The background of the cover is a landscape photograph. In the foreground, a dirt path splits into two, leading towards a single, vibrant green tree standing on a grassy hill. The sky is filled with dramatic, colorful clouds in shades of purple, pink, and orange, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

# How to Live *in a* Post-Religious Age

*Terrorism, Philosophy, and the Meaning of Life*

Masahiro Morioka



**How to Live in a Post-Religious Age**  
Terrorism, Philosophy, and the Meaning of Life

Masahiro Morioka

Translated by Robert Chapeskie

Tokyo Philosophy Project

Tokyo

How to Live in a Post-Religious Age: Terrorism, Philosophy, and  
the Meaning of Life

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# FOREWORD TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

This is the English translation of *How to Live in a Post-Religious Age: Aum and the Meaning of Life, Complete Edition*.<sup>1</sup> This book was originally published in Japan in March 1996, when I was 37 years old. It was then rereleased as a “complete edition” with the addition of a new “Foreword” and “Afterword” in April 2019. Today, with religious terrorism and the brutality of war waged by strong nations receiving attention again around the world, I am very happy to be able to make this English translation available to international readers.

The writing of this book was triggered by the sarin gas attacks on Tokyo subways that occurred in 1995. A religious cult called “Aum Shinrikyo” (hereafter referred to simply as “Aum”) manufactured sarin gas, a chemical weapon, and deployed it in multiple subway trains. The result was an unprecedented incident in which thirteen people were killed and roughly six thousand were injured. I was profoundly shocked by this event. I was shocked because the leaders who made the sarin gas were scientists of my own generation, and they engaged in this terrorism using sarin in the sincere belief that it could save people’s souls. There were also those among

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<sup>1</sup> 森岡正博『完全版 宗教なき時代を生きるために — オウム真理教と「生きる意味」』法蔵館, 2019.

them who earnestly pursued “truth” and “the meaning of life” through the path of religion. In this I saw a reflection of myself in my twenties.

I entered a science program at university to study the truth of the cosmos through physics. Realizing that natural science is severely limited, however, I became drawn to religion. But I could not bring myself to believe in God or Buddha. I had no choice but to look for a path that was neither science nor religion. How was I different from the Aum leaders with a similar intellectual background who took the path of religion and ended up making sarin gas? This problem is surely not mine alone. There must be many young people around the world who find themselves wedged in the gap between science and religion, unable to move forward.

This book was written for such people. I very much hope that its message will reach readers around the world.

The phrase “post-religious age” is used in the title. When the book was first published in 1996, it referred to an era in which religion was no longer able to play a leading role in society. According to a 2015 survey of the global population by the Pew Research Center, Christians form the largest group at 31%, followed by Muslims at 24% and “unaffiliated” at 16%. People who do not believe in religion are already a powerful force. In many countries, the percentage of people without religion will presumably continue to gradually increase.

But are people without religion not troubled by problems with a religious dimension? No, they most certainly are. I know this because I myself, someone with no religious affiliation, continue to wrestle with such problems today. Why was I born? Where will I go when I die? How can I be saved from this painful life? What is the meaning of life? People

without religion must take a non-religious approach to living and to thinking about these questions that can never be answered by natural science. How are we to do this?

Religion has long contemplated these questions. There is much that people without religion can learn from it. At the same time, there is presumably much that people who walk the path of religion can learn from those who do not. It is sad to see division between people who follow a religion and people who do not. I would like to call an era in which these people respect each other without rejecting each other's path and can learn ways of approaching problems in the spiritual dimension from each other a "post-religious age." This is a new definition of this phrase. Here non-believers can turn to religion and people of faith can give up their religious affiliation without issue. How such a world can be made possible is one of the themes of this book.

Aum, a cult religion related to yoga, is a very modern religious group that has engaged in violent terrorism based on religious faith. It began as a yoga studio in 1984, and later grew into a large religious organization as its adherents increased. Its doctrines changed over time, however, and eventually it evolved into a group trying to send people to a better afterlife by taking their lives. On June 27<sup>th</sup>, 1994, it carried out a terrorist act using the chemical weapon sarin in Matsumoto City, and on March 20<sup>th</sup> of the following year it deployed sarin once again in an attack on subways in Tokyo.

Aum founder Shōkō Asahara (born Chizuo Matsumoto) and the leaders who carried out the sarin attacks were arrested, and after long trials thirteen of them, including Asahara, were executed in July, 2018.

Hearing only a broad outline of the incident, it may seem

to have been mass murder carried out by a fanatical group lacking in reason. The depth of this incident, however, lies in the fact that this was not the case. What shocked people was that among the leaders of Aum there were many brilliant scientists who had graduated from top universities. They belonged to what was called the “Ministry of Science and Technology” within the group, and manufactured the sarin used as a chemical weapon themselves. At the time, no one could give a satisfactory answer to the question of why elite scientists would join a cult and commit mass murder. From the perspective of the average citizen, it could only be described as a completely incomprehensible incident.

As I have stated, I could not think of these leaders as having nothing in common with me: I was from the same generation, and I too had come face to face with the question of “the meaning of life” after entering a science program at a top university. I could very easily have become a member of Aum when I was a university student. I could have participated in crimes along with its leaders. I truly believe this. For me, therefore, to think about Aum is to think about myself during that period.

I mentioned “the meaning of life,” but readers may find it hard to believe that people who committed mass murder with sarin were thinking about such things. They may consider it impossible that people who commit crimes like murder could attempt to seriously contemplate the meaning of life. On this point there is a very interesting document I would like to cite here. It is a manuscript entitled “To Students” written by an Aum leader named Ken’ichi Hirose in 2008 when he was in prison awaiting execution. He had been asked to write it for use in talks at universities warning students

against cults by the photojournalist Shōichi Fujita.

Ken'ichi Hirose was one of the perpetrators of the sarin attacks and belonged to Aum's Ministry of Science and Technology. Hirose graduated from Waseda University's Faculty of Science and Engineering at the top of his class, and despite earning high praise for papers he co-authored with his master's course supervisor in graduate school he abandoned this life and entered Aum. He was a brilliant student who would surely have become an outstanding scientist had he remained in university. (Waseda, the university at which I currently teach, is one of the leading private universities in Japan.)

Hirose abandoned his faith in Aum in prison. He then dispassionately analysed the process by which he had been brainwashed by this cult. His manuscript opens with the following passage.

“What is the meaning of life?” – Has this question ever come into your mind?

I begin with this question because it is a problem people your age tend to grapple with, and can also be a reason young people become involved in “cults.”<sup>2</sup>

Hirose opens with “the meaning of life” when addressing university students. He says that “the meaning of life” is not meaning found in everyday life, but something involving “the purpose for which I was born.” He also says that the reason he was sucked into Aum was that it seemed to provide a direct answer to the question “what is the meaning of life?” The

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<sup>2</sup> p.1.

desire to seek “the meaning of life” is indeed one route by which young people enter religious cults.

In this book I aim to make this route clear. Both Hirose and I first tried the path of natural science before changing course toward religion or philosophy. But while Hirose became a believer, I was left outside religion, unable to have faith. What determined this difference in our paths?

In Chapter One, I consider science and religion. I believed that truth could be learned through natural science. When I actually began a specialist program at university, however, I realized this was not the case. Still seeking truth, I then approached religion. But I was faced with the enormous barrier of “faith.” I had been turned away from both science and religion.

In Chapter Two, I consider mystical experiences. Mystical experiences were of pivotal importance to Aum. In this chapter I give a detailed account of the “mystical experiences” and “trap of a closed community” I have encountered myself. The reader will see how the sweet nectar of “only we are right” is formed. This kind of self-righteousness seems to be increasing in the current era.

In Chapter Three, I consider Yutaka Ozaki, a singer who died young after having been active during the same period as Aum. Readers of the English edition may not be familiar with this Japanese performer. As a precocious rock singer who made his debut at an early age, he sang passionately about absurd or irrational aspects of society, about himself being destroyed by desire, and about “the meaning of life,” and died young under mysterious circumstances. There are presumably similar singers in the reader’s home country. I would like you to keep such a figure in mind when reading this

chapter. In fact, Ozaki manifested a similar structure to the trap of a religious cult. He took on the expectations of his audience, and through them acquired their desire for his death. Why was Ozaki unable to avoid turning toward death while seeking the salvation of his soul?

In Chapter Four, I consider the ingenious structures that allow us to avoid seeing things we don't want to see in which nearly all of us, not only adherents of Aum, are caught. These "blindfolding structures" have been put in place throughout society and in every corner of our minds. I look for what might be needed to escape from them. What is the nature of a path that is neither science nor religion? Where does such a road lead?

I hope you will consider these questions with me.





## PREFACE

To live in a post-religious age.

How is this to be done?

What is the meaning of life? What is the meaning of my existence? Natural science does not provide any kind of answer to these questions.

Religion says it resolves these issues, but I cannot believe in it.

Unsatisfied by science but unable to take the path of religion, how am I, left hanging in this way, to go on living in this world?

The sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway perpetrated by Aum in 1995 was an event that affected me deeply. It caused me to reconsider what life is and what it means to live in this society.

What I have assiduously pursued in this book is not the question “what is Aum?” but rather “what is this ‘I’ that must live in the era of Aum?”

I have taken this approach because the question the Aum incident puts to us is not “what is Aum?” but rather “who are you who have witnessed what Aum has done, and how are you going to live from now on?”

When a person who is not satisfied by science but cannot enter the world of religion tries to think about “the meaning

of living” and “the true self” with their own mind and their own two eyes, they descend into inescapable isolation. This occurs because the answers to such fundamental questions must be excavated from within oneself.

This is very difficult, painful work.

But you are not the only one carrying out this task in solitude. In this wide world there must be many others enduring the same suffering and writhing in the same hole.

I too am one of them.

There is thus a need for some kind of system by which these people who are trying to stand up on their own can support each other’s solitude in a pluralistic way and encourage each other from afar. What is needed is not the creation of a closed therapeutic community but rather a way for individuals to find hope in the midst of mutually supported solitude.

The century is about to turn, and a “philosophy boom” is underway.

But to simply organize and restate the history of thought and philosophy in easy-to-understand language is not philosophy.

Philosophy ought to be the act of this “I,” who is living its one and only life here and now, putting its whole being into thinking through the nature of the world and the meaning of life with its own mind and in its own words.

This is what I attempt to do in this book.

At what level of depth do we engage the Aum incident and confront it? Focusing on this point should reveal whether or not the words of thinkers living in the same era as this incident ring true.

# CHAPTER ONE

## Between Science and Religion

### 1. An Uncomfortable Feeling about Faith

Among the people close to me, I have many friends who believe in religion. They are all good people. In terms of character they are far superior to me, and what they do in their daily life is wonderful. I often cannot help thinking that compared to them I am a useless person.

But when I am with them there are times when I am suddenly beset by an uncomfortable feeling. This is caused by the conviction many of them have that “absolute truth has already been revealed by someone.” Whenever I encounter this kind of conviction underlying their casual remarks, I feel an infinite distance open up between us. “Absolute truth has already been revealed by someone.” This is a conviction I can never have. If I were to say such a thing to them my religious friends would surely give up on me. But I must state this here before moving on. “Absolute truth has not been revealed by anyone in the past, and it will never be revealed in the future.” This is the conviction that comes most naturally to me. It goes without saying, of course, that this intuition of mine has no basis.

When I write this, one response will no doubt be, “So are

you saying it is stupid to seek absolute truth, or to seek enlightenment or salvation?" I have a straightforward answer to this question: I think seeking absolute truth, seeking enlightenment or salvation, and engaging in devotional practices or spiritual training in pursuit of these aims are all wonderful activities. Does absolute truth exist? What should I do to be saved from this life full of suffering? What is the purpose of living in this world? I think a person who is moved to agonize over these sorts of questions and who engages in activities with the aim of resolving them displays the noblest form humanity can attain.

I have no desire to reject or deny this kind of human passion that lies at the bottom of all religions. This passion exists inside me, and in a sense it can be said to be the motivation behind my own inquiries. I therefore do not think it is stupid at all.

I am simply unable to accept the conviction that absolute truth has already been revealed by someone. This may be because there was a period when I was deeply immersed in what is referred to as "science." Science assumes that the knowledge we currently possess is always insufficient. Science must therefore always be moving forward. Science is an endless process of pushing ahead in pursuit of answers that have not yet been found. Science has no end. Science cannot, therefore, ever arrive at ultimate truth.

Of course, there is also the perspective, sometimes found within religion itself, that the essential character of religion is an endless process of pursuing absolute truth and engaging in devotional practices. Let us for the moment accept this view. Even religions that take this stance, however, do not deny the fact that their founder obtained absolute truth or received it

from god and then passed it on to their followers. If such a denial were made, the foundation of the religion would crumble. It is because of this requirement that I cannot get on board with religion.

The biggest reason that, despite being captivated by questions of life and death, I cannot turn to religion, is that I cannot “have faith” in it. I can rely on other people, come to like them, and believe what they tell me. It is only religious “faith” I find impossible.

Faith also has various aspects. Faith is believing in the “absolute truth” preached by the founder of my religion. Faith is also believing that I will be saved if I follow the words of my religion’s founder. Accepting the existence of a transcendent being by focusing on my own limitations as someone who cannot attain absolute truth is also a kind of faith.

For me, however, all of these forms of faith are impossible.

Almost all religions are constructed around belief in their founder, doctrine or a transcendent being. This is true of Christianity and Islam, and also of Japanese schools of Buddhism such as True Pure Land and Nichiren. Of course, faith becomes a less significant factor in the case of religions like Taoism and Shinto that are rooted in the everyday lives of ordinary people and embedded in local customs. Within the field of sociology of religion, it has often been asserted that it is a mistake to take the view that there is no religion without faith. In one sense this is indeed correct. It is a fact, however, that a great many religions have been constructed with faith at their core, and by using faith as a foothold have gone on to acquire enormous power.

## 2. A New Way of Thinking about Life and Death

Let me state my position once more.

I have long been captivated by questions of life and death. But I cannot pursue them by taking the path of religion because I cannot accept the idea that someone has already revealed absolute truth and I am incapable of having faith in this kind of truth or absolute being or founder. When I say this, the response will presumably be, “So you are an atheist, materialist, and proponent of scientism.”

What I want to suggest in this book is that this kind of “people who do not believe in religion are materialists” dichotomy be abandoned. For me this point is very important. I hope the day will soon come when one can say things like “I do not believe in religion, but I am not a materialist,” “I do not believe in religion, but I am not a devotee of scientism,” or “I do not believe in religion, but I am not an atheist” without anyone finding it remarkable.

Some scholars declare that there is no such thing as yogic levitation, no “next world” exists, and there is no god, but this is not how I see things. Presumably no one can conclusively assert whether levitation is possible or not until this phenomenon appears in plain view, it is impossible to objectively prove whether a “next world” exists or not, and it is indeed impossible to declare whether or not god exists. (I do not want to get into a detailed philosophical discussion, but saying that something does not exist and saying it is impossible to prove that something exists are two different things.)

In short, I cannot make any determination about the existence of things like gods, a next world, or levitation. They

may or may not exist. In cases where we cannot make a determination, isn't saying "I don't know" the most honest stance to take?

Furthermore, as I stated above, I believe that thinking about questions like "what is absolute truth?" "does another world exist?," and "what is the meaning of life?" is a very important thing for human beings to do. I understand very well the feelings of people who cannot help thinking about these sorts of questions; pursuing them is one way of proving your existence as a human being, and this kind of passion exists within me as well.

I therefore choose the path of continuing to think about questions of life and death and grapple with my own way of living in this world as neither a religious believer nor an atheist.

I had had these feelings for a long time, but after encountering this Aum incident, I was pushed to the point of needing to make a public declaration. In this sense the Aum incident was a deeply significant experience for me. Why had young people who wanted to know the meaning of life and death, who wanted to be saved, and who wanted to obtain supernatural abilities found it necessary to be bound by faith in Asahara, the founder of the cult? Isn't one reason for this the fact that today's society has provided only religion as a means of pursuing such questions? Is it not the case that this society has come to accept only a dichotomous structure in which one either lives an ordinary life mired in the realities of the secular world or enters a religion and pursues the meaning of life and death? As a result, is it not the case that some people grappling with these issues have had no choice but to enter a religion and have been unable avoid getting bound up

in absolute faith in its leader?

Is it not also the case that those who lack the courage to knock on the door of religion have no choice in this society but to give up struggling with issues of life and death and dedicate themselves to boring, mundane everyday tasks? Being occupied with one's daily work drives complicated things like questions of life and death out of view. If you go out on the town there are many momentary diversions that have been prepared for you. Complicated issues can be forgotten in this cycle of daily work and nightly pleasures. When they learned of the Aum incident, some of those living this way must have had a sudden realization that they themselves could have joined such a religion and experienced a sober moment in which they questioned their current lifestyle. When Yutaka Ozaki died in 1992, his fans who had become fully integrated into social institutions as upstanding members of society must also have briefly had the same kind of feeling. But these fans, too, had to immediately banish these reflections from their minds and return to their ordinary daily lives. "In this managed society, there is no room for individuals to consider questions of their own life and death." This is indeed the case, but it is also an excuse people give themselves.

Knock on the door of religion and enter a life of faith, or remain in the secular world and live your life oblivious to questions of life and death. Is our society, which seems to provide only these two options, not indeed terribly impoverished? Is it not possible to find a third way between these two paths?

Here I would like to cite some of what Tetsuo Yamaori said about the Aum incident. He had had a dialogue with Aum founder Asahara and was inundated with requests for



interviews from the news media. At first he refused. During his interactions with the mass media, Yamaori turned to a group of TV directors and asked them, “What is your religion?” Almost all of them replied that they were atheists. Yamaori writes, “Journalists on the front lines of the mass media are scrutinizing and attempting to report on this major incident rooted in the deepest levels of religion from the atheist perspective.” “If so, what kind of perspective is the atheist perspective? This is also something that can be debated ad infinitum, but we can say, for example, that the atheist perspective is one that attempts to scrutinize, analyze, and explain this incident not from the point of view of god or Buddha (i.e., from the perspective of people who believe in religion) but from the point of view of society (i.e., from the perspective of those who view this kind of event from the stands).”<sup>1</sup>

The dichotomy that appears in this text is an example of the kind that bothers me.

Yamaori divides the ways of looking at Aum into two categories. One is the god or Buddha perspective. As Yamaori himself notes, this is the perspective of those who believe in god or Buddha, i.e., the perspective of faith. The other is the societal perspective. Yamaori says this is a perspective that observes the incident as an onlooker; those who take this perspective are spectators who enjoy watching events unfold from the sidelines.

It is precisely this sort of criticism, one that establishes a perspective of faith on the one hand and spectator on the other and uses this dichotomous scheme to attempt to examine

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<sup>1</sup> Tetsuo Yamaori, “The Atheist Perspective,” (山折哲雄「無神論者の眼差し」『イマーゴ』臨時増刊号〈オウム真理教の深層〉), August 1995, pp. 26-27.

religious phenomena, that oppresses those like me who, despite remaining in the secular world, cannot be spectators, and instead grapple with the Aum incident as something that should not be considered to be simply someone else's problem. This dichotomous scheme completely ignores the many people in this society who, while they cannot place themselves on the side of believers, cannot simply sit in the stands as indifferent spectators. The many silent individuals who, while remaining in the secular world without being able to take the leap of faith, nevertheless cannot give up on their passion for "mystery," "life and death," and "enlightenment," surely suffered greatly when they were forced to confront the Aum incident.

I had the urgent sense that with one false step I myself could have entered this cult. What always irritates me when reading criticism on the topic of Aum is that I can never feel this kind of urgency in these writings. I once picked up Asahara's book with a photograph of yogic levitation on its cover in a bookstore and started to read it. In the end I decided not to buy it, but others, such as, for example, former Aum Nagoya branch head Mr. A, bought it, read it enthusiastically, and became members of Aum.<sup>2</sup> What is the difference between us? Was I too not just a slight push away from ending up in their position? After all, I had picked up the book because of an embarrassing feeling of excitement caused by the picture of levitation used on its cover. It is clear that one of the reasons young people were attracted to Aum was the desire to acquire supernatural abilities, including levitation. I understand this feeling. It clearly existed within me as well. I

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<sup>2</sup> 『現代』 August, 1995, p. 80.

too wanted to levitate and bend spoons with psychic power. I was very interested in transcendental meditation (TM), a practice that includes the same kind of levitation. Without honestly reflecting on this point in my past, the essence of Aum does not come into view. (I discuss this point in more detail in Chapter Two).

Let me review what I have stated so far.

What is the meaning of life in this world? What happens when you die? What is the right way to live? Our society, in which religion is the only doorway that has been left open for people who cannot look away from these problems and have devoted themselves body and soul to addressing them, is truly impoverished. There is something wrong with a dichotomous society in which to address these issues one must either embrace a religion with faith in the absolute truth someone has revealed at its core or else give up thinking about these issues completely and simply consume the pleasures of daily life in a managed society.

When I say this, one response may be, “Buddhism acknowledges ‘*zaike* (lay devotee)’ as a third way between living a secular life and withdrawing from the world as a monk. So it is in fact your perspective in which you declare Buddhism to be dichotomous that is narrow-minded.” But being a *zaike* is for people who, while living in the secular world, nonetheless aspire to a path of faith. In this sense this approach too falls into the category of religion based on faith. It is therefore not the kind of third way I have been discussing.

Let us consider this point using a different example. According to an Asahi Shimbun article, high-ranking Aum member Kazuko Miyakozawa, who had been arrested, responded as follows during an interview. “The first thing I

thought was how dirty this world is!’ Going outside, the scenery of steel and buildings visible from a car window felt very cold. Restaurants looked vulgar, and people wearing suits seemed bizarre. “Those people’s bodies were bound in twine, and they seemed to have no sense of freedom.”

What is this world? What are human beings? It is natural that such sights should appear if you look at the world as it exists with these sorts of questions in mind. She is observing its scenery very earnestly. “As someone who must live day after day in this dirty, vulgar, and oppressive society, what am I?” Questions of this sort must have been on her mind.

Using this kind of inquiry as a springboard, she would then presumably have been able to continue examining, with her own eyes and mind, questions such as “what is the meaning of living in this world?” and “how should I confront this society?”

But this was not the path Miyakozawa chose.

She goes on to say, “From now on my task is to determine how to act in accordance with the will of my guru. To implement my guru’s will 100%.”<sup>3</sup>

The tragedy of Kazuko Miyakozawa can be seen as the fact that a person with an acute ability to reflect on herself and society could not help choosing the path of believing in the guru she had embraced and living as his robot over the path of addressing these issues with her own mind and her own two eyes. I would suggest that one of the factors behind her being unable to avoid this path is the kind of dichotomy found so often in this society.

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<sup>3</sup> 『朝日新聞』 August 16, 1995, Osaka evening edition.

### 3. Why Did Budding Scientists Turn to Aum?

When the subway sarin gas incident occurred, and when it began to be suspected that Aum was the group behind this crime, I did not see this as anything other than a simple act of indiscriminate terrorism by a cult group. Apart from the uncanniness of having been in Tokyo on a work-related trip until the day before the incident, I did not have any particular feelings about what had occurred.

My attitude was suddenly transformed, however, when Hideo Murai, a high-ranking member of the cult, was assassinated in broad daylight. My feelings changed because of the fact that Murai and I were the same age, a detail that was perhaps trivial but nonetheless had a very strong effect on me. What's more, he too had majored in astrophysics at university before entering Aum. For me this fact was very troubling.

In the reporting on Aum, much attention has been paid to the existence of a "Ministry of Science and Technology" within this organization. It appears that young people who were in university and on track to become top-level scientists gave up their promising careers to join this "Ministry" within Aum. It has been reported that they then developed weapons of mass murder, including Sarin gas. "Why would budding scientists at prestigious universities be drawn to Aum's cult religion? It is incomprehensible." This was the sort of thing that began to be discussed in the mass media. In newspapers and other media, the argument has been made that this incident occurred because post-war Japanese science education has been inadequate; if science education were being conducted properly, presumably there would not be any

scientists who brought together science and the occult.

Listening to these sorts of opinions makes me sigh. For me it is all too easy to understand why budding scientists are flocking to new religions.<sup>4</sup> I want to shout at the top of my voice, “It is because of people like you, people who say ‘I don’t understand why they would do such a thing. Let’s make science education more comprehensive,’ that young scientists in the making are running to new religions.”

In any case, the existence of this “Ministry of Science and Technology” troubled me greatly. Hearing about it was a shock from which I found it very difficult to recover. I can understand the earnest desire to address life’s questions within those who entered this “Ministry,” and at the same time I can also understand the evil temptation of the desire to immerse oneself in the theoretical possibilities of the technological development of chemical weapons within that closed-off environment. I think that if I myself were in that position it would not seem at all strange.

In a round-table discussion with Hayao Kawai and Shin’ichi Nakazawa, Hidetoshi Takahashi, a former Aum adherent, said that there were several types of people among those assembled within Aum. “Various types of people were gathered there together, people who wanted supernatural abilities, people who were drawn to the leader’s Buddha-like nature or compassion, people whose illnesses had been cured, and people like me who were harboring spiritual pursuits or

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<sup>4</sup> In this book the Japanese phrase “新々宗教” has been translated as “new religion.” In many cases this phrase refers to “cult religions” that have recently appeared. The definitions of “new religion” and “cult religion” are contentious and have been the subject of much debate both inside and outside of academia.

philosophical questions.”<sup>5</sup> There were people like Mr. Takahashi, who, while conducting scientific research at a university, also had a strong interest in questions concerning humanity and spirituality.

When he was a university student, Mr. Takahashi had been enrolled in the geological science department. At the same time, however, he had been unable to put the questions “what is humanity?” and “what am I?” out of his mind. It was in the midst of these circumstances that he attended a lecture by Aum founder Asahara. At the lecture Mr. Takahashi asked Asahara what he thought about the approach of scientifically examining the questions he was confronting. Asahara’s reply left a strong impression on him:

He said something like “you are not likely to find the answers to the questions you are confronting by pursuing science.” I too had vaguely sensed this. Doing “science” will not give you an answer to the question of why human beings are born.<sup>6</sup>

Mr. Takahashi had also long asked himself whether it might in fact be impossible to come to any understanding of why he himself had been born into this universe by investigating the properties of the universe in the field of astrophysics.

Because I too was looking for something spiritual, the kind of knowledge I wanted to obtain was neither a photograph of what the universe was like nor something discovered using analytical devices. What I

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<sup>5</sup> 『イマージュ』 August 1995, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> p. 10.

began to think about was why I had been born into this universe, into this world, and why I perceived it as I did.<sup>7</sup>

The science he was doing would not provide him with answers to his questions about life and existence. When a religion that authoritatively and concisely lays out answers to the questions “what is humanity?,” “what are life and death?” and “what is existence?” appears in front of scientists struggling with these sorts of issues, it should be easy to imagine them being drawn to it. It is easy for troubled scientists to jump over into the world of religion or the world of spirituality. This is a point worth noting.

Dr. Ikuo Hayashi, a physician at Aum’s Astral Hospital Institute, had also been a member of the young elite in the field of medicine. He abandoned the path to a successful medical career and entered Aum. According to media reports, Dr. Hayashi, too, is said to have turned to Aum as a result of his own deep contemplation of “questions of life and death.” Were his own advanced medical techniques actually helping patients’ souls? He is said to have experienced these sorts of doubts. Hidetoshi Takahashi describes his impression of Dr. Hayashi as follows:

Mr. Hayashi, who has now been arrested, was a doctor. He worked to save people, and the moment he realized he wasn’t saving them at a fundamental level he wanted to practice religion instead of medicine.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> p. 17.



As one of the perpetrators who made holes in the bags of sarin gas during the subway attack, this same Dr. Hayashi was a direct participant in indiscriminate mass murder. This tragedy was caused by sincere motivations. Was entering a new religion really the only path open to him?

To move from being a scientist to working in the field of spirituality.

This is an issue with which I too have grappled.

I too entered university with the aim of becoming a scientist. I was then confronted by the same doubts as Mr. Takahashi and found myself becoming hopeless. As a result, I ended up changing paths and exploring the world of spirituality. In my case, the move was from a science program to an ethics major in the humanities department, but I think my destination could just as easily have been certain new religions active within my university, or even Aum, which had just been created around that time. Even after transferring to the humanities department I hardly ever went to the university, so there was ample room for this to have occurred.

Reading the personal history of Hidetoshi Takahashi quoted above, hardly anything emerges to separate us. I have seriously wondered whether I too might have ended up a high-ranking member of Aum if circumstances had been slightly different. I think I would probably have felt restricted within the relationship between myself and the leader and left the group, but it is indeed possible that I would have witnessed the production of sarin gas. This possibility is quite real given the fact that many of those who became high-ranking members of the organization or researchers in the “Ministry of Science and Technology” were of my generation.

I myself could have entered Aum. This awareness is my

fundamental stance when examining the incidents that occurred. It seems clear that there is a need for other options so that people do not have to choose this path. I want to move forward thinking along these lines.

#### 4. Disappointment with Science

It may be a bit of a digression, but I think it is necessary to write a bit more about myself before moving on. Was the fact that I did not enter a new religion like Aum merely some kind of coincidence? Or was there a reason? I think that reflecting on my own past is essential to examining this issue, because the pattern I followed when I was young was presumably not unique to me and must have been shared by others living in the same era.

I have written about this elsewhere, but when I was in junior high and high school I was very interested in physics and mathematics. I liked solving math problems, and I even competed with my friends to find alternative solutions not listed in our exercise book's answer key. I also liked physics. I was excited by this fascinating branch of science in which mathematical techniques are used to reveal the structure of the world one step at a time. In addition to the physics I learned at school, I also remember reading and re-reading introductory texts on the theory of relativity and quantum mechanics. My interest then turned toward astrophysics and particle physics. At the time astrophysics was beginning to be connected to particle physics through the big bang theory. Questions about when and how the entire universe had begun were starting to be answered, through, of all things, the behavior of the tiniest particles. This wondrous fusion of

macrocosm and microcosm was taking place at the leading edge of contemporary physics.

My young mind was captivated by this spectacle. I decided to become a physicist and do research in the field of theoretical particle physics. I would uncover the shape of the universe.

I was also deeply captivated by the “measurement problem” that the field of quantum mechanics faced at the beginning of the 20th century. When you measure the behavior of very tiny particles, this act of measuring itself influences the movement of the particles you are trying to measure. Leading physicists such as Einstein, Bohr and von Neumann disagreed about how this phenomenon should be interpreted. When it comes to the domain of the very small, the seer is no longer separate from what is seen. They are in a relationship of mutual interference. This is astounding. Someone has to solve this mystery.

When I was in high school, I studied very hard for my entrance exams with this dream in mind. Looking back on it now, there are signs that I was confusing physics and philosophy. I naïvely believed that the mysteries of the universe, the world, and myself could be solved by physics. Why did the universe come to exist? Why does the world take the form it does? Why was I born into this world? What is the meaning of life and death? I thought it was physics that would give me the ultimate answers to these questions. I believed that physics was the only discipline that could provide a final answer to these kinds of questions about “the whole,” and mathematics was to be used as a tool in this endeavor.

I entered my university’s course for students planning to proceed to the science or engineering departments. I knew it

would be difficult to get into the physics department, but I thought I would at least try.

So was I a “science person” in high school? Not really. Beginning in junior high school I was constantly reading novels, so I could in fact have been described as a “literature person.” Then in high school I became obsessed with philosophy. I enjoyed reading the works of thinkers like Pascal, Nietzsche and Freud as if they were works of literature. I can remember reading these sorts of texts on my own because I had no friends with whom I could discuss them. As for why I enjoyed reading these works of philosophy so much, it was because they dealt directly with humanity’s “life and death” questions. I suspect this is something everyone remembers going through, but the biggest issues for men in their highly sensitive teenage years are normally sex and death. Unstoppable sexual urges and feelings of romantic love welled up inside my body. What was I to do about them? Then there was the separate question of what would happen after I die. Would I alone cease to exist, or would the entire world disappear along with me? What would a world without me be like? Could I bear the thought that I would become nothing? When I began to think about these things the night became frightening and I could not sleep. No matter how much I thought about these questions the answers could not be found. The best solution was not to think about it. I therefore tried to keep them out of my mind as much as possible, but they returned to assail me on a regular basis. They would not let me sleep.

As a result, within this young me, questions of philosophy and religion, such as “what will happen after I die?” and “what is the meaning of life?,” existed alongside questions of physics,

such as “how is the world constructed?” and “how did the universe come into being?” without any kind of contradiction. I thought that I would become a physicist, or, failing that, a novelist. Today I am neither of these things, but at the time physicist and novelist were interchangeable to me. What tore apart this natural idea of mine was the “science program or humanities program” dichotomy deeply rooted in the Japanese education system. This “science program or humanities program” system still angers me. It caused me no end of suffering. It is quite hard to forgive what it did to me.

In any case, I went to university with the intention of becoming a physicist and unraveling the mysteries of the world, the universe, and the self.

I entered university in 1977. All traces of student unrest had disappeared, and there was nothing interesting happening on campus. At first I diligently went to all of my classes, but after about two months I had stopped attending almost all of them. I stopped going to the university and spent my time hanging out in Tokyo with close friends. There were three reasons for this. One was that while I had been at the top of my class in high school, once I entered university I was surrounded by people who were as good at academics as I was. I lost the will to study even harder and rise to the top of this group. This is the first reason I dropped out. The second reason was that the flames of youth that had been suppressed within me suddenly broke free and began to blaze intensely. I burned with regret at not having been able to have a single girlfriend because I was studying so hard for the entrance exams and with the desire to make up for lost time. Both of these causes of distress are commonly experienced by students who have done very well on their entrance exams.

The third reason was my disappointment with natural science.

This was indeed the biggest issue in terms of a problem I faced within myself.

After entering university and beginning the science program's basic training course, and after watching my friends devote themselves to their studies, I gradually began to have the sense that I was "sobering up" and becoming disenchanted with natural science. The science I aspired to was not supposed to be this kind of dull, dry collection of techniques and methodologies. It was a more dynamic, exciting effort to unravel the mysteries of the world, the universe, and the human spirit. Instructors who yawned as they guided students through experiments, mathematics and physics formulas lined up in an orderly list, mechanical statements of the solution to differential equations in class – each time I encountered these things I was beset by an uneasy feeling that perhaps I was not in the right place.

Of course, being disappointed in natural science as a whole on the basis of having taken a few introductory courses in a university science program may be described as arrogant. I would not contest this description, because it may well be that the sort of excitement I was looking for can indeed be experienced once you have completed your basic training and progressed to specialization. There were in fact some exceptions, such as chemistry classes on the three-dimensional structure of molecules, that were quite interesting, so the me who abandoned natural science without sticking it out and proceeding a bit further may indeed have been an arrogant and lazy person.

Sitting beside my classmates who were on track to

become first-rate experts in their fields and watching the professors who were already prominent scientists day after day in my classes, I think I may have begun to sense something. I think I may have had a premonition that what I was looking for would not emerge from this group of people. Later, looking at my friends who were specialist scientists in the making, I rarely saw the thrill of excitedly unraveling the mysteries of the universe and humanity. Contemporary “big science” is constructed like a bureaucracy, with the majority of scientists working day in and day out as nothing more than a single cog in a complicated team effort. There is the joy and excitement of glimpsing the intricacies of the universe through hypothesis building and small discoveries, but contemporary science has become too complicated for one person to directly relate this to understanding the universe, humanity, and the self.

When I say this kind of thing, I am often misunderstood to be rejecting science. Of course, I have no such intention. There is only one thing I want to state, and that is that what I really wanted to do cannot be done within the field of natural science. Natural science will never provide the answers I really wanted. That is all I am trying to say. Those who feel that natural science is their calling can be very happy. I would never reject natural science for these people.

In other words, I had made a serious mistake.

What is the meaning of the existence of the universe? What is life? What is death? What is the meaning of life? Why do I exist? I thought science was something that could answer these sorts of questions. Immediately after entering university, I realized that believing this had been a mistake. After learning a bit about the philosophy and history of science this

became clear beyond any doubt.

One year after entering university I was plunged into the biggest identity crisis (destruction of the image of myself in which I had believed) of my life. I faced the shock of realizing that what I had been aiming for up until that time was the wrong goal. Ahead of me lay total darkness. I quit going to my university classes, but I didn't know what to do instead. I slept during the day and stayed up at night, and all I did was try to enjoy myself. Day after day I went on living in this way.

As for my state of mind at that time, I felt as though I could see a set of railroad tracks leading far off into the distance, but the train I was riding had wrecked and I had been thrown off alone into a field of grass beside the rails. I didn't dislike or despise natural science. The intellect within me was clearly scientific, and I felt a thrill of excitement when I solved a math puzzle or read news accounts of the latest scientific discoveries. Even now these sorts of thoughts and feelings remain strong within me. I was someone who under ordinary circumstances ought to have become a scientist. I should have been someone who shut himself in his laboratory all night, staking everything for the joy of making a new discovery. I should have taken the standard route of doing research and drawing steadily closer to the mysteries of the natural world one step at a time. Guilt about having intentionally abandoned the path of natural science at its earliest stage is something that remains deep within me even today.

Looking back even further into my childhood, I had not decided to become a scientist simply because I was good at the intellectual games of mathematics and physics. When I was in high school there was a certain scientist I admired greatly. I



wanted to be like him with all my heart. This object of my admiration was Dr. Serizawa, the one-eyed scientist who appears in the movie *Godzilla*. The scientist who dives beneath the sea on a suicide mission to kill Godzilla with an “oxygen destroyer,” a supremely powerful weapon he himself had invented, the scientist who does battle with an evil created by mankind (Godzilla) in order to save humanity – this was my ideal man. To me, science was neither just a game nor the pure pursuit of the joy of discovery. Science was something that must save humanity, something that must fight against the evil mankind has created. This is the kind of feeling, romantic and embarrassing to think about now, that I had towards natural science.

Even after becoming a university student, I think this view of science remained somewhere in the back of my mind. My dream of becoming a member of a scientific community working to save humanity remained intact. I suspect that this is what made my disappointment with my science classes so hard to take.

Around this time, invitations to join new religions abounded on university campuses. Universities were swarming with organizations like research group G., which caused social controversy by forcing students to engage in group living, and research group T., which aggressively urged students to study the teachings of Shinran. I myself was approached many times and engaged in intense debates with research group T. students and members of organization S., which originated from the Nichiren sect of Buddhism. I was a science student, so I often started with the topic of how questions of life and death cannot be answered by science. They immediately agreed with me on this point. I then

remember asking them to show me how their religion could produce answers to these questions. In the end they could only answer with the tautological claim that the truth was written in their sacred texts so these texts must be correct. To me, someone who had aimed at becoming a scientist, this was not a convincing response.

One reason I was not drawn into any new religions during this period may have been the ineptness of their solicitations. Looking back on it now, I may well have expressed an interest if I had encountered a method of recruitment based on mystical experiences at that time. If this is indeed the case, then it may have been simply because I did not encounter this kind of appeal that I did not enter a new religion, making it indeed just a matter of chance.

## 5. Things Natural Science Cannot Address

Let me write a little bit more about myself.

I was in a university science program for three years. I then moved to the literature department where I also spent three years.

I therefore know something about the atmosphere of both humanities and science programs.

I don't know about today, but at that time the science program was very different from the humanities program. To begin with, the science program followed a stricter curriculum. If you wanted to get good grades you had to attend lectures every day from morning until evening. Science classes built on each other, so if you fell behind somewhere you wouldn't be able to follow what was going on. Humanities classes were less demanding. You could skip over things here and there and still

keep up.

Science classes were very systematic. This corresponds to the way contemporary science itself has been systematically organized as a hierarchical system with journals like *Nature* at the top. University education, too, is connected to one end of this competitive race in which everyone is trying to have their articles published in what are deemed to be the most prestigious international journals. This race is a fierce competition in which you try to release your results faster than your rivals, even if only by a minute or a second, and it is won by people with the kind of ability and personality that allows them to concentrate solely on their goals without getting sidetracked. In order to have their research proceed efficiently, these winners obtain funding, organize graduate students and young researchers, delegate various tasks to them, and put together and present the results of these efforts in their role as a research leader. Scientists who cannot pull ahead of the pack and reach this top position can only ever function as a gear in the machinery of other people's research. This is the reality of contemporary scientific research.

Of course, it is not as though these sorts of circumstances exist only in the world of natural science. Within today's large organizations, including corporations and governments, people go about their daily work on the basis of this kind of theory of power. In this sense, therefore, "scientist" is now nothing more than an ordinary profession within one of today's large organizations. The sorrow of contemporary science is precisely the same thing as the sorrow of contemporary bureaucracy and the misery of working in a

contemporary corporate organization.<sup>9</sup>

So what did I perceive by observing science education and the science students receiving it? And what did I notice later when I interacted with regular scientists working at the leading edge of scientific research? What I found through these experiences was that in order to keep cranking out result after result within the contemporary scientific research system you must not think about “extraneous things” in your life, i.e., things that do not serve to advance your research. People who are able to thrive within the contemporary scientific research system are people who can wipe the “extraneous things” in their lives from their minds and dedicate themselves to their research day and night, or people who can cleanly separate their research from their private lives such that “extraneous things” in their lives are never brought into their research. These sorts of students get good grades in university and move on to graduate school or a first-rate corporate laboratory, or in some cases rush off to study in America. They then succeed in having papers published in first-rate journals and are appointed to important positions at universities or research institutes.

The converse can thus also be stated: with very few exceptions, people who cannot wipe “extraneous things” in their lives from their minds will fall behind or drop out of the mainstream science race. These people who fall behind face an identity crisis. It is here that new religions extend an inviting hand.

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<sup>9</sup> For a description of this kind of sorrow see Tadashi Nagase, “Aum Technology: Awash in Fantasy Science and Illusory Weapons” (長瀬唯「綺想科学と妄想兵器にまみれたオウム・テクノロジー」ブランク編『ジ・オウム』太田出版), 1995, pp. 272-299.

So what are these “extraneous things”?

I will take myself as an example. The things that concerned me when I was a university student were as follows. “I made it through studying for entrance exams and now I am studying the fundamentals of science at a university. But in order to get into the physics or information science departments I will have to get good grades. In order to beat the other students and get good grades I will have to study single-mindedly without being distracted by anything else. If I succeed, then what? I will presumably go on to graduate school and continue doing research, but this time if I don’t get results on the international stage I won’t be able to become a professor at a university. In order to do this I will have to beat my competitors to the punch, even if only by a minute or a second, and have my achievements become known throughout the world. This race to succeed in the world of science will continue for half of my life. But is this really what I wanted to do? When I dreamed of becoming a scientist, was I really dreaming of taking part in this kind of horserace and taking the top prize? What is the meaning of my life as a scientist? Will continuing down this path really bring me happiness?”

I remember these sorts of doubts occurring to me one after another. They then progressed to the following questions.

“What I wanted to do by studying physics was to consider, in the way I found most satisfying and convincing, questions like ‘why does this world exist?’, ‘what is the meaning of my living in this world?’ and ‘what will happen after I die?’ I have a feeling that if I continue on my present path and enter the world of natural science I will not obtain truly satisfying answers to these questions. Isn’t natural science an academic

system that has been established by putting aside these sorts of questions? Should I really devote half of my life to such a system?”

I was concerning myself with these “extraneous things.” I confessed these worries to friends in the same natural science program at university. Their response, uniformly, was that no matter how much you think about such things no answer is likely to be forthcoming, so they themselves chose not to think about them. I was very disheartened by this. They were all good friends (we went to baseball games, organized group dates, and took part in our university’s student festival together) but deep in my heart I thought I had to enter a world different from theirs.

Of course, someone could have offered me the advice that these sorts of “extraneous things” are the standard worries of youth, and that, since everyone passes through this kind of period and becomes an “adult,” I should put these thoughts out of my mind for now and focus on my current studies. But I suspect that such advice would not have helped me, because what bothered me was the process of “putting it out of your mind and forgetting about it” itself. This is the same process that is used to forget about the question “what will happen after I die?” You put this question out of your mind for the time being, only to have it ultimately return once again in the second half of your life as you begin to feel the effects of aging. And it may well be that the longer you have been able to ignore this concern the more intense your anxiety will be when you are finally forced to face it.

This process of putting “extraneous things” out of your mind is in fact deeply connected to the fundamental nature of contemporary natural science, which is modeled on physics.

In natural science, when you investigate a given phenomenon you try to consider it in isolation by reducing the number of variables involved as much as possible. This is the way of thinking that best suits contemporary natural science, and through this radical process of elimination science has produced result after result in a variety of fields.

But the idea of this kind of process of elimination itself was something to which I had difficulty reconciling myself from the start.

Surely the world moves according to various factors that cannot be ignored. When we understand a natural phenomenon, are we not throwing away something important by reducing the number of factors related to it? Are there not indeed things of importance among the fine particles that pass through the holes in the sieve of natural science? Will it not prove impossible to answer questions such as “what is humanity?,” “what is the mind?,” and “what is existence?” without grasping these things that are discarded? Will answering questions like “what is the meaning of being born and dying?” and “what is the meaning of life?” not also be impossible?

My classmates said, “Such questions cannot be answered no matter how much you think about them, so I don’t think about them at all,” and there is a certain individual who reached the pinnacle of scientific research by strictly adhering to this kind of attitude. His name is Susumu Tonegawa, and he won the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1987. He believes that all biological and mental phenomena can be explained by the behavior of matter. During an interview he responded as follows to questions posed by Takashi Tachibana.

Q: “If the broad framework of biological phenomena is determined by genes, is there fundamentally no such thing as the mystery of life?”

A: “A mystery is something that cannot be understood. Living creatures did not exist on the Earth from the start, but rather emerged out of non-living matter. If they came from non-living matter, they can be explained using the methodology of physics and chemistry. In other words, I think that living organisms are nothing more than extremely complex machines.”

Q: “If so, then can all biological phenomena, including human mental phenomena, be given an explanation at the level of matter?”

A: “I think so. Of course, we cannot do so right now, but I believe some day it will be possible. ... For example, I think we will be able to give a material explanation of human thoughts and even emotions. Right now there are many things we don’t understand, so mental phenomena may seem like mysterious biological phenomena, but once we understand them there will be nothing mysterious about them.”<sup>10</sup>

Tonegawa adheres to a way of thinking which holds that biological and mental phenomena can be reduced to the behavior of matter and thereby explained, or in any case this

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<sup>10</sup> Takashi Tachibana and Susumu Tonegawa, *Mind and Matter* (立花隆・利根川進『精神と物質』文春文庫), 1990, pp. 322-323.



is his “belief” regarding his work, and it is clear that the result of his pushing ahead with research on biological phenomena supported by this belief has been a record of outstanding accomplishments.

Furthermore, because the state of the world depends on our brain’s cognitive principles, according to Tonegawa it is possible to say that “the world exists because the human brain exists.” And if we can unravel the material phenomena within the human brain, “we will come to understand what kind of situations, what kind of stories move human beings.”

Tachibana is bothered by this extreme physical reductionism and asks the following question. Tonegawa’s reply is worth noting.

Q: “If that is the case, then what happens to a world in which every one of these brains that serve as subjects of cognition has disappeared? Does it exist or not?”

A: “Well, since that goes beyond what our brain can comprehend, all we can say is that we don’t know. Scientists have a tendency to skirt around things that are essentially beyond our ability to understand and things that are intuitively deemed to have no chance of actually occurring.”<sup>11</sup>

Tachibana’s question about “a world in which every one of these brains that serve as subjects of cognition has disappeared” is, in other words, the question of whether or not the world will exist after we are dead. In short, he is asking

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<sup>11</sup> p. 329.

how the phenomenon referred to as “my death” is viewed within Tonegawa’s physical reductionism. Tonegawa’s reply is that “scientists have a tendency to skirt around things that are essentially beyond our ability to understand and things that are intuitively deemed to have no chance of actually occurring.”

When I read this reply for the first time I was dumbfounded. Looking back on it now, however, I get the sense he was being completely honest about what he believed.

He was frankly stating that it was because he avoided “extraneous things” that cannot be resolved within the framework of natural science that he was able to win the race for the Nobel Prize.

This is the kind of person who is best suited to doing scientific research.

I was not able to adopt this way of thinking.

What is the meaning of life? What is the nature of my existence? What is the point of continuing my studies? Is my current way of living making me happy? Unable to put these sorts of “extraneous things” out of my mind, I left the path toward structured scientific research at the undergraduate university education stage. Of course, I assume there are also great scientists who have succeeded in the world of natural science while continuing to consider these sorts of “extraneous things.” But I think such cases are exceptional, and I myself was incapable of living in such a clever and admirable way.

I think there must be many others like myself who set out on the road to natural science but were forced to leave this path because they were not able to put their concerns about “extraneous things” out of their minds. Some of them then entered Aum, a religious group seeking a spiritual world. It

appears that among the scientists in Aum's "Ministry of Science and Technology" there were some individuals who had entered the organization because of the appeal of ample funding and the freedom to conduct their own research. There were surely many others, however, who followed the path mentioned above.

I dropped out early, but Hideo Murai didn't drop out until after he had gotten as far as graduate school. It may indeed be the case that his jump in the other direction was more radical because of the length of time he had served as an apprentice within the scientific research establishment.

## 6. New Religions' Pattern of Recruiting Scientists

Let us now consider the ways in which people affiliated with new religions approached young people with doubts about natural science at universities. I have experienced this kind of invitation, but since I have never approached someone in this way myself and have never seen a manual describing how it is to be done, please consider the following merely a hypothesis formed on the basis of my experience.<sup>12</sup>

I would begin by talking about "death."

"You are trying to become a scientist. Within the world of science you will investigate the truth and seek to unravel the world's mysteries. In the world of science, however, even simple things like 'what is death?' are not understood. Have you ever thought about what will happen after you die? Do you

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<sup>12</sup> On the actual recruitment methods employed by cult religions on ordinary people see Steven Hassan, *Combatting Cult Mind Control*, Park Street Press, 1988.

think there is only nothingness, or do you think you will travel to another world? You normally avoid thinking about these sorts of things, don't you? Thinking about them is scary, isn't it? I bet you try to enjoy what is right in front of your eyes without thinking about these scary questions.

But isn't the question of what will happen after you die very important to you? At most you will only remain alive on this Earth for a few more decades. You may die even sooner because of illness or an accident. At present most people die of cancer. What would you do if you were told you had this disease and your case was terminal? You have only a short time left to live. What will happen to you after you die? Is this not a very important question? How long will you go on ignoring your own death?

The science to which you are planning to dedicate your life will never give you any sort of answer to this question of 'death.' Science is fundamentally incapable of answering the question of what happens to you after you die. Medical science can explain in detail the physiological process that occurs when a person dies, but it cannot tell us anything about what happens to that person after death or where they will go. What the average person most wants to know, however, is not the details of the physiological process of dying, but rather what will happen to us and where we will go after we die. Science thus tells us nothing about what we most want to know.

Imagine a terminal cancer patient who is so anxious about what will happen after they die and where they will go after death that they lie awake at night trembling in fear. What can science do for them? All it can offer is sleeping pills and antidepressants. Science cannot directly respond to the voice calling out from their soul. This is how powerless the science

to which you are planning to give your life is when it comes to a person on the brink of death.

Is the path to which you should dedicate your life not indeed a different path rather than the way of science? Our religion, for example, clearly explains what happens after you die. It's like this..."

I think there are quite a few people who would be affected by this kind of approach. If someone happened to be experiencing the kind of identity crisis I faced when I was a student, they might give themselves over to the religion in question out of desperation.

The fact that natural science cannot fully resolve questions concerning death is indeed a serious problem. For example, as became clear in the academic debate over brain death, while biomedicine could describe "what kind of state brain death is," when it came to the question of "whether or not brain death is the death of the human in question" physicians had to remain silent and leave it to a social consensus and legislation. There were some who declared that from a scientific perspective brain death was equivalent to the death of the human in question, but they were nothing more than narrow-minded experts who had no genuine understanding of the nature of science. The most valid conclusion to be drawn in the academic debate over brain death is that the question of whether or not brain death is the death of the human being in question is to be resolved through an agreement or determination arrived at by society, politics, the law, religion, and culture. There is no place for natural

science at this level of discussion. <sup>13</sup>

The same can be said concerning near-death experiences. In the last few years, near-death experience research using scientific methods has made it quite clear that this phenomenon actually exists. It has been observed that just before death many people have a similar experience of passing through a dark tunnel and being drawn into a world of light. The scientific approach, however, then inevitably proceeds to the branch of brain science that examines what sort of internal physical processes of the brain correspond to this kind of experience. This is the only path science can take, because in the end it can never provide a definitive answer to the question of whether the world of light people visit during near-death experiences is the “next world.” The study of near-death experiences as science can thus only examine the processes of brains that exist in this world. Regarding what we most want to know, whether or not the next world can be known via near-death experiences, once again science can only remain silent.

A second line of questioning that could be used on young scientists concerns “the meaning of life.”

“Step by step natural science is moving towards the definitive resolution of the mysteries of this world. You too may have believed this when you set out upon the path of becoming a scientist. The science of the 20th century has indeed revealed the microscopic structure of the world, the process by which our universe began, and the structure of

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<sup>13</sup> See Masahiro Morioka, *Brain-Dead Person* (『脳死の人』東京書籍), 1989. Translations of some chapters are available at: <http://www.lifestudies.org/braindeadperson00.html>.

DNA, one of the fundamental components of living organisms. These can all be described as truly wonderful achievements.

Among these developments, the study of the life sciences, which has moved forward by leaps and bounds in the second half of the 20th century, has begun to elucidate several major components of the workings of living organisms that had not been known before. Going forward, if the life sciences progress to a true study of complex systems including molecular biology and the behavior of whole genomes (genetic information within our cells in its entirety), new light will undoubtedly be shed on areas unique to living beings such as the emergence of life and evolution. While incorporating brain science, the life sciences of the future will close in on the secrets of life and the human body.

There is also a question, however, that will never be answered no matter how much progress is made in the life sciences. This is the question of the meaning of the lives of the people who are doing this research, or, in other words, the meaning of your own life. Why were you born into this world? Why must you eventually die? The life sciences cannot answer such questions. What is the meaning of the life you yourself are living right now? What is its purpose? Natural science does not answer these sorts of fundamental questions about life at all.

This is the science to which you are devoting your life. You are giving your life to this science that offers no answers to life's fundamental questions. Is this the right choice? Is this the choice that is most true to your self? Are you not becoming a scientist simply because you want to avert your eyes from the problem of your own life and death?

In doing so, are you not moving one step at a time further

and further away from the fundamental questions that you really ought to be tackling?

Surely what you really ought to be working towards is the elucidation of the meaning of your life and death as much as possible by yourself. Unless you resolve this question in a way that you yourself can be satisfied with, you will be living a false life. And resolving this question within the framework of natural science is impossible. What you must engage in right now is not natural science. What you must tackle are the questions of your own existence, your own life, and how you ought to live here and now.

So come with me. Our religion will teach you how to live and provide you with the ultimate answers to these questions....”

Young people who continue to be captivated by the youthful question “what is the meaning of my life?” will find this invitation alluring. Will I be happier if I forget about this question, lose my naiveté, and go on with my life, or is it better to be led down this path?

A third line of questioning takes a slightly different angle but strikes at the same target: “science cannot address the irreplaceable existence that is yourself.”

“Modern natural science has made great strides as an experimental science. The foundation of natural science is a process of formulating hypotheses using mathematical techniques and then confirming them through experimentation. What is important in this process is “reproducibility;” when an experimental result is obtained it must be possible for other people to obtain the same result by



performing the same experiment. The law of universal gravitation confirmed experimentally by Isaac Newton several centuries ago can be confirmed in the same way by a person living in Japan today. It can therefore be called a scientific law. All other environmental conditions being equal, the results of an experiment confirming a law of natural science must be the same even if the experiment is performed by a different person or in a different time or place. If the results of an experiment someone did yesterday are completely different from the results of an experiment I do today, then what is being tested is not a scientific law.

When a new scientific discovery is made, it is only accepted as true if the same results are obtained when the experiment is carried out by other scientists. To put it another way, something that cannot be replicated or for which an experimental model cannot be constructed is not to be called experimental science.

Here some may object that this would mean sciences that examine history, such as evolutionary biology, which examines the history of the evolution of living creatures, and astrophysics, which includes the elucidation of the history of the universe, would not qualify as experimental sciences. Indeed, what has been and gone cannot itself be reproduced in an experiment or replicated over and over again. In this sense, these historical sciences can be said to differ from standard chemistry and physics. Nevertheless, in the case of astrophysics, electromagnetic waves from distant celestial bodies can be measured, and this act of measurement can be replicated. In the case of evolutionary biology, fossils can be excavated from strata and dated, and this act of dating can be replicated. By ensuring this kind of reproducibility, historical

sciences can be squeezed into the framework of experimental science.

But there is, in fact, a phenomenon that in principle cannot be reproduced by any experimental models. It is nothing other than your own life. You were born in a certain place at a certain time, grew up over a period of many years, and now exist here in the present. Your life and existence here and now cannot be exchanged for those of anyone else, and are indeed irreplaceable. This life that occurs only once, in which you are born at a specific point in time, grow up, grow old, and die at another point in time, cannot ever be repeated. Your life is open only to the unique human being that you are, and you yourself must live out, only once, this irreplaceable life that can never be experienced by another person. In this sense, moment by moment your life is a series of irreplaceable experiences and not something that can be repeated.

You cannot live your own life over again. That moment you couldn't speak those words to a person close to you will never come again. You must live the rest of your life dragging this moment that has passed and can never be taken back along behind you. This is what it means for you to be living an irreplaceable life. What is lost cannot be recovered. Even if you get it back later, this is only "restoration after the fact."

In life there is no "if that moment comes again." When it comes to your irreplaceable life, the idea of testing something "once more under the same conditions" is absurd. It is impossible in principle.

"Reproducible experiments" concerning your own life are thus impossible. You yourself cannot replicate and confirm the irreplaceable life you are living right now.

Modern experimental science, therefore, cannot address

this one-time-only life of yours. Natural science can never address the existence of “this you” living your own unique life. Nor can it ever address the “irreplaceability” of your existence.

In other words, natural science cannot address the irreplaceability of our individual lives that are being lived here and now and will one day end in death. This individual, irreplaceable being that lives and dies while interacting with others is called “life (*inochi*),” but its irreplaceable reality cannot be grasped by natural science. It cannot be understood, as I have already stated several times, because natural science cannot grasp the irreplaceability of the events that occur in this world. It is impossible because what can be grasped by natural science is only what is replicable, namely the replaceable, interchangeable aspects of the world. How can natural science grasp this aspect of life, the essential quality of which is that it occurs only once? What is visible to natural science is only the physiological aspects of life as a living organism. What natural science can understand is only the characteristics of living creatures in general that can be commonly observed in you, me, or any other person.

This life of mine that occurs only once cannot be explained by science. The meaning of living this one-time-only life cannot be grasped. The meaning of my encountering various people and events over the course of this lifetime that occurs only once cannot be understood. The fact that in the midst of this one-time-only life I am suffering and agonizing right here and now cannot be made the object of investigation as it actually is. Science cannot stand beside this me living the irreplaceable moments of my life.

Is what you are looking for not in fact something that can stand face to face with your life being lived here and now and

address it directly? Do you not feel a need for something to stand beside you and allow you to contemplate, grow and be healed? Science will never do this for you. Science will coldly turn its back on the raw existence of the you who is alive here and now.

Only religion can provide what you seek....

It is by no means only natural science that loses sight of “irreplaceability.” Take a look at today’s society. No one thinks of you as an irreplaceable human being. Say you enter a company. Eventually you will probably be promoted to supervisor or manager. But think about it for a moment. What is it about you that the company needs? Do they require your existence itself? Surely not. What they need is only your specialized skills and your ability to do work. As evidence for this, imagine, for example, that you get into an accident on the way to work one day, become partially paralyzed, and have no choice but to quit your job. Will your company be thrown into confusion and collapse as a result of your absence? Surely it will not. Another person doing roughly the same amount of work that you used to do will take your place at your desk and everything will go on as it had before without skipping a beat. What your company requires from you is your skills, capabilities, and functions. That is all. To your company you are nothing more than a single cog in a profit-generating machine. If you break you will simply be replaced. Unless you are someone with very special skills, any number of replacements can be found.

This is the principle that drives modern society. From the perspective of society, you are not some kind of irreplaceable being. You are an interchangeable part that can be replaced at any time. The society we live in today is one that says, “we

don't need you. We don't have any need for you as an irreplaceable human being, but we do need you as an interchangeable part." Society operates on this kind of principle.<sup>14</sup>

This is by no means only something that goes on inside corporations.

The same trend can be found in today's scientific and medical technology. Organ transplantation, for instance, is an example of this way of thinking. The idea behind organ transplantation is that organs inside the body are nothing more than interchangeable parts. So if an organ breaks down, the response becomes to simply replace it with a healthy one from the body of a brain-dead person. In truth, even organs must presumably have their own individuality and have been engraved with the history of the person in whose body they were grown. But these aspects are nullified, and thanks to the progress of technology that aims to circulate them as colorless, transparent parts, a great many of the organs and tissues in the human body have become recyclable components.

It's no different even when it comes to scientists. Apart from people with extraordinary capabilities, they are only used as disposable pawns to advance an enormous system of scientific research with their specialized skills. The scientific research and development system wants you as a specialized worker who will perform a specific function as a single component of a larger mechanism. No heed is paid to your internal thoughts and feelings as a unique individual.

It's the same with the current education system. When

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<sup>14</sup> This point is emphasized in Wataru Tsurumi's *Complete Suicide Manual* (鶴見済『完全自殺マニュアル』太田出版), 1993, which became a bestseller in Japan.

we are at school, we are raised to do as we are told. After graduating into adult society, we are trained to work as an efficient part utilized by a company. And when we become seriously ill or physically disabled, we are discarded by this company and sent, along with a gift of money, to die, hooked up to tubes in a modern hospital that views the human body as nothing more than a collection of parts. This is the form our lives are currently being given.

Today's society has reached this state because it has lost the flexibility to respond individually to each irreplaceable life. And because it has lost the joy of awakening and entering into a greater spiritual life that does not suppress the individuality of each life within it.

Don't you think there is something wrong with a society that is so suffocating and suppresses your life? Don't you think a less oppressive world in which people could stretch and grow and live freely would be better? Don't you think the world should be a place in which you are accepted as you are by everyone around you and you are able to move forward with your own self-realization in the midst of your connections to these other people? Shouldn't we live in a society in which you can appreciate and live to the fullest your irreplaceable life?

We are working towards the creation of this kind of society every day. Won't you join us in building a society in which we can live more freely and happily? ...”

Getting someone to directly perceive the suffocation of modern managed societies and then offering them release from it may also be an effective approach.

I have mentioned three methods of persuasion, but what

are the feelings of the young people who are subjected to wave after wave of these sorts of appeals? Various doubts will enter their minds, but since the main thrust of what they are being told is persuasive, it will presumably be difficult for them to definitively argue against these sorts of appeals.

Let us stop here and think for a moment.

These arguments I have put forward to entice people into becoming religious are not mere rhetoric; they do in fact accurately portray one face of modern science and modern society.

I therefore think the young people who nod in response to these appeals as a whole, even though they may have various (correct) arguments against them, can be very thoughtful and sincere individuals. They are people who want to look directly at themselves and their society and try to discover how they ought to live. There are presumably many thoughtful and sincere people of this type among those who take a tentative step forward in response to invitations from new religions, including Aum.

## 7. Why I Cannot Believe in Religion

The question is, even if I can agree with these assertions up to the point of “what I need is neither natural science nor this kind of modern society,” can I also agree with what comes next?

In describing the three types of appeal above, I said nothing about the next step. But the actual appeals of new religions will go farther. In the invitations to join new religions there will be claims such as “in our religion, every day we are putting the truth into practice, and everyone is smiling and

full of joy” and “human beings are reborn in the next world, and the form we will take is described in our sacred text.” If you ask them how they can say these sorts of things, they will give various responses, such as presenting more documents and saying, “Because it is written here,” saying, “Because our founder said so,” and promising that if you follow their religious practices diligently you will experience these things for yourself.

As I mentioned above, I got stuck at this point.

The main reason I could not proceed any further was as follows. When these people criticize modern science or modern society, they approach these subjects from various angles, logically and empirically building up a collection of things that are wrong or strange, but when it comes to their own religion, this skeptical, empirical spirit suddenly evaporates and they believe in their sacred texts or the words of their founder without question. I could not join them in this radical shift in attitude. Of course, they rely extensively on logic and empiricism regarding the internal consistency of sacred texts and doctrines, but when it comes to why the original words of holy figures can be said to be “correct” they suddenly fall silent. They have nothing to say because from that point on you enter the domain of *faith*.

I am unable to get over this barrier.

As I stated at the start, I am a person who is unable to believe in religion. Modern science cannot resolve the meaning of life and death, and modern society does not address the irreplaceability of our individual lives. Even though I feel these deficiencies deeply and desperately desire a way of life that properly addresses these issues, I still cannot enter a religion built around faith (here I have in mind



religions with a founding figure and sacred texts).

Why am I unable to enter into this kind of religious faith?

There are four reasons.

First, as I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, I cannot intuitively accept the notion that “absolute truth has already been revealed by someone.” I cannot experience this sense or intuition for myself; it somehow rings hollow. I therefore do not feel any inclination to accept claims that absolute truth has been spoken by some great person in the past, has been bestowed on human beings by divine revelation, or has been recorded in sacred texts.

Second, religion often speaks about “the afterlife” with certainty, and I cannot accept this. Presumably no person living in this world can speak definitively about the afterlife, and when someone attempts to do so unabashedly this is a stance I cannot accept. Of course, anyone who hears a definitive account of the afterlife will have a desire to cling to it. But when it comes to the fundamental question of what happens after you die, I don’t like it when someone speaks with certainty what to me can only be baseless speculation as if it were the truth. As I have already mentioned, even near-death experiences, which have been interpreted as journeys to the next world, may someday be explained by mechanisms within the brain as advances are made in the field of brain science. If the existence of an afterlife is a *hypothesis* it is understandable. As a definite *assertion*, however, it is completely unacceptable.

Reasons three and four are more fundamental.

The easiest way to explain them is through examples.

In Christianity, for instance, “God created the world” is considered an absolute truth. In other words, someone who

believes in Christianity cannot put their life on the line and seriously doubt with their entire being the proposition that God created the world. This is the case because a person's faith begins when they stop actively questioning whether or not God really created the world and resolve to live their life assuming that this claim is correct.

It's the same with Buddhism. Faith begins when a person stops wondering whether claims such as "the Buddha attained the enlightenment of non-self" in the case of ancient Buddhism or "believers will reside in the next world after they die" in the case of Pure Land Buddhism are truly correct and resolves to live their life assuming that these assertions are true.

To put it another way, what I am saying is the following.

"God created the world" and "believers will reside in the next world after they die" are presumably things someone told you and not something you discovered through your own efforts. In other words, people set out down the path of faith when they decide to stop trying to answer questions that are not easy to resolve by thinking them through on their own and start living their lives assuming that an answer they have received from others, for example, "God created the world," or "believers will reside in the next world after they die," is correct.

The third reason I cannot believe in religions is that, regarding these fundamental issues concerning the existence of the world and the universe in its entirety, I cannot take the stance of asserting that "such and such is correct." In other words, I cannot intentionally give up my endeavor of doubting with my whole being the correctness of such claims.

The fourth reason I cannot believe is that I cannot take as

my own the answers provided by other people to these sorts of fundamental questions. I cannot fit myself into the shape of the thoughts and words of others and accept these thoughts and words as if they were my own.

These four points are the biggest problems for me.

And I think these problems must also be a serious hindrance for many others who have the same questions I do but in the end cannot commit themselves to a religion.

Here I have used the phrases “give up my endeavor of doubting” and “cannot ... seriously doubt.”

These expressions could easily be misunderstood, so I would like to add a bit more explanation before moving on.

To begin with, the long road a person takes before choosing the path of faith is full of ongoing contemplation and doubts about religion. There must be many people who arrive at faith only after a lot of thought, doubt, and anguish. It is not as though everyone who enters a religion is averse to contemplation.

There are a variety of processes that can be at work when a person sets out on the path of religious faith. There are those who do so after having reached the limits of thought, and others who dispense with contemplation and take this path straight away.

No matter what process they choose, however, when someone heads down the path of religious faith they must presumably intentionally and actively give up doubting the correctness of what is said to be absolute truth and the assertion that this truth was spoken by a particular religious leader. Whether these claims are in fact correct or mistaken is something the individual in question cannot determine on their own, but they must resolve to live their lives on the basis

of the strong conviction that they are true.

Even after a person has entered the path of religious belief, at times their faith will waver, and they will have doubts about the correctness of their religion's ultimate truth. No matter how strong their faith may be, there are probably very few people who are able to escape from these sorts of doubts completely. It is human nature to swing like a pendulum between belief and doubt.

But these sorts of doubts that arise naturally in the midst of a life of belief are completely different from the act of "seriously doubting the correctness of absolute truth" mentioned above. The former "doubt" consists of wavering back and forth within the framework of a decision to believe. The latter "doubt," however, is a serious reconsideration of your decision to set out upon this path itself. People who believe cannot seriously engage in this latter form of doubt, because to do so would mean to leave their religion.

This is the precise meaning of what I am trying to say.

For the reasons stated above, I cannot believe in religion.

But without choosing the path of religion, I nevertheless want to pursue, as far as my own eyes and mind will take me, the meaning of my own existence, the meaning of life and death, and the question of what I truly am.

What kind of journey will this be?

What I can say at this point is that when I address the mysteries of the world there are four things I want to affirm from the start.

- 1) I will be faithful to my sense that absolute truth has not been revealed by anyone (including myself) and will probably never be revealed in the future. There is only

the journey in pursuit of understanding. We keep asking over and over again no matter how many times the answers fail to emerge. It is the trajectory of questioning that is important.

- 2) I will not speak with certainty about the existence of an afterlife. It may exist, and it may not. Similarly, I will not speak with certainty about the existence of the absolute, the transcendental, or God. They may exist and they may not. I will clearly state my ignorance of what I do not know.
- 3) When it comes to fundamental matters concerning the existence of the world and the universe in its entirety, I will not take the assertive stance that “such and such is correct.” I will not adopt a stance of intentionally and actively ceasing to doubt, with my entire being and with my life on the line, the correctness of the proposition in question.
- 4) Regarding these fundamental matters, I will not fit my own thoughts into the shape of those of others. My answers will be found through my own thoughts and words.

## 8. The Problem of Spirituality

Tetsuo Yamaori employs the following dichotomy: you are either in the world of “faith,” or you view religion from the outside as a “spectator.” I have criticized this scheme and said

there must be a third way between these two poles.<sup>15</sup>

If such a third way is possible, I think it may be described as follows.

It is an approach in which, while neither relying on religious faith to answer questions of life, death and existence nor abandoning their consideration, you confront our scientific, materialistic society that turns a blind eye to these questions and live your life while considering these issues for yourself and pursuing them with your own eyes, mind, body and words. It is an approach in which, while maintaining the four-part stance described above, you take sole responsibility for undertaking this pursuit of these questions of life, death and existence through communication with others and arrive at your own conclusions regarding your own life and death.

I call this state of mind, and the way of life supported by it, “life studies.” Of course, very little of this approach has been outlined so far, and I plan to consider it carefully in *An Introduction to Contemporary Life Studies*, a series of articles to be published in the magazine *Buddhism*, beginning in the autumn 1995 issue.<sup>16</sup> I refer to this approach as life studies, but of course other people may well conduct similar programs under other names.

Whenever you seriously address questions of life and death, connections with religion inevitably arise. After all, for more than two thousand years it has been religion that has focused most intently on the consideration of these issues. There are indeed many things to be learned from the religious

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<sup>15</sup> Ayumi Aoyama also uses the phrase “third way.” See Ayumi Aoyama, *The Smart Way to Leave/Enter a Cult* (青山あゆみ『カルトのか・しこい脱け方・はまり方』第三書館), 1995, p. 32.

<sup>16</sup> *Buddhism* (『仏教』) vol. 33.

tradition in regard to these questions. This is something even I acknowledge.

It is my intention, however, to open up, here in contemporary Japan and without taking a religious approach, an intellectual path to directly addressing and thinking through these issues that have in the past been dealt with by religion. This is also the meaning of this book's title: *How to Live in a Post-Religious Age*. Religion itself will no doubt continue to exist for a long time. Religion has many roles left to play within this society. For me, however, there is already no religion. For people who have also stumbled at the same place I did, there is already no religion. How are people who no longer have any religion to confront what has until now been primarily spoken about by religion? Thinking about this question leads to thinking about what approach one should take in order "to live in a post-religious age."

Here I would like to reaffirm a few points that may be unclear.

I am not opposed to religion. I want to avoid being misunderstood on this point. Religion should function properly for those who desire it. No one has the right to prevent people from finding salvation in religion.

What I have stated is only that there ought to be a way to pursue questions of life and death without taking the path of religion, and that I myself intend to confront these issues without taking a religious approach.

Nor am I opposed to natural science. Here again I hope I am not misunderstood. I have of course spoken extensively about the negative aspects of modern science. I think these issues must indeed be looked at unflinchingly. In order to overcome its negative aspects, natural science must correct its

trajectory going forward. Making these sorts of criticisms, however, is completely different from rejecting natural science. It is a fact that natural science has enriched society in numerous ways, and humanity would surely not be able to continue to grow without it. While continuing to embrace natural science, I believe that we must assemble the wisdom of many individuals to consider how modern society should be run.

What I have argued is that there are problems whose solutions will not come from natural science, and I want to find a form of inquiry in which these issues can be addressed directly. This will probably be a field of study quite different from today's natural science, but I want to pursue it nonetheless.

In other words, without being against either religion or natural science, I want to create a third way that does not depend on either of these approaches. This is not something that can be done by me alone or within the span of a single lifetime. But it is something I am working toward.<sup>17</sup>

When I declare my intentions in this way, some people respond by suggesting that if I gather like-minded people and create an organization to pursue this goal, in the end it will amount to the same thing as creating a religion. Indeed, to adopt that kind of approach would risk ending up on the same religious path I am supposed to have renounced.

Some of what I have done so far has in fact already been mistaken for religion, so it is important that I root out the source of this misapprehension as soon as possible. When my first book, *An Introduction to Life Studies*,<sup>18</sup> was released, one

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<sup>17</sup> I have said the same thing in *Brain-Dead Person*.

<sup>18</sup> 森岡正博『生命学への招待: バイオエシックスを超えて』勁草書房, 1988.



reader told me, “until I met you I thought it was a Tenrikyo text.”<sup>19</sup>

These sorts of undertakings that are not based on faith must therefore be solitary efforts in which individuals primarily think things through on their own. The individuals who think and act on the basis of this kind solitary approach can create a loose network to exchange ideas, share wisdom, and learn from each other. It is important not to build an organization of comrades in lockstep or create a group of people who stand in solidarity with each other. And care must always be taken to avoid a charismatic individual being worshipped or their words being taken as absolute.

Supported by communication within this kind of loosely affiliated group, with my own eyes, mind, body, and words I cultivate my own thoughts on the meaning of the life and death of this “I” that exists here and now and on the essence of the society, world, and universe in which it lives. This is the kind of approach I have in mind.

It is a point that has often been made, but “spirituality” is not the same as “religion.”

Here “religion” is an active body combining different elements such as a founder, doctrine, and religious activities, while “spirituality” refers to religious themes concerning the fundamental nature of human life such as “what are life and death?,” “what happens after you die?” and “why do I exist?”

What I have returned to over and over again is this spirituality. What is the meaning of my being alive here and now? What will happen when I die? Why do I exist? How do I live a good life?

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<sup>19</sup> Tenrikyo (天理教) is a “new religion” established in 1838.

Using the word “spirituality” somehow makes it sound a bit difficult, but it is actually quite straightforward. For example, right now I am living over here. You are living over there. So why is it that we exist at these points in space and time? It presumably would not matter if we did not exist on the surface of this planet at this particular time in this particular era within the long history of the universe. But we do exist in the present era. When you think about it, this can only be described as a miracle. Or perhaps it can only be described as a mystery. What emerges at this juncture is spirituality.

I have long been fixated on these issues of spirituality.

What I want to say here is that these questions of spirituality can be pursued without relying on religion. It must be possible to think about these issues even without religion.

To take the four-part stance outlined above and pursue the questions posed by spirituality to the last without setting foot on the path of religion – surely someday we will discover how to do this.

To live in a post-religious age, it is necessary for us to confront our own spirituality without relying on religion. Supported by a loose network of people walking a similar path, with our own eyes, minds, bodies and words we must pursue to the very end, without abandoning contemplation, the search for the truth of the world and the meaning of our own life and death.

This is also a struggle that will test how much *solitude* you can endure. Human beings cannot, of course, live in complete solitude. We live by leaning on others in various ways and receiving their assistance. Human beings are not strong enough to live in a state of total solitude. Nevertheless,

when it comes to investigating the truth of the world or the meaning of my own life and death, this is something that I ultimately want to undertake and accomplish entirely on my own. I want to maintain a solitary struggle to the very last. This means that when I get to the point where this investigation has gone quite far and is reaching its limits, I must confront the world in total solitude as a single individual. Having rejected the path of religion, it is inevitable that I will be in complete solitude when I reach the outermost limits of my journey. People bearing this kind of resolve towards solitude inside them, exchanging faint signals from the inky depths of this solitude, delicately interacting with each other within a network: I think this is one form this third way of pursuing the truth that is “neither religion nor science” can take.

## 9. My Message to You

There are people who are attracted to the natural sciences but somewhere inside themselves have a sense that this is not where they want to spend the rest of their lives. There are people who, while working busily within one of modern society’s massive organizations, think that functioning as this kind of cog is not what they really want to do. There are people who, while they may ignore them in their daily lives, cannot help but care about questions like “what is the meaning of my life?” and “what is this world to me?”

For such people, religion may be one viable option.

But there are doubtless many individuals whose souls have nowhere to go because they cannot acquire the kind of “faith” religion demands.

I am one of these people.

I want to call out to the many others who I am sure are living secretly within the holes and gaps in this society.

There must be a way to follow the investigation of these questions through to its end using your own eyes, mind, body and words without either descending into materialism or taking the path of a religion based on faith. Life is short. Rather than squandering your short life ignoring these questions, there must be a path that lets you return to them again and again at your own pace over the course of your lifetime.

I myself am searching for this kind of path.

So my message to those of you who are troubled by the same sorts of questions I am, and who, while refusing to ignore them, don't know what to do, is that I hope that you will go on confronting, from your own standpoint and at your own pace, these questions without giving up.

People who grapple with these sorts of questions must live their lives in solitude.

But it is this very solitude that is the key to opening up a third way of addressing these questions.

People for whom the weight of these questions has become too heavy a burden to bear must not be allowed to gather at the feet of a charismatic leader. This kind of situation will almost certainly transform, at some point, into a community of abdicated responsibility in which you no longer think about these questions for yourself but rather let someone else think about them for you and taste only the resulting nectar they provide. It will end up being just like the Aum community.

We who examine these questions by ourselves, therefore,

must each one of us stand on our own two feet as an isolated, solitary individual.

To confront these questions in solitude, however, is an undertaking so painful it is difficult to endure. It is natural to begin to think that if it is going to be this painful it would be better to stop worrying about these sorts of things and lose yourself in your daily work or the things you enjoy. As a human being, it is only natural to think this way.

That is why I want to call out to you, and to everyone who is trying to address these issues entirely on their own.

Let us communicate with each other by sending out faint signals from our horizons of solitude. Our beings themselves are not likely to directly interact, and indeed they should not be allowed to interact too easily. Instead, when the opportunity arises, let us send each other faint signals carrying elements of our contemplation, action, and self-expression. Let us send each other the message that we are not alone in being captivated by these sorts of questions and dedicating our lives to addressing them.

Perhaps by doing so, I can give you just a little bit of courage. I can in no way shoulder your burden. It is all I can do to carry the weight of my own. What I can do, however, is encourage you ever so slightly from a distance. And you can likewise encourage someone else somewhere in this wide world.

I would suggest that this kind of loosely woven network of mutual encouragement and inspiring messages can provide a supportive infrastructure for anonymous individuals who are trying to address these questions by themselves to help anchor them to this world.

At this point I have no idea how far my voice will reach.

Nevertheless, I send out this message.

We live in solitude. But we can connect ourselves to others while maintaining this solitary state. And it is this kind of approach that will lay the groundwork for a new form of human connection that does not rely on religion. There must be a way of connecting with each other through mutual displays of kindness and temperate courage without in any way shouldering each other's burdens or creating tightly knit communities or organizations.

We must be capable of building this kind of future.

## CHAPTER TWO

# What Are Mystical Experiences?

### 1. The Meaning of Mystical Experiences

It seems that among the young people who joined Aum there were quite a few who, having seen the photograph of Aum leader Asahara levitating, became adherents out of a desire to be able to do this kind of thing themselves. Encountering such individuals, there are those who would ridicule them, saying things like “He’s just jumping,” “There’s no such thing as levitation,” “It’s stupid to believe in something like that,” or “Why would you want to levitate?”

Every time I hear such dismissive descriptions of these people as “naïve youngsters tricked by levitation,” I feel an indescribable sense of anger and frustration. This is because I myself had the experience of being struck by the photograph of Asahara levitating on the cover of his book and being compelled to start reading it in the bookstore. Even before encountering this book, I had been very interested in supernatural abilities. I thought that every human being possessed hidden abilities that could emerge in moments of extreme danger or when guided by the right kind of practice.

Aum was not the first group to claim that levitation could be achieved through yogic techniques. Practitioners of

Transcendental Meditation (TM), for example, who engaged in the same kind of spiritual training based on yogic principles, had been claiming that after a great deal of practice it could enable you to levitate since long before Aum was founded.

Transcendental Meditation is a yogic cult religion spread throughout the world beginning with America by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who moved to the United States from India in the 1960s. During the 1970s, its yogic techniques were adopted in various fields such as athletic training and its influence grew.

I think I first became aware of the existence of Transcendental Meditation around the end of the that decade. A Japanese woman who practiced TM appeared on a TV program and talked about how wonderful its techniques were. She said that if you practiced TM, you would gain the ability to float in midair. When the interviewer asked if she herself could levitate, she laughed and replied that just that morning she had floated above her bed with her legs crossed underneath her.

If you read a TM text, it becomes clear that in almost all cases what is referred to as “levitation” is in fact jumping. But the claim that in rare cases floating in the air with your legs crossed under you can occur is difficult to refute. If someone tells you “I saw someone I know floating in the air with my own two eyes,” in order to refute this assertion you must prove either that what they saw was a hallucination or that they are lying to you. But since this kind of proof is presumably impossible, it ends up being an unresolvable argument. The fact that it is possible to take a picture of “levitation” by photographing someone jumping using their own muscles does not necessarily demonstrate that all levitation is a form



of jumping. This is the difficulty one encounters when arguing about supernatural abilities.<sup>1</sup>

Those who opposed Aum vociferously argued that these levitation photographs were fakes or that all of the mystical experiences its adherents obtained through religious practice were drug-induced hallucinations. Report after report implied that there was no such thing as levitation or supernatural abilities and the problem lay in the intellectual faculties of people who were so easily deceived.

Looking at the mass media coverage, in the end it seemed that what was occurring within Aum was group brainwashing or mind control conducted through the restriction of access to information and administration of drugs under the direction of an insane religious leader.

It must be acknowledged that in its broad outlines this understanding was indeed correct; numerous facts demonstrated that this was the case.<sup>2</sup>

But I think it is a mistake to summarize the Aum incident in this way, because when we adopt this kind of summary we lose sight of the very important fundamental questions posed by what occurred.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, what are we to make of the levitation photograph of Masaharu Naruse, in which he seems to be floating in a relaxed pose a meter above the ground? See Masaharu Naruse, *Levitation* (成瀬雅春『空中浮揚』出帆新社), 1992.

<sup>2</sup> Mind control through fostering a fear of death and hell is particularly horrifying. See Shoko Egawa, *Saviour's Ambition* (江川紹子『救世主の野望』教育史料出版会), 1991 / Shoko Egawa, *2200 Days of Pursuing "Aum Shinrikyo"* (江川紹子『「オウム真理教」追跡二二〇〇日』文藝春秋), 1995 / Steven Hassan, *Combatting Cult Mind Control*, Park Street Press, 1988 / Tarou Takimoto and Tatsuya Nagaoka eds., *Escape from Mind Control* (滝本太郎・長岡辰哉編著『マインド・コントロールから逃れて』恒友出版), 1995 / Aum Believer Rescue Network (ed.), *Liberation from Mind Control* (オウム真理教信徒救済ネットワーク編著『マインドコントロールからの解放』三一書房), 1995.

One of these fundamental questions is how we are to understand supernatural abilities and mystical experiences, and another is the question of what occurs within a group of people who share these kinds of experiences.

The public discourse seems inclined to steer around these issues, but this is not a sufficient response. We must consider more seriously the things referred to as “supernatural abilities” and “mystical experiences” and their connection to ourselves.

Takashi Tachibana observes that through their training, Aum’s early leaders actually underwent mystical experiences. These arose through a similar mechanism to near-death experiences. Tachibana said the following after reading first-person accounts of believers’ mystical experiences:

These descriptions [Hisako Ishii’s] are in fact very consistent with those of mystical experiences in other religions and the “experience of light” in near-death experiences.

Reading the notes of other leaders, it is clear that they too engaged in extremely harsh training and underwent a variety of mystical experiences. They had out-of-body experiences. They also had experiences they called “astral trips” in which they entered a world in another dimension and moved through the future or the past or visited places such as heaven and hell. There was also the levitation that became famous.<sup>3</sup>

He then goes on to state that it was because they were

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<sup>3</sup> Takashi Tachibana, “‘Religion and Murder’ in Aum Shinrikyo,” (立花隆「オウム真理教にみる『宗教と殺人』」『週刊文春』) July 20, 1995, p. 158.

supported by these sorts of mystical experiences that Aum's senior members were able to commit the extreme crime of killing people to whom they had no connection whatsoever.

The effect of mystical experiences in a religion is extremely powerful, and even when it comes to other religions besides Aum, people who have these kinds of experiences will come to stubbornly believe in the absolute truth of the religion in question.

This is where Aum's strength lies. The high-ranking senior members who committed murder believed, on the basis of their mystical experiences, that Asahara had truly become a god, and so, thinking it was a divine command, had complete faith that even the killing of human beings was the correct thing to do, without asking themselves whether it was right or wrong.<sup>4</sup>

I too believe that "mystical experiences" clearly did exist as part of the backdrop to the Aum incidents. Regarding the meaning of mystical experiences, we must dig a bit deeper. I would like to delve further into this issue as something that concerns me in my own life here and now.

In this chapter I will attempt an examination of these points to the limits of my ability. This investigation is also deeply connected to the task that is the theme of this book: "how to live in a post-religious age."

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<sup>4</sup> p. 156.

## 2. The “If I Change, the World Will Change” Way of Thinking

I wanted supernatural abilities. I wanted to have mystical experiences. And I wanted to attain “enlightenment.” I remember a monk from another country, when he was asked, “Why did you come here?” in a documentary depicting the lives of ascetic monks at Eihei temple, replying that he had come because he wanted to attain enlightenment. This feeling, desiring enlightenment, is something I can vividly understand, and I wanted to acquire supernatural abilities and have mystical experiences as an extension of this desire for enlightenment.

When thinking about the recent Aum incident, there is a tendency to avoid the issue of supernatural abilities and mystical experiences, but this leads us to close our eyes to the existence of the desire for supernatural abilities, mystical experiences, and the attainment of enlightenment that lies submerged within us. Until we can look directly this desire, it will be impossible for us to properly address the meaning of the incidents cult religions like Aum have caused.

It is precisely because many people secretly harboring this desire became adherents, and because senior members were given mystical experiences by Asahara, that Aum, a group closed-off from the rest of society, did such extreme things.

So where does the reason for this desire for supernatural abilities, mystical experiences, and enlightenment lie? I would like to consider this question by reflecting on my own experiences.

There are many people who display a strong interest in

the mystical and things not of this world.

I too had an interest in such things.

Behind the surface of this world, is there not perhaps some kind of mystical space, normally unknown to us, whose laws in fact control the world in which we live? I had this kind of sense when I was young. These laws of an underlying world could be things like the world of spirits, the prophecies of Nostradamus, or the Gaia hypothesis.

I therefore wanted to learn the secrets of this other world that most people hadn't noticed. This kind of intellectual desire was present within me. While hidden from the surface of this world and thus invisible to people living ordinary lives, there are in fact important secrets buried below, and the world we live in moves according to their rules. These secrets are known only to a chosen few. These few will only open the doors of this knowledge to people of compatible understanding. I wanted to learn from them and pursue these secrets of an underlying world. My head was full of these sorts of thoughts.

Of course, at the level I have just described, this desire still barely differs from the inquisitiveness of natural science. As I noted earlier, I had dreamed of becoming a scientist. Natural science, in particular disciplines such as physics, is an endless endeavor to use mathematics and experimental equipment to elucidate the physical laws, invisible to the naked eye, that lie behind the phenomena we observe in the world, so in this respect it is almost exactly the same as the investigation of the mystical. For example, since they deal with things that cannot themselves be caught in the net of direct observation, advanced developments in elementary particle physics such as quark theory or quantum

chromodynamics enter something like a world of mystical experience research using mathematics. The wall separating physics from mysticism is lower than might be thought.

There is therefore nothing strange about my wanting to become a scientist and at the same time displaying an interest in investigating the underlying world in the form of phenomena such as supernatural abilities and mystical experiences. And since the investigation of supernatural phenomena has remained, for reasons that are not clear to me, taboo within the established scientific system, I was reduced to turning my attention to the world of the occult where such topics are routinely discussed.

The accounts of mystical experiences I found in the domain of the occult, however, did not satisfy me either; they were highly suspect, containing too many elements that seemed shoddy and self-serving. I continued to feel, however, that a sounder interpretation of things like supernatural phenomena and supernatural abilities must be possible.

Looking back at my state of mind at that time, an intellectual desire to discover the unknown powers and laws that move the world definitely existed within me and was the primary reason I had an ongoing interest in things like mystical experiences and supernatural abilities. Behind these thoughts lay the suspicion that today's science is not capable of properly coming to grips with the truths of the world. I had the sense that it may not be up to this task.

There is, however, something I want to make clear here before moving on. I believe it is important to affirm that there is absolutely nothing wrong with this intellectual desire itself, the desire to discover the unknown powers and laws that move the world I have just described. The root motivation

behind all forms of inquiry, including natural science, is the type of intellectual desire I have just described. Scholars should not blame the intellects of young people who enter cult religions guided by such a desire.

It should be emphasized that within people who are attracted to mystical experiences and supernatural abilities there is a sense of inquisitiveness about these sorts of unknowns. They do not lose their intellectual faculties in the face of the mystical; on the contrary, they are carried away by their intellectual curiosity and desire to thoroughly investigate these phenomena.

Of course, this is not all.

Another reason I wanted mystical experiences and supernatural abilities was that I hoped to break through the impasse in which I found myself at the time and change my way of being. Like a pupa breaking out of its cocoon and becoming a butterfly, by acquiring these abilities I wanted to shed my skin and become another person. I wanted to raise myself up into a new world through experiences such as having an unknown energy well up inside my body and becoming able to commune with the universe. By obtaining supernatural abilities other people could not imitate, such as the ability to bend spoons with my mind, I wanted to draw out my own undeveloped abilities and complete my metamorphosis into a new person.

When I was a university student, I experienced an identity crisis. Without knowing what road I should take going forward, and without knowing what I myself most wanted to do, I spent my days seeking only pleasure. Even if I left the path towards becoming a scientist and moved to the faculty of letters, I had little hope of being able to move on to graduate

school. But I went on living in a daze, neither taking credits to qualify as a school teacher nor looking for a job at a company.

I think the idea that if I could obtain supernatural abilities or mystical experiences I might undergo a radical transformation was indeed one hope I clung to at that time. Some unlucky twist of fate had left me stuck in this immobile state, but this was not my true form. If some other power were given to me I might be able to transform myself and break down this wall I kept hitting. In some part of my mind, I was hoping to receive this kind of power.<sup>5</sup>

The feeling of “moving to a higher stage” that became well known in connection with the Aum incident, if it can be taken to mean the process of “shedding your skin and becoming a new person” I have just described, is also something I can easily understand. In the mass media, this expression was taken to mean improving your position within the organization, explained through the metaphor of gaining higher titles in society such as going from “manager” to “department head,” but I think it was not only about this kind of external hierarchy. I think it also contained an internal meaning of breaking through to another dimension, transforming yourself and being reborn.

The criticism that Aum’s internal structure was hierarchical and directly reflected the hierarchical society outside it may therefore be a bit one-sided. “Moving to a higher stage” could mean not only gaining a better title and having more people underneath you, but also you yourself being reborn as a new person different from the one that had existed up to that point. It is possible that this expression also

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<sup>5</sup> Regarding similar thoughts in the minds of Aum’s believers, see Shoko Egawa, *A Savior’s Ambition*, pp. 223-225.



carried this kind of significance.

I wanted to be reborn as a new me. This was a desire I held fervently.

Wouldn't my changing also change all of the circumstances surrounding me? Like an extremely short-sighted person seeing the world completely differently after putting in contact lenses, wouldn't my internal transformation result in a drastically altered view of the world around me? I clung to this kind of expectation.

"If I change, the world will change." "If I change, the Earth will change." This was one of the typical calls to action of the ecology movement that emerged in Japan in the 1980s. I too was clearly swept up in this tide of the times.

With the defeat of the student movement in the 1970s, young people's gaze began to turn inward. At the time of the student movement, there were clearly many people who thought that if they changed society the world would change. But after the disappearance of the student movement as a force for social reform, this kind of thinking was no longer mainstream. What emerged in its place was the idea of attempting to change not "society" but the "self" – to attempt to change the world by changing your internal self. This is what "if I change, the world will change" means.

Aiming at this kind of internal change, some people turned to self-improvement seminars and therapists, while others flocked to new religions such as Aum. I got as close as a single step away from doing so myself.

If I change myself the circumstances surrounding me will change, and I may be able to escape from them. If I relentlessly raise myself up in this way, a new, heretofore unknown world may open up for me. This kind of "desire to

change” and “desire to escape” definitely existed within me.

There was also another feeling that supported this kind of desire: I wanted my self to be wrapped up in something bigger. Within this embrace, I wanted to become one with this bigger thing, rest my mind, extinguish myself within it, and obtain peace and healing. I wanted to be carried into a world of peace by this thing greater than my self. I had thoughts of this kind. I thought I might be able to reach this kind of state through mystical experiences obtained through spiritual training.

### 3. Aspiring to Enlightenment

There was also another reason that I wanted to attain enlightenment.

I wanted to know why I had been born into this world. I wanted to know the meaning of my life. And I wanted to know what would happen to me when I die. Death was my biggest source of fear and anxiety. Thinking about death kept me awake at night. This is still the case, but at that time it was much more severe.

When I was beset by thoughts of death, I tried to get rid of my anxiety by telling myself, “Everyone is going to die someday, so you have to live each moment joyfully and to the fullest.” In my mind I knew that this was nothing more than a way of putting off my fundamental problem, but this makeshift approach was the only option available to me. All I could do was use this way of thinking to drive the shadow of death out of my sight.

In Buddhist writings, it is stated that if you engage in spiritual training and attain enlightenment your anxieties

about death will disappear. Was enlightenment perhaps the only way to completely escape from the fear of death? I thought so. According to the basic doctrine of Buddhism, we are afraid of death because we think that something called “death” exists. But we only think this because we are captivated by illusions and do not see the world as it really is. If we escape from these illusions, attain enlightenment, and view the world correctly, we will realize that there is no birth or death as such. Since there is no death, there will be no fear of death. We will arrive at this kind of understanding.

This way of thinking had a certain persuasiveness. I was strongly attracted to the radical idea that it was wrong to think that birth and death exist. If I engaged in Buddhist training, would I be able to reach this kind of enlightenment? Was there no other way of attaining this kind of understanding? I could understand Buddhist ideas, but it was hard to put them into practice. In Buddhism it is said that only the Buddha attained true enlightenment by himself, and since then even the number of people claiming to be enlightened has not been large. Could I really become one of them? When it comes to Japanese Buddhism, the kind of faith I have talked about is given great weight, so it is impossible for me to take part in this religion. Pure Land Buddhism says that after you die you will reside in the pure land, but this is quite different from the ancient Buddhist way of thinking about death. Difficult issues like this appeared one after another, and it was impossible for me to proceed any further.

But I still wanted to attain enlightenment. I read the writings of D. T. Suzuki over and over again. When I read books on Zen Buddhism, they seemed to be saying that I could attain enlightenment if the framework of my understanding

of the world underwent a paradigm shift (fundamental change). Zen interpreted in this way was very easy to understand. It was the same as the idea that “if I change, the world will change.” To obtain this kind of enlightenment, you need to practice Zen meditation. You control your breathing and enter a state of “non-self.” I very briefly tried doing this kind of meditation on my own.

When I continued meditating in this way, there were indeed moments when the way the world appeared seemed to change completely. In my case, it was when I was walking down the street without thinking about anything in particular and not during Zen meditation that I was assailed by a sense of the world being turned upside down. I flirted with the thought that this might be enlightenment. But of course it was not; I was still being assailed by the fear of death.

The first reason I wanted to attain enlightenment was a desire to do something about my fear of death. I hoped to become enlightened and live my life without any fear of dying. In practice, however, I was unable to pass through Buddhism’s gate. I could not take the path of faith, and the tenor of Buddhism as it was actually practiced was not very receptive to the desire of naïve young man who wished to enter it because he wanted to become enlightened right away.

The second reason I wanted to attain enlightened was a deep-seated desire to attempt to understand the true form of the world. In books it is written that when you experience enlightenment you are freed from mistaken worldly perspectives, such as the belief that your self and the world, or your self and other people, exist separately, and you are able to enter into a limitlessly flexible and accommodating state in which there is no border between you and the world or your

self and others. It is written that you will obtain a true view of the world that transcends birth and death.

I wanted to learn to see the world in this way. I desperately wanted to see the world that was said to be revealed by enlightenment, a world in which the self and the world danced together without any borders or distinctions between them. I even thought that if such a world could be revealed to me, I would abandon philosophy that is guided by logical reasoning. I wanted to reconstruct this world based on an entirely different perspective so that it would no longer be ridden with such depressing boundaries and limitations. I thought enlightenment would be a more direct method of opening the door to such a world than philosophy.

#### 4. A Desire for Power

I have mentioned three reasons behind the desire for mystical experiences, supernatural abilities, and enlightenment.

But looking inward, deep inside myself I find another major motivation behind this desire. It is very painful for me to write about this, but I feel I must do so.

The desire that lay deep within me and most powerfully drove me was a desire for power. I wanted much more power than I have now. By acquiring an abundance of power, I wanted to become a greater being than I am now. I wanted to become an enormous being and look down on the entire world. This kind of desire clearly existed deep within my mind.

This kind of aspiration to strength and power drove me to seek mystical experiences, supernatural abilities, and enlightenment.

When I was a university student, I didn't have any power at all. I was physically weak, and of course my social influence was zero. From the perspective of society, my existence was "nothing." As someone who harbored a secret desire to become big and powerful, this was a cruel set of circumstances. The paths to organized science and graduate school were almost completely closed to me, and there was little chance of my being able to achieve my aims by rising through the existing social hierarchy.

With no way to satisfy my desire in the society around me, I turned towards the possibility of doing so within myself. If I could not make it big within society, I would satisfy my desire by accruing enormous power within myself. By doing so I would become a great and powerful being, and look down on others from above. This kind of passion emerged within me.

I would like to consider this desire for power in greater detail.

To begin with, this desire manifested as a wish that I would become bigger. I wanted to produce a greater power and become bigger and stronger. I wanted to extend my own body, to expand and gather vast quantities of powerful energy within myself. I wanted to let this energy ripen and grow inside me, and then release it all at once into the outside world. I would then be able to shoot out an immense blast of energy and show everyone my power. This kind of desire to grow to immensity, based on a physical sensation, definitely existed within me.

Becoming enormous would presumably also increase my physical/spiritual power and improve my abilities in a variety of areas. I would be able to do many things that I had not been able to do in the past. In one stroke I would make up for the

many things that until then had been impossible.

Being able to bend a spoon with just the power of my mind was, to me, a way to acquire this kind of power, make myself bigger, and display an ability to do the impossible. The same went for levitation. I would show everyone that I could do things that until then had been impossible, things that no other ordinary person could do.

That was not all. If I could bend spoons in front of other people, wouldn't I then be able to receive a great deal of attention? Would I not be looked at with amazement? I craved this kind of attention from others; this kind of desire, too, arose within me.

Somewhere in the back of my mind, there was also the thought that if I acquired this kind of supernatural ability, I might finally be able to obtain an identity. Having abandoned the path of organized science and fallen into an identity crisis, I thought that I would be able to acquire a new identity by becoming able to bend spoons. Readers with common sense may dismiss this way of thinking as risible. "Those are the delusions of a child." I would not disagree with this criticism. These can indeed be described as the childish delusions of a youthful, immature mind. I think it is wrong, however, to dismiss as laughable the fact that there was a human being who could not help but have such delusions, because I believe we must examine the question of why, at a certain point in my life, I felt compelled to cling to them.

For example, a former Aum devotee and Japanese Self-Defense Forces official gave the following response in an interview.

"I've wanted to be strong since I was a small child. I

wanted to become strong and do something about this corrupted world. Practicing yoga with the aim of obtaining supernatural powers and joining the Self-Defense Force shared a common root; I wanted to protect this country.”<sup>6</sup>

“I wanted to be strong” was the motivation behind his fixation on supernatural abilities. He was seeking an identity as someone who becomes powerful and protects this country. We must clearly grasp the significance of this fact. We must understand this desire to become great and strong held by people seeking supernatural abilities.

This desire to become great and strong leads to what is referred to as the “lust for power.”

I want to state this clearly. A lust for power lies submerged within the mind of a certain type of person who approaches a religion because of an attraction to supernatural abilities, mystical experiences, and enlightenment. These people may not themselves be conscious of this lust for power, but if they were to dispassionately analyze the motivations that brought them to religion, they would presumably become aware of its existence.

This lust for power is a desire to occupy a position of superiority by acquiring these sorts of abilities and experiences, and from this position of authority to look down on, subjugate, manipulate, educate, guide and save those who have not undergone this advancement. At the root of this desire is an embodied sensation of wanting to stand upstream

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<sup>6</sup> Kiyoshi Ishikawa, “Transcendent Experiences of LSD and the Alchemy of Mercury,” (石川清「LSDの超越体験と水銀の錬金術」『別冊宝島229・オウムという悪夢』, 1995, p. 12.



in a river and reach out a hand to those standing downstream.

When it comes to people who want to have a mystical experience, for example, in some part of their minds these individuals presumably have a sensation of wanting to experience for themselves a “mystical experience that hardly any other people have had.” This is precisely the same psychological process that makes people want to wear on their wrist a brand new model of watch that almost nobody else owns. In short, by having this kind of experience, I want to position myself above all of the ordinary people who have not had it and look down on them. What should this be called if not a lust for power?

I think this kind of lust for power clearly exists within the minds of people who say they want to engage in spiritual training because they want to levitate or bend spoons.

And this then escalates into a lust for power in the form of a desire to teach, guide and save. I have been able to directly observe within myself this kind of process by which the lust for power grows.

Through the acquisition of mystical experiences and various abilities, I am able to place myself above other people who have not yet accomplished such things. This satisfies my pride. What should I do when I want to increase this pride even further? I should reach out to those who do not yet have these abilities. I have climbed up to here. You are stuck down there. Take my hand and let me pull you up to the place I have reached. Try doing as I say. You will be able to get closer to where I am. I will be your guide. I can raise you up with these two hands of mine.

The rhetoric used to describe extending a hand to someone in a lower position involves phrases like

“compassion in the form of altruistic behavior,” “love,” and “philanthropy.” I do not want only myself to be saved. I will not be happy until you are happy too. Religious acts involve giving a state of bliss and happiness not only to the self but also to other people. The sense of satisfaction I feel reaching down and pulling my comrades up to the summit of the rocky cliff they are climbing will satisfy the pride hidden inside my heart to no end.

One face of this Buddha-like, compassionate mindset of wanting to undertake spiritual training, obtain this kind of experience, and save other people is, indeed, a loving mindset that gives serious consideration to the happiness of others. Its other face, however, is based on a lust for power manifested as a desire to stand in a position of superiority and pull up those below you in a one-sided act of salvation. I think we must look clearly at both of these aspects that are submerged within the minds of people who turn towards spiritual training or the devout practice of religion. Religious people tend to emphasize the former and close their eyes to the existence of the latter deep down inside themselves, but is this tenable? We must acknowledge the fact that, whether I save them or some transcendent figure behind me saves them, at the source of the “desire to save others” there is a lust for power in the sense that “the person who saves others should be me,” and the same sort of power relationship that inevitably arises between doctors and patients also arise between the “person who acts as an intermediary of salvation” and the “people who are saved.” Even if there is a reverse mechanism by which the “intermediary of salvation” is also saved by “those who are saved,” we must not close our eyes to the fact that at the base of this interaction between two

individuals there is a one-sided power relationship.

Of course, power relationships of this kind are not only seen in cult religions that peddle mystical experiences and supernatural abilities; they are something that can be seen in all groups whose members aim to attain technical skills through training and step-by-step advancement. Similar structures exist in the fields of sport, entertainment, and education. But because the criteria for advancing to the next stage of technical proficiency are not based on objective achievements, like being able to hit a home run, but rather on esoteric events of internal transformation and awakening, the power of those who oversee this development emerges with even greater amplitude.

And because those involved believe that by pursuing this kind of internal development they will be able to obtain knowledge of unknown worlds and unknown laws, awaken to a new self, no longer fear death, and display supernatural abilities, those at the top of this kind of hierarchy become even more powerful.

In addition, this lust for power also carries the danger that with one false step it can easily become a desire to manipulate everyone or control everything that happens and continue to develop along these lines. Because practitioners are said to experience things like leaving their bodies and perceiving a fusion between the self and the universe in mystical experiences while doing yoga, is it not particularly easy to induce visions that you can expand yourself to fill the universe and look down on the entire world from above? Can this not easily lead to a delusional desire to position yourself at the top of the world and subjugate everyone's activity below you?

Mr. A, a former head of Aum's Nagoya branch, has said that the fundamental flaw in Aum's doctrine lay in this kind of self-perception. He maintains that Asahara's enormous "ego" is what caused the organization to go astray.

Buddhism says that the root of suffering is the illusion that there is an "ego." In Asahara, however, there was a monstrous "ego," an "ego" that wanted salvation, an "ego" that wanted to protect its position, an "ego" that was Aum. He justified this with the concept of Ātman. Aum's believers then fell under the delusion that there was an "entity" called truth, and devoted themselves to protecting it.<sup>7</sup>

In a religion entered through mystical experiences and supernatural abilities, it may be difficult to prevent the enlargement of egos supported by a lust for power. And this was by no means a problem affecting only Asahara.

When it comes to the lust for power in the hearts of those who seek mystical experiences and supernatural abilities, do the two desires of wanting to enlarge myself until I am as big as the universe, put everything within my field of view, subjugate it, and take it in, and wanting to acquire experiences other people do not have, placing myself above them, and satisfying my pride, not indeed come together as one harmonious whole?

Without acknowledging the fact that this desire may exist within me, and perhaps within you as well, we will not be able to get to the bottom of what occurred in the case of Aum or

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<sup>7</sup> 『現代』 August 1995, p. 88.

understand other religions entered through the path of spiritual training.

## 5. In the Narrow Space Between Mystical Experiences and Faith

I have looked at the desire, submerged within us, to obtain mystical experiences, supernatural abilities, and enlightenment.

But having so strenuously rejected religious faith, how is it that I seem to have no qualms about mystical experiences?

In the case of faith, in the end I must abandon my own thinking. When it comes to mystical experiences and supernatural abilities, however, I can keep trying to acquire these things on my own to my heart's content. I can investigate them inside the framework of my own experience without ever abandoning my own thinking. This is perhaps why there is so little opposition to them within me.

As I have already mentioned, if I had encountered a religion entered through mystical experiences when I was a confused university student in the midst of an identity crisis, I may well have joined it. "Our approach does not require 'faith.'" "You can proceed while confirming things through your own experience." If I had been "rationally" persuaded in this way, I think I might have jumped straight in.

In fact, in the case of Aum as well, particularly in the early stages, its methodology was based on the autonomous training of its individual members with Asahara raising the level of their experiences. This has been made clear by various pieces of testimony. It seems that it was only later when financial problems emerged that this transformed into a

massive hierarchical system with heavy drug use.

So far I have discussed my own latent, internal desires for mystical experiences, supernatural abilities, and enlightenment, and I have stated that it is impossible to understand people drawn to organizations such as Aum without fully recognizing and acknowledging these desires.

But while these desires were very strong within me, I did not actually set out on the path of spiritual training. I therefore cannot know what sorts of things would have awaited me there and what I would have experienced had I taken this route.

Having closely examined Asahara's writings, Tetsu Nagasawa, a scholar of Tibetan esoteric Buddhism, has pointed out that he accurately describes various mystical experiences and supernatural abilities that occur during the practice of this religion. For example, Nagasawa writes as follows about Asahara's early book, *Supernatural Abilities: "Secret Methods of Development"*<sup>8</sup>:

Regarding its promotion of awakening this Kundalini life-force, nothing in *Supernatural Abilities: "Secret Methods of Development"* can be described as original. But a certain kind of vivid reality can be felt in its content. He writes frankly and concretely about the "makyo [dangerous self-delusions]" that can arise during the practice of Kundalini awakening and the mistakes he made in the course of his training, and these passages include many observations that are persuasive to people who have practiced *qigong* or *yoga*.

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<sup>8</sup> 麻原彰晃『超能力「秘密の開発法」』大和出版, 1986.

The reader can clearly sense an actual, intense spiritual training behind his words.<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, when you read the text mentioned above or Asahara's *Going Beyond Life and Death*,<sup>10</sup> the vivid reality of the physical transformation described cannot simply be dismissed with the single word "delusion."

Asahara would often engage in "shaktipat," a practice of directly inserting his spiritual energy into the foreheads of his disciples. This is described by the Mr. A quoted above.

For example, there is "shaktipat," a ritual in which the master gives his own energy to his disciples. When Asahara touched his thumb to a disciple's forehead, his face would become pale and gaunt before your eyes and his body would stop moving. I was very moved to see him go this far in giving his energy to another person.<sup>11</sup>

Shin'ichi Nakazawa describes Asahara's shaktipat as follows:

To begin with, using a method called "shaktipat," the guru sent powerful energy into a disciple's brow chakra. This powerful energy served as a "primer," and an amazing transformation began to occur in her [Hisako Ishii's] body. Energy flowed up and down through her central neural pathway, and it seemed that she experienced an emission of brilliant light within her

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<sup>9</sup> Tetsu Nagasawa, "Our Neighbor Shoko Asahara" (永沢哲「わが隣人麻原彰晃」『イメージ』), August 1995, p. 213.

<sup>10</sup> 麻原彰晃『生死を超える』オウム出版, 1986.

<sup>11</sup> 『現代』August 1995, p. 83.

body whenever it hit one of her chakras.<sup>12</sup>

Hisako Ishii herself has also described this experience:

The master approached me.

“Today, you will definitely attain salvation,” he said.

Then he gave me the final initiation. It was intense energy. Spiritual energy (*qi*) accumulated in my head.

The training began. There was still a cluster of energy at the top of my head. The master’s energy seemed to have stayed there. The pranayama of Candali did not work. The master’s energy would not dissipate. It was an amazingly powerful body of energy. Thinking I needed to give strong stimulation, I immediately began *vayaviya*. I continued for thirty minutes and then entered the pranayama of Candali.

Pleasant sensations washed over me. I trembled. I tingled. And then an amazingly powerful golden light, dazzling as the sun, rose from my body to the area between my eyes and the top of my head and shone out in front of me.

This golden light poured down like rain. In the midst of this light, I was drenched in a feeling of bliss. After that, this sun rose many times, and then finally a golden swirl descended, encircling my body.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Shin’ichi Nakazawa, “Nihilism of the ‘guru’” (中沢新一『『導師』のニヒリズム』『イマーゴ』), August 1995, p. 258.

<sup>13</sup> Shoko Asahara, *Mayahana Sutra* (麻原彰晃『マハーヤーナ・スートラ』オウム出版), 1988, pp. 193-194.



If we believe Hisako Ishii, the power to elicit this kind of experience must have existed within Asahara. Shin'ichi Nakazawa, who is himself experienced in the practice of Tibetan Buddhism, quotes this passage by Ishii and states that "this is something that actually occurs."<sup>14</sup>

If someone were given this kind of experience by a religious leader directly, it would presumably be very easy for them to develop a strong faith in this leader. The path of entering through experience and proceeding to faith would open up for them.

When it comes to religions entered through experience, I think there are cases in which faith is not required in the beginning. But at some stage in the progress of your training and practice of the religion, there must come a time when you have to pass through the doorway of faith in its doctrine or leader. Until you demonstrate your faith you cannot advance any further. There must presumably be this kind of turning point.

There is just one thing I would like to say to those who have been practicing a religion and have reached this stage.

The experiences you have been able to obtain through your spiritual training or devotional practices, and the experiences you have been able to obtain through the guidance of your religious leader or teacher, are no doubt wonderful things. I am sure they were mystical, pure, full of joy and saturated with indescribable feelings of comfort and pleasure. It is truly wonderful that a person can experience such states. I do not deny this in any way. I do not deny that such experiences exist, and I do not condemn your attempts

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<sup>14</sup> Shin'ichi Nakazawa, "Nihilism of the 'guru'," p. 257.

to obtain them.

The fact that you obtained these experiences, however, may be separable from the “cosmology” preached by your religious leader or written in your holy book. Your having been able to have these wonderful experiences does not necessarily mean that this cosmology is correct. It may be that your mystical experiences simply occurred through a physiological process, and could indeed be experienced by anyone who followed the same steps. Even if you obtained mystical experiences guided by a religious leader or teacher, there may not be any necessity whatsoever for you to accept the cosmology they preach and believe in its ultimate truth.

I want you to use your own eyes and all of the powers of your own mind to awaken yourself to the fact that, while it may seem plausible at first blush, in fact the kind of reasoning that says “I had a mystical experience so I should believe what my religious leader says” has no basis. I want you to thoroughly consider this point with your intellect fully engaged. And I want you to become aware that in this world there exists a greater diversity of ways of looking at things than you may have thought.

For those who have actually been given this kind of experience, to not believe the person who gave it to them feels like an extremely harsh act; surely only a very cold-blooded individual could objectively scrutinize and relativize the person who has lifted them up and awakened them to a new self.

I am well aware of this.

But it is at this point that I hope you will stop and think deeply about the whole picture with your own eyes and mind, because once you go further there may be no possibility of

coming back. *Use your intellect to scrutinize and relativize the life-changing benefactor who has opened your eyes.* This is what I am saying. Coldly hold at a distance and scrutinize this person who has been perhaps the most important individual in your life and without whom you may not be here today as the person you are. No matter how good it feels to be with them, and no matter how much you would like to stand beside them forever, I still want you to try holding yourself at a distance from this person and thinking about them clearly. I want you to try looking at this person from a distance even if they tower over you with the dignity and love of a father. I want you to take a half-step back outside this sphere of influence and engage in “patricide.” And if your mentor displays discomfort at this scrutiny, you may well be standing at a very critical crossroads.

I have no intention of saying anything about the path you end up choosing after undertaking this scrutiny and enduring the suffering it requires. Whether it is the path towards deeper faith or the path towards leaving your group, it will be something you yourself have decided. You should follow through on it while taking full responsibility for your own actions.

Right before entering a faith, just once I want you to think things through as far as your intellect will take you and conduct this kind of relativizing.

As resources to aid in this kind of undertaking, I will write a bit about two things I experienced. These are experiences that have for a long time remained locked away deep inside my mind. The case of Aum has penetrated to this deep level of my consciousness and disturbed me greatly. I must write the following not only for the sake of those who

stand unsure at the edge of faith, but also for the sake of my own inquiry going forward.

## 6. My Mystical Experiences

I have had mystical experiences.

When I was a university student I succeeded in having such experiences on my own.

For me, therefore, so-called mystical experiences are not “mystical.” They are nothing more than one of the physical states human beings can experience if they follow certain steps. Even I, a person of no faith, was able to have mystical experiences. And I did so without any guidance from a teacher or mentor. What is the significance of this?

It’s simple. There is no necessary connection between having a religion or faith and obtaining mystical experiences. That’s all.

When I was a university student, I was interested in mystical experiences and supernatural abilities. I wanted to experience such things for myself. As I explained earlier, however, I did not take the path of religious devotion or spiritual training in order to attain this goal. Instead, I read a lot of meditation and yoga manuals. Curled up in bed in my apartment, I read about things like what you should do to open your chakras.

I suspected that supernatural abilities such as ESP and telekinesis and the mystical experiences that yoga can provide were the same type of thing. I thought that the human body was endowed with these sorts of unknown abilities, and that when turned outwards they became supernatural abilities and when activated internally they became the mystical

experiences obtained when practicing yoga.

In other words, by practicing yogic meditation, even I might be able to have supernatural abilities.

When I read books by people who consciously underwent mystical experiences, they all said more or less the same thing. And this was also quite similar to what was said by a boy who had become quite famous at the time for his ability to easily bend spoons with his mind.

First, fully extend the muscles in your back and breathe using your abdomen. Then hold an image of light in your head. As you continue to do this, the light will grow bigger, and eventually it will envelop your entire body. When this happens, various mystical phenomena will occur. It was also said that spoons could be bent using this approach.

It made sense. I thought I would try it myself.

This idea occurred to me when I was a third-year university student, right around the time I started living on my own in an apartment in Itabashi, Tokyo. Even today I can clearly recall that time in my life down to the smallest detail.

Late one night, leaning against the bed in my room, I folded my legs into the lotus position, straightened my posture, and began to breathe using my abdomen. I had read somewhere that you should make your exhalations long and your inhalations short, so I followed these instructions. As I continued this abdominal breathing in the dead silence of my room, I began to feel a gentle tingling in my head in time with my exhalations. When I felt this stimulation, I immediately thought, "Oh, I know this feeling."

In elementary school, I had often played a game that involved bringing my finger close to the area between another person's eyebrows. I would have a friend close his eyes and

slowly bring my finger closer to his forehead until he said, “The spot between my eyebrows tingles! It hurts!” When I had him do the same thing, the spot between my eyebrows really did tingle and start to hurt when he brought his finger close to it. At the time, I found this strange and wondered what this pain could be.

This same tingle was now occurring inside my head.

As I continued the abdominal breathing, this tingling I felt when I exhaled gradually grew larger and more distinct. Eventually it came to feel like a small point of white light. I concentrated all of my consciousness on this sensation.

As I did so, the number of these points of light increased. There were now several such points within my head. It seemed as if star-shaped sugar candies were twinkling behind my eyes.

This was the first time I had tried to meditate seriously, and of course I had never received any meditation training. Everything I did was by analogy to what I had read in books or simply a shot in the dark. At the time I had no qualms about doing something so dangerous. At this stage, these kinds of experiences were still interesting to me. “Wow, when you meditate, stars appear inside your head. I bet when they get bigger, they will be suns, just like in the books.” I thought about these things, as if they were happening to someone else.

On a whim, I decided to try to move these white points around. When I did so, they really did begin to move, slowly, around the inside of my head. This surprised me. The points moved freely, revolving around the top of my head.

I don’t remember how long I spent moving these points of light around.

After a while, they began to grow larger within my head and gradually clump together. Once they had all combined

into a single ball, the white light became quite bright. This light began to float up to the top of the inside of my skull. I couldn't see it with my eyes, but this clump of light was there inside my head. And then this spot began to tingle.

This sense of tingling is a bit difficult to describe. There was a sense of "pain," similar to what you feel when the tip of a needle is pressed into your skin, but at the same time there was also a sense of tingling "pleasure." These two sensations combined to create a very odd feeling.

I tried to bring this clump of white light to the middle of my brow. When I did so, it really did move right to the spot between my eyebrows. The clump of white light was in the center of my brow, just above my eyes. The spot between my eyebrows tingled, and it felt very good. In Indian paintings you can often see a third eye depicted on a person's forehead, and I understood this to be a reflection of what I was experiencing. While it was fixed in the center of my eyebrows, this light seemed to grow even bigger.

I don't know why, but I then began to wonder what would happen if the ball of light were brought down to a lower position. I tried to make this happen.

While making very long exhalations using abdominal breathing, as I breathed out I tried to move the ball of light downwards from between my eyebrows. As I continued to do this, the clump of white light moved past my nose to a spot near my chin. This did not feel as though a tiny ball were traveling down the surface of my face, but rather as though the clump of light that had been at my brow had gradually expanded in the same place, just like a balloon being blown up, until its inflating spherical surface covered my nose and then reached as far as my chin. The clump of light gradually grew

larger, and its edge moved lower and lower.

The edge of the clump of light progressed to my throat. When it reached this point, it was as though everything above my neck were being wrapped in a tingling ball of light, and my entire head felt as though it were being immersed in hot water. The inside of this ball of light seemed hot.

I tried to move this clump of light even lower. It moved past my shoulders and down into my arms, eventually getting as far as my elbows. When it reached this point, my internal sensation suddenly changed. The ball of light began to emit a low, droning sound. This sound gradually grew louder until it hurt my ears. (Accounts of near-death or out-of-body experiences often mention this kind of sound. It has also been observed in cases of sleep paralysis. Here there seems to be some kind of connection between these phenomena.) Then my heart suddenly began to pound so hard it sounded like bombs going off and felt as though it were leaping ten centimeters out of my chest. In terms of my internal perception, it really felt as though my heart were jumping through my ribcage to a spot in front of my body. Then, and even now I find this hard to believe, my arms swelled up to twice their normal size. My entire body was overcome with a feeling that was similar to nausea but at the same time extremely pleasant.

In short, I was wrapped in a tingling, droning ball from my arms to my head, my heart seemed about to burst, my arms were distended like bumpy logs, and it really seemed that I was about to die. The light now reached the fingertips of my arms that had doubled in size and were shaking uncontrollably.

I must honestly record what I was thinking at that time.



I intuitively thought, “If I were to move this tingling sphere onto a spoon right now, I could bend it easily.” But I didn’t have any spoons, and I thought that if I moved the sphere any lower it would further stimulate my violently pounding heart and I really could die. I was suddenly terrified and thought I had better stop.

Then, and this too was strange, just thinking that I wanted to stop caused the tingling sphere to immediately disappear. All that remained afterwards was my normal self. The supernatural phenomenon that had just occurred left no trace; it was as if it hadn’t really happened.

Several days later I tried again. This time I had a spoon ready so that I could try to bend it. Following the same steps, I controlled my breathing, produced a ball of light, and began to lower it. The sphere came down as far as my shoulders but refused to go any further. As I was engaged in this struggle, it suddenly disappeared.

These were the only two occasions on which I had this kind of experience; it hadn’t happened to me before and hasn’t happened since. I tried again several times, but it did not even get as far as the spot between my eyebrows. Even now, if I control my breathing and concentrate, a small spot starts to tingle in my head, but it only goes back and forth on the surface of my skull without ever going inside. Interestingly, I can only move this tingling spot from the middle to the left side of my head. It won’t go to the right side. Why is this? Perhaps it is somehow connected to my brain’s left hemisphere.

In any case, this experience was neither a dream nor an illusion. Nor was it a drug-induced hallucination. It was something I actually felt in my body while in a completely

sober state.

I can therefore affirm the existence of experiences in which it seems as though your body is being enveloped by light and you are overwhelmed by an indescribable feeling of pleasure. No matter how many people who are called “scientists” may insist that these are merely hallucinations, I can say with certainty that they exist as internal experiences that can occur in a state of sobriety without the use of drugs.

The account given above is based on notes I wrote after these experiences. I still remember what occurred very clearly, so I don’t think my descriptions include any embellishments or exaggerations.

Compare my experiences to those of Hisako Ishii cited above. I will quote the passage again:

The master approached me.

“Today, you will definitely attain salvation,” he said.

Then he gave me the final initiation. It was intense energy. Spiritual energy (*qi*) accumulated in my head.

The training began. There was still a cluster of energy at the top of my head. The master’s energy seemed to have stayed there. The pranayama of Candali did not work. The master’s energy would not dissipate. It was an amazingly powerful body of energy. Thinking I needed to give strong stimulation, I immediately began vayaviya. I continued for thirty minutes and then entered the pranayama of Candali.

Pleasant sensations washed over me. I trembled. I tingled. And then an amazingly powerful golden light, dazzling as the sun, rose from my body to the area

between my eyes and the top of my head and shone out in front of me.

This golden light poured down like rain. In the midst of this light, I was drenched in a feeling of bliss. After that, this sun rose many times, until finally a golden swirl descended, encircling my body.

The description given by Hisako Ishii, “pleasant sensations washed over me. I trembled. I tingled,” is extremely similar to what I experienced. The phrases “powerful golden light, dazzling as the sun” and “rose from my body to the area between my eyes and the top of my head” also fit my experience perfectly. “The golden light poured down like rain,” too, might be how you would describe it if you were inclined to be poetic. In my case the sun only rose once, but for Ishii it seems to have “risen many times.”

Based on his own experiences, Shin'ichi Nakazawa states that “this is something that actually occurs,” and on this point I am in agreement. This sort of thing really does happen.

But I would like to go a bit further.

This kind of experience can be had without practicing yoga, engaging in the devotional practices of esoteric Buddhism, believing in a cult religion, or believing in the words of a religious leader. This is what happened in my case. I did it with just abdominal breathing, the lotus position, and concentration. Such experiences, at least at the level I described, can be obtained without joining a meditation circle or having a mentor.

There is thus fundamentally no necessary connection between obtaining this kind of mystical experience and engaging in spiritual training or believing without question in

the words of a religious leader.

Of course, it may well be the case that it is easier to have these sorts of mystical experiences if you conduct this kind of training. Believing in religion may give you greater confidence and mental strength and make it easier for you to have this kind of experience. It may be that you can attain this goal in a shorter amount of time if you follow the guidance of a religious leader or mentor. This sort of connection may indeed exist between these activities and mystical experiences.

Nevertheless, the fact that I was able to have the mystical experience of entering a world of light on my own without either religion or faith means that assertions such as “you cannot have a mystical experience without spiritual training,” “you cannot have a mystical experience without having faith,” “you cannot have a mystical experience without reaching a high spiritual level,” and “you cannot have a mystical experience without following the instructions of a religious leader or mentor” are all mistaken.

Mystical experiences can be had even without spiritual training. They can be had without faith. They can be had even if you are neither a religious leader nor a spiritual mentor nor someone with a high spiritual status. They are something that should not be considered so precious or extraordinary.

This kind of understanding, if you can obtain it, is surely very useful when it comes to relativizing the religion in front of you. Being able to have mystical experiences is not in itself something of great significance. It is just like having sex, reaching orgasm, and feeling intense pleasure, only more delicate and sustained.

Of course, from the perspective of the entire process of yogic or esoteric Buddhist training, the mystical experiences I

obtained on my own are probably nothing more than the first tiny steps. I acknowledge this. Aum's books describe acquiring powers of telepathy (mind reading) and being able to experience visions of travel to another dimension during meditation. When you hear about these sorts of things, you may feel like giving this religion a try yourself.

However, I think the fact that it is possible to have the sorts of mystical experiences I did without accepting a religious system or engaging in spiritual training is critically important.

Furthermore, and this is even more important, even if you obtain a mystical experience by following the instructions of a religious leader, it does not necessarily follow that this leader's words are true.

The religious leader who gave you the bliss of mystical experiences says, "The end of the world is coming." But when you think about it dispassionately, reasoning that "he gave me mystical experiences so his prophecy about the end of the world must be correct" requires a leap of logic. The end of the world may come or it may not. Isn't this the correct logical conclusion? This is how I hope your thinking will proceed. Just by slightly changing our way of thinking in this way, we can begin to examine things for ourselves. Just once is enough, but I want you to sit yourself down and try to scrutinize and relativize, using your own eyes and mind, the religion right in front of you, your religious leader or your mentor.

One Aum disciple says that he had hated religion before he joined this group, but nevertheless he ended up being drawn into the cult.

Darduri-siddhi (a phenomenon in which the body

jumps upwards while maintaining a sitting pose that is taken to be the stage before levitation) occurred the first time I trained at the dojo, and I had an experience of light through shaktipat (the transference of energy from an accomplished disciple). I was able to experience what was being preached for myself, and little by little I started to think that Aum's spiritual training could be the real thing.

...

After undergoing various experiences, even I, a member who hated religion, came to firmly believe that Aum's doctrine must be the real thing.<sup>15</sup>

I want you to consider this dispassionately once more. Is there really any necessary connection between jumps in the lotus position and becoming able to have "experiences of light" on the one hand, and "Aum's doctrine must be the real thing" on the other?

Isn't there in fact no necessary connection between these two things?

Aum's doctrine states as follows.

Those who possess murderous, violent, slandering, hateful, exclusionary minds will descend into hell. Those who ridicule and harm holy people (people who are supposed to lead many souls to a higher world) will descend into hell.

Those who are in the midst of ignorance/delusion and preoccupy themselves with sexual desire, drown in

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<sup>15</sup> *Vajrayana Sacca* 12, September 1995, p. 20.

pleasure, give themselves over to love, and tremble in fear will be reborn as animals.

If you covet various objects, food, knowledge, etc., never feeling satisfied no matter how much you acquire, or if you drown in the world of images, then you will drift through the world of low-level spirits (hungry ghosts.)<sup>16</sup>

Isn't there an enormous gap between obtaining mystical experiences through training, or by having someone pour their vital energy into you, and believing in this kind of "karma cosmology" preached by a religious leader?

Is it not necessary to hold out as long as possible at the edge of this chasm?

Of course, the correct practice of yoga or esoteric Buddhism accompanying mystical experiences may transform the way the world appears and allow you to acquire a new way of looking at the universe. There is a world of difference, however, between obtaining this kind of view of the universe empirically through your own spiritual training or contemplation and accepting without question the view of the universe or truth preached by someone else.

In the case in which you develop this perspective yourself, it is possible for you to constantly self-scrutinize its foundation, correcting what needs to be corrected and flexibly adjusting your view in the midst of communication with the world and other people. In the case of acceptance of a cosmology or truth preached by another person, on the other hand, you have already entered the domain of "faith," and in

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<sup>16</sup> *Vajrayana Sacca* 12, September 1995, p. 29.

principle doubts about the content of this doctrine will not arise.

Let me say it again.

There is no necessary connection between obtaining mystical experiences and the cosmology of a religion centered around these experiences being correct. Mystical experiences can be obtained with neither religion nor spiritual training. The cosmology of a religion is not proved or disproved by the fact that you had a mystical experience. It may be correct or it may simply be wrong.

If you have had mystical experiences and are not sure what to make of them and find yourself wavering on the brink of faith, why not try thinking about things in this way? I hope you will stand fast at this point, and calmly pursue answers that are fully comprehensible to you using your own eyes and mind. To say “I don’t have a clear answer” is also a very respectable response. I think it is much more respectable than unquestioningly adopting an answer produced by someone else as your own opinion.

Aren’t there many things in the world that aren’t understood? That’s why we investigate them and try to make sense of them for ourselves. Directly acknowledging that we don’t understand what we don’t understand, we then investigate it with our own eyes and mind at a careful pace.

Of course, there are many people who view mystical experiences skeptically, calling them fake or hallucinations. When the things you have experienced so vividly for yourself are completely dismissed in this way, it would not be at all strange for you to harbor feelings of distrust towards those who do not believe them, or for you to want to turn your back on a society in which such people constitute the mainstream.



I understand such feelings well.

Even so, however, isn't accepting without question the cosmology preached by the mentor or religious leader who has given you mystical experiences also too extreme? There is no reason to believe that everything the person who gave you mystical experiences says is correct or the truth.

While humbly acknowledging the fact that meditation can create mystical experiences, what we must do now, therefore, is attempt to carefully separate this fact from "faith," "the words of religious leaders," and "religious truth." At the same time, we must also carefully maintain a separation from the form of scientism which asserts that "mystical experiences are nothing more than a physiological process within the brain" (this kind of scientism leads to the idea that love and other emotions are nothing more than processes in the brain.)

What is needed is a third path between these two extreme positions in which you investigate, under your own power, the meaning of mystical experiences in the context of your own life and death.

## 7. My Experiences in a *Qigong* Community

Such a path must exist.

But for people who have shared mystical experiences, and intuitively felt that this was how to reach the truth, it is very hard to scrutinize and relativize their community; doubts arise, but communities are surrounded by an ingenious structure that crushes such misgivings.

For example, even if a doubt arises and you ask a fellow member about it, a procedure is put in place to throw the question back on you and have you engage in self-criticism:

“Who are you to ask such a thing? Go back and think it over more carefully.” This is a technique by which everything that is “external” to the community is thoroughly driven out, and any issues that arise are internalized. Once issues have been internalized, what then unfolds is an accumulation of tautologies, the forgetting of the real self in the guise of self-criticism, and reinforcement of faith in the guise of learning.

Furthermore, members of a community centered around the sharing of mystical experiences can always fall back on these experiences to suppress their unease when they become confused or begin to have doubts. For example, when doubts arise, members of such a group can dispel them by engaging in yogic meditation, savoring that ecstatic experience once more, and convincing themselves that what they have been doing is indeed correct, that their doubts were the whispers of the devil, and that what their mentor says is indeed the truth. I think that when mystical experience, a tangible grounding that can be confirmed with one’s own body, is shared by a community, it is very difficult for its members to scrutinize and relativize it and free themselves from it.<sup>17</sup>

In the previous section, I said we should scrutinize and relativize our mystical experiences and our religious leaders.

In the case of communities built around mystical experiences, however, no matter how much I might say it is important to use your own eyes and mind to objectively examine your religious leader, it is extremely difficult to actually do so. It is difficult because, when it comes to what you experience through meditation, it is indeed with your own “eyes and mind” that you perceive your own physical changes,

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<sup>17</sup> See Mitsunari Ooizumi, *People Who Had Faith in Shoko Asahara* (大泉実成『麻原彰晃を信じる人々』洋泉社), 1996, p. 113.

internal transformations, and various mystical experiences. The more likely someone is to attach great importance to what they have experienced for themselves, the more difficult it is for them to scrutinize and relativize the meaning of what they have experienced.

This is a very difficult problem.

It is one to which I do not have a definitive solution.

All I can do is describe what I myself experienced in my late twenties and hope that it will prove instructive in some way. This experience weighed very heavily on me, a weight that I continued to bear until very recently.

When I was in my late twenties, for about two years I belonged to a group in which I conducted research activities as a volunteer. The group's leader was an older man with a fair amount of charisma. Below him there were two main members, myself and another man, and one additional member. A few university students with shared interests rounded out our very small group. Various individuals from other groups came and went. (The people involved are still active in a variety of fields, so I will refrain from using their real names and discussing anything that could infringe on their privacy.)

I want to dispassionately consider what I was thinking and what sort of state I was in during the two years I spent in this group. This is thus an account of my own self-analysis, and not in any way an attempt to pass judgement on others.

I was in graduate school when I was invited to join the group.

At the time, I had progressed to graduate school in the humanities, but I was studying bioethics, a new field in which very few people were active, on my own instead of doing

research of the sort requested by my faculty. I read related literature in English while seeking guidance from Keiko Nakamura and Shohei Yonemoto. Right around this time, Hisatake Katō and Nobuyuki Iida were putting together a collection of materials on Anglo-American bioethics at Chiba University, and I was recruited to work on this project. I contributed several articles to this collection.

One day I received a telephone call at home from someone who wanted to meet with me. When I arrived two people were waiting. They were trying to start a research group, and they had read one of my articles in the collection with great interest. What this research group wanted to address was the state of modern biological science. They said they wanted to consider this subject from a broad perspective. As part of this effort, they were conducting a series of interviews with individuals on the cutting edge of biological science. They wondered if I would be interested in taking part in this research. This was their invitation. What they said was interesting, and for the most part it overlapped with what I was trying to do. I had a surprising amount in common with the man who seemed to be the leader.

I remember being excited after leaving them and thrilled by the sense that this collaboration might open up an interesting new world for me. After checking with the university library to make sure this group was not affiliated with a religion, I began making weekly visits to their office located in a leafy suburb.

We would have long discussions in their office surrounded by greenery, stroll between the trees, go out together to conduct interviews, eat dinner and drink alcohol in their office in the evening, and late at night I would return

home by train.

Among all of these activities, the most intense were the focused discussions, referred to as “brain work,” that would sometimes continue for hours. What is “life?” What is “science?” What is “the North/South problem?” We thoroughly discussed and debated these sorts of topics. These discussions came to primarily revolve around an in-depth back and forth between myself and the man who was the group’s leader (I’ll call him “Mr. B.”) As our discussions deepened and new developments and discoveries occurred, the distance between me and Mr. B shrank and we became quite close. At least this is how I felt.

As these discussions grew richer and more concentrated, all of us came to share a certain worldview. This view held that everything in the world was connected to everything else like a thread. We called this state of affairs “life (*inochi*).” Our individual “lives” were connected to the “lives” of every other living thing on the planet. Thinking about our own “lives” was thus connected to thinking about the “lives” of every other living being. By the same token, thinking about all “life” on Earth was also connected to thinking about the “lives” of we ourselves who were engaged in this contemplation. In this sense, thinking about global environmental issues and thinking about our own health and medical care were the same thing.

Indeed, looking at the state of modern science and civilization, it is clear that life, something that ought to be considered a connected whole, is dealt with by breaking it down into fragments. Reductionist molecular biology also makes this kind of mistake, as does the way of thinking which holds that brain death is human death. The prevalence of the

scientism which holds that everything in the world can be understood using the scientific method is also a problem. Science has its limits, and the essence of life cannot be understood through the application of its methods.

Our group strongly advocated this worldview. We organized research conferences and large scale symposia.

This was in 1986, so we were quite strongly influenced by the so-called “new science” (a branch of the New Age movement) that was flourishing in Japan at that time. I enthusiastically brought into our discussions the idea that environmental issues and medical issues were one and the same, while Mr. B brought us the idea that everything is connected to everything else like a thread. “Life” emerged as a key term in the midst of this collision of ideas. I published my first book, *An Invitation to the Study of Life*,<sup>18</sup> in 1988 after I had already left this group, but there is no doubt that its content owes much to these discussions.

On the basis of this worldview, we advocated a multidisciplinary approach in which life is addressed from a variety of perspectives, criticized the reductionism of the life sciences, and attacked scientism itself. At the time, these assertions were considered quite extreme, but even now I do not think our intentions were mistaken.

Mr. B maintained that all living things are connected like a thread. This was because he was a *qiqong* master. At the time, *qiqong* had not yet become very popular. I too, though I had heard the name, did not know what exactly was involved in its practice. In *qiqong*, it is believed that the life force (*qi*<sup>19</sup>) inside my body flows together dynamically with the *qi* of the

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<sup>18</sup> 森岡正博『生命学への招待』勁草書房.

<sup>19</sup> 氣 in Japanese.

ground underneath me and that of plants and trees growing nearby. The *qi* inside me flows out through my hands and feet and intermingles with the *qi* emitted by other people, trees, and animals. Therefore, if we consider this flowing *qi* as fundamental, all living creatures are connected through this web of vital energy. If your perspective is based on *qigong*, it is easy to understand how everything is connected like a thread.

Sometimes, when we were tired out by brainwork, we would wander together among the trees. Following Mr. B's instructions, we would relax our hands, stimulate our bodies' external pressure points, and stand with our knees slightly bent and our bodies slack. In a daze we would listen to the voices of our bodies. Standing there like this, the sound of the wind rustling the trees around us and the cries of the birds circling above our heads felt very fresh and invigorating. Finally, we would slowly raise both of our arms in front of us, then smoothly lower them as far as our waists. We would repeat this over and over. This activity could also be thought of as an effort to become more familiar with one's own body by continuing these slow, deliberate motions amid trees and plants.

After continuing this kind of physical exercise for several weeks, suddenly there came a point when I was aware of the movement of *qi* within my own body. I started to feel a tingling sensation flow from my back into my arms when I was lifting them in front of me. As I continued to do this a powerful tingling began to build in the palms of my hands. When I said that my palms were tingling, Mr. B replied that what I was feeling was *qi*.

Once I had this understanding, many other things came

to mind. For example, sometimes when I get extremely frightened, something like an electrical current flows from my back into my head. The feeling of *qi* was very similar to a weaker version of this sensation. It was also very similar to a sensation of something squirming and moving around inside my body that I had sometimes experienced. It occurred to me that we may be feeling *qi* all the time without being particularly conscious of it.

Once you know what *qi* feels like, you can then practice and polish this awareness on your own. You become able to practice by yourself. There was a period during which I practiced on my own like this on a daily basis. As I did so, I began to be able to clearly perceive the flow of *qi* from my palms. When my condition was good, I could clearly perceive something like a cool wind flowing out of my palms. In my room I could feel something like a breeze flowing out of my hands even without moving my arms.

When practicing *qigong* in a group, I once stood face to face with a young woman who was an advanced practitioner and held my hands up to hers with about ten centimeters separating us. She closed her eyes and sent *qi* into my palms. Even though there was a ten-centimeter space between us, when she did this, I felt a powerful radiation just as if I had brought my hands close to an infrared stove. As you would expect, I was very surprised by this. It was very hot. There may be another explanation for it besides the theory of *qigong*, but this phenomenon truly exists.

In my case, strangely, when *qi* begins to flow out of my palms the perceived temperature of my hands gradually falls. At times they become extremely cold, like ice.

When you become more sensitive to the *qi* you emit



yourself, you also become more sensitive to the *qi* possessed by other people. Arriving at study sessions or meetings, there are times when I have felt the tense *qi* of the participants with my entire body as soon as I opened the door.

Writing about it like this makes it seem truly occult, but if I were to call it “the atmosphere of a place” then it is presumably something everyone has felt. So what exactly is “the atmosphere of a place?” We often feel that the atmosphere in a certain place is tense, relaxed, calm, etc. What exactly are we feeling when this occurs? Perhaps “feeling another person’s *qi*” is just a particularly acute version of this kind of sensation we all regularly experience.

This is something I would describe more as a subjective feeling than an objective fact, but when a particular group of people practices *qigong* together, the members of that group begin to sense that their “*qi* goes well together.” By “*qi* goes well together” I mean that they come to trust and rely on each other and begin to feel that other people in the group would not lie to them. I don’t want to generalize this claim, but in my case at least this is how it was. This would presumably be seen by *qigong* theory as the inevitable result of the influence of each other’s *qi*.

I was only ever able to sense the *qi* emitted by myself or other people, but in my group there was someone who, after starting from the same place I did, claimed to have become able to perceive the *qi* of trees. On his own he would stand stock still facing the trunk of a large tree, his hands held up in front of him. Watching him do this, I thought it would be great to reach that point. In the end I was never able to sense the *qi* of living creatures other than human beings. I quit before reaching that level.

I don't know what exactly this *qi* is. I don't know whether it is the energy of living things or not, or if it is some kind of autosuggestion. What I can say for certain, however, is that it is a fact that I was able to feel this kind of thing arise within myself, and it is also a fact that I was able to vividly perceive it being emitted by other people.

In any case, what is important is the following two points: by practicing *qigong* it is possible to obtain this kind of unexplained sense through a step by step process, and it seems that when *qigong* is practiced by a group of people they may develop feelings of intimacy and trust beyond what would normally be expected.

## 8. The Mentality That Operates within a Closed World

We were thus simultaneously a volunteer research group focused on the life sciences and a *qigong* circle. In both cases the leader of our activities was Mr. B, who was also a *qigong* instructor. Metaphors and examples referencing *qigong* were often employed in the discussions lead by Mr. B, and phrases such as “heal the planet” and “biosphere Gaia” were used during our *qigong* lessons. Our research and *qigong* lessons were intertwined in a way that made them difficult to distinguish from each other.

As I continued this lifestyle, I gradually became completely absorbed in this group. There was a period during which engaging in debate with Mr. B, talking about the future, and occasionally receiving *qigong* lessons seemed to be my main purpose in life. At the time I was a graduate student with absolutely no prospects of employment (the study of bioethics

I was engaged in was still not receiving any attention within Japanese academia), and I think my activities within the group were especially important to me as a form of emotional support because of these circumstances.

Regarding our research, I worked very hard to stand on an equal footing with Mr. B in my discussions with him. Our interests and ways of thinking were surprisingly similar, so at times our debates became very intense. When it came to the ability to plan and conduct research, Mr. B was peerless. On this point I respected him very much. Regarding *qigong*, Mr. B was my mentor. I tried to do as he said in our lessons. My progress was slow, so in this area I had to follow Mr. B unquestioningly.

As we took part in activities such as practicing *qigong* together, feeling each other's *qi*, and engaging in concentrated discussions in which our thoughts and sensibilities intermingled, gradually the boundaries between oneself and the other people in the group became indistinct. This blurring of the line between the self and others may well have been an illusion, but this is what it felt like. Gradually our *qi* began to align, and being together with comrades whose *qi* aligned in this way felt very good. In this atmosphere we brought up things from our pasts, and little by little we became able to talk about psychological wounds we had never discussed with anyone. It was moving to hear stories about other people's lives, and the fact that I myself was able to discuss such things was in itself very moving.

Once this kind of atmosphere develops within a group, you begin to easily accept things you would normally begin by doubting. For me it was especially easy to accept "mystical" phenomena because we were comrades who shared the

experiences of *qi*, itself a mystical phenomenon whose true nature was unclear.

Here is one example of the kind of thing I am talking about.

Early one morning I took the train to our office at the outskirts of the city. As I was jostled about in the crowded train I became lost in a sexual fantasy. I think this is fairly common among young men, but once something set off a series of sexual images it was impossible for me to stop them from flashing through my mind. I became so excited that I wanted to masturbate right away.

When I got to the office, Mr. B was in the room and our eyes met. I greeted him normally, but after gazing intently at my face for a moment he said something to the effect of “Oh dear.” Then he said, “Well, have a seat” and pointed to a chair. This response on Mr. B’s part was markedly different from his normal attitude. We then engaged in small talk. He told me that everyone has times when their *qi* gets disturbed, and when this happens you should do something to change your mood before getting down to work.

I thought he knew that I was sexually excited. He knew just by looking at my *qi*. I was very ashamed.

Looking back at it now, I can see that a belief that “Mr. B can see other people’s *qi*, so my sexual excitement has been given away” had established itself in my mind without any skepticism on my part. Thinking about it more carefully, there was no evidence whatsoever that Mr. B had become aware of my arousal. He may have observed it and he may not have. All that was certain was that he had noticed there was something different about my mental state that morning. If that was all he had done, then it was something of which any slightly

sensitive person is capable.

But because we were interacting at the level of *qi*, without any doubts I found it not at all implausible that someone could sense another person's sexual excitement. I was still incapable of such things, but perhaps I would gain these sorts of abilities once I became a more advanced practitioner. This is what I thought. These sorts of ideas came easily into my mind. This is the kind of atmosphere in which we were immersed.

Later that day, the members of our group gathered around Mr. B and engaged in a lengthy discussion. After the discussion had ended and we were all eating together, Mr. B said, "When we are debating, you all tend to get excited and irritated in spite of yourselves. When this happens, I send *qi* in your direction to calm these feelings." When I heard this, I immediately thought to myself, "Oh, I see, Mr. B is guiding us in this way to make sure our discussions proceed well."

Let me say it again. When I, who am normally very skeptical, heard the almost unmistakably occult claim "I send *qi* to calm your excitement during our discussions," I was deeply impressed and thought to myself, "Oh, that's what was happening." At the time I felt that Mr. B, who had shown such concern for us, was a very important person. I felt a strong sense of gratitude.

Once you have shared certain assumptions, had your thoughts, feelings, and *qi* intermingled with those of the other people in your group, and adapted yourself completely to that space, something that would seem stupid or ridiculous to a total stranger can come to sound perfectly natural and obvious.

This kind of thing also happened.

One day I was headed to the office with Mr. B. I got out

of the car and tried to open the lock on the door. The lock was in bad shape, however, and no matter how many times I tried I couldn't get it to open. As I was making attempt after attempt to cajole the latch into releasing, Mr. B gently stopped me. Leaving the key in the lock I turned towards him. Mr. B stared at the lock for a moment with an expression of intense concentration. Then he said, "Try it once more." When I turned the key in the lock that had thus far refused to budge it opened easily on my first attempt. Mr. B. said, "Sometimes transmitting *qi* can open doors."

I was quite surprised. The power of *qi* had been demonstrated right before my eyes. That's what I thought. At the time I believed without any doubt whatsoever that *qi* had opened the lock. I had no doubts about the validity of describing what had just occurred in front of me as "the power of *qi*." I didn't consider that it might have been a coincidence that the lock opened when it did or think about what Mr. B might have said if it had not opened. I immediately determined the lock's opening to be the result of the "power of *qi*" we were training ourselves to manipulate every day.

At around that time, Mr. B would sometimes invite a few students to the office and give them *qigong* lessons in the meeting room. One day I too was taking part in one of these lessons at the periphery of the assembled group. After we had learned a *qigong* method of moving our bodies, Mr. B came around to touch each of us. Eventually my turn came. He held his hand above my hipbone. Then he slowly moved the palm of his hand upward. Despite the fact that his hand was not even touching my clothing, as he moved it, a bone just above my hips made a popping noise and moved within my body. This was another very surprising experience. Mr. B explained

that he had corrected the position of my bone with the power of *qi*. I still have no idea what actually happened that day.

After this Mr. B expounded on various topics. Someone asked him how powerful *qi* was. Mr. B said that when it came to hitting someone, for example, the damage you inflict if you simply hit them is very different from the damage you inflict if you hit them while augmenting your strike with the power of *qi*. Then he told us a story. One day when he was at a dojo someone asked him to demonstrate the power of *qi*. Mr. B focused all his energy and directed a blast of *qi* at the feet of the person standing in front of him who had asked for the demonstration. While maintaining a rigid, erect posture, his target rose straight up to the ceiling and then fell to the floor unconscious. Mr. B used a judo technique and brought him around. It seemed that his testicles had become lodged inside his body. Normally human beings cannot jump up to the ceiling while maintaining a rigid posture. Such is the power of *qi*.

When I heard this story, I was very impressed. Because I had already seen for myself how *qi* could open locks and move bones, I was able to easily accept this story as an extrapolation along the same lines. As scenes in which a blast of *qi* sends someone flying are common in popular media like anime and manga, it was not an image that encountered much resistance.

Here I speak from my own experience.

When we are in a group in which certain assumptions are shared, and in which things like *qi*, thoughts, and feelings are intermingled, there are times when we accept without any resistance stories or lines of reasoning that have no clear basis. This was true even in my case, and I am normally a very skeptical person. This fact must be addressed head-on.

In order to avoid any misunderstanding, I should state here that I am not denying the possibility that these phenomena occurred as a result of the power of *qi*. I want to make this clear before moving on. These phenomena may really have occurred because of *qi*, or they may have occurred as a result of other causes. At this point I cannot say which explanation is correct. What I want to say here is that even though I had no clear evidence that these phenomena were caused by the power of *qi*, at the time it was easy for me to believe that this was the case. What I am talking about is the psychological processes that were operating within myself.

## 9. The Sweet Nectar of “Only We Are Right”

The fact that within a closed-off group of people who share the same assumptions it is easy to believe things without any basis is a very serious matter. This is often seen not only in new religions but also in revolutionary groups and student movements, and can even be observed in closed-off bureaucratic organizations. It can even be said that this kind of thing will inevitably be seen whenever we form intimate groups. But this tendency is particularly striking in the case of groups that emphasize the sharing of thoughts, articles of faith, and actual experiences.

In order to get people to leave cult groups like Aum, the normal approach, and this is indeed perhaps all that can be done, is to provide them with a lot of information and repeat over and over again that their beliefs have no basis, but as long as the group continues to exist, this kind of persuasion remains exceedingly difficult.

This difficulty arises from the fact that attacks from the



outside along the lines of “what you are saying has no basis” may in fact serve to make the members of a group even more unified.

This is something I suspect everyone has experienced, but when you come under attack from an external enemy the bonds within a group become stronger. This is why politicians intentionally construct imaginary external enemies: by doing so they maintain internal unity.

At the time, our group also encountered this kind of situation.

We believed that modern science had analyzed in separate, discrete sections and broken down into components what ought to be viewed as an inseparably interconnected living world. Within our bodies this approach had given rise to problems concerning the distortion of medical science, and outside of our bodies it had led to environmental issues. We therefore believed that problems with modern medicine and environmental issues had the same root, and to resolve them it was necessary to criticize the “componentism” of modern scientific technology and its “reductionism,” and hammer out a new, truly holistic science.

Incidentally, the entity that supported our group financially and gave our activities legitimacy was in fact an organization whose aim was the promotion of natural science. This organization included many scientists among its executives and provided backing for scientific research. We received this support for the purpose of considering the orientation of the natural sciences in the contemporary era.

As it turned out, what we argued was that modern natural science was the root cause of many of the problems that afflict modern society, and we held seminars with this idea as their

basic theme. As might be expected, this brought complaints and pressure from senior members of the organization. The person looking after our group did their best to absorb this pressure themselves, but we who were engaged in making these arguments soon became keenly aware of these difficult circumstances.

In our discussions, we became increasingly preoccupied with these natural scientists who were pressuring us. Various problems were being created because the scientific methodology they employed every day in their work was flawed. Unaware of this fact, and without any attempt to understand the correctness of what we were asserting, they simply found our claims offensive. They were therefore trying to crush the project that was making these unpleasant assertions.

I was not able to meet with these scientist executives directly. I heard about their dissatisfaction and efforts to crush our group indirectly from the person in charge of looking after us. But that didn't matter. We were seeking the truth, and these scientists were trying to take advantage of their authority to shut us down. To avoid being defeated by these efforts, I had to fight them. This was the meaning of the research we were engaged in, and the fact that they were angry was a sure sign that we had touched a nerve. Taking this view, I continued doing my research and contributing to our discussions.

I thought, "They are in thrall to a flawed methodology. And they don't know it. Everything in the living world is connected to each other, and science needs to be holistic. We are the ones who understand this truth, and we are under attack. We who are in the right are facing persecution. But we

cannot allow ourselves to be defeated by their efforts. We have to stand strong. We have to follow through on our beliefs. There is no need to change course no matter what outsiders might say. I am doing what has to be done.”

As for my feelings at the time, this period, in which I was trying to pursue what I believed in while being persecuted, was filled with a kind of stoic resolve but was also a very blissful time. “People around me who make various criticisms know nothing of the truth. Only we, the ones they see as their enemy, know what is truly correct.” We had the pleasure, for which there is no substitute, of knowing that the truth was on our side. I can still vividly recall this pleasure and happiness.

To put it metaphorically, it was as if we were squatting in a circle within a closed-off, secret garden and lapping up the sweet nectar that was the knowledge only we possessed; being persecuted was something very sweet and pleasurable. There is nothing as sweet and appealing as being confident that the truth is on your side and engaging in a stoic struggle to defend it.

We who know the truth are being persecuted by those who do not. When placed in such circumstances, if it was for the sake of protecting the truth, making the truth known to others, or putting the truth into practice, committing “small evils” is something that cannot be helped. It is natural for one’s thinking to proceed in this way. This mentality may be similar to that of a passionate scientist who thinks it is permissible to falsify the data a little bit if it will help show people the truth.

Once you have tasted the sweet nectar of “only we know the truth,” it is very difficult to break free of the group in question under your own power. There is a well-known story

of a daughter who had joined Aum turning to her father who was trying to get her to leave the group and shouting, “Dad, open your eyes!,” and I can well understand the feelings of this daughter who wanted to give her father a taste of this nectar precisely because she loved him so much.

## 10. The Enemy Is Inside You

Later, after a series of various incidents, our group experienced an internal rift.

I chose to set out on a different path from Mr. B. When I did so, little by little I began to see things that had been invisible to me when Mr. B was around. When this charismatic figure I felt compelled to trust disappeared and I had to think about everything for myself, I began to learn that the world was more diverse than I had thought. This process was full of an indescribable sense of liberation, just as you might feel if you were able to view from various angles a landscape painting that until that point you had only been able to look at from one direction.

Mr. B taught me many things and helped me to grow. This is a fact. The person I am today would not exist if I had never met him. In this sense he was my mentor and I respected him.

But what I discovered after our separation was that Mr. B’s approach was also just one way of looking at the world. My heartfelt embrace of his way of thinking and determination to pursue it was also nothing more than one way of seeing things.

It was after the breakup of our group that I was able to begin a process akin to plucking scales from my body and discarding them one by one. This was a process that would

surely have been impossible for me to complete as long as the group continued to exist. In the interest of privacy I cannot discuss these events in detail, but a factor brought into our group from the outside exposed a certain contradiction that had lain buried in its foundation and as a result we disbanded.

It was entirely thanks to a “foreign substance” brought in from the outside that I was able to realize the narrowness of the group I belonged to and scrutinize and relativize the thought and behavior of the mentor I had idolized. In other words, it was because of an opposing external factor that I was able to thoroughly examine what we had done.

All I can say to others who are drinking their fill of sweet nectar within a community, therefore, is that when something from the outside comes to destroy your world, I hope you will take advantage of this precious opportunity and not miss the chance to take up the task of relativizing yourself. I hope you will transform yourself by interacting with a “foreign substance” from the outside. I hope you will have this kind of courage. This is my heartfelt wish.

In this way, I was forced to separate from Mr. B, my mentor, and stand on my own. There were no academic institutions that would take up my theme of grasping the living world as a whole philosophically, and writings addressing it had not yet appeared in Japan. I thought that I had no choice but to create an academic discipline that would consider life in its totality by myself. In 1988 I published *An Invitation to the Study of Life* and advocated the necessity of a new discipline called “life studies.” In this book I wrote that every living thing in our world is interconnected. It is a mistake to divide it into humanity and nature. Adopting the perspective that humanity and nature are deeply connected,

we must take the first step towards non-anthropocentrism. We must move beyond the conflicts and contradictions that have been created by modern civilization towards a state of harmony and symbiosis between humanity and nature.

At the time I was writing these things, however, I had still not completely left behind the worldview I had maintained in my discussions within the group. Everything in the world is connected, and scientism is the enemy. Division and violence are the enemy, and the world must turn towards harmony and symbiosis. I had not taken even a single step away from this way of thinking. Despite having right in front of me the fact that our group itself had broken up in acrimony without even being able to achieve harmony and symbiosis among its own members, I had not grasped the importance of what this fact signified. Without addressing this issue, I went on contemplating harmony and symbiosis in my head as in the past. I thought only about how to overcome the scientism and modern systems that had destroyed these ideals.

When I was thirty, I had a child. It was a very busy time for me in my career, so I left nearly all of the childrearing to my wife and put in long hours at work. When I got home the baby would be crying and screaming. From evening until late at night I had to take on some aspects of looking after our child. Changing my bad-tempered baby's diapers; washing dirty diapers in soapy water; rocking my restless infant in my arms to try to get him to sleep: having to do these things irritated me. Anger would boil up within me as I held my baby who could not yet smile and wondered why my time had to be taken up by such things. "Why? Why do I have to waste my time like this? There is so much I have to do. There is so much I have to think about. I can't be taking care of you like this."

One night the baby cried so loudly that the feelings I had been bottling up exploded from deep within me. Yelling “Shut up!,” I threw a nearby slipper at him. The slipper narrowly missed his body and bounced off of the wall behind him with a loud bang. I stood there, my body shaking with emotion. An overwhelming “rage” had surged upwards from deep inside my body. It was very close to a “violent impulse.” An impulse to commit violence against something that was taking my time against my will filled my entire body.

When my excitement had subsided, I realized the meaning of what I had just done. I, who had asserted that the living world must be full of harmony and symbiosis and who had thought so long and hard about the ethical principles needed to bring this about, had committed violence against my own infant, an extremely weak being incapable of offering any resistance. The extremely violent impulse to silence this child had come from nowhere else but deep inside my own body. I was dumbfounded.

When I became aware of these violent impulses toward my own infant, my contemplations up until that point seemed meaningless. Everything about myself as someone who had sought harmony and symbiosis inside his own head had been negated. It was a real turning point for me. In that moment, I realized my own errors during the time I had made imaginary enemies of proponents of scientism and sipped the sweet nectar of a closed group.

The enemy was not outside myself. It had built its nest within me. To examine life is to examine the way I myself have been living. I had to examine myself as a living being who, while seeking harmony and symbiosis among living creatures, had committed violence against those closest to him, made no

serious attempt to interact with them, and made their lives hard to live.

Since the days of my closed world of sweet nectar, how long had it taken me to become capable of discovering something so obvious? How many people had I made to suffer during this time? I still hurt people today, of course, but I have no doubt that the suffering I caused during that period was much worse.

## 11. A Philosophy of Worldly Desires

I wanted enlightenment. I wanted supernatural abilities. I wanted to know the truth. I wanted power. I wanted to stand above other people. And I wanted to be saved from the fear of death.

In the midst of my struggle to pursue these goals, I had mystical experiences, practiced *qigong*, pushed ahead with my research, and created a community in which I drank sweet nectar along with my comrades. We created an imaginary enemy, scientism, and rushed off down the pleasant path of believing only we were correct. What were the results of this? Wasn't I, a banal human being full of egoism and desire, all that remained after the community fell apart? Only me, a person who made beautiful pronouncements while being shaken by rage and committing violence against his own child? What did it all mean?

It is clear to me now.

What was needed was neither enlightenment, nor supernatural abilities, nor the truth. What was really needed was the modicum of *courage* necessary to take a hard look at myself and sincerely examine myself as an ordinary person



full of worldly desires and incapable of reaching enlightenment, acquiring supernatural abilities or obtaining the truth. It was the courage to honestly acknowledge myself as a person who cannot escape worldly desires, to view the world from this perspective, and to decide how to live my life. What was really needed was the determination to bring this kind of resolution to my life.

I don't need enlightenment. I don't need supernatural abilities. I don't need mystical experiences. Far from purifying my worldly desires and limitations, on the contrary these things only serve as devices to cleverly divert my attention from the acts of violence, oppression, and evil I commit every day. They only serve to distract me from the things I ought to be addressing.

What is needed now, therefore, is “a philosophy of worldly desires.<sup>20</sup>”

What is needed is a philosophy of worldly desires through which I, a human being full of contradictions and desires who is incapable of becoming enlightened, reaching the truth, or having faith, can keep my gaze fixed on the distant heavens while wading knee-deep through the mire of worldly concerns, and, guided by the light of their constellations, try to figure out the meaning of my own life as I wallow here and now, and endlessly seek a way to live this life full of filth and pleasure and suffering and reach a final answer to its central question.

How many people have I oppressed, ignoring their entreaties, making their lives difficult, and walking all over

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<sup>20</sup> 煩惱の哲学. Bon'nō (煩惱) is *kleśa* in Sanskrit, which means earthly desires and disturbing emotions such as greed, a craving for sensual pleasure, and anxiety.

them as I pursued my own advancement? How many bad acts have I committed, stealing pleasure and satisfying my desire for power and domination, and how much suffering have I experienced from such acts? How much pride and ecstasy have I wallowed in, and how conceited have I allowed myself to be?

I will not, however, choose the path of repentance and atonement through religious practices in pursuit of enlightenment. I do not choose this path because it is a system that, rather than purify me, would only serve to make the deep-rooted worldly desires that indelibly stain my body more difficult to see. I reject this approach because there is a risk of it functioning as a system that allows people to justify committing mass murder with sarin gas as being ultimately for their victims' benefit. There is a risk of it functioning as an unseen mechanism by which I could shift responsibility for my own evil onto a theory or system.

For these reasons I do not choose this path.

The path I choose is one that begins with facing the fact that I am a person whose actual behavior tends to betray the ideals, reasoning and beautiful words that come out of his mouth. It begins by honestly acknowledging that I am a person who cannot ever escape his worldly desires and banality. I want to create a philosophy that takes as its starting point my acceptance of the fact that I have hurt many people in the past and will presumably hurt many more in the future. I want to begin with the fact that I will no doubt continue to commit countless evils and betrayals as my point of departure.

Having acknowledged these facts, however, without ever justifying them, without shrugging off the current state of affairs as inevitable, and without using my own suffering over

these failings as a tool of self-defense, I must find a path in which I put my life on the line whenever there is a chance of self-transformation, and by doing so continue endlessly searching for the meaning of life at my own internal pace.

While building a modest network of mutual support with other people who have similar thoughts and feelings, and while struggling to directly receive the messages of the soul sent to me by other people from the depths of their beings, I believe there is a way to fully live out our lives in this muddy world full of pain and pleasure.

While I have not yet glimpsed it, I believe that somewhere this path must exist.



## CHAPTER THREE

# The Trap of Healing and Salvation

### 1. Aum and Yutaka Ozaki

From the late 1980s to the early 1990s Japanese society was at the peak of its “bubble economy.” People stopped thinking about things deeply, and lived only for diversions and whatever pleasure could be had in the moment. Serious matters were avoided, and attention was focused on the frivolous and fashionable. Anyone who asked “What is the meaning of life?” would be mocked. Days were spent wrapped up in the booming economy, and nights were devoted to garish “love games” at pleasure spots. According to the mass media, this is what the big city lifestyle had become.

Looking back it seems a bit ironic, but this bubble era was the period during which Aum greatly expanded its power. During this period in which people were intoxicated by the superficial splendor of the bubble economy, Aum grew by picking up on young people’s secret inkling that there was something wrong with their society.

At right around the same time, in the world of music there was someone who was pursuing the questions of “What is right?” and “What is the meaning of my life?” in the most direct way possible. He was a rock singer by the name of

Yutaka Ozaki. Ozaki, who sang about freedom, what is right, and the meaning of life in an era that praised the frivolous and trivial, was not thrust into the limelight by society in general; young people learned about him from each other by word of mouth, and he became a huge star overnight without appearing on TV. Within this administered society full of ostentation and pretense, Ozaki's stance of persistently questioning the meaning of life was enthusiastically embraced by people in their teens and endowed him with a youthful charisma. Shortly after rising to prominence, however, in 1988 he was arrested for possession of amphetamines.

After being released from prison Ozaki launched a comeback. His concert tour was a success, but once again he came up against his own limitations, and in 1992, at the young age of twenty-six, he died under mysterious circumstances.

"How am I to go on living in this dirty society?" "What is right?" "What is the meaning of life?" Both Aum and Yutaka Ozaki directly pursued these sorts of questions in the 1980s. One formed a community of religious practice outside of society, while the other chose commercial music as his *métier*. Entering the 1990s, Aum collapsed as a result of its own anti-social activities, and Ozaki died without having been able to get out of his own musical and intellectual *cul-de-sac*.

Here I think we must stop for a moment and consider the significance of these two social phenomena, Aum and Yutaka Ozaki, both appearing and meeting their end at roughly the same time in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Yutaka Ozaki made his debut in 1983 and died in 1992. Aum originated as a yoga group called the Aum Shinsen no Kai, which was established in 1984, and committed its sarin gas attacks on the Tokyo subway system in 1994. This concurrence is by no

means coincidental.

My focusing on the music of Yutaka Ozaki in this chapter, however, is not simply the result of his having been active at the same time as Aum.

I have said that we need a way of connecting people to allow for gentle and flexible mutual support in the solitude we encounter when we attempt to face the mysteries of the universe without taking the path of religion. I have also said that this approach must begin with a frank acknowledgment of the fact that we can never escape our own desires, evils, and worldly passions, and must be based on a philosophy of these problematic worldly desires.

At a time in my thirties when I had just begun a new job that was not going very well, had no one around me who understood what I was doing, and felt myself on the brink of sinking into a deep despair in the midst of this fatigue and loneliness, by listening to Ozaki's CDs I managed to escape this descent and find comfort and encouragement. The words and voice of Ozaki, who at that point had already passed away, went straight from my headphones into my heart. I had the vivid sense that I was not the only one trying to find a glimmer of hope in the midst of solitude.

But that was not all. I will discuss this in greater detail later, but in his later period Ozaki recognized the unavoidable desires and worldly passions inside himself for what they were, and, with this as a starting point, continued to search for his "true self" and "healing." He did not try to attain salvation by ascending to heaven, but rather by groping for answers while standing here on the desire-drenched Earth. He was clearly thinking about a "philosophy of worldly desires."

The potential for a "way of connecting people that

facilitates mutual support in solitude” and a “philosophy of worldly desires” was latent in Ozaki’s music, but he was unable to bring it to fruition.

Consequently, while it may mean a bit of a detour, here it is necessary to examine the path of success and failure traced by this artist. We must thoroughly analyze why, after attaining commercial success, he could not avoid getting caught in the same trap as Aum.

Of course, Yutaka Ozaki was not the only one looking for “the meaning of life” while making music during this period. But to me it is Ozaki who most vividly exemplifies a certain type of drama with which sincere artists who lived in the same era as Aum were forced to engage.

## 2. The Turn towards Religion in Ozaki’s Music

What Ozaki consistently sang about was how he ought to live in contemporary society. “Within this society entangled in joy and suffering, how am I to find the meaning of life?” This was his theme throughout his career.

His message during his early period, to put it bluntly, was one of *ethics*. What was being talked about was “rightness,” “freedom,” and “love.” The message of his late period was *religion*. His songs were full of words like “desire,” “sin,” “peace of mind,” and “life (*inochi*).” Yutaka Ozaki’s mental and spiritual world underwent a dramatic shift from ethics to religion.

To begin with, let us take a look at the “ethics” he focused on singing about during his early period.

“What is right?” “What is my true self?” “What is the meaning of life?” His first message was that he wanted to



search for the answer to these questions.

During the day we work hard at school or at a company, and within an administered society our bodies and minds become worn out and used up. Every day we leave for school or our company at the predetermined time, do the predetermined studying or work assigned to us, and then return home. What I ought to do has been determined ahead of time by someone else, and all that remains is for me to do it in silence. All that is required is that I kill my ego and deal with what I am given in the manner I am told.

When night falls, these worn out “salarymen” and young people, freed from the bonds of their company or school, give themselves over to fleeting moments of freedom and pleasure. They flock to nightspots and occupy themselves with things like alcohol, romantic relationships, music, dancing, and fighting. These nighttime areas endlessly absorb the desires of these sorts of men and women. Young people slip out of their homes to speed through the nighttime streets on motorbikes.

Ozaki saw the people who live in today’s big cities as beings that aimlessly come and go day and night as though possessed.

This teenage singer calls out to us, “Isn’t there something wrong with this life of ours in which we go on repeating this kind of thing over and over again?”

In truth, isn’t there another way of living? Normally we avoid thinking about such things because we are very busy and it is too much trouble. But isn’t there indeed something wrong with the way we are living?

Our society runs on money and desire. It is a society in which preference is given to people who went to good schools, and in the end is constructed to give advantages to those who

take hold of money and power. Such things are well understood. But is just being swallowed up by this kind of society really a life I want? There is something wrong with the way this society is, and a different, “right thing” must surely exist somewhere. People say, “If everyone has fun and feels good, isn’t that enough?” But there must be more to life than this. There must be some kind of “right thing” that cannot be reduced to mere pleasure.

Ozaki’s songs are filled with cries of “How am I to reach this kind of ‘right thing’ or ‘truth’?”

*For me to be me  
I must keep on winning  
What is the right thing?  
Until I know it in this heart*

(“My Song”<sup>1</sup>)

The term “right thing” is also rephrased as “true self” many times in his lyrics. In his late period the term “meaning of life” starts to be emphasized more strongly.

What exactly are the “right thing,” “true self,” and “meaning of life?” These were the most important themes Ozaki sang about consistently throughout his career. Of course, in his early period Ozaki was not yet able to express the exact meaning of these ideas. But as someone constantly searching for the “right thing,” his cries from the heart appealed strongly to those who heard his songs. And by sharing in this cry, his listeners received from Ozaki an incomparable energy and desire for life. I listen to Ozaki’s

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<sup>1</sup>「僕が僕であるために」.

songs to receive this message with my entire being.

His second message was “freedom.”

This society is an administered society in which everything is subject to administration and control. In an administered society, our lives are all fundamentally under external control, and there is no true freedom. Only by moving in accordance with the established rules are we allowed to exist in a classroom or receive a salary from a company.

Of course, even in our society there are groups of outlaws such as biker gangs and criminal syndicates. Nevertheless, today’s high-level administered society administers our entire society, taking into account in advance the actions of such outlaws as one type of behavior heretical to the system. At first glance people in biker gangs and the like may seem to have obtained “freedom,” but they are only being allowed certain liberties by the police authorities and other such elements within society. The freedom found here is nothing more than a pretense of freedom or sham freedom being put on display. It is only being tacitly permitted as a comparatively safe outlet for young people’s dissatisfaction.

Even freedom from the system has been built in as one of the choices within the system – this is the kind of society in which we are living. Here the irreplaceable “self” is increasingly being lost sight of. Little by little we are losing the reality of this “self” that is not gathered up as a pawn of this administered society or one of its cogs.

True freedom, therefore, must be connected to swimming against the current of this administered society, and trying to regain this “self” here and now must be connected to true freedom.

Over and over again, Ozaki sang, “I want freedom.”

*Don't you want to be free?  
Don't you want to burn?  
Don't you want to be free?  
Don't you want to live as you think you should?  
What is freedom?  
What can we do to be free?  
What is freedom?  
Are you living as you think you should?*

(“Scrambling Rock’n’Roll”)

But while he wanted freedom very badly, in the end he was unable to obtain it.

*Like a beast in heat  
The city is very dangerous  
There might be a way in but there's no way out  
Scrambling  
Wandering the streets*

(“Scrambling Rock’n’Roll”)

In this administered society, in which “there might be a way in but there’s no way out,” a way out – in other words, freedom – does not exist.

Ozaki sings that when he speeds through the streets on his motorcycle, “the night of fifteen feels like I have managed to become free” (“The Night”<sup>2</sup>), but ultimately he only “feels like” he has succeeded in becoming free. In this society, true freedom can never be obtained. He is beset by this kind of

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<sup>2</sup> 「15の夜」.

pessimism.

This pursuit of freedom eventually veers towards a “death urge.” We can never obtain true freedom in this actual world. But there is still one way to achieve it: we can die. When I choose death, presumably by committing suicide, I am for the first time able to escape this social system, obtain “true freedom,” and at last arrive at my “true self.” In this society where “there might be a way in but there’s no way out,” the only doorway to freedom open to me is the way out of “death.” Ozaki sings about this in the final three lines of one of his most iconic songs, “Graduation.”<sup>3</sup>

Ozaki’s third message is “love.”

His theme here is the “hopelessness of love;” no matter how strongly two people are drawn to and embrace one another, they can never attain oneness. This main idea, though it may have undergone some minor adjustments, remained consistent from his early period right up until the end of his life.

Everyone is alone. But no one can live on their own. So I need you. So I embrace you. We embrace and love each other, and I try to become one with you. But when we do this, what we realize is that no matter how tightly we embrace each other, in the end we remain distinct individuals. Two can never become one. In the end I am always left on my own. I want to love you. And I want to cure this loneliness. Nevertheless, after we have embraced, I am always drawn back into my original loneliness.

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<sup>3</sup>「卒業」. Regarding the interpretation of “Graduation,” see Etsuko Yamashita, *The Soul of Yutaka Ozaki* (山下悦子『尾崎豊の魂』PHP 研究所), 1993; Noriyuki Ueda, *Religion Crisis* (上田紀行『宗教クライシス』岩波書店), 1995. I interpret this song as a “song of death.”

Ozaki does not believe in a love in which two people become one. A love in which two become one will never arise through embracing one another. Afterwards you are always alone and left to suffer on your own. Even so, there is nothing for Ozaki to do but go on crying out, "I want you to hold me."

In the midst of Ozaki's transition from his early period to his late period he begins to display a new approach to tackling this problem. He adopts the stance of encouraging and emboldening those who have been overwhelmed by the hopelessness of love and left paralyzed in their solitude. You are not the only one trembling, unable to achieve love and unable to escape your loneliness. The door to a future must surely exist somewhere.

Human beings are always alone. The heart that tries to break out of its solitude and seek love will always run into a wall. But you are not the only one. Everyone who is suffering in their search for love confronts this wall. You are not the only one. When it comes to bearing this anguish, you are by no means alone.

At some point Ozaki's yearning for love transformed into encouragement for others who are suffering.

Osaki's encouraging and emboldening others in this way can be seen in various instances including the concert he gave just before his death.

Ozaki's anguish lay in the fact that no matter how hard people suffering from loneliness try to alleviate it through love, in the end this can never bring people together. No matter how hard we embrace each other, we will always be separate. How can we save individual people, who can only exist as thoroughly isolated beings, from the depths of suffering and despair? Who will save me from my own despair? And how?

Ozaki's thought gradually shifted from "love" as romantic love towards "love" as salvation that relieves the suffering of human existence. Little by little, Ozaki's music began to take on a religious character.

### 3. Seeking His True Self

With the desperation of being unable to find his true self in spite of his best efforts, the hopelessness of love, and his sense of being blocked in weighing on him, Ozaki began to use amphetamines.

The whirlpool of desire, the temptation of pleasure, escape from loneliness and anxiety, resistance against society, irritation with the everyday, troubles in his personal relationships – enveloped by such circumstances, Ozaki turned to drugs. This led him to a state of dazed stupefaction, but did not provide him with a fundamental solution. The only result was an even more intense wandering between the everyday and the fantastic, between pleasure and suffering.

In the midst of all of this, Ozaki gradually began to sense his own "sin." He had committed sins, and was being judged by something transcendent. He began to see his own existence mired in filth in relation to this transcendent figure in heaven. The theme of romantic love gradually transformed into a love that brings "salvation." Then came an awareness of his own limited life being succeeded by a kind of "life (*inochi*)." Having passed through the self-negation of giving himself over to drugs and obtaining nothing by doing so, Ozaki began to shift course towards religion. But just as he was setting foot in the religious dimension, he encountered the biggest crisis of his life.

Before discussing this crisis, let us first take a look at the music released during his comeback in the 1990s. It is full of religious characteristics not found in his early work. The young Ozaki, who had searched for freedom and what is right, drowned in drugs and descended to hell; after crawling his way back from these depths, he encountered something religious.

When it comes to the content of his songs, too, he does not sing about freedom and what is right directly, but rather about staring unflinchingly at this self mired in desire who could not do what was right and could not obtain freedom. Then, from this lowest point, he tries to grab hold of “love,” his “true self,” and “healing.”

In “Love Way” Ozaki sings as follows.

Human beings live in this world sullied by desire. Driven by this “flame of desire cradling my mind and body,” we give our bodies over to the consoling pleasures of the night. This world of desire wrapped in pleasure and hypocrisy steals away people’s hearts.

Ozaki’s poetry as he sings of human desire is beautiful:

*In the midnight streets*

*A mad sun rises*

*Changing the shape of desire*

*Stealing hearts from naked skin*

[...]

*In the darkness of desire*

*A mad sun rises*

*In the middle of the mad city*

*Lighting up those who hide their bodies in consoling  
pleasure*



(“Love Way”)

He does battle with desire:

*Last night  
All night  
I fought against desire  
Since everything that enfolds you  
Destroys me*

(“Scratch of the Sun”<sup>4</sup>)

But he cannot overcome it.

What assails Ozaki, as he goes on living inundated with desire, is his feeling that he is committing irredeemable “sin.” The burden of those who lose themselves is a sin for which they cannot atone.

*Love Way  
I feel like I am being judged by something  
Love Way  
As though something entraps everything in sin  
Love Way  
Even if we cannot atone for anything  
Love Way  
We can love each other to survive*

(“Love Way”)

When Ozaki sings about losing his “heart,” I think he means his ethical heart that judges “what is right and moral.” He who

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<sup>4</sup>「太陽の破片」.

was supposed to have been searching so hard for his “true self” and “what is right” now drowns in the desire that wells up from deep within his own body, unable to defeat it. When he becomes aware of this self that has lost its moral heart, Ozaki senses his sin, and comes to feel that some transcendent being is judging him.

Although burdened by sin in this way, he does not proceed down the path of redemption through the rejection of desire.

*The flame of desire cradling my mind and body  
Even when I feel the end of everything  
Everything that pollutes itself to go on living is dear to  
me*

(“Love Way”)

While being urgently aware of sin and the judgment of a transcendental being, Ozaki tries to place himself on the side of “desire.” With the line “Everything that pollutes itself to go on living is dear to me,” he affirms lives that are lived in the midst of pollution and are inundated with desire. Ozaki looks directly at his own being that cannot help but be inundated with desire and makes no attempt to avert his eyes. He is clearly striving for a “philosophy of worldly desires.” From this starting point, he is trying to think about how to deal with his own sin. He is trying to begin a conversation with a supernal, transcendent being.

Ozaki himself, standing inundated with desire upon the earth, and some kind of transcendental being, existing high above his head in heaven – Ozaki powerfully evokes this vertical scheme, the sense that “I on the earth” and “god up in

heaven” are facing each other directly while being separated by an infinite distance.

In “Eternal Heart,” which to me is Ozaki’s greatest masterpiece, this interrogation of the transcendental develops further into an interrogation of “life (*inochi*).”

Ozaki sings about how I, in the midst of living a life burdened by the solitude and loneliness of being on my own, should react to human love. Then in the second half of the song he looks towards something beyond humanity.

*I want to believe  
If there is something that can give me love without lies  
I will give my body and mind  
That is love, that is desire  
Because that is the truth of what presides over  
everything  
That is why*

(“Eternal Heart”<sup>5</sup>)

If there is something that will give me a love without lies, I want to give my body and mind to it, because that is the truth of “what presides over everything.”

*I look up at the night sky as though standing on the  
precipice of a cliff  
I try crying out at this sky that seems about to swallow  
me up*

(“Eternal Heart”)

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<sup>5</sup> 「永遠の胸」.

The second line, spoken as though whispering, perfectly illustrates the image of the vertical structure that is Ozaki's fundamental perception of the world. He is standing on the edge of a precipice. If he looks down, at his feet gapes an infinite abyss. If he looks up, a night sky that seems about to swallow him up expands far above his head. He is standing with unsteady footing in the middle of the infinite expanse between the chasm's bottomless abyss and the twinkling heavens far above his head. Ozaki then turns to the infinitely distant night sky, raises his arms, and cries out. What Ozaki cries out to, at the far away edge of this night sky, is nothing other than his god.

*Where am I to go?  
I who stand here unmoving on the Earth,  
Why was I born?  
If my being born has a meaning,  
And if there is someone who needs me,  
I want to communicate  
Everything I have learned  
Everything in which I have sought happiness without  
limit  
I want to share  
Everything for surviving*

(“Eternal Heart”)

Ozaki cries out, “Why was I born?” only once in this song. Why was this I, who, while seeking what is right, has become engulfed in desire and descended to hell, born into this world? Turning toward the god of the night sky, toward an infinitely distant being, Ozaki screams this question to which there can

be no answer.

Why was I born into this world? And where am I trying to go? These are the fundamental questions Ozaki poses. They are nothing other than the fundamental questions of philosophy and religion: “Where did I come from?” and “Where am I going?”

In the next line this cry shifts toward the meaning of his having been born, or, in other words “the meaning of living” or “the meaning of life.” What is “the meaning of living”? My having lived thus far in the midst of pleasure, despair, and loneliness – what could the meaning of this life be? Writhing in agony, being wounded by betrayal, trying to love women, drowning in drugs, and striving to seek what is right – what is the meaning of this life of mine?

Ozaki responds to this question as follows.

The meaning of life is to communicate everything I have learned to those who have need of me. Everything I have learned, everything I have come to know, everything I have grasped amid my numerous failures in my life up until now, and the things I have not been able to accomplish – Ozaki says that for him the meaning of life is to communicate all of these things to those who will go beyond him and try to live as best they can in the next era. He wants to communicate these things, and to share them with others. He is filled with this desire to communicate and share with those who will live in the next era the tracks he has laid down as someone who, while falling into the depths of despair time and time again and repeating his life’s failures, nevertheless unswervingly attempted to chase down and corner the questions to which there can be no answer.

To what was an unanswerable question in Ozaki’s early

period, namely, “What is the meaning of life?”, here at last he is able to find an answer. Even if his energy is exhausted and he can go no further, by passing on everything he has learned this life full of humiliation can be redeemed.

When Ozaki said, “I want to communicate,” what he had in mind was, to begin with, the fans who listened to his music. But what was also certainly present in his thoughts was his own child who had been born right around this time. This album was given the title *Birth*<sup>6</sup>. This presumably referred to Ozaki’s own rebirth and also to the birth of his child. When he says, “those who have need of me,” I think he must also have been alluding to his own newborn infant extending his feeble hands to the father on whom he depended. To Ozaki, wouldn’t his child have indeed exuded unbounded potential and the possibility of breaking through the limitations of his own life? And behind this image of his child, wouldn’t he have glimpsed the countless fans who had heard the cry of his heart?

But here too, in these lyrics of Ozaki’s, I detect an odor of “death.” When he sings so intensely about wanting to pass on everything he has experienced, I sense behind these words another message: “Even after I have died, I want you to take these things and live bravely.”

Consider the final phrase in “Eternal Heart”:

*I am always here*

*Even when you cannot see anything for your tears*

*I am always here*

(“Eternal Heart”)

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<sup>6</sup>『誕生』.

Who is the “you” that cannot see for their tears? Is it not perhaps those closest to Ozaki, crying for him at his funeral? Is he not perhaps calling out to them, saying, “I am here in the world of death, the eternal world of death, and I am always watching over you”? It feels as though he had anticipated this kind of scene.

In the last song on this album, “Birth,” Ozaki’s intention to communicate the meaning of life to his son is expressed more directly.

*Raise your birth-cry  
And stand up  
Finally begin to walk  
Become alone  
Even with a heart overflowing and driven wild by  
sadness  
There is nothing to fear  
That is the meaning of life*

*Hey Baby  
Don't forget  
The meaning of living bravely  
Hey Baby  
The answers you seek  
Might not exist  
Even if you don't find a single certain thing  
Stand tall and don't give in to the weakness of your  
heart  
Keep running  
Keep crying out  
Keep wanting*

*This endless brilliance of life*

*You who are newly born*

*You are not wrong*

*Nobody wants to be alone*

*That is life*

*Do you understand?*

(“Birth”)

Nobody wants to be alone – that is life. Even if you are driven wild by sadness, there is nothing to fear, because that is the meaning of life. Ozaki is affirming the loneliness and anxiety from which he is suffering by asserting that they are life, or that they are the meaning of life.

He also tells us not to forget the meaning of living strongly. There may not be some kind of answer, we may not find something certain. But rather than letting this defeat us, we should go on demanding meaning from life, continuing to run, to cry out, and to want. This is the “brilliance of life.” This is what Ozaki sings. “Don’t forget the meaning of living strongly.” This is a message of encouragement Ozaki sends to a new life that has just been born.

To go on running, crying out, and wanting, trying to break through your own intractable limitations – this effort itself is passed on to the next generation in an unbroken line. Here a religious, prayer-like quality can be found in this entrusting of the future to a “chain of life” that transcends your own miniscule life and death and moves forward without end.

Ozaki’s gaze as he tells his own child about the meaning of life and encourages him to live well in the future is directed



in precisely the same manner towards the fans at his concerts. Ozaki spoke to his fans about the meaning of life and said that he wanted to heal their suffering from the stage. In the end, however, this stance of Ozaki's drove him into an excruciatingly narrow place from which he was unable to escape.

#### 4. Rock and Roll as Healing

The place Ozaki arrived at was "rock and roll as healing."

From the stage he would turn to his fans, who suffered the same kind of anguish he did and had gathered at his concert to escape, if only briefly, their everyday existence, and cry out to them that he understood them well, that he had been the same way for a long time, and that they must all go on living strongly without losing heart.

By taking in Ozaki's cries with their entire beings, his fans came to feel in their bones that they were not alone in their suffering and were guided toward a deep healing. A man who had been brought to the depths of despair by drugs was now standing there on stage and singing these beautiful songs. This same Ozaki, who had been betrayed and wounded, had revolted against society, and had failed at life, had come back to the stage and was now encouraging us. A person can recover this beautifully from failure and despair. Even I, plagued as I am by suffering, anxiety, and frustration, can perhaps be like Ozaki and try a little harder to live without succumbing to myself. Thank you, Ozaki. Thank you for encouraging me. Thank you for your beautiful songs.

Ozaki sent the following message from the stage:

"I had the same worries, suffering, loneliness and hope

as you. I failed at life and descended to the depths of despair, and now, on this stage, just for you I am singing songs of loneliness and hope, giving you strength, encouraging you, comforting you, and healing you. When you are worn out by life and your dreams seem lost, listen to my music. I am always beside you. I am beside you, and I will keep watching over you.”

Ozaki sent this kind of message to all the fans in his audiences that numbered in the tens of thousands. But in the eyes of each individual watching his performance, this message was received as though it were being directed toward him or her alone. Ozaki was speaking these words of encouragement to me alone. In this way, with a voice and manner of speaking that could be understood in an instant, Ozaki called out to his audience.

In sociology this kind of communication, in which it feels as though a person is speaking only to me even though they are actually speaking indiscriminately to a large number of people, is called a “parasocial interaction,” and Ozaki’s performance on stage seems to be a typical example of this.

When I think that someone is speaking only to me, the words sink deeply into my mind. They reach the feelings of anxiety and fear I have been holding deep within myself and gently envelope them.

What sort of point did Yutaka Ozaki’s “rock and roll as healing” reach? The answer to this question can be clearly understood by listening to a performance he gave a few months before his death. The atmosphere of that night is captured in the album *The Day 1991.10.30 Live at Yoyogi*

*Olympic Pool*<sup>7</sup>. This album is a complete recording of that night's performance, and it provides a detailed record of the interaction between Ozaki and his fans.

If someone who had never been to a rock concert were to listen to it, this album might sound like the meeting of a “new religion” or something of the sort. Such is the level of intimacy between Ozaki and his audience. This kind of fiction of intimacy between the performers on stage and the audience watching them often arises naturally at rock concerts, but Ozaki's shows were something different. The atmosphere was very close to that of a charismatic religious leader and their believers.

Let us begin by listening to “Freeze Moon,” the song that forms the climax of the middle part of that night's performance. Riding an intense beat, Ozaki begins singing with a full-throated scream. Continuing at what is almost a shout, his words are difficult to catch. The first half of the song ends in the midst of this yelling and excitement, and the band suddenly lowers its volume. Here Ozaki's talking and ad-libbing begins.

Soft piano accompaniment repeats in the background. From the audience there is a steady buzz of clapping and encouraging cries of “Ozaki!” These cries of “Ozaki!” can be heard coming from all directions, voiced by both men and women. Ozaki begins to speak as though singing, leaving ample pauses so that the audience can respond.

“Everyone...” (A roar of excitement erupts from the audience. There is a wave of applause. Shouts of

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<sup>7</sup>『約束の日』.

“Ozaki” can be heard from various directions)  
“...tonight is...” (Clapping intensifies. A woman’s voice yells “Ozaki!” A man’s thicker voice shouts “Ozaki!” Others join in from all over with the same cry.)  
“...the fifty-sixth concert.” (A roar. Clapping. “Ozaki!”)  
“Welcome to Yoyogi Olympic Pool.” (Clapping. “Ozaki!”)  
“The music we play...” (Squeals. Oohs and aahs.)  
“...with all our hearts...” (Clapping. A roar.)  
“...our lovely smiles... (Clapping. Oohs and aahs.)  
“...all of this is for you.” (Oohs and aahs. Squeals. Clapping intensifies.)  
“I am...” (“Ozaki!”)  
“...a lonely rock and roller” (“Ozaki!” “Ozaki!” “Ozaki!”  
A man’s voice from the back of the audience shouts, “Keep singing to us forever”).  
“Your frozen hearts...” (The audience falls silent).  
“...I am a rock and roller who can heal them” (A roar. Clapping. Many cries of “Ozaki!”)

When Ozaki sings a single word, cheers, clapping, and shouts of “Ozaki!” continue to echo from the audience unabated. The exclamations of “Ozaki!” in particular, with an echoing back-and-forth between the high-pitched screams of women and the deeper voices of men, create a distinctive atmosphere. Up on the stage, Ozaki deliberately sings or speaks one phrase at a time while acknowledging and confirming this audience response.

“Mmm” (“Ozaki!”)

“For you... (A man’s voice: “Thank you!” “Ozaki!” “Ooh.”

Applause. A woman's shrill voice: "Ozaki!")  
"For you who have been waiting." (Applause. "Ozaki!")  
A man's voice: "Tonight is the greatest!" Cheering and clapping in response.)  
"For this day" ("Ozaki!" "Ozaki!" A man's voice: "Come on!" "Ooh")  
"Why have I kept singing?" (The audience falls silent.)  
"What I remembered is..." (Silence)  
"...your..." (Silence)  
"...warm..." (Silence)  
"... cheering and applause" (A great roar of cheering and flurry of applause.)  
"Betrayed, betrayal, betraying – such things are unthinkable!" (Loud applause.)  
"Can't your..." (Silence.)  
"...warm hearts..." (Silence.)  
"...be understood?" (Silence.)  
"Of course!" (Applause.)  
"I can understand them!" (A roar. Clapping and loud cheering.)

After this comes a moving scene.

A voice from the audience calls out to Ozaki standing on the stage, "Don't fall!" Laughter erupts from the audience. This was shouted by a fan who had in mind an incident in which, during a 1984 performance at the Hibiya Open-Air Concert Hall, an overly excited Ozaki had jumped into the stands from a seven-meter-high lighting rig and broken his left leg. They were words of concern for Ozaki, who had moved close to the edge of the stage.

Ozaki hears this shout and responds spontaneously.

“A man who once fell down there has climbed back up!”

This is met with thunderous applause from the audience. Ozaki continues speaking.

“So don’t any of you ever give up on your dreams!  
Never!”

This scene offers an excellent illustration of the core of Ozaki’s healing message.

“A man who once fell down there has climbed back up!” refers both to Ozaki’s having fallen down, broken his leg, and recovered to sing here again today, and also to his having been reborn to sing again after he had drowned in drugs, gotten arrested, and descended to the depths of despair. Haven’t I, after hitting rock bottom and tasting my fill of despair, come back to sing in front of you once again? Look at me. Look at this man who came back from such a low place to sing for you once more.

You may be suffering right now. You may be standing in the depths of despair. I understand. I understand because I used to be standing there myself. Destroyed by my relationships with other people, drowned by drugs, and betrayed, I had hit the very bottom. But as you can see, I have been reborn. Look at me, up here on the stage, singing in front of everyone. Believe that every human being has it, this power of recovery. Believe in this power to climb back from rock bottom. No matter how deep you may sink into despair, you must never throw away your dreams. Hold on to your dreams and believe in your future, because I will be watching over you.

Because I who have tasted the same suffering as you will always be watching over you.

Ozaki stops talking and begins singing “Freeze Moon” again. After singing the last lyric, with the band still playing he starts ad-libbing to the audience once more at the top of his voice.

“Hey, everyone, do you have a dream?”

“Can you keep chasing your dream?”

“Will you never, ever, succumb to yourselves?”

“All right.”

“So that your dreams will never die.”

“And so that your dreams will never be crushed.”

“I will keep on screaming forever... Waaaaah!”

The song finishes amid this wild enthusiasm.

To stop everyone’s dreams from being crushed, to stop everyone from succumbing to themselves, I will keep singing, I will keep screaming. This, to Ozaki, is the meaning of rock and roll. “Rock and roll as encouragement,” “rock and roll as healing” – these are the sorts of things Ozaki was aiming at in his final years. Music to give solace to those in the depths of despair and strength to those close to giving succumbing to themselves – this is what Ozaki was looking for. This was not simply saying “Come on!” or “Keep fighting!” but sharing his own experience of having sunk to the depths of despair and singing compassionately about the strength of a human being capable of climbing their way back from such a place. This was the kind of path to healing for which he was searching.

## 5. Who Killed Ozaki?

Ozaki certainly seemed to be searching for this kind of path, but only a few months after this concert he died under mysterious circumstances that resemble suicide. What happened to Ozaki as he proceeded down the path of rock and roll as healing? At this point nobody knows.

But to me there is one clearly understandable route by which Ozaki could have been forced to turn towards death. It is ultimately nothing more than a supposition, but the image of a pitfall lying in wait for him on the road to rock and roll as healing appears vividly in my mind. Was there no other path for him to take? Was there truly nothing else for him to do but carry everything on his own shoulders and set a course for his own destruction?

Ozaki's music encouraged people who were mired in despair. But when he sang at his concerts about being a "rock and roller who can heal" people's hearts, did he not perhaps step over a line that shouldn't have been crossed? I can't help thinking that he did.

From up on the stage, Ozaki gave the audience an impression of himself as a man who had climbed his way out of the depths of despair and told them they were not the only ones suffering. The audience superimposed their current, suffering selves on the image of Ozaki suffering in the past. They tried to see their own future in this image of Ozaki who had been reborn after suffering, take strength from it, and find healing.

In order for the audience to take strength from listening to Ozaki, it was necessary that he be burdened with the anguish of his past. What would have happened if, with a



buoyantly happy expression on his face, he had said, “In the past I suffered, but now just look at me – body and mind both feel great. So you have hope too!” The audience who had come to be comforted in their suffering would surely have been deflated and unleashed a storm of booing. In order for the audience to superimpose their own suffering and despair on Ozaki, the same suffering and despair they were experiencing had to adhere to the Ozaki they saw in front of them. The audience could superimpose their own suffering on this vivid suffering attached to Ozaki, and then try to see their own future in the image of him having climbed his way out of it. Ozaki would thus always have to bear the burden of suffering and despair in front of the audience. In fact, Yutaka Ozaki’s facial expressions were always somehow tense and pained. He was full of the pain of trying to take on everything in his past.

What we have here is the following structure: “I am being healed here and now because Ozaki, who is suffering, is singing for me.” To put it more bluntly, it is precisely because Ozaki bears the burden of suffering that I am healed.

But it was this structure of healing he himself had constructed that drove Ozaki to his death.

The members of his audience may perhaps have had the following thoughts: “Listening to you tonight, I had the feeling I was being healed. Thank you, Ozaki. Tonight was wonderful. From tomorrow I will return to my boring everyday life. There I will probably once again be beset by despair and overrun by anxiety. When this happens, I’m sure I’ll want to listen to you again. I’m sure I’ll want to see the moving and beautiful figure of Ozaki, a man who climbed his way back from suffering, up on that stage.”

These audience members may then have begun to think

as follows: “Please, Ozaki, keep singing forever. Keep healing me. Keep showing me the figure of a man who, while continuing to bear the burden of suffering, stands up in the face of it. Yes, Ozaki, I want you to keep showing me this figure of a man standing up in the face of suffering over and over again whenever I need it. When you do this, I can watch you, be healed, and get back up myself.”

The following desire must then have arisen within these audience members:

“In order for me to always have the comfort of this healing, Ozaki, please keep suffering. And keep on giving these performances in which you climb out of this suffering forever.”

If this is the case, then in order to heal his audience Ozaki had to keep on endlessly repeating this performance of undergoing suffering in which he climbs out of it, falls back into it, and then climbs out again. To truly take on the role of a “rock and roller who can heal,” Ozaki had to go on repeatedly suffering like this forever. To be able to heal his audience, Ozaki himself must never be healed. To always be able to give strength, comfort and healing to his audience, Ozaki must continue to internalize the “suffering,” “worry,” “screams,” “despair,” and “anxiety” they carry, and go on suffering, worrying, and screaming, wringing his voice out of his entire self.

This was the structure of healing Ozaki created between himself and his audience.

Once he had been caught up in this structure, there was no getting out. To step beyond it, saying, “I’ve managed to become happy. Good luck, everyone!” would be an act of betrayal. It would be the kind of betrayal Ozaki hated more

than anything. Ozaki could not betray the desires of his audience. As long as this kind of request kept coming from his audience, Ozaki could not step down from this role of reproducing suffering in himself.

The more sincere this structure of healing was, the more difficult it would have been for Ozaki to escape from the world of suffering. What was going on in the heart of this sincere singer, bathed as he was in the unconscious gaze of fans that said, “For the sake of my healing, Ozaki, please keep suffering”?

He must eventually have felt as though he were under some kind of threat. “Hey, Ozaki, don’t run ahead and get healed by yourself.” He was assailed by this tacit pressure. When he stood before an audience of tens of thousands and spoke his words of healing, behind the cheering and the clapping and the cries of “Ozaki!”, did he perhaps sense an unconscious, almost murderous desire from his fans – “Keep suffering, Ozaki, so that I can be healed”?

In the concert I talked about earlier there is a moment when a male voice shouts, “Keep singing to us forever!” How did Ozaki take this cry from a fan? Would he have viewed it simply as a fan saying, “I want you to keep singing forever,” or would he have taken it as something closer to a threat: “I want you to keep repeating this state of climbing out of suffering forever”?

When I listen to the recording of the concert, I can vividly sense, hidden behind the excitement of the fans, something like a threat or murderous intent being directed toward Ozaki. This is like a voice emanating from a submerged place of which the audience themselves are not consciously aware. If this were a voice from their subconscious, then Ozaki must

also have received it in the domain of his own subconscious. He must have sincerely perceived his fans saying, “Go on suffering for us forever” in his subconscious.

What happens if we examine the subconscious of the audience more closely? What the audience ultimately wants is for the repetition of Ozaki’s suffering to continue “eternally.” This is the only way the healing of their minds and hearts can be promised “forever.” But Ozaki’s suffering might not continue endlessly. At some point, Ozaki may indeed find happiness. If this happens, he will no longer heal me. This would be a problem. I have to eliminate this possibility. How should I do this?

There is only one answer. I should kill Ozaki. I should kill Ozaki and have him become an eternal martyr bearing his suffering. By doing so I will keep Ozaki locked up in the world of suffering forever. If he dies, the actual Ozaki will be gone, and I will no longer be able to go to his concerts. The best part of Ozaki, however, is contained in his CDs and videos, and I can take them off the shelf whenever I want. I can savor the memory of the martyred Ozaki while listening to his music whenever it suits me. While crying over the sadness of his life full of suffering, along with my tears I can obtain a pleasurable sense of healing.

“Die, Ozaki!”

I believe this thought existed at the core of his audience’s subconscious.

Ozaki died a few months after this concert, shortly after the announcement of what would be his final album. It seems to me that he may have taken this message from his audience to heart, and killed himself in order to complete his creation of “rock and roll as healing.” He seems to have been led to a

death nearly indistinguishable from suicide by the death-wish or death-urge he had harbored since he was a teenager being amplified by the unconscious “please die for us” message he received from his audience.

What we got as a result was a young, good-looking rock star steeped in mystery. His CDs continue to sell very well, and we can listen to Ozaki just as he was at twenty-six years old whenever we want to gain strength, be comforted and be healed. Things have indeed turned out just the way the audience’s subconscious wanted them to.

I want to ask his fans, “Weren’t you waiting eagerly for Ozaki’s early death in some part of your mind? How many of you can hold your heads up and say with certainty that you harbored no such desire?”

In this sense, what killed Ozaki was the desire of his audience. The desire on the part of his audience to be able to go on being healed forever, and Ozaki’s earnest effort to satisfy this desire, that is, his attempt to bear on his own shoulders the worries and suffering of each member of his audience.

Yutaka Ozaki died trying to shoulder the worries and suffering of each member of his audience.

Does this remind you of anyone?

That’s right, it’s just like the destiny of Jesus Christ, who is said to have taken on the sins of all mankind, been crucified, and died. It’s just like the figure of this savior, who gave everyone hope of eternal salvation by shouldering the burden of their sins and being killed.

Yutaka Ozaki was well aware of the fact that his own destiny was similar to that of Jesus Christ. Consider the jacket

design for his final album, *Confession for Exist*<sup>8</sup> [sic], which had been completed just before his death. Ozaki himself, eyes closed and peaceful, is lying on a cross-shaped pattern, just as though he has been crucified. Ozaki died shortly after having completed an album on the cover of which he is crucified like Christ. He had clearly been conscious of the destiny he took on when he started “rock and roll as healing.” In an interview given a week before his death, referring to the album *Confession for Exist* he mentions that he wrote the songs thinking about “Christ, someone crucified on a cross” in the sense of “a person who had endured severe trials, or a person who had undertaken to atone for all sins, someone with this kind of fate or destiny.”<sup>9</sup> The Christ who had taken on this kind of destiny was none other than Ozaki himself.

Ozaki did not by any means die cradled in bliss. His death was a tragedy brought about by his having taken on the role of giving strength and healing to all of his fans and the larger-than-life expectations this placed on him. He tried to take on all of the wishes and desires of his audience by himself. This is where his tragedy arose. He earnestly accepted the role of a “rock and roller who can heal your frozen heart,” and he had to go on playing it until death finally tore him away. This was the pitfall lying in wait for him.

The structure of “healing” Ozaki had created of his own volition turned on him and began to swallow him up. The more he tried to face up to this directly the more deeply mired in it he became, until ultimately he became completely caught up in it and was destroyed. This seems to have been the route Ozaki followed.

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<sup>8</sup> 『放熱への証』.

<sup>9</sup> Etsuko Yamashita, *The Soul of Yutaka Ozaki* (『尾崎豊の魂』), p. 136.

Ozaki himself was clearly aware of this.

In “Last Christmas,”<sup>10</sup> a track included on the album *Confession for Exist*, he sings:

*I am all alone*

*I don't know anyone*

*There is a me that nobody knows*

...

*I am all alone*

*People I don't know are watching the me I don't know*

...

*I am all alone*

*I fight with myself*

*There is a me that nobody knows*

(“Last Christmas”)

“People I don’t know are watching the me I don’t know.” These words must have been very keenly felt indeed. The Ozaki who stood on the stage and sang things like “a rock and roller who can heal your frozen heart” was, in Ozaki’s own eyes, a “me” that was not his true self, a “me that I don’t know.” It was a self somehow like an other who continued to play this “role” of a counselor healing the hearts of people he didn’t know.

Here there is a “me that nobody knows,” a true self that none of these people can see. When he steps away from the role of “Yutaka Ozaki” there is a “me” that none of the people in the audience can see. There is a “me” that, without flattering the audience, as a lonely subject looks only at itself and creates songs.

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<sup>10</sup> 「太陽の瞳」.

Ozaki's state just before his death was one of being torn between the "me that I don't know" of whom others had expectations and the "me that nobody knows" whom other people could not comprehend. And the self that was being torn apart, unable to vanquish this state of affairs, chose death.

## 6. A Community of Shifted Responsibility

Was this really the only way to strengthen, encourage, comfort, and heal those who have fallen into despair and anxiety? Was this the only place a soul that sought what was right, its true self, and freedom could end up?

I do not think the place Ozaki reached on the album *Birth*, namely, the idea that the meaning of life is to pass on to the next generation everything I have learned and the stance, cries from the heart, and energy needed to live strongly, was mistaken. His mistake came when he entered the world of "I will heal you."

I think there are at least two reasons Ozaki was drawn toward death.

One, as I have mentioned several times, was his adopting an "I will heal you" stance towards a large, indiscriminate audience, and his attempting to take on by himself the wishes and desires that were inevitably aroused in this audience by this "heal-and-be-healed" relationship. To completely heal another person is not something that can be achieved so easily. Of course, it may well be possible to heal a person's heart or mind for a moment. Ozaki possessed a genius that allowed him to do this through music. But he had not thought ahead to what these people would begin to want next after they had obtained a momentary sense of healing. He had not



anticipated the way this desire would be amplified by the atmosphere of the concert hall.

The other reason may have been that when Ozaki was suffering under the weight of this burden, he did not have anyone with whom he could share it. He did, of course, have a loving family, including his parents and brothers. When he descended into suffering, I'm sure they consoled him empathetically and did their best to help him get back on his feet. I think he must have taken considerable comfort from his immediate family.

Nevertheless, when Ozaki was in the grip of the unanswerable questions that lay at the core of his anguish and suffering — “What is right?” “What is my true self?” “Am I being judged by someone?” “What is the meaning of life?” “What should I do with these desires?” — there doesn't seem to have been anyone around him who shared these questions of the soul, and who could turn to him and say, from the standpoint of another seeker like himself, “You are not the only one suffering like this.” If there had been such a person close to him, or even among his more distant acquaintances, then presumably Ozaki would not have had to carry the burden of his anguish all by himself and succumb to an early death.

I believe that the causes of Ozaki's death were that he shouldered the many burdens of his audience on his own, and that there was no one around him who could share his questions of the soul. I will never be able to confirm it, of course, but that is my feeling about what happened.

If so, what we can learn from Ozaki's death is the following.

I must not take on the desire for healing from a large,

indiscriminate group of people by myself, and I must not take on the burden of their suffering and despair alone. I will not heal you, and I will not bear your burdens. I will only address my own burden. Fighting only this battle I will shoulder this burden and live my life to the fullest. This brings us back to Yutaka Ozaki's starting point. "For me to be me, I fight with myself." And when it seems that I cannot bear my own burdens any longer and am close to giving in, or when, because I have become shut away in my own shell, I am no longer able to properly see the outside world, at such times people struggling to reach the same goal can encourage each other from afar. Many people must give strength to each other so that none of them is broken on their own. Their burdens must be dispersed rather than concentrated.

The road Ozaki walked is somehow similar to the path of the young people who, seeking the meaning of life and absolute truth, entered Aum and did things like kidnapping believers' family members and releasing sarin gas. Noriyuki Ueda says that when religious groups become large, the founder, too, is "brainwashed" into conforming with the group's system.<sup>11</sup> This may well have been something common to both Ozaki and Aum.

Ozaki and Aum both engaged in vigorous activities in pursuit of things like the meaning of life, what is right, and absolute truth in the mid 1980s and early 1990s, and in doing so acquired a large number of zealous believers or fans. Both projects, however, collapsed suddenly. Seeking the meaning of life, what is right, and absolute truth was not by any means a mistake in itself. This is the great task that human beings

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<sup>11</sup> "Founders Too Are Brainwashed" (「教祖もまた洗脳される」, 『仏教』 no. 33), 1995, pp. 2-15.

must face in every era. Both Aum and Ozaki took up this task directly. But what was the result? Aum committed acts of indiscriminate terrorism and was destroyed, and Ozaki succumbed to himself and met a death similar to suicide. Their initial intention seems to have led to a completely contrary outcome.

What Aum and late-period Ozaki have in common is that they both created “communities” for the purposes of healing or salvation. Aum built its community in an isolated rural area. Ozaki assembled a community of healing within his rock concerts, fictional spaces that can only exist temporarily. On the other side of this fictional space were the tens of thousands of listeners who might attend a concert. Of course, these two communities had different characteristics. But they were the same insofar as both attempted to share a space and construct, if only temporarily, an intimate relationship in order to obtain something in common.<sup>12</sup>

Within both communities everyone’s gaze was focused on a single charismatic leader. In the case of Aum this was its founder, Asahara, and in the case of Ozaki these gazes were of course focused on Ozaki himself. Those seeking healing or salvation wholeheartedly concentrated their gaze on a single figure. These were a special kind of community in which all of the members tried to build a one-on-one relationship with a single charismatic individual.

Why did they focus their gaze on this single figure? It was because this was the only person who could give them healing or salvation, through initiation in the case of Asahara and through his singing in the case of Ozaki.

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<sup>12</sup> See my book *Consciousness Communication* (『意識通信』ちくま学芸文庫), 1993, 2002.

In this kind of community, the path to healing or salvation comes only from this single individual. By accepting the energy and words of this one person with their whole body, everyone is able to obtain fulfilment. This means, in short, that in this community the ultimate answers always come from just this one individual. To put it another way, in this community there is no need for members to work out the ultimate answers for themselves using their own eyes and mind, and this is something they are indeed not supposed to attempt. The ultimate answers must always be left up to that one individual. Members must not try to obtain things of an ultimate nature on their own. Therefore, to put it bluntly, this is a community of shifted responsibility.

People are very comfortable within this kind of community of shifted responsibility. When it comes to what is important and what is difficult, all they have to do is listen to the words of their charismatic leader and implement them faithfully. If Asahara says I should do something, I need only do as I am told; just by doing this I am automatically moving closer to the truth. In the case of Ozaki, all I must do is focus my entire being on whatever words Ozaki sends next to heal me and make me feel good. I do not have to invent my own lyrics and melodies and start singing on my own. All I must do is wait for Ozaki to sing for me.

This is a very pleasant place. Within this closed off space in which only the figure of the charismatic leader can be seen, I focus my consciousness completely on the words and energy emitted by this figure, and I have this charismatic individual do my thinking and singing for me. I am only listening. I give my entire being over to what is emitted by the charismatic leader, forgetting myself as though drugged and letting this

nectarous pleasure seep into the marrow of my bones. I want to remain lost in this blissful world forever. Give me more words. More energy. More sweet nectar.

Aum responded to the desires of such people organizationally, creating a hierarchy of stages of spiritual practice and training, while Ozaki tried to take on these desires directly by himself and in doing so brought about his own ruin.

This is what makes me think that when we seek the meaning of life, what is right, and absolute truth, we may need to follow a path that does not include creating communities of healing.

In this sense I think Ozaki's starting point was not mistaken.

On his first album, he sang, "For me to be me / I must keep on winning / What is the right thing? / Until I know it in this heart."<sup>13</sup> For me to be me, I must struggle to keep winning against myself. I must fight on – while receiving support from others – until this battle is won.

Ozaki's attempt to create something like a community of healing did not begin until he had reached the final years of his life. This is where he took a wrong turn. He should never have sung things like "a rock and roller who can heal your frozen heart" in front of his audience. These sorts of words should never have passed his lips.

By starting down the path of healing, he ran into an enormous wall. If at that point he had returned to where he had started and set out again in a different direction, he may well have been able to avoid dying the way he did.

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<sup>13</sup> "My Song."

It is painful to think of what happened in this way, because Ozaki is no longer in this world.

Instead, I turn to the path Ozaki couldn't take, and, while learning from everything he experienced and communicated to me, begin to walk down it. With no idea of what lies in wait for me, I set out from the place where Ozaki fell.

Music copyright license number: 1903052-901<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> 日本音楽著作権協会(出)許諾第 1903052-901 号

## CHAPTER FOUR

# The Courage to Be Myself

### 1. Ineffective Prescriptions

What occurs to me now is this.

Neither Aum nor Ozaki in his later period created a place where people could pluralistically give each other the courage needed to think about themselves and the world with their own eyes and mind, and to live their own lives. Is this not the reason they both met with disaster?

How can we, in the midst of our solitude, give each other this courage?

I want to find this kind of path.

Here there are two books dealing with Aum I should mention: Shinji Miyadai's *Live in the Endless Everyday* and Osamu Hashimoto's *Religion Isn't Anything To Be Afraid of!*<sup>1</sup> Both are worthy of note as books written in response to the Aum incident, and both are works I feel personally compelled to cite in the context of this discussion.

To begin with, let us take a look at Shinji Miyadai's text.

Miyadai makes two assertions. One is that the Aum incident was brought about by the "wandering conscience"

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<sup>1</sup> 宮台真司『終わりになき日常を生きろ』筑摩書房, 1995. 橋本治『宗教なんかこわくない!』マドラ出版, 1995.

found in a modern Japan in which morality has been dismantled. The other is that it was an incident caused by people who could not adapt to the “endless everyday” that has been readily apparent since the 1980s rashly attempting to destroy it.

His conclusion is that we must acquire the wisdom to “slowly” adapt to and live within this “endless everyday.”

Let me begin with an explanation of “wandering conscience.” Miyadai says that it is a mistake to think of the high-ranking Aum members who released sarin gas as extremely evil people. We must instead examine the paradoxical notion that these devotees “released sarin because they were conscientious [...] they released sarin because they were elites who were thinking about society.”<sup>2</sup> There has never been a monotheistic ethics in Japanese society, and morality has instead been regulated by the reciprocal gaze of the community. This morality as seen by the community, however, has broken down through the intense urbanization and increased emphasis on information found in recent years.

As a result, in a modern Japan in which ethics and morality have disintegrated, the stronger the orientation towards a conscience that “wants to do good things” the more urgent the vague sense of not knowing what is good becomes and the stronger the desire for a “clear truth” grows.<sup>3</sup> When a figure who definitively provides standards of good and evil, such as Aum founder Asahara, appears, people with a wandering conscience obtain standards of good and evil from his words, and, while they may have some minor misgivings,

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<sup>2</sup> pp. 4445.

<sup>3</sup> p. 62.



do the “right thing” and release sarin gas.

The “endless everyday” is a way of understanding society that became prominent in the second half of the 1980s. People who are not wealthy will never become wealthy, and people who are not attractive to the opposite sex will never become attractive. This is a society in which there is only the ceaseless repetition of this kind of “endless everyday.” People born from around 1955 to 1965, and in particular men born during this period, were unable to adapt to this kind of society. They were a generation who grew up with a certain image of how society would be and their own bright futures, and in the 1980s they were betrayed by reality. They sought an “unpolished diamond” not in society but within themselves, and yearned for “the day of salvation of a future that would surely come.”<sup>4</sup> These people who attempted to create and execute their own armageddon were the embodiment of the ills of a generation unable to adapt to the “endless everyday.”

In contrast to this, there were young women who saw the “endless everyday” society for what it was and chose to live as they pleased within this endless everyday existence. This approach would later be inherited by the young girls who sold their used underwear, gym outfits, and school uniforms in the 1990s. Miyadai says that this has now begun to spread to the young men who dye their hair and pierce their ears.

In this way Miyadai looks at Japanese society in terms of these two categories of people who have not been able adapt to the endless everyday and people who have. He then arrives at the following conclusion.

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<sup>4</sup> p. 100.

What we need is the “wisdom to live in the endless everyday.” The “wisdom to live with an aimless conscience in the midst of the endless everyday without knowing what is good.” To the “ethical” reader who condemns me as “immoral” or “unethical,” I would say that it is people without wisdom like you who cause “fake fathers” to appear and sarin gas to be released.<sup>5</sup>

This wisdom is the wisdom to “live slowly”<sup>6</sup> as some young women do in an everyday that goes on forever without trying to seek a “bright future.” This is a state of “not engaging in any particularly ‘passionate romance’ or becoming devoted to ‘religion.’ That is not to say, however, that it is a form of shying away from communication because of a psychological complex or desperately searching to find their true self.”<sup>7</sup> In this way they melt into the urban landscape as fragments of it.

After quoting a young female Aum member who said, “I wanted to engage in spiritual training and become as white and pure as this devotee’s outfit,” Miyadai writes as follows.

To live “slowly” in this world that has “forever lost its brilliance,” while embracing a “self that even in the future will never shine” — isn’t it indeed necessary to find the wisdom to live like this? If conscious spiritual training is needed, I think it is not the kind of training that “strives to purify a self that cannot become completely pure” but rather the training needed to “embrace a hazy self that cannot become completely

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<sup>5</sup> p. 113.

<sup>6</sup> まったり生きる.

<sup>7</sup> p. 165.

pure and go on living.”

[...]

Why does it have to be a completely pure society? Why do we have to be completely pure people? Do we really need “blinding brilliance”? It might take a bit of work, but if you spend some time in different sorts of places and around different sorts of people, you should be able to find somewhere you can live “slowly.” After all, elderly people who require “blinding brilliance” will only disappear as time goes on.<sup>8</sup>

Miyadai is saying two things here. The first is “let’s just live our lives slowly in this endless everyday without looking for some kind of shining self.” The second is “rather than trying to ‘purify’ our selves that can never become completely pure, let’s instead begin by honestly accepting these selves that cannot be completely purified.”

I share Miyadai’s feelings when it comes to the latter assertion. As I emphasized in Chapter Two, I think we must first honestly accept and embrace the evil and worldly desires we human beings inevitably possess as aspects of our selves, and then investigate how we ought to live as individuals carrying this evil and these worldly desires. I therefore believe this second assertion is correct.

I cannot, however, accept Miyadai’s first assertion. I cannot accept it because the people who took part in the Aum incident had been driven so far into a corner that their minds could never be changed by inducements from an intellectual such as “let’s live the endless everyday slowly.” If these were

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<sup>8</sup> p. 170.

people who could make suitable compromises with their surrounding and live slowly, why did they give away all of their possessions for Aum, leave home, and become devotees? Did they not indeed enter Aum because this was impossible for them?

One devotee wrote the following to his family who had come to take him home.

And now I want to ask you. Are you thinking seriously about your own life? Are you living to the best of your ability? Are you satisfied with a life of living however is easiest, growing old and dying?<sup>9</sup>

Those who left their homes to join Aum, or those at risk of doing so, were those who, when they tried to adapt to our actual society, were unable to choose to live “slowly” in spite of various trial-and-error attempts, and left society behind in order to seek absolute truth and the meaning of life.

In other words, this prescription of Miyadai’s will not reach those who enter Aum looking for absolute truth and the meaning of life.

Miyadai’s prescription functions only as a stamp of approval for people who live their lives however is easiest but feel somehow guilty about it, a reassurance that “it’s ok to live like that. There’s nothing you need to feel bad about.” It can never reach people who attempt to reconsider and reject the idea of “living however is easiest” itself. Miyadai’s words will never reach the hearts and minds of people who, while

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<sup>9</sup> Aum Believer Rescue Network (ed.), *Liberation from Mind Control* (オウム真理教信徒救済ネットワーク編著『マインドコントロールからの解放』三一書房, 1995, p. 159.

attempting to find the meaning of life in religion, stand uncertain at its threshold. They are not words that will be understood and resonate in the minds of people who joined Aum or might have joined Aum.

Let me state this more clearly.

Miyadai's assertion that we should "live the endless everyday slowly" does not move me at all.

I can say without any flattery or irony that as social analysis I think this book of Miyadai's is very well done, but its message doesn't resonate with me. Nowhere in this text can I find a message for someone like me who might indeed have joined Aum. Perhaps people who have been badly mistaken like me will eventually just grow old and disappear. Even after I am dead, however, surely many others will be born with the same sort of psychological characteristics I now possess.

## 2. Approaches Outside of Religion

Osamu Hashimoto's *Religion Isn't Anything To Be Afraid of* doggedly pursues the questions "What is religion?" and "Who are the Japanese people?" while engaging in an analysis of the Aum incident. The intuitive insights scattered throughout this book are superb. I had not read it when I wrote the first chapter of this book, "How to Live in a Post-Religious Age," and submitted it to a journal for publication. Coming across it later I was surprised to find that Hashimoto had emphasized many of the same things I was asserting.

Hashimoto says that what Japanese people need today is to think about things for themselves and to endure the loneliness this brings. This is precisely what I argued in Chapter One.

He says that we are troubled by questions like “Is it really OK for me to just go on like this?” and “Will I never be anything more?”, the answers to which never seem to appear. Since we cannot find the answers to these questions no matter how much we think about them, we start to wonder, “Isn’t there someone somewhere who can come up with an answer for me? Doesn’t this kind of easy answer exist?” And then by hastily looking for this answer in someone else’s words or in some kind of doctrine we move closer to religion.

As we draw closer to religion in this way, we are conscious of the fact that we are unable to understand “faith.” We come to believe that it is because we cannot understand faith that we are unable to find the answers to our questions.

That is why you have thoughts like “What are people who don’t have faith supposed to do?” and “Isn’t faith something that deep down everyone needs to have?” That is why you worry, “Why can’t I understand ‘religion’?” You dimly entertain these sorts of thoughts. But what you are lacking is “thinking about things with your own mind,” and “thinking about things with your own mind” is extraordinarily hard, slow, and inefficient.

What is clear is that what Japanese people need most is not “religion” but the habit of “thinking about things with their own minds”<sup>10</sup>

But to constantly think about things with your own mind is to endure the loneliness of facing the world alone. This is very difficult and painful.

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<sup>10</sup> p. 88.

When you think about things with your own mind, “loneliness” will, as a matter of course, inevitably follow. When this happens, Japanese people immediately start to feel insecure, and they soon begin to think, “I want someone to do something for this insecure me,” and head towards “salvation.” The reason this happens is that these people don’t have the following very simple idea: “‘Thinking about things with your own mind’ means ‘thinking alone,’ so ‘thinking about things with your own mind, and thereby becoming lonely’ is a completely natural state of affairs.” As for why they don’t have this simple idea, it is, I’m quite sure, simply because Japanese people are not accustomed to “thinking about things with their own minds.”<sup>11</sup>

Hashimoto is saying that we have no choice but to think about things with our own minds and endure the loneliness this brings. I said the same thing in Chapter One.

No matter how determined we are to think with our own minds and endure this loneliness, however, because human beings are weak creatures we often succumb to our own weakness and cling to other people. The problem of what to do in this kind of situation remains. One possible approach is to say that this is an obstacle the person in question has to overcome on their own, and the rest of us ought to leave them well enough alone. But I think that some sort of support may indeed be necessary. This must be mutual support, however, not the kind of “I will heal you” support that Yutaka Ozaki

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<sup>11</sup> p. 125.

tried and failed to provide.

While Hashimoto takes the position that religion is fundamentally a relic of the past, he suggests that the possibility of religion providing this kind of support remains.

[This is the case] because there are many people in the world who are thinking, “I want to be able to think about things properly with my own mind,” and if you try to encourage them, in the end this [encouraging] voice will inevitably become a “religion.” We should not forget that religion is this kind of “love that calls out to people.” It is religion because it contains love.<sup>12</sup>

It may well be correct to say that religion is “love that calls out to people.” And I’m sure there are indeed cases in which religion can offer encouragement. But I don’t think a voice that encourages people to think about things with their own minds “will inevitably become a religion.” There must be another way to encourage this. There must be an approach in which people without any faith whatsoever can encourage each other and think about things on their own. That this will inevitably lead to religion is Hashimoto’s pessimistic belief.

Mutual encouragement is always at risk of transforming, before anyone realizes it, into a community of shifted responsibility in which individuals merely drink the nectar by having someone else do their thinking for them. That is why what I am looking for is an approach in which people encourage each other to think with their own minds while guarding against this risk to the greatest extent possible. This

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<sup>12</sup> p. 284.



is precisely what I have been attempting throughout this book.

### 3. The Gap Between Religion and Reality

In the Aum incident, as Shinji Miyadai points out, there is the paradox that people who were “overflowing with conscience” and wanted to do good released sarin gas in an act of indiscriminate terrorism in order to accomplish their good deeds. I think one of the causes that led to such a thing occurring was indeed people who had lost the ability to think about standards of right and wrong with their own minds simply doing Asahara’s bidding. On this point Miyadai’s analysis is correct.

I also think, however, that a “dynamism of blindfolding oneself” may have been at work as a causal factor behind this paradox. In the past I have referred to this blindfolding mechanism that lies submerged within our minds and our society as the “*Ubasute*<sup>13</sup> problem,” but I think the same sort of thing is happening here as well.

It is said that among those who entered Aum, there were many people who became devotees in order to pursue questions like “What is the truth?” “What is right?” and “What is the meaning of life?” As Takashi Tachibana has also speculated, it is reasonable to think that this kind of motivation was strong among the high-ranking members who took part in the incident directly, and that it had been further strengthened by mystical experiences.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Ubasute* was an ancient practice of abandoning elderly people in the wilderness (see my *Invitation to the Study of Life* 『生命学への招待』勁草書房, 1988).

<sup>14</sup> “‘Religion and Murder’ as Seen in Aum” (「オウム真理教に見る『宗教と殺人』』『週刊文春』), July 20, 1995.

Here let us imagine someone earnestly seeking truth, what is right, and the meaning of life. They become a devotee in a religious group that says it will provide answers to these questions. There they are taught a worldview in which such and such is the correct truth, the law of the universe, and the way to live. They buy into this worldview, start studying, undertake spiritual practices, and try to begin a new way of life. In most cases, this kind of worldview demands an ascetic lifestyle, compels obedience to certain commandments, and has as its aim the creation of an ideal person.

But there is a problem that weighs constantly on the devotee who takes this kind of path and seeks to deepen their faith: there is an intractable disparity between their “self as it actually exists here and now” and their “self as it ought to be according to religion.” This is something that occurs in every religion. For example, not only in Aum, but in many variants of Buddhism as well, the taking of a life is doctrinally forbidden. You must not indiscriminately kill living creatures such as animals or insects. Because it forbade even the killing of kitchen cockroaches, the sinks of Aum are said to have been swarming with them. But even as they discipline themselves toward becoming the “self I ought to be,” there is nothing the devotee can do about the “here and now” self who kills mosquitos or other pests, eats meat, and drinks alcohol. They are faced with this gap between the ideal and the actual.

Because the control and surveillance of the senior members is very strict, the regular devotees at the bottom of a religious organization’s hierarchy take this disparity to be the fault of their own inadequacies and continue to harshly discipline themselves and train hard in order to attain their ideal self. When they reach the upper levels of the hierarchy,

however, there are now few people controlling them, and the scrutiny they are under weakens. When this happens, basically there is nothing for them to do but obey the precepts of their religion through their own self-restraint and self-control.

Having reached these upper levels, once again they are confronted by the disparity between their “self as it actually exists here and now” and their “self as it ought to be according to religion.” No matter how high their rank has become, they still have not attained complete enlightenment. Worldly passions and desires are still buried inside them. But since they are bathed in the adoring gaze of lower ranking members who see them as a great person of advanced religious practice, it will not do for them to let themselves behave badly.

At the point where control from above is loosened, the devotee faces the inescapable struggle against their self directly. If they are extremely strong-willed, they will continue to pursue a thorough dialogue with their self, and through interacting with a god or transcendental entity may head unswervingly down a path toward some sort of overcoming of their self that exists here and now. There are presumably other ways, too, of proceeding without dodging the issue.

But here there is also another path to take. This is the path of inventing some kind of mechanism that allows you to “not have to see” your “self that exists here and now” and erecting it around yourself. To give a simpler example, in the distant past Japanese Buddhist sects forbade their monks from drinking alcohol, because to do so was against the tenets of their religion. Being human, however, there were times when even the devout wanted a drink. What was “invented” in this case was a habit of calling alcohol “wisdom water [prajñā-

water]” and drinking it on the sly. They drank it while telling themselves, “It isn’t against the rules because it’s ‘wisdom water.’” At first they might have been reluctant, but with time they got used to it and came to think nothing of it. At some point even the awareness that what they were doing was forbidden presumably faded away. The technique of renaming alcohol “wisdom water” seems to have functioned as a mechanism that allowed them to “not have to see” the fact that they were drinking alcohol. Aum, too, did the same sort of thing. For example, its tenets forbade the killing of living creatures. But as became clear in the investigation following the sarin gas incident, its members had in fact cruelly murdered many people who had gotten in the way of their organization. It seems that at some point they began to refer to murder as “powa” in their own cant. In Aum’s teachings, “powa” means shifting one’s consciousness from a lower world to a higher world,<sup>15</sup> but it also came to refer to the completely different activity of killing people. Here, too, a mechanism of changing the way of referring to something was operating. By calling murder “powa” they escaped seeing the reality that what they were doing was murder and thus something that violated both morality and the law. When this tendency was carried to an extreme, the result was Aum members saying things like “Isn’t it great they got ‘powa-ed’?” while committing acts of indiscriminate killing, as was seen during the sarin gas incident.

In organizations such as Aum that emphasize autonomous religious practice at the level of the individual, mechanisms of “not having to see” are also needed among

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<sup>15</sup> Aum Press(ed.), *Aum Is Now* (『オウム真理教は現在』オウム出版), 1995, p. 39.

ordinary devotees. For example, in many cases they harbored a strong desire for their own beings to become pure, or “white.” Through religious practice they hoped to bleach their dirty selves, which had been sullied by the pollution of reality, and attain a “true self” that was completely pure. And they wanted to reach this state as quickly as possible.

But it is impossible for ordinary people to become completely pure overnight. No matter how much religious practice they accumulate, desire, vice, envy, confusing thoughts, lust for power, the taking of lives, and violations of their religion’s commandments surely continue to swirl within them. While seeming to have departed from their bodies, in fact these things remain stubbornly alive deep inside them, welling up from within when any sort of opening presents itself.

When this polluted self appears, these people directly face the disparity between their “self as it actually exists here and now” and their “self as it ought to be according to religion.” Here what they really ought to do is carefully examine themselves through introspection and deepen their contemplation. When the desire to quickly become pure is too strong, however, they become frustrated with their self that is still stuck at this early stage. Here the kind of blindfolding structure we have been discussing starts to function. They banish the fact that desire, vice, and a lust for power exist within them from their field of view. Even though these things are right in front of their eyes, they pretend they don’t exist. Even though they are plain to see, they act as if they were invisible.

One mechanism employed to this end is the spreading of depictions that “such things actually do not exist.” Aum’s

publications targeting ordinary believers and outsiders are full of images of devotees living lives full of smiles and happiness. There is no desire, wickedness, or betrayal. There is only smiling and contentment. This is what is portrayed. As these publications are intended as bait to lure in people who are outside of the organization, it is perhaps natural that they would not include anything negative. Additionally, however, I think this perception of the current situation as being inundated with happiness is also one sought by the devotees themselves in the deepest part of their psyches. I think this sort of depiction is desired by devotees as a reinforcing mechanism that allows them to “not have to see” the desires, depression, and wickedness inside themselves.

Another mechanism involves attributing something unfavorable that has occurred within a religious organization to the work of those outside the organization. When a large number of people fall ill within the organization, or something emerges to greatly impede its operations, rather than thinking of this as “reaping what they have sown,” they blame everything on an external conspiracy. By doing so they avoid having to see it as their own problem. Aum was indeed inundated with various conspiracy theories, including that of the Freemasons. The structure of attempting to explain problems whose causes lay within themselves as being the result of external conspiracies also functioned as a mechanism of “not having to see” their own sullied or impure aspects. This was further bolstered by their being in a space of religious practice closed off from the outside world. They avoided having to see various things by wrapping themselves in a membrane that filtered the information they received.

By deploying these sorts of mechanisms in layers around

themselves, it becomes possible for people to banish the “self as it actually exists here and now” from sight and superimpose on themselves an image of the “self as it ought to be according to religion.” Ultimately people who take these sorts of measures end up becoming unable to see what they are actually doing in the real world. They become unable to see the social significance of what their own bodies are doing. They become only capable of explaining themselves through a self-justifying way of thinking that sees everything they have done as rational and correct. Their logic is that since they have become the “self I am supposed to be,” there must not be anything wrong with what they have done.

When someone manages to avoid having to see “the self I don’t want to look at” in this way, in what sort of psychological state do they end up? The answer is easy. They experience their self as if it had truly been reborn. The things they had been worrying about in the past seem like illusions. Their worries have been dispelled. Now “there are no worries at all.” This is presumably a very refreshing, pleasant world full of joy; they must feel as though they had shed their confused past self and obtained a new one. There may be some who mistakenly take this to be “enlightenment.” Such is their relief when this burden is removed from their shoulders. This must be a truly pleasant state, and once you have tasted it you must never want to let it go. Seeing only the self you want to see, not having to see the self you don’t want to see, and a community that will allow you to go on doing this. If such a place existed, wouldn’t everyone want to live there?<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Mitsunari Ōizumi also emphasizes this pleasure (Kentarō Takekuma, *Armageddon and Me* [竹熊健太郎『私とハルマゲドン』太田出版], 1995, Ōizumi’s statement on p. 49). Aum senior member Hisako Ishi’s memoirs

#### 4. Our Side's "Blindfolding Structures"

When people enter a state of not having to see the self they don't want to see, they truly cannot see the significance of what their bodies are doing. They don't realize that when they kill someone in a nation governed by the rule of law they are committing murder. They end up falling into the reasoning that "the self I ought to be" has only done "good things," so what could be amiss? In the case of the sarin gas incident the perpetrators had some reservations about what they were doing so I don't think it had reached this level of completeness, but the foundations of their way of thinking must have been something like what I have just described. I think this kind of underlying structure can also be seen in Miyadai's "wandering conscience" paradox.

Incidentally, doesn't the problem I have just described also exist here on this side of society where we ourselves live? Isn't our understanding that this was the pitfall that a special community like Aum fell into a blindfolding structure that conceals a similar problem on our side of this society? I cannot help but think that this is the case.

Isn't it the same here on this side?

Let me give one example that has stuck in my mind.

A few years ago, I attended a symposium on global environmental issues. I had been conducting research on environmental ethics, so I was on stage as a panelist. Various factors that had led to the global environmental crisis were

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also repeatedly describe the pleasure she felt in religious practice (Shoko Asahara, *Mahāyāna Sutras* (麻原彰晃『マハーヤーナ・スートラ』オウム出版), 1988.



introduced. The political, military and economic colonial domination of the countries of the South by the countries of the North formed the backdrop. On top of this, developed countries had spilled the polluted materials that accompanied their industrialization beyond the areas where their own citizens lived. These harmful substances had diffused, passing through the Earth's complex network of substance circulation, and the damage they caused had spread to every corner of the globe. The global environmental crisis is a crisis that has already gone beyond national borders. Every individual must therefore employ for themselves an imagination that goes beyond the interests of the area in which they live. For this reason, too, it is necessary to establish an environmental ethics in which the Earth belongs to all of humanity, including the people of future generations.

The discussion was proceeding along these lines.

At the time I had some doubts about this "environmental ethics" way of thinking, and I wasn't able to completely go along with this line of argument. When we say these things, how are we supposed to deal with the desires of the people living here and now? I had these kinds of doubts. So I put up my hand and said the following. "We who are living right now, whatever we may say, want to live in comfort and pleasure. Isn't that true of the majority of us? What is the point of preaching an ethics of living simply to such people?"

A famous university professor responded to my comment. "I understand what you are trying to say. But being pessimistic like that won't change the situation. There must be something we can do here and now. Starting right now, even if it's only a little at a time, can't we start doing things like working to reduce the energy we use and throwing away

less garbage? Isn't it this kind of accumulation of small things that is important?"

I had no reply to this. All I could do was back down. I thought that what he had said was indeed correct. The rest of the discussion, too, then moved on in the direction of his remarks.

After the symposium had ended, I was waiting for the bus. The professor who had responded to me in the discussion session approached me and we chatted for a bit. He took a cigarette out of his pocket and lit it. "Wow," I thought, "this professor smokes even though he's an ecologist." The bus came. The people who had been waiting walked toward the boarding area. The professor and I also took a step forward. I will never forget what he did next. He dropped the lit cigarette at his feet, stubbed it out with the bottom of his shoe, and pushed it through a hole in the sewer grate. In that instant I was frozen, unable to move. I could only stare at everything he was doing and then at the opening in the sewer grate that is normally used to drain rainwater. What had he been saying just now at the symposium? Hadn't he said we should start right away by throwing away less garbage, and gradually, even if only a little at a time, accumulate positive changes? Saying this, hadn't he received heartfelt agreement from everyone in attendance? How could this same man have just kicked his cigarette butt into a sewer grate right in front of my eyes as though it were the most natural thing in the world? What sort of person was this? What had I just seen?

When it comes right down to it, he was someone who never noticed the significance of what he had done. That is all I can think. He never noticed the enormous contradiction between his assertion that we should save energy, reduce

garbage, and accumulate these sorts of actions a little bit at a time and his actual conduct of tossing his cigarette butt into the sewer. He may even have been completely unaware of the fact that had tossed his butt away after finishing a cigarette. He may have had no awareness whatsoever of what his own body was doing. As he was unconsciously flicking his butt into the gutter, in his mind he may well have been absorbed in formulating an action plan to solve an environmental problem.

This is just my supposition, but since he was constantly telling other people that we have to protect the environment, the existence of a self that did the opposite must have been inconvenient for him. In such situations, rather than more bothersome options such as not smoking outside or carrying around an ashtray, he presumably chose the easier option of eliminating all awareness of his own actions when he did such things. He thereby managed to avoid having to see that he was littering the street with his own cigarette butts. The existence of this littering self was erased from his world. It must have made things very easy for him. This way he could devote all of his energy to solving environmental problems.

What, I would like to ask, is the difference between people who commit acts of indiscriminate terrorism and say, "Isn't it great they got 'powa-ed'?" and this professor? When it comes to this kind of structure, aren't they the same?

I suspect that I myself, and you who are reading this book, are also caught up in the same kind of structure without knowing it. I can see no reason to think we are exceptions.

## 5. What Feminism Brought to the Fore

This is a very important point, so let us examine it a bit

more deeply.

Take, for example, what is referred to as the “women’s movement” or “feminism,” a movement that addresses true equality, fairness, and symbiosis between men and women in society, and seeks to effect social change. There are very few people who would say they oppose equality between men and women. But when you look at what is actually happening in our society you see things like gender discrimination in wages, sexual harassment in the workplace, and terrible employment discrimination. There is nobody who is unaware of this difference between what is proclaimed and the actual situation.

Feminists are doing things to try to close this gap. They point out what is wrong with the social structures that give rise to discrimination, protest against the unfairness of preconceptions that say, “This is how women should be,” and blow the whistle on actual discrimination and sexual violence. Over and over again, they call out the fact that this gap between men and women not only exists in cases that are easy to see, such as employment discrimination and rape, but is constantly being reinforced by the words, attitudes, and customs of men found in our daily lives and in our workplaces. They have asserted that the structure of society as a whole won’t change unless we make changes in the current state of affairs at the level of this sort of subtle, everyday behavior.

I think these women’s way of thinking is very persuasive. The subtle problematic behaviors that men unconsciously engage in towards women in daily life are, from the male side, the most difficult to see. Just like the professor I mentioned earlier was unable to see the significance of dropping cigarette butts in the street, what women find unpleasant about men

and society in their daily lives, what makes them frustrated and angry, is very difficult for men to see.

Here is an example.

There is a male professor who is always proclaiming the need for true equality between men and women. He is a self-described ally of feminists. He believes that all discrimination in society should be eradicated, and that we must ensure that women have the same rights as men in all cases. When he hears there has been sexual harassment he gets as angry as if it had happened to him. This professor interacts with female university students in his classes and talks to them about feminism.

“Men and women must be equal, so I want you to have the self-confidence to speak up and give your own opinions,” he says. “You mustn’t go on putting up with these problems in silence, because one step at a time you women can change society by asserting yourselves. I want you to think this way even in this class. Up until now the male students have taken part in our discussions enthusiastically, and the female students have not said very much at all. But I’m sure there must be many things you want to say. Aren’t there? If so, it’s OK to start expressing yourself.”

Then the class begins. Because of what the professor said, the female students talk much more than usual. Male and female students speak one after the other, and the professor adds comments and criticisms to what they have said. As this continues, however, the amount of talking being done by the female students decreases noticeably. The professor doesn’t know why this is happening.

What the professor couldn’t see was what the “body language” of his facial expressions and gestures was

communicating when his female students were talking. At first his female students were enticed to speak more, but they couldn't help sensing with their entire bodies the unvoiced "discomfort" that was evident in his expression and response when they made their own assertions. That is why they found it increasingly difficult to speak and eventually stopped talking altogether.

The professor is completely unable to see that his body language is sending his female students exactly the opposite message of his verbal assertions.

Insofar as he too is unaware of the significance of what his own body is actually doing, this professor is the same as the one who tossed his cigarette butt into the drain.

Instances of this sort of thing can presumably be found all around us if we look for them. Women, too, can sometimes become unable to see something important because of their self-consciousness that they are feminists. This can be seen in cases such as those in which a woman shifts the blame for an unhappy state of affairs arising from her own personal traits onto the structure of male domination. There are cases in which even feminism functions as a mechanism to avoid having to see something. This is thus a problem for both men and women, for you and I, for each one of us living in this time and place.

## 6. The True Significance of the Aum Incident

Feminism teaches us that the history of humanity up to this point has been a history of the domination of women by men on various levels. Of course, as women too can be said to have supported this domination from the other side, in this

sense they are complicit in this state of affairs, but their supporting this domination was the result of there being no other way for them to survive or enjoy a certain standard of living.

Within modern societies that have become quite wealthy, women have begun to voice a desire to change these sorts of male-dominated social structures. Since contemporary society rejects inequality based on sex as a concept, it cannot ignore the calls of these women. Men, too, must support equality and fairness between men and women on a conceptual level. As everyone knows about the unfair treatment to which women are subjected in Japanese society, displaying an understanding of the feminism that calls for reform in this society gives one the air of a liberal intellectual. As feminist discourse has become more common in the mass media, the number of male scholars who include feminism in their area of study has increased.

When a man first encounters feminism, he presumably understands it as follows. "Up until now society has operated with men dominating women, but from now on we must change this society into one in which men and women maintain relationships of true equality. Feminism is seeking this kind of society and working towards creating it."

This assertion in quotation marks is indeed what feminism has said. Broadly speaking it is not mistaken. Men are therefore correct to understand this sort of thing to be the central claim of feminism.

What is important, however, is that this assertion in quotation marks is not all there is to feminism. Only half of what feminism asserts is expressed in this statement.

Why is this the case? Because the assertion feminism

wants to make is the kind of assertion that can only be partially expressed in the form of a statement in quotation marks.

So what is the other half of what feminism asserts that remains hidden behind this statement? *It is asking you who have understood what is stated in quotation marks how you are going to actually transform your relationships with the women around you from this moment onward.* This is what is most difficult to communicate to men. The reason it is so difficult is that this is the message men are most reluctant to face. That is why it is difficult to get it across to them.

Some of the male intellectuals and scholars who don't want to face this message actively display an understanding of feminist thought, study it, and attempt to engage in discourse on it. By doing so they expect that they can together delude themselves into believing that the proposition contained in quotation marks above is all that feminism is asking. The more a man wants to avoid facing feminism's other message, the more he tries to demonstrate his understanding of its "propositional content." We must not lose sight of the paradox that arises here.

Let me say it again. The more a man wants to avoid changing his actual behavior starting right now, the more he supports and tries to understand the "discourse" of feminism.

Men who are always proclaiming in front of others, "Just as feminism says, up until now men have dominated women, but going forward we must create a society in which men and women can co-exist equally," do you really understand the meaning of what you are saying? Feminism does not only assert that we must understand this kind of "proposition." What feminism wants more than anything is to ask how you



who have accepted this “proposition” are going to change your relationships with the women around you from this moment onward. Feminism’s query is pointed at you and no one else. Can you truly stand face to face with it? Are you really prepared to change the way you are, starting right now? This is what the movement called “feminism” is truly asking.

The sense of distrust and irritation shown by women towards men who display an understanding of feminism comes from their having encountered, over and over again, men who, while they may understand the “propositions” of feminism, make no changes in their actual behavior or attitude. This is not equivalent to having adopted feminism.

As you have probably noticed, when I say “you” or “men,” I mean men who are reading this book right now. And I mean me, the man who is writing it, too. To encounter feminism is to get “caught up” in feminism. To get caught up and tossed around, and to be conscious of yourself being tossed around. Having simply “understood” does not mean you have encountered feminism. Displaying an understanding of feminism precisely because you don’t want to change is an awful attitude to take.

In the sense that it brings this subterfuge to the fore, feminism is truly great. (So far I have given one example involving a scholar throwing away his cigarette butts and another involving a self-described “feminist” man. I suspect that among the women reading this there will be many who feel that the disingenuous attitude adopted by men towards women is not so simple. I think they are right. These two examples made a particularly strong impression on me, but for women in particular they may be no more than the sort of thing they see every day. I plan to address this kind of gap

between the sexes in my next book.)

This sort of thing is not limited to feminism and environmentalism. Indeed, I think the same thing confronts us when we consider the Aum incident.

To the critics who look at the thoughts and actions of Aum devotees and make various critiques of them from a secure and lofty perch, I want to shout at the top of my voice, "Do you understand the real issue the Aum incident is pointing out to us?" Its essence is not questions such as whether Aum is really a religion, or what we should think about the relationship between religion and evil. The fundamental question posed by the Aum incident is this: "How are you, someone who has come face to face with Aum, going to live in this society starting right now?"

The question Aum puts to us is not "What is Aum?" What it asks us is "Who are you who have witnessed Aum, and how are you going to live from now on?"

A large segment of devotees, unable to find meaning in living within this dirty society, joined Aum seeking "absolute truth," their "true self," and the "meaning of life." As a result of looking for such answers, some of the leaders themselves carried out acts of indiscriminate terrorism.

The question put to us by the Aum incident is therefore as follows.

"We leading devotees of Aum chose a way of life in which we pursued absolute truth, our true selves, and the meaning of life. And we failed. This failure was exposed to you in its entirety. So now we would like to ask you. What exactly is it that you are seeking as you live within this thoroughly sullied society? What is it that you think is the truth, what is it that you think is your true self, in what do you find the meaning of

life as you live your lives day in and day out? This is what we want you to tell us. Rather than criticize us from on high, we want you to show us your own view of the truth, your own view of life, your own way of living. If you have never considered such questions, take the Aum incident as an opportunity to do so and tell us even a little bit about the way of living and direction you are going to take going forward as you contemplate your own life and death from now on. We failed. But now we are turning to you and asking you this with our entire beings. We want to say it one more time. All of you who have said this or that about Aum, how are you going to live your own lives in this post-religious era? What is the meaning of life to you? We want you to look at this directly and raise your voices on it.”

I think this is the fundamental question that Aum is putting to us. And this book is my earnest response.

Thus far I have been considering this question while taking the Aum incident, feminism, and ecology as my subject matter. I think I can also add bioethics to this, because the structures of “not having to see” I have been discussing, and the structures in which the behavior of those who are thinking about these problems themselves is being called into question, can also be seen in the difficult problems of the present era concerning brain death, organ transplantation, and abortion. When it comes to organ transplantation, there are discourse structures that conceal the desires of those who receive transplants,<sup>17</sup> and concerning abortion and contraception, too, the discussion should immediately come back to what is to be done in regard to sexual intercourse from now on.

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<sup>17</sup> See my *Reconsidering the View of Life* (『生命観を問いなおす』ちくま新書), 1994.

I therefore think it is necessary to simultaneously consider at least these four topics of bioethics, environmental ethics, new religions, and feminism. This is why I have often mentioned these four topics in the process of formulating “life studies.”

## 7. Opening Yourself Up to “Mystery”

Why have “blindfolding structures” that allow us to avoid seeing what we don’t want to see come into being? At their foundation there is presumably an intractable natural inclination to not see what we don’t want to see. To go on looking at what we don’t want to see is indeed painful. It is easier if we don’t have to look. A mentality of wanting to take the easier path exists in each of us.

In addition, blindfolding structures also emerge when the estrangement between the “self as it actually exists here and now” and the “ideal self as it ought to exist” becomes too severe. I am doing everything I can to become my ideal self, but no matter how hard I try I never reach my goal. The gap between this ideal self and my actual self as it exists now is very painful. In such cases, it is not surprising that a subconscious desire to not see what actually exists emerges.

I think we are in fact bound by many blindfolding structures. We are no doubt tied up in many layers of blindfolding structures of which we are unaware. I myself have for many years been bound by a blindfolding structure that caused me to ignore the voices of feminism. I am therefore not only talking about other people.

When someone is bound by a blindfolding structure, they become unable to see what their true self is like. The ecologist

who threw his cigarette butts on the ground had clearly lost sight of what his true self was. If we want to pursue our true selves, we must therefore make a continuous effort to bring blindfolding structures into view and confront them. We must constantly endeavor to keep our eyes open to them while deceiving our inclination to become comfortable.

Your “true self” is not obtained by closing your eyes and making yourself “completely white.” Your “true self” is something that emerges each time you engage in the process of opening your eyes and looking unflinchingly at what you don’t want to see.

This is an important point, so let me repeat it.

There is a way of thinking in which my “true self” is something that shines like a star somewhere far above my head, a destination I will reach after lengthy religious training or devotion, but this view is mistaken. Instead, in the midst of the process of looking at my self that exists right now in a form I don’t want to see while enduring the suffering this causes, my “true self” arises each time I do this as the unified whole of the self I discover there and the self that is engaged in looking at it.

But discovering the blindfolding structures by which I am blinkered and removing them through my own efforts alone is an extremely difficult task. The shape of my own self is the most difficult thing for me to see. This can best be seen by looking through another person’s eyes. But a complete stranger won’t pay attention to me or engage with me. It is only the small number of people to whom I am important who will engage with me and teach me about the self I do not want to see. Or the small number of people who hate me and want to somehow bring me down. These are the only sorts of people

who will thrust the blindfolding structures by which I am blinkered in front of my face and make me see them.

Encountering the blindfolding structures in which I am blinkered is therefore something that happens in the course of my engaging in deep, intense interactions with other people. In some cases I may have them shoved violently in my face by another person, and in other cases I may engage with another person and in doing so discover them by myself. In Chapter Two I said that when something foreign intrudes from the outside it can give you an opportunity to open your eyes, and this is precisely what I meant. When I engage in a foreign and unpleasant interaction with another person, I encounter what blindfolds me.

The three defining characteristics of a blindfolding structure are as follows.

First, it is something discovered in the course of the personal, everyday movements of my body or my normal, routine ways of thinking. It is in these sorts of ordinary, subtle workings of my body and mind that traces of what binds me most deeply appear. In order to face what is binding me, it is therefore necessary to carefully examine and bring to light, one by one, the most personal aspects of how I act, what I think, and what words I use. What are the things I am doing or saying that run counter to, or bear no relation to, my own consciousness? I must acknowledge each of them in turn.

Second, discovering a blindfolding structure is very painful. Discovering it is painful, facing it directly is painful, and overcoming it is painful. It can be so painful I might think it would be better to go back to how things were before. This is the aspect of my self I want to avoid seeing the most, so having it revealed is inevitably going to be painful. We must

understand this point clearly. Facing this kind of thing directly is difficult for everyone. If we forget this we will end up back where we started.

We must also be aware that discovering these structures takes time. They are not so easy to find. I am attempting to reverse my own efforts at concealment and uncover something I myself have been hiding, so it will certainly take time. It may take a very long time to get from having a vague notion of what I have been concealing from myself to being able to clearly acknowledge it. After I discover it, it may take an even longer time before I am able to work up the resolve to attempt to overcome it by myself. What is important is to be forgiving with myself about the fact that this takes time. I discover these things slowly, and I change slowly. This is fine, because it is wanting to do something right away, to reach enlightenment quickly, that gives rise to these kinds of blindfolding structures. We must go at our own pace, and we must be forgiving of each other in this regard.

Third, after I have discovered a blindfolding structure and come face to face with the true figure of my self, I have no choice but to transform my self. I must decide for myself how to deal with the “figure of my self I don’t want to see” that becomes visible when the blindfolding structure is removed. Choosing not to see, too, is indeed one way of dealing with this situation. But if I believe that after having seen this true figure there is no going back to the way things were before, only one option remains. I must change the structure of my self so that the “self I don’t want to see” doesn’t end up getting hidden in the world below my consciousness. This may involve transforming the “self I don’t want to see” into something else through some kind of effort, or transforming myself so that I

can continue to look directly at the “self I don’t want to see” and engage in dialogue with it. In either case, I must change my self in a deep sense.

Changing my self in this way inevitably requires interacting with other people. Seeing what I don’t want to see and changing a self that does not want to change is arduous and difficult to endure. To bear such a burden and press forward on my own is an extraordinarily difficult task. I therefore want to have a small number of important people who can support me, even if only for a moment, when I feel I am about to be crushed under the weight of this burden. I also want to hear inspiring and encouraging words from other people far away who are carrying the same sort of burden and attempting to walk the same sort of path. I don’t want a healing community of the kind Yutaka Ozaki tried to build. Instead, what I want is voices of encouragement from far away and love from close by. And I too will keep on hurling my message with all of my strength to anonymous others who are struggling against themselves far away.

What is needed right now is therefore the “courage” to set out down this sort of path.

Let me say it once more.

To go on living in this world people must bear burdens they cannot carry on their own. There are times when we feel as though this weight is going to crush us as we struggle to stand on our own two feet. At such times we wish for someone who could share our burden or carry it for us.

But it is impossible for someone to take on the burden another person is carrying directly. That burden must be carried by that other person themselves until the very end. In this sense I think that people are completely isolated or cut off



from one another.

But when you who are carrying this kind of burden are struggling to deal with it on your own, there are things I can do to assist you in your struggle from the sidelines. Without shouldering your burden for you directly, I can stand beside you and support you as you carry it yourself.

I want to look for ways to provide this kind of support.

Of course, the situation in which you support someone nearby with whom you have a close relationship is different from that in which you support someone far away whom you don't know. Acknowledging these differences is very important.

Assistance provided in such a way that I take responsibility for your life is only possible in the case of the small number of other people I encounter in an inevitable way.

In the case of other people, I cannot and must not support them in a way in which I take responsibility for their lives. If I take on other people beyond my capacity, I will only end up destroying myself.

But I am not saying that we should coldly ignore these other people. Instead, I want to look for a way to encourage them and give them strength from a distance. Surely there must be a way of connecting people in which the words and voice I send out can reach a suffering person unknown to me and provide even a small amount of support to lighten the load that person is carrying, just like when the words of someone I don't know reach me and save me.<sup>18</sup>

Let me look back on what I have said thus far.

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<sup>18</sup> Regarding social welfare, the reformation of policy and social systems is needed. See Masahiro Morioka (ed.) *A Study of Interdependence* (森岡正博編著『「ささえあい」の人間学』法蔵館, 1994).

The meaning of life cannot be made clear by science. But taking the path of faith is also impossible. Swinging back and forth between science and religion, some of us are unable to belong to either, but neither are we able to bury ourselves in this society as it exists and spend our days just enjoying ourselves. Isn't it important to create a network of mutual support for those of us who find ourselves in this situation so that we can better seek the meaning of our own lives using our own eyes, minds, bodies and words?

To think exhaustively using your own eyes and mind means that in the end you must confront your own "solitude" by yourself. To confront your own solitude is extremely painful. It might be reasonable for you to cling to answers given by someone else. But at such times I hope you have the courage to hold out to the very end, think things through with your own eyes and mind, and continue pursuing the answer.

We are all inevitably burdened with worldly desires and evil. What stands in the way of seeking the meaning of life are these unavoidable worldly desires that permeate our bodies and the weakness that makes it impossible to look directly at them. This is true of everyone. Unless they are born a saint, everyone suffers from these problems. So I hope you will take just a little bit of courage and look directly at your own fallibility, worldly desires, and evil. I hope you become able to see these things and begin by accepting the existence of your self just as it is. I hope that you take this as your starting point.

Sometimes when I am in a world I think is fine just as it is, a foreign entity from the outside invades this world and tries to destroy it. This invader may be an enemy who intrudes on my world with ill intent, or an ally who does so out of love. When something comes to destroy your world from the

outside, you should face it directly, and in the process of this confrontation you should try scrutinizing and relativizing yourself and your world from an external perspective. This too should be undertaken using your own eyes and mind. I want you to have this kind of courage. The result of this may be that the invader retreats, or it may be that you collapse. Whatever the outcome, I want you to make this kind of attempt. This may amount to confronting the “father” in your mind and killing him, but isn’t it worth doing nonetheless? For those of you who grew up in a family without a father who was a strong presence, isn’t your “father killing” still unfinished? I hope by engaging in such efforts you can find your self.

When a charismatic figure appears, it is very easy to create a healing community of shifted responsibility centered on this figure in which this figure is expected to provide the ultimate answers. But this stops everyone else from thinking, and makes whatever comes out of this community, good or bad, the responsibility of this charismatic leader. It also binds those who take part in it in layer upon layer of blindfolding structures. It does indeed feel good to be inside such a community and continue drinking its sweet nectar. But is feeling good really what you are looking for? Is feeling good the most important thing in life? I want you to have the courage to reexamine the pleasure in which you are immersed and think about how this pleasure is created.

When you have noticed a blindfolding structure in which you are bound, and somewhere inside yourself realized that you have to change, how wonderful would it be to have the courage to resolve to try, at your own pace, to actually make this change. When people are obtaining pleasure or have vested interests they generally don’t try to change. How great

it would be to have the courage to transform, little by little and with tears in your eyes, this self that feels as though it is shackled to a tremendous weight.

I cannot sustain this kind of courage on my own. I always lose heart. While trying to change, before I know it, I have slipped back to where I started. Having courage is painful and tiring, and sometimes I become so desperate I want to give up my attempt. There are even times when, in reaction to all of the efforts I have made so far, I intentionally do the very thing I should have avoided most. No matter how far I go, my own weakness will not disappear. I cannot overcome this self who is incapable of holding on to his courage. That is who I am.

So when I am at risk of giving up, I want you to encourage me and bolster my strength so that I can somehow manage to hold on to my courage. With this kind of network of people urging each other to have courage from a suitable and modest distance, even I may be able to confront my self. I may be able to maintain the courage to face myself just the slightest bit longer than usual. And I may be able to offer words of encouragement to others.

This is what I wanted to say in this book. It is a message for you, and also words of encouragement for me, its author.

Finally, there is one more thing I must say.

I have said that a network is needed. But this network itself must not be closed off from what is outside it. A network of mutual encouragement in the pursuit of the meaning of life with one's own eyes and mind must not be closed off from people or communities that do not live this way. Instead of these people who share the same goal narcissistically licking each other's wounds, it is essential that each one of them constantly engage in communication and meaningful

confrontation with people outside of this network.

This is important, so let me say it one more time.

People who attempt to think with their own eyes and mind must not close themselves off from others. They must maintain as much contact as possible with people who choose to live differently. They must constantly try to engage in the state of “non-understanding” (neither side being able to understand the other at all) that will inevitably arise between themselves and these people who live in other ways. It is important not to run away from the “impossibility of understanding.” Through the “impossibility of understanding,” they must go on trying to discover both their own true self and the true self of the people with whom they are interacting.

Of course, it is a desire to understand another person that gives rise to communication. Supported by a desire for love and understanding, I set out into the sea of communication. As a result, through dialogue and collision with other people, what had been impossible to understand becomes comprehensible. When this happens, it is a tremendous achievement.

Afterwards, however, I must further open myself up to a new impossibility of understanding. In this way I am always opening myself up to the “impossibility of understanding” and “mystery.”

What I need in order to continue looking for my “true self” is not “understanding” but “mystery.” To live an impossibility of understanding; this is to open oneself up to “mystery” and strive to receive the “voice of the soul” that mystery sends. To put it another way, I think this is the meaning of eros. What Aum was lacking was this kind of eros.

I said that when we encounter a foreign substance from the outside, or become aware of a blindfolding structure, it becomes necessary for us to transform ourselves. But if I change myself in this most fundamental place, won't I lose the part of myself that is most distinctly me? Won't this lead to a breakdown of self-identity? Won't I jump into a completely different me? These sorts of doubts may well arise.

But I don't share them.

In order to continue being me, I must go on changing.

In order to continue being a me who seeks the meaning of life and his true self, I must go on changing my current self. What is needed for me now, therefore, is the courage to continue being me, and the courage to go on changing myself toward this end.

Changing myself does not mean that I change everything about myself at once.

To continue being me is to turn toward the world and other people and change myself, while protecting what is most important to me.

I continue to change at my own pace and rhythm while protecting what is most important to me. While confronting solitude, suffering and struggling to find the meaning of life, and ceaselessly posing the question "What is my true self?" I will live this short life to the fullest.

In order to continue being me, I will go on changing myself at my own pace.

In this process of transformation, I need people to give me strength, sometimes from so close they are inside me, sometimes from as far away as a distant planet, at times intensely and at times with moderation. To be me, I need you. I want a you with whom I can exchange, from a distance at

which we will never carry each other's weight, messages of the soul, and together with whom I can engage in mutual support of each other's solitude and courage.

And when you are about to fall into the dark nebula of your own solitude, I want to be able to throw you a slender thread from far away. If I do so you may be able to gather together threads from several people, including me, and climb out of this abyss of despair.

I am searching for an approach in which, within a nebula in which no bearings can be taken, each of us continues to climb toward their own self.

Have I perhaps overemphasized constantly running toward oneself?

Maybe I have.

At the same time, however, I have tried to encourage you to run at your own pace.

Running at your own pace means taking a long view and moving forward as a whole while taking appropriate breaks and steps backward to avoid exceeding your limits and running yourself into the ground. I want you to clearly understand this. If you continue running beyond your limits, you will either exhaust yourself and collapse, or, tormented by the gap between your "self as it is now" and your "self as it ought to be," cover yourself in blindfolding structures as you run.

Run at your own pace. Don't dwell on "not getting results" and blame this on other people or yourself.

Human beings, after all, cannot change overnight. In the midst of trying over and over again, suddenly you transform. When the time to change comes, it happens smoothly and naturally. Until then you must wait with perseverance.

There is nothing to be done about the frustration we feel that the time to change has not yet arrived. When we succumb to this frustration and the desire to change quickly, before we know it we have fallen into a blindfolding structure that allows us to avoid seeing our “self that does not change.”

I have no idea what comes next, so I will stop writing here. What happens now is directly connected to how I live my life from this point onward, and to how you, the reader who has made it to the end of this book, choose to live your own life starting now.



## AFTERWORD

This book ends here, but I'm sure there are still countless questions swirling in your head.

For example, I've said that you should think things through right to the end with your own eyes and mind, but there are many people in this world who cannot bear this kind of burden and want to have someone else give them an answer or to resolve their problems by clinging to another person. What should these people do? Am I forcing them to think things through right to the end with their own eyes and mind?

To begin with, I would respond as follows.

I am not trying to force or coerce those who want to choose such options to think things through with their own eyes and mind. I don't have any answers when it comes to what they ought to do. This book of mine cannot provide them with any kind of active guidance. This is the limit of this book. It is a boundary within which I must remain. Instead, as I said in Chapter Four, I will continue to engage in communication with these people.

Have I tried to force someone else to do something, or preached some kind of norm, anywhere in this book? Haven't I only talked about my own decision to live my life a certain way, and imagined the sort of person I think might respond to this message?

Here is something else readers may have doubts about.

In this book I have said that there needs to be a network through which people who are looking for the “meaning of life” and their “true self” in solitude can support each other from afar. But what this network would be like in concrete terms is not clear. People who agree with my message may be left wondering what exactly they are supposed to do.

This is another question to which at the moment I have no answer. I frankly confess this. While I am certain this is the right direction, I don’t know what concrete steps should be taken. I would therefore like to know what sorts of things you who have read this book all the way to the end are thinking. I would like us to think together about what might be possible when it comes to this kind of network. I cannot carry you directly. There must be some way to pluralistically distribute this load or burden so that we can support each other. The formation of this network involves neither creating cultural centers, holding regular get-togethers, forming fan clubs, establishing secret societies, nor, needless to say, founding an academic society or giving lectures. The kind of network I am talking about has nothing to do with “people gathering at a certain place.” Instead, what is really needed is a way of connecting people so that the messages of their souls are carried to those who are truly seeking them through something like the mesh of a net.

There are times when words transmitted by someone I don’t know at all give me existential support. These might be the words of an anonymous person living in a distant place or of someone who lived more than a hundred years ago. Can we not lace together, in the manner of simultaneous occurrences, a way of connecting of this sort? I would like to offer a name for this kind of movement of words: “Life studies.”

I am currently publishing a series of essays entitled “An Introduction to Contemporary Life Studies” in the journal *Buddhism*.<sup>1</sup> I had been planning to revise these extensively and publish them as a “life studies” series. As it turns out, I decided to write *How to Live in a Post-Religious Age*, and I’ve come to think of this book as the first title in this “life studies” series. I would thus like to consider this book “Life Studies - Volume One.” It is full of the fundamental ideas of life studies. In the succeeding volumes I hope to take these ideas to the next level.

Early in the summer of 1995, Mr. Hiroshi Nakajima from Hōzōkan asked me to write a two-thousand word essay on the topic of Aum for a special volume of the journal *Buddhism*. My manuscript grew quite long and was eventually published under the title “How to Live in a Post-Religious Age” in *Buddhism Special Volume No. 8* (January, 1996). What was supposed to be a two-thousand word essay turned into a forty-two-thousand word manuscript, something that I’m afraid caused considerable difficulty for Mr. Nakajima. Chapter One of this book is a revised version of this essay. Section Seven of the essay, in particular, was completely rewritten.

I had many valuable experiences during the time I was writing this book.

Most valuable among them was being able to pull a trauma that been lying deep at the bottom of my mind up into my consciousness and actually experience this dramatic process with my whole being.

From April when Mr. Murai was killed until August when

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<sup>1</sup> 『仏教』.

I decided to write this book, I had been trying my best to forget about Aum. I wanted to keep it out of my mind because this incident was an incomparably harsh reminder of various events in my twenties that I had buried deep in my mind and hoped never to think of again. During this period, the part of me that didn't want to remember these things was fiercely battling with another part of me that wanted to recall and resolve them.

In August I was laid up with an illness, and when my body began to recover, the battle finally ended. In the process of getting over this physical illness, I came to realize that I was allowed to forgive the illness of my mind as it was, which I had long been suppressing in a deep layer of my consciousness. As the veil of my mind slid up, I was able to see everything I had to write next.

It took four months for me to pull the reason I had to write about Aum out of the depths of my mind. This fact was a fresh shock for me. Having engaged in this work, I am now able to clearly see why I must construct "life studies." This book will be a turning point for me.

December 1995, Kyoto.

## AFTERWORD — 2019

### 1.

Twenty-four years have passed since the first edition of this book was published. The founder and twelve leaders of Aum have been executed and are no longer in this world. This book came out when the memory of the sarin subway attacks was fresh and was widely read. With the passage of time, however, people's interest in the Aum incident has faded, and it has gradually disappeared from bookstore shelves.

People seem to have been reminded of this incident when the executions took place in July of 2018. Special programs were aired on television, and news coverage from the original incident was played over and over again. Hearing an expert on a TV program say something to the effect of, "In the end we weren't able to get to the bottom of what the Aum incident was," I thought to myself, "That's wrong." There had been a steady accumulation of accounts of the trials, writings by former members, interviews of those involved, and academic research based on these materials. And there was this book of mine, which can be considered a kind of "first person" research. Copies of this text, however, had become quite hard to find.

Later on, I became acquainted with Michiyo Toshiro, an editor at Hōzōkan, and she agreed to reissue a complete

edition of this book. For this reissue, I wrote a new “Foreword to the Complete Edition” and this “Afterword—2019.” In places I have made revisions to the wording of the original text, but the gist of its content remains unchanged. The publication of this complete edition has made it available to readers who are too young to have been aware of the incident at the time. No doubt there will be new discoveries. The questions of what the Aum incident was and who we are as people who must live in this era are sure to reemerge with fresh urgency.

It is also possible to consider Aum within the context of global “terrorism,” because the starting point of other terrorists who engage in mass murder in the name of religion must also be the search for “the meaning of life.” This book can perhaps also be read as a clue to understanding these actors from the inside who have been lumped together as “religious terrorists.” Michel Wieviorka, for example, said the following in a discussion with Satoshi Ukai. “Frustrated in their search for the meaning of life, young people head to Syria on a journey of initiation. [...] they participate in jihad to find meaning in their lives. What is important is that when they lose sight of their identity and attempt to construct a new identity they seek meaning in an extreme form, and this leads to terrorism.”<sup>1</sup> The pattern of behavior of young people who entered Aum looking for the meaning of life is perhaps being repeated in many places around the world. It is even possible that the Aum incident was not a specifically Japanese event but rather something that occurred inevitably as part of a larger global trend at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. This is suggested by many incidents involving

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<sup>1</sup> 『週刊読書人』 March 4, 2016, p. 1. Translated from the original Japanese.

cult groups with apocalyptic ideology that have occurred around the world.

After the publication of the first edition of this book, two books of interviews by Haruki Murakami were published and received a lot of attention: *Underground* and *At the Appointed Place*.<sup>2</sup>

In the first volume, *Underground*, Murakami and his team conduct interviews with victims of the sarin subway attack and their family members, and their efforts produce a valuable work that succeeds in creating a true-to-life portrait of these victims who tend to remain hidden in the shadow of the incident. Murakami challenges the dichotomy that the world of Aum is evil and a transgressor while the world on our side is righteous and a victim. In truth both worlds are very similar. Murakami says, “Is this not, in a sense, a shadowy region within ourselves (an underground) we avoid looking at directly and, consciously or unconsciously, expel from the phase of reality?”<sup>3</sup> There is something in this stance of trying to find fundamental commonalities between Aum’s world and our society that resonates with this book, *How to Live in a Post-Religious Age*.

The second volume, *At the Appointed Place*, presents interviews with former and current believers in Aum. Apart from one (Hidetoshi Takahashi), they were not leaders of Aum, and in this sense the text is a unique resource. Murakami

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<sup>2</sup> 村上春樹『アンダーグラウンド』講談社文庫 1997, 『約束された場所で』文春文庫 1998. An English translation combining both volumes was published in 2000 (*Underground*, translated by Alfred Birnbaum and Philip Gabriel, The Harvill Press/Vintage International).

<sup>3</sup> Page 744 of the Japanese edition, translated here by Robert Chapeskie. The same passage is found on p. 229 of the English edition of this text cited above.

points out that elite scientists joined Aum because they wanted to use their expertise “for a more deeply meaningful purpose” and writes that within our social system they “could not help having profound doubts about the meaning of their own existence being pointlessly ground down.”<sup>4</sup>

While I agree with Murakami’s analysis in many respects, it seems to have a major limitation. His perspective is always that of an onlooker, and lacks the pressing sense that he himself could very well have ended up in Aum. Moreover, in these two volumes the thoughts of Aum’s leaders who carried out the attacks are not elucidated, and what was going on in their minds remains a blank spot.

The study of Aum then continued, resulting in works such as Robert J. Lifton’s *Destroying the World to Save It*<sup>5</sup> and Hiromi Shimada’s *Aum: How Did Religion Create Terrorism?*<sup>6</sup> These are essential reading to understand the incident as a whole. What is not cultivated even in these scholarly texts, however, is an inherent understanding of the question of “the meaning of life.”

## 2.

Here I would like to take a closer look at the 2008 manuscript written by Aum leader Ken’ichi Hirose I mentioned in the “Foreword to the English Edition.” (This text can be downloaded from Kenji Kawashima’s website).

When he was a high school student, Hirose became

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<sup>4</sup> Page 324 of the Japanese edition, translated here by Robert Chapeskie. This passage could not be located in the English edition.

<sup>5</sup> Metropolitan Books, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> 島田裕巳『オウム—なぜ宗教はテロリズムを生んだのか』トランスビュー, 2001.



aware that someday everything in the universe would become nothing, and came to view the world with a deep sense of “emptiness.” He then became interested in “the meaning of life.”<sup>7</sup> He tried reading philosophical and religious books, but was unable to accept either approach; at its core philosophy seemed to depend on the personal intuitions of philosophers, and he did not know “how to determine the truth or falsity” of religious doctrines.<sup>8</sup> After learning about an incident involving the refusal of blood transfusions by Jehovah’s Witnesses his “distrust of new religions” became firmly established.<sup>9</sup> While seeking “the meaning of life,” Hirose thus initially harbored an antipathy toward religion.

The decisive change in this attitude was caused by a “mystical experience.”

A month after reading one of Asahara’s writings he had found in a bookstore, an “explosive sound” reverberated within his body when he was sleeping. Hirose then experienced the following.

Something like a viscous, warm liquid began to flow down from my tailbone. [...] It flowed slowly up my body along my spine. When it reached my waist, it suddenly expanded to the front of my abdomen. It was a feeling I had never experienced that didn’t seem to be of this world. [...] the Kuṇḍalinī continued moving upward.

When the Kuṇḍalinī rose to my chest, it spread throughout this area. [...] when the Kuṇḍalinī reached

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<sup>7</sup> p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> p. 13.

the bottom of my throat, I stopped feeling the heat rise. Something like a vapor that was not hot rose in its place. When this made it to the top of my head there was a sense of pressure, and my skull made a quiet screeching sound.

This was a sudden event, and I worried about what was going to happen, but after reaching this peak the series of phenomena settled down. I seemed to have made it through unscathed.

“Aum is true.”

It felt as though Aum’s religious worldview had colored reality all at once. I became convinced that the “meaning of my life” was to strive for salvation or enlightenment with Asahara as my guru.<sup>10</sup>

Hirose had a mysterious experience that seems somehow similar to my own that I describe in Chapter Two of this book. He noticed that Asahara’s book had precisely described his own mystical experience, and became convinced that what Asahara said was the truth. Through his mystical experience Hirose came to accept Aum’s doctrinal system and decided to become a follower of Asahara.

Through having a mystical experience, Hirose set out on the road to religious belief. Many readers will presumably wonder how Hirose, possessing a scientific, rational intellect and harboring a distrust of new religions, could have become a devotee of a cult religion thanks to a single mystical experience.

The impact of yoga-type mystical experiences, however,

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<sup>10</sup> pp. 14–15.

is tremendous. This can be seen by looking at my own mystical experience presented in this book. The force of vividly perceiving within your own body phenomena that cannot be explained by today's natural science, even to the point of seeing light, is overwhelming. It is indeed having a scientific, rational intellect that keeps you fixated on this intense experience you cannot dismiss as an illusion, wondering what on Earth it could be.

In Chapter Two I discuss how I myself, someone who was supposed to have a scientific and rational intellect, easily accepted the mysterious experiences I “witnessed” when I entered a closed qigong community. In this regard Hirose and I are the same. But Hirose ran straight into the arms of faith in Asahara. I headed down the same path, but at some point found myself unable to continue. Where did this difference come from? Or was it simply the product of chance? I still don't know. When scholars discuss Aum it is easy for the matter of mystical experiences to be given little weight. But it must not be disregarded. The question of mystical experiences is both crucial and complex, and requires further consideration.

In Section Six of Chapter Two, I write as follows. “There is thus fundamentally no necessary connection between obtaining this kind of mystical experience and engaging in spiritual training or believing without question in the words of a religious leader.”<sup>11</sup> “Furthermore, and this is even more important, even if you obtain a mystical experience by following the instructions of a religious leader, it does not necessarily follow that this leader's words are true.”<sup>12</sup> If there

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<sup>11</sup> pp. 107-108.

<sup>12</sup> p. 109.

are any readers who are wrestling with how to understand their own mystical experiences, I urge them to calmly consider these passages.

Hirose came to believe that Asahara was shouldering the “bad karma” he had accrued in his place and was purifying him. Asahara appeared to Hirose as a “god of salvation.”<sup>13</sup> Asahara furthermore began to preach that killing people who had accumulated bad karma in this world would allow them to be reborn in a higher world (the doctrine of “powa”). As a result, Hirose says that when he was ordered to deploy the sarin by Murai, “To me at the time, this instruction only seemed to be the salvation of people who had been born into the world of suffering.”<sup>14</sup> In this way, according to the logic of Aum, the mass murders using sarin were a project of salvation to allow people who had accumulated bad karma in this world to be reborn in a higher world. This is Aum’s answer to the question, “Why did you kill indiscriminately using sarin?”

Hirose concludes his manuscript with the following passage. It is important so I quote it at length.

Today I reject all of Aum’s doctrines and Asahara’s divinity. I do so because I understand the religious experiences that had provided grounds for their validity as illusory phenomena that occur in a state in which neurotransmitters in the brain are overactive, and the doctrines do not mean what they claim. [...]

Having distanced myself from Aum’s doctrines and Asahara, today I am without [religious] belief. However, I acknowledge the value of religion because there are

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<sup>13</sup> p. 21.

<sup>14</sup> p. 35.

many people whose character has been elevated through faith. Human beings seem to have the capacity to perceive transcendent existence. This is proven by the fact that religion has persisted since the birth of humanity no matter the circumstances, despite suppression by authorities and the development of science. [...] And transcendental existence itself is not something people like me can refute. [...]

[This is the case] because this kind of concept cannot be defined in a manner that allows for scientific proof. For this reason, the transcendental worldview of cults is also extremely difficult to reject through science.<sup>15</sup>

Hirose declares that he has completely rejected Aum and is in a state of non-belief. Nevertheless, this does not mean he rejects the significance of religion. He takes this stance because religion has the function of elevating people's character, and because the existence of the transcendental cannot be refuted by science. Regarding mystical experiences, Hirose concludes they are illusions caused by transmitters in the brain and do not have the particular meaning attributed to them by Aum's doctrines.

Hirose may thus seem to have returned to the worldview he had held as a high school student before learning of Aum: a state in which he seeks "the meaning of life" but finds it in neither religion nor philosophy. Nor, of course, can natural science provide an answer. This is close to the position from which I began writing this book. I wish I could have talked

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<sup>15</sup> pp. 57–58.

with Hirose while he was alive. I wish I could have discussed “the meaning of life” with him after he had returned to a state without religion or belief.

### 3.

The question of how to live in a post-religious age was also addressed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche declared that “God is dead,” grappled with the question of how human beings were to live without God, and proposed ideas such as “eternal recurrence” and “*amor fati*.” He suffered a mental breakdown and died, however, before fully developing these concepts. This book is also a project to further develop the philosophical horizon opened up by Nietzsche in the present era.

When considering how to live in a “post-religious age,” however, progress cannot be made by people without religion thinking only among themselves. To consider how to live in a “post-religious age,” we must break down the wall between what is inside and what is outside of religion and engage in a discussion of the wisdom in the religious dimension and view of humanity that religion has built up over millennia. The publication of the first edition of this book did in fact provide me with many opportunities to interact with religious people. Their attitude toward this book was warm, and I learned much from them. I realized that the border between religious and non-religious perspectives is not so clear, and the grey zone between them is wide.

For example, in this book I talk about religion in terms of the dichotomy between “religious people who are capable of having faith” and “I who cannot have faith,” but I received the

criticism that this dichotomy itself should be reconsidered. After all, there are many religious behaviors that do not involve clear “faith.” Can the feeling that makes you put your hands together when you see the sunrise or the act of making a wish at a shrine be called “faith”? Is there not a grey area of things that are difficult to categorize as either “faith” or “not faith”? Can’t the Japanese word “*shinjin*,”<sup>16</sup> meaning something like “piety,” be positioned in this kind of grey zone? These points were made to me, and I had to admit they were valid.

I have also come to have doubts about this dichotomy from a philosophical perspective.

Taking Christianity as an example, I write as follows in Chapter One.

In other words, someone who believes in Christianity cannot put their life on the line and seriously doubt with their entire being the proposition that God created the world. This is the case because a person’s faith begins when they stop actively questioning whether or not God really created the world and resolve to live their life assuming that this claim is correct.<sup>17</sup>

I then assert that I am incapable of this kind of “faith.” But here I have committed an error: I too have things I “cannot put my life on the line and doubt with my entire body and soul.” For example, I believe that the students I teach at my university are flesh and blood human beings and not well-built robots. Logically speaking, there is in fact a non-zero

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<sup>16</sup> 信心.

<sup>17</sup> p. 58.

chance that they are high-quality robots. Nevertheless, I cannot put my life on the line and doubt with my entire body and soul that they are genuine human beings. The same can be said of propositions such as the sun will definitely rise tomorrow and the world will continue to exist after I have died. Logically it is possible to doubt them, but I cannot put my life on the line and doubt them with my entire body and soul. In other words, I can be said to have “faith” that they are true.

If so, I who cannot believe in religion do indeed have “faith” in something, and the schema of opposition between I who cannot have “faith” and religious people who are capable of “faith” falls apart. This is a philosophical problem that is not resolved in this book.

In abstract terms, it amounts to something like this. A person can doubt any individual proposition. Nevertheless, no one can doubt all propositions while actually living in the world, because it is impossible to actually live in the world without accepting as obvious truths several fundamental things that allow your life to take shape. Unless I accept propositions such as the family members I love are not robots, the sun will rise tomorrow, and the world will continue to exist after I die, I cannot sanely live my life. However, the content of the set of fundamental things that cannot be doubted is not objectively fixed; it differs depending on the person. For some people the content of this set includes God, for others it does not. Nevertheless, the structure that allows this set to take shape itself is universal. This can be called the “structure of conviction” or the “structure of obviousness.” This has been a major issue in philosophy from the skepticism of Descartes to the question of certainty in Wittgenstein and Husserl’s phenomenology. Since this issue cannot be pursued any



further in this “Afterword,” I will stop here by promising to address it more thoroughly in a future work.

#### 4.

As I noted in my Afterword to the first edition, this book was the first volume of my “life studies” series. Life studies is a research methodology that requires “never detaching oneself from what is being investigated.” Without losing sight of the fact that I myself am involved in the subject of study and in some sense can be considered the “person in question,” I make this “being the person in question” itself the subject of my inquiry. A confessional method of trying to examine how I myself actually exist in relation to the subject in question is employed, and I then call on the reader to examine themselves in the same manner. Life studies proposes this kind of communication undertaken while maintaining a moderate distance as a new method of study. In this book I tried to implement this method in practice, albeit in an awkward manner. This text can also be positioned as a “life studies manifesto.”

This life studies method in which the person who studies is included in what is studied cannot be the kind of academic inquiry pursued in universities. This is the case because the model for academic inquiry is science, and one of its starting assumptions is that the person who studies is cleanly separated from what is studied. As a result, for the time being, life studies must be conducted outside of academic inquiry.

Following this book, I published *Painless Civilization*,<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> 森岡正博『無痛文明論』トランスビュー, 2003.

in which I critique contemporary society from within, in 2003 and *Confessions of a Frigid Man*,<sup>19</sup> in which I analyze male sexuality, in 2005. *Painless Civilization* philosophically deepened the message of this book and has become my most important work. In *Confessions of a Frigid Man* I further developed my method of confession and tried to illustrate my own sexuality and connect it to the problem of the meaning of life. These three books comprise my life studies trilogy. In these works, the concrete method of life studies has been gradually elucidated. Readers of this book who take an interest in the methodology of life studies are encouraged to read the two other volumes. (English translations of both can be freely downloaded online). I intend these three texts to conclude my efforts to write about life studies with substantive content, and going forward I would like to shift my focus to the methodology of life studies itself. In doing so, I plan to clarify the strengths and weaknesses of life studies that have been revealed by my experiments thus far (and are also clearly evident in this book.)

I have also been pursuing academic research on the philosophy of life in parallel to life studies. Here I try to logically elucidate what life is and what it means to live while pushing myself as the subject of this inquiry into the background. I am also writing a trilogy on this “philosophy of life.” The first volume is *Manga Introduction to Philosophy*.<sup>20</sup> This work sketches out an overview of the philosophy of life in the form of a comic book (manga). The second volume is *The Philosophy of Birth Affirmation* (provisional title, not yet published), and in it I plan to construct a philosophy of life

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<sup>19</sup> 森岡正博『感じない男』ちくま文庫, 2005.

<sup>20</sup> 森岡正博・寺田にゃんこふ『まんが哲学入門』講談社現代新書, 2013.

system centered on the key term “birth affirmation.” The third volume is “Philosophy of life” (provisional title, not yet published), in which I plan to provide a summary of the history of the philosophy of life and the logic of life. These trilogies on the “philosophy of life” and “life studies” are the two pillars of the methodological endeavor in which I am engaged to open up new horizons of knowledge. *How To Live in a Post-Religious Age* was the first step in this journey.

In this book, I often speak about “the meaning of life.” Today a “philosophy of the meaning of life” subdiscipline has begun to take shape around the world within the field of analytic philosophy. The topic of “the meaning of life” nearly disappeared from academic philosophy after the wave of existentialism dissipated, but it was revived once again at the start of the twenty-first century. The International Conference on Philosophy and Meaning in Life has been held since 2018, and I am a member of its Steering Committee. My own “philosophy of the meaning of life” can be said to have started with this book.

I would like to thank the many people who helped me to write this book. I would like to send my heartfelt respect to Mr. B, who appears in the main text, and my heartfelt love to my son. I am deeply grateful to Hōzōkan for agreeing to publish this complete edition. I would also like to express my profound gratitude to the editors of the first edition, Hiroshi Nakajima and Mie Hayashi, and to Robert Chapeskie for his beautiful translation.

Addendum: The Aum incident has also been extensively studied outside of Japan. There are numerous important

academic works in English, such as the text by Lifton mentioned above, and there was also a special feature on the Aum incident in *The Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 39 (1), which was published by Nanzan University in 2012. As an example of recent research, Erica Baffelli, one of the editors of this special feature, has been conducting a survey of female former followers of Aum, and the results of her ongoing work are highly anticipated.

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## About the Author

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Email address: <http://www.lifestudies.org/feedback.html>

## BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR



# Painless Civilization 1

A Philosophical Critique of Desire

Open Access Book

Tokyo Philosophy Project (2021)

**Freely downloadable from:**

<https://www.philosophyoflife.org/tpp/painless01.pdf>

The elimination of pain and the acquisition of pleasure seem to be the ultimate aims of our civilization. However, paradoxically, the endless tendency to eliminate pain and suffering makes us totally lose sight of the meaning of life that is indispensable to human beings. How are we to battle against this painless civilization? Published in Japanese in 2003. The translation of Chapter One was published in 2021 under the title Painless Civilization 1.

## BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR



# Painless Civilization 2

Painless Stream and the Fate of Love

Open Access Book

Tokyo Philosophy Project (2023)

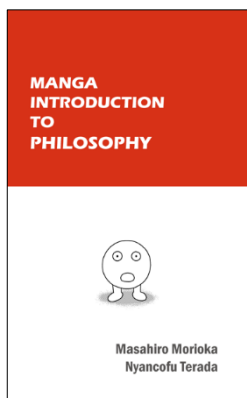
Freely downloadable from:

<https://www.philosophyoflife.org/tpp/painless02.pdf>

This is the English translation of Chapters Two and Three of *Painless Civilization*, which was published in Japanese in 2003. In this volume, I examine the problems of painless civilization from the perspective of philosophical psychology and ethics. I discuss how the essence of love is transformed in a society moving toward painlessness and how the painless stream penetrates each of us and makes us living corpses.

In order to tackle the problems of painless civilization, we must look inside our inner world because the “desire of the body” that lurks within us is the ultimate cause of our society’s movement toward painlessness. Love and the meaning of life are the central topics of discussion in the following chapters.

## BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR



# Manga Introduction to Philosophy

An Exploration of Time, Existence, the Self, and the Meaning of Life

Open Access Book

Tokyo Philosophy Project (2021)

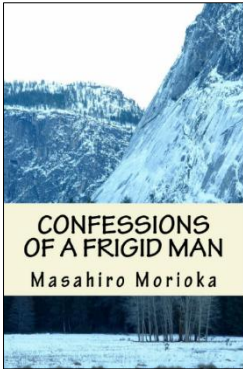
**Freely downloadable from:**

<https://www.philosophyoflife.org/tpp/mangaphilosophy.pdf>

As the title says, this book is an introduction to philosophy. I tried to write about questions like “What is philosophy?” and “What does it mean to think philosophically” for a general readership. This is not a book that presents easy-to-understand explanations of the theories of famous philosophers. Instead, I have tried to express as clearly as possible how I myself think about four major topics: “time,” “existence,” “I,” and “life.” By following this route, the reader will be led directly to the core elements of philosophical thought.



## BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR



### Confessions of a Frigid Man

A Philosopher's Journey into the  
Hidden Layers of Men's Sexuality

Open Access Book

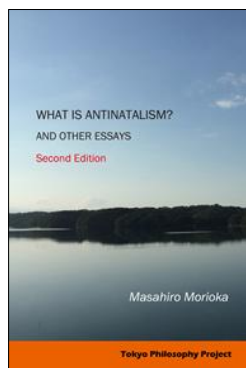
Tokyo Philosophy Project (2017)

Freely downloadable from:

<http://www.philosophyoflife.org/tpp/frigid.pdf>

The most striking feature of this book is that it was written from the author's first person perspective. The author is a professor who teaches philosophy and ethics at a university in Japan, and in this book he talks about his own sexual fetishism, his feeling of emptiness after ejaculation, and his huge obsession with young girls and their developing female bodies. He undertakes a philosophical investigation of how and why sexuality took such a form within a person who had grown up as a "normal," heterosexual man.

## BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR



# What Is Antinatalism? And Other Essays Second Edition

Philosophy of Life in  
Contemporary Society

Open Access Book

Tokyo Philosophy Project (2021, 2024)

Freely downloadable from:

<https://www.philosophyoflife.org/tpp/antinatalism.pdf>

This book is a collection of essays on the philosophy of life's meaning in contemporary society. Topics range from antinatalism, meaning of life, the trolley problem, to painless civilization. I am now writing a comprehensive philosophy book on those topics, but it will take several years to complete; hence, I decided to make a handy book to provide readers with an outline of the philosophical approaches to the meaning of life that I have in mind.