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## Prayer of Nonreligious Spiritual Caregivers

This study examines the beliefs of nonreligious spiritual caregivers by considering their actions as prayer when they are with clients, trying not to escape from the situation and accepting the reality of a client's situation. Novelist Ōe Kenzaburō and photographer Fujiwara Shinya refer to the notion of a “prayer without religious faith.” Borrowing from their discussion, we define prayer as something in which people accept themselves as ordinary beings when faced with extreme situations. This prayer is supported by the belief that “even though this happened, the world will continue.” Through this, a person, a so-called “ordinary being”—accepts another person, who is also an “ordinary being,” and the deceased, who died as “ordinary beings”—by looking after them with loving care. This belief and prayer is supported by the original Japanese concept of impermanence and the tradition of memorial services for ancestors to communicate with the living.

KEYWORDS: spiritual care—prayer—nonreligious—view of life and death

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THERE HAS been an increased need for spiritual care for quite a long time when dealing with terminal illnesses. Hospital chaplains who only provided religious support by reassuring patients of the opportunity for worship, as well as a connection to a religious organization, gradually listened to patients' suffering and fear closely regardless of the patients' faith (ITŌ 2010, 44). Spiritual care has evolved from such religious needs. Post-1960, there has been a growing medical need for broader, more holistic care for terminal-stage patients dealing with spiritual pain. In Japan, since the 1980s, discussions and practices of spiritual care have been conducted with both religious and medical specialists at the core. The concept of "spiritual care," however, was unclear. What actually constitutes the content of "spiritual care," and the understanding of how it works, differed among specialists involved in the discussion. As a result, the role of spiritual care was questioned. Under what conditions would one be able to say that ample spiritual care was successfully conducted? Here, we will place spiritual care into the following three categories. The first category is spiritual care that removes or relieves spiritual pain through examining the cause and/or conditions of the pain. The theory most commonly referred to is spiritual care as defined by Murata Hisayuki 村田久行 (MURATA 2005). Murata categorizes humans as a presence of connections, time, and independency, and a lack of any of the three categories results in spiritual pain. Being able to support the purpose of each person's life is the true meaning of spiritual care.

Second, regarding spiritual care in relation to transcendental existence, the aim is to obtain "tranquility in heart and mind," the focal point of the Christian faith, or in Buddhism "peace of mind." Kubodera Toshiyuki 窪寺俊之 defines spirituality as the development of a relationship with a transcendental existence (that is, a god and/or Buddha, and so on), which functions to heal and/or support one's life (KUBODERA 2014, 101). In having a chaplain approach a patient for spiritual comfort, the patient will reflect on their life through a spiritual perspective, taking a new stance with the following observations: 1) we are living through the working and/or plans of a transcendental existence; 2) we are given meaning and goals to live, regardless of the given conditions; and 3) to see life after death, returning to a spiritual world (that is, Heaven in Christianity, the Pure Land in Buddhism, and so on) is one of the desired outcomes of providing spiritual care (KUBODERA 2014, 101–105). Takaki Yoshiko 高木慶子 presents *spirituality* as the unification of physical, societal, and mental aspects, the "key to personification," which in Japanese is expressed as *inochi* (TAKAKI 2014, 47–51). That being said,

each person has their own perception of an “Other World” and “Greater Power” that when one’s belief is affirmed, peace and tranquility is attained. This is said to be the effect of spiritual care (TAKAKI 2014, 57). Regarding this second form of spiritual care, when confronted with the problem of not being able to be solved by human power, and so faced with the limitations of human power and powerlessness, in order to remain in a state of peace and tranquility, the care recipient must become aware of, and revered to, a transcendental existence for the connection to become certain. A transcendental existence need not necessarily be the Christian God or Buddha, so as long as it is something that one believes in. Whatever the case may be, the goal is to raise awareness of the connection with a transcendental existence.

Even when faced with limitations, having spirituality gives one hope, as well as peace and tranquility of the heart and mind. Religious care based on theological principles infers being saved by a transcendental existence, but rather what we refer to here as spiritual care is to support recipients to discover the support of a transcendental existence by themselves. When Okabe Takeshi 岡部健, a pioneer of clinical religious practice in Japan, came face-to-face with death, he was surrounded by darkness. Not knowing in which direction to go, however, he described his feeling of amazement and explained that being able to clarify the direction is the role of the clinical religious practitioner or chaplain (OKUNO 2012).

Third, there is spiritual care as the relationship between the caregiver and recipient. Itō Takaaki 伊藤高章 states that spiritual care is the relationship between two people standing atop differing coordinates who through discussion come to an awareness of their own narrative in the “here and now.” It is through this realization that the two stances merge and become one plateau, and the realization of a new horizon clarifies the relationship, and also that of the relationship with a transcendental existence, empowering the recipient (Itō 2014). Furthermore, in regards to communication between the caregiver and receiver, Konishi Tatsuya 小西達也 explains spiritual care as the provider exhibiting a sense of spirituality, making it easier for the care receiver to also exhibit spirituality, and under such conditions, the caregiver then becomes able to provide the necessary support for the care receiver to face reality (KONISHI 2011). The state of being able to express one’s inner dimension is said to be one of the distinct conditions of spirituality. The actualization of such a state is one of the purposes of spiritual care. Although the result is peace of mind, one’s heart may still waver and he/she may continue to suffer till the end, being unable to accept death. Supporting such a situation and being able to assist an individual’s life is spiritual care. In other words, attaining a connection with a transcendental existence which leads to a peaceful and tranquil heart and mind is not always the purpose of this form of spiritual care. Developing this third form of relationship

between caregiver and receiver builds trust and respect, which unconditionally accepts the care receivers' present situation. To accept the care receivers' worries, suffering, and/or anger, regardless of how challenging the conditions may be, caregivers need some sort of belief, such as religious faith, to support themselves (KONISHI 2012). On the other hand, if it is possible to accept care receivers as such, spiritual caregivers can be nonreligious and need not be clergy or those with a religious faith (YAMAMOTO 2013).

When it comes to one's religious beliefs, however, many Japanese claim that they are nonreligious or do not believe in any one particular faith. This is not the case. Those who are referred to as "nonreligious people" in this paper comprehend the meaning of religious faith, and deepen their awareness of their connection with other's lives, those who have passed away, the transcendental existence, and the world. In other words, they look at the depths of life, yet choose not to have a specific belief in any given religion.

On the other hand, those who are unaware of the religiosity of both self and others, unable to accept the beliefs and religion of supporters, and those who live without taking the time to explore the depths and hidden grooves of life are referred to as "persons of nonreligion."

To explore the beliefs that support the activities of a nonreligious caregiver, we will consider prayer, which is necessary in the third form of spiritual care, to accept the care receiver's "now" without any conditions.

## 1. *The Concept of Prayer in Spiritual Care*

### 1. SIMILARITIES AND DEFINITION OF PRAYER

What is prayer? In the *Shukyogaku jiten*, prayer is defined in a broad sense as an individual's internal exchange, a living personal contact and dialogue with God, that is a central practice for religious phenomena (OGUCHI et al., eds., 1973, 31). In other words, it is a form of communication with a transcendental existence such as God or Buddha, and is very much a religious action.

Tanatsugu Masakazu 棚次正和, however, claims that prayer is conducted in a narrow sense with the presupposition that prayer is to a personal god. Therefore, Tanatsugu introduces a fourth interpretation of prayer, prayer in a broad sense (TANATSUGU 1998, 252–56). In other words, aiming for unification or interaction with a transcendent being is expressed as "prayer with the intention of coming into contact with a transcendent being"; improving or restoring the connection with the world unites us with the transcendental world and is expressed as "prayer with the intention of a worldly connection"; attaining self-realization at a higher level through the transformation of one's self-consciousness is explained as "prayer with the intention of self"; and diversity in all thought and action

compacted into the words of prayer is expressed as “prayer with the intention of words.”

Considering Tanatsugu’s classification, Uno Kōichi 宇野功一 defines prayer with the presupposition that

... both personal and impersonal existence are through the workings of an absolute transcendental being, and that by focusing on something the action to change will take place within the inner-self on the workings of existence, including self, other, and the world. Any specific behavior, subject of prayer, and language is unnecessary. (UNO 2014, 155)

## 2. PRAYER INVOKED FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE PATIENT

Shibata Minoru 柴田実 states that chaplains at a Christian hospital conduct “prayer for patients” and “prayer as a way to not escape from a clinical situation” (SHIBATA 2013). As mentioned earlier, prayer is conducted when a patient gives their consent to having a prayer said for them, and this is requested by someone for example before an operation or during a conversation with the patient. The content of a prayer could include the prayer for successful surgery, recuperation and/or relief from a disease, a way of trying to protect the patient and, regardless of the situation, to pray to God to leave everything up to him and that he look over the patient. This concept of prayer is similar to Tanatsugu’s “prayer with the intention of coming into contact with a transcendental existence.” As a result, the patient then feels a sense of appreciation that “there is someone who will pray for me.” Regardless of whether or not the patient holds a specific religious faith, Shibata claims that with the trusting relationship between the chaplain and patient as the foundation, the patient gains a sense of direction and comfort, encountering a connection with the chaplain as a religious practitioner through prayer, and belief in the sense of being saved (SHIBATA 2013, 82). The patient in some form senses the workings of a transcendental existence, and experiences comfort in some dimension. In regards to this concept of prayer, the second form of spiritual care is realized.

## 3. PRAYER TO NOT ESCAPE FROM A CLINICAL SITUATION

Accepting one’s situation as defined by the third form of spiritual care involves caregivers relieving the following wishes: a patients relief from an illness, accept ance of death, attainment of peace, and/or to be saved. Having such desires can demonstrate that one is in denial of the present condition and may result in distancing the patient from unconditionally accepting the “now.” This is where prayer to not escape from a clinical situation, to comfort the patient and their present situation unconditionally, as justified by Shibata, becomes practical.

Shibata discusses the following from an interview with a chaplain. Under extreme situations the patient and caregivers realize there is nothing that can be done. The patient's feelings of hopelessness then leads to the caregiver falling into a feeling of despair. As a fellow human, when there is no other option but to accept the given situation, there comes a time to look toward something beyond the limits together with the patient (SHIBATA 2013, 83–88). In such a situation, there is a prayer for facing—and not escaping—from the condition. The chaplain contrasts their position to that of Jesus Christ, who prayed through the suffering he experienced as he was killed on the cross, as found in the Old Testament. This is not prayer for the benefit of the patient, nor is it prayer conducted with the understanding of the patient. Rather, it is prayer for one's self; for one to be able to remain in the given situation they are in, and to be accepting of the situation they are involved in.

The paper by psychiatrist Doi Takeo 土居健郎 entitled *Seishin Ryōhō to Shinkō* (lit. Psychotherapy and Faith; orig. 1971) introduces a case where a patient mentions learning prayer from Doi, which led him to examine the practice of “hidden prayer” (DOI 1990). Despite being a devout Catholic, Doi did not promote his religion in his clinical work. What was meant when the patient commented that prayer had been taught by Doi? As a psychiatrist, Doi tries to shed light on the darkness that his patients display. When interacting with his patients, however, he recognizes that the feeling of loneliness the patient is experiencing also causes the caregiver to feel a sense of solitude, and the feeling of hopelessness the patient experiences also makes the caregiver feel hopeless as well. With there being a need to shed light on the situation, however, Doi was determined to “not flinch and not turn my face away from the problem” (DOI 1990, 23). Believing that a light exists to shed onto the darkness that lies within the patient, he claims that one's religious beliefs, normally hidden within, in turn appear. As a result, Doi analyzes that the practice of prayer leads to the light, through which the patient gains a sense of awareness.

When one remains without the urge to flee with a patient who is troubled, there is a moment for prayer that Doi refers to as “hidden prayer” (DOI 1990, 24), but it does not conform to any particular religious practice of prayer. Rather, it is a manifestation of one's existence. As the caregiver, one's faith becomes apparent. In fact, Doi states that “such faith is necessary in order to face the truth of the patient” (DOI 1990, 24). For a caregiver with faith in a particular religion, when confronted with a situation that cannot be resolved, the caregiver continues to accept the patient's current situation unconditionally, to remain at the patient's side, and the caregiver reverently prays to an absolute figure whether it be a transcendental existence, a god, or a buddha. The caregiver, despite being fully aware of their powerlessness, continues to remain in the situation because they believe

in the practice of prayer—that is, “prayer with the intention of coming into contact with a transcendent being.”

On the other hand, how would a caregiver without a specific religious faith, one who is “nonreligious,” be able to accept a patient’s situation and remain at their side unconditionally? Doi claims that doing away with religious faith and prayer altogether would make the provision of care impossible. A “nonreligious person” would not pray to an absolute transcendental existence. However, as Doi feels care is impossible without prayer, without doubt there is prayer supported by a view of life and death that accepts extreme situations. Although Doi emphasizes the importance of faith and prayer, I feel that prayer that is not based on any specific religious tradition by those who are nonreligious exists.

## 2. *Prayer That is not Based on a Religious Faith*

With the presupposition that prayer is a religious practice, the disquisition on prayer that does not conform to any given religion is limited. This paper will introduce a 1987 lecture entitled *Shinkō o motanai mono no inori* (lit. Prayer by One Who Holds no Religious Faith; ŌE 1992) and novel, *Jidō ningyō no akumu* (*A Robot’s Nightmare*; ŌE 1990) by renowned novelist Ōe Kenzaburō 大江健三郎, and an essay entitled *Nanimo negawanai te o awaseru* (lit. Not wishing anything, placing one’s hands together; FUJIWARA 2003) by photographer Fujiwara Shinya 藤原新也.

### 1. ŌE KENZABURŌ’S CONCEPT OF PRAYER

Kenzaburō Ōe, who describes himself as one who holds no faith, introduces five forms of prayer that he noticed within himself. First, there is the “artist’s prayer” that includes novelists and artists composing works of art in a chaotic world. Despite the world being in chaos, however, creating art with the wish that it be something orderly, Ōe describes this [wish] as being a form of prayer.

Then there is prayer that acknowledges one’s existence, a prayer that is unable to undo or erase that one exists here and now. It is that one moment during which we realize this that is also another form of prayer. Ōe’s son was born with a deformity, and Ōe was informed by the doctor that undergoing surgery would still leave his son with a severe impairment. Confronted by the situation, however, he sensed a radiant light, and rather than choosing the path to not have the operation and let his son die, he decided to go ahead with the operation.

The third form of prayer is “prayer for mourning.” Despite not having a religious faith, there is the prayer of mourning for the deceased, mourning the loss of someone special. Ōe’s son, who has intellectual disabilities, composed a piece called *M no Requiem* (*Requiem for M*) to express his feelings when he heard of

his previous doctor's death. This is a prayer that does not comprehend a transcendental existence, religion, or religious faith.

The fourth prayer is expressed as "prayer that questions the world" by one who has no firm belief in everything in the world, that is, one who has no religious faith. Ōe describes this form of prayer as follows:

I think I would like to write in a novel asking, what is a person, what is a society, what does it mean to be alive? Although it may not be enough to assert the reader, I am hoping to share the message to always continue to question things [in life]. This is because such people do not carry a firm belief.... Although I may not have religious faith, I plan to continue questioning things in life. With the mentality that this is the function of a novel, ... a sense of direction in one's heart is held by people even like myself and I feel that this mentality is one way of prayer. I believe in prayer and I wish to express so. (ŌE 1992, 31–32)

Embracing such a spiritual question thinking it important, aware that an answer would not be reached and yet continuing to question, is what Ōe referred to as "prayer by one who holds no religious faith."

Finally, for both those who do/do not have faith, prayer that expresses "our hope for the world to continue on after us" could be interpreted as our "prayer for peace." Ōe's participation in the movement for the defense of the Constitution of Japan and the peace movement is precisely the form of such a prayer.

As a child, Ōe would bow whenever walking past a Christian church or Japanese shrine. Then later, after moving to Tokyo to take the university entrance exams, as he walked past a Russian Orthodox Church, he caught himself about to bow, but then realized, "No. I must not bow here. If I bow here, God might get the impression that I am bowing to have God help me pass my exams and I would not want to be thought of in that way" (ŌE 1992, 33). Despite acknowledging that a transcendental existence is to be revered, he had no desire to have a wish fulfilled or granted. He wishes for a world filled with chaos, one that does not go as hoped for, and expresses this in his novels. The only prayer is to accept each life unconditionally, and that such life will continue on after us.

The question is, what is Ōe praying to? At the very least, it is clear that Ōe is not praying to a transcendental existence, but rather, the focus is to the world, a deceased person, or even something not necessarily clear, and the target can be very ambiguous and may vary from moment to moment. Because "to not have a firm belief" is more commonly explained as "one who does not hold religious faith," it is not possible to pray to a faith-related transcendental existence. Hence, the practice of prayer as discussed by Ōe does not suggest that prayer and one's heart and mind be directed toward someone or something, or that one place their palms together in reverence. Prayer is not something that can be conducted toward a specific target. Rather, it is simply a call, a question, or thought



that comes out naturally. Expressing this through writing novels and compositions is a form of prayer.

If that is so, it can be said that spirituality may be expressed through dialogue and conversation, and that the act of spiritual care itself may possibly be a form of prayer.

## 2. FUJIWARA SHINYA'S CONCEPT OF PRAYER

We will now examine prayer as demonstrated by Fujiwara Shinya. Fujiwara was raised in a household where every day, his parents would pray before their family Buddhist altar. He himself, however, was not one to conduct such practices, and he called himself "infidel." Even going on a wandering journey through India, he completely rejected religion, and standing in front of the shrines, not once did he put his hands together in respect of the gods. However, that did not mean that he did not believe in gods. He clarifies that it is not that he does not believe in gods, but rather, it is religious "authority" that he is strongly against (FUJIWARA 2003, 31). Following the death of his mother, and taking the opportunity to fulfil his mother's wish to go on the Shikoku Pilgrimage, the feeling of wanting to place his hands together arose within Fujiwara as he stood before the various gods and buddhas.

Since then, he continues to travel to Shikoku in remembrance of his family members. However, while on a Shikoku Pilgrimage in remembrance of his older brother, in seeing the various ways others would pray he began thinking, "although prayer is expressed in various ways, many are praying for self-salvation" (FUJIWARA 2003, 33). Whether it be prayer in memory of the deceased or the repose of one's soul, it is still broadly praying for self-salvation. He also points out that "praying for world peace" rather than praying for one's self is not realistic, in contrast to the "prayer of mourning" and "prayer for peace" that is "prayer by one who does not hold religious faith," as referred to by Ōe. On the other hand, Fujiwara expresses opposition to prayer as being a combination of "prayer" and "wish." While sensing a feeling of preciousness in the practice of prayer, Fujiwara realizes the deeply embedded sin of not being able to escape from the mentality of "praying for..." and, wanting to be free and while on the Shikoku Pilgrimage, he decided to quit the practice of prayer.

However, once he saw a mother telling her daughter, "Try greeting Odaishisan and bow." The girl, carefully gazing at the main temple hall, appeared to be frightened as she had her eyes peeled on the inside of the temple hall, before placing her hands together and lightly bowing. Watching the girl, the next form of prayer was observed.

Not wishing for anything, but simply innocently placing one's hands together.

(FUJIWARA 2003, 37)

Not having prayers and wishes together—this is the ideal form of prayer as claimed by Fujiwara. Through this observation, which he explains as “prayer simply sensing the world right in front of one’s eyes,” he recalls his own experience of prayer as a child. Following the death of his aunt, sitting in front of the family Buddhist altar his mother would say, “From now on, auntie will always be sitting here. Put your hands together like this, and say hello to auntie.” Before his aunt passed away, however, he was told that the family Buddhist altar is where the god is. Staring carefully at the family Buddhist altar, within the darkness was a small golden statue of the Buddha glowing radiantly. Fujiwara says, “I was wrapped in an indescribable feeling of amazement, as if the statue of the Buddha had lit up my heart that I wanted to place my hands together” (FUJIWARA 2003, 36). This episode is similar to Ōe’s experience standing in front of the chapel during his entrance exams. Whether it be our expression of fear or respect, when placing our hands together in front of the gods or buddhas regularly, it is not for the purpose of wishing for something.

However, “simply praying,” as we may have done during childhood, is actually extremely difficult as we cannot go without wishing for something. Fujiwara realizes that the object of prayer is something greater than oneself, as with Odaishisama and Dainichi Buddha. For example, a master-servant relationship is developed. That is all the more reason why prayer for self-salvation can exist. However, in regards to the master-servant relationship, it then becomes difficult “not to wish for something.” On the other hand, let us consider prayer in which the master-servant relationship is reversed, such as a small Buddha or guardian deity of children known as Jizō. In remembrance of a loved one, the Jizō has been carved and its significance, which has been passed down over time, has become a “collaboration between persons and nature,” reminding us of the preciousness of [all], which is not to pray to become blessed, but rather, to pray for oneself.

With no means of salvation in this human world, I want to become like the unwavering ocean, accepting all, regardless of other’s distress and battered hearts.  
(FUJIWARA 2003, 40)

It is a prayer to simply accept things just as they are, not wishing for nor questioning anything. Just like the little girl introduced earlier, it is “prayer simply sensing the world right in front of one’s eyes.” Fujiwara claims that this prayer is not a prayer to something greater, but is the realization that is attained through the sharing of love and compassion similar to that of the little Jizō. In other words, he resists a master-servant relationship between transcendental existence and human beings. The practice of prayer is brought about by the relationship that is realized through love and compassion that is apparent in the care provided by a person. Like Ōe, who states “one who does not hold religious faith” as “holding no firm belief in everything in the world,” those who hold no faith in

an absolute [existence] like a god or buddha feel uncomfortable to receive divine favor.

That is why Fujiwara, like Ōe, acknowledges the preciousness of prayer and does not wish for a world free from decay and chaos, but rather accepts this world just as it is. In doing so, the object of prayer is to be “something small,” like the Jizō in remembrance of “the deceased.”

### 3. PRAYER TO LIVE AS AN ORDINARY PERSON

The following excerpt from Ōe’s short story *Jidō ningyō no akumu* can be contrasted to the stance taken by Fujiwara:

If one is prepared to simply live an ordinary life ... I feel that it should be just as simple at the moment of death, to return to zero. In other words, basically [beginning from] zero and then later returning to zero. Isn’t taking into consideration things like the soul after death, or infinite life, a given privilege?

(ŌE 1990, 137–38)

An enormously vast number of [ordinary] people are living and dying without having faith as well as not thinking about [what happens to] one’s soul after death. Once you realize that you are in the vast ocean of ordinary people, wouldn’t it be easier to view your own life and death more objectively? And on top of that, you would come to think that such a life and death is not meaningless. With many years of experience as an ordinary person myself, I am certain.

(ŌE 1990, 140)

These words were spoken by a woman to a man named K, who is a projection of Ōe himself. In other words, this is another form of “prayer by one who holds no religious faith” in comparison to “prayer by one who holds no religious faith” as indicated by Ōe, which includes “prayer that questions the world.” Ōe, who had no firm belief in everything in the world, indicated a prayer that continues to question the world. In contrast, the woman stated that she also has no firm belief, and she does not question the world. It is still meaningful not to take the soul into consideration after death, to live and die without having a connection to a god or a buddha. Despite not having a concrete idea of the soul after death, despite not being able to gain a “peaceful and tranquil heart and mind” through developing a connection with a god or Buddha, regardless of whether you may or may not know if you can or cannot, have or do not have that chance to go to heaven, the Pure Land, or “that world,” after death, there is meaning to life, and this belief is shown because you have no firm belief in everything in the world. It means, however, to disregard salvation following death and to want peace and tranquility, “viewing yourself as a privilege.” Looking at “praying for...” as the deep sin of human beings, Fujiwara strongly denies such prayer.

It could be said that what supports this belief of “regardless of..., there is meaning” is one’s view of life and death—“like so, the world has continued until now and shall continue here on out.” When one’s limitations permeate within oneself, there is a prayer to place yourself in the hands of a larger and/or absolute existence of a transcendental existence. However, there is another prayer, to accept that “I am just an ordinary person,” and to come to terms and pray as a form of acceptance. To be able to come to terms like so, regardless of praying for the “continuance of the world,” we have come this far and believe that we will continue to do so, even with the world in chaos and deterioration, disaster-stricken regardless of time, and flooded by anxiety and distress, as the woman in *Jidō ningyō no akumu* said. These are the grounds upon which Fujiwara negates “prayer for peace” as presented by Ōe. In addition, by coming to terms with “we are just ordinary beings,” and being able to accept things just as they are, just as Fujiwara wishes, “with no means of salvation in this human world, I want to become like the unwavering ocean, accepting all, regardless of other’s distress and battered hearts.” A prayer filled with love and compassion for a barely known, nameless existence of the deceased appears. This is not a prayer asking for the greater and/or absolute existence of a “transcendental existence.” This prayer is possible only because we are fully aware that one cannot be like “the unwavering ocean.” After all, we are “ordinary beings.” We express our love and compassion for the deceased who died powerless as “ordinary beings,” a barely known, nameless existence. In the same way, amid the chaos, deterioration, and anxiety, both you and I who are born and will eventually die as “ordinary beings,” accept the given condition with love and compassion. Therefore, it could be said that “prayer that is not based on religious faith,” means “prayer to live as an ordinary person,” which ties into “accepting a person’s now” as embedded within spiritual care.

### 3. *A View of Life and Death Which Supports Prayer to Live as an Ordinary Being*

What kind of view of life and death will support prayer to accept this world that is overflowing with deterioration, chaos, and absurdity, and to live as ordinary beings? First, in loving the deceased, there is a view of life and death that believes that “the world has continued until now and shall continue here on out.”

Sakai Yūen 坂井祐円 cites that the concept of the Other World as understood in Japan is a “naturalistic concept of the Other World” and a “concept in search of the Other World within despair” (SAKAI 2015, 197–202). In regards to the first concept, Yanagida Kunio 柳田國男 states, “when someone dies, they go to the Other World becoming an ancestral spirit, looking over his/her descendants living in this world, frequently coming and going between the two worlds, eventually transmigrating once again into this world” (YANAGIDA 1962). Like

the continuous seasonal cycle in the natural world, Sakai explains the structure of the Other World as a circulation, a view of life and death affirming that this world is based on a well-grounded social system. That is, in facing one's own death, having memorial services conducted after one has died is a way that the existence of the deceased continues. Also, in looking over those that are living, their anxiety toward death lessens, and when encountering the passing of a loved one and looking after the deceased, the relationship continues as they watch over you, easing the grief and loss.

In contrast, the “concept in search of the Other World within despair” is requested under unstable and critical conditions, and displays the effect of the feeling of disparity when the limitations of human power are exposed. The teaching of the Primal Vow of Amida Buddha spread at a turbulent time in history that included poor crops, hunger, plague, and on-going warfare. In describing how people were forced into conditions of disparity, Sakai states, “Absolute assurance concerning the question of the afterlife will provide the strength to live no matter how miserable the actual conditions may be” (SAKAI 2015, 202–203). The “concept in search of the Other World within despair” as cited by Sakai can be related to “prayer based on a religious faith.” Also, a “naturalistic concept of the Other World” can be related to “prayer without a religious base” and “prayer to live life as an ordinary person,” which all share a commonality.

Yamaori Tetsuo 山折哲雄 refers to a Japanese circular view of the Other World included in a “naturalistic concept of the Other World.” He named the Japanese concept of impermanence “the impermanence of revitalization and circulation” by referring to what Terada Toshihiko 寺田寅彦 called “natural impermanence” (YAMAORI 1996). In *Tensai to kokubō* (orig. 1934) (TERADA 2011a) and *Nihonjin no Shizenkan* (orig. 1950) (TERADA 2011b), Terada states that although we enjoy the blessings of nature each day, there are things like earthquakes, tsunamis, and typhoons that are unpredictable threats of nature. As a result, we develop an obedient attitude toward nature, which creates a sense of “natural impermanence.” While this may be an unpredictable threat by nature, the changing seasons continue on—birth, being nurtured, and returning to nature. This is the development of “the circulation of impermanence” as pointed out by Yamaori. Only through knowing the richness of this world can we humbly accept such absurdity as the “impermanence of [this] world.”

The presence of those who have passed away under such conditions continues to be remembered in different ways. Namihira Emiko 波平恵美子 explains that only those who are properly sent to “that world” by their loved ones following customary traditions become “a deceased” (NAMIHIRA 2004, 45–82), who will make various requests to the living person(s). By abiding by these requests, interaction develops. Various rituals focus attention on the presence of the deceased by pointing out specifics such as “the deceased is watching,” “the deceased is requesting so,”

or “the deceased is thirsty.” With the living person(s) obeying the requests, the rituals are then conducted. Although many of the customs have been discontinued, even today, food that the deceased liked is offered to the family Buddhist altar, and by responding to the request(s) of the deceased, there is continuing interaction between the living and deceased. It could, however, be viewed as there not being “something greater” between the deceased and living. The priest serves the role of connecting the Other World and this world, and although places including gravesites, temples, and family altars serve to connect places between this world and the Other World, we are not protected by the “greater something.” Rather, it is the understanding that our ancestors are looking over us that results that puts our hearts and minds at peace. It is through the care expressed by those living that for the first time our ancestors become “activated,” and the interaction begins. This is referred to by Sakikawa Osamu 崎川修 as “care for the deceased” (SAKIKAWA 2013). Particularly in Japan, the deceased become buddhas through conducting memorial services for them, and in coming and going between the two worlds during annual observances to remember the deceased, known as *bon* and *higan*, the deceased are said to be watching over their descendants. This focuses on the “relationship between the living and deceased.”

Wakamatsu Eisuke 若松英輔 points out that this concept of life and death is vibrant even today. Wakamatsu shares the following from conversations with victims of the Great East Japan earthquake.

The deceased really do exist, but there is no one living who has experienced death. This is the basis of my Theory of the Deceased. A near-death experience is not death. That is merely having approached the Other Shore, but returning to this world without setting foot on the shore. The Other Shore is in reference to the shore of the Other World. It would be fine if we just experience what the Other Shore is like when our own time comes, when we ourselves die, and I also think that we should think about how we are to spend our life in the Other World once we actually get there. The interaction or reflecting on the association between the living and deceased is my Theory of the Deceased.

(WAKAMATSU 2012, 15)

What is the Other World like? What will happen when I die? Will I be able to go to the Pure Land or Heaven? Will I attain salvation? These questions are not a concern since there is no faith or urge to pursue answers. All that matters is to believe that the deceased do exist, and that the deceased interact with those of us living. Though one may be in a state of despair, is it not a fact that accepting the belief that we “live and die as ordinary beings” is what supports us?

Sakai claims that in an ultimately critical situation, praying and leaving things up to the workings of a transcendental existence makes sense. On the other hand, naturalistic concept of the Other World is developed within a maintained

social order (SAKAI 2015, 199). However, Terada states that it is because of the unpredictable threats of nature such as earthquakes and tsunamis that “natural impermanence” is nurtured (TERADA 2011b). Whether in regards to a naturalistic concept of the Other World, or a critical situation, believing that the world will regain its stability—so as long as people recognize that after they die their presence continues as a deceased person, and that even without leaving it up to the workings of a transcendental existence nor having a specific significance of some sort—all that matters is to simply accept this as the impermanence of the world. One conducted memorial services for the deceased and created a connection with the deceased to console themselves. Also, knowing that one is always being watched by ancestors made one accept critical situations and continue to live. This is no doubt one aspect of the Japanese.

From his experience during the Great East Japan earthquake, Wakamatsu states that the deceased do in fact exist, and that by putting the souls of the deceased to rest and creating a relationship with the deceased, people have been trying to accept the unprecedented crises in recent years that we are having to face (WAKAMATSU 2012). Coming from firsthand experience, when face-to-face with a difficult experience that felt as if his body were breaking, Wakamatsu felt that it was the working of the deceased that had protected him. However, the deceased are not to be mistaken for a transcendental existence that includes the “existence of a greater power” or an “absolute existence.” The living respond to the deceased, and vice versa. Wakamatsu states that the deceased is a “neighbor” who lives with us cooperatively. Following the great earthquake of 2011, as the souls were put to rest it was proclaimed, “The souls of the deceased, may you rest in peace.” Hearing this, Wakamatsu says that he felt strongly that something was not right. He explains that the words sounded as if they were trying to complete the situation by sending the deceased away into another dimension. But as this was not the case, and rather than praying for the peace and tranquility of the souls of the deceased, Wakamatsu says that he would like to continue praying to the deceased, to hear their voices, listening to the “words of the deceased reflecting on the living,” and hoping to sense their existence.

Being able to accept critical situations as being “impermanent,” life continues on by changing its form and interacts through a “circulation of impermanence.” What supports this concept is not an absolute transcendental existence but rather the interaction with the deceased through memorial observances conducted for our ancestors.

### *Conclusion*

Wakamatsu regarded being able to sense the presence of the deceased and being able to interact with them as more important than the soul having a sense of peace

and tranquility. For many years, such a perspective on life and death has been cultivated through conducting memorial services and simply accepting without question critical situations as being impermanent. It is without doubt that all human beings will eventually die, that life is impermanent. Although we will die and change in form, there is a belief that we will continue to exist as a deceased being, and our world has and will continue in such a way through “impermanent circulation,” whereby we shall discover the meaning of such a world in which “ordinary people” live and die. In regards to critical situations, “those who hold no religious faith” do not question the meaning, but either submissively accept the significance, or question the meaning. Yet in doing so, they may not find the answer, but find meaning in the process of searching for the meaning. Even if an answer were to be found, it would continuously change, and a definite answer would not be obtained, and change would continue endlessly. This perspective on life, death, and grief is thought to be what is supporting the third form of spiritual care that is provided by nonreligious spiritual caregivers. The practice of prayer conducted here is for nonreligious caregivers to refrain from fleeing from the situation. That is to say, it is a prayer for remaining as calm as possible and being able to accept any given critical situation despite knowing that faith is not gained, and yet continuing to question in the form of praying. Supporting that is the love and compassion of the deceased, and the practice of prayer here is the feeling of wanting to hear the voice of the deceased.

More than the soul of the care recipient being peaceful and at ease, being able to sense the presence of one another and being able to interact is what is being requested. It is not about praying for “the peace and tranquility of your soul,” but rather, it is about praying “to hear your voice” trying to accept the situation no matter how trying the suffering may be. It is not prayer towards a transcendental existence of something much greater. It is prayer for something heart wrenching; for those who passed away having lived the same as “ordinary people,” continuing this far despite the devastation and chaos, and for a world that will go on. This prayer can also be contrasted to Tanatsugu’s broad concept of prayer as “prayer with the intention of a worldly connection” (TANATSUGU 1998). Human beings are present within this world. The world is multilayered and human beings also exist in a multilayered manner. Praying not to transcendental existences such as gods or buddhas is “prayer that is not based on religious faith.” However, a transcendental existence is present in the background, believing that the world will continue. In regards to that world, human beings, including both the living and deceased, will regarded as “presence of living as ordinary beings.” That, without doubt, is the third form of spiritual care, in which prayer that is performed by “nonreligious” caregivers who do not wish to attain faith in salvation or be at peace and in tranquility, is thought of as being conducted only to refrain from wanting to escape from the situation.



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