death paradigm in the religion of nenbutsu demonstrates itself of itself. Shinshu, which celebrates "the consummate proof of Great Nirvana in the single instant of focused thought (ichinen) that visits a person lying on his deathbed on the brink of death," is not the desire for the immortality of the soul so as to continue life in the next world; that would only mean further rounds of transmigration in suffering. When one aspires for Ascent to Birth in the Pure Land, rather, there is no need to demonstrate in one's life that our present cycle of living-and-dying is as one with Suchness; for, our present cycle, as the condition of taking refuge in the Pure Land of Eternal Truth, has taken a course naturally leading us to that realm.

And so, our Life, intuitively aware of that Eternal Truth, takes on the significance of demonstrating that truth; our Death, as an event to be looked forward to with expectation, becomes an occasion for us to become as one with that Eternal Truth. Subsuming our present cycle of living-and-dying within itself, Eternity imparts upon us an intuitive awareness of the Life-and-Death paradigm; our present cycle, as a demonstration of Eternity in this life, takes refuge in Eternity to become as one with it. Herein is a model of human existence in which finite man as finite man is bestowed with all the virtues of the Infinite.

vi.

In the religion of prayer, God has an actual existence and man has an actual being; for that reason, God and man are two. In the religion of zazen-meditation, the Buddha is not sought outside of man; for that reason, Buddha and man are originally one. But, in the religion of nenbutsu, neither the Buddha nor man is grasped as necessarily having actual existence; for that reason, the Buddha can presence itself in man, and man can become the Buddha.

As to these religions, though, whether we are talking about God and man, or the Buddha and man, they are not of the same character. There is a difference between the Savior and those saved, the Awakener and those awakened. Accordingly, when the nature of man is that of one to be saved, the significance of salvation becomes problematic. In the religion of prayer, salvation is based on the assumption that a promise exists between morality and happiness, a promise that suggests that unhappiness is due to evil. Unhappiness is not the retribution of evil itself, but is thought to derive from outside of oneself as a punishment meted on one.

For that reason, not only is that unhappiness removed through God's love, we must also repent our ways and aspire to do good. This formulation is a feature that runs through all religions of prayer. The depths of that awareness of evil has different degrees, however, and if one were to take that awareness to its ultimate limit, one would realize that human existence as such is sinful and evil, such that salvation itself has to depend wholly on the power of God. In the religion of prayer, though, the individual has actual being, hence we as

sinner actually exist. Accordingly, to depend on God for our salvation, a transformation of the human character must take place.

Thus, in the promise of happiness, a transformation of the human character is brought about by swearing to the heart of God to do good -- this is the salvation offered by the religion of prayer. In the process of salvation, though, it is highly unlikely that anyone will awaken to this on their own; there must be someone who serves as their Teacher; even zazen-meditation and nenbutsu would be impossible without a teacher. In religion, the Teaching becomes the message. In the religions of prayer, however, the one who teaches is at once the one who is saved. Accordingly, the Founder of a teaching is at once the Savior. This feature is found first in Christianity, and is also seen in the so-called new religions.

From the perspective of that principle, the Founder must be one who has been saved by God, and so all those who believe in God must be brought to the same status that he or she has achieved; in this sense, the Founder is the Savior. The ordinary believer is not saved by God directly, but receives deliverance through the Savior. One who saves others must be a person who can become God, and it could also be said that God as such has to be able to become a person. That divine person or humanized God is neither a person nor a god, however: a third party has to mediate the existence of man and God. That divine person is one who has grasped the intent of God and thus works for the salvation of man.

This sort of thought, typically found in Christianity which is characteristically a religion of god, was not found in Buddhism originally. Born as man the Buddha does not go on to become a savior. Even if he is called the Savior, this is intended as praise for the merits of his world-transforming teaching. By contrast, the assumption of punishment and the provision of joy are not found in the Buddha. The Buddha is, from start to finish, an Awakened one. Even in Buddhism, though, there are forms that resemble the religion of god, such as Shingon mikkyo.

The main figure of worship in Shingon is Dainichi Nyorai (Mahavairocana), but the one working out the salvation of the believers is the all-illuminating Vajra, Kobo Daishi (774-835). The esoteric ritual called sanmitsu kaji (the state of grace when one is embraced by Buddha in threefold practice of word, body and mind) is the practice by which Shingon practitioners mediate the relationship between Buddha and man. In this sense, all Shingon practitioners function as saviors, although the primary exponent among them would be Kobo Daishi. Accordingly, the Shingon sect could be called a religion of prayer within Buddhism.

This form of Buddhism founded by Kobo Daishi may well be an improved Buddhist version of the original Japanese religion called Shinto. Or, wrought out of the religious consciousness of the Japanese, it may be a statement of their understanding of Buddhism. Either way, it presents aspects significantly different from original Buddhism. As a strong reaction to that departure, there arose the critical teachings of Zen and nenbutsu. In the trend of the Kamakura period (1185-1333) of criticizing the Shingon, that formula, though esoteric, was taken up by the Nichiren sect. From this we can see how deep a hold the religion of supplication has on the hearts of people.

vii.

In contrast, in zazen and nenbutsu, this Founder-as-Savior feature does not exist -- this shows how much importance is placed on the role of the Teacher. In Zen, Shakyamuni is given importance, since it is with him that the Buddha-marga begins. The marvelous awakening of Nirvana, the storehouse of True Dharma catalyzing that awakening, is what has been transmitted down through ages since the time of Shakyamuni. This tradition from teacher to disciple has been especially regarded as the transmission from Buddha to Buddha. Indeed, no school places more emphasis on respect for their instructors and

masters than does the Zen school. In this situation, however, the Zen master's first concern is not the salvation of his disciples, but to have them attain satori. In that satori, it is necessary for them to be possessed of a "Buddha-killing, patriarch-killing" attitude. Indeed, it is through the disciple that the salvation of the Master is achieved; for, the transmission from Master to disciple is effected only when each party fulfils his respective role to the maximum degree.

The Zen satori, however, is for the chosen few, that cannot be sought by those in secular life, since it requires a secluded life style to pursue its particular kind of practice. Even if it were not limited to monastics, it would still be called a religion of the learned class. The scholar and the statesman would do well to let their thoughts dwell on Zen. The scholar who reaches the limit of knowledge in the notion of Sunyata, or emptiness, will discover therein a new point of departure in the logic of soku-hi (affirmation-negation). Soku-hi negates what we regard as knowable, in order to uncover the fullness of all knowledge. For the statesman to practice Zen is to dwell in the gut-center of his or her being. This produces in the practitioner a sense of detachment, which is a conscious expression of the logic of soku-hi.

For that reason, in Zen, the Zen masters, as well as scholars and statesmen, share in common a kind of outlook on life. But, that outlook can be said to derive from those originally possessed of firm character. Still, one may well wonder why many are given over to pride and arrogance. In the satori of the Zen masters there is no feeling of compassion for the spiritual imperfections of others. Sinfulness and imperfection -- these afflict those who are irrevocably lost in the realm of delusion. Such flaws originally did not exist, and so they should be eradicated. As long as one is awakened oneself, one need pay no attention to the deluded condition of others. The practice of benefiting others is thus reduced to performing religious services for the Buddhist community. We must save the world, we must save the people -- such sentiments do not help one to attain satori. What matters is the pursuit of the practice leading to that right place among those who have already attained enlightenment.

And so, in Zen, there is no talk of salvation. Awakening is dwelt upon, because Zen is not concerned with salvation. In the religion of nenbutsu, though, the satori attained is spoken of as salvation. Accordingly, such satori is different from that of Zen; such salvation differs from that of the religion of prayer. We are ordinary, unenlightened beings riddled with imperfections, a part of the teeming mass of humanity burdened with sin and evil, caught in an endless cycle of life-and-death. Such people can only be saved through the Great Compassion of the Tathagata.

This form of salvation, though, is unlike that seen in the religion of prayer which takes place between man and an actually-existent God; in the religion of nenbutsu, salvation is enacted through the working of the Original Vow directed toward all sentient beings. Imperfection, sin and evil -- these mediate the relationship between one person and the next; they are not simply what an individual being enacts. We can detect herein the ground of human karmic suffering. To achieve the deliverance of all beings from such suffering, the Original Vow of Great Compassion was established. Indeed, the karmic suffering arising out of spiritual imperfection may be ours collectively, yet it is what we have to endure individually.

For that reason, when we place the blame on others for the suffering we endure, at length there is no salvation in store for us. The Great Compassion of the Vow is directed toward all living beings, yet we are the one who are the recipients of its salvific activity; the nenbutsu-way by which I attest to my very own salvation thus points to a way of salvation for all living beings. Herein we can detect the difference between the salvation of the nenbutsu-way and that of the religion of prayer. There is no need to repent our sinfulness and evil or

to start a new life; what is needed is solely to know that, in that self-awakening to our own sinfulness and evil, there is to be found our salvation as well.

And so, as one ponders the matter, it becomes clear that the salvation attained through the nenbutsu-way is to truly discover oneself in the presence of the Light of the Buddha. Zen is to gain insight into oneself through one's own efforts. In prayer, one must first see oneself and then turn to God. But, the priority of the nenbutsu-way, in this regard, is to perceive the Buddha -- not a vision of the Buddha, but simply to sense the presence of the Light, and to express one's gratitude for the Great Compassion. In the Light of Great Compassion, one gains an insight into oneself, by reason of which the unsalvageable self achieves salvation. For, although the insight we gain into ourselves would suggest we are beyond salvation, the Light of Great Compassion embracing us would assure us we fall well within the scope of those who will be saved; it is to that extent that are we infused with the merits of the Buddha.

In the religion of nenbutsu as well, the instructions of the Teachers are especially important. Without their instructing us, we would know nothing of the Original Vow of the Tathagata, nor would we be able to reach a sufficient understanding of the intent of the nenbutsu teaching. At the same time, since the Founder of the religion was Shakyamuni, our appreciation for his teaching is especially profound. But Shinshu also speaks of the compassion of the two Honored Ones, Shakyamuni and Amitabha. This would suggest that Shakyamuni is not simply being regarded as the Founder, but, here too, neither is Amitabha alone being regarded as the Founder. That is because even Amitabha became a Buddha through the agency of the Original Vow.

And so, one who awakens to the Original Vow to follow the Way of nenbutsu, whether one is called Amitabha or not, has no choice other than to do what one does. It is certainly the case that the two Honored Ones, in the process of becoming Buddhas, had to endure difficult practices; this was done not to expiate their own sins, but as their Great Practice of converting others. For that reason, their Practice had to be done to perfect the faith essential to the practice of the nenbutsu-way alone. Though fundamentally expressive of the transference of the Tathagatas' merits to us, that faith essential to the practice of the nenbutsu-way is, in itself, the Way through which our satori is attained.

The salvation of the nenbutsu is thus the salvation of the Teaching. Though Shakyamuni underwent salvific practices, we regard him as the Founder, but not as the Savior. And so, all those eminent priests and learned ones of the tradition are those who have received the Teaching, and are not living Buddhas. Even a person who is praised as a living Buddha, is simply a person who speaks the Truth. But, even such a person is the same as all other people; that is, he is one who receives the salvation of the Teaching. In this formulation, the religion of prayer bears strong resemblance to the religion of nenbutsu. But, we must not lose sight of the fundamental difference between them. As far as it is a form of Buddhism, the religion of nenbutsu is not built on an experiential outlook. And so, if from the outset we mistake the religion of nenbutsu, it would seem to bear resemblance to the religion of prayer. Herein lies the profound problem of religious self-awakening.

viii.

At this point we must clarify the significance of Buddhism as a world-negating teaching. Unlike Christianity's claim that what is True exists, Buddhism claims that what exists is not possessed of Truth. This is not simply a matter of a difference in how each formulates their thought system. In Buddhism, the world is perceived as the realm of real existence; it is the realm of historical society. The religion of god, by contrast, is motivated by the wish to somehow save that worldly realm. As long as those who hold that wish belong to that realm, however, realizing that wish is no easy matter.

The religion of god is compelled to seek for an answer to this problem in man's belief in god, a god that is stipulated to really exist. In Buddhism, by contrast, the human condition is thought to be such that salvation is altogether impossible, and so the liberation of world-negation is sought instead. Buddhism is compelled to seek for an answer to this problem through man's belief in the Buddha; but, that Buddha must be one that constantly negates the possibility of real existence. Thus, one might say the religion of god conceives of salvation as taking place within this worldly realm, whereas the religion of Buddha conceives of salvation as being saved from this world.

But, to the extent that no salvation presents itself in this secular realm, the religion of god stands in contradiction to the world; that is, in face of a godless world, it has no choice but to assert the existence of a god in this world. This has always been a deep-seated tendency in historical society, and has also figured especially in man's tendency to struggle against the world; that is because the world in general is comprised of those who do not believe in god, or those who believe unconsciously in another god -- a difference that presents itself as the struggle between theism and atheism. As a result, the religion of god is obliged to adopt the same organizational structure as found in the world. Herein we find the significance of the congregation of god.

It is no coincidence that the congregation of god adopts an imperialistic organizational structure. From what I understand, the different ranks held by teachers and followers express a similar hierarchy in the heavenly realm. These ranks have their exact counterparts in the Shinto religion of Japan. With regard to this organizational formula, there are points we should especially pay attention to. The first is that salvation is defined by one's membership in the congregation. To be strongly attracted to the sacred writings is not enough for one to be regarded a person who has actually been saved. Even a person who claims to be in direct spiritual communion with god would still not be regarded as one who was saved. The only criterion of actually being saved is to have one's name entered in the congregation's roster.

This brings us to the second point: that having others join the congregation is regarded as the duty of the believer. The attainment of faith is a matter to celebrate, and it is only natural that one should feel it his or her place to recommend it to others and try to convert them. But, this natural feeling is lacking among those who belong to the religion of prayer. Unless one brings others into the faith, the believer is regarded as remiss in his or her duty, and so the salvation of that person cannot be said to be complete. As a result, one is obliged to employ various means of converting others. More than conversion, new membership takes priority. It is not because one believes that one is baptized; it is because one is baptized, rather, that one becomes a believer. In effect, an invasive means is being employed to make believers out of people. When that happens, those who control the congregation turn into the ultimate sources of authority for that lineage.

This imperialistic formulation is being implemented today by the atheists, as if there were no other possible choice. And so, those who are otherwise rather cut and dry when deciding matters, typically evade the question of whether they believe in god or not, claiming that either way it all boils down to a question of morality. To the contrary, we regard atheists as ignoring morality; it is the theists who are always spiritual, and we cannot help but respect those who have faith, because those who believe in god, believe in a [moral] way of life. Yet in order to be moral, it is not always necessary to believe in god. That is another reason why the debate between the atheists and theists is a never-ending one.

The statist organization of the congregation is not completely absent from Buddhism. The establishment of the Kokubun-ji temples in the provincial capitals, for example, can be regarded as one way this formulation has expressed itself. Even the specially-designated areas (kekkaï) conceived by Kobo Daishi and the ordination platform (kaidan) of Nichiren

can be said to be typical examples of how the organization of the Dharma was formulated along statist lines. From the outset, though, Buddhism has sought to cooperate with the State, and has not stood in opposition to it. While there were no doubt times when this was enhanced by State recognition of the religion, this should be regarded as growing out of Buddhism's basic character; herein lies the significance of Buddhism's world-negating stance. Indeed, even the mikkyo rituals to secure the welfare of the State, to avert disasters and extend life, are meant as calls for assistance from the unseen world, and not as direct intervention.

That has not always been the case with the religion of prayer. Nichiren Shonin, for one, had his share of difficulties with the State; now, however, it [e.g., the statist model] has become the organizing force for the Nichiren congregational structure. And so, if Buddhism seeks to adapt itself to a statist society, is it also obliged to struggle against those forces counter to that formulation? Herein lies the problem Buddhism is compelled to solve. In this regard, we must respond first to the issue of Buddhism built around the message of supplication.

ix.

Zen, by contrast, makes no demands as to how its supporting congregation should be organized. It would seem that Zen has no preference as to whether its context is a statist society or not, hence has no need to struggle against the context per se. If it does have cause to struggle, it would be against those times when spiritual freedom fails to be ensured. Since such struggle must take place in whatever age it finds itself, Zen makes no demands on the various forces molding its organizational structure. In this way, Zen remains always free, and the Zennist who aspires to be free thus has no use for congregations.

If we were to seek for a parallel feature in Zen, it would be the dojo, or practice hall. Along with its respected lineage of Zen masters, there must also be a place where dedicated students can gather to practice at the feet of the masters. That place is the zendo, or Zen monastery, where all who wish to do zazen-meditation, whether scholar or statesman, can come to practice. Accordingly, the pure regulation of the dojo and the traditions and customs of monastic life become especially important. Once they are disobeyed, once they are no longer observed, Zen is unable to establish itself. This is not Zen as a practice done in order to attain satori, but, as Dogen (1200-53) would have it, Zen as the practice negotiated after satori has been attained.

In the Zen standpoint here expressed we can detect the original attitude of Shakyamuni. The Zen seeker's aspiration for enlightenment thus clearly suggests the significance of the attitude of world-renunciation. But, is there not the tacit assumption of a nonpolitical, State-rejecting ideology in that attitude? Or, it may well be because of that attitude that the assembly of free men holds meaning. Here we can detect the shift from original Buddhism to Mahayana Buddhism. Even though Mahayana Buddhism belongs to the secular life of ordinary people, it is still a life lived in pursuit of the Buddha-marga. Were this not so, we would be unable to draw inspiration from the worldly teachers we encounter in Mahayana literature such as the Avatamsaka's fifty-three instructors or the Vimalakirti-nirdesa's protagonist Vimalakirti. When we ask what comprises the pursuit of the Buddha-marga in the secular life of ordinary people, it should make no difference whether one is monastic or lay; whatever one's station in life may be, that, as such, is one's dojo, one's place of practice.

We must bear in mind that the Zen master is akin to the physician. People must regularly seek out a physician's advice, if they are to maintain their health. Likewise, those in secular life must regularly bring themselves in contact with the Zen master's advice, the advice of one who has renounced the world, if they are to apprise the spiritual dimension of the free

man, whilst living in the context of a statist society. What this ultimately means is that it is possible for us to transcend the world whilst belonging to the world. Even the interviews (sanzen) with Zen masters engaged in by scholars and statesmen holds this significance. However much the Zen master may be praised as the epitome of the free man, though, in actuality he has no choice but to capitulate in some way or other to the statist-society context in which he finds himself. Herein we encounter an unresolved problem for Zen Buddhism as a religion.

When it becomes apparent that the statist society one is living in is culpable of misdeeds, it is only natural for a person to seek out a nonpolitical way of life. For those who seek for such freedom, it is understandable that they find congregations organized after the statist-society model to be oppressive. This tendency is also becoming increasingly apparent in the religion of god. Sentiments such as those expressed by the saying, "Render unto God that which is God's, render unto Kaiser that which is Kaiser's," have spawned the so-called churchless congregations of today; these impulses were no doubt present even when the Zen monasteries were originally established. It is not our place to criticize such forms of religion; indeed, their presence provides a respite from the tedium of life in the secular realm.

x.

If we inquire as to how the congregation of nenbutsu ought to be organized, it is clear that the Shinshu institution presently possesses an organizational structure that differs little from that of the religion of prayer; it is a formulation similar especially to that of a State with a monarch. While this structure would suggest that the Shinshu institution is invested with hidden powers, in fact Shinshu does not possess the dynamic character of the religion of god. In this regard it would seem to be virtually powerless. Let us therefore proceed by examining this point of Shinshu's power or powerlessness.

It is possible to explain the various factors involved in how the Shinshu congregation came to be organized along the lines of a statist formulation. We may suppose that the desire to form a group among those sharing the same beliefs welled up naturally and grew into the desire for an organization. In other words, even if the desire to form an organization was not there originally, it was inevitable that someone at some point would attempt to impose some sort of an organizational structure onto the group. Whether this was the result of friendly persuasion from without or considerable invasive force, the fact is it has come to be firmly established.

And so, even in the Shinshu congregation, one is made aware of being a member of the sect, wherein ordination and initiation ceremonies receive emphasis. Ordination and initiation to a certain degree represent the promise of salvation, whereas excommunication is regarded as the fate of those who are given to heretical ways. The Shinshu organization does not exhibit the intractability of the religion of god, though, and for that reason, one may be a member of the sect, and yet constantly be questioning oneself about the genuineness of one's own faith or lack thereof; nor is there any responsibility for followers to recruit new members. Accordingly, there is no need to deny Ascent to Birth to a member who wants to become free of the sect, nor is there any need to force a person to become a member of the sect. While these reasons recommend themselves as to why the Shinshu congregation continues to flourish, we must also ask if there is not a contributing factor in the way in which the Teaching is propounded in Shinshu.

It is said that Buddhism's preoccupation with the problem of the human condition is cited as the reason it pays scant attention to the problems of society. Let us consider this statement to be valid for the present. We will note of course that society and the human condition are not separate entities. Society, moreover, is structured by the will of man, whereas the

human condition is inherent to the life of man. Much the same thing can be said of the body politic [e.g., the State] and the world-at-large [its citizenry]. However much historical society may change, the situation of those in the world-at-large hardly changes at all -- this is the human condition with which Buddhism concerns itself.

Thus, in whatever society it finds itself, Buddhism seeks to resolve the problem of human condition in terms of that condition. But, when this is done, is there not the danger of escaping from reality, of intellectualizing the problem? As long as the problem of human condition remains unchanged in society, the realities of society necessarily inform our perception of the human condition. And so, the awareness of the depths of our karmic bondage to the human condition, the awareness of how difficult it is to leave behind our pettiness, our hauteur, that come from living in historical society. It is through this dimension that the religion of the Original Vow that takes the nenbutsu-way as its medium, is revealed to us.

For that reason, the Shinshu congregation is established on the awareness of our inextricable bondage to the human karmic condition. Paradoxically, karmic bondage becomes the infinite source of strength for the Shinshu congregation, since there is no other way than the Way of the nenbutsu for dealing with the problem of the human condition as it presents itself to us now. Though we can mitigate the adverse effects of human karma to a certain extent, eradicate them wholly we cannot. That is because, whether one is affecting others by one's karma or being affected by the karmic effects of others, there is no path of salvation for those who are caught in the net of karmic bondage, save to take refuge in the Original Vow.

At the same time, we find in [the Original Vow] the potent social force driving the Shinshu congregation. Shinshu has no need to rush each member to resolve his or her question of faith, nor has it need to have them to recruit new members. In an egalitarian live-and-let-live philosophy of fellowship, since there is no real need to build up the influence of the congregation, Shinshu contends that one may do whatever one wishes; for, it is not in the Shinshu way of thinking to regard those who do not belong to the congregation as ineligible for obtaining Ascent to Birth in the Pure Land. Hence, the Shinshu teaching of the Way of the nenbutsu illumined by the Original Vow ought to serve well as a religion even in a statist society. If Shinshu were an effete philosophy, it could never have provided the impetus for building a congregation.

The Shinshu congregation's readiness to obey monarchical rule is an attitude that derives from Buddhist tradition. Buddhism probably put monarchical rule on a pedestal because there was nothing other than imperial rule that belonged under the name of State. This propensity should not be understood as unconditional praise for imperial rule, since Buddhist sutras and treatises describe the king as being instated by the will of the people, and also tell of the misfortunes that befall evil rulers.

But, the literature also tells us that only the creator of a peaceful State in accordance with Buddhist philosophy can be called a true Monarch. It is difficult for those of us who have been raised in the Buddhist tradition to conceive of a State more benevolent than that of imperial rule. And so, whatever happens to the structure of statist society in the flow of time, our wish is that its statesmen, who function in much the same role as the imperial monarch, be truly possessed of a Buddhist self-awakening. To that extent, Buddhism is concerned not with what kind of statist society we live in, but with the kind of spirituality possessed by that State.

This way of thinking is closely connected with the problem of philosophy and religion. Kiyozawa Manshi (1863-1903) used to say that we should not argue over what kind of philosophy his notion of Seishinshugi (the Way of the Soul) amounted to. Whether it was

correctly understood as idealism or as materialism, it had no bearing whatever as to what our religion was all about. To not contend with other philosophies, yet to be unadulterated by them -- this well characterizes the history of Buddhism. It has assimilated every kind of thought system it has encountered, and has Buddhicized them in the process. It is undeniable that the kind of philosophy one possesses is determined largely by the kind of person one is, and further, that the kind of philosophy one possesses becomes the basis of one's life. To that extent it is possible to establish a Philosophy of Buddhism, which is a truly desirable prospect. But, then again, when it starts to become fixed as a philosophy, it would already have lost the very qualities that made it Buddhistic in the first place.

In a Buddhist self-awakening, one should take the station in life one has been given, and use it as one's place for the practice of the Way (dojo). In this sense, the Zen congregation is to be held in the highest esteem. As mentioned above, however, the Zen religion is under the control of the Zen master, who is a received member of a learned class. In that sense, the Zen master could well be regarded as one who has abandoned his given station in life.

In this regard, if we were to extrapolate on the special koans or cases the ancient Zen masters assigned to their students to work on, I think that, in Shinshu, it would be highly suggestive to think of our daily life as a sort of koan we must solve. That koan we must negotiate with firsthand offers no easy solution. To smooth our path in this enterprise there are the true Principle of the Original Vow that removes doubt and demonstrates the proof of awakening, and the true Wisdom of the Way of the nenbutsu that turns karmic evil into virtue.

But, how that true Principle and that true Wisdom come into play in this life given us, is something that we cannot anticipate. Herein we find the mission of Shinshu priest and layman alike, as well as the joys and sorrows of those who seek to pursue the life of faith. In sum, the way the Shinshu congregation ought to be, is to be constantly fulfilled within.

To be fulfilled within is not a rejection of the movement from within to without. Indeed, without that outward movement, the inner fulfillment would become a fixed state. That the Shinshu congregation exists today is a testimony to the understanding and inspiration of our patriarchs and predecessors. The decline of that power can be attributed to the decline of that inner fulfillment, a matter we must do some soul-searching over. But, that outward movement again depends necessarily on our inner fulfillment. Understanding and inspiration are what come of themselves, and do not depend on our plans and methods. Methods and plans will surely issue of themselves from out of our inner fulfillment. That is, we should not become members in order to be saved; it is out of the joy of salvation, rather, that we seek to join our religious group---this is what characterizes the Shinshu congregation.

-- An adapted translation by W. S. Yokoyama

Notes:

[1] For a more detailed discussion of the above, the readers are referred to other works by the author such as "Religious Awakening"/ Shukyo-teki kakusei (1947) and "Talks on the Shoshinge"/ Shoshinge kodoku (1949). I discuss the notion of worship in "Introduction to Religion"/ Shukyo nyumon (1950).

[2] These categories as seen in Buddhism are discussed from various angles in the third section of my work "A History of Japanese Buddhism"/ Nihon bukkyo shikan (1940), which can be regarded as complete in itself. In the sequel, I would like to consider further the relation between these three forms.