

IN A LETTER that went out to some of you from Yvonne Rand, President of Zen Center, she wrote: "Suzuki-roshi died early in the morning, Saturday, December 4, 1971 just after the sounding of the opening bell of the five-day sesshin commemorating Buddha's Enlightenment. He left us very gently and calmly. And he left Zen Center very carefully, teaching us in everything he did. There is almost no sense of his being gone, for he continues to live clearly in the practice and community that were his life work. His last appearance in public was on November 21 at the ceremony to install Richard Baker-roshi as his successor, according to his long-standing plan. He left specific directions for the ways he wanted the community to develop, and his wishes are being carried out."

Mrs. Suzuki, Otohiro his son, and Baker-roshi were with Suzuki-roshi when he died. Shortly after, the older disciples came up from the Zendo and moved him to the room where he usually met with students for *dokusan* (personal interview) or tea. The disciples offered incense and chanted the Heart Sutra in Japanese and English. Then all of the one hundred and fifteen students attending the sesshin came up and one at a time offered incense. They were joined by many of the older students from all over the Bay Area. The incense offering lasted until he was taken to the funeral home late in the afternoon. The funeral was to be done according to Japanese custom here in America. We waited a week for the arrival from Japan of Hoichi, his son and Abbot of Suzuki-roshi's former temple, Rinso-in, and for Niwa-roshi, his Dharma-brother and Abbot of Eiheiji in Tokyo. During this week two students at a time sat with him and did zazen and helped the many people who came to sit or offer incense.

THE FUNERAL CEREMONY was calm and very beautiful, on Sunday, December 12 at 2 p.m. It was led by Niwa-roshi, Katagiri-roshi, and Moriyama-sensei, the successor of Suzuki-roshi as Head Priest of Sokoji Temple. About five hundred people attended, including Buddhist priests of many schools and countries. Hoichi-sensei and Baker-roshi, as Suzuki-roshi's direct disciples, bowed and offered incense for all the disciples. The ceremony ended with a statement by Baker-roshi of all our feeling:

"There is no easy way to be a teacher or a disciple, although it must be the greatest joy in this life. There is no easy way to come to a land without Buddhism and leave it having brought many disciples, priests and laymen well along the path, and having changed the lives of thousands of persons throughout this country; no easy way to have begun and nurtured a Sangha and community that include a mountain monastery, a large city practice center, and other practice centers in California and elsewhere.

"He brought us Buddha, himself, and an understanding of Buddha which included us. There was room for everyone. He knew himself that well. He brought us Dharma, such a thorough understanding and living of the teaching that grasses, trees, flowers, tables did actually teach us. He brought us Sangha, the traditional ancient Buddhist community, giving us a full sense of how to live through Buddhist tradition, to learn from his own Japanese culture, and to include our own culture through which Buddhism must find its expression.

"But this 'no-easy-way', this extraordinary accomplishment, rested easily with him, for he gave us, from his own true nature, our true nature. In Hazel Paget's funeral ceremony and Trudy Dixon's funeral ceremony he spoke of three minds:



Niwa-roshi and, behind him, Katagiri-roshi

Joyful Mind, the joy of Buddha's mind in all conditions; Compassionate Mind, which includes all of us without any idea of self; and Big Mind, as big as a mountain, deep as an ocean, without discrimination, penetrating fully and exactly, one with everything simultaneously.

"Through the intimate and unconditioned relationship of teacher and disciple, he left us intimate with Buddha and ourselves. He left as much as any man can leave, everything essential: the mind and heart of Buddha, the practice of Buddha, the teaching and life of Buddha. He is here, here in each one of us, if we want him, and in the life here, which was his life work to allow us to continue.

"Let us do everything possible to allow his passage, in many forms, to be complete, treating each other as Buddha. Let us each be reborn now. Let us realize our own true nature.

"At the beginning of Buddha's Enlightenment sesshin, just after the bell opening the first period of zazen, our great teacher, Suzuki Shunryu-daiosho, joined Buddha. He passed with decision and gentleness. A few days before he died, when it was difficult for him to speak, I asked him, 'Where will we meet you?' A small hand came out from underneath the covers, made a small bow, and drew a circle in the air."

Richard Baker himself appeared, walking slowly down the narrow hall in the semi-darkness, holding the fly-whisk of horsehair, and wearing a robe given to him by Suzuki-roshi of sky-blue and gold cloth, decorated with brightly colored phoenixes. All heads bowed as he passed and entered the Zendo, where he made an offering at the altar. He returned a moment later, and, looking neither right nor left, he walked steadily back to join the rest of the procession. We heard them going back upstairs, the solid bangings of the staff and the strange notes of the bells receding in the distance, until only the gong and the drum broke the stillness of the dimly-lit hallway.

"Then we were summoned upstairs to the Buddha Hall. We filed in through the Zendo and out through its rear door, then up the stairs and into the main corridor. Walking slowly, we entered the Hall, passing the great drum, and filled up the wide expanse of tatami mats left in front of the Mountain Seat Altar. Visitors were seated in chairs all around the perimeter of the mats, while we sat on our heels, Japanese style. Meanwhile, the procession had gone upstairs to the next floor, to the room of the Master, Suzuki Shunryu-daiosho, the founder of Zen Center, whom Richard Baker was succeeding. Everyone who knew this man loved him, and I myself, though I had only met him once, regarded him with the deepest respect. I knew that he was quite ill at that time, but when he, at the head of the procession, entered the Hall, I was shocked to see him as frail and shrunken as the man who appeared, a ghost of the person whose immense vigor and spiritual strength had guided the Center through the first uncertain years of its existence. He entered, practically being carried by his son, but holding his staff firmly, and thumping it on the matting as he approached the Mountain Seat. He bowed at the altar, and was helped to a place to the right of the platform. Richard Baker entered then with the retinue, and seated himself in a lacquered chair facing the Mountain Seat Altar. The great drum fell silent. We chanted in unison the Prajna Paramita Hridaya Sutra in English, and then, having offered prayers and incense in front of the Altar, Baker-roshi ascended the steps of the platform and stood, several feet above the onlookers, offering incense to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and the Patriarchs, to the benefactors of the Center, and, finally, to his own beloved teacher, Suzuki-roshi. He said:

This piece of incense
Which I have had for a long long time
I offer with no-hand
To my Master, to my friend, Suzuki Shunryu-daiosho
The founder of these temples.
There is no measure of what you have done.

Walking with you in Buddha's gentle rain
Our robes are soaked through,
But on the lotus leaves
Not a drop remains.'

"Then Katagiri-roshi, acting for Suzuki-roshi, recited the brief authentication verse with a full-bodied shout, in true Zen fashion. For his sermon, Baker-roshi stated simply, 'There is nothing to be said.'

"This was perfectly true. Then followed the so-called Dharma-questions, when the other priests seek to test the new Abbot's understanding. The following marvelous dialogue ensued between Baker-roshi and the priest from the Mill Valley Zendo:

(Bill Kwong) 'Chief Priest!' (shouting)

(Baker-roshi) 'Is it host or guest?'

(Bill Kwong) 'Iiii!' (shouting)

(Baker-roshi) 'Show me your True Nature without shouting!'

Bill then simply bowed, and returned to his seat.

"Following congratulatory telegrams and such, the ceremony was concluded. Suzuki-roshi was helped to his feet and moved to the front of the altar to make his bow. But when he turned to face the people, there was on his face an expression at once fierce and sad. His breath puffed mightily in his nostrils, and he looked as if he strove vigorously to speak, to say something, perhaps to exhort the disciples to be strong in their practice, or to follow Richard Baker with faith; no one can say. He faced the congregation directly as if to speak and instead rolled his staff between his hands sounding the rings twice, once looking to the left and once to the right side of the hall. It was as though some physical shock had passed through the hall; there was a collective intake of breath, and suddenly, everywhere people were weeping openly. All those who had been close to the Roshi now realized fully what it would mean to lose him, and were overcome with a thoroughly human sorrow. As their Master falteringly walked from the



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