

Chijo no kyushu: Hozo bosatsu shutsugen no igi

The Savior on earth: The significance of Dharmakara Bodhisattva's appearance in this world.

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[Translator's notes: *To accommodate what I think is Soga's thought, free renderings of technical terms have been made: shinjin as awakening of faith; shin as awakening; in part in an effort to avoid use of word "faith." Other departures: busshin as Buddha intuition (rather than b. mind), in an effort to avoid use of word "mind." Diacritical marks have not been inserted.]*

Soga sensei was a noted Shinshu "theologian" teaching at the Otani University in Kyoto. His writings have only gradually been accessible to western people. We are grateful to Mr. Wayne Yokoyama for making this important essay available. It will be useful in Buddhist Christian dialogue and for the study of Shin Buddhism itself. Soga's thought is complex and requires reflection, but we present it as a resource for students and scholars interested in the deeper aspects of Shin thought.

I.

It was in early June of last year [1912], while I was at Kaneko Daiei's place in Takada, that I at last gained an insight into that exceptional phrase, *Nyorai wa ware nari* ... "The Tathagata becomes us." And then in late August at Akegarasu Haya's place [in Kanazawa], I came around to understanding, *Nyorai ware to narite ware o sukui au* ... "It is through the unity of Tathagata and self that the Tathagata manages to save us." Then, around October I realized what was meant by *Nyorai ware to naru to wa bosatsu ryutan no koto nari*.

The unity of Tathagata and self is sewn up with the event of Dharmakara Bodhisattva's birth [in this world]. While such matters may not have perturbed others in the least, they have been a constant source of annoyance to me these past 20 years. At times I got so worked up about it I thought I would go stark raving mad. Day after day I would thumb through the sacred writings, but could garner no clue as to the significance of these passages. My situation was aggravated by the fact I was beset by all the trivial problems that have colored these dark and troubled times of contemporary Japan. And so, attaining this level of clear-sightedness was like a ray of light shining at the end of a long and dark tunnel.

I am struck dumb when it comes to expressing such feelings in words. But there was a part of me that was not content to remain silent, and so from October of last year [1912], I began to publish portions of my confessions in my column "Storming winds, pelting rain" [in the journal *Seishinkai* {World of Soul}]. Also, in the January [1913] issue of the journal *Mujinto* (Everlasting Light), I published a piece called "Hozo biku kuon no busshin no kongen-sha toshite no genzai no Hozo biku" ("Dharmakara Bhiksu in the Present as the One Awakened to the Eternal Buddha-mind of Dharmakara Bhiksu").

After [these pieces] came out, I received words of encouragement from friends far and wide, but this only made me question my own position further, forcing me to confront some of my deepest fears. Looking back on this time, I am surprised by the boldness and sheer arrogance of the enterprise, and I cannot help but lament the paucity of the intellectual

resources then at my command as I engaged the task. Now, as I reflect [upon] the matter, I see this is what is meant by experiencing the reality of "originally there is not a single thing" (*ganrai muichibutsu*; note that this a passage attributed to Zen's Sixth Patriarch Hui-neng), where, through the help of numerous friends on the Way, even those who heaped on me their contempt and derision, I was made to benefit greatly from the merit of the thoughts they turned over to me, a fact that impresses me greatly even now.

II.

I knew of the name of Dharmakara Bodhisattva (Hozo Bosatsu) from long before and treat it as a major concept now, but truth is, I must confess, there was a stretch when it sat on the shelf for the longest time. Of course, I am equally at a loss with what to do with the concept of the Land of Bliss (*Gokuraku*, literally, "Ultimate Bliss"), that realm which [lies] tens of thousands of millions of Buddha-lands to the west. But, as I cannot imagine this world of present reality to be the Land of Bliss, then whether I like it or not I have to capitulate to the Land of Bliss in the west. When it came to Dharmakara Bodhisattva, though, I was simply unable to bring myself to believe in the account of the Original Vow being produced from the five kalpas-long contemplation and the aeons-long practice [to fulfil the Vow], nor did I feel myself under any burden of obligation to believe. As a small child being taught the *Shoshin-ge* (Shinran's "Hymn of True Faith"), I recall struggling to remember verses I simply couldn't understand, like:

Hozo bosatsu inni-ji, . . .
goko shi'i shi setsuju,
jusei monsho mon jippo

In the causal stage as Dharmakara Bodhisattva . . .
he undertook the five kalpas-long contemplation,
[to achieve] as vowed: that the intoning of the Name would resound throughout the universe.

Shin believers who hold to a simple faith would be moved to tears when they heard the part about the five kalpas-long contemplation. But once I started to think for myself, whatever attraction I had to this Practice of Vow in causal state soon faded. Instead, I found myself interested exclusively in the name *Jinjippo muge-ko [Nyorai]* . . . "Tathagata of Light radiating unhindered in all directions." For the time being, I had come to the conclusion that the so-called great law of cause and effect fell into the category of things that had no discernible meaning, but because it was to me inconceivable that humankind could extract itself from beneath the weal of [such a universal principle] as cause and effect, I would explain it [away] by saying that in order for the Tathagata to inform humankind of the Original Vow, the Tathagata was able to bring the thought it sought to transmit to us through manipulating the laws of cause and effect that govern the [lower] laws of the human thought processes; but the truth is, I was so enamored by [the imagery of] Tathagata's radiant Light that it exclusively guided my thoughts to the point it destroyed any budding interest I might have had in the Vow practice in causal state of Dharmakara Bhiksu.

In short, though I would go around talking up the theme of holding to the central belief in the Original Vow, the truth was I regarded the Original Vow to be nothing more than simply the great soul energy (*dai-seishin*, literally, "great spirit") of the Tathagata's true awakening. Dharmakara Bhiksu was nothing more than the temporary name of an incidental figure who appeared briefly for a five kalpas-long contemplation in the greater scenario of the Tathagata's eternal drama. Moreover, it was a drama that did not require our own appearance on stage. Our savior was, for all extents and purposes, simply an emanation out of eternity of the Tathagata of Light unhindered that radiates its effulgence in all directions.

III.

However, when that eternal Tathagata of Light radiating unhindered in every direction becomes the object of our affection [and guides our choices], it becomes an extension of our ideals and ceases to function in the capacity of world savior. This kind of belief, self-serving and intellectualized, is as such enmired in the satori of so-called self-power Holy Path (*jiriki-shodo*), implying ineffectual practice. Salvation, on the other hand, is a problem of reality. It is the great problem of what we must do as protagonists [in the drama] of life's conflicting realities (*jinsei no genjitsu*, literally, "the reality of human life").

There is no salvation in store for us when we rely on our empty ideals [to pull us through]. [What we fail to realize is that] all of the gods, Buddhas, and bodhisattvas in every direction in this triple world of past, present and future [manifest] a facet of human ideals. The Name of [the Tathagata] of Light radiating unhindered in every direction contains [all of the merit of] the various names of every god, Buddha, and bodhisattva; as it thus signifies the synthesis of all human desires, it is to this dimension that we must direct our deepest aspirations.

But, if we merely become enamored with the idea of Light, we must ask ourselves: Is the light of wisdom that issues from the truth of our world of ideals sufficient to rend the long dark night of ignorance? Is it sufficient to serve as the proverbial raft whose functioning (*gyogo*) dispels the suffering of the great sea of life and death that issues from the realities of the human condition? When we step aboard the great Vow ship of compassion, our ideals at last match with our realities for the first time, and the sea of human life with its suffering of conflicting realities as such becomes a vast sea of Light radiating in fullness and in all its unimpeded glory. But, when we distance ourselves from the great Vow ship of compassion, the sea again reverts to what it was before, a sea full of suffering, hardship, impediments.

It may seem futile to talk about a Light unhindered shining its rays on the sea of suffering of present reality; indeed, for the person drowning in the depths of that ocean it is only to be expected that he should decry any mention of benefit or gratitude. But, what we are seeking after in the here and now is not some empty notion of light, but the Ark of the Vow a-sail on the sea of human realities. A Tathagata of Dharmakaya of eternal truth can never become the savior of we who stand face to face with [life's pressing] realities. Our savior in this world of conflicting realities must necessarily be one who mediates the gap between the human world and the Buddha world (*ningen-butsu*), by appearing in this world of conflicting realities.

In the Christian concept of [the] Trinity, Jesus Christ serves as mediator between God and man, and it is this very role as mediator that makes it impossible for Jesus to truly fulfill his role as world savior directly. If we conceive of God the Father as eternal light, this points to the impossibility of God being able to make intimate contact with the world of human realities. Even if God were the creator of this world, once this world of conflicting realities came into being, there appeared an absolute demarcation between God and this world, such that each exists completely independent of the other.

God, of course, may be said to be in possession of an original dimension through which God holds dominion over the world of man; but God as such is unable to either better the human condition or to work out man's deliverance. God's utter isolation is especially evident in God's act of sending God's beloved son, Jesus, into this world of conflicting realities, and it is through Jesus's role as world savior and as medium to the spiritual world that we learn of the design of this God isolated in eternity to become one with humankind.

Thus, between the Father of eternal light and we humans who have fallen into the sea of life and death, there is a gap as great as that between heaven and earth. [God's] sphere of

influence would indeed seem not to reach to where we are. It is for this reason that [the Eternal Light] takes on the form of the savior Dharmakara Bodhisattva who mediates the gap between the human world and the Buddha world, merging with [this world of particularities] at the point where the Light [of the Buddha world] mingles with the dust [of this world].

IV.

The question that now engages us is: Who is Dharmakara Bodhisattva? That is, where did he come from, where did he make the Original Vow, where did he practice, where did he attain supreme enlightenment? [It could be said that] he attained supreme enlightenment in the Pure Land in the west, a realm distant from our world of conflicting realities. But there is a problem as to the circumstances surrounding the birth of this mediator to the worlds of human and Buddha. In Christ, however enshrouded he may be in the ideal of Light, it is clear he is an historical figure.

[The claim] that Christ is well qualified to be the savior in this real world is, in part, grounded in his taking this real world as the foundation [of his ministry]; but at the same time his inability to achieve that goal of savior may be attributed to the fact he occurs as an individual in history. For however great he may be, in final analysis is he not just another human being?, and as far as being a soul in need of deliverance he would have to be a person no different from us. In so being, then, our mediator of the worlds of God and man loses his credentials as savior [of those] in conflicting realities.

For how can [an individual] be [savior] when he is as always who he is [i.e., an isolated individual], and I am always who I am? Even if Christ were a manifestation issuing from the heavenly world, it would be impossible for him as an individual to act as savior to me, another individual. If in this capacity he is unable to become the new savior, his role would then be reduced simply to being nothing more than the first discoverer of a new truth: that God is father to humankind. Christianity in its outward form may thus seem to resemble our religion of so-called other-power salvation (*tariki kyusai*), but strip away the mask and what it turns out to be is a teaching based on the ideals of self-power effort (*jiriki doryoku*, that is, the idea that man can save himself by his own efforts).

From the world of such ideals, God is portrayed as shedding its light to reveal the ever-deepening gravity of the impediments of human karma, and while we may look to this god in adoration, this can only mean that the groans of effort that rise up in our throats [as we strive to save ourselves] are being made in vain.

By contrast, Dharmakara Bodhisattva is never presented as an historical figure. Dharmakara Bodhisattva instead is born by appearing directly in the hearts and thoughts of we members of humankind. That voice beckoning to living beings everywhere does not come to us from on high, from the lofty reaches of the world of pure light, nor are we being beckoned to by some objectively distinct personality who exists as an individual separate from us.

The voice of Dharmakara Bodhisattva issues forth from within the breast of each person trapped in the gloomy darkness of suffering and despair. When the Original Vow of Dharmakara Bodhisattva is described as the proverbial raft on the great sea of life and death, it points to the issuing forth of that voice from the depths of our hearts, from beneath the very ground on which we stand. In contrast to all of the idealistic religions of the world that I will call "religions of Heaven," only our religion of salvation in Dharmakara Bodhisattva stands apart as the sole "religion of Earth."

Religions of Light so-called are numerous, but only our Shinshu is a religion of the Ark. Only our Shinshu is a religion addressing the conflicting realities [each of us are experiencing], and as such it is a religion offering true salvation. Phrases such as *heizei gojo* ["ordinary life is **"] and *shinzoku ni-tai* ["the two truths of ultimate and worldly nature"] maybe said to express salvation Reality offers, but [in truth] they pay no more than lip service to it. Why is it, one wonders, that there are so many who, whilst singing paeans of praise to the Light as it might turn out in some future time, pass their lives in vain in this sea of life and death, only to vanish forever into its depths?

The truth is that our Shinshu, like the many Light-praising religions throughout the world, also sings praises to the Light Tathagata disperses in every direction. But where the Light mingles with the dust, we who sing these paeans of [praise to the Light] are not being suspended in midair. Our feet are planted firmly on the deck of the ship crossing the great sea of conflicting realities. What this means is we do not exist as isolated individuals who [at death] vanish forever. As long as I am in the great sea of Life, as a passenger aboard the great Vow ship I am enjoying the long crossing as the ship plows the sea of life and death.

When I am forgetful of that ship, though I live out my days pleasantly I am not truly living up to my name as a person who praises the Light. And so when the dust of my conflicting realities mingles with the Light of eternity, this does not mean the dust will not settle [and will be suspended forever]; it is only natural, rather, that of its own weight it still must fall to that place where it must fall. [This is what I mean when I say that, though I mingle with the Light,] I am not a person suspended in midair.

Note that all the Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and gods in the triple world [of time] and the 10 directions [of space] beckon to us from the Heavens above. Each and every one of them has their own special kind of light to beam down on us. Combining all these lights together into one is the Lord of Blazing Light, Amida Tathagata (Amida Nyorai, Buddha of the Infinite), who manifests the next higher level of reality. Still, adoration and salvation are not the same thing.

Though it is said that the gods and Buddhas do not forsake us and are constantly calling to us and shedding their light on us, on our part, however, when we realize how utterly helpless we are when it comes to saving ourselves, how lacking in resources we are when it comes to living a religious life, instead of abandoning our [revealed] selves, we throw away those gods and Buddhas, and seek desperately for some way to escape. Strictly speaking, the Original Vow would have to be limited to Dharmakara Bodhisattva's 48 vows.

Though there is a tendency to think of other-power salvation as ineffectual, the founder [Shinran] Shonin described true other power as the power of Tathagata's Original Vow. But here we must ask ourselves: What is the power of Tathagata's Original Vow? It must be the ability to save this self of ours trapped in the web of conflicting realities. It cannot be like a beautiful painting of a tasty treat that does not do it for us. Ultimately, though, the power of the great compassionate Kannon (Avalokitesvara) is like this kind of painting, for it has no footing in our web of conflicting realities. It operates as nothing more than a beautiful story.

Dharmakara Bodhisattva's Original Vow is of a completely different order from this. On the one hand, as the mediator of the worlds of humans and Buddhas, [Dharmakara Bodhisattva] is as such the Amida Tathagata who is actively mingling its Light [with the dust of this world]; on the other hand, Dharmakara Bodhisattva sees through the eyes of the protagonist self that truly seeks salvation. If I were to set down the logic in operation (*kotowari*; principle), I would say, "The Tathagata is no other than our self (*Nyorai wa sunawachi waga nari*)" or, it would seem to me, "[The unity of] Tathagata and self occurs" (*Nyorai-waga to naru*).

The main [operating principle] in the process of salvation (*kyusai shu*) is the configuration known as the unity of *ki*, or "seeker," (the moment of awakening, *shinnen*; [literally, "religious conviction" Soga Ryojin's notes) and *ho*, or Dharma (Tathagata, Nyorai) [*ki-ho ittai*]; from the standpoint of the person undergoing this process, it could also be expressed as the unity of Buddha-intuition (*busshin*; literally, Buddha-mind) and intuition of the ordinary person (*bonshin*)."