

4 MODERN APOCRYPHAL

by Rick Fields

*Suzuki Roshi
Center docto*

Suzuki Roshi was a Zen Master of the Soto School of Zen Buddhism. His Dharma-name was "Crooked Cucumber."

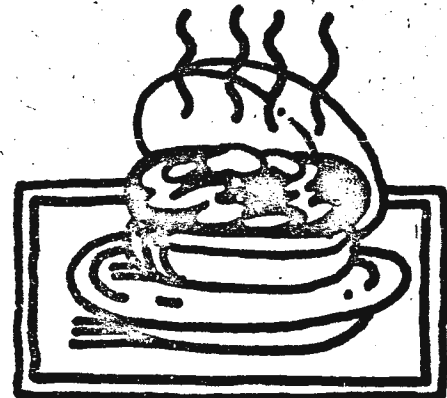
Suzuki Roshi originally came to San Francisco to lead a Japanese congregation. When some young Americans asked to study with him he said, "I sit every morning at five. You are welcome." This spirit became the San Francisco Zen Center, and Tassajara, a Zen Mountain Training Center.

He died December 7, 1971. His words can be found in a collection of talks, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*.

These empty words I dedicate to Suzuki Roshi.

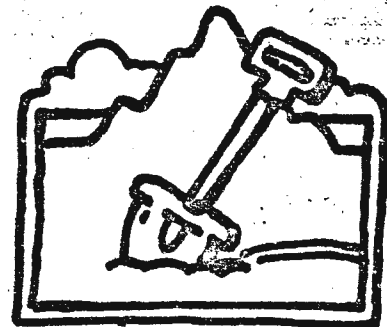
Cheeseburger/Grilled Cheese

Thus have I heard from someone who heard it from someone: Once when Tassajara, a mountain retreat center, was being built, a carpenter was working on it; he was not a zen student but a yoga student; he kept a strict vegetarian diet, eating mostly fruit and nuts. He was driving Roshi back to San Francisco, along the Coast highway, when they both got hungry. Roshi wanted to stop right away but the carpenter kept on driving, looking for a place where he could get pure food. All they passed, however, were hot-dog and hamburger and taco joints. Roshi kept saying, How about stopping at this place? But the carpenter kept saying, No let's go on a little more. Looking for his fresh fruit meal. Finally Roshi told him to just stop at the next hamburger stand. The carpenter ordered a grilled cheese sandwich. Roshi ordered a cheeseburger. When the food came Roshi took one bite out of his cheeseburger. The carpenter took a bite out of his grilled cheese. Then Roshi made a face and said, I don't like this. He handed the cheeseburger to the carpenter, and took the grilled cheese for himself. You eat it, said Roshi.

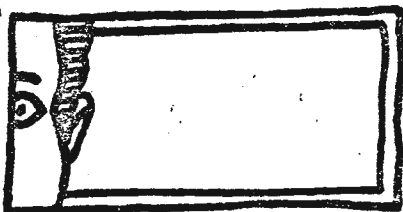


The Shovel

Once everybody at Tassajara took some tools and climbed a long hot dusty mountain trail to work on some project. When they reached the top of the mountain they discovered that they had forgotten the shovel and began discussion about who should return and get it. After the discussion had ended they realized that Roshi wasn't there. He was already half-way down the mountain trail, on his way back to pick up the shovel.



ZEN STORIES

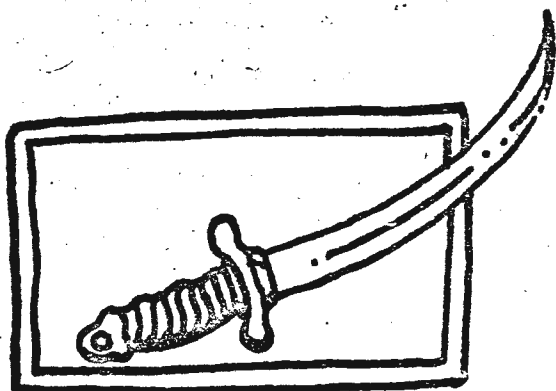


The Stare

This story actually happened to me, so it's true as far as I know. I went into a converted movie theatre with meditation mats where the balcony used to be, to sit zazen. It was the first time I'd ever been there and I was late and mildly stoned. I'd never sat zazen with so many people before, nor even knew that so many people did it, so it was overwhelming to rush into a room filled and crowded with so much stillness. After forty minutes of just sitting, blowing in the mind-wind, everybody got up and rushed into a smaller room which had an altar at the front. I went along since I'd never been there before and was just going along. Then everybody stood in straight rows and chanted the Heart Sutra in Japanese, slow, deep, mono-noted, and touched the floor with their forehead six times. Then everybody turned and one by one filed out of the room. After a while it was my turn; I didn't know what to expect; I think I thought we were all leaving thoughtfully. When I stepped through the door there was this small bald Japanese man standing there with a funny stick like a whisk in his hand. He looked right through me with both eyes. I didn't have time to be there. Then he bowed and so did I.

The Sword of Manjusri

After that the zendo moved to Paige Street and there were black kids in the neighborhood who didn't exactly know what to make of the whole thing. Once a few of these neighborhood kids came into the building just as zazen was over. They saw Roshi standing there with his stick and this really big kid said, Hey man, what you doin' with that stick. And all the zen students started to gather round because the situation made them nervous. Roshi, however, wasn't at all nervous. He turned and began to grow; he grew until he was about six feet high and very powerful — although he is really small and frail and was even then dying — and then he raised his stick high above his head, his face was filled with roaring oceans, and all his students were getting more and more up-tight thinking, Hey, Roshi, be careful, you'll get 'em mad. And then he brought down his stick with a terrific gentle power-force. About six inches from the big kid's shoulder the stick suddenly lost weight and was like a soft subtle feather floating down until it touched his shoulder and rested there. I use it to hit people, said Roshi. Then he handed the stick to the kid and, turning his back to him presenting his own shoulder, said, Would you like to try? The kid stood there for awhile, and then touched Roshi's shoulder very softly with his stick.



MARK FISHER