

## BOOK REVIEW

(Lama Anagarika Govinda)

ZEN MIND, BEGINNERS MIND; Informal talks on Zen meditation and practice by Shunryu Suzuki, Master of Zen Center, San Francisco and Carmel Valley; edited by Trudy Dixon, with an introduction by Richard Baker. Published by Walker/Weatherhill, New York & Tokyo 1970. 134 pages; price \$4.50.

If spontaneity is the hallmark of Zen Buddhism, then this book conveys this characteristic attitude in a most charming way. It has the freshness of the spoken word in response to a momentary situation or problem of everyday life, and we can almost feel (or see with our inner eye) the smiling countenance of the Roshi. Trudy Dixon, one of Suzuki-roshi's closest disciples, who dedicated the last year of her short life to the editing and arranging of these talks, gives an excellent description of the relationship between Zen teacher and Zen pupil; and one of the best definitions of the title "roshi", which corresponds to the Indian term "guru": "A roshi is a person who has actualized that perfect freedom which is the potentiality for all human beings. He exists freely in the fullness of his whole being. The flow of his consciousness is not fixed repetitive patterns of our usual self-centered consciousness, but rather arises spontaneously and naturally from the actual circumstances of the present. - His whole being testifies to what it means to live in the reality of the present. Without anything said or done, just the impact of meeting a personality so developed can be enough to change another's whole way of life." (p.14)

So far the West has been fairly swamped with Zen literature and more or less self-styled Zen teachers. But Suzuki-roshi, who has taken upon himself the difficult task to make an entirely new beginning of Zen in a Western country whose traditions are diametrically opposed to those of his own country, is the first who has succeeded not only in creating widespread interest in the ideas of Zen, but to establish Zen as a way of life by founding the first Zen training monastery outside Asia, at Tassajara (above Carmel Valley) in the mountains of California. Besides this many other groups have sprung up under his able leadership, the biggest one

it is the effort to improve ourselves that is valuable." For this reason the famous four vows of the Mahāyāna are not to be judged from the point of view whether they are attainable or not, but whether they are worth striving for or not: "Although sentient beings are innumerable, we vow to save them. Although our evil desires are limitless, we vow to be rid of them. Although the teaching is limitless, we vow to learn it all. ~~Although~~ Although Buddhism is unattainable, we vow to attain it." <sup>The Roshi's comment is: /</sup> "If it is unattainable, how can we attain it? But we should! That is Buddhism. To think, 'Because it is possible we will do it', is not Buddhism. - Whether or not it is possible is not the point. If it is our inmost desire to get rid of our self-centered ideas, we have to do it. - Your effort appeases your inmost desire. There is no other way to attain calmness. Calmness of mind does not mean you should stop your activity. Real calmness should be found in activity itself. We say, 'It is easy to have calmness in inactivity, it is hard to have calmness in activity, but calmness in activity is true calmness.'" (p.41/42)

While reading the book, the title "Zen Mind, Beginners Mind" reveals itself in its true meaning, namely, that this book is not meant merely as an introduction for beginners, but on the contrary, that a Beginner's Mind is the true mind of a genuine Zen follower, because only a mind that has the freshness, and receptivity and openness of a beginner, is an unprejudiced and spontaneous mind, who can see things anew in every moment of his life, unhampered by the deadening routine of habit and preconceived ideas. It is this freshness which pervades the whole book and brings us directly into the presence of the Roshi, who defines wisdom as "the readiness of the mind". (p.111)

The book has been beautifully produced under the loving care of the Roshi's closest disciple, Richard Baker, the founding director of the Zen Mountain Center and himself a Soto Zen priest who is presently living in Japan. The jacket as well as the fine cloth-bound cover of the book show the calligraphy by Shunryu Suzuki Roshi. The back of the jacket bears an almost life-size photograph of the author by Robert S. Boni. <sup>(excellent,</sup>