

Certain Views on Shinshu

1963 Talk 'Waga Shinshu-kan'

by D.T. Suzuki; W.S. Yokoyama, trans.

1. There is much I personally have to say on the topic of Shinshu, but time is limited and having brought no notes with me, I'm afraid I'll just have to speak extemporaneously. As far as foreign countries go, particularly America, considerable inroads have been made in bringing the Shin message to the people. This missionary work, though, has been directed not so much toward the average American as it has been to the Isseis, the first generation of Japanese who immigrated there.

This breed is virtually exhausted now, and will vanish altogether in the next ten years or so. In their wake rises a new generation, but so far as I can tell no effort is being made to make Shin comprehensible to them as they set out to pursue lives in contemporary society. Experience tells us of course that sitting around and fretting over a problem, thinking, I really ought to do something, gets us nowhere. Were we in Japan, we'd resolve the problem in a snap by doing or saying something to get the message across. But take one step into a foreign country where the language is different and it's a totally different ball game. In a wholly different linguistic context, it's incumbent we adapt our way of thinking to a more contemporary mode, articulating that message in ways of expression that will call up a response in the minds of listeners today.

Some ten years ago I remember speaking to a kaikyoshi missionary about translating a sutra like the Larger Sutra of Infinite Life. He told me, well, he didn't think it was such a good idea since sutras are so rich in mythic content foreigners wouldn't be able to follow them. His recommendation was it was better not to translate, although recently a translation of that very work has come out by Yamamoto Kosho. If I remember correctly, there were several sutras translated by Nanjo Bunyu and Takakusu Junjiro in the Sacred Books of the East series edited by Max Muller. But those were works done by scholars for scholars, and they'd hardly get a rise among general readers. For the way those English translations were done made Buddhism virtually incomprehensible.

There's a difference in the way that Easterners and Westerners think that doom such translations to failure. As I'm sure you've heard me say more than once, the Western mind treats the problem dualistically, the Eastern mind conceives the problem before that duality occurs, before the subject-object division. This is the foundation of Eastern thought. So for the Westerner there's no way for them to understand matters unless things are broken down into their dualistic components. With regard to putting Buddhism in a contemporary mode, there are some Japanese promoting this very idea. But we must ask ourselves whether they've truly left behind the old ways of thinking, and whether they're really that well versed in the new ways they advocate. They use sophisticated philosophical terms and arm themselves with all sorts of clever explanations. But more often than not I come away with the impression they haven't really thrown themselves into the heart of the matter, and since they can only see the problem from the outside, their words fail to have the ring of authority.

But even as we hope Westerners will come to a proper understanding of Eastern thought, and Easterners a proper grasp of Western thought, this is not a problem that can be solved overnight, nor can we forget the traditional modes of thought handed down by our ancestors; indeed, these two wings of thought promise to usher in an age of discovery that I believe will sweep all of us in time. While such changes do not transpire overnight, someone has to make a start by laying the groundwork for such changes. These changes do

not necessarily have to be patently "new," but at least they must evince a departure from the way we have been viewing things up to now.

2. In recent times we've heard people discussing the pros and cons of the Shin notion of aku'nin shoki, that the evil person is the true object of the Buddha's compassion. I cannot give you a historical rundown of the concept, especially with the regard to the term aku'nin, or "evil person," but we must allow that in its time it held nuances different from what we mean today when we talk about a person being good or evil from our own moral perspective. In those days, for instance, when we said a person was good, people would have imagined someone from the ruling classes, a person of means who had an education and was in a position to live the life they wanted. For this was a position they secured, it was said, due to the fruit of good karma from their previous life.

By contrast, for those whose bad karma of previous life outweighed the good, the social situation they were born into would be most unfavorable; they would find themselves among the lower classes of society, with scant education bordering on illiteracy, an orphan in a convent, a peasant tilling the soil, a huntsman pursuing game for a living. So, on one hand, we had those who, due to evil karma of past lives, were born as peasants oppressed by the ruling classes; on the other, we had those born into the privileged classes, who lived in luxury, and who, swaggering about, would oppress the lower classes. Even though this may have served as a popular explanation why some people were in a better situation than others, to view the problem of aku'nin from a religious standpoint we would have to consider the strife an evil person causes.

Hence, a person of rank who is enthralled by power and likes to impress his authority on people at their expense cannot be said to be either a great person, or, as it were, a good one. But people in those days did not think as we do now, and though I believe it fairly accurate to say they regarded those in power as the good and the oppressed classes as the evil, I have no way of knowing whether this is true or not, not being a historian and having no means to tell how people then, distinguished good from evil. One thing is for certain, though, and that is, when we look at the problem of good and evil from a moral or philosophical standpoint, what we call the religious has nothing to do with the good or evil of moral conception, and so it doesn't really matter whether we say the evil person or the good person is the object of the Buddha's compassion.

A person hearing this might ask, "If the evil person in particular is singled out to go to the Pure Land, what then is a good person to do?" Although the notion of aku'nin shoki would seem to be unfavorable to the good person, from a religious standpoint there is no distinction as to good and evil among people; all are the same, good and bad alike. But there are those who are so transfixed in their thinking as to good and evil that they can never bring themselves to accept the notion of aku'nin shoki, that the evil are the first to benefit from the Buddha's compassion, that Shin teaches.

Such people are strangers to religion, and for all I know they are on a beeline rush to hell. It is all the more remarkable, then, that a person like Shinran should appear in that age and, not being transfixed by moral concerns, should articulate the notion of aku'nin shoki. Shinran is also reported to have said, "It was all for my sake that Amida established his Original Vow." This tells of a powerful religious experience that enabled him to say what he did. It is possible someone might criticize this statement, saying, "That's fine for him to know it was for his sake, but where does it leave the rest of us?" But those who demonstrate such shallow thinking have no real understanding of Shinshu.

It may be that points such as these are what everybody is engrossed in, but I would contend our real concern should be to drive ever deeper to reach an understanding of what Shinran intends by these words. Our critic might say, "That's Suzuki speaking, and what he

says doesn't go for the rest of us." But when I view things from my own standpoint, I come to much the same conclusion as Shinran did: that it was for my sake that Amida established his vow. And so when Shinran says Amida established the vow for Shinran's sake, or I say it was for my sake, I find myself perfectly content with that statement.

That it should be for "Shinran's sake" or for "my sake" is the point where my salvation is worked out; at the same time it is the point where the salvation of all living beings is worked out. Hearing that Amida shall not enter the state of perfect enlightenment until he has seen to the salvation of all living beings, our critic might say, "Well, if it is decided that we're all bound for the Pure Land, that means we can leave it up to Amida to do the rest. We don't even have to lift a finger, just sit about fanning the breeze until then." And, yes, that's perfectly fine to do, if that's what suits you, you should feel perfectly content to do so. Being perfectly content, that enables you to say what you do. And you could never have done just that had you not come full circle to yourself.

3. If we look only to words to understand what something means, the discussion becomes overly literal and leads nowhere. Zen people do not disdain the written word, but they do aspire "not to stand behind the written word" and seek a "special understanding transmitted outside what you have been taught." Both of these slogans admonish against being transfixed by the written word. While the Zen person is urged to keep the written word at arm's length, this does not mean we lose contact with words altogether. A cat is still a cat, a dog a dog, one goes meow and the other bowwow. It goes without saying that such conventions are essential to maintain. At any rate, when words lead us around that makes for an impossible situation. But that's what often happens in the case of philosophy. Words are necessary in philosophy.

But by their very necessity words can spirit us off on a wild goose chase. From that point of view, though words are good to have, words are also things we could well do without. When skillfully applied, words can direct our attention beyond words, that is, to a dimension detached from words. In the metaphor of the finger pointing to the moon, the words are the finger, but the point is not to see the finger but the moon to which it points. Though we cannot do away with that finger -- that would be chaotic -- at the very least we must remember it imperative not to base our understanding on words. The reason we should not rely on words is simply this: whether we're talking about philosophy or religion, the medium of words forces us to put the message into abstract terms. It may be true that we need intellection in order to articulate or rationalize our thoughts, but here we must remember that "this self alone" articulating those thoughts cannot be an abstracted "this self alone"; it has to be a most concrete "this self alone." And so whenever you confront the word "this self alone" in your readings, you should always remember never to grasp it in the abstract.

This is what I mean by not being transfixed by words. That's a very important lesson to remember. The point where the abstract concepts of philosophy are experienced most concretely is the very point where we come into the living marrow of religion. The point where the abstract concepts of philosophy are taken to their ultimate limit in abstraction, is the point where the ultimate significance of religion is experienced in the most concrete of terms.

And so, religion is what is imbued with this most concrete character. In its concreteness, it is at the same time detached from words. When we distance ourselves from words, it would seem we would risk losing our frame of reference, thus it is said, "Detach yourself from words without detaching yourself, without detaching yourself detach yourself." Pragmatically, this may sound like we're saying detach yourself if you can detach yourself, don't detach yourself if you can't detach yourself, but at length this logic of detachment without detaching, detaching without detachment, does not quite match up with that pat

explanation. But the point where this incompatibility in logic is brought into line in terms of our own life experience is where we come into religion.

There is a poem by Daito Kokushi* that goes:

*mimi de mite / See with your ear and
me de kiku / Listen with your eye,
utagawaji / Letting not a shred of doubt arise.
onozukara naru / The world transformed by
noki no tamamizu / The song of the rain falling through the trees.*

We usually hear the sound of the falling rain with our ears, but this is not what Daito says when he writes, "... see with your ear and listen with your eye." When we return to the point where all the ways we sense things are not parceled out into their conventional patterns, we enter the dimension he speaks of as "the world transformed by the song of the rain falling through the trees." This is a precious moment he captures. There is probably no more abstract a term as *jinen honi*, the dimension of the world transformed.

Yet when we are drawn into the world of *jinen honi*, we can truly hear "the song of the rain falling through the trees." For the Zen person, to reach this point is to cross the threshold of the world transformed, but for the Shinshu person, there is no giving *jinen honi* any paradoxical expression. To the Shinshu person, *jinen honi* obtains where thinking is thinking, listening is listening, seeing is seeing. It is here too then, on the plane of in our daily lives, that *jinen honi* is operative.

Even though we speak this most conceptualized and abstract matter of *jinen honi*, in "the world transformed by the song of the rain falling through the trees" we experience this complete abstraction most concretely. In the very fact of our hearing the falling rain the world of reality is presenting itself to our senses of sight and sound. Since this concrete experience is open to us, we can neither remain satisfied with the literal, nor can we detach ourselves wholly from words.

4. If we look at sutras we often find the word *ku*, or emptiness, but it is difficult to imagine what is intended by this "emptiness," and so we end up conceptualizing it. To take hold of it experientially, though, would require we devote our entire life to it.

There is also the interesting saying, "The triple world is only mind, all dharmas are only consciousness." Though the idea it contains is labeled idealism or subjectivism, it is pointless to explain it as such when we want to grasp what is truly meant by the "mind alone." In the Bible, for instance, it says, "In the beginning, God said Let there be light." I've heard numerous explanations by Westerners who say ... this is the gospel truth. Every word and phrase recorded in the Bible is said to be gospel truth, but my question is, who saw that God? Who saw that God and heard him when he uttered those words, Let there be light? When God appeared in his person, there was no one to attend him.

And so when he uttered, Let there be light, unless there was someone taking shorthand or tape recording the session, how could there be any record of the event? If I were to raise such an objection, surely I would be told, "Don't ask stupid questions! That's just the way it was." If we think of it in the terms I suggest, though, we'd have to conclude that what the Bible says here is just a story that's been made up. Recently, the courts ruled in favor of a plaintiff named Mr. Yoshida who claimed his innocence on charges of murder for forty-nine years.

Whether innocent or not is something he himself knows best, and so if he announced, "I killed no one," then the matter should have been settled once and for all, but the fact is the

courts demand we come up with evidence. We have to produce evidence outside our person, such as the testimony of a third party, to settle the matter in our favor. But even such evidence is not necessarily conclusive. Perhaps if we existed [as God instead of as] humans, it would be unnecessary for us to produce physical evidence of who we are.

Long years ago when I was in America, I remember going to the bank to withdraw some money. When I showed the teller the bank draft written out to me, he said, "Yes, this says Suzuki, but do you have any proof you are that Mr. Suzuki." If I didn't have any proof, he couldn't hand over the amount. What nonsense, I said to myself, even if I say I am who I am, they still ask me for proof of who I am! Fortunately, I had a friend who came to vouch for me, without which I would never have made that withdrawal.

But if you think of it, we often find ourselves in this kind of situation in today's world. In the case of God, even if there was no one to stand witness or in attendance, all the same it would stand that, "In the beginning God said Let there be light," and in this way light and darkness, mountains and rivers, Adam and Eve appeared. And it did not matter whether there was anyone to see or hear this event. Someone might say, "Well, it would be better to see it this way, since we would have seen it this way, had we experienced it with our own eyes and ears."

That is, it was written up this way and so everyone has to believe this is how it was. But it would seem to me that the people who would believe in it had to come first [and this determined how the account was written]. This is not always the way it works, though, for the explanations people base their understanding on today are a marked departure from those in the past.

5. When I was young I read an account of Schopenhauer's life. In one episode he accidentally tipped over the inkwell, spilling ink all over his desk, to which he remarked, in effect, "All of this was predetermined from the moment God said, Let there be light." Schopenhauer is an intriguing character, and I remember agreeing with him fully on that point. If we follow the same line of reasoning, the inexorable laws of human karma whose workings determine what we do all the way down to the present moment, as well as all the laws that govern the universe, were wrought the moment God said Let there be light. If we think out our experience of the external world, what we see with our eyes and hear with our ears are all subject to the laws of physics and the principles of science. Scientists have recently been able to demonstrate the various laws determining such phenomenon as sight and sound.

While such a trend is not without its merits, from an altogether different perspective when we look at the event through the eyes of a person who has become God himself, we find therein the imperative for God's saying, Let there be light. If such an imperative did not exist, God would not have said what he did. Thus, when we look at an event as a person who has become God, the necessity of seeing the event from an objective standpoint no longer exists. And so, my being born and my coming to be where I am, here now, were, objectively speaking, decided the moment God said Let there be light.

This is not just a matter of our being ignorant of the fact; from the standpoint of the sentiments of God himself who is able to utter the words, Let there be light, this is to be freely functioning as I am (jiyu jizai). It is in this capacity that I appear, in the midst of all these various physical laws and scientific theories based on objective study. Though it would seem I am being constrained by my context, the fact that I emerge in the midst of all these laws is a testimony to my freeness. It is out of my own free will that I appear here.

In ethics this would bring in the problem of free will and necessity. Before, I used to think that free will was not completely necessary; now, however, I think otherwise: that once one

crosses the threshold [of that world where one becomes God in one's own person] whatever one does is out of one's own free will. In the Tannisho, Shinran says, "If it is your karma to kill, it may end up you will go out and kill a thousand or ten thousand people. But if your karma is not so, it will not do for you to kill a single soul or a single bug." That may be so, if one looks at this problem as in the objective (kyakkan-teki) case. But when we view the matter as the protagonist in a subjective scenario (shukan-teki), it now becomes possible to say that whether we kill a single bug or a thousand or ten thousand people, all of that is what appears out of our own free will. In this situation, we must hold ourselves completely responsible for whatever acts we commit.

The life of wild animals in Africa is something I've seen only through watching movies. The lion hunts down the deer and devours it. The deer is running for her life and so the lion cannot catch her readily, and is only felled by another lion working in tandem with the first. We feel sympathy for the poor deer and think the lion cruel, but from the standpoint of the lion, who is starving, the deer just represents something to eat. When compassion is not an issue, it is wrong to accuse the lion of cruelty.

Sometimes our cat would go to the neighbor's pond to catch fish. From the cat's point of view, she thinks, "Oh, I'm so hungry and there's no one home to feed me. But, I know: I'll go to our neighbor's house who has something good to eat and fetch me some supper."

Then we catch the cat in the act and shout at it, saying, "What foul mischief have you been up to again, naughty kitty!" But the cat cannot figure out what it is that so upsets us. That thieving cat that we humans see is only freely acting out its nature. We who see from the outside what the cat is up to, pass judgment on it, saying this is right, that is wrong. But if compassion is not an issue here, it is wrong to accuse the cat of thievery: it is only doing what it must out of its nature.

A pine seed will grow to be a pine tree -- that is the freedom of the pine. From our point of view, a pine has no choice other than to be a pine. Someone might say, since a pine cannot become bamboo, is this not a lack of freedom? But that's incorrect. From the point of view of the pine [as the protagonist in this subjective scenario] there is no freer functioning for the pine than to effect the pine it is. This is what jinen honi is -- the self-effecting -- and it is a most important lesson to learn.

6. It is said that an infinite kalpa of evil karma is eradicated by one breath of nembutsu. One breath of nembutsu is an extremely short span of time. By contrast, the kalpa, a unit conceived by the Indian mind to express an infinite amount of time, was not just a thousand or ten thousand years, but a vast span of time. And what happens when all the evil karma accumulated from the time God said Let there be light, is eradicated when I say Namu amida butsu? If but a breath full eradicates all the evil karma amassed over billions of years, how is it possible for this miraculous cure to work its wonder? Objectively speaking, the situation this involves is of staggering enormity. If we had to bear all this evil karma, we wouldn't last a day, we wouldn't last even a minute.

Yet with a single voicing of Namu amida butsu all that is gone. What do you think of this? What I have just described is the enormity of the problem of evil karma as grasped from a dualistic world view. However, if we return to the point where God says Let there be light which occurs prior to the bifurcation of reality, in each breath upon breath, moment upon moment, there emerges that dimension of Let there be light. The German mystic Meister Eckhart says, in effect, "Jesus Christ is born in my heart in each breath upon breath, moment upon moment." It is said that Jesus Christ was born in Jerusalem over nineteen hundred years ago, but the truth is, Jesus was not born then; he is born, rather, as Eckhart would have it, now in my heart, in each breath upon breath I draw, in each moment upon moment I live.

If we pursue that line of reasoning further, when we experience that event for ourselves, the light that issues when God said Let there be light issues anew, here and now. Then it follows that a single breath of *Namu amida butsu* can sweep away the evil karma of infinite kalpas. We look at the event analytically, in terms of time and space, cause and effect, karma, or good and evil -- in short, all the stuff and nonsense that incites philosophers to fiery debate. From another perspective, though, all that debating is just a flash in the pan, [leaving us as much in the dark as ever]. If we keep this in mind as we start to read the *Tannisho*, I find it makes much more sense.

The *Tannisho* speaks of the way of the *nembutsu* as the one way without hindrance, as well as the *nembutsu* as the form of the formless. Truth is, when I first encountered the *nembutsu* as the one way without hindrance, I just couldn't make heads or tails of it. In a Zen context we might say that in the act of raising of a single finger there emerges into the world of myriad phenomena the unhindered functioning of the real (*jiji muge*). I assumed the same was being said about the *nembutsu*. But in recent years I think I've gotten a better grasp of what is really meant. In the spring of this year [perhaps 1961.5; "*Shiki soku ze*" {Form is emptiness}], I gave a talk on the meaning of *daigyo*, literally "great practice," at the university.

The term appears at the beginning of the *Gyokan* [Practice] chapter of *Shinran's Kyogyoshinsho*: "As I reverently contemplate the aspect of Amida's turning merit over to me for my going forth to the Pure Land, I find there is at work a great practice and a great faith." The character *gyo* is usually translated as "practice," but that falls short of the mark, and so I have rendered it as "act." This is what my talk was about. As the Great Act is "to praise the Name of the Tathagata of Unhindered Light," the *nembutsu* is not just a matter of chanting the *nembutsu* with one's voice; when one says *Namu amida butsu*, one has to effectively become Amida Buddha. That's why it is called the Great Act. We might understand the "great" in the sense of "absolute." In Goethe's *Faust*, there is the line, "In the beginning, there was the Act." That Act, or *Tat*, is the Great Act *Shinran* speaks of. That *Tat* is the one way without hindrance.

Thus, the *nembutsu* is not just the chanting of *Namu amida butsu*: it is to effect *Namu amida butsu*. Once you effect *Namu amida butsu*, you become unhindered as you are (*muge jizai*). The effecting of *Namu amida butsu* takes place in an instant. To say that it takes place in an instant is the same as saying no time passes at all. To say that no time passes at all, means that neither is there any space in which it occurs. It is time itself, as itself, not as a function of some-thing existing out there. Nor is it confirming space as a function of some-thing existing out there. If we speak of space, then time has to enter in; if we speak of time, then space has to enter in. And so where time and space form a unity, that is an instant. That is the one breath or one moment [of *nembutsu*]. At that point where the one breath or one moment emerges, that is the Act.

This is not simply an act, but the Great Act. When *Namu amida butsu* remains at the conceptual level of reciting or chanting, it has yet to attain to the Great Act. It is this Great Act that eradicates evil. It is here that the Perfect Fulfilment of All Virtues is realized. The classic statements that *Namu* is the seeker (*ki*) and *Amida butsu* is the Dharma (*ho*), or the unity of seeker and Dharma (*kiho ittai*) are all made after the fact. *Namu amida butsu* is the Functioning itself. When perceived in this way, the one way without hindrance becomes comprehensible.

7. As to [the *Tannisho's*] phrase "the effecting of self emptied of self" (*gi-naki o gi tosu*), the "emptying of self" indicates nonbeing, and the "effecting of self," in contrast, being. Taken together they indicate the moment in which the absolute contradiction of being and nonbeing manifest a unity. The "emptying of self" is negation, the "effecting of self" is affirmation. Here, affirmation is negation, negation is affirmation; that is, A is not A,

therefore A is A. This [world of affirmation-negation] is what obtains at peak religious experience. [The paradoxical dimension to which Daito alludes in his poem where] we see with our ears and hear with our eyes also emerges here. This kind of world is none other than [the enactment] of the Great Act (daigyo) [as conceived by Shinran]. In "the effecting of self emptied of self" the elements that stand in absolute contradiction become one. It will not do, however, to say that "affirmation becomes negation," or "negation becomes affirmation." There are no two entities, with A becoming B and B becoming A, but rather they manifest a [preconceived] unity; it is because we deny their unity that we grasp them as objects, saying that this one has (or does not have) the characteristics of self, or distinguishing one as A and the other as B.

Thus, even as God says Let there be light, we have strayed from the mark. We have to go to the point before God uttered those words. It is there that we find Namu amida butsu. [Shin] often speaks of Infinite Light and Infinite Life. Infinite Light is space, Infinite Life is time. If time space and time were made one, it would be the here-now. The one breath of the here-now is the Great Act. It is here that the Great Faith appears. It is in the context of the Great Act and Great Faith that the Perfect Fulfilment of Infinite Potentialities is realized. The "infinite potentialities" can also be rendered as "infinite possibilities." The Perfect Fulfilment of Infinite Potentialities is fairly self-descriptive. This way of thinking is of Chinese origin, and differs from the way people today think. Amida is Infinite Light (Amitabha) and Infinite Life (Amitayus), one being space and the other, time. In China, this becomes Namu amida butsu, the original Indian terms being adapted to suit Chinese tastes.

While Amida Buddha also acquires a tantric flavor as a provisional name [for one of the god in the Shingon pantheon], Namu amida butsu is the Great Act itself. And so Namu amida butsu is not just the chanting or recitation of the Name, but [the enactment of] the Act itself. The point where we return to the world of the Act is the one moment of faith, thus it is in the context of the one moment of faith that the Perfect Fulfilment of Infinite Potentialities is realized. The infinite potentialities means that all things are herein contained. Thus I regard "infinity is zero and zero is infinity" as one of the ultimate statements that Buddhism can make.

Here, "emptiness" from the phrase, "Form is emptiness," is zero. In India, this was originally the Sanskrit word "sunya," but, according to one explanation, this gradually became the English word "zero." This emptiness is our so-called infinity, infinity is emptiness. In the space of a single breath where there was nothing, there emerges the reality of Amida as Infinite Light and Infinite Life. This is where the Perfect Fulfilment of Infinite Potentialities is realized. It is here that the infinite potentialities flood one's being.

Thus, what we call Amida's very body is the one moment of our statement "zero is infinity, infinity is zero." The one moment is not actually one; it is zero. When such matters are not articulated in words, or are not spoken of as such, they become Namu amida butsu. Enter the world of that one moment, and all evil karma of our relative world vanish completely like mist before the morning sun. Evil karma, objectively speaking, still exists. Do wrong and you can expect to pay the consequences. All the same, such evil no longer troubles you, and you are able to function freely and unhindered as you are. This is what is meant by "gi-naki o gi tosu," the effecting of self emptied of self.

8. There comes a time in every person's life when we ask, "What's life all about?" "What am I living for?" We wake up one morning, asking ourselves, "What's the meaning of life, if there is a meaning?" But there is no answer to that question. We cannot tack on meaning to our lives from the outside; life itself should more than suffice. To go on living, to choose life, and to value living each day as if it were ever new -- this is something people find hard to understand. Why am I living, they ask -- a question that betrays the fact they base

themselves on a dualistic world view; here, they must go beyond that [to reassert themselves]. Do that, and life itself appears at that point.

By life I mean "gi-naki o gi tosu," the effecting of self emptied of self. In gi-naki, where life is emptied of meaning, it is there that we should discover meaning [anew]. In a dualistic world view, we think that negation becomes affirmation, or affirmation becomes negation; but do not linger there, where one's mind vacillates from one scenario to the next; [return to that original point where] the two are as one. Once you've voiced your dissatisfaction [with your way of being], you won't let it go at that. Where you stand now, that is emptiness. It is from there that your life emerges and is set in motion. When you grasp that subtle shift, you've grasped the meaning of life. It is from this point that we can understand what Shinran meant when he said, "It was for the sake of this person [Shinran] that Amida established the Original Vow." The Great Act is, in that light, the nembutsu as the way unhindered; it is the effecting of self emptied of self. That is also jinen honi, the self-effecting [we are brought to achieve through the working] of Dharma. Jinen honi means sono mama, to be what it is.

What [in China] was referred to as true Suchness or Suchness as such, came to be called in Japan as sonomama or konomama, to be what one is. A pine tree has to be the pine it is, and therein lies its freedom. We look at the pine and say, oh how sad that it will never become bamboo, but the pine looks at itself and has no qualms that it has only pinehood to look forward to. You might pity the pine for never being able to become bamboo, but it's not a matter of having the stuff and never achieving it, for it never had the potential to be anything else in the first place.

By and large it's how we perceive the problem that makes all the difference in the world. Now, if judging from externals, all of you are bound up by karma. But if we throw ourselves into the heart of things, karma no longer becomes a problem. Once you have stood "at the hub of activity from which the Great Functioning arises," we realize that what we call the hub of activity is only determined after the fact, using the things we've seen and heard as the grounds of our decision. Thus we create the guidelines for what we do.

That creative hub in actuality was neither center nor perimeter; it was the [awakened] state where we truly experienced a sense of freeness. That's sonomama, the freedom to be what we are. In terms of the [awakened] state and its functioning, the [awakened] state tends to have an image of being static and abstract. But when the [awakened] state of sonomama obtains [and a person is what that person is], this state of "being what one is," is what it means to be free. We may distinguish the state of "having freedom" (jiyu) from the state of "being what one is" (jizai), but when, through the Dharma, we accept ourselves for what we are, we may understand this state of "being what one is" as engendering a sense of freedom. The person existing in this state of freedom is often spoken of in Zen.

When this state of freedom obtains and one is moved to the very core of one's being, a sense of motion sets in. As the [awakened] state and the sense of freedom it engenders exist in unity, whether we are speaking of the [awakened] state or its functioning we are pointing to a dynamic condition where the [awakened] state and its functioning manifest a unity. This unity of static state and dynamic state is called sonomama, konomama, or Suchness as such. It is here that jinen honi, the self-effecting of the Dharma, appears. There may be all sorts of functionings and different things here that do not seem to be in place. Since all things are empty, this does not mean this plurality is merely reduced to a state of Oneness; rather, the One is the many, the many is the One. Form is emptiness, emptiness is form. In the state of having freedom they are in the state of "being free to be what they are." Philosophers may criticize my saying this, but to me being is the state and becoming, its functioning.

In my words, "Becoming is being." Being and becoming are one. And so, becoming is being, being is becoming; the state is its functioning, the functioning is its state. There is the phrase, "the wondrous state of being of true emptiness," but I prefer to read this as "the wondrous functioning of true emptiness." Emptiness is static, as is being; in contrast, functioning is doing, becoming, moving, thus is imbued with a sense of motion. And so do not say "the wondrous state of being of true emptiness," but rather "the wondrous functioning of true emptiness," as it more effectively portrays the true nature of things. Here we gain an insight into the "enactment" of the Great Act. With regard to the Great Faith, faith has a sense of being static, but with the Great Act there comes a sense of functioning or working -- what I call "enactment." *Namu amida butsu* is not a matter of chanting or reciting the Name; one has to effect, rather, what *Namu amida butsu* is. That done, all the evil karma one has accumulated up to now is expiated.

9. What I want to say here is this: Amida, as emptiness and the wondrous functioning, is the wondrous functioning of emptiness. The Great Act is where Amida and I become *ki-ho ittai*, the unity of seeker (*ki*) and Dharma (*ho*). We do not become something that is represented by the words *ki-ho ittai*; we become, rather, *ki-ho ittai* itself. When we speak of *ki-ho ittai*, we speak of it as something different from ourselves. As far as philosophers go, that is all good and well. But those who actually experience what religion points to, throw themselves into the heart of things, to become *ki-ho ittai* itself.

Thus, to chant the Name of Amida is to become that Amida whose Name you chant. There may be those who object to what I say, saying, "Where is the *tariki* (other power) in this? All you have is *jiriki* (self-power)." But, as I've told you on many occasions, we find an eloquent example in the *myokonin* (wondrous, radiant person) Asahara Saichi (1850-1932), [whose faith was so alive] he couldn't hold back its expression. That's how people are. If I am a fool, fine, so be it, but I won't sit still until I can shout it from the rooftops. That's what makes people so interesting. The dog and the cat don't feel satisfied unless they fill their quotas of bowwows and meows. They can't say, "Hi, I'm a cat," but instead run and jump and catch mice, in the way cats do. That alone should be enough, but if the cats were human, they would want to say things like, "Hey, I'm going out to catch a mouse," or "Look, I just got me one!" or they just can't put their mind at ease. That's where the problem lies. It's a problem and yet it points to an interesting aspect of us! humans, and gives us a hint as to how to live.

Asahara Saichi once said, In *tariki*, there is no *jiriki*, nor is there *tariki*: There is only sheer *tariki*. *Namu amida butsu*, *Namu amida butsu*. This is a very interesting statement. He does not just say, "In *tariki*, there is no *jiriki*, nor is there *tariki*: There is only sheer *tariki*," and end it there. To it he adds: "*Namu amida butsu*, *Namu amida butsu*." I would only botch it up if I tried to explain it, but if we take this poem as it is, *sonomama*, we have a most penetrating statement. It would seem apparent that *tariki* [as an overriding principle] contains both *jiriki* and *tariki*, but Saichi says that "in *tariki*, there is no *jiriki*, nor is there *tariki*," and that "there is only sheer *tariki*." This sheerness is the Absolute. To stop there would be what philosophers might do, but Saichi goes on to say, "*Namu amida butsu*, *Namu amida butsu*." This "*Namu amida butsu*" is worth a thousand pieces of gold, and Saichi has to say this to set things right. That Saichi should reveal this aspect of himself makes this poem extremely interesting.

*This is a translation of part one of the two-part *Waga Shinshukan* [Certain Views on Shinshu], SDZ 8: 339-378