

“The Day of Days” and Shingon Buddhism

No doubt many people have had solid twenty-four hour periods in their lives in which events pile on top of one another in rapid sequence, time being more important than causality.

Princess Poon Diskul, President of the World Buddhist Federation, used to say to me continually, “Books! Books! Books! All Americans know is books!” This lady is a Princess Royal and very important in the affairs of Southeast Asia. She was not surprised to find me involved in a huge, and quite successful anti-communist cabal to prevent the reds from taking over the Buddhist Federation. She herself took command, but that is a later story. Therefore one is not going to prove one’s experiences by referring to books by others any more than one need refer to others in discussing his own breathing or eating.

Even before going to Mt. Takao one was told by Zen monks: “Already you are two grades beyond Dr. Daisetz Suzuki. But so long as we rely on books and personalities we can never get to the essence of Dharma, or for that matter, to any wisdom.”

Dr. Suzuki has written that “Zen is Prajna and Prajna is Zen,” which is like mentioning two strange words, not necessarily experienced, and relating them to each other. What did he mean? But in some of his writings he contradicts this by proclaiming that other schools of Buddhism have keys to wisdom and cosmic experience. And certainly Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, now retired President of India, has proclaimed that **Prajna** is the essence of Dharma.

As the writer has met both of these gentlemen and has sat in meditation with each, the above remarks are not unfounded. And the facts that books may indicate otherwise, then direct experience is to support the contentions of an “Inquisition” against a “Galileo.”

On June 12, 1956, one left Tokyo with his host, Mr. James O. Kinoshita and was joined by Chief Forester Masao Kusaka and Botanist Hayashi. We visited the National Nursery where plants, successfully grown, are adopted for commercial ventures. Then to the Forestry Station where copious notes were taken and sent to the City College of San Francisco. There still being time, my hosts took me to the Royal Cemetery, warning that no non-Asian had ever been there. They hoped I would not object to their customs. (One had already read Ruth Benedict’s “The Chrysanthemum and the Sword.”)

Mt. Takao is forty miles west of Tokyo. The Forestry Station and Nursery were on the left, and the cemetery on the right side as we approached the mountain. The cemetery is lined with Cryptomerias, “cousins” to our redwoods. There they were planted to function as our Italian Poplars do.

We stopped at a point opposite to that of the grave of the late Emperor, bowed, walked up, bowed again, meditating and then suddenly my hosts disappeared, leaving me alone in a large expanse.

Nothing lothe, I walked to a point opposite the tomb of the late Empress, bowed three times, meditated, walked to about thirty feet from her tomb, bowed again, meditated, then walked backwards, facing the tomb, bowed again and waited. The hosts rushed up: “You did everything right. You did everything the way it was supposed to be done.”

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The explanations may be either that of Prajna, having direct insight to the nature of things; or Alaya-Vijnana, which is to say, that everything that has ever happened is recorded in the atoms of the universe and can be picked up by an awakened person.

My hosts were very joyful. No non-Asian had ever been invited there and the last guest, a Buddhist from Ceylon, had refused to bow. We climbed the mountain partly by cable car, partly walking. We studied the trees and shrubbery as we went, and then stopped before the stupa over the ashes of Lord Buddha.

My first teacher in the Dharma was the late Dr. M. T. Kirby who is best known for having become the teacher of the famous Dr. G. P. Malalasekera of Ceylon. I remembered most clearly Kirby's own story of his Enlightenment and also his lectures on the disposition of the ashes of Lord Buddha. These have since been divided into eight portions, one to several of eight countries. (Despite the egocentric dogmas of several experts in what is popularly called “Buddhism,” I have visited five of the temples containing some of those ashes.)

We stopped only a short while before the Stupa but did have a long break and meditation on our way down, taking pictures.

We arrived at the temple at dusk and bathed together in a large tub, then sat in a square, rubbing each other's backs. We were then given two kimonos each to wear, it being cold on the mountain top.

Next followed the largest vegetarian meal I have ever had. Nearly all the items were forest-grown and I remember distinctly the excellent Spinach and the huge Mushrooms—one to a plate. We also had bean-curd, deep-fried vegetables, lotus-root in many forms, many Soybean preparations, Potatoes and a few other things. I could not finish the Rice. We had Tea then and constantly during our visit.

That night there was a religious discussion. “Shingi” means new or revised. **Shingi Shingon** may be translated as the **New (or Revised) School of the True Word (or Mantra Yoga)**. Fortunately I had attended a few services at the original Koyasan Temple in Los Angeles. **Shingi Shingon** differs from **Koyasan** or **Kobo Daishi Shingon** in its attempts to eradicate the Shinto and Japanese elements. It is very Indian.

The “revision” also includes the introduction of electricity, flush toilets, radio, and television, but was not used for heating at the time of our visit.

After a long discussion we went to bed, sleeping two to a room with ample covers. I was awakened at 4 and we were ready at 4:30 in the morning. We could see far into the distance on a very clear but dark predawn. The warning gong emitted exactly the same sound as that used by the late Nyogen Senzaki.

We entered the temple and sat on one side. The Abbot, Senior Monk, six other monks and three novices came in. The three novices sat at the extreme ends on either side and had small roles during the ceremony. One monk had functions similar to those of the acolyte in Roman Catholic churches.

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The Senior Monk’s duties were similar to those of a deacon—reading verses before responses and reciting, then joining in the chants. He also beat on a drum and cymbal-like instruments. The Abbot was busy throughout the ceremony, especially in the purification of water, air and fire.

We used a number of Mudras (hand gestures). The purification of water and fire were particularly elaborate. Both incense and kindling were used. The modes of the chants sounded almost European, nothing like the Japanese or Chinese. The language sounded like a Japanese Sanskrit. There were many genuflections toward the end.

The ceremony ended exactly at dawn, whereupon we had an elaborate breakfast and at seven thirty a long session with the Abbot and several monks. One of my companions said that Kobo Daishi, who first introduced Shingon methods into Japan had been a friend of Nestorians and thus there were Christian elements in the ritual. This may also account for the modal music.

It is overlooked that Gautama Siddhartha, Lord Buddha, insisted he was restoring the **Arya Dharma** or pure teachings of the ancients. The monks confirmed the remark of Nyogen Senzaki that Shingon was largely a preservation of ancient Indian teaching, While I left feeling that I had been witnessing a Vedic ceremony, this was certainly confirmed later when I attended one in Bombay. The chief differences were that the laity also took part in the ritual and that women were admitted—the men and women being on opposite sides of the hall.

Takakusu in his *The Essentials of Buddhist Philosophy* suggests that the ritual was based on adaptations of the Homa cult (p. 142). He also states (p. 147), that “At present the Shingon School has two branches, old and new.” But he does not tell us that the difference is chiefly the inclusion or exclusion of Japanese elements.

Kegon (Avatamsaka or “Garland”) Buddhism teaches a philosophy of Absolute Monism, which is to say, that everything in the universe reflects everything else. It is the doctrine of Universal Light and there is some evidence that both Jesus Christ and Mohammed taught something of the kind.

What Kegon teaches as philosophy, Shingon presents as ritual. This means that everything has the seed of enlightenment and goodness. That everything is made of light is partly corroborated by the ultra-microscope, which I had just seen in operation at the University of Tokyo.

Shingon has a blending of Compassion and Love, and the vegetarian diet is an application thereof. The positive and negative aspects of Love and Compassion are symbolized in Fudo and Kwannon. But instead of the better known Sakya Muni (the historical Buddha) or Amida, Boundless Light, being the center of worship, they place Dainichi Norai there. But he is almost regarded as the Indian Nirguna Brahman and it is the aspects, personified as Bodhisattvas, which are more important in ritual and teachings. (Dainichi Norai might be related to the Ineffable Silence.)

Fudo is the Bodhisattva of Wise-Love and Kwannon of Tender-Love; or as father-love and mother-love. Fudo places Wisdom above Compassion and this brings us back to Prajna. Kwannon places Mercy first, last and eternally.

This person was then initiated as **Fudo** and given instructions accordingly. This has placed him in opposition to all the popular leaders in the West who have been regarded as representing **Buddhism**. This has placed him in opposition to any and all men of British birth who are associated

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with the word “Buddhism.” And Daisetz Suzuki also has been held anathema by the Chinese. We come back to her Serene Highness, Princess Poon and her “All Americans know is books ! books ! books !”

Shingon also posits Satori and includes both the “sudden” and “gradual” explanations. These were explained by Abbott Yamamoto. Thus Shingon in a sense embraces both Zen **ji-riki** or “self-power” and Jodo **tariki** or “other-power.” The stress was more on combating evil within oneself than metaphysics about it. There are several disciplines toward this end.

Roshi Yamamoto regarded Shingon and even Buddhism as a whole as **ways** toward Truth. Any religion might bring about the same results, especially if it be based on Love.

We then entered on a long series of agreements. This is always possible when two mystics meet, **though they come from the ends of the earth.**

Doctrines of Kegon and Shingon are well illustrated by the ultra-microscope. The difference is largely that Kegon presents philosophy and a minimum of ritual and Shingon utilizes ritual to the full. Yet this ritual seems to be of very ancient vintage.

(I later visited Mt. Koyosan and noticed that the swastika plays a comparatively small role and that Karl Jung has also overemphasized the importance of the Mandala and has little idea of Love, Mercy, and Compassion in the teachings.)

We then climbed to the top of Mount Takao where my picture was taken sitting between the Western and Oriental Plan trees, meditating on World Peace. We were there met by the late Baron Nakashima who was my titular host in Japan and a veritable Pooh-Bah.

We slowly walked down the mountain, stopping for pictures before the Stupa of Sakya Muni. I hardly remembered the rest being so **high**. When I reached Tokyo to call on Baron Toda, the Lord Chamberlain, I was told he was too busy arranging for a very important person to visit the Imperial Grounds. I listened and heard the name “Lewis-san.” This one, totally ignored in his own land, became the first simple person in history to be admitted as a guest of honor in the Imperial Grounds and Imperial Botanical Gardens.

The Foreign Office took no notion then, or later. And one’s history in Japan was followed by events in each Asian land visited!

It is very hard to explain ritual in words and we do not realize the parts that Earth, Air, Fire and Water play in our lives. The Western culture in this regard culminated and terminates in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* of another Richard Burton.

Shingon is not fundamentally different from much of Tibetan Buddhism.

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