

c/o Aitken
2119 Kaloa Way
Honolulu 14, Hawaii
October 25, 1962

Dear Sensei,

Enclosed is a letter to the people in the Zen Center. I'd rather this one be confidential to you. I don't know whether you and Mrs. Suzuki realize how really ill I must have been to refuse a Japanese dinner, especially by as good a cook as I know she is. The truth of the matter is, for about three days before I sailed I had constant, severe - this is very indelicate, but I don't know of another word for it - diarrhea; from nerves I know, but the effect was the same as if it had been from a more physical cause. I had made up my mind to wait until the ship was at least one day out of Los Angeles before asking the nurse on board for some medicine; I was afraid they might think I had some communicable disease and not let me sail. However, the ship stayed in L.A. from Wed. morning till Thurs. afternoon, and I spent that time at my friend's home; she had some medicine which helped a bit. Enough about my ~~my~~ physiological difficulties.

In Los Angeles I had expected this friend to meet me at the pier; I had written her I was coming about two weeks before and she hadn't answered, so I took it for granted she would be there. We have known each other since the beginning of highschool days. When the ship docked and I saw she wasn't there, I called her up (thinking maybe they had gone out of town or something) and she said a few words, in a voice that sounded not like her old self; then she told me. Her mother, who is in her seventies I guess, and who is living with them, has cancer. They knew it for a few months and she recently came back from the hospital, and now is "comfortable". If you know anything about cancer, you know what that means (it means that there is not much longer to go). But my friend said she wanted to see me, that she wasn't being polite. She could hardly get away from the house (they live in Montebello, kind of a suburb), so ~~she~~ was up to me to go there. I knew she would do the same for me if the situations were reversed and I had said I wanted to see her.

Not being the calmest person in the world in times of stress, as soon as I hung up the phone naturally I began to fall apart. And naturally I turned to the logical place (and person) - the nearest Zen temple and the nearest (English-speaking) Zen priest. I doubt if Maezumi San would want this to be publicized, because people who do this kind of thing usually are too modest, but I think someone should know that there is at least one real "Zen man" in L.A. (I can't speak for the others because I don't know them), and I'm telling you because I'm not exactly on letter-writing terms with Bishop Yamada. To make a long story short, Maezumi San said if I could get to downtown L.A. he would take me to Montebello and back to the pier the next day. I didn't ask him to do this; he volunteered. He even had to cancel something (or be late to it, I forget which) for this. I think when I called it was with the hope that he would tell me that of course I couldn't go, it would upset me too much. I would probably ^{have} felt worse if I hadn't gone; but I would have been delighted to have the excuse of someone else's telling me not to go. Though of course I realize that friendship is not friendship which stops when things get bad, and that she would have done the same, or more, for me.

Anyway, I don't think I would have made it if not for Maezumi San. I don't mean the transportation itself (though if you know Los Angeles at all, this can be a formidable factor); a cab-driver could have gotten me there and back. But I doubt very much if a cab-driver could have given me the stamina to see it through. I don't know how he did it; all I know is that I didn't do it; It wasn't that he said unforgettable words of inspiration or anything like that; in fact, he hardly said anything. How I got through those hours without getting more hysterical than the family (in fact, they weren't hysterical at all; they were very matter-of-fact about the whole thing), and how I shook her mother's hand when I was leaving and said "I hope you'll be better soon," (her mother doesn't know she has cancer) without simply cracking up, I don't know. The role of the calm smiling hero is completely alien to me. This is what I dreaded most in going there, of making things worse instead of better for my friend and her family. If the essence of Buddhism is compassion, I would like to go on record as stating that Maezumi San has got it, and when and if the citations are passed out (whatever they are - satori? Nirvana? subtraction of 1000 kalpas of karma?) he deserves a giant share.

Other than that, the trip was uneventful. I haven't heard from my friend since arriving here. I don't know what is happening there. I hope you are all well. Sincerely, Sally