

VERBATIM VERSION--Not Proofed

Gil Fronsdal

Saturday Afternoon, 30 May 1998

Sati Conference, Palo Alto, CA

*Introduction*

And then I'm also very pleased to introduce to you the Reverend Koshin [?] Ogui, who—I'm happy because he was one of the early students of Suzuki-roshi, and also because he has maybe a little bit different perspective on Suzuki-roshi than the Zen Center crowd because he wasn't exactly part of Zen Center as I know it. Rev. Ogui is a Japanese Pure Land priest. And one of the tenets of Pure Land Buddhism, simplistically, is you don't practice—you *can't* practice in a kind of formal way. Formal way of practice is no longer possible or it reinforces a sense of self, perhaps, and gets in the way of real realization.

So meditation is usually not considered something that Pure Land Buddhists do. But Rev. Ogui became a student of Suzuki-roshi and went on to become one of the important teachers and ministers of Pure Land Buddhism in America. But in doing that, he also teaches zazen, which is a little bit of a radical thing to do, I *believe*. So I'm very glad that he's here, and glad that he can offer his perspective of Suzuki-roshi. Thank you.

Koshin Ogui

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*On Getting out of Meetings*

*A Strange Man*

Rev. Ogui— Either  
title OK? Or please  
choose another.  
—Editor

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*"Today is today.  
Today is not yesterday.  
Today is not tomorrow.  
Do you understand?!"*  
— Suzuki-roshi

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Thank you.

What a strange man [laughter] is Shunryu Suzuki-roshi.

My meeting was scheduled first weekend of June, and because of the head of administrator's convenience, re-scheduled to this weekend, which I had to fly in from Chicago. Here I am. [Laughs.] Very strange man, he is. [Laughter.]

At his death, of course I was saddened, and yet something woke me up early in the morning. Something made me to write something about him. So I followed such inner energies—karmic energy—and I couldn't help myself to write about him [...] times—what ten, thirteen, fourteen times which I forgot.

Here you are. Here *you* are. That is amazing. And here I am, meeting together under name of Suzuki-roshi's conference. What kind of being *is* he?

I am very honored to meet with senior leaders of Zen Center, such as Tenshin Reb Anderson and rest of senior leaders, teachers, and Gil was kind enough to make arrangements. Melanie pulled me out from meeting. Again, Suzuki-roshi was kind enough to pull me out from business meeting which I didn't like. [Laughs, laughter.] Very strange.

I came to United States 1962. Then I had argument with my senior monk or minister in Los Angeles, so that I was under care of head administrator, *socho* [?], like archbishop-type. "Under care." Sound is good, but under *watch* [laughs, laughter]. I was very much depressed. I was ready to go back to Japan because of so many reasons. What I had to do in Los Angeles was nothing but memorial services and funeral services, putting all the papers in the envelopes, and so on, which is fine. Yet I was among the midst of Japanese and Japanese-American community, which is fine too. But I kind of questioned, "Where is rest of the Americans?" And of course, because of my limited ability of English, frustrations, excitements made me very difficult crisis or difficult situations. And I was "under care" of the head administrator in San Francisco. I was ready to go back to Japan.

Then one day, very cute Zen priest walked into the Buddhist bookstore. He foresaw my insight, I think, as you mentioned in part. Someone mentioning about he could *read* mind. And he said, "Well, even Jodo-Shin-shu minister, why not come to sit with me?" I had such experience when I was in Japan. My father was very strange man. Even he was Jodo-Shin-shu priest at 17th generation, he sent me to Rinzai Zen temple, which is located to next village when I was small. Which means I was bad boy [laughter], because I did not behave well same as with rest of the brother and sister. He sent me to specially to the Zen temple [laughs, laughter] when I was *grammar* school, which means fifth or sixth grade, I believe. So I was curious why I am the only one who had to go to different temple to stay with old distinguished nice Zen priest.

Because of such a karmic relationship, invitation from Suzuki-roshi was not much strange. So I started harder to practice zazen meditation again at Soko-ji. As someone was mentioning, it was a time I came back to San Francisco from Los

Angeles 1963-4-5-6 area. The area or time of hippies. Cultural evolution of time. [...] flower boys and girls like that.

The one time I remember that the young flower girl walked in with almost naked, but she had some kind of tennis-court netting as her dress [laughs, laughter]. This is a true story which I experienced. Which means you could see everything through, right? Then Suzuki-roshi said—well, Katagiri-roshi was there too—"Could you tell her to wear a little more?" Then Katagiri-roshi had a habit to scratch his head and say, "Ahhh. *Koma tana*." He always, "I don't know what to do." That was his habit, sometime he say that. Then he looked at me [laughs, laughter] and said, "Could you tell her to?" [Laughter.] But I didn't know how do I say in English, you know. [Laughter.] But in the other hand, I was young. I was at the age of 23, so that I was sort of enjoying it in a sense [laughs, laughter]. So I started thinking, how do I say in English, "Wear a little more" [laughs]. Katagiri-sensei didn't know exact English word to say it. Anyway, I approached her and said, "Suzuki-roshi is saying, you better wear a little more. Otherwise (*that* was a difficult word) other will get excited." Well, she cried and she said, "This is my best dress!" [Laughs, laughter.]

Rev. Ogui— Spelling of Japanese phrases throughout is only a guess. Corrections needed. — Editor

And Katagiri-roshi always said, "You know, I don't know what to do." But he did so many things. And Suzuki-roshi was, as you mentioned that, very compassionate and same time very powerful person of wisdom. He accepted anyone to come. Then one day, he was giving a talk. And he said, "Today is," then walking slowly (my English is better than his English at that time, you know, contrasted with what I'm talking now; he was much dignified English—"Today *izzu*" [laughs]. "Today *izzu* mmmm [Samurai-style "mmmm"] [laughter], today *ja*." "*Ja*" is Japanese, you know [for "Well!" or "Then!"]. Emphasis of word "today is today." "*It is*, indeed," you know. In Japanese, say "*ja*." "Today is" (walking along), and "Today, today *ja*." [Laughs.] And walking along, I was waiting next word. And he said, "Today is notto yesterday." [Laughter.] Then [laughs] he said, "Today is notto tomorrow." Yeah. Then he walked toward one of the persons in front. He grabbed him. "*Do you understand?!*" [Laughter.] Then he *smiled*. And he said, "That's all today."

So I was astonished, you know. One of my frustrations is because of I could not speak English. But he spoke the words, "Today is today. Today is notto tomorrow. And today is notto yesterday." Five different words. That astonished me. *Wow!* "I could speak—I could use five words." [Laughter.] Oh! I was serious. Five words! That was such an impact. Something dropped. *Wow!* I could be little useful. Not like him, but useful.

Of course, later I realized the more important things. In Japanese expression is, "*Hara ga suwaru*." *Hara* is abdomen, belly. *Suwaru* means "sit down." "The one whose belly sit down." It's a kind of [...] which I was not, of course.

That impact, I could say, stopped me to stay in America. Only five or six *words*. So I could say, because of him I am still keep doing following my karmic path as Jodo-Shin-shu minister.

And one day, at the Colma cemetery, it was a national memorial day, Katagiri-roshi and I were start talking about financial difficulties. We talked about all kind of things. It came to the financial difficulties because he had to take care of his wife and children and so on. Then he was saying, "Oh then in that case, I'd better become Jodo-Shin-shu minister, who is more financially supported." [Laughter.] Then I said [laughs], "Well, but I rather attracted by Zen priest, and I should become Zen priest. So why don't we change?" [Laughs, laughter.] Then I intentionally asked Suzuki-roshi, who was sitting next to us, "It is possible that I become Zen priest?" And he said, "Mmm. That's difficult." "Then [laughs], how about Katagiri-roshi to become Jodo-Shin-shu minister?" He gave us same answer, "Mmm. That's difficult." So I didn't ask him any more [laughs], but in the back I felt that I'm talking while he was talking in such a silence, saying like, "Each one has karmic path to go." That I heard. Again, made me so determined to go my karmic path.

Then one night, someone knocked my door. I was taking easy after shower. So I opened the door, and Suzuki-roshi was standing right in front of the door. And he smiles, and he said, "Can you serve me a cup of tea?" So, kind of embarrassing with shorts, and I changed clothes and I welcomed him to cup of tea. He enjoyed the tea and stayed in my apartment for a few hours, then he thanked and left.

Later I found out [laughs] he run away from meetings at Soko-ji [laughter]. I heard from Mrs. Suzuki [laughs]. He suddenly *disappears* from the meeting! [Laughter.] He says he goes to rest room, but he didn't come back. [Laughs, laughter.] Then I found out that was a meeting that he was asked to choose which one he should take—which one means formal members of Soko-ji Temple or *Hakujin* people. "*Hakujin*" means "white people"—non-formal members of temple.

So I asked Mrs. Suzuki what did he say? She said, "He kept saying same things again and again." She was kind of excited. "He should say something more different way, but he kept saying, 'I take people who come to meditation practice.'" [Laughs.] Isn't that beautiful? Mrs. Suzuki [said], you're wrong. Kept saying same things: I take people. I go along with the people who come to zazen meditation.

All of you know that, right? When he is in Tassajara, he won't come back to Soko-ji for couple months. When he is really concentrated being with you, he forgot even his wife. She got excited one time [laughs]. He completely forgot her. So concentrating writing something to talk to you tomorrow morning or tomorrow evening, so he locked the door and he couldn't hear even Mrs. Suzuki's

banging the door from outside. So she said she once slept in the bathtub [laughs, laughter]. I think she was almost going to divorce him.

And of course he had to go back to Japan, but he decided to stay. Decided to stay with the people who liked to practice way of Zen, which means he left temple for people who practice Zen. He stayed for people who practice Zen. He is still staying [with] us, and even he pulled me out from meeting today [laughter]. What a *being* he is.

I am so grateful that I could be here today what I am. And thank you, all of you, who [are] still living with his spirit.

Again, thank you. Thank you very much.

[1956 words]