EDITED VERSION

Gil Fronsdal
Saturday Morning, May 30, 1998
Sati Conference, Palo Alto, CA
Introduction

It is a particular pleasure to introduce Carl Bielefeldt. He is the one who entrusted me with my academic lineage. Carl has been deeply involved with Zen for his adult life. He was a student of Suzuki-roshi. He went and practiced in Japan. And he has dedicated his academic career to studying Dogen and Soto Zen. You will not find many people who are as deeply affected by his contact with Soto Zen as Carl. So, thank you

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The Intellectual World of Soto Zen at the Beginning of the 20th Century

Carl: Title OK? Or please choose another. - Ed.

Thank you, Gil. And thank you for setting up this conference. Actually, this conference is the first of what Gil and I both hope will be an ongoing long-term relationship between the new Sati Center for Buddhist Studies in Palo Alto and our Center for Buddhist Studies at Stanford, and I think it's particularly appropriate that we started with something so dear to the hearts of both Gil and me.

Gil told me that what I was to do was to speak, *very briefly* [laughs], about what you might call the other side of Suzuki-roshi's background in Japan—namely, whereas Richard [Jaffe] was talking about the institutional developments, I was to speak of the intellectual world of Soto Zen at the beginning of the 20th [illegible] was coming of age.

So that's what I'll do. I won't be able to talk in broad terms about Soto Zen intellectual life, but I would like to touch on a few people who were particularly important to Suzuki-roshi himself.

Suzuki was born in 1904 in the late Meiji period that Richard was talking about, which ended in 1912. He came of age in a period known as the Taisho, which extended from 1912 to 1926. This was a *very* volatile time, not only institutionally for Japanese Soto Zen Buddhism, but also intellectually. It was a time when Soto

Zen, like Buddhism in general and Japanese culture in general, was going through extraordinary intellectual change. The Taisho period, for example, is often known as a kind of window of liberalism in Japan—a period between the Russo-Japanese War and the Pacific War in which Japanese society experimented with socialism, communism, democratic forms, party politics, and so forth. This is the time just when Suzuki-roshi would have been a young man living in Tokyo, the center of all this activity.

In Buddhist terms, this is really the period in which we see the development of modern Japanese Buddhism. Intellectually speaking, it goes in two directions: One is internationalization and the other popularization. As Richard mentioned, Japanese Buddhism had been persecuted at the beginning of the Meiji period, back in the second half of the 19th Century, and was forced—whether desired or not—to reconsider itself. It had a very different status in society, and it realized that its old forms of teaching and understanding itself had to be redone. And we see throughout the last part of the 19th Century and into the early decades of the 20th Century, an extraordinary effort by all the different schools of Japanese Buddhism to rethink themselves.

Carl—OK to substitute "whether desired or not" for "willy-nilly"? —Ed.

Why?

Part of this evolution involved thinking of themselves as Buddhists rather than, for example, as *Jodo-Shin-Shu* Buddhists or Soto Zen Buddhists. That is so say, they stepped back and looked at the Buddhist tradition as a whole for the first time—world Buddhism—and formulated their place within this much larger Buddhist tradition. So we see, at this time, new forms of Buddhist scholarship that had never existed in Japan: scholars going to Europe and India, studying Sanskrit, Pali, and eventually Tibetan, and trying to understand Buddhism in a broad international mode. This was a mode that they were learning from the new scholarship on Buddhism being done in Europe and America.

So this was one element of the internationalization. But another very important element was placing Buddhism within the context of religion. Religion or *shukyo*, the term by which the Japanese now speak of religion, was not a traditional category of understanding. Buddhism was not considered a *religion* by Japanese Buddhists until the 19th Century, when they studied Western scholarship—in which the category "religion" was found—and translated the term into Japanese. And so for the first time, Japanese Buddhists were asking themselves, "What is Buddhism as a religion? What is religion?" They became very interested in the new science of religion, as it was called, in comparative religion, and in the philosophy of religion. They tried to reimagine Buddhism as a whole and their own particular sectarian traditions in terms of this category. "What does it mean to be a religion? What kind of a religion are we?" So this was a kind of new international modern understanding of Buddhism as a religion.

Carl—OK as worded? I didn't want it to read as though there were THREE elements (internationalism, religion, and popularization)—just TWO (internationalism and popularization). —Ed.

The second major direction of the development of modern Japanese Buddhism was a popular outreach. Buddhists of the Edo period (the period just before the Meiji) had been more-or-less enfeoffed by the government with their own congregations, their own property, and their own sort of self-contained institutional units. Now, in the Meiji period, when they were disenfranchised and thrown into open competition for believers and for the resources of the community, they began to develop new ways of reaching out to that community: new forms of publishing including magazines), preaching, organizing new groups—in short, new approaches to teachings that were directed towards the lay populace in a manner that they had never really tried before.

Soto-shu (the Soto school) was right at the center of this kind of new movement in Buddhism. We see the development of new forms of scholarship: working on modern textual studies of the *Shobogenzo,* for example. During this time we see Soto scholars trying to understand Soto Zen within the broader context of Buddhism by understanding it, for example, in relation to Indian and Chinese Buddhism. Soto scholars also reformulated the religion as a philosophy. The study of Dogen became prominent during the first years of the 20th Century. And we see Soto very much engaged in public outreach.

At the end of the 19th Century, the Soto-shu published a work called the *Shushogi,* which brought together passages from Dogen's *Shobogenzo* that were particularly appropriate for lay teaching. *Shushogi* was the subject of many commentaries and lectures and books sponsored by the Soto-shu to try to bring Soto teachings to the lay public. They launched new magazines of various kinds. They also started new study groups that both monks and laymen attended.

Suzuki-roshi, then, grew up in a world where things were changing very rapidly. And Soto Zen was reaching out in a way that he would later invoke in a very different context.

Carl—Ages correct? —Ed.

Suzuki was ordained in 1917 (at the age of 13) and took *shiho* from his master Gyokujun So-on in 1926 (at the age of 22), the year he entered Komazawa University. This was the first year of the Showa era—the era we just completed with the death of the Showa Emperor Hirohito in 1989—a time of great openness and change in Japanese society. For the Soto-shu, it was perhaps noted especially as the year in which the famous Japanese philosopher Watsuji Tetsuro published his book *Shamon Dogen (Dogen the Monk),* which is often held up as the first work to bring Dogen to the Japanese general public as a great religious thinker.

When Suzuki-roshi entered Komazawa in this year, 1926, the university itself was in the process of transforming itself into a modern private university. Komazawa, located in Tokyo, traces its origins back to the 16th Century, to an institution called *Zendondin,* a study center for Soto monks that had been established in a monastery in Tokyo named *Kichijo-ji.* Monks during the Edo period—that is, from 1600 on—went there to be trained in Soto studies. In the Meiji period, this institution was transformed into something called the *Soto-shu Daigaku* or

Soto-shu Daigakurin. This school introduced more systematic and modern attempts at the study not only of Soto but of Buddhism in general. The year before Suzuki-roshi entered, the institution changed its name to Komazawa University, signaling that it was now not simply an institution for monks to study Buddhism, but it was a modern private university as well. It has become a quite prominent private university in Tokyo and continues to this day.

Already in the Meiji period, before Suzuki-roshi attended there, the then *Soto-shu Daigakurin* had been the center for the training of Buddhists who were interested in the new, more international style of study—scholars like Kimura Taiken and the famous Uyi Hakaju. The latter was, for many years, a professor at Tokyo University and then Tohoku University. He was one of the early leading Japanese authorities on Indian Buddhism, but he was also very closely connected to the Soto-shu. Indeed, after he retired from Tokyo University, he became a professor at Komazawa University and eventually became its head.

Similarly, in Zen studies, one notes scholars such as Yamado Kodo, who produced the first modern dictionary of Zen Buddhism. Of particular importance for Suzuki-roshi was a teacher by the name of Oka Sotan. Oka Sotan was born in 1860 and became a professor at the *Soto-shu Daigakurin*. He was the first lecturer in a very important new movement that was started at Eihei-ji at the beginning of the 20th Century—a series of lectures on the *Shobogenzo* that greatly transformed the Soto-shu understanding of Dogen and the *Shobogenzo*. Oko Sotan was the initiator of these lectures. He went on to become the head of Komazawa University and was one of the leading figures in the teaching of *Shobogenzo* in the early 20th Century. Oka Sotan was the teacher of Gyokujun So-on, who was Suzuki-roshi's first teacher.

So in the 1920's, when Suzuki-roshi came to Komazawa, the school had a number of very important scholars working in the new international creation of a Buddhist studies in Japan—for example, Omori Zenkai, a very interesting man who spent a lot of time in the US in places like West Virginia and other unusual sorts of places for Japanese scholars to visit at the beginning of the 20th Century. Maybe they still are today, at least for Japanese scholars. He was very interested in the philosophy of religion and comparative religion. He was teaching at Komazawa when Suzuki was a student there.

Tachibana Shundo was a scholar of Pali who had studied in Europe and South Asia and eventually did a dissertation at Oxford. Some of you may have come across his book, *The Ethics of Buddhism*. It was published in 1926—the year that Suzuki-roshi came to Komazawa.

Carl—Was Tachibana a teacher at Komazawa? —Ed.

And there were also scholars working on the new Soto Zen studies, especially focused on Dogen and the *Shobogenzo*—for example, Ondo Bunai and Jimbo Yoten, who together produced a very important work that brought together the most famous traditional commentaries on the *Shobogenzo.* By Suzuki-roshi's day, a student could read texts of the *Shobogenzo* together with the commentaries of all the masters going back to the Kamakura period—a very important resource for transforming Soto Zen studies.

And scholars were also interested in Soto Zen as a philosophy—for example, Okada Giho, who was a professor at Komazawa and eventually became the head of Komazawa University. He went on to publish an extensive and systematic account of the *Shobogenzo.* That is to say, he treated *Shobogenzo* as a systematic philosophy in parallel with Western philosophers like Kant and Hegel, and he tried to lay out the philosophical system of the *Shobogenzo.*

People were also interested in the *Shobogenzo* as religious teaching. Especially important at this time at Komazawa was a man named Eto Sokuo, who was probably the foremost figure in producing the new *Shobogenzo* studies that still continue to this day. He was a specialist in the *Shobogenzo,* and in fact edited the first popular version of the *Shobogenzo.* But he taught a very broad approach to Soto Zen within the context of Buddhist studies. And he did another thing that's important to remember about these scholars: He emphasized the combination of scholarship and practice. That is, typically these scholars were also monks, had their own temples, and tried in greater or lesser degrees (depending upon the individual) to integrate their study of the *Shobogenzo* with their Buddhist practice.

Perhaps the most interesting and important of this type of scholar at Komazawa at the time Suzuki-roshi attended was the president of the University, Nukariya Kaiten. He was a many who, very early on, went to Europe and the US and studied there for several years. While abroad, he published what was really the first well-known book about Zen Buddhism in English, called *The Religion of the Samurai.* I don't know if any of you have come across this book, but I encourage you to look it up. It's fascinating. It is a very early study explaining Zen, especially Soto Zen in the West.

Nukariya Kaiten combined scholarship with the popularization of Soto. He was very active in trying to re-explain Soto to a lay audience in common terms. In fact, the very year that Suzuki-roshi came to Komazawa, Kaiten published a short book called the *"Shoshin Mondo," ("Questions and Answers about True Faith"),* in which he tried to lay out, for everyone, simple principles of Soto Zen as a religion. This book [laughs] actually became quite controversial. In the years following its publication, Kaiten got into a considerable debate with Harada Sogaku and other people who said, "Soto Zen is not so simple. You can't just package it for laymen like that. This is just pop Zen, and we won't have anything to do with it!" It was quite a debate—called the True Faith Debate—and continued throughout the 1920's, when Suzuki-roshi was studying at Komazawa. He would undoubtedly have been exposed to this debate.

Carl—I moved "for everyone" to avoid potential confusion (i.e., was it WRITTEN for everyone, or is ZEN for everyone?). Change OK? —Ed.

Carl—Sentence added OK? —Ed.

Nukariya Kaiten was Suzuki-roshi's academic advisor at Komazawa, and when Suzuki-roshi graduated he wrote a graduation thesis under him. It's entitled, *"Raihai-tokozui Makio Chu Shinto Seru Dogen-zenji No Shukiyo,"* which translates as something like, *"Dogen-zenji's Religion as Seen Especially in the Chapter of the* Shobogenzo *Called 'Raihai-tokozui.' "* This particular chapter, as many of you know, is quite famous, actually it's even somewhat notorious, because it's about the importance of submission to the master. That's what the main theme of the chapter is.

Carl— OK to add "-zenji" to translated title? —Ed.

But much of the chapter is taken up with a question of the role of women and Dogen's attack on those who regard women as inferior. Accordingly, it has been held up by the women's movement in Soto-shu as an example of the *founder's* sense of egalitarianism in regard to gender issues. Recently I got a copy of Suzuki-roshi's graduation thesis from Komazawa University. I haven't had a chance to read it yet, but I did look to see whether he was a champion of women's rights. It turns out he wasn't interested in that issue at all. He was much more interested in the relationship between master and disciple in general.

But one of the interesting things about that dissertation is that he clearly reflects Nukariya Kaiten's interest in treating Soto Zen as a religious (as opposed to purely philosophical) experience. He frames the entire essay around this subject.

"Dissertation" OK? Earlier and later used "thesis." —Ed.

Added clauses OK? —Ed.

Clearly Suzuki-roshi was interested at this time in *shukyo kaiken* (religious experience), a category that had been borrowed from Western philosophers like William James, and in his thesis he cited people like Watsuji Tetsuro and Nishida Kitaro as his sources, along with his advisor Nukariya Kaiten. So he was obviously reading the "new" literature of Japanese philosophy at this time.

He studied a chapter of the *Shobogenzo* in his graduation thesis, but his deeper study of the *Shobogenzo* seems to have taken place *after* he left Komazawa. In 1930, he graduated and went to Eihei-ji for a short period of training. At Eihei-ji he was assigned as attendant to a famous monk named Kishizawa Ian. And this was the beginning of a long association between Suzuki-roshi and this older and venerable monk.

Kishizawa Ian was perhaps the leading interpreter of the *Shobogenzo* of his day. He had been a student of the most famous Meiji scholar of the *Shobogenzo,* Nishiyadi Bokusan, who was also the teacher of Oka Sotan. Nishiyadi was, in some ways, the leading figure of the Soto-shu in the 19th Century, not only as a scholar but also as an [or the?] appointed *daikogi* (master lecturer) at the new religious academy called the *Kyobu-sho.* This had been established by the Meiji government to provide for the study of various Buddhist teachings. Nishiyadi represented Soto-shu teaching at that academy and eventually went on to become the abbot of Soji-ji and the head of the Soto-shu. But he's best known for the work that he did on the *Shobogenzo,* especially a famous commentary called the

Is it "an" or "the"? —Ed.

"Shobogenzo Kaiteki," which still, to this day, is probably *the* favorite commentary on this book for most *Shobogenzo* scholars.

Kishizawa Ian-roshi, Suzuki-roshi's mentor at Eihei-ji, was born in 1865. His career was not typical of Soto monks at this time. That is to say, he started out in a secular career as a school teacher and then, after studying with Nishiyadi Bokusan, converted to Buddhism and was ordained at the age of 32. (So it's never too late!) He received *shiho* (dharma transmission) from Nishiyadi at the age of 36. Kishizawa Ian went on to become abbot of several temples and then to take up residence at Eihei-ji, where Suzuki-roshi met him, as what's called a *seido* (a former abbot).

Ian-roshi lectured at Eihei-ji for thirteen years in the *Genzoai*, as it's called (the lecture series on the *Shobogenzo*). He published prolifically: He wrote on the five-rank theory of Soto-shu, on the Soto-shu precepts, and so on. But he's best known for a very large commentary on the *Shobogenzo*. During the years that Suzuki-roshi was studying with him, Ian-roshi was lecturing constantly on the *Shobogenzo* in what he called *katoshu*. These were something like a koan collection. He would write about different fascicles of the *Shobogenzo* and publish them in various places, and eventually his lectures were brought together many years later in what I believe to be the most extensive commentary ever done on the *Shobogenzo*, his twenty-four-volume work entitled *"Shobogenzo Zenko."*

Is it Kishizawa-roshi or Ian-roshi? Or both?
—Ed.

After studying with this renowned teacher, Suzuki-roshi returned to his own temple to Zoun-in and then to Rinso-in. But Kishizawa-roshi also left Eihei-ji a couple of years after Suzuki-roshi did. He moved to a temple called Gyokuden-in, which was located in Shizuoka just a few miles from Rinso-in. And there he set himself up and continued his lectures on the *Shobogenzo*. Suzuki-roshi then commuted to Gyokudenin to study with Kishizawa-roshi from 1932 right until the latter's death in 1955, soon after which Suzuki-roshi himself left for America.

Dan Welch: When you said that Kishizawa Ian was giving a series of lectures, were they directed primarily toward monks or was he beginning to address Dogen's teachings to a lay audience as well?

Carl Bielefeldt: They were very much directed to the public, actually. He didn't just lecture: He *regularly* published what he was lecturing on. That is to say, his collected commentaries came out much later, after his death, but throughout the period that he taught Suzuki-roshi he was publishing in popular journals that were quite accessible to the public. And if you read his commentaries, they're very colloquial kinds of commentaries—very kind, in a way, in that he goes into extraordinary detail. That's why it took twenty-four volumes [laughs] to put them out.

Steve Tipton: Carl, a question in a way about disestablishment: You really touched on the denomenationalizing of Soto-shu during this period. And Richard Jaffe raised the point about the movement from a clergy that was (at least officially) celibate to a married one. Can you say a little bit about what that has to do with us? For example, the idea of a priesthood of all believers tied to this kind of religious thought—to catechizing, to writing, to teaching within that context? In some ways that is what we take for granted. There is no established church. There is a kind of Protestant priesthood, leaderless, in which we can all play a part if we want to in various forms or pursuits.

Carl Bielefeldt: I'd like to reiterate the point that Richard was making about the institutional side. On the intellectual side, Suzuki-roshi came of age at a time when the way one understood and taught Buddhism was thrown wide open. It was a time of great experiment. And here again, by being exposed to this sort of volatile environment and experimental forms of teaching, I think Suzuki-roshi was well prepared, you might say, intellectually, to take it another step and bring it out into the greater world.

EDITOR'S NOTES

1. Jodo-Shin-Shu: "True School of the Pure Land," a school of Japanese Buddhism that emphasizes the forty-eight vows of Amida (Amitabha) Buddha.
2. Enfeoff (en-FEEF): A Western legal term, dating from the Middle Ages, that refers to the investment of a freehold (freely held) and typically inheritable estate in land by a feudal lord or baron.
3. Soto-shu: Soto School (Jap.).
4. *Shiho:* Dharma transmission (Jap.).
5. Watsuji Tetsuro: When a professor at the then Imperial University in Tokyo, author of "Shamon Dogen" ("Dogen the Monk"), in *Nihon Seishin-shi Kenkyu* (*Studies of Japanese Spiritual History*), Tokyo, Iwanami Shoten, 1926.
6. Edo (Tokugawa) period: named after Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu, who made Edo (Toyko) the seat of government (1600-1867).

Is Edo period also known as Tokugawa? —Ed.

7. Meiji era: "Enlightened Peace"; designation of the reign of Emperor Mutsuhito (1868-1912).
8. Taisho era: "Great Rightness"; designation of the reign of Emperor Yoshihito (1912-1926).
9. Showa era: "Brilliant Peace"; designation of the reign of Emperor Hirohito (25 December 1926-7 January 1989).
10. Five-rank theory: Also called the Five Degrees of Tozan, the five different levels or degrees of realization formulated by Ch'an Master Tozan Ryokai (Tung-shan Liang-chieh) (807-869 CE).

OK? —Ed.

11. *"Raihai-tozukui,"* [Realizing the Essence of the Way by Making a Venerable Bow," or more literally "Prostrating to Attain the Marrow"], in Eihei Dogen-zenji, *Shobogenzo,* written at Kasho-ji Temple on the 15th day after the Spring equinox (March), 1240 CE. Dogen urged us to revere all beings whole-heartedly if they have attained the truth: "Both men and women can realize the Way. In any case, the realization of the Way should be respected, regardless of sex... . In practicing ... the most difficult thing is to find a guiding teacher." A teacher may have "the spirit of a wild fox... . Even trees and stones might preach to us ... and we should investigate even fences and walls." Dogen noted that even the great god Indra prostrated himself to a wild dog as his master. (It is not difficult, perhaps, to understand why this charming fascicle might appeal to Suzuki-roshi.)
12. *Shobogenzo: "Treasury of the True Dharma Eye,"* a collection of up to 95 fascicles written by Eihei Dogen-zenji (1200-1253 CE) over the last two decades of his life. Edited into a chronological form in 1690 by Kozen, 35th abbot of Eihei-ji, and published in 1816. Widely considered to be the principal written work of Zen Buddhism.

Questions:

—Was SR's graduating essay a thesis (MA level) or dissertation (PhD level), or is it impossible to compare?

—Who signed the thesis/dissertation? Did he have to "defend" it in academic dharma combat?

—Do we know the courses SR took at Komazawa and from whom he took these courses? (That is, did Komazawa University keep transcripts?)

—Do the facts that (a) he went to Eihei-ji AND Soji-ji, (b) that he was appointed assistant to Kishizawa Ian, and (c) that Nukariya Kaiten was his advisor indicate that he was regarded as a "promising" student by Soto-shu (or anyone else)? Was this comparable to a Catholic priest being sent to Lateran College (Vatican City) to be "groomed" for higher ecclesiastical positions? Or was this more-or-less routine training for a Soto Zen priest at the time?

—Why did the Meiji government establish the *Kyobu-sho*? Didn't that government prefer Shintoism to Buddhism? Or did Meiji relax some of the prior discrimination?

—Could you explain a bit about the Soto-shu? Is it incorrect to translate it as simply "Soto School?" And when Nishiyadi became its head, what did that mean? Is there a Western analogy?

—Anything published (in English) about the lives of Kishizawa Ian or Nukariya Kaiten or Gyokujun So-on? In general, there seems to be a hole in the literature on the history of Zen Buddhism—roughly from the late 1800's to the 1920's