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Dharma West: A Social-Psychological Inquiry into Zen in San Francisco

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CHAPTER II

DEVELOPMENT OF SAN FRANCISCO ZEN CENTER

In the climate of the late 1950's, with the controversy over beat and square Zen, San Francisco Zen Center began. It is today the largest and wealthiest Zen organization outside of the Orient. Those who began zazen practice with Suzuki Roshi were older than those who are there today. One student who was present in the early days estimated that in 1961 the average age of the Zen students was between thirty-five and forty. They were regularly employed and came close to the description of the "square" Zen students that Watts described. Most of them had been associated with the Academy and were part of the zazen group under Tobase at Sokoji.

Shunryu Suzuki, who is now the Zen Master of the San Francisco Zen Center and the major force around which the Center has gathered, was the son of a Zen Master. Suzuki was given to his father's disciple to be trained in Zen and became a Zen Master at a very early age. In Japan, it is considered inappropriate to be trained in Zen by one's own father. Suzuki was not a typical Zen Master or member of Japanese society. During

World War Two he was quite a deviant, as he was the leader of a pacifist organization in Japan when almost all of Japan obediently followed the leadership of the government in its war against the allies.

Suzuki always felt an interest in spreading Zen to the west. In the late fifties, Tobase Roshi, who then was the Zen Bishop of America, wrote the Zen Soto Headquarters in Japan. He reported that he was having difficulty in managing Sokoji alone and requested that another Zen priest be sent over to San Francisco to help. Suzuki reported how he chose to come to San Francisco. He stated:

> At that time Sokoji was in confusion and the resident priest of Sokoji and the Bishop of America, Tobase Roshi asked Headquarters to send someone to help him. Headquarters appointed several people, but they would not accept the position. The people who wanted to come, Headquarters could not accept. My friend, who was Director of Headquarters, didn't know what to do, and he said jokingly, "Why don't you go?" Since I would be new there, I thought to myself that I would be free from the confusion at Sokoji and that I would have more freedom to do things. In my mind, I wanted to propagate our way with Caucasians. And in a month, when my friend came again, I said to him, "I will go." He was amazed.[1]

Suzuki said that he had no idea how long he was going to stay in America. He reports the following:

> I had no idea [how long I was going to stay] but I said "I'll come back in three years." I did not return to Japan during those three years, and in 1962, I asked my friend to send my wife. She was managing and teaching at two kindergartens, and I wanted my friend to get her out. . . . She

> promised the kindergarten and my congregation to bring me back in three years. When I decided not to return to Japan even then, I had to resign. Fortunately they wanted my boy [son] to be my successor.

Shunryu Suzuki arrived in America in May, 1959 to be assistant to Tobase Roshi at Sokoji. One or two months after his arrival, students at the Asian Academy discovered that he had come to Sokoji. He had six or eight students who wanted to do zazen with him. His early students said that when they asked him if they could study Zen with him, he said, "I sit every morning at five o'clock. You can join me if you want."

Practice at that time was very informal. Zazen periods were rather short. People had to climb over the pews, in what was later to be the main zendo, in order to find floor space in which to sit. There was very little ritual at that time. Suzuki said of those early days:

> First of all, I had plenty of time to be with students, because I was around, and because there were not many students. Sometimes we'd go to museums or movies or restaurants. We had a pretty good time. But I didn't want Zen Center to be a kind of social club, so at the same time I tried to refrain from that sort of activity. I wanted us to devote ourselves to Zen practice, not to eating or seeing movies.

One of those early students described the significant differences that she saw in those earlier days as compared with 1970 practice:

> The master-disciple relationship didn't come into the picture as strongly then as it does now that people want closer contact with him [Suzuki]. There were only eight or twelve of us, and on Saturday mornings we'd each bring some kind of food. I used to bring milk and eggs or just the eggs. B.K. was the cook. It was a closer and friendlier atmosphere than there is now, but that is also because of the size. Also, we didn't eat in the zendo. We ate in the kitchen, which I liked. When we sat at the table with him, we could watch every move that he made. Now it's difficult in the zendo for a lot of people to see him and besides, they're supposed to be looking right down. Whereas, at the table we could watch him fix tea, watch his facial expressions, gesture, etc.[2]

Another student described the feeling of the practice in the early sixties.

> There were fewer students, and Roshi had more time. He always attended parties and group things. And there was more individual attention and more time to chat or go out with him. There was a more relaxed atmosphere in the kitchen, and Roshi had a kind of leisurely attitude, like he just lived here, and these people were joining him, rather than he was the head of some teaching thing. There was a nice relaxed feeling about being in someone's living room all the time. We used to go and have tea with him or breakfast.[3]

Another student stated:

> Yes, I remember going for a Christmas trip on New Year's day--or going places like Farmer's Market and Mt. Tamalpais. There were quite a lot of occasions like that.

The informality of those times is well depicted in the following report of one of his early students. He said: "When we first came, sometimes he just didn't feel like coming down, and we would be standing there on the steps of Sokoji and he would wave to us to go away."[4] More than once he would do this. On the days

when he did come down to do zazen, the sitters would wait in the cold early morning air on the steps of Sokoji until Suzuki came out of his apartment across the road, opened Sokoji's door, and let everyone in. After zazen, Suzuki almost always invited the students to stay for breakfast.

As with the study group prior to Suzuki's arrival in America, this early group assumed none of the Japanese mannerisms of gassho,[5] shashu[6] and highly ritualized behavior either in the zendo or outside of it. As the woman above pointed out, breakfast was eaten with Suzuki while sitting in chairs and people would talk and look around while eating. Aside from short zazen periods and sutra chanting, there were no trappings of a subculture such as exists today. Zen Buddhism was not seen as an all-encompassing way of life. There was no sentiment about becoming ordained or going into the priesthood. The group members ate meat, drank alcohol, and lived in a relatively conventional life style.

The older students whom I interviewed all felt a nostalgia about the earlier days of Zen Center and expressed a kind of disappointment about the loss of those days. One woman expressed it in this way:

> There was a kind of special spirit then--a kind of innocence in that many of the students then didn't have a whole lot of preconceived ideas about what Zen was. It was much more open-minded then

> than now. One of the reasons why there was this openness to Zen was because there weren't the kind of books that influence people now, like The Three Pillars of Zen.

The expectations that gradually many new students brought with them was seen by some of these older students to be the unfortunate influence of Philip Kapleau who gave a picture of Zen practice as the monastic koan-study leading to enlightenment. Many of the older students felt disdain for the younger ones who come to Zen Center with "kensho fever"--a strong desire for an enlightenment experience that Kapleau has popularized.

Relations with the Japanese American Congregation

The life of the small zazen group and the life of the Japanese American congregation of Sokoji were quite independent. To reiterate, the focus of the Japanese American congregation was primarily to coordinate social activities in the Sokoji community. There was by and large no Japanese American interest in doing zazen. On the other hand, the San Francisco Zen Center, as it was later to be called, came together for the express purpose of zazen practice. The only things that the zazen group had in common with the Japanese American congregation were that both groups considered themselves Zen Buddhists, they both shared the same Zen Master, and the

small Caucasian group rented space in Sokoji for their meetings.

The Japanese American community had great difficulty accepting the idea that Caucasians could be seriously interested in Zen. In Japan, Zen Buddhism is thought of as confined to Japan. One's family background and religious tradition largely determined if one were a Zen Buddhist. Aside from very few, Japanese did not become Zen Buddhists out of a religious search. Caucasian Zen students who have returned from the study of Zen in Japan have complained about the fact that they had a difficult time being accepted as serious Zen students by the Japanese.

The Japanese Americans at Sokoji shared these ideas about Zen being a national religion. The members of the study group at Sokoji were looked upon with suspicion and mistrust, by the Japanese American congregation. The Japanese Americans had not forgotten their wartime internment, and those memories contributed to their uneasiness with the Caucasian group. Slowly, however, over a period of several years, the Caucasians were cautiously included in some of the social events of the Japanese American congregation. The older members of the Japanese American congregation spoke favorably of the early students and said that they were gradually accepted in the social life of the Japanese American congregation.

It later became clear that the cautious inclusion of the Caucasians was possible not only because of the relatively small size of the group, but more importantly because they were older and "respectable" in appearance. Their respectability was of course in contrast to the unkempt appearance of "hippies" who were later to invade the Zen Center.

Zen Center became incorporated and officially named in 1961.[7] This incorporation was done as a result of the increased size in the zazen group under Suzuki and the legal-financial status of this larger group. The early group with Suzuki gave him no official salary. Small donations of money and food were regularly given to him informally. Suzuki, perhaps to offset his financial position, engaged in takahatsu or begging as the monks from Zen Monasteries traditionally engage in in Japan. When asked about takahatsu, Suzuki explained:

> Yes, I did this once a week and sometimes continuously for two or three days for maybe a year or so. I started from here to Fillmore and sometimes from here to downtown.
> Windbell: What did people think of you?
> Roshi: Quite a few knew what I was doing and some gave me a dollar or fifty cents--that was a big surprise.
> Windbell: What did the police think of it?
> Roshi: I don't know. They never said anything. Perhaps they didn't know what I was doing. Someone told me it was against the law. I did it anyway.[8]

About the incorporation of Zen Center, Suzuki stated:

> By 1961, we had many more students, and when they gave me some money, I asked them to take care of

> that money for our expenses--equipment and such. Then I thought it would be better to have some organization to take care of all the business. We discussed what the name would be, and at last we decided on Zen Center. This was in 1961. It took one year to get permission from the state.[9]

The incorporation of Zen Center occurred in conjunction with the growing seriousness of the members. Suzuki planned the first one day sesshin in the winter of 1961. This was indicative of a more solid and intensive emphasis on zazen. Suzuki increasingly demanded disciplined sitting, precise chanting of the sutra and proper bowing. Even though he was giving more structure to the practice, the informality of those days found expression in his capricious time of zazen periods. One of the students reported:

> One of the things I remember about those early sesshins was how inconsistent Roshi was in the timing. Whether a period was forty minutes or one hour didn't make any difference to us but the fact that we didn't know [ahead of time how long the period was to be] did. And it seems that some of our zazen periods were twenty minutes, some of the kinhin[10] periods forty minutes. And then again we'd sit for an hour and a half.[11]

During an early sesshin one student recalled that Suzuki had indicated the beginning of zazen, and then he went outside of the Center and didn't return for several hours. At another time Suzuki would see that most of the sitters were getting restless and were anticipating the end of the zazen period. Suzuki would tell them that the zazen period would last twenty minutes longer to help

rid the sitter's attachment to a certain time length.

The variation in zazen and kinhin time is an important indicator of the nature of the practice. As Zen Center grew, kinhin and zazen times became fixed at forty minutes. The institutionalization of the zazen time period is in keeping with the growing size and impersonality of the Center. The personal touch and caprice of Suzuki Roshi is less evident and seems to be the accompaniment of the Center becoming an established center for Zen practice.

In the early 1960's, Suzuki began democratizing the Center. Members of the group were gradually given responsibility for carrying out the rituals and tasks during the zazen period. The kyosaku[12] carrying, timing of the zazen period, leading the service, lighting the incense were activities that members assumed. Even zazen instruction and giving lectures were assumed by older students. This democratization is in distinction to the practice of Zen in Japan in which the priest performs all functions in the zendo. The carrying out of administrative functions and the performing of the rituals by members of the sangha resembled the workings of a monastery more than of a householder group. At that time, however, the attitude and life style of the members was not monastic.

There were those at Zen Center who had dreams of the considerable expansion of Zen Center's facilities and influence. As Zen Center began to grow, its direction toward expansion and incorporation was opposed by some members who feared that they would lose the closeness and contact with Suzuki and the informality that had been their experience. The incorporation and expansion of Zen Center, which was conceived and carried out in 1961, was directed by a few aggressive, educated young men who were close to Suzuki. These men went about to organize Zen Center in a way that would attract Zen students and would make Zen Center an institution that would offer "real" Zen study to those who might only get such study by going to Japan.

There were many motives for this plan of establishing Zen Center as a legitimate center for Zen study. One clear motive, was the extreme difficulty of a westerner going to Japan to study Zen. Gary Snyder reported that the number of those who have gone to Japan to study Zen has been large, but the number who successfully completed Zen study is almost zero. He and others have said that the problems of language and culture to the non-Japanese interested in Zen study are almost insurmountable. In order to study Zen in a Japanese monastery, it has been necessary to learn not only Japanese, but Chinese and Chinese poetry in order to

understand the difficult teishos[13] of the Masters. Japanese monasteries, according to Snyder, will make no accommodation for the westerner who wishes to study Zen. Snyder estimates that ninety-nine per cent of all Zen teachers are unavailable to the westerner who doesn't know the language. There are, however, a handful of monasteries and teachers, mentioned in Chapter I, who will allow westerners to come to study without facility in the language.

With the incorporation of Zen Center, membership continued to gradually increase. Before the incorporation, Zen Center was literally very difficult for someone to physically find. If one was not involved in the Academy for Asian Studies, he would have little chance of finding Sokoji and Suzuki Roshi. One man who was seriously looking for a Zen practice Center described his difficulty in finding Sokoji. He said:

> I came to California in 1960 and it took me about six months to find Zen Center. . . . I had read the Way of Zen and the Spirit of Zen at that point, and when I read the Way of Zen, I finished the last page and then went back to the first and read it all over again. I admired him very much as a writer [Alan Watts] but I didn't want to attend what was called "seminar." That wasn't the kind of Zen I was looking for. I was looking for a practicing group and kind of suspected that it was here, because I had read The Dharma Bums, and it just seemed that this ought to be the place where it was at. I went to the Asian Academy and inquired if there were a practicing group but unfortunately got there at the time when there were no classes in session. . . . The Director of the Academy was there, and I spoke

> to him and he said, "Well, you should be enrolled in a class." And I said, "I don't want to enroll in a class I want to practice Zen." I looked in the phone directory, and there was nothing under Zen. I went down to Chinatown and found the Chan and Tao Societies, but they looked very forbidding from the outside and I didn't have the courage to knock, and I didn't quite think that was it, anyhow. I looked up the Buddhist Churches of America headquarters on Octavia Street . . . and they could not help me. I went over to Berkeley and went to the Shin Center there, and there were no Caucasians around. They could offer me lessons in Japanese and some Sanskrit but no practicing Zen or anything like that. At that point I decided, well, I'll just bide my time. And then, I think it was about the middle of November, suddenly right in the middle of a page in the Chronicle was a picture of a Zen Abbot who was visiting San Francisco . . . they gave the address . . . [of Sokoji].

After the incorporation, Zen Center became less and less difficult to find. The membership increased gradually. The zazen schedule grew to include morning and evening zazen, a Saturday morning sitting for five hours, a monthly one day sesshin, bi-annual week long sesshins, and bi-weekly lectures. Members at that time reported that even with the increased practice, there was no real sense of community. One student said: "Zazen was kind of like psychotherapy then, and there was no idea of the Bodhisattva ideal or a life long commitment to Buddhism or Zen Center."[14]

In those early days, the regular members were concerned with attracting new members and many of these members reported being pleased and surprised when a new sitter would continue to come. Anyone who wished to do

zazen was welcomed, and there was no period of initiation required prior to sitting with the regular group. Inevitably, there were many who were mildly curious about zazen and would come to the Center to satisfy their curiosity without having any intention of serious Zen practice. One Zen student who had been a regular member since 1959 estimated that between 1960 and 1965, there was a ninety per cent turnover of members in those early years with a core membership of ten to twelve students who were serious in their commitment.

By 1965, Zen Center had grown to the point that a good turnout would be twenty-five people. At that time the social environment of the San Francisco Bay Area was undergoing a cultural revolution of the young. In late 1964, the momentous Free Speech Movement had reached its peak in Berkeley, and the first avalanche of the youth rebellion was beginning. In Berkeley and elsewhere the old established order and values were breaking down. Young people who were involved in fraternities and sororities were developing a defensiveness about such a college life style. Involvement in political action was fast becoming "in" on college campuses in the Bay area. The great Auto-Row, Sheraton Palace sit-ins and demonstrations at Jack London Square were manifestations of this emergence of youthful interest in political action.

Both parallel with and succeeding this upsurge of

youthful political activity, there arose an enormous interest in certain drugs, especially hallucinogens like marijuana and L.S.D. The great Be-In of 1966 took place in Golden Gate Park in San Francisco where there were thousands of young people smoking marijuana openly and participating in this few found consciousness of "being-in." The Haight Ashbury was being inhabited by the first hippy pioneers and mottos of "turn on, tune in and drop out" were in the air. Throughout the United States the radio stations proclaimed San Francisco as the home of the flower children and psychedelic capital. They played a song whose lyrics rang out: 1/67

> If you're going to San Francisco,
> Be sure to wear a flower in your hair,
> If you're going to San Francisco,
> You're sure to find some groovy people there.

The flower children movement rapidly upstaged the weary political movements and the popular press exploded with stories about hippies, San Francisco, and the dangers and delights of L.S.D. the new Acid Rock music began and places like the Fillmore Auditorium and Longshoreman's Hall were instantly famous. These Rock Palaces vibrated with the L.S.D. sounds of the Jefferson Airplane, the Grateful Dead, and Big Brother and the Holding Company. The psychedelic poster became the new, exciting west coast art form. Lines of young people would form hours before small copies of these posters were distributed. A

new drug vocabulary emerged and terms like wiggy, freaky, turned on, groovy, crash, far out, out of sight, too much, psychedelic, mellow, trippy, to come on to [a drug], bummer, were every other word that many young people uttered.

This rush of L.S.D., S.T.P., D.M.T., psylocyben, and of course marijuana had a monumental effect on the lives of those youth who were using them. A new kind of man and life style was developed overnight by many in and around college campuses based on the regular usage of psychedelic drugs. With the new magic of L.S.D. and marijuana, there were those who earned the new labels of "acid head," "acid freak," "pot head," or just "head." It was a time in which anything was felt to be possible to the turned-on generation. Fantasies that would have heretofore been considered insane, unthinkable or out of the question were acted out. It was not uncommon for those involved in this drug culture to take L.S.D. every day for months or to regularly attend sexual orgies. L.S.D. exploded the boundaries of social acceptability and opened up the idea for those involved in this life style that "anything goes." Ramparts magazine quoted a hippy saying, "If shit would get me high, I'd eat it."[15]

The consequences of taking psychedelic drugs were enormous. For many, it validated a deep seated

resentment and discontent with the trend of American society and culture. These drugs provided a view of life and the world that enabled many discontented young people to sever their attachments to the forms and values of America and seek a different way. The Haight Ashbury, which flowered and died in a year represented the first social manifestation of L.S.D. use. Country communes were another way in which the acid consciousness manifested itself.

In the context of this time, there arose a great interest in eastern religions and practices. In 1966, the Beatles made a pilgrimage to India and became the disciples of Maharishi Mahesh and Transcendental Meditation. The music of the Beatles and other Rock groups began incorporating the music of the east. The press and mass media ran stories on these practices. Life magazine had a cover story on meditation. The Beatles' trip to India produced a glut of interest in Transcendental Meditation which abruptly declined when the Beatles left India and politely said that Maharishi was a fraud.

Zen Center experienced the effect of these social changes as well. In 1966, the regular attendance doubled from twenty-five sitters in 1965 to almost fifty. There was also a change in the kind of student who came at that time. He was not the older, regularly employed individual who had come in the beginning. The great

influx at Zen Center was composed mostly of younger people in their twenties who had much experience with drugs. They found that the ideas that they had heard in Zen were expressive of the kind of reality that they had experienced on drugs. It was a reality that they could not seek anywhere else but on drugs, and hopefully with Zen. They had undergone the most powerful experience of their lives on drugs. We will see in Chapter III how they had not been able to explain or understand their psychedelic experiences in any categories or concepts native to their culture. They had read the teachings of eastern mystics who seemed to have the same understanding that they had experienced on drugs. These people came to Zen to pursue the same experience to which the drugs had given them access.

This new influx of young people to Zen Center was a major change in the life of the Center. Another major change was occurring within Zen Center itself. Suzuki Roshi, several years before, had mentioned to his closer students the idea of Zen Center purchasing a place in the country to which the members could go for a more intense and monastic practice. Richard Baker, one of his disciples, immediately began looking around for such a place. In 1966, some land was offered as a donation by one of the Center's supporters. The land was located on the California coast near Jenner. Suzuki decided that

the land was too open and not secluded enough for the quarters that he had in mind. Then the older student found some land for sale which bordered on a national park near Monterey. Suzuki saw the land, thought it was appropriate, and with the urging of a few elite, influential students, this land became a serious possible purchase for the small Zen group.

This purchase of land was not, however, unanimously supported by the membership. It was clear that the younger, unmarried members of Zen Center were the motivating force behind the purchasing of this land. The older, familied students had great reservations about buying this land for what was advertised as "a more intensive center of practice." Purchase of this land meant an expansionist direction, which, for many older students in the group who were part of the beginning Sangha, threatened the family like, informal, intimate nature of the group. Some of the older students expressed this reservation in saying that Zen Center has become cold, impersonal, bureaucratized, and competitive. A woman said in an interview: "People didn't have to outdo the other person [in the early days of Zen Center]. We didn't have to get Roshi's attention--we had it."[16]

Not only was there opposition to the purchase because the expansion was a threat to the intimacy of the

group and to ready access to Suzuki, but also because the purchase meant a departure from "householder"[17] practice to one that was monastic. In Zen parlance, householder practice is one in which the individual leads a worldly life with a wife and family, has steady employment and does zazen perhaps in the morning and evening. The householder practice was the practice of those who opposed the purchase.

The other kind of practice, a practice that was implied by this purchase is monastic. It precludes marriage, family, steady employment and generally is "otherworldly" as opposed to "this worldly" style of life. Many of the people who opposed the purchase felt that the direction of Zen Center, implied in the purchase, would leave them out, invalidate their style of life and invalidate their practice as "real" Zen practice. As we have discussed in the case of the New York Zendo, the purchase of a country quarters was in fact a conflict over life styles.

As is typical of the Zen Center style, these conflicts were understated and muted. The desire of the majority of sitters clearly favored expansion and a more monastic practice. Suzuki Roshi's older disciple, Richard Baker, recently named Suzuki's Dharma-heir, was the spokesman who articulated the desire of this majority. He soon designed the first brochure that proved to be

the main vehicle of the fund raising. The cost of the land was one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. At the time that this brochure was sent out, twenty-five hundred dollars was paid as a down payment and the terms of the sale purchase necessitated a first payment of twenty-five thousand dollars. The group of fifty members was incredulous as to their ability to raise this huge sum of money for many of them were marginally employed. A woman who was involved in the office at the time stated:

> I just had no business being secretary [of Zen Center]. I was elected in the days when you wrote a few letters to people who wrote and asked about when zazen was or how they could best get into it and they were in Canada or . . . how could they sit at home, those kinds of letters. And right during that year the change came from the small group, really . . . financially poor . . . I couldn't do it [being secretary], I couldn't even type, and so to get the minutes [of the board meeting] typed was a big thing. And all of a sudden we were writing letters to people all over the country and sending out brochures that cost five hundred dollars to print. And like that was totally outside of my experience . . . and I didn't have the experience. . . . I thought Tassajara was too big . . . maybe some small farm somewhere . . . there weren't very many of us . . . it was because of him [Dick Baker], that we got Tassajara.

Kathy Cook

It didn't appear from first glance that there was any possibility of raising what appeared to be such a vast sum of money. One of the students involved with the purchase of the land, later to be called "Tassajara" or "Zen Mountain Center," said:

> Although it seemed too early and seemed impossible for such a small group who thought of themselves as impoverished and with no material resources to speak of to raise enough money to buy Tassajara, there was some feeling of "let's try it," and Dick was the catalyst and made each person feel that it was possible.[18]

A huge mailing list of fifty thousand names was compiled and the first brochure was sent out. It had fold-out pictures of the land considered. Its major selling pitch was that Zen Center's size demanded the purchase. The secretary of Zen Center at that time said that it was the first public articulation of what Zen Center was trying to do and made many of the Zen Center members feel that it was a legitimate project after all.

Soon after this brochure was mailed, the neighboring land, with a resort building and hot springs was put up for sale. Because the possibility of starting a practice period immediately, the leadership, with the prodding of Richard Baker, decided to buy it as well. A second brochure was mailed describing this additional purchase and then a large amount of money came back to Zen Center in response to the brochures. An involved student said:

> And the thing that was absolutely incredible was that the initial down payment of twenty-five thousand dollars on Tassajara came in the form of many small donations. And in fact . . . it took the first two years . . . for us to know that we could really do it. People sent us regularly small donations so

> that this enormous, r... ...s amount of money came in the fo... ...and ten dollar donations . . . it b... ...us that what we were trying to do ... ...r ourselves but something that sugges... ...ves for others.

The first brochure ... described the potential purchase and the money ... The second brochure was more personal and spiritual in content. In both brochures there was careful mention of Suzuki Roshi as a legitimate Zen Master who decided to stay in America permanently. Also there was careful avoidance of the word monastery, which in America is a loaded term. "Zen Mountain Center" the brochure read, "is not a place to retire permanently from the world, but rather a center to deepen the practice of meditation in a calm and natural environment. The second brochure included the ~~fact~~ that the hot springs was being purchased in addition to the original land described in the first ~~brochure~~. There was a description of the first practice period and an account of the improvements made on the hot springs. The preservation of the natural ecology and the beginnings of the zazen timetable were mentioned. The second brochure read:

> In addition to the physical work there is the primary practice of zazen (usually inaccurately translated as meditation). During training period, the schedule for students is--rise at 4 a.m., 50 minutes zazen at 4:20, followed by breakfast, a three hour work period ending with mid-day zazen, lunch, rest period, study period, a two hour work period, supper, a lecture, and one or two more periods of

> zazen before bed at 9:45 p.m. During the sesshin (an intensive period of meditation) ending a training period, zazen continues all day long except for breaks of walking zazen, lectures and meals. A leading psychiatrist and professor who has been a student of Zen both in this country and Japan was a student at Zen Mountain Center for the training period. He said that "Tassajara has everything Japan has and more."[19]

In less than a year Zen Center had received more than ninety thousand dollars from all over the country mostly in small donations. The next few months were to be no less successful and Zen Mountain Center was to remain financially solvent especially after the large fifty and sixty thousand dollar gifts were donated by wealthy donors in the New York area. Chester Carleton, founder of Xerox Corporation was a very important contributor to Tassajara. When he died, a few years ago, he left a twenty-five million dollar trust to Zen Buddhism in America.

The fund raising for Tassajara was not only confined to these brochures. Various benefits were arranged. They included workshops in sensory awareness, a Japanese and Indian music festival, a Japanese art sale. One of the highlights of the fund raising was the "Zenefit." It was a huge Rock concert put on by famous Rock groups of the area like the Grateful Dead and the Jefferson Airplane. The concert was a huge success and it brought together once again the hippy drug culture and Zen. This meeting, however, was just a cordial one night

stand and the ways of the drug users and the Zen practitioners increasingly diverged.

The secretary of Zen Center said that these fund raising projects were important means of bringing the Zen Center Sangha together. They were important ways in which Zen Center was publicized. The complicated nature of the fund raising events required much teamwork and effort. These events thus served as a focus that brought Zen students together who had formerly little or no contact with one another. Richard Baker, who is now seen as the mastermind behind the purchase of Tassajara was also the catalyst in the fund raising and "made accessible other people's energy and ideas."[20]

Zen Center had sent out approximately fifty thousand brochures. The fund raising events were heavily advertised. Zen Center, which was an obscure little group a few years before, was now a known fact among many people. On October 18, 1968, Time magazine did an article about Tassajara. Windbell, the Center's official publication, had started out as a mimeographed sheet of paper for a dozen or so members, and then was regularly reaching several thousand people all over the country. As one student said, "Tassajara really put us on the map."

Indeed it did. From the first mailing of the brochures, applications from all over the country came pouring in for the first training period. From this time

on, Zen Center was to see a typical sight which was a new product of suburban affluence and the inner psychological distress of many young people--the wandering young American with a pack on his back and no place to call home. The secretary of Zen Center described this phenomenon poignantly. She said:

> From this time on [from the Tassajara project] we just started getting more and more students. It was a very steady influx. The thing that absolutely staggered me was the way people would come. They arrived in the office with everything they owned in their back pack. Someone's sister's friend had told them about Zen Center and Tassajara. They had arrived with no more information than what amounts to "here I am and I'm here to practice Zen." And it happened many many times. A lot of those who were lay ordained came at that time."

Tassajara can be seen to mark a second phase, a major shift and change at Zen Center on many different levels. The age distribution radically changed, the motivation and life style of many students changed. The community itself changed. The model practice, the social structure of Zen Center, and the focus of the teaching changed as well.

Before Tassajara, Zen Center was a place to do zazen, and hear lectures. With the establishment of Tassajara, according to an older student, "people began to realize that there was a possibility of a much more intense and fully developed practice." This student said that the change in teaching was one from "Mercy Buddhism" to "Transmission Buddhism." She explained:

> Mercy Buddhism is practicing as a Bodhisattva to help people maybe without their really understanding the teaching so that they couldn't teach others. In Mercy Buddhism, the congregation comes to the temple maybe once a week, they send their children to Sunday school, but they don't really take a deep interest in exploring the depths of Buddhism . . . there's usually little zazen practice. Transmission Buddhism, on the other hand, involves the teacher-disciple relationship where the teacher's understanding gets transmitted in full to the disciple.

In the Rinzai sect, when "transmission" has been completed the disciple is given inka by the teacher which signifies that both teacher and disciple "have the same mind as Buddha."[21] In practical terms, Transmission Buddhism is the Buddhism practiced in a monastery. Mercy Buddhism is the practice of the lay householder.

The fears of the older students who opposed the monastic direction of Zen Center were realized. Zen Center was, in fact, moving in such a way as to preclude family and householder practice as "real" practice. Zen Center's official policy and ideology was pluralistic and there was no acknowledgement of "real practice." The unwritten norms, however, maintained that legitimate practice was monastic. A woman who was married and had children talked about her involvement as the secretary at Zen Center at the time.

> We knew that it [Tassajara] was fundamentally going to change our relationship with our master [Suzuki]. It seemed that it wasn't going to be a

> family thing, and all of a sudden there was going to be this change at Zen Center where people would go and live with Roshi . . . there weren't going to be any children, and our children were just starting school . . . it looked like all the energy was going to go into something that our life style wouldn't fit into . . . and there was this kind of grief about it. Like, I envisioned Roshi would go off and live there, and I wouldn't see him any more . . . no longer would I have any day to day relationship with him.

The Tassajara purchase was completed. This purchase laid the foundation for the larger, more bureaucratic form that Zen Center has taken. The appearance of the younger, more energetic students changed the nature of the atmosphere as well. The psychological space from which most of these new Zen students had come was from involvement with drugs, and rebellion against parents and society. Many had long hair, weird clothes, sustained themselves on marginal employment and had dropped out of conventional American life. They were seriously interested in practicing and studying astrology, macrobiotics and other vegetarian, esoteric diets, I Ching consultation, Tai Chi, and even acupuncture. "Straight Society" was an anathema and anything that smelled of middle class America was considered profane. Their entrance into the Center set up a division between the older "straighter" members who ate meat, smoked cigarettes and drank alcohol, and these younger Zen students. In some ways the division smelled of the earlier distinction of Alan Watts between beat and square Zen.

Related to this age and life style division, was the city-country division. Tassajara practice soon came to be seen by the people doing it as the only "real" practice. This judgment was highlighted when those at Tassajara returned to San Francisco. Those involved in the city practice became defensive against the implication that it was inferior to practice at Tassajara. A student described this schism in the following way:

> We had all these really big, strong, healthy people in Tassajara who were practicing zazen five hours a day and . . . were into this very powerful thing. You can't imagine how powerful that was . . . to go to Tassajara after being at Sokoji for a couple of years . . . Man, suddenly you go to Tassajara and you're practicing all the time . . . tore the top of my head and a lot of others' heads . . . some are really plugging into this Buddhist anonymous monk archetype thing, and then you come to the city, and you see all these people running around like this. . . . And the city people couldn't really understand what the Tassajara trip was, and the Tassajara trip got very superior, and they were sure that the city didn't understand them.

Zazen at the Center became very formal and ritualized and newcomers and old-timers alike expressed the feeling that the "vibrations" had become very cold, impersonal and competitive. The newcomer was paid little attention. Only after a year or so did he become accepted into the regular group. This is in contrast to the earlier reception of beginners. As life at Zen center diverged more and more from everyday American life, the necessity of careful scrutiny of who was

included became necessary. The social-psychological dynamics of this will be discussed in Chapter IV.

With the Tassajara purchase, the social structure of Zen Center changed. In 1966, the first of the houses across the road from Sokoji was rented by Zen students. This was the beginning of "Zen Housing." It was necessary to accommodate those who were returning from Tassajara to city life and for those waiting to leave for Tassajara. As there was a large number of people who came to Zen Center expressly to go to Tassajara, a waiting period was instituted. Thus, many Zen students would have to find accommodations for a few months prior to leaving for Tassajara. What was to be called "Zen Housing" was the answer to these housing problems. Similarly the student who was returning to city life from Tassajara needed accommodations immediately upon his return. He could move into Zen Housing and continue uninterrupted Zen practice at Sokoji.

It was possible for the Zen student living collectively across the street from Sokoji to support himself on one hundred dollars a month. Jobs were gotten in menial work like Gardening, babysitting, housekeeping, reading to the blind, and were passed on to other Zen students when one had to leave for Tassajara. As will be discussed later, those who employed Zen students usually allowed them to pass their jobs on to other Zen

students. The ethic in Zen Center is to do one's best and Zen students impressed their employers by their hard work.

With the institution of Zen Housing in 1966-1967, came the beginnings of the subculture that is evident today at Zen Center and Tassajara. This subculture arose from a number of Factors. Perhaps, most important is the fact that Zen Housing created a situation in which Zen students could live together, relatively isolated from American society. Aside from the few hours that most spent in daily employment, life revolved around Sokoji practice. Given the general antipathy for the forms and values of American culture, the Zen subculture was rather ecclectic and drew from a number of sources. Drug subculture, Japanese forms, descriptions of Zen monks in English Zen literature were some of these sources. Yet there were questions that had to be resolved. Should men and women live together in the same quarters? What about drug use? What about sexual encounters between Zen students? What about sexual encounters between a Zen student and someone that he brings to Zen Housing? What about diet?

The place of sex in Zen Housing was never resolved. There were casual sexual encounters but few long-term relationships. Living together out of wedlock was sanctioned. The diet by and large was vegetarian

with emphasis on macrobiotic eating in some of the houses. Drugs were not used although there were some exceptions. Recently more explicit rules have arisen to govern the issue of drugs.

In late 1966 and early 1967, branches of Zen Center were being established around the Bay Area. One of the oldest students of Suzuki found that life in the city was very trying for himself and his family. Without the blessing of Suzuki, he moved to Mill Valley. There he established the "Mill Valley Zendo" which presently has a regular attendance of twenty-five students. The atmosphere and way of life at the Mill Valley Zendo is very different from the San Francisco Center. It retains the intimacy and small size of the original group that began with Suzuki.

A student of Suzuki from Berkeley established a small Zendo in Berkeley after he had commuted daily to San Francisco. The Berkeley Zendo is located in an old redwood attic in the top of his house. The membership in Berkeley has increased greatly and today fifty sitters are not unusual at evening zazen. The student who started this Zendo was ordained in 1969. He has given the Berkeley Zendo a monastic feeling as he is unmarried and frequently goes to Tassajara. Breakfasts are formally eaten in Berkeley in the morning and most of the regular zen students' life style resembles that in San Francisco.

A third branch center was established in Los Altos by a woman who donated a house that she owned to the San Francisco Zen Center. A monk from Japan came in 1967 to be the head of this Zendo and since his arrival, the Los Altos Zendo has experienced an increase in membership.

All three branch zendos have been made financially independent of the San Francisco group. These zendos are all smaller groups with more intimacy and less rigid practice. There is a close connection between these branch zendos and the main one in San Francisco. Many members of the smaller groups keep in contact with San Francisco by attending the five hour meditation-breakfast-service held in San Francisco on Saturday morning from five a.m. to ten a.m. The members from the smaller zendos also attend some or all of the monthly and annual sesshins held in San Francisco.

The members of the Berkeley, Mill Valley, and Los Altos Zendos are primarily younger people between the ages of twenty and thirty. They consider San Francisco Zen Center their parent organization and Suzuki Roshi their teacher. There is a feeling at the San Francisco Zen Center that practice at these branch zendos is less authentic than in the main center. This feeling is shared by many members of the branches, many of whom go to the San Francisco group as they become more deeply committed

to Zen practice.

While there were internal divisions and changes occurring within Zen Center itself, other problems were surfacing between the Japanese American congregation and the Zen Center group. The only official relationship between Zen Center and Sokoji was an agreement whereby Zen Center rented the main zendo for daily zazen for two hundred dollars a month. To reiterate, the Japanese American congregation had no interest in serious zazen practice as did the Zen Center group. The Japanese American cautiously accepted the early members of Zen Center, between the years 1960 and 1964. This early group was invited to some religious ceremonial holidays of the Japanese congregation such as the celebration of Buddha's birthday and enlightenment. This was possible not only because the regular members of Zen Center were regularly employed and groomed in appearance but because they were relatively few in number and could be relatively easily assimilated by the Japanese American group. As time passed, however, the Zen Center population grew to the point where it all but overtook the temple. Worse, as far as the Japanese Americans were concerned, there were an increasing number of people who looked like "hippies." There were also "crazies" who would sometimes wander into Sokoji high on L.S.D. wanting to tell the Zen Master about their enlightenment. The "hippies"

and "crazies" would often be confused in the minds of the Japanese Americans, and they began to strongly resent the Zen Center group.

There was another aspect to the conflict. The Japanese American congregation would continually put pressure on Suzuki to ask the Zen Center group to leave Sokoji. Suzuki would side with the Zen Center group, praise their effort and say to the Japanese Americans that he would go if the Zen Center group was thrown out. This had the effect of the Japanese American congregation feeling betrayed by their own Zen Master and feeling outdone by Caucasians in their own religion. Suzuki would hold up the "hippies" as models of proper Buddhists. One student described that situation which was becoming more intense in 1967 and 1968.

> Sometimes we were invited to their ceremonies [of the Japanese American community] at Sokoji and sometimes we weren't invited to the ceremonies. One time they had a big party after Buddha's birthday and they handed out bag lunches to the Zen students at the door so they woudln't come in and sit down and eat . . . and they said that it was because we didn't like their food and of course we <u>loved</u> their food . . . it was <u>so good</u>. That was the meaner period. Some of us got in and sat down there before we realized it and just started eating because we were used to doing it . . . But Roshi would just tell them when they would come and complain and say that we'd have to leave. . . . then he would tell them "<u>Then we will leave together</u>." [Their complaint was that we were] dirty [and had] long hair. And there weren't even that many long haired people in that time . . . there were really a lot of straight looking people. But maybe their feet weren't clean . . . and then they began to

> complain about "Well it was alright in the beginning when it was J.R. because he was clean and everything . . . And Roshi told them that it wasn't our looks that was bothering them . . . That they hadn't liked J.R. either . . . and it was just some excuse.

Some of the Zen students had felt contemptuous of the Japanese American congregation as well. One older student said:

> It was an incredible feeling to build up a strong attachment to the room [the main zendo at Sokoji] where you do zazen . . . and you go in there after one of the Sokoji banquets and you see these empty half gallon Jim Crow bourbon bottles on the table and chicken bones on the floor and people tromping in and out with their shoes [zazen is done barefooted] and you say "what's Buddhism?"

Many Zen students had come from middle class families whose banquets would resemble those at Sokoji. These students would be shocked at finding what they were trying so desperately to leave was so close to home. The generation gap existed as strongly between the Japanese Americans at Sokoji and the Zen students, as it did between theZen students and their parents.

Finally the conflict between the Japanese Americans at Sokoji and Zen Center was fanned by old rivalries in the Japanese American community itself. Zen Center's secretary told me that the "hippy" Buddhists were pawns in the rivalries between the Japanese Zen Buddhists and other Japanese Americans. The Japanese Americans from Sokoji reputedly would boast about the fact that they had more Caucasian converts to their temple than did any

other Japanese American group. The non-Sokoji Japanese Americans would counter with the charge that Sokoji was a place that encouraged dirty hippy Buddhism.

Thus Tassajara brought great changes in Zen Center. The membership grew, new controversies arose, more conflict between the Japanese American community arose, and Sokoji rapidly was becoming too small to hold the great number of people who wanted to practice zazen. The leadership upon the suggestion of Suzuki, decided to find new quarters. This was not only to relieve the problem of physical space but to resolve the conflict and bitterness between the Japanese American community and Zen Center. In 1969, someone found an old Jewish women's residence in the heart of a black ghetto that was for sale. Suzuki approved of it and the Zen Center membership was invited to inspect the building in June of 1969. Soon after, it was announced that the leadership had decided to buy the building and a fund raising drive was initiated.

There was a much more confident and professional attitude about fund raising for the "Page Street" property. The funds were raised relatively easily and quickly from Zen Center members and interested people. The sum of three hundred thousand dollars was made up of interest free loans that friends of Zen Center had loaned. It again was surprising as it was in the case of

Tassajara, to find considerable wealth within the Zen group itself. Even in a few cases a Zen student with no possessions, employed in marginal work, would loan Zen Center several thousand dollars. With the financial help of the wealthy New York patrons, the entire cost of the Page street property was financed without any outside loans. After a few months, a building became vacant next to this new property and the leadership found it necessary to buy this place in order to accommodate some of the priests and their families. Thus, another mini-fund raising was quickly initiated. The pitch in this mini-campaign was that if all of the Zen Center members could contribute fifty dollars, the down payment for this property could be met. The house was purchased in short order.

"Page Street" as the new Zen Center is called, is a large building that now accommodates seventy live-in students. There is a huge kitchen and dining room, a parlor that has been changed into the "Buddha Hall." Rooms in the front of the building act as the offices of the Center and handle a large volume of mail and business that daily come to Zen Center. There are washing facilities in the basement and many rooms for storage. Finally, what was once a candy-cane colored recreation room in the basement has been converted into the main

zendo, and a hallway that enters into it which has been converted into an auxiliary zendo to accommodate late-comers and the frequent overflow of sitters.

In Chapter IV, we will examine the emergent social organization and life style of Zen Center at Page Street.