

# ***Reflections on AKP Talk***

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As I think it over in my mind, the talk I gave today on Modern Shinshu Figures was a truly rewarding experience. The day before I had attended a symposium at which the Dalai Lama was the featured guest, and I learned something from listening to this great human being: that "you must do what you believe," that there is no gap between practice and faith. This morning as I was reviewing my materials for my talk, it struck me that this exactly explains people like D.T. Suzuki, Soga Ryojin, and Kaneko Daiei, who utterly dedicated their lives to what they believed. So when I walked into the lecture hall (a beat-up old room in an old building way off campus), I must have been glowing like a thousand candles.

As you stand before your audience, you have to convey to them a context for understanding these Modern Shinshu Figures. Sketching a lineage chart on the wall, it crossed from one side of the blackboard to the other

Nanjo Bunyu ---> Kiyozawa Manshi ---> Sasaki Gessho --->  
Tada Kanae ---> Akegarasu Haya ---> D. T. Suzuki --->  
Soga Ryojin ---> Kaneko Daiei

The arrival of the modern period in 1868 was welcomed by most of the two hundred or so aristocrat households in the exclusive Kyoto Imperial Palace villa by abandoning their elegant homes for new residences in Tokyo.

The Academies that were once the flagship of the Honganjis were no longer the prestigious institutions they had been when they were supported by the Tokugawa government, and in the new era, the Meiji, were made obsolete by the establishment of the University under the new educational reform. The Buddhists were pushed aside, and it was a dark and confusing time for them.

In the caste-like society of the Tokugawa period the highest rank the sons of Jodoshinshu temple families could achieve was to become a Lecturer in one of the Honganji Academies. In the modern age, that goal was replaced by that of becoming a Professor at an Imperial University, as Nanjo Bunyu did for his work in Sanskrit.

Nishitani Keiji points out Kiyozawa was epochmaking in deploying Western philosophy to mediate Buddhist thought. That is, through Western philosophy, the Buddhists were able to defend and clarify their position -- a brilliant move on Kiyozawa's part. An early example of this is his *The Skeleton of a Philosophy of Religion*, translated by Noguchi Zenshiro in 1893. Nishitani Keiji calls Kiyozawa's achievement "epochmaking," saying, "Through Kiyozawa, Buddhism was able to blaze a new path, a path of religious seeking mediated thoroughly by Western philosophy" ("*Kiyozawa Sensei and Philosophy*" [Kiyozawa Manshi Sensei to tetsugaku] 1952).

As I was preparing these materials, the thought struck me: In the early modern period the Jodoshinshu thinkers, concerned with their image in the eyes of the ruling classes, likely made a conscious choice to phase out the Anjinketsujosho in favor of the Tannisho. The reason is the Tannisho emphasizes the master-disciple relationship, e.g., Shinran's veneration of Honen, which shows obedience of the followers to the powers that be. The Anjinketsujosho, on the other hand, emphasizes the mystical unity of seeker to Dharma (ki-ho ittai), that is, the seeker does not need a master or a temple or a school to moderate his

relation to the Dharma. Since Kiyozawa typically speaks of his relationship to the Tathagata as a master-disciple relationship, this would place him squarely in the world of the Tannisho.

At the same time, Kiyozawa talks of seeking "within the confines of the self," in his famous essay *Seishinshugi*, "The Way of the Soul," 1901.

To comment on the Kiyozawa selections in E. Andreasen, comp., "Popular Buddhism in Japan" (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), it is unfortunate that the compiler did not choose "The Way of the Soul" (*Seishinshugi*), the lead essay by Kiyozawa in the premier issue of the *Seishinkai* journal in 1901. The Way of the Soul is the hallmark of Kiyozawa's thought and the cornerstone for later *Jodoshinshu* thinkers such as Soga and Kaneko. In particular, Kiyozawa's emphasis on seeking "in the confines of the soul" resonates with the Zen phrase, *honrai muichibutsu*, "Originally not one thing," that is, there is not one thing 'out there' we should seek for in our spiritual quest: you are buddha [so you don't need a master or a temple or anything else outside of your {true} self].

Inspired by Kiyozawa's essay, Soga is forced to look in the sutras for some way to establish a true self in the Pure Land teachings. He at last locates it in the figure of Dharmakara Bodhisattva from the Larger Sutra of Infinite Life. Before Soga, the Pure Land concept of sentient beings as laden with evil karma and not a speck of good was the prevailing view, making it impossible to speak of a true self. Soga thus uses Dharmakara Bodhisattva as a fulcrum to shift the world of Pure Land thought onto a wholly new axis.

In 1965, Soga gave a talk, *Waga Nyorai o shinzuru ga yue ni Nyorai orimasu ya* "It is because I believe in the Tathagata that I know that the Tathagata exists!" This is in direct response (albeit over sixty years later!) to Kiyozawa's final essay, *Ware wa kaku no gotoku Nyorai o shinzu* "This is the way I believe in Tathagata" 1903. Kiyozawa's original title was shortened to *Waga shinnen* "My Religious Conviction" (or My Faith) by Sasaki Gessho. But the essay raised a nagging doubt in Soga's mind: does the Tathagata come first or do I come first? He never resolved the question, until 1965, on the occasion of a talk to celebrate Soga's ninetieth birthday. How he resolved the problem is reflected in the title of his talk.

In that talk Soga says that the legacy Kiyozawa bequeathed them at age forty when he died, was all they had to go on then. But now, Soga, from his higher perspective at age ninety, can see there was more to the problem than that. In short, Kiyozawa's premature death prevented his developing a more mature philosophy. It is great when one of Kiyozawa's best disciples can openly admit there were shortcomings in his teacher's formulations.

Discussing D.T. Suzuki, there's interesting materials in Kirita Kiyohide, "Young D.T. Suzuki's Views on Society," trans. Andrew Bernstein, "The Eastern Buddhist New Series" (1996). Toward the end it lists five factors that contributed to Suzuki's critical spirit:

- (1) an elite education,
- (2) no social ties,
- (3) his experience of poverty,
- (4) his encounter with Zen,
- (5) his years of living abroad

Interestingly, Kirita elaborates in (2) that Suzuki was a loner, kept to himself, and had no friends. Nishida in a preface also describes Suzuki as "sitting on a mountaintop high above the clouds, gazing out on the world." I would assert that this unique personality type---the Hermit or Eremetic -- is also found in Soga and Kaneko. These were people who had no real

friends and no social life as we imagine it, because they dedicated their lives to what they believed, a higher cause for which they were born, a mission they had to carry out. This is also seen in ancient India in those ancient sages who practiced the way of dhuta (J. zuda), such as Bodhidharma, who lived unfettered, meditating under trees and open sky, to explore the Buddhist mysteries, to die along the roadside in an unmarked grave.

The Kaneko essay we looked at was a talk he originally delivered in English in Tokyo before members of the Philosophical section of the Royal Asiatic Society on August 16, 1948, the third anniversary of the end of World War II. I remember examining the mimeographed transcript deposited by the author in the Otani University library. In it, Kaneko wrote something to the effect,

(A) "Buddhism in its fundamental orientation points to the Nirvanicization of life." The term "Nirvanicization" was coined by Kaneko for this talk. I searched the text the students were using, but it wasn't there!

Instead it had,

(B) "But the Buddhist doctrine rests on the serenity of cessation of life."

This is altogether different. Then I realized this was the Eastern Buddhist old series version. A heavy-handed editor who didn't understand what Kaneko was trying to say, had apparently expunged the key term in (A) and reconstituted it to (B). What a loss! The term Nirvanicization expresses Kaneko's key concept of ichinyo. Ichinyo is made up of two components: one + Suchness, but "one Suchness" makes no sense in English. What Kaneko means is that Suchness or Eternity is a dynamic state that is transforming history into itself and purifying it (the excesses of human karma) in the process.

As a final note, we will observe that our solitary trio of D. T. Suzuki, Soga Ryojin, and Kaneko Daiei were like hermit sages blessed with longevity, all of them living into their ninety-sixth year. I truly believe the critical spirit they manifested grew directly out of that unique eremitic personality to dedicate themselves "to do what they believed," and this is what it means to live a spiritual life.

In an afterthought, there was something the Dalai Lama said that made me realize that the Larger Sutra of Infinite Life is actually a metaphor for bhavana, spiritual practice; that the swirl of light that appears at the ulna of an enlightened being is what happens when we look to the future with optimism, when we know in our hearts the future is bright and secure. Where we are now there are obstacles and hurdles we puny humans must get around, but get around them we shall. And far down the road we can see blue sky and radiant light of that Land of Bliss. And that's what the storyline of the Larger Sutra is all about. If you believe it, you have to do what you believe.

Of course this is not what the Dalai Lama said. But something he said jarred my memory and made me think this. Halfway through the talk, he switched from Tibetan to English. A good percentage of the audience could now respond to what he was saying. Toward the end he had a moving message that almost brought tears to my eyes. Then the translator, a young Japanese lady, repeated the same thing in Japanese, and again that almost brought tears to my eyes. As the Dalai Lama exited, he paused and gave one final namaste to the audience, to me!, with that wonderful smile. So in this world there walk amongst us beings of Light. You can join them!