Thomas P. Kasulis **Intimacy: A general orientation in Japanese religious values**

To achieve an insightful understanding (*Verstehen*) of the morality of another culture is to go beyond the mere accumulation of factual knowledge (*Verstand*). We can know all about Japan—its population, history, geography, and managerial style—and still not understand it. Understanding goes beyond knowing; it includes feeling (*Einfühlung*) and imagination, the capacity to project ourselves into the place of the Japanese, to imagine at least for a fleeting moment what it is like to be Japanese.

In saying that we should try to understand the Japanese, that we should imagine ourselves into their place, we are not saying we have to agree with them, endorse their behavior, or even like them. Contrary to some of the claims made in the popular press lately, to be a Japanologist is not necessarily to be a Japan apologist. Like the people of any culture, the Japanese are sometimes trustworthy and sometimes deceitful, sometimes nationalistic and sometimes humanitarian, sometimes rational and sometimes emotional, sometimes predictable and sometimes inconsistent. So as not to seem apologists, some interpreters of Japan have chosen to lose themselves in a morass of detached observations and statistical esoterica. They fear to engage the empathic imagination requisite to true understanding because they mistakenly think that to do so is to lose objectivity. To put oneself in the other's place, they reason, is to give up the option of disagreement.

Such a quest for detachment and objective certainty is quixotic. Here metatheory and overly self-conscious methodological considerations may obstruct the efficacy of practice. It is not a difficult intellectual exercise to construct a set of ideal criteria for intercultural understanding that could never be met. By such rationalization we could "prove" that we can never insightfully understand the ideas, values, and behavior of another culture. Yet, in practice, we somehow manage. Despite our animosities, mistrust, and aggressive tendencies, the world has not suffered the consequences of a hostile nuclear detonation in forty-five years. We may not always like each other, but we have at least reached the point where international misunderstandings have not led to global disaster. Two of the most significant American deeds in the Pacific War—the victory at Midway and the assassination of Admiral Yamamoto—were the result of American intelligence agents' breaking Japanese secret codes, codes specifically designed to be as unintelligible to Americans as possible. So, whatever the theory of intercultural untranslatability or unintelligibility may be, the facts of human practice disprove the theory.

In analyzing the dynamics of intercultural understanding, it is useful to bear in mind parallels from the interpersonal realm. When the football defensive

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captain decides on the defensive formation, he tries to anticipate what the opposing quarterback will do. He temporarily tries to think as his opponent thinks. It is irrelevant whether the defensive captain likes the quarterback or whether he agrees with his reasoning: the defensive captain puts aside all such considerations and simply uses his imagination, intuition, and feeling to put himself temporarily into his opponent's shoes. The same analysis holds for the defense attorney who tries to anticipate what line of argument the prosecution will follow in an upcoming case. In short, to imagine oneself empathically into the other person's place is the basis of much of our interpersonal understanding. Furthermore, as both Confucius and Jesus of Nazareth pointed out in their respective versions of the Golden Rule, it is also requisite to moral behavior.

But how can we really imagine ourselves into the Japanese context? Again, what works on the interpersonal level can be modified to work on the intercultural level. When we meet people for the first time, how do we come to know them, and eventually come to understand them? In an undergraduate short-story writing class, one of our assignments as students was to do a character sketch in 250 words. After a couple of days of frustration in which we all swore it was impossible to make a character come alive in one typewritten page, the professor gave us a hint on how to go about it. "In the first sentence or two, set up your character as a stereotype and then use the rest of the page to modify that image," he said. To our surprise, the technique worked. The professor explained that such a process mimics the way we actually learn about people. As soon as we see people, hear their names, learn their occupations, we set up stereotypes in our mind. Then, as we talk with the people and get to know them, we continually adjust our image until eventually we reach a profound level of understanding.

In this article we will try a similar approach in trying to come to an insightful understanding of Japanese morality. Of course, no culture is monolithic: differences among individuals can always dominate over cultural uniformity, but it is still useful to try to think of a culture as a whole, as a collective person. According to this line of thought, Japan's personality is its cultural forms, its biography is its history, its patterns are its traditions, its goals are its values. When we talk about a society's cultural form, history, tradition, and values, we are brought into the heart of its spiritual experience. Whether we choose to call this the society's religion, philosophy, national character, or world view does not concern us here. The point is that in order to understand the Japanese, to anticipate their behavior, we must know the why's behind the what's, we must know the values driving the culture. To get us into the context where we can begin to understand the why's of Japanese culture, we will resort to a heuristic. A heuristic is a tool for interpretation, in this case the use of an overgeneralization or a stereotype, that can help us move imaginatively from our culture into Japanese culture. Eventually, as we come to

know Japan better, the heuristic will undergo continuous modification; it will be merely a barebones skeleton on which can be fleshed out the Japanese personality. But it will be a starting point, one on which we can build our understanding of Japanese spirituality.

As a starting point, our heuristic must have two virtues: (1) like a stereotype, it must be simple enough to be readily grasped; (2) it must be familiar enough that it is not foreign. After all, the starting point is meant to help us overcome our sense of foreignness, not add to it. The ideal would be an analysis that begins with our own experience, one that allows us to see something Japanese in ourselves.

For the heuristic to work, therefore, we must allow it to appeal to our imaginations as well as our intellects. Hence, we will develop a series of images reminiscent of everyday events. The reader, however, must be willing to follow these images in the correct way. They are not meant as points for philosophical analysis, but rather as catalysts for imagination and affect. The purpose of the heuristic exercise is to develop a mood (*Stimmung*) that will allow us to resonate with a value orientation important to Japanese morality. Our purpose for now, however, is not to compare or think about these images. We should only let them be suggestive of an aspect of our own lives, however seldom analyzed.

Image I. Think of what it is like to be with your spouse or a lifelong dear friend. Such a person is someone to whom you feel you can say anything, but you need say nothing in order to be understood. A little pucker of the lip, a twitch in the eye, a movement of the eyebrow, or a barely audible sigh says it all.

Image II. Someone steals your wallet. Both the money and the treasured family pictures—negatives lost long ago—are gone. The money belonged to you; it was your money. But the pictures belonged *with* you, not to you. In taking the photos, the thief stole part of your self, not merely something external like the money over which you held title.

Image III. You see your daughter after she comes home from school. You know something is wrong and something is bothering her. You can't put your finger on it, and you can't explain how you know, but you know she will pick at her dinner and look at the television tonight without really watching it. You even know that when you ask her what's wrong, she'll say "nothing's wrong."

Image IV. You've been working on a piano piece for months, endlessly drilling the chord progressions, getting the technique down perfectly. One day, quite unexpectedly, the awareness of technique disappears. You are playing the same notes as always, but it is completely different. You feel you are not playing the music, but, rather, the music is playing itself through you.

Image V. Michelangelo looks at the discarded block of marble given to him. He wonders what to do with it. Studying the marble, the image of David appears from within it and the artist sets to work releasing the image from its stone case.

Image VI. After traveling for some weeks, you return home. You take a little stroll around the yard, go into the house, and sit in your favorite chair; a close friend drops by to ask about your trip. You feel yourself relax as you let down your defenses and give yourself up to the familiar. You feel you are really home.

What do all these images share? In my terminology, I say that they are all permeated with a sense of *intimacy*. The word "intimacy" may at first seem odd. It seems more like the name of a French perfume or maybe a term in a sex manual rather than a moral concept. In an important sense—and perhaps this tells us something about our own culture—we have robbed the word of some of its original power. In Latin, *intimus* means either what is innermost or a close friend. The verb *intimāre* means to make known. Putting this together, we can say that the root meaning of intimacy is something like *to make known (intimāre) to a close friend (intimo) what is innermost (intima)*. Thus, intimacy involves an inseparability, a belonging together, a sharing. We have many friends and advisers, but only a few intimates. Many things are in relation, but only some are *intimately* related. We know many things, but have intimate knowledge of only a few. We express many things, but only those in our inner circle understand what we *intimate*.

As philosophers, we can research the phenomenological structures of our experiences of intimacy, attempting to clarify its meaning and its implications for a variety of philosophical issues in epistemology, philosophy of language, aesthetics, ethics, and the philosophy of religion. Our purpose here is primarily to investigate the significance of intimacy for understanding Japanese morality, however. For that investigation, we can limit our analysis of intimacy to five broad considerations.

First, the objectivity of intimate knowledge is personal, not public. In the modern West the tendency (with a few notable exceptions such as the theories of Michael Polanyi) has been to divide knowledge into two types: subjective and personal versus objective and public. Intimate knowledge suggests, however, the possibility of objective, nonpublic knowledge. An example will demonstrate our common acceptance of this difference, however seldom we think about its philosophical significance. In many Olympic events such as diving and gymnastics, the judges do two types of scoring: one for degree of difficulty and one for style or form. The first score is objective and public—everyone in the stands can observe the dive, verify how many somersaults were involved, and determine the degree-of-difficulty score by referring to a set of rules. If two judges disagree about the difficulty of the performance,

we could even play back a videotape and determine which judge was correct. But what about the score for style or form? No nonexpert can make that judgment, no instant replay can verify the accuracy of the score. Therefore, the judgment is nonpublic. Yet, the judgment is not simply subjective—the judges are expected to agree within a small margin of error. It is not like the aesthetic film criticism of Siskel and Ebert, where we expect disagreement. In fact, if the Olympic judges' disagreement on the style scores is too great, we suspect political motives coloring the judgment. That is, we accuse the judges of dishonesty. Yet, there can only be dishonesty in judgment where there is objectivity. Hence, we have a case of objective, but personal, knowledge. Obviously, an emphasis on this form of knowledge coincides in Japan with the emphasis on the master-apprentice relationship not only in the arts, but even in managerial training.

Second, the phenomenon of intimacy is experienced as an internal, rather than external, relationship. An external relationship assumes that each relatent exists independently on its own and that the relatents *enter into* a relationship. If the relationship is dissolved, the relatents remain intrinsically unchanged, returning to their independent selves. Western law, for example, tends to look at marriage in this way. The law is designed to formalize or dissolve the bond relating two independent persons, each one having individual rights, privileges, and duties. An internal relationship, on the other hand, is more like the overlapping of two circles. Part of circle A is part of circle B and vice versa. If B were to disappear completely, A would lose part of itself. An internal relationship is part of what things are, not just a bond they have entered into. In our society, for example, we often think of love as an internal relation. In a loving relationship, when there is separation or death, the partner feels the loss of part of himself or herself, not just that he or she has been disconnected from an external tie. The differences between the contractual and the intimate form of relationship are relevant to how Japanese society maintains so many *Gemeinschaft* characteristics internally while more commonly adopting *Gesellschaft* characteristics in its dealings with other societies.

Third, intimate knowledge has an affective as well as an intellectual dimension. Modern Western philosophies have generally focused on the intellectual form of knowing (*epistēmē*) over practical wisdom (*phronēsis*). Consequently, our epistemologies tend to distinguish sharply between thought and feeling. If we consider how we know that today is Wednesday, that $1 + 1 = 2$, or that the grass is green, for example, there is certainly no place for emotion in these judgments. Yet, what about the way we know another person? Or the way the craftsperson knows the feel of the tools and the wood? Or the way the teacher knows what example will help the student most? In such cases, feelings, intuitions, gut reactions, and hunches are important. The modern West has tended to make knowledge into a black-and-

white affair: I could never claim to know my children, if by "know" I mean the perfect and complete knowledge I have that 1 + 1 = 2. But certainly, I do know them in some respects and know them in more than the simply factual way that they might be known by a sociologist or a psychiatrist. I can readily imagine what they feel and what they will do with an insight beyond what an objective, external, intellectual knowledge could yield.

Following the assumptions of our modern Western epistemological theories, we can uncover, and historically have already uncovered, a plethora of "problematic claims" to knowledge such as my knowing another person to be in pain, my knowing my own psychological and internal physiological states, or my knowing that I need to accelerate immediately if I am to negotiate the turn I am currently making on my bicycle. In practice, however, we continue to have medical personnel, we try to understand our feelings, and we persist in risking our personal safety by trusting our knowledge of bicycling. There seems to be a gap between our epistemological theories and our everyday practices: what is problematic for theory seems to be the working assumption for practice. It is at least conceivable that in a different culture, a society might develop its theory and practice without that paradox. Japanese society is noted for the sensing of consensus, for learning through imaginative imitation of the master, and for leaving unsaid what is most important. There the affectively charged forms of knowing might be considered less problematic than in the modern Western epistemological tradition.

Fourth, intimate experience has a somatic aspect complementing the mental or psychological. This point is a corollary to the previous one. It is hard to imagine a disembodied affect or feeling. We could not have a gut feeling if we had no guts. Furthermore, as we have seen, the Olympic gymnastics judges acquired their intimate knowledge of the sport through their *praxis*, the psychophysical enactment of training, performing, coaching, and judging. They incorporated their knowledge, literally bringing it into their bodies, through the repeated practices of gymnastics activities, initially under the guidance of a master, until they themselves became masters. Here again we see the connection to the Aristotelian notion of practical, as opposed to theoretical, wisdom. We may note how unlike a computer is this function of practical wisdom. A computer needs no master to mimic, needs no exercises to repeat, needs no habits to form. It is pure intellectuality. As such it is also impersonal and disembodied.

In connection with this discussion of the somatic aspects of intimacy, we should also reflect on the relation of physical style to personhood. How do we come to know another person initially? Contrary to the idiom, there is no meeting of the minds. We meet not minds but people—flesh-and-blood, thinking and feeling human beings. We meet an *incarnate* person, even if that person is only perceivable as a voice on the phone or as a style of writing. We

come to know people through the way they walk, talk, dress, or smile. Style is the intimation of what we are. Getting to know someone is getting to the point where we can read these intimations.

In Japan, the tea ceremony or the Noh drama is stylized into a sequence of soft gestures suggestive of profundity; Zen Buddhist enlightenment is enacted through the meditative activities of the monastery; differentiation in bowing behavior intimates a complex structure of respect, deference, and duty. All these behaviors fit under the general category of *kata*[a], the somatic enactment of fixed patterns or forms connected to intellectual, psychological, and affective states.

Finally, the fifth characteristic of intimate knowledge is that its ground is not generally self-conscious, reflective, or self-illuminating. Again, this runs counter to many modern Western philosophical tendencies. Following the Cartesian model, we Western philosophers typically regard self-consciousness as illumination, as enlightenment. Self-consciousness brings insight into ourselves, our values, our behavior. We submit our actions to the illumination of self-criticism in light of principles, ethical codes, and commandments. We trust in the process of bringing our assumptions to light and testing them in a detached manner.

Yet, if we go back to our previous point about the parent's knowing that a child is troubled, what explicit, self-conscious grounds does the parent have for making that judgment? Sometimes we want to say we don't know exactly how we know something about someone, but we *just know*. How do we know how to ride a bicycle? How do we know that a toddler is about to fall? How do we know when to press a friend on a certain point and when to back off? If we cannot have a clear and distinct understanding of the process grounding that knowledge, we should not simply assume that it is inferior to the knowledge of, say, what time it is. There are different kinds of knowledge as well as different degrees of knowledge. The practical wisdom developing from years of exposure to a person or to a particular process cannot be explicitly laid out in terms of principles and data. If we want to learn about Zen Buddhism or even Japanese management, we must realize that the knowledge they exemplify does not come through the application of dogmas or principles. They derive rather from the unself-conscious assimilation of a way of living and acting.

We have, of course, only given the broadest outline of a phenomenology of intimacy, but this sketch is enough for our present purposes. In regard to Japanese morality, we can say that the Japanese axiological orientation has traditionally placed a primary emphasis on preserving and enhancing intimacy. This is, of course, too broad a claim to substantiate here. Our interest, however, is to use the notion of intimacy as a heuristic to place us within a framework for achieving some degree of *Verstehen* of Japanese morality. To show how this heuristic might be applied, we will, in the remainder of this

essay, comment on the Japanese religious traditions of Buddhism and Shintō, showing how their axiological perspectives might be understood within the context of preserving and enhancing intimacy. To anyone with previous knowledge of Japanese religious thought, much of what will follow might seem introductory and superficial. Yet, it is precisely at the introductory level that a heuristic should be most beneficial. Hence, for such readers, the point should be to evaluate how the notion of intimacy sheds new light on already familiar material.

Before discussing the religious moralities of Shintō and Buddhism, we should understand why Confucianism is not being considered in this context. Although Confucian ideals have been important throughout Japanese recorded history in political theory and social hierarchies, it has seldom functioned in Japan as a religious tradition of any significance. The veneration of Confucius himself, the idea that the emperor rules by his own virtue (*te*[b]) rather than through simple hereditary lineage, and the spiritual nuances of the mandate of heaven (*t'ien ming*[c]) typify religious aspects of Confucian praxis in China that did not carry over into the mainstream of the Japanese tradition throughout most of its history. In short, although Confucianism is clearly a central aspect of the Japanese philosophical tradition, it does not play a similarly central role in Japan's religious tradition. Since the purpose of this article is to explore how intimacy is a useful heuristic theme in understanding Japanese religious morality, therefore, Confucianism is not our concern here.

Shintō[d] is the offshoot of the indigenous religion in Japan, the manaistic, animistic, magical religion that existed before the impact of Chinese high culture and of which we find traces in archaeological artifacts, ancient myths, and early poetic works. Shintō is an ethnic rather than a universal religion, so it does not proselytize or seek converts. It is as tied to the Japanese sense of ethnicity as Judaism is to Jews and Hinduism to Indians. Being Shintō means to many Japanese nothing more and nothing less than being Japanese. Hence, according to the 1986 statistics of the Japan Agency for Cultural Affairs, 93 percent of the population consider themselves adherents of Shintō. The fact that 74 percent of the Japanese also identify themselves as Buddhists is evidence of both Shintō's national universality and its openness to coexisting with other religious forms.

In regard to intimacy, Shintō's values can be expressed in terms of (1) the primacy of feeling and intuition over logical explanation, (2) the inseparability of humanity and nature, and (3) ethnocentrism. Let us briefly consider each.

In comparison with Buddhism, Shintō does not have a complex creedal or doctrinal system. It is more a set of attitudes and customs. The primary religious focal point in Shintō is *kami*[e], often misconstrued in English as "gods." A *kami* may be a god—for example, the Sun Goddess Amaterasu is a *kami*, but a *kami* can also be an extraordinary natural object such as a special tree,

rock, or mountain. A person may be a *kami*, most notably the emperor, but also a great warrior or artistic master of some sort, especially after death. Even a human-made article, a special sword, for example, may be a *kami*. Thus, the word is perhaps best translated simply as "sacred presence."

To a degree, Shintō does have an accepted set of myths, the stories of the gods in the *Kojiki*[f] and the *Nihonshoki*[g] justifying the centrality of the imperial family, for example, but Shintō generally function as a folk religion: each locality has its special *kami*, distinctive festivals, and sacred objects. Shintō is more a set of feelings about purification, renewal, regionalism, and communal spirit than it is any kind of philosophical or doctrinal system.

Our second point is that Shintō emphasizes closeness to nature. As we have already pointed out, natural objects can be *kami*. It is important to bear in mind that the object itself is a *kami*; the *kami* is not a spirit lurking invisibly in the tree or mountain. When pilgrims reach the summit of Mt. Fuji they will find the *torii*[h] gate marking off the sacred presence. There is no shrine, no building, not even a sign. The pilgrim knows that the mountain itself is a *kami*. And it is a *kami* not for what historically happened there (as would be the case for Mt. Sinai, Mecca, or Jerusalem, for example), but just because Mt. Fuji itself commands our respect and awe.

Finally, we must mention the ethnocentrism of Shintō. Through Shintō ritual, the Japanese celebrate their common bond. Japan is not a polity, a political bond established among individuals for their mutual benefit. Rather, Japan is more like a tribe, a family, a house. When Shintō first became formalized in the eighth century, it was connected to the imperial household as a way of bonding the various clans together into a single entity in the face of the threat of invasion from Korea and China. Generally, though, the political nature of Shintō has not been central in Japanese history. Most of the time the military ruled and the emperor served as no more than a ritualistic reminder of ethnic identity.

In fact, historically speaking, when Shintō has been attributed a distinct system of precise beliefs, it has been more for political and nationalistic purposes quite disconnected from the local folk religion. For example, in the late eighteenth century the National Studies School (*kokugaku*[i]) philologically deciphered the *Kojiki*, the long-neglected eighth-century text associated with proto-Shintō. Malcontents used the movement to reassert the political and religious centrality of the emperor. Using the reinstatement of the authority of the emperor as their rallying point, they eventually succeeded in replacing the Tokugawa shogunate in the mid-nineteenth century. A few decades later the fascists used the same theme to establish their own authority, and they carefully crafted an interpretation of Shintō tradition and ethnicity that led to jingoistic fervor. This came to be called "state Shintō," as opposed to "shrine Shintō."

In short, precisely because Shintō has such a loosely structured set of doc-

trines, precisely because it appeals mainly to the heart and not to the mind, and precisely because it stresses the intimacy of the Japanese people with themselves and with their land, it is susceptible to distortion by political forces who can manipulate it for their ends. If a particular group can successfully identify their cause with Shintō, what Japanese can resist? To deny Shintō is, for most Japanese, to deny their Japaneseness.

In leaving the topic of Shintō, it may be useful to offer yet another vignette, one taken from everyday life in Japan. It is an activity that occurs millions of times every day and is representative of what must be the most common spiritual act in Japan. Few Japanese would think of it as "religious" but would, if queried, admit its association with Shintō. The activity is the visit to a neighborhood Shintō shrine.

Let's perch ourselves on a small hilltop in Ueno Park in Tokyo. We are no more than a couple of hundred yards from Ueno Train Station, a commuter center through which literally millions of Japanese pass every day on their way to work or on their way home. Below us is a small rectangular piece of land, perhaps seventy-five by twenty-five yards in size, covered with gravel. At one end is a small Shintō shrine, a simple hut of maybe twelve square feet, unpainted, and containing no images or icons of any sort. From our observation perch, we watch the Japanese businessmen in gray suits hurrying to work. We focus on one running through the park. Reaching the shrine area which stands between him and the station, he stops and then goes over to the spring-fed water trough to rinse his mouth and wash his hands. Purified, he slowly walks up to the shrine, holds his hands together prayerfully, bows, claps, and pauses for perhaps ten seconds. He then claps again, turns solemnly from the shrine to the edge of the sacred area, and runs like the devil to the train station.

Western commentators are often perplexed by this almost primitive act of unreflective piety. Often the Japanese does not know or even care which *kami* is recognized by the shrine. In the period of silence between the claps, typically nothing is said or even thought. There is usually no formal prayer of any sort. When questioned about the meaning of the ritual, the Japanese may often offer only the most vague of answers; it is not simply an act of thanksgiving, petition, or even purification. The Japanese simply recognizes the *kami*, feels the presence, and goes on with the day's business.

What, then, is this most common Shintō ritual all about? It is simply a recognition of, and fomal participation in, the presence of *kami*. For that brief moment of silence, the Japanese businessman has opened himself to that presence and become intimate with it. To ask the Japanese why he visits the shrine is an odd question. It is as if we asked people why they visit their intimate friends. Is it to thank them for something, to ask for something, to get something off one's chest? These may well be part of the purpose of the visit, but just as likely the visit stems from the urge to share a moment

together. "I was in the neighborhood and just felt like dropping by for a little while." In that moment in front of the shrine, the Japanese is making an intimation, an affirmation of the intimate circles to which he belongs: the natural world, the sacred space, the *kami*, his fellow Japanese.

Our purpose here is not to analyze Shintō, an extraordinarily complex and varied religious tradition, but rather to see how the heuristic of intimacy helps us achieve a *Verstehen* of Shintō moral values. Shintō is, to use the terminology of Rudolf Otto's *Idea of the Holy*, a religion of the numinous. Shintō recognizes this numinous dimension without the need to formulate it doctrinally or theologically. For Shintō the numinous is known intimately, not discursively. Its content is affectively connected to nature, the *kami*, the imperial family, and ethnic identity. Hence, its goal is not formulated in terms of ethical principles or even of a Confucian-like list of virtues. Rather, its goal has come to be encapsulated in the simple term "purity of heart" (*magokoro*[j]).

Let us now turn to our discussion of Japanese Buddhism, noting how its historical development preserved and enhanced the ideal of intimacy in a way complementary to the evolution of the native spirituality and subsequent Shintō tradition. For the purpose of putting our heuristic to further use, we can briefly consider three major Japanese Buddhist traditions: Shingon[k], Shin[l], and Zen.

Shingon represents the first major phase of the emergence of Japanese Buddhism and we can frame our discussion by considering the myths and doctrines associated with its founder, Kūkai[m] or Kōbō Daishi[n] (774–835). Artifacts throughout Japan attest to Kūkai's miraculous powers: he carved wooden buddha images that would not burn; he inscribed sacred characters on stone using only his fingernails, and so on. Most striking of all, however, is the *mythos* associated with his body entombed on Mount Kōya in the famous complex he established there, a complex that is more popular than ever as a site of pilgrimage. Believers say Kūkai did not die in the ordinary sense of the word. Rather he came to be seated in a permanent state of meditation such that he merged with the Buddha *hosshin*[o] (Sanskrit: *dharmakāya*) itself, the highest level of reality in which the entire cosmos is identified with the Buddha. It is said that Kūkai's fingernails and hair are still growing.

Our first reaction may be to consider Mount Kōya a quaint example of the archaic and superstitious. Here we have the makings of a mystic nature cult: darkened rooms filled with musty incense, moss covering the thatched roofs and ancient gravestones, the rumbling incantations of mantras. Kōya might be seen as the final fortress of folk religion in a society of technologists and business tycoons; it is where Japanese pilgrims can temporarily divest themselves of modernity's cloak and once again imagine life among the naked magic of rocks, trees, and streams. From this perspective, Kūkai is a Japanese Merlin and Mount Kōya a museum for the Druidic relics of Japan's ancient past.

But there is another side to the story. Merlin wrote no books, and if he had, they would undoubtedly have been no more than collections of spells and charms. Rather than recipes of incantations, rituals, and magical formulae, Kūkai's treatises more resemble the systematic philosophical scope of, say, the *Summae* of Thomas Aquinas. His magnum opus, *The Ten Mind-sets* (*Jūjūshinron*[p]), is probably the most comprehensive treatment of Buddhist thought written in Japan before the modern era. Shaman he may have been, but Kūkai was also an intellectual giant in the development of the emergent Japanese culture. He founded Japan's first public school open to all children. He was one of the finest calligraphers of his era. He wrote in Chinese a treatise on Chinese poetry that was apparently as well-regarded in China as it was in Japan. A reservoir he designed in his native province is still used for irrigation today. In short, Kūkai's rational capacities were as much a factor in his charisma as his thaumaturgy.

In a sense, Kūkai was both a Merlin and a Thomas Aquinas. His genius was in his ability to integrate the magical and the philosophical, the mystical and the discursive. Kūkai developed ideas he learned in his study of Chinese esoteric Buddhism and proceeded to create a comprehensive metaphysical system that was able (1) to explain the relation between religious practice and the wonder-working power of ritual; (2) to incorporate all the previous schools of Buddhist, Confucian, and Taoist philosophy into a single hierarchical system; and (3) to show how the indigenous notion of *kami* could be integrated into his Buddhist system.

His philosophy was one of *kyō*[q] or resonance that operated on three levels. On the macrocosmic level of ordinary experience, we have the objects of the senses, but these objects are just the surface manifestation of a microcosmic field of energy and vibration. What seems to our senses to be solid is, in fact, a vast system of resonance. Where does this resonance come from? If we move back far enough to the cosmic level, we see that the pattern in all the resonance is really the being of the cosmic Buddha, the *hosshin*, called Dainichi Nyorai. The entire universe is just the Buddha Dainichi, and it is that Buddha's own physical and spiritual activity which is the resonance that, on our sensory level, appears as the world. Through ritual—for example, the chanting of *darani*[r] or mantras—therefore, the Shingon Buddhist can contact this deeper resonance, experience the world as Dainichi Buddha, and sometimes even subtly affect the world of the senses through the power of the ritual.

The crucial issue in the development of Japanese Buddhism during the Heian period was this emphasis on the idea that the formless, absolute Buddha expresses itself through all the phenomena of this world (*hosshin seppō*[s]). Kūkai helped established this principle so firmly that it can be considered a fundamental orientation within Japanese Buddhism in general. It is also a foundational principle of Japanese aesthetics: each thing in the world directly manifests the highest sacred reality. The Buddha is understood to be literally

everywhere, and every phenomenon is, in itself, the full expression of spirituality. So the key for the artist, whether painter, sculptor, poet, Noh actor, or even martial artist, is to express through one's action the holiness of the everyday.

From the standpoint of Japanese Buddhism, the human predicament, the turmoil of deluded life, is that we are no longer aware of this intimate unity of all things. We humans have fallen into seeing ourselves as separate from each other, from the world, and from the Buddha itself. In such a state, we cannot be aware of ourselves as expressions of the Buddha-principle. The solution, then, is for human beings to reestablish the intimate connection with all things. Each of the various forms of Japanese Buddhism has its own theories and practices for carrying out this project. The esoteric forms of Buddhism, such as Shingon and Tendai, emphasize participating directly in the sacred aspect of the world. Since the entire world is the expression of the Buddha-principle, the human being must participate in various rituals—chanting, hand gestures, visualization techniques—that attune one to the Buddha's activity. This version of Buddhism is, in essence, sacramental. The ritual is not a means to Buddhahood, nor is it a reminder of the Buddha's presence; rather, the performance of the ritual *is itself* the Buddha's activity.

The two other Buddhist traditions we will consider are products of the Kamakura period, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The Kamakura period was a time of military competition, the dissolution of the power of the aristocracy, the rise of the samurai *shōguns*, the extravagant taxation levied against the peasant farmers, the decay of cities racked with famine and pestilence. In this context, the issue was no longer the metaphysical harmony of the universe, but rather, what Buddhism could mean for *me* personally. The focus of Buddhism would shift from the metaphysical questions of what reality is to the existential questions of what I am and how I can achieve peace of mind.

In the Pure Land forms of Buddhism as established in the Kamakura period by people like Hōnen[t], Ippen[u], and Shinran[v], this led to the calling into question of the Heian period's view of practice and ritual as the road to spiritual development. The Pure Land Buddhist reformers maintained that any attempt to perform a religious practice consciously is itself a way of separating oneself from the reality of Buddha. These forms of Pure Land Buddhism (and they became the dominant form of Japanese Buddhism) believe the only way to reestablish intimacy with the world is by completely relinquishing even the slightest sense of self. One must surrender completely to the grace of Amida Buddha, one of the devotional, heavenly forms of the Buddha known only through spiritual vision. If one can do so, one will be assured rebirth in Amida's Pure Land, a heavenly state wherein the circumstances, unlike those of this world, are favorable for personal spiritual development and the achievement of enlightenment. Even this act of faith is itself under-

stood to be only a manifestation of the Buddha's activity. If this faith occurs, however, the person is transformed and becomes part of the natural, spontaneous expression of the Buddha-principle.

One important modification in this tradition was articulated most clearly by Shinran (1173–1263), the founder of the Shin Buddhist Pure Land sect. Shinran personalized the Pure Land message even further, making the Pure Land not an otherworldly heaven to which one goes after death, but rather the infusion of a sacred power into the individual in this world. Yet, according to Shinran, we are so permeated with a sense of ego and sin that the pure, trusting faith in Amida necessary to this rebirth is always just at the horizon of possibility. It is as if it is always there just beyond our grasp, but to grasp at it only pushes it farther away. We must thoroughly recognize our own inadequacy, and only through a pure act of self-surrender to Amida's saving grace can we ever attain that which is always just beyond us.

Let us turn now to the other most influential form of Kamakura Buddhism—Zen. In this tradition, the intimacy is achieved not through ritual participation nor through faith, but rather through the straightforward acceptance of reality as it actually presents itself without conceptual filtering. Through disciplined meditation practice, one is supposed to quiet the thinking processes that tend to arrange our experience according to what *we* want to see, hear, taste, smell, and feel. Because of our desires, favored ways of thinking, presuppositions, and prejudices, we ordinarily distort what is actually present. In the state of enlightenment, however, one sees directly what-is, as-it-is.

In a sense, Zen personalized Kūkai's vision by limiting it to this world as it appears. It preserved the idea that everyday reality itself is sacred, but it differs from Shingon in that its approach is to find that sacred quality in the everyday *as the everyday*. There is no moving between the cosmic, microcosmic, and macrocosmic levels. The sacred reality is encountered directly right here and now as the right here and now. Unlike the Pure Land sects, however, Zen affirms the absolute necessity of saving oneself, of disciplining oneself through the practice of Zen meditation or *zazen*[w]. In fact, the most philosophically articulate of all Zen masters, the founder of the Japanese Sōto[x] tradition, Dōgen[y] (1200–1223), argued that the practice of *zazen* was not the means to enlightenment but was the practice of enlightenment itself. Why? Because in the state of *zazen*, one breaks through all conceptualized distortions of reality and simply allows what-is to be what-is. The intimate belonging with things just as they are is the foundation of the Zen way of life.

The lasting impact of the Pure Land and Zen traditions on Japanese values can be described in terms of their competing visions of personal fulfillment. For Shinran, self-fulfillment is realized through trust and dependence on a power beyond the self, what is commonly called *tariki*[z], other power. Self-fulfillment evolves out of the recognition of individual limitation and personal

corruption. This value orientation has had a lasting effect on the self-effacing, working-in-the-service-of-others psychology so marked in the Japanese. In its negative, distorted form it can nourish a sense of the powerlessness of the individual.

The Zen vision of personal fulfillment is typically characterized as the opposite of the Pure Land view. Zen emphasizes not other power, but own power (*jiriki*[aa]). Dōgen makes self-discipline an end in itself. This leads to the psychology of quality control: you do your job right, not because it will have utilitarian benefits, but because the concentration and discipline needed to do the job right is a spiritual end in itself. It is not the perfection of the product that is important. What is important is the perfection of the person's concentration and discipline, which makes the product perfect.

Like the Pure Land principle of self-surrender—indeed, like the highest religious principles of all traditions in all countries—the ideal was susceptible to a secularized distortion. How something is done can so dominate the evaluation that the value of the thing done escapes moral discernment. This particular distortion of Zen drifted over into the popular samurai code, for instance, wherein the issue of killing was subordinated to the aesthetic beauty of how it was done. If properly wielded in the right state of mind, the samurai sword was unpolluted by the violence around it. The unfortunate consequence of this was that the samurai often did not think of the morality of the violence itself.

This discussion of the Pure Land and Zen views of self-fulfillment leads us to our final point: the difficulties of cross-cultural understanding. It is never easy to understand another culture. As we study Japan, we must be willing to suspend temporarily our own cherished cultural assumptions. We have tried to imagine ourself into a context where intimacy is the defining characteristic of human being. For the Japanese, we are not primarily *homo sapiens*, human being as defined by wisdom or rationality. Nor are we primarily *homo faber*, human being as defined by our building builders or creators. Nor are we primarily *homo ludens*, human being as defined by our ability to play. Rather, we are *homo intimans*, human being as defined by our capacity to intimate our intimacies. To the Japanese way of thinking, we are most human when we form bonds of belonging with nature, with each other, with our nation. We are most ourselves when we have built such a rapport that we need not speak in order to express ourselves. We are most ourselves when we suspend contrivance and let things be themselves, even helping the rock to be a rock by placing it where it belongs in a garden. We are most ourselves not when we know the world, but when we feel at home in it.

In conclusion, if we consider the religious ideas of self, bringing in all the Shintō affects and Confucian notions of hierarchy as well as the Buddhist theories, we have something like the following. What does it mean to be self-fulfilled to the Japanese? It means going beyond an egoistic sense of inde-

pendence to a recognition of the interdependent and dependent side of human existence. It means taking a sense of spiritual satisfaction in following a self-imposed ideal of discipline. It means resonating to the vibrations of nature, seeing yourself and the natural as belonging *with* each other, without nature belonging *to* humankind or humankind belonging *to* nature. It means having a common set of social patterns, hierarchical in nature, which binds us together as an organized society. And it means having a sense of belonging with a particular people, bound by blood, ritual, and familial affection.

If we stand back and look at this picture of human being, comparing it with the ideals that modern Western philosophy has held most dear, we start to fathom the depths of the problem of our understanding Japanese morality. We find in the Japanese account no marked emphasis on any of the following: the individual (soul) as the primary unit of spiritual, moral, and political meaning; the notion of a set of universal principles applying to all humankind as the ideal of behavior; the idea of a legalistic, contractual relationship among persons or between a people and their God; the idea of a divine plan worked out in natural and human history to which we feel responsible; or the hierarchy of rationality as what sets off the human from other animals.

This radical difference in values underscores the difficulty of our achieving a *Verstehen* of Japanese morality. The morality of a culture necessarily reflects that culture's philosophical anthropology, its understanding of human existence. If the philosophical ideas of humanness in Japan are as different from our modern Western notions as our brief study suggests, we must bridge an enormous gap before we can begin to understand the dynamics of Japanese morality. This essay offers the experience of intimacy as a heuristic for reorienting our own thinking so that we can at least glimpse the world through the eyes of Japanese values.

Intimacy is not a distinctively Japanese experience. If it were, we could never hope to understand the Japanese. No, as the Japanese themselves point out, the need and desire for intimacy is a common characteristic of all humanity. The difference between Japan and the modern West lies in how commonly we express that particular commonality as an essential characteristic of our value systems: religious, moral, and aesthetic. The difference between Japanese morality and our own Western morality is a matter of emphasis, a matter of axiological priorities. Because we can imaginatively change our priorities, we can achieve some *Verstehen* of Japanese morality. Through that act of the intercultural imagination, we come to understand better not only the Japanese, but also ourselves. This is what makes the study of Japanese philosophy a rewarding form of philosophizing in its own right.

[a] 型
[b] 徳
[c] 天命
[d] 神道
[e] 神
[f] 古事記
[g] 日本書紀
[h] 鳥居
[i] 国学
[j] 真心
[k] 真言
[l] 真
[m] 空海
[n] 弘法大師
[o] 法身
[p] 十住心論
[q] 響
[r] 陀羅尼
[s] 法身説法
[t] 法然
[u] 一遍
[v] 親鸞
[w] 坐禅
[x] 曹洞禅
[y] 道元
[z] 他力
[aa] 自力