

ZEN NOTES



Abbot Suzuki Roshi

SHUNRYU SUZUKI ROSHI

By Mary Farkas

I thought to write something about Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, the individual who died at sixty-nine December 4th, 1971 in San Francisco, after spending twelve years in this country teaching.

After looking over the material I found in my files about him, I was struck with several things about it. The first is that almost nothing has been mentioned about his life prior to his coming to the United States. For us, then, the twelve years of his American stay are substantially his life; his significant work was accomplished in this brief span of years, one round in the Chinese way of counting years by twelves.

The second is that everything told about him and said by him (exemplified in his one book, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, published in 1970 and his remarks and lectures that appeared in the *Wind Bell*, Zen Center's excellent publication) represent the Soto Way so perfectly and impersonally that his twelve years here are clearly its manifestation, the man merged in the Way.

The third is that through the efforts of this small quiet man a thriving Soto Zen organization has sprung full-fledged into being in our land. The second phase of Zen's superhistorical history (the pioneer phase was its first) commences here. To speak about Suzuki Roshi, therefore, is to speak about Phase Two of Zen in America.

In the spring of 1959 Shunryu Suzuki Roshi came to lead the Japanese Soto Zen congregation at Sokoji Temple, 1881 Bush Street, San Francisco, where he was expected to remain for about two years.

As, one by one, English-speaking persons desirous of studying Zen sought him out, he told them, usually, that he did zazen every morning and that anyone could join him who wished to do so.

This particular congregation was somewhat known to us from the letters of a former member, who attended there regularly. It was typical of many such congregations, composed largely of Japanese-speaking persons. Their head priest also spoke Japanese only. The services in such temples, though differing in content, are noticeably like those in Western churches, showing elements of both Catholic and Protestant influence. The congregation usually sits in pews or on seats, and their buildings are Western in style and arrangement. Often meeting rooms may serve multiple uses for the community.

Some few non-Japanese-speaking Americans were regularly attending the services at Sokoji Temple. One of these, a former Institute member, who had gone to San Francisco in 1951, as I recall, was ordained a priest there, he wrote us in the fall of 1955, and was influential in adopting some of the practices at the Institute for English-speaking members. I think our Hannya-folders, which recorded this ubiquitous chant in Roman transliteration from the time of Miura Roshi's visit earlier that year, were dispatched from New York to enable those members to chant at zazen meetings something like ours, and our former member read Sokei-an's lectures at these meetings on Fridays. Miura Roshi had spoken there on his way back to Japan in the spring.

In December 1959 our correspondent wrote: "We have a new priest who

speaks English fairly well, and he is a grand person. Everyone at our temple is more than happy to have him as a teacher." In December 1961 he wrote again: " Since the arrival of our priest, a year and a half ago, I have not read Zen Notes to our group, as Rev. Suzuki has a fairly good command of English and everything has taken the Soto approach. On three sides of our temple we have a raised dais with tatami and cushions and even Charlie (another old Institute member) sits lotus posture, (we sit facing the wall), all lights out except the candle on the altar. Sensei walks around with the big stick--quite a few get some good whacks. I haven't as yet, Sensei says my posture is good. We have several boys that look like beatniks with beards, sweat shirts and some with sandals, but I must say they are well behaved and seem sincere. We usually have twelve or fifteen and often twenty-nine of a Wednesday night."

Within a year the group, needing more room, separated from Sokoji Temple and incorporated as Zen Center.

During the middle sixties the "well-behaved beatniks" along with the usual assortment of personality types that take up Zen were augmented by hippies. With LSD and marijuana prominent everywhere in San Francisco, interest in "consciousness altering" methods grew phenomenally high. By 1970 the sitting group had grown to more than three hundred students who practiced daily at a residence and zendo at 300 Page Street as well as at independent but affiliated zendos in Berkeley, Mill Valley and Los Altos. As the drug craze progressed through the normal phases, many young people who had turned away from drugs also

looked to Zen for firmer footing. When Suzuki Roshi visited the Institute in 1969, we asked him for his views about the Zen-drug tie-up we kept hearing of. From his reply, we gathered that students who had been on drugs gradually gave them up and that highly structured and supervised activities left little opportunity and lessened inclination. In an interview in the Village Voice, July 6, 1967, Peter Schneider (one of the leaders) said, "Many people coming to Zen nowadays have used or use acid. Once they become really involved in Zen though--say by the time they're ready to come down here--they've stopped. Acid can't help you reach truth the way meditation can. Meditation takes you far beyond, if you're willing to accept the discipline."

That discipline was provided when in 1967, at Tassajara, in the Santa Lucia Mountains below Carmel Valley, a monastery was established, to be later presided over by a second Zen master invited by Suzuki Roshi, who organized it, point by point, on a modified model of traditional monasteries.

The first summer about seventy students qualified by accepting, after six months practice in San Francisco or other qualified zendos, three days of *tangaryo* (continuous uninterrupted sitting from 4 a.m. to 9 p.m. with only short breaks after meals) were permitted to remain there from periods ranging from a few days to three months. When asked about the makeup of this group, Dick Baker gave a random sampling--college students, many from Minnesota and Texas, professors, a psychiatrist, an importer, a bookshop owner, a former naval commander, and a few housewives. Some remained after

the summer as students and directors. A few stayed for years.

Volume IX, Fall-Winter 1970-1971 of the Wind Bell vividly described the communal life at 300 Page Street, the large building into which the city group had moved in 1969.

Those living in the building (about seventy can be accommodated) were asked to attend a minimum of one zazen period a day and to share the house cleaning and kitchen work. "The major requirement is that you have completed three months of zazen practice, that your effort is seen as sincere, and that you can meet the monthly payment, now \$90. This includes a \$30 pledge fee for Zen Center staff and maintenance and teaching expenses." Turnover was high. After 16 months of full occupancy, one-fourth of those who originally moved in remained.

Several more Japanese priests arrived to help out and a growing brotherhood of American teachers are being developed, several of whom have been ordained as priests, thus establishing an American line of succession. In 1969 Suzuki Roshi ordained six young Americans as first order priests. Richard Baker, the founding director, and one of the prime movers in the whole project, received Dharma transmission in 1969. The ritual, from an American view extraordinarily structured, has been somewhat trimmed, Baker stated in a Time article, Oct., 1968, to fit the American attention span. "The Japanese like huge ceremonies that go on for a week. Now the roshi will take a two- or three-day ceremony and cut it down to two hours. Recently I told him that if he doesn't cut it down to half an hour, I won't come."

The day, however, is not cut down. Beginning at 4:40 a.m., it combines meditation, work and study until 10 p.m. And bows have been increased to nine instead of the usual three.

At both establishments, city and country, the Soto emphasis on the careful performance of daily acts prevails. "Kitchen work and meal practice," Suzuki Roshi said, "are very important. This is the first step toward the practice of non-duality. Those who have non-dualistic meal practice can extend that practice endlessly into various practices. The way we take care of kitchen work should be the same way we take care of our posture and breathing and every part of our body in our zazen."

No detail was left to chance. With considered forethought even a cemetery was laid out. Suzuki Roshi prepared his students for the time he perhaps knew would be soon at hand, the time hardest for students: "If when I die, the moment I'm dying, if I suffer that is all right, you know; that is suffering Buddha. No confusion in it. Maybe everyone will struggle because of the physical agony or spiritual agony, too. But that is all right, that is not a problem. We should be very grateful to have a limited body... like mine, or like yours. If you had a limitless life it would be a real problem for you."

Suzuki Roshi's personal example will be remembered in every part of the establishment. "The only reason we're here," a student said, "is that we are students of Suzuki Roshi. The only reason Zen Center or Tassajara exists is because of Suzuki Roshi."

Suzuki Roshi was a true inspiration to all who knew him. He did not spare himself but gave freely, working and

living his own Way before their eyes. His non-ego attitude gives us no eccentricities to embroider upon. Though he made no waves and left no traces as a personality in the worldly sense, the impress of his footsteps in the invisible world of history lead straight on. His monument is his establishment of the first Soto Zen monastery in the West, with its city adjunct.

The pioneer period of Zen in America, Rinzai in essence, exemplified by Shaku Soyen, Sokei-an Sasaki, Nyogen Senzaki and Daisetz Suzuki, offered Zen to Americans by lectures, writings, and sanzen. Soen Nakagawa Roshi, and his distinguished disciple, Eido Tai Shimano, continuing in the line first trod by Nyogen Senzaki in Los Angeles, have now established a traditional center here, with a country zendo. In Rochester, New York, the establishment of Philip Kapleau, of *Three Pillars of Zen* fame, is also flourishing. An English-born woman, Jiyu Kennett Roshi, established a Soto monastery on Mt. Shasta in 1970. In the Los Angeles area, a Myoshinji man, Joshu Sasaki Roshi, who arrived on the scene some ten years ago, is energetically commuting among his growing Rinzai-ji branches as he develops teachers to lead them. Two Chinese monastic establishments, one in San Francisco, one in the Bronx, are also under way; though not specifically Zen, their Mahayana teachings tend to overlap with it. Tibetan centers also exist.

Will Phase Two Zen, with its structured monastic regime under strict supervision be the way of America? Will we be drawn to a system like that in Southeast Asia where young men and (attention Fem Lib) women will under-

take monastic living and training as part of their education?

A more mixed form exists in the lay-zendo self-awakening method which we ourselves somewhat lazily exemplify. Regular zazen, periodic sesshins, with professional leaders when available, plus visits to professional centers here or in Japan is another answer for national and even international cooperation, with groups of all sizes interacting, as projected by Sokatsu Shaku and his descendants.

While (mostly) young Americans have been throwing themselves into the monastic meld, one questioning voice has been heard, that of Alan Watts, though, as he first says, in a letter published in the November 1971 issue of *The Middle Way*, he "would not for a moment wish to impede the excellent work now being done in Western Zen monasteries, of which there are at least six (including the second largest in the world) in the U.S.A...it is not generally realized by Western Buddhists that the majority of student-monks in Japanese Zen monasteries are sons of priests, or other very young men, who have been sent to these institutions by their fathers. This has probably been the case for some centuries, and it follows that the style of discipline imposed is designed for youths barely out of adolescence who have no natural and independent interest in Buddhism. The Western equivalent would be an ecclesiastical boarding-school for boys or a pre-seminary training school for Catholic priests...It is therefore somewhat humorous, and a little sad, that Westerners sincerely and deeply interested in Zen submit to these disciplines under the impression that

they are very esoteric and essential to Buddhist wisdom...May I cautiously and respectfully suggest that many Oriental masters, in their training of Western students, are simply following custom and habit, and have not seriously considered how to deal with mature adults, coming to them with a genuine, and urgent interest in the Dharma."

At this time, what I personally feel most urgent is to express the utmost gratitude to those Japanese Zen teachers who have taken the trouble and in some cases given their lives to advance Zen in this country. Their remarkable and selfless kindness must never be forgotten. As an American Zen Buddhist, my gratitude is not limited to those who have been my own teachers, nor of my own sect, but includes all those who are truly bringing Japan's greatest treasure here. Today, particularly, I feel like saying, to use an expression of Paul Reps, to Suzuki Roshi, thank you for your life. It has benefited us all.

In conclusion, I'd like to quote Suzuki Roshi once more, this time on the

Bodhisattva Way, which is beyond sects and applies to all who take The Vow.

Our practice is to help people, and how to help people is to practice our way in each moment. That is how to live in this world and how to practice zazen. To have absolute refuge, we do not have emotional activity or thinking activity in our practice. To stop thinking, to be free from emotional activity when we sit does not mean just to be concentrated, but to have complete reliance on ourselves, also. We are just like a baby who is on the lap of its mother. That is zazen practice, and that is how we should extend our practice to our everyday life.

Of course, there are no special rules on how to treat things or how to be friendly with others. How we find the way in each moment is to think about how to help people practice a religious way. If you don't forget this point, you will find out how to treat people, how to treat things, how to behave yourself and that is at the same time the so-called Bodhisattva Way.

Rinzai Record

If there were a Buddha-Mara, that is, one in whom Buddha-nature and Mara-(evil)nature are inseparably combined, like the mixture of water and milk from which the Goose King, Hamsaraja, drank the milk alone, one who has the true Dharma Eye would distinguish the Buddha and Mara. But if you favor the sacred and abominate the secular you sink or swim in the sea of birth-and-death.

If you examine Rinzai's words carefully, you will see that he was trying to simplify the Buddhism of his time, which had become so complicated during the Tang Dynasty. He was really trying to popularize Buddhism so that everyone in China might understand its true principle. But today, when we read the Record, we feel as though we are climbing a mountain instead of coming down from its top to the town below. We realize that our time is an intellectual one com-

pared with the Tang Dynasty, when such a simple Buddhism was being proclaimed. Such simplicity is difficult for our minds to understand. When I read this Record, I always feel that if someone were to call "Ah!" and another were to answer "Ah!" that would be the whole story of Rinzai's Buddhism. Perhaps we might find someone with such a simple mind in the American Far West. In the deep woods where no ax has touched a tree, if we called to him, "Hey!" he would just

answer "Ha!" He would not be afraid to look at anything, he would not hesitate to answer, he would be very kind and very simple. In the city, if you call "Hey!" they'll think you a pick-pocket. When I was in the West I thought America was the natural ground for Zen Buddhism. Comparing American students with ours, ours are putting on rouge and white paint and hanging trinkets on themselves. The Oriental has lived so long in complicated thoughts that his mind is enwrapped with artificial affectations, while the American is very simple. Of course in the cities there are many complicated people, but I cannot believe that any artificial, sophisticated, metaphysical type of religion will fit the American heart.

In striving to understand many things in my own past (and I haven't had much time to come to a conclusion) I feel now that I would rather make a solid foundation on the same ground than spread new branches from the trunk of this tree. My nature demands that I converge my effort to the center, to the root, to simplify life. Perhaps I have become lazy--lazier than in my youth, though I was lazy then also--but I like to see everything going on as it is without analysis by philosophy or logic.

I hold my glass in my hand and know that its colors--white, yellow, blue and red--come from various sources that I can observe logically, but this observation has nothing to do with the fact that *this is that*.

Even when we know this simple Reality, however, our life never stands upon it, but upon the results of our artificial brain activity. Perhaps we should not blame ourselves for the

fact that while animals live in nature, man must live in his brain.

We enjoy a landscape, but we value a landscape that is painted more; we see the beauty of the human body on canvas, in marble or ivory, better than in the living body of a human being because the beauty of the form is abstracted from natural conditions.

It seems to me that the human being who lives abstracted from nature is like someone who intoxicates himself with alcohol, which is abstracted from a natural source. There is a real drama on every street corner, but we do not see it as drama; we can appreciate it only on the stage, where it is simplified. My friend asked me to go to the country, but I prefer to observe human life rather than nature--it is nature abstracted from the wild state, love represented. I draw a line distinctly between a being who lives in nature and one who lives in his brain. Standing upon that viewpoint, I see what is called evil or virtue, but to me there is no mixture. It is a shortcoming of the human being that he always mixes up nature and art. The human being took the food from nature, ate it and created art; then he abominated returning to his natural home. When we think of nature, we think of art, but do not mistake nature for art. Art is abstracted nature.

If there were a Buddha-Mara: If Buddha is Wisdom, what is Buddha-Mara? A word like this gives us a portrait of Rinzai. Of course he is confessing what he is, someone who has creative and destructive power at the same time, who understands Nirvana and evil. He is in darkness (avidya) and understands entire annihilation--in other words, Buddha. The evil of which Rinzai

speaks is entire darkness.

In Mahayana theory, the Alaya consciousness comes from the hidden consciousness, as heat that has not permeated the air, or light that has not come into the circle where light may be seen. In interstellar space, light is not shining--there is no air, no light, no heat--it is a latent force to be manifested materially. In consciousness there is the part that is hidden, amara, also.

The Buddha called this Nirvana and also avidya; before we understand it, it is darkness, and when we understand it, it is Nirvana.

Someone said, "What is it that makes the difference? If you know, then you are emancipated." Someone else said, "Though you do not know where you came from, anyway you will be emancipated."

In Sanzen, when I realized entire annihilation, I felt as though I had broken through the bottom of a bucket and I understood the poetry of the ancient Buddhists describing the bottomless pail holding the full moon. I appreciate it; I have broken through the bottomless pail of my mind.

Buddha-nature and Mara-nature are inseparably combined, like the mixture of water and milk from which the Goose King, Hamsaraja, drank the milk alone. Rinzai borrowed this statement from an old sutra. Water is enlightenment and milk is ignorance. We come from original darkness (avidya) and therefore do not know the Real in us; we use it unconsciously, not knowing how we do it. Using this instinct from the darkness of avidya, we make many mistakes without realizing it--for we are a mixture. Hamsaraja, the Goose King, sucks the milk of original dark-

ness and leaves the clear water of Buddha-nature. The Buddha teaches the same--by destroying the darkness in the mind, one leaves the Buddha nature--the real enlightened nature. It is in all naturally when the cloud of illusion is blown off the mind; then the sun shines naturally in the mind. So Buddha is the "Goose King" drinking the milk of ignorance and leaving the clear water of enlightenment.

One who has the true Dharma Eye would distinguish the Buddha and Mara. The arhat has three supernatural faculties that enable him to know his past, his present and his future state.

In what stage was your consciousness in the past? In what stage will it be in the future? now? Is your mind emancipated? Where is the trouble in your mind? Is it in darkness or not? If Rinzai has experienced all the different stages of his own consciousness, he knows the consciousness of others.

If you favor the sacred and abominate the secular, you sink or swim in the sea of life and death. You have experienced all the different stages and are nothing but consciousness--the tip of your finger, toe, nose, or tongue--all is consciousness. From Rinzai's standpoint, you must not love the condition called sacred nor abominate the condition called secular. Why sacred? Why secular? No reason--for these exist in the human mind but not in the true mind. If you attach to such ideas you "sink or swim." This is the "sea of birth-and-death." Here you cannot attain absolute understanding--you always live in the relative; you have to live in your mind and cannot reach a stage higher than that.

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