



Hoitsu Suzuki Roshi gave the Saturday morning lecture and helped with the special birthday ceremony for his father.

My Parents

*Hoitsu Suzuki Roshi
City Center
May 22, 2004*

GOOD MORNING.

Thank you for inviting me. Thank you very much for this ceremony.

It's very unusual in Japan, a hundred years birthday for a dead person. We do that for a very, very high priest, Dogen-zenji or Kaizan-zenji, a big, BIG teacher. The first time I heard about this ceremony—"Is it true?" Suzuki Shunryu is a very lucky man.

Suzuki Shunryu was born close to Tokyo, on Mount Fuji, midway up the mountain. His aunt said, "He was always a big talker." She said he woke up one morning and said, "When I grow up I will make a train from here to a zoo—with an elephant and a lion and a big park." This boy was unusual—always big talking. And he loved flowers and trees, a little bit different from other children. He's short and not so strong.

And he was very poor. But he didn't mind. He was born in a mountain village, and moved to Shizuoka temple. His master was a very strict teacher— not so much food or clothes, very poor. Little by little he grew up, but he was still poor. I think he was always poor.

When I was at university, he was here in San Francisco. But he didn't send me money. This was a big trouble for me. But he didn't mind. My father's friend gave me money and my grandmother gave me money. My uncle died in the second war, and the government sent money to my grandmother. This money she gave to me. Suzuki Shunryu didn't give me any money. Because of that, I say, "Thank you, my Uncle. Thank you, Grandmother."

Poor is a very wonderful thing. I think if he was rich, maybe he wouldn't have come here. Poor is a wonderful thing. If you're my father's disciples, if everybody is rich, they will not continue Zen practice. Dogenzenji says in Buddha's way one must study poverty. If you have many things, maybe you will lose the way. Thank you, Suzuki Shunryu. I am poor.

My father, Suzuki Shunryu, had many sides, many faces. Not just a wonderful face. Before he came to this country, he asked me "I want to go to America. Are you ok?" I said, "If you are ok, I am ok." And he came.

I had two sisters and one brother; one sister was in the hospital. My younger brother was maybe fifteen, a very difficult age. And the older of my two sisters was younger than me. I was a university student when he came.

I think everybody said he was unusual—one face was very cool, no compassion. The other side was very warm, very soft and warm. Sometimes he hit my back. Sometimes he was very strict. For other people, there was the soft, warm, quiet face, but inside he was very strict and hard. I didn't like. One day he threw me into our pond. My mother said, "What are you doing? This is your child." A quiet, soft, warm, tender face, but the other side of compassion was very strict. Short temper. Loud voice. [Yells.]

He had many faces. He left his family, his children, in Japan and came here. I think he thought about us, but he came anyway. Kichizawa-roshi was my father's life teacher, a very famous roshi in Japan. He was Nishiari Bokusan's disciple. When he met Bokusan-roshi he was a middle school teacher. He stopped teaching and became a monk and disciple of Nishiari Bokusan. He had a child and wife. After he became a monk, he left them because he wanted to practice the Buddha Way. Nobody thinks about the children. Nobody thinks about the family. Maybe always there is a family or children. To practice that way is very powerful. I think a big monk, a big priest, a roshi, maybe can cut off and take everything and go.

Now I thank you, Suzuki Shunryu, because I come here. You invite me. Thank you for Suzuki Shunryu. Thank you.

Did you see the picture and exhibit next door? I saw my mother's picture. My mother was very warm and she had a big heart. She was always thinking of me. When I was twelve years old, my mother was killed by someone. She was 42 years old. She said I am going. I can hear her voice,

her last voice, anytime. Maybe at the time my mother tried to say something to her children, but it was just "Mmmm. Mmmm."

Two years ago I had asthma. I couldn't breathe. Nobody was in the house, just me. I could not breathe and could not see. I thought I saw something coming. I thought, I think it's right now! "Help me! Somebody help me." Then somebody said, "Hang on." That voice was my mother's voice, and I "hung on." I came back here, to this world. My mother watched. For fifty years she watched me. Big surprise. My mother was like that.

I offered incense to Buddha and my mother. This was a true mind offering for my mother. This was the first time that I offered incense like that. As a monk, a priest, many times I offered incense to other people, in other houses, chanting and taking money. "Thank you very much." This was a true incense offering. Thank you very much. Thank you.

Maybe my mother is watching me now. I think, "Oh!" Sometimes I do a bad thing. Bad monk, bad person. She watches me always. "I'm sorry. I'm a bad boy." My mother's mind is like that.

Thank you. ~



EDNSHIN JUDY BUNCE

Jakusho Bill Kwong greeting Hoitsu Suzuki Roshi in the City Center courtyard. In the background are Paul Discoe and Peter Schneider.