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Yo, David,

This stuff I'm going to write down here may not interest you in your current role, but I'm writing it down because it interests me, and might conceivably interest some later "editor" of the lectures. The disk I am sending you has thirty-nine lectures on it. Only the last two, the ones from 1971, are not based on Brian Fikes' transcriptions of the original tapes. The 1971 lectures are based on the transcriptions by early students that were collected in the Zen Center library's typescript edition of Suzuki Roshi's lectures.

Actually, I'm not really sure whether Brian transcribed the tapes, or simply checked the existing transcriptions and re-typed them on his word processor. Some of the lectures seem to have been heavily edited before Brian got to them, which makes me think he didn't actually re-transcribe the lectures but just checked them. I seem to remember at least one particularly well edited lecture (by Katharine Thanas, I believe) in which I may have changed only two words and some punctuation.

For the most part, what I was trying to do was put the words into normal English order, and to remove the Buddhist Hybrid-Japlish. I eliminated a lot of repetition when this seemed to be a product of oral presentation, and left some of it in when he clearly seemed to be trying to emphasize a point. Suzuki would frequently start a sentence, drop it in the middle, and recast his thought in different words or grammar. I always opted to go with one version of the sentence, but I may have combined elements of his initial foray into the thought with his second attempt. It is a miracle that he could teach and communicate as well as he did when struggling with the language barrier he had to deal with.

The Japlish is insidious and very difficult to root out of the text. There are times when I swore I had gotten rid of all of it only to return to a lecture a couple of days later and spot some the minute I picked up the text I had previously edited. The difficulty is compounded by the fact that some of his favorite mannerisms made their way into the unconscious of his students and reappear by oral transmission in the lectures of people who never actually heard him speak. So you get Japlish popping up in the lectures which everyone, including the Zen Center editors,

is so used to that they don't notice that we just "don't say that" in English. Also, after you dive into reading, you lose your "ear" and get dragged "off key" by listening to him speak.

The fact that these are spoken words also makes them difficult to deal with. I tend to fill the page with commas, break up long sentences, and put in "which's" and "that's" and other transitional and linking words which he left out. The fact that Japanese has no articles meant that Suzuki could take them or leave them in English, and mostly he just left them out. It gets tricky sometimes: he will always say simply "precepts," for example, where in English we would be more likely to refer to "the precepts." But, when you say "precepts are not potato chips," you don't necessarily mean "the precepts." At times you can't tell whether to go for the abstract or specific "precepts" when he probably means both, or, actually, is simply not making a distinction which an English speaker would. Very Zen, very non-dual.

I don't believe there is any Japlish in the first book, but there is also very little of his voice, at least not if you take the tapes to be his voice. I've always found ZMBM difficult to read. I finally decided that the problem with it is that you can't hear his rhythm, his breathing, his pace or style. The text is so carefully edited and pieced together that the speaker just sort of disappears. Very Zen, very non-dual...selflessness and all that, but curiously flat, like distilled water. It would be nice to try to keep some "voice" in the published lectures, but that would be difficult. It would help if one person produced the final version of all the lectures so that his peculiar choices of what to report to the reader from his experience of the tapes could be consistently present as a substitute for the more chaotic oral style of Suzuki Roshi. The editor's preferences would be a kind of "wave table lookup" for the digital/midi version of Roshi's analog voice.

I found editing this stuff very hard. It takes a lot of concentration. My deepest regret is that Brian didn't begin at the end of the tapes and work his way back. In my opinion, a lot of the early stuff is boring; the Lotus Sutra lectures are just a disaster. I think he probably sharpened up a lot as he realized he was dying. It would be great to have the whole thing on a CD ROM disk so you could see what Suzuki Roshi had to say about any given topic by doing a search.

Thanks for doing all this work. I hope to see these lectures published before too long.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tom Coburn". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name "Tom Coburn".