

scene in California was looser yet more extreme than on the East Coast, where there was still a hard edge of intellect. That was much harder to find in the West. In California, everything was "groovy, man." I think that it was while we were in the Bay Area that Rinpoche coined the phrase "cutting through spiritual materialism," which became the title of his best-selling book published in 1973. If he didn't use the phrase then, at least he was formulating the idea behind it. As he said sometime later: "Coming to this country was an interesting encounter. . . . A lot of people had already become professional spiritual supermarket shoppers, and some were still trying to become so."² At the same time, in general, he didn't seem too put off or upset by most of the people he met. In fact, he felt that people's fascination was ripe to be punctured and that there were possibilities for authentic spirituality to flourish in America, even in California!

We spent several days with Tarthang Tulku, another Tibetan teacher, who had been in the United States for about a year. He had a small house in Berkeley where he lived and conducted sessions with his students. Eventually, he purchased a center in a beautiful area of Berkeley Hills. Tarthang and Rinpoche were quite friendly, and in later years, they talked about going on vacation together in Mexico, although that never happened. Tarthang was beginning to think about bringing Western psychology into his presentation of the Buddhist teachings. That was very interesting for Rinpoche, since he too had begun to use some of the language and ideas from Western psychology to present teachings on the nature of mind and development of ego. Their approaches were quite distinct, but there was some common understanding. Tarthang extended a great deal of hospitality to Rinpoche and me at this time, and we were grateful for his generosity. We stayed with him several times when we made visits to the Bay Area.

While we were in California, Rinpoche also had a remarkable visit with Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, the founder of San Francisco Zen Center. Suzuki Roshi had been in America for more than ten years, and a large community of practitioners had grown up around him. He had an extraordinary effect on Buddhism in America. One would have to call him the true grandfather of the Practice Lineage in this country.

Sam Bercholz arranged for us to travel to Tassajara Zen Mountain Center, Roshi's rural practice center near Big Sur. We spent several days

there. There was an instant connection between Rinpoche and Suzuki Roshi. Roshi toured us around Tassajara, which he was justly proud of. It was a magnificent setting, with cabins set into the hillside, a beautiful shrine room, and wonderful hot springs that we enjoyed during our stay. In meeting Roshi, Rinpoche said that he had met his first real spiritual friend in America. He asked Roshi how he taught meditation practice to his students, and Roshi said that he had decided to have all of his students count their breaths during meditation, which he described as "Bodhidharma style." Bodhidharma is considered to be the father of Zen in China. Like Padmasambhava in Tibet, he was unconventional and could be very wrathful.

Rinpoche was quite affected by seeing how Roshi was teaching meditation, especially the emphasis on group practice at Tassajara. As I've mentioned, Rinpoche was already presenting the discipline of sitting meditation as the main practice for his students. From his experiences in England, he had realized the danger of Westerners getting tripped out and confused by the tantric practices in Tibetan Buddhism. He had encouraged some students in England to do prostrations, the traditional entrance to Buddhist practice in Tibet. As soon as we came to America, however, he stopped giving that practice. Later he asked almost all of his students from England to repeat their prostrations, after they were well grounded in meditation.

The instruction Rinpoche had been giving since we arrived in America was telling people to sit without much technique at all. He felt, initially at least, that any technique could be perverted or misunderstood, especially in the Western culture with its fascinations. At the beginning, he said: Just sit, don't count your breaths, don't label your thoughts, don't do anything. Just sit. Later he began to refine the technique.³ His discussions with Roshi about sitting practice and his observation of the environment at Tassajara played an important part in how his presentation of meditation evolved. Soon after our first visit, Rinpoche arranged for some of his senior students to practice at San Francisco Zen Center and Tassajara Zen Mountain Center so that they would have an appreciation for the approach to sitting meditation that Roshi stressed. Several students from the Zen center were also invited to conduct the first meditation intensives at Tail of the Tiger, daylong sittings that Rinpoche called *nyinthuns*.

Rinpoche was also quite taken by certain aspects of the Japanese aesthetic. In later years, when other Tibetan teachers taught at our centers, they often commented that the meditation hall had a Japanese feeling. The colors Rinpoche used were definitely Tibetan: Chinese vermillion red, bright yellow and orange, intense blues, and gold. However, the shrines he designed for his centers were quite unlike those in a Tibetan shrine hall. Traditionally, Tibetan shrines have many offerings and other objects on them, and there are lots of statues and paintings around them. From some point of view, you might almost say they're cluttered. Rinpoche designed a very simple shrine on which there were seven offering bowls filled with pure water. In the center of the shrine a crystal ball was placed, representing the open nature of mind.

Rinpoche also became fond of Japanese incense, and it was used exclusively in his centers for many years. It has a much more subtle scent than Tibetan incense. He also used Japanese gongs in the meditation hall to signal the beginning and the end of practice sessions. In addition to the sitting practice of meditation, Rinpoche introduced walking meditation, and some aspects of that practice I believe he took from the Zen model.

However, what was most important about this first meeting was the heart connection between Rinpoche and Roshi. After we left, Rinpoche said that Suzuki Roshi was the first person he met in America who reminded him of his own teacher, Jamgön Kongtrul. Rinpoche had Roshi's picture put on the shrines at all of his centers in America, along with the photograph of Jamgön Kongtrul, representing the Tibetan lineage. In this way, he honored Roshi as one of the lineage fathers in America. We would see more of him in future visits to California, although, tragically, he died from liver cancer in December of 1971, soon after we met him. In the short time they knew one another, he and Rinpoche made grand plans. It was partially Suzuki Roshi's inspiration that led in 1974 to the foundation of the Naropa Institute, a university based on the Buddhist contemplative traditions and Western scholarship as well. Rinpoche's work with psychology also went in new directions due to his conversations with Suzuki Roshi about the need for a Buddhist-inspired therapeutic community.

In addition to his publishing company, Sam Bercholz had started a metaphysical bookstore on Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley. We visited there