

Ryokan's Interpretation of the Never-Despising-Anyone in *Hokke-san* and Whitehead's Idea of "Envisagement"

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I. The locus philosophicus of Whitehead's Idea of "Envisagement"

This article begins with the conclusion I have arrived at in my 1999 article entitled "Whitehead and American Process Theology: A Critical Exposition and a Proposal from the Eastern Perspective."¹ Before writing the said article I had long been in search of the way in which what Charles Hartshorne calls the "worshipability of a persuasive God"² can be intelligibly accounted for in terms of the conceptuality of Whiteheadian process philosophy. The persuasive, concrete Deity is, as a whole, an all-embracing love. As such, the Deity is both the universe and a personal God, the reality which Hartshorne designates "panentheistic" or "surrelativistic."

However, this elucidation of the panentheistic characterization of the Deity notwithstanding, Hartshorne has left one important issue unresolved. The issue is this, that insofar as the panentheistic God is all-embracing, God is transcendent of us worldly creatures while prehending us, in such a manner that God cannot be prehended by us. In order for this God to be prehended (or "known" in some important sense or another) by us, the God must exert some other functions of influencing us in the course of the creative advance of the universe than an "all-embracing love" which is an inclusive function. In the above-mentioned conclusion I have come to grasp two such functions of influencing us as crucial after the all-embracing love of God has been exerted with regard to the past occurrences before the nascent concrescence is to come out: namely, "envisagement" in relation to the primary dative phase and "provision of initial aims" in relation to the nascent concrescence.

Hartshorne's idea of the all-embracing love of God is

effectively-cum-affectively significant only after some diverse things have happened in the universe. Herein is operative God's inclusive function or understanding. But this function is to be integrated in the depths of the inner life of the Divinity with God's creatively transformative function which evocatively impinges upon the nascent concrescence. And the divine act of integration of the two functions takes place silently in the depths of the inner life of the Divinity even before calling us while, however, being "with us" through and through, envisagementally.

As is evident in the above, the problem of "envisagement" can make sense in the "interim" between what Whitehead refers to as the third phase of the creative advance of the universe (namely, "the phase of perfected actuality, in which the many are one everlastingly, without the qualification of any loss either of individual identity or of completeness of unity" [PR,³ 350-351]) and the fourth phase (namely, the phase in which "the perfected actuality passes back into the temporal world, and qualifies this world so that each temporal actuality includes it as an immediate fact of relevant experience" [PR, 351]). It is precisely herein that the locus philosophicus of Whitehead's idea of "envisagement" lies. The third phase derives the conditions of its being from the two antecedent phases, namely, the first phase which is "the phase of conceptual origination, deficient in actuality, but infinite in its adjustment of valuation" [PR, 350] and the second phase, "the temporal phase of physical origination, with its multiplicity of actualities" [PR, 350].

What is crucial in the said "interim" is, as far as I can see, the way in which the fact that we worldly actualities are prehended and understood by the concrete, consequent function of the Deity is recognized, as such, *sub specie aeternitatis* by the conceptual, primordial function of the Deity. This intra-divine way of recognition Whitehead expresses in these words: "...the love in the world [of the consequent nature of God] passes into the love in heaven [of the primordial nature of God]" (PR,

351). If the intra-divine way of recognition is accomplished, it certainly will give rise to the divine-mundane way in which "the reality in heaven passes back into the world," thus enabling the fourth phase—the phase of "the kingdom of heaven being with us today"—to come out. However, within itself, the said intra-divine way of recognition is still, silently operative, thus conceivable, to use Whitehead's phraseology, even "apart from the fact of realization" (SMW,⁴ 105).

It is precisely within this particular context that Whitehead maintains that the underlying activity (which is coterminous with his later notion of "creativity") has three types of envisagement. Whitehead writes:

These are: first, the envisagement of eternal objects; secondly, the envisagement of possibilities of value in respect to the synthesis of eternal objects; and lastly, the envisagement of the actual matter of fact which must enter into the total situation which is achievable by the addition of the future. But in abstraction from actuality, the eternal activity is divorced from value. For the actuality is the value. (SMW, 105)

It is noteworthy that in the third type of envisagement the intra-divine way of recognition of what the consequent nature of God perceives as occurring in the world tends to be attentive to what might come out in the nascent concrescence. The love in heaven has not flooded back again into the world yet. Still, the love in heaven looks deep into and thoughtfully takes into account the world which is miserable within itself but is already accepted by what Hartshorne calls the all-embracing, hence I might designate earthy, love of God. Let me then consider this problem of "divine envisagement" further within the context of Zen Master Ryokan's interpretation of Never-Despising-Anyone and the prodigal son in his *Hokke-san* (Adoring the Lotus Sutra).⁵

II. Zen Master Ryokan on the Never-Despising-Anyone in *Hokke-san*

Chapter XX of *The Threefold Lotus Sutra* is entitled “The Bodhisattva Never-Despising-Anyone.” There is a striking passage in the chapter:

After the extinction of the first Tathagata King of Majestic Voice and after the end of the Righteous Law, during [the period of] the Counterfeit Law bhikshus of arrogance obtained the chief power. At that period there was a bodhisattva-bhikshu named Never Despise[s]. Great Power Obtained! For what reason was he named Never Despise[s]? [Because] that bhikshu paid respect to and commended everybody whom he saw, bhikshu, bhikshuni, upasaka, upasika, speaking thus: ‘I deeply revere you. I dare not slight and contemn you. Wherefore? [Because] you all walk in the bodhisattva-way and are to become buddhas.’ And that bhikshu did not devote himself to reading and reciting the sutras but only to paying respect, so that when he saw afar off [a member of the] four groups, he would specifically go and pay respect to them, commending them, saying: ‘I dare not slight you, because you are all to become buddhas.’ Amongst the four groups, there were those who, irritated and angry and muddy-minded, reviled and abused him, saying: ‘Where did this ignorant bhikshu come from, who [takes it on] himself to say, “I dare not slight you,” and who predicts us as destined to become buddhas? We need no such false prediction.’ Thus he passed many years, constantly reviled but never irritated or angry, always saying, ‘You are to become buddhas.’ Whenever he spoke thus, the people beat him with clubs, sticks, potsherds, or stones. But, while escaping to a distance, he still cried: ‘I dare not slight you. You are all to become buddhas.’ And because he always spoke thus, the haughty bhikshus, bhikshunis,

upasakas, and upasikas styled him Never Despise[s].
(TLS,⁶ 290–291)

One of the finest interpretations of this bodhisattva-figure of the Never-Despising-Anyone (Skr. Sadaparibhuta; J. Jofugyo), I believe, was delivered by Zen Master Ryokan (1758–1831) in his tanka:

One who is a monk needs nothing—
Only “Never Despising Anyone”
For this is the unexcelled practice
of all bodhisattvas⁷

Ryokan's enthusiasm for this bodhisattva is consolidated in a profound manner in and through writing *Hokke-san*, his poetic tribute to the *Lotus Sutra*.

[#79] Day and night you practice
bowing and bowing again
You live your life simply practising bowing
I take refuge in you, Never-Despising-Anyone
You stand alone, without a peer,
above and under heaven (GF, 71)

A fresh gale coming in! (RHS, 304; Eng. trans. mine)

[#81] Some throw stones, some beat him with sticks
He retreats, then stops and calls to them aloud
Since this fellow has left the world
No one has heard from him
But the wind and moonlight that fill the night
For whom do they reveal their purity? (GF, 71–72)

Should he rise now from the dead
I certainly would like to take up the broom!

(RHS, 307; Eng. trans. mine)

[#82] There was no one like you in the past
 There'll be no one like you in the future
 Never disparaging, Never-Despising-Anyone!
 Your pureness makes me forever adore you (GF, 72)

In adoring the Never-Despising-Anyone
 I unknowingly was just too talkative!
 (RHS, 309; Eng. trans. mine)

With regard to *Hokke-san* (Adoration of the *Lotus Sutra*) #79, Makio Takemura attends to the fact that what is precious about the Never-Despising-Anyone is his wholehearted immersion in the act of bowing. It is precisely there that a fresh gale comes in. (RHS, 305) Whence comes in the fresh gale, then? As far as Ryokan himself is concerned, the whence question is answered over and over again in his poems, as in the following:

Since becoming a monk, I've passed the days
 letting things naturally take their course
 Yesterday I was in the green mountains
 Today I'm strolling around town
 My robe is a sorry patchwork
 My bowl a veteran of countless years
 Clear, quiet nights
 I lean on my staff and recite poetry
 In the daytime
 I spread my straw mat for a nap
 People may say, "He's a no-account fellow"
 Well, this is how I am! (GF, 69)

Letting things naturally take their course (騰々任運)
 —this motto of Ryokan's clearly points to the Whence of his
 whole life permeated by a "poetics of mendicancy" although his

identity emerges, as Ryuichi Abe correctly manifests, in “the mutual reflections of the diverse signs for Ryokan—a degenerate, a beggar, the most useless man ever, the one who ran away from home and then from the monastic life, the one who returned from the ‘conjured city,’ and the one who rediscovered his home as the jewel that always remained in his robe” (GF, 69). Compare this motto of Ryokan’s with Jesus’s prayer in Gethsemane: “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want” (Mark 14:36) and we will know that they both aspired to “justify the ways of the Divine to humans.”⁸ The ways of the Divine to humans are already here—however hidden and potential in terms of “envisagement,” as discussed in the previous section. We just need to justify them at present in the midst of our decisions for the future salvation of fellow-humans.

In this sense, the Never-Despising-Anyone is an “interim” existence living between the “primary, dative time” of God’s acceptance of us creatures or of the potential Enlightenment which “is already with us”⁹ and the “nascent-concrescent time” of our actual knowledge of the all-embracing love of God or of the actual Enlightenment.

III. Ryokan on the Prodigal Son in *Hokke-san* and Envisagement

Chapter IV of *The Threefold Lotus Sutra* is entitled “Faith Discernment.” In this chapter there is an important passage about the father and his prodigal son:

Another day he [the father] sees at a distance through a window his son’s figure, gaunt, lean, and doleful, filthy and unclean from the piles of dirt and dust; thereupon he takes off his strings of jewels, his soft attire and ornaments, and puts on again a coarse, torn, and dirty garment, smears his body with dust, takes a dustspan in his right hand, and with an appearance of fear says to the laborers: ‘Get on with your work, don’t be lazy.’ By [such] a

device he gets near his son. (TLS, 113)

In *Hokke-san* #25 Ryokan writes:

[#25] Another day the father sees his son's figure
 Gaunt and filthy—really deplorable
 Taking off his soft attire and ornaments
 He puts on a coarse, torn, and dirty garment

Because of the wonders he can humiliate himself
 (RHS, 133–134; Eng. trans. mine)

It is precisely in this earthy form that the true Buddhahood manifests itself. For Ryokan the accomplishment of “faith discernment” in the life of the prodigal son is discernible here. I would like to concur with Makio Takemura when he boldly contends:

The Buddha cannot be found apart from my actuality here–now clothed in a coarse, torn, and dirty garment. On the other hand, it may be the case that poor–looking persons we come across from time to time are, in reality, the ambassadors of the Buddhahood. (RHS, 135)

If so, we can be fully content with the idea that the Never–Despising–Anyone is theistically undergirded because he/she is envisaged compassionately in terms of “the [Divine] envisagement of the actual matter of fact [i.e., his/her status of humiliation] which must enter into the total situation [i.e., his/her status of salvation or enlightenment] which is achievable by the addition of the future [i.e., when the love in heaven floods back into the world and God becomes the great companion—the fellow–sufferer who understands]. Ryokan, too, attends to this state of affairs in his own unique manner: He writes:

waga nochi o
 tasuke tamae to
 tanomu mi wa
 moto no chikai no
 sugata narikeri

while beseeching thee
 for mercy after my death
 lo I find myself
 already embodying
 the Original Vow now!¹⁰

The truth which inheres in this tanka is commensurate with the insight of Paul Tillich into the mystery of faith which he discloses with these words: "He who speaks through us is he who is spoken to."¹¹ Ryokan's poetic faith/enlightenment richly resonates further, in my view, with the following dictum of the Reformer Martin Luther: "Oh, that we might willingly be emptied that we might be filled with thee; Oh, that I may willingly be weak that thy strength may dwell in me; gladly a sinner that thou mayest be justified in me (*Libenter peccator ut tu iustificeris in me*)."¹² And we have to know that Ryokan thus came to find the final solution to his inquiry into the problem of theodicy which he had expressed in a tragic tone with this haiku in memory of his father Inan who had plunged into a stream of the Katsura River in Kyoto while threatened by the Tokugawa shogunate officers. Ryokan's return to Echigo as a mendicant priest was initiated by this haiku:

Someiro no
 otozure tsugeyo
 yoru no kari

darkling wild geese,
 bring tidings of my father

from Mt. Someiro¹³

Concluding Remarks: Toward a New Possibility of the Christian Witness to the Buddhists

Ryokan's journey back home to Echigo (i.e., present-day Niigata), I think, is profoundly akin, spiritually speaking, to the case in which the 102 Mayflower passengers set sail from England for New England while reading on board the Geneva Bible in which is written: "...let God be true and euery man a lyar" (Rom.3: 4).¹⁴ Ryokan and the Puritans commonly but differently strove to justify the Ways of the Divine in their renewed domains of living Religion: one in the Buddhist spirit of the Never-Despising-Anyone, and the other in the spirit of the Mayflower Compact—"for the Glory of God and advancement of the Christian Faith and Honour of our King and Country."¹⁵

Do they meet each other today in some way or another? I have tried thus far in this article to answer this question in the affirmative. The third millenium is beckoning us to strive for a genuinely global civilization—and this by way of an ongoing East-West dialogue in which I find the comparative studies of Ryokan and process thought so enticing.

One of the ways in which we can notice the compatibililty, or the possibility for a mutual transformation, of Buddhism as represented by Ryokan and Christianity as articulated by the philosophy of Whitehead is, if I am correct, the problem of what John Cobb designates "the Christian witness to the Buddhists," which, however, presupposes the Christian learning from the Buddhists—the process of passing over to the Buddhist realm of "Emptiness." In his 1982 book *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism*,¹⁶ Cobb boldly proposed to re-grasp the theistic figure of Amida Buddha appearing within the realm of Jodoshinshu (True Pure Land Buddhism) "as" Christ.

Cobb's major Whiteheadian reason for this identification is as follows:

Whitehead's account of the Primordial Nature of God addresses the same feature of reality as that spoken of by Shinran as the primal vow of Amida. Both of these are remarkably analogous to the Johannine and patristic accounts of the Word of God or Logos or Truth which is Christ. That, too, is a primordial character apart from which nothing exists. It is a creative redemptive character. (BD, 128)

And Cobb further writes:

The conclusion from the above is that Amida *is* Christ. That is, the feature of the totality or reality to which Pure Land Buddhists refer when they speak of Amida is the same as that to which Christians refer when we speak of Christ. This does not mean that Buddhists are completely accurate in their account of this reality—nor that Christians are. It does mean that Christians can gain further knowledge about Christ by studying what Buddhists have learned about Amida. It means also that Buddhists can gain further knowledge about Amida by studying what Christians have learned about Christ. (BD, 128)

This process of mutual fructification of Buddhism and Christianity is a rich theological event which can take place even “beyond dialogue.” By the same token, what I perceive as theologically meaningful in re-grasping in Whiteheadian terms the figure of the Never-Despising-Anyone as this is poetically articulated by Ryokan in *Hokke-san* is, let me emphasize, the fact that we Christians can gain further and richer knowledge about the “self-emptying figure (i.e., kenosis) of Christ” in Phil. 2:6-11.

From the viewpoint of this further and richer knowledge of the kenotic Christ as “Never-Despising-Anyone,” it appears

really fitting that Jesus prayed on the cross, saying, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing,” precisely when some people standing by scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!” (see Luke 23:34–35). For we really come to notice here that at this very moment Jesus is authentically revealing Himself, namely, as “Never–Despising–Anyone,” the Savior. This is what we Christians can learn from the Buddhists who are pursuing the way of Never–Despising–Anyone, as in the case of Zen Master Ryokan.

In this new format of kenotic Christology (which I might call the proposal for a Never–Despising–Anyone Christology) what is crucial in Whiteheadian terms is the fact that the theistic figure of Never–Despising–Anyone as Christ is “envisaged with us creatures” under the potential phase of our existence where “we are still sinners” (cf. Rom.5:40) while, however, praying for our forgiveness and salvation that are to be realized under the phase of the ever–nascent concrescence of our existence in the future. In this sense, as P. T. Forsyth insightfully maintains, Christ is the one “whose whole existence is prayer, who is wholly *pros ton theon* [with God] for us.”¹⁷

Conversely, what is revealed here in one and the same breath, on the other hand, is the truth that in Jesus as the Christ the Buddhist ideal of “Never–Despising–Anyone” is a naked, incarnate, “historical” actuality pure and simple. Here [I]t is highly recommendable for us now to see, with John Cobb, that “It is in Palestine, rather than in India, that history, when it is read as centering in Jesus, provides the strongest basis for believing that we are saved by grace through faith” (BD, 140). These inspiring words he spoke in the hope that once the attitude of mutual suspicion and defensiveness between Christians and Buddhists in the Jodoshinshu camp is truly superseded, “there is no reason in principle why Buddhists cannot internalize the Palestinian as well as the Indian past” (BD, 140). Now it is my contention that the same vision might

be true of the Christian witness to the Buddhist believers in the Lotus Sutra camp. Ecce homo! This, I believe, is at the core of the Christian message which we should vindicate and bear witness to in the presence of the Buddhists today.

NOTES

*This is a paper delivered at The International Conference on “The Lotus Sutra and Process Thought” which was held in Bandaiso, Fukushima, Japan, July 13–18, 2000 under the leadership of Dr. Gene Reeves, Rissho Kosei Kai.

1. Contained in: Hiroshi Endo, ed., *Purosesu shiso kenkyu* (Studies in Process Thought), Tokyo: Nanso Sha, 1999, pp.91–107.
2. Charles Hartshorne, *Creativity in American Philosophy*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1984, p.112.
3. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, Corrected Edition, eds. by David R. Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne, New York: The Free Press, 1978.
4. Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, New York: The Free Press, 1967.
5. See Makio Takemura, *Ryokan “Hokke-san” Shakuhyo* (An Exposition of Ryokan’s “Adoring the Lotus Sutra”), Tokyo: Shunju Sha, 1997. (Hereafter cited as RHS.) Incidentally, let me emphasize at this early stage of the present article that Ryokan puts forward the afore-mentioned theme of “divine envisagement” in his unique, artistic manner in the following haiku:

araike ya
kawazu tobikomu
oto mo nashi

the new pond:
not a sound of a frog
jumping in
(Sanford Goldstein, Shigeo Mizuguchi, and Fujisato Kitajima, trans., *Ryokan: Selected Tanka, Haiku*, Niigata: Kokodo, 2000, p.119)

In my paper on “Hartshorne and Nishida: Re-Envisioning the Absolute. Two Types of Panentheism vs. Spinoza’s Pantheism” (which was presented originally at the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy Paideia: Philosophy Educating Humanity, Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.A., August 10–16, 1998 and is now readable on-line at <http://www.bu.edu/wcp>), I have referred to Basho’s famous haiku: “furuike ya/kawazu tobikomu/mizu no oto: the

old pond, ah!/a frog jumps in:/the water's sound!" as manifesting the truth, which D.T. Suzuki expounds to this effect: "...the poet sees into this Unconsciousness not through the stillness of the pond but through the sound stirred up by the jumping frog" (*Zen and Japanese Culture*, Washington: Pantheon Books, 1955, p. 242). From my process perspective, this signifies that what was at the center of Basho's concern in this poem was the problem of "concrecence" or self-creation of each and any creature. By contrast, I might say, Ryokan's interest here is in artistically putting forward the problem of "envisagement" which precedes the nascent "concrecence." He provides us with an articulate exposition of this "new" problem (which I might call the "araike [new pond]" problem) in *Hokke-san*.

6. See Bunno Kato et al. trans., *The Threefold Lotus Sutra*, Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Co., 1975.
7. Ryuichi Abe and Peter Haskel, *Great Fool: Zen Master Ryokan — Poems, Letters, and Other Writings*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996, p.71. (Hereafter cited as GF.)
8. Cf.: "But, after all, the power of attainment of the desired end is fundamental [in education]. The first thing is to get there. Do not bother about your style, but solve your problem, justify the ways of God to man, administer your province, or do whatever else is set before you" (Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and Other Essays*, New York: The Free Press, 1967, p.12). Cf. also: "To vindicate Eternal Providence, and justify the ways of God to man. That is a theodicy, the attempt to adjust the ways of God to conscience. But to His own conscience above all" (P. T. Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, London: Duckworth & Co., 1916, v).
9. Cf.: "Indeed, Ignorance is the negation of Enlightenment and not the reverse" (D. T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism, First Series*, New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1961, p.139).
10. See Makio Takemura, *Ryokan — Nihon no kokoro no genten* (Ryokan: The Origin of the Japanese Mind), Tokyo: Koseido Shuppan, 1994, p.292; Eng. trans. mine.
11. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Vol.3*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963, p.192.
12. Martin Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, ed. W. Pauck, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961, p.67.
13. See Sanford Goldstein, Shigeo Mizuguchi, and Fujisato Kitajima, trans., *Ryokan: Selected Tanka Haiku*, Niigata: Kokodo, 2000, p.133. Mt. Someiro is to the Buddhists what the Kingdom of Heaven is to the Christians.

14. Gerald T. Sheppard, ed., *The Geneva Bible: The Annotated New Testament 1602 Edition*, Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1989, p.72b.
15. William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation: 1620–1647*, ed., with an introduction & notes, by Samuel Eliot Morison, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952, 1998, p.76.
16. Published by Fortress Press in 1982. (Hereafter cited as BD.)
17. See P. T. Forsyth, *The Soul of Prayer*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1916, p.91.