

ZEN NOTES



Living Zen

Our 28th Anniversary was celebrated this year by the visit of Professor Hoseki Shinichi Hisamatsu. Professor Hisamatsu, who has been conducting seminars at Harvard University on Zen and Japanese Culture during the last semester, is well known as a modern Zen thinker. We are interested in Professor Hisamatsu from several points of view. One is that we believe the coming of major Zen personalities to America and their resultant impact on Western thought is an important means of speeding the belt-flow of Zen eastward. As you know, we like to cultivate the quite probably mythical notion that Zen originated with Sakyamuni Buddha in India, that it came to China from the West (*What was the purpose of Bodhidharma's coming from the West?*), that it moved eastward from China to Japan (see ZEN NOTES Vol. II, No. 8) and that it is now on the move again, from Japan eastward to America. Another aspect of our interest is that Professor Hisamatsu represents an enormously important philosophical ideal which many today believe could solve the great and grave problems facing Japan and America, indeed the whole world, if human beings could not only understand it but be fired by it to act upon their understanding.

A more complete expression of Professor Hisamatsu's view than can be compassed by our limited space is contained in his article (our circulating library has several copies in English translation for loan to members) entitled "Nothingness." It covers some aspects of this attempt by the Japanese to develop a view based on "Mu" designed to deal with the problems of modern life.

The philosophy of Kitarō Nishida (1870-1945) whose leading disciple Professor Hisamatsu is, resulted from the impact of Western thinking (especially Hegel and Marx) on the Buddhism-based view common to Oriental thinkers, with particular reference to the process of history. In contrast to the insignificant role given the individual in the systems of both Hegel and Marx, the former, as critically regarded by Nishida, taking the position that individuals are mere puppets operated by the cunning of Reason in a course predetermined by the Absolute, the latter casting the material-economical basis of society in the driver's seat, Nishida assigns to the individual the power to create history by exercising free

(please turn to the last page)

THE TRUE SELF When one breaks his shell which covers the True Self to become a true human being, and to live a true life, we call it the realization of awakening of the True Self.

Realization of the True Self may be compared to a chicken emerging from its egg. An egg which is covered by a shell is like a man who is bound by the actual world while living in the actual world; while a chicken who has emerged after breaking the shell from within is like the True Self. A self breaks its own shell and comes out as the True Self. Speaking from the standpoint of the shell, the chicken may be different from it; the chicken who gets out, however, was before in the shell. Every man has in him the True Self that may get out of his actual self. But we do not mean that man has a natural predisposition, the developing of which makes him automatically into his True Self; that is to say, the True Self cannot be made from a biological nature or predisposition. At the same time, however, even a man who has been awaked to the True Self cannot express the possibility for awakening except in terms of such a potency. With an ordinary man this potency is covered and hidden, and therefore he does not know that he can become the True Self. Nonetheless, when the potency has, just as a chicken emerges from his broken shell, become manifest and then realized, then he is called the True Self. Or, we may rather say that this realization or awakening itself is actually the True Self, noting that it is realization without an object to be realized, and awakening which is beyond mere consciousness. For awakening of the True Self is not a faith in God or Buddha who is different from and other than, the believer. God or Buddha, according to our view, should not be objectified or externalized. As God or Buddha is in its true sense nothing but the True Self, it is a contradiction in terms to say that we worship and believe in God or Buddha. The belief that we have the True Self in us, and that it can be manifested to us, is the only true faith, if it can be called a faith. But of course we prefer the term self-awakening to faith, since we ourselves here become and realize the True Self. True religion is not a religion of faith, but a religion of self-awakening; and therefore we are not to be believers but to be self-awaked...

We, as members of the Gakudō-dōjō, the Association for Self-Awakening, are seeking together for such a religion. We have sworn the following oath. We feel this vow should be sworn not only by the members of our association, but also by all human beings, seeing that every man, as a true man, must have a true religion.

THE OATH OF MANKIND Keeping calm and composed, awaking to our True Self, turning ourselves into human beings full of compassion.

Developing our nature according to our respective missions in life, discerning the agony of society as well as the individual and tracing it to its fountainhead, pursuing the right direction in which our history should follow.

Holding hands all together as brethren without distinction of race, class, or nationality, and attaining to the full our heart's desire for the emancipation of mankind.

Let us establish the World which is true and happy.

THE SPINNING TOP

Man's life, Professor Hisamatsu says, may be likened to a spinning top. Its action is three-dimensional, the dimensions being depth, space, and length. If any of these dimensions are neglected, man's life is incomplete.

The top, as it spins on its axis, is thought of as self-plumbing. Going deeper than the life of Reason, we reach Essential Life, the world of the Formless Self. To realize this Formless Self is to awaken, to be enlightened, to attain Satori. This is the first dimension of the Zen life.

Egoism is the center of space. Spinning from the center out, individual egoism expands. Its centrifugally expanded egoism is that of the group. Further expansion envelops racial and ideological groups (communism for example) but is still egoistic. The United Nations is an even wider spin-out, though still in the realm of ego. As our egoism slowly transforms itself into altruism, the whirl is out to the circumference of all mankind. There only can we attain Absolute Altruism, where we know ourselves as just one mankind. And only when human beings, all of whom, from the Buddhist view, have Buddha-nature, expand to their full size, as the Egoless Self, or Formless Self, can their main desire now, peace on earth, be achieved.

The first and second dimensions are the basis for the third. As the top spins, it also moves in a dimension which may be called length, in which it creates history. Now if the self of Reason, that is, the self which has not yet deepened to Essential Self, makes history, it is history based on Reason. In order to create Essential History, Real History, the base must be the Formless Self. The creator of our historical history, modern man, is making history with Reason as base. If, however, he could create history with the Formless Self as base, then our history would be superhistorical history. This is the most important thing for us now, if change is to take place for the better.

Of course, when we create historical history, we tend to be bound by our creation. And, unfortunately, Reasonable progress has created a more and more complex society. People in the West, for example, following this pattern are involved in a highly complicated mechanized society. Japan could not support so mechanized a society, so the direction of her progress is a terrible problem for her. Naturally modern civilization must advance and primitivism is no answer to this problem, but the experience of the West has shown that the more complicated society becomes the more suffering increases also, so merely Reasonable progress is not an answer either.

The fate of the human being trapped in his own history may be compared to the fate of the silkworm, which gradually imprisons itself in a cocoon of its own making. Our world should be created for our greater freedom, not bondage. Rather than the silkworm, let us imitate the spider. He creates his environment, also, but sits in its center and presides over it, the master of his creation.

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Zen's view of human history can be understood from this example. By Satori we awaken to the Formless Self. This liberates us from all bondage. Because of its Formlessness, the Egoless Self can create freely. Thus Zen Buddhism, when it includes these three dimensions, that is, to awaken to Formless Self, to stand on the standpoint of all Mankind, to create Superhistorical History, makes for a truly complete life.

THE SPINNING TOP is a report of a lecture given in Japanese at Pendle Hill by Professor Hisamatsu, translated by Mr. Jikai Fujiyoshi, noted by Mary Farkas.

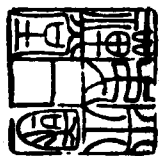
THE TRUE SELF is an excerpt from an article "Nothingness."

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(continued) choice. In Nishida's opinion (and we call to your attention the similarity of his view to that of the Buddhist theory of relative-causation) there is, of course, an environment surrounding individuals which by the development of its own tendencies limits the freedom of action of individuals. But enlightened individuals, because they can choose, by their free action can give new direction to the development of their environment, thus creating what Professor Hisamatsu calls Superhistorical History. In other words, man is the architect of his own future.

Professor Hisamatsu, however, has by no means limited his action to the rationalizing of Zen to the taste of the Western intellectual palate. As we know from Mr. Masao Abe, Assistant Professor of Nara Liberal Arts University, who honored us by a visit last year, Professor Hisamatsu's Kyoto Zen-group (the Association for Self-Awakening) sits zazen traditionally (full-lotus is emphasized) and there have been rumors that Cambridge, too, these latter days, has had its sitting-sessions.

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