

Mad Monkey Mind

by

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Early in 1966, Shunryu Suzuki Roshi made an unexpected request. He asked me to keep a notebook for him. He explained he wanted to see how Buddhism was fitting into our American way of life. I didn't know if I could write anything that would be helpful, but I agreed to give it a try. "You will not be satisfied with what you write," Roshi said. "And I will not be satisfied with what I write. But someday what we write may help someone."

At the time, I was one of Roshi's drivers, as was my husband Tony Johansen. I had the good fortune of driving Suzuki Roshi weekly to Los Altos where Marion Derby faithfully recorded and transcribed his lectures. These lectures were later compiled into the book, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, edited by Trudy Dixon, now one of the most widely read books on Zen practice. I was lucky to be able to ask Roshi questions on the drive, and often he would answer my question in that evening's lecture. More frequently I would write something in my notebook which was triggered by his talk. But what makes the notebook so special are the notes Suzuki Roshi added on rare occasions. They are priceless.

The first entry I made in the notebook on January 29, was titled "Wrong, wrong!"

January 29, 1966

"At last I will write a page in this notebook without tearing it out. Until tonight I have discarded each page as being too incomplete and perhaps even very wrong in my understanding. Tore it out because I couldn't accept the incompleteness—the wrongness—of my understanding of Zen.

"But now perhaps I am learning to accept making mistakes. Maybe I can accept being wrong and go on bravely and sincerely without trying to kick sand over an error I just made or run away from an error I am making.

“What exactly did you quote Dogen as saying about how Zen is being wrong one day after the next, or living one mistake after another? Though I don’t grasp completely, of course, what Dogen said, I understand that I will never escape from being wrong.

“Perhaps it is because ‘perfection is unattainable’ and yet we are always working for perfection. Of course, when we have an unattainable standard set for ourselves, we shall always be “wrong”, that is, we shall never be perfect.

“Yet it may be that our perfection lies in our continuing to work for perfection while accepting our continual wrongs.”

The quote from Dogen Zenji had been in the morning lecture when Suzuki Roshi was responding to a student’s written question:

“Dogen Zenji said, ‘My eighty years of life is a succession of mistakes. But there is Zen in it.’”

The second entry in the journal I called “The Deep Dark Secret!”

February 3

“Katagiri Sensei is laughing at my “deep secret” which I embarrassedly confessed to him. I never told anyone before—except my husband Tony—because I feel that I shouldn’t even be thinking of it. That is, I very much, perhaps too much, want to be a Buddhist nun. Are you laughing, too? Even though I can laugh at myself the desire remains.

“Not that I do not wish to be wife to my husband and mother to my children. I feel fortunate to have such a fine family. Of course, I only think about becoming a nun when

the children are raised. But I wonder if it is not very bad practice to be thinking so far in the future.

“Really I know that I must live in today completely. In today I have every chance to make strong effort and train hard. The complexity of my family relationships gives me such opportunity to make my effort.

“It is hard though to think about those years when the children will not be at home; I guess I shall continue to practice as an American housewife....

“Oh, it is difficult to be writing this—to be honest about my emotions while at the same time trying to be intellectually in control of these strong feelings. You see, I feel such a reverence for my master that I would wish to work for him and follow his teachings every hour of the day—and yes, I know that I do homage to the Buddha and propagate Buddhism when I simply (though to me it doesn’t seem simple) truly make my effort to be that which I am. Now. Here.

“Do you remember that you said that in our culture we seem to have our religious feelings in our chest rather than in our diaphragm, our center? You said we do not have our religion where we live, where our strength is, in our hara, but have it here in our emotional chest. No, those aren’t your exact words, but I think I am experiencing my chest religion as I write this! I have an actual pain, a longing, a beating of wings inside my rib cage. And this strong feeling is my longing to study as your disciple as is done in Japan, cleaning your temple, sitting with you in meditation every day, learning from your every-day way of life. And this feeling in my chest also has to do with the dread of also having to leave you to go study for a while in Japan to train as a nun. Then maybe—

another part of my confession—I could return to help you bring Buddhism to our over-ripe adolescent country.

“The deepest part of my religious feeling—that part which is calmer and closer to our Buddha nature—is well aware that I should find the Way in whatever I am doing. There should be no need to be a nun. Really, I am trying to get under my emotions to the basic strength and wisdom of our Buddha nature. But I’m telling you, anyway, of my emotional longing to be your disciple. This will give you an idea of where I think I am in all this.”

With a great deal of trepidation I turned in my notebook the next evening. What would he think of my self-conscious confession? Would he think me foolish or perhaps overly bold? Tony had the next turn at driving him to the morning lecture. When he came home he told me all about it. My worst fears were realized. Roshi’s lecture had been about Zen and excitement. He had cautioned against becoming too excited about Zen. He advised that if you have too much excitement you forget your own way. “That is very dangerous,” he said. He spoke about Zen practice being like baking bread and we should know how much temperature we can handle.

I could hardly contain myself all day, waiting until I could ask him about it on the drive that evening. Immediately he reassured me. He said, “I knew he would tell her about the lecture, and I knew she would think it was about her.” He explained it was for another student who was thinking about dropping out of school.

Suzuki Roshi’s talks were tailor-made, like Buddha’s. Buddha’s talks were created for a certain group at a specific time. Roshi once explained that no teaching, not even

Buddha's, could be entirely appropriate in another time and place. Never-the-less, he encouraged us to study the teachings even if they are not perfect.

His reassurance that the lecture was not about me gave me the courage to ask him directly about my desire. "Do you think when my children are grown I could become a nun and study with you at your temple?"

"I hope so," he answered seriously, almost sadly it seemed. But I was elated.

Monterey

The trip to Monterey and Carmel was an unplanned adventure. It started with my disbelief that Roshi was going to take the Greyhound bus to Monterey where he was scheduled to speak to a Japanese congregation on Saturday followed by an introductory seminar he would give to a separate group in Carmel on Sunday.

"The bus? Isn't anyone going to drive you? May I drive?"

"They say they have no room for my driver. I will take the bus. It's okay".

"Well, at least I'll take you to the bus."

I picked Roshi up on the corner of Bush and Laguna early the next morning. He was waiting as usual on the peeling painted steps in front of the old synagogue-turned-Zen Temple, wearing soft gray robes with a bundle at his side. "I'm driving you all the way there," I said. He repeated the fact that he'd been told there would be no room for his driver. "I've got my sleeping bag," I explained. "I can sleep on the beach."

It was a beautiful day for the drive, the hills all green from the spring rains. Luckily it wasn't raining now. I would be dry in my sleeping bag. "Your dress is very good for today. It is the same color as the hills," said Suzuki Roshi.

When we arrived at our destination, several men approached the car, and Roshi instructed me, "Don't go yet." He and the men spoke warmly to each other in Japanese as they led Roshi into the banquet hall. I stood awkwardly at the door ready to take my leave. "Not yet," he said quietly, and we sat down at the long table lined with Japanese Americans. No one seemed to notice me, and I was glad to fade into the background. Roshi delivered a talk to those gathered for the occasion. When he finished, I tried again to make my leave. "Where and when shall I come back for you?"

"Wait," he whispered. Soon we were swept away with a group of parishioners to waiting cars, and I was instructed by one of the men to follow him. He led us to a private home where tables were set and food was waiting. "Sit," Roshi said motioning to a chair beside him. Our cups were filled with drink. Roshi took a swallow, then looked at me with wide eyes. I took a sip, it was hard liquor. He turned to me, pointing his finger at his head and made a little spiral in the air. With a playful smile he pointed at the drink. I grinned back. When they came to freshen our drink Roshi put his hand over his glass, and I gladly followed his lead.

Eventually one of the facilitators got Roshi together with an older Japanese woman, someone he apparently knew. Her house was where Roshi was to spend the night, so I tried unobtrusively to make my exit. "Not yet. Wait."

In her kitchen we sat at a small table where she spoke with Roshi of many things in Japanese. Sometimes he would turn to me to acknowledge my presence, filling me in. "I knew her husband," or "She grows flowers for Buddha behind the kitchen." Finally, she rose and led us through her cottage-like home to a tiny bedroom in the rear. It had twin beds. On

one of them, the hostess had already turned the sheets down for Roshi. He turned to me and asked politely, "Do you mind?"

"No," I answered. "Do you?"

By the time I was out of the bathroom, he was in his bed. When I turned back the covers on the other bed, I remembered I had read somewhere that monks in the Zendo sleep flat on their backs. I was sure I'd be awake all night because I never sleep on my back, and how could I dare make a sound or toss and turn and disturb Suzuki Roshi? He was hardly three feet away. I felt I needed to lie perfectly still, therefore I thought I would never fall asleep.

I must have drifted off in three minutes flat.

In the morning he woke me simply by standing beside my bed. He was already in his robes, and I hadn't heard a thing or moved an inch, apparently, as I was still flat on my back. "Please help her with breakfast," Roshi said quietly.

I dressed quickly, listening to him chanting sutras in another room. When I passed by the room, I saw him kneeling in front of her altar with its large framed picture of her dead husband between two vases of white chrysanthemums from her kitchen garden. Buddha's flowers. Breakfast was all but on the table when I got there, miso soup and rice.

In Carmel we connected with the second group Roshi was scheduled to meet. At the seminar, Roshi taught the precipitants how to sit zazen, illustrating the posture with me as a prop. Once before he'd taken me into a college classroom for the same purpose. It had always been simple for me to sit full lotus, not because I made some brave effort, but maybe because my hip joints were comfortably designed for childbirth. Who knows, but I felt like I was cheating, and in Carmel I told Roshi so. "I don't think you should use me as an

example. My zazen is terrible. My mind isn't calm, it's not even quiet. I talk constantly in my head."

"Never mind. You look like a Buddha. It encourages people. And as for your mad monkey mind, don't worry, it will quiet down as you get older. Just sit."

By the time we were headed home, the sun was setting. "Please stop," Roshi said, and we pulled over. I followed him to the edge of the cliff where under a weathered Cypress tree we looked at the pink and golden sunset out over the blue Pacific. I expected to linger over the view and drink it in, milk the moment, make it last. But Roshi only looked at it for a few moments, then turned away and started back to the car. "I'm glad you have your enlightenment," he said as he walked past me.

What could I say. My mad monkey mind was speechless.

In lectures Roshi always encouraged us not to seek enlightenment. And we needed to be told this because we definitely were after "It." We had hoped to become fully conscious and at one with the universe. Whatever hints we managed to get of this consciousness were so satisfying that our small minds naturally hungered for more. But the Bodhisattva vow was to refrain from seeking one's own enlightenment until every single being in the universe, even the rocks themselves, experienced enlightenment. This was true religion, not some selfish desire to achieve a certain state of mind for ourselves. Zen practice was not for personal benefit. We beginners tried to let the hope of enlightenment go and learn to practice with the Bodhisattva spirit.

Even before Monterey, in our formal interviews, Dokusan, I felt plunged into the very thing I was trying not to seek. When I would sit in zazen facing Roshi, Roshi sitting in the same posture just a few feet from my face, there were no questions. In the beginning

more times than one I felt as though I were rising off my cushion, floating, and a clear white light shone around Suzuki Roshi. I knew this had to be one of those illusions one experiences along the way and I didn't cling to it. I let it be and there were no longer any ideas, no words, no separateness.

Sometimes Roshi would break the silence. "Do you have some question?" There were none. But later back in the Zendo sitting zazen, my busy mind would spew forth questions I thought needed answers. Why I wondered, had I not asked this or asked that? One day I shared this puzzlement with Roshi himself, and he explained that there is a Japanese Buddhist term for what I experienced. "You have awakened antennae." He gestured in the air between us, drawing an invisible curved line between his forehead and mine.. "When you are with me you share my enlightenment."

February 15

"Oh, such indescribable good feeling! I'm filled with a joy that manages to fit comfortably inside my body without bursting to get out. It is a comfortable bearable joy because there is great peace in the midst of it.

"To know that it is not foolish to want to be a nun is such marvelous relief! To have you understand and accept my deepest longings and struggles brings the greatest encouragement. And to have you explain that my confusion after confusion will add richness and depth—not weakness—to my experience has brought undefeatable hope.

"The last entry contained a sense of apology concerning my surging emotional feelings. But now you see how today I accept and enjoy being an emotional human being. What a gift of myself you have given me.

“If only I can not forget all that I feel today. If only I don’t slip completely back into the delusion of isolation. We become so lonely and feel so utterly inadequate when we experience the feeling of being an isolated small self, a small self that is simply incapable of enough understanding to be an adequate expression of...?... of Buddha. How often I’ve had the almost hopeless feeling that I have only enough understanding to realize I don’t completely understand, and that I’ll forever lack the ability to live in harmony with that which *is*. But for the present—the great eternal present—the reaching for perfection is the most beautiful truth in itself.

“Truly the confusions are settling in like softly drifting snow. I hope I won’t get quite so deep in them this time. I’m not going to feel defeated by confusion, though—you assured me of its value. But I must admit I did enjoy the feeling of the ground swept nearly clear of snow as we drove home from Monterey.

“A great part of the confusion is in the form of self-criticism which seems to be the destructive type, but we’ll hope not. For instance, it is becoming hard to believe that you actually receive encouragement from *me*. You told me you enjoy reading anything I write. ‘Your writing should be based upon your sitting,’ you advised. I am filled with self-doubt, yet I know that if I don’t have faith in myself then I am not doing *you* justice. To have the deepest appreciation for your Buddha-nature, I must accept mine. How can I worry about failing you? I’ve begun to worry again about letting you down.

“You once told us the story about how you were with your master cleaning out a pond. You caught a fish with your hands, and you pointed out a worm on the body of the fish, and you told your master it’s scientific name. Immediately he shoved you into the mud. Well, lately it seems I notice every bit of ego as it arises in me, and right away

I shove myself in the mud of my own judgment. In the last two days every time I've realized my desire to be correct, I wonder 'who is this who is wanting to be right?'"

Suzuki Roshi wrote the following in black pen at the bottom of the page.

“No one knows what is wrong love and what is true love when he is in a kind of doubt and fear. Have faith in me and in yourself and in your husband, and come and see me. And keep going on and on. You and your husband at last come to the front door of our way. Let's have a meal with all of us, you and your husband and my wife. But wait! I must consult about it with my tigress!”

This tigress was a strong, attractive, self-assured woman whom we all called “Okusan” as if that were her first name. We didn't know it was Japanese for “wife” and that her given name was actually Mitsu. Most of us didn't know Suzuki as “Roshi” yet, or even what roshi meant. We called him Reverend Suzuki, or Sensei, following the lead of the Japanese congregation. I thought “Sensei” was his first name, not knowing it translates as “teacher.” Mitsu would eventually be known as Sensei because she taught so many of us tea ceremony. Still, I'll always think of her as Okusan, honorable wife.

Roshi once told a story about how much he missed her before she finally gave in and joined him in America. He described how he was sitting, all alone, at the long table in the kitchen in Sokoji, a floor above the hall where the Japanese dance band held rehearsals. He said when they would play Sakura, (Cherry Blossoms), a popular Japanese love song, tears ran down his face. But he told the story with such a smile it was hard to know if he were teasing.

There were other tears he told of, and he spoke with a straight face. “When we offer incense to our father who has died, we feel sad. But when we offer incense for our teacher,

the tears stream down our cheeks.” I was grateful he spoke of his own deep feelings for his teacher. It made my feelings seem more a natural part of the master/disciple relationship.

“February 15 Master—Pupil

“Buddhism did not invite me because of its deep and sound philosophy or its rich tradition, though these are extremely valuable. I came to see if there was a human being who could *be* what I only had an idea of what human beings *could* be. I came with a longing to see religion expressed, not simply explained intellectually or structured in rituals, but to see it *live*. Hardly did I dare to hope it possible, and then you existed and religion was born.

“Of course, without you the truth would still be the truth. But for me it’s existence would be like that of an unborn child, real and undeniable, yet untouchable.

“At first it was such a dream fulfilled to find you, nothing else in Buddhism mattered. Sitting in zazen was merely a waiting period until you would give us a lecture. I simply sat the forty minutes just to hear you speak. Then it hardly even mattered what you said; it was great encouragement just to see you. And yet I did hear you and began to follow your teachings as best I could. Zazen became more zazen and less waiting.

“As I listened and heard I grew more critical of my feelings for you. It seemed surely I mustn’t feel so strongly. I feared I was clinging to my master—and would that be Zen? I’d have to leave you, I thought, or I would never become strong on my own.

“For a couple months I went through a depression that seemed hopeless. I felt I was in the “trap” of Zen, trapped in a challenge for which I was unfit. I almost resented

Zen for becoming the only way for me, and I wished I could find a different way, a “lighter” way to live.

“But I felt resigned. I had enough intuition to know that Zen was the way, yet I felt I would never have enough understanding to properly *practice* the way. I felt certainly I was cast in a part for which I was incapable. What finally brought my commitment was the simple truth that it was impossible for me to do anything else. I began to approach the practice with less concern for whether or not I did it perfectly, and I became more concerned with simply making my effort.

“Temporarily my worry about being too dependent on you was relieved by talking to you about it. You convinced me that I would have the strength and faith to practice without you. ‘But it is not a problem,’ you said. ‘After all, you *have* me.’”

“March 3, 1966

“Pre-menstrual muddle”

“Another month gone by, I mentioned to you how I, like many women, experience a great deal of tension and irritability during the last few days before the beginning of each menstrual cycle. I become heavy physically—from increased water retention throughout the body—and heavy in the mind and expression. If I were off in the hills in a cave, I’d wait out these days. But in the midst of family life and the immediate world I blunder along, making a shambles of many relationships—especially that of mother and wife.

“I cannot even understand things intellectually as well as on other days, and I obviously do not react well emotionally. It is like a dreadful regression, and I lug around

delusions which I can usually see through. This heavy emotional tone is explained by science as having the physical basis in unbalanced hormones as well as perhaps increased fluid in the brain tissues causing pressure. So, I try to understand my state of being in terms of my body having an effect on my mind.

“But no! The body and mind are one. And feeling as deluded as I do today, I am very confused about what is happening here within the body and mind. This *subtle* encroachment of my body’s imbalance influencing my understanding, that is hard for me to deal with, to confront. If I can learn to confront it.... The problem is so elusive, yet so powerful.

“Yes, even on balanced hormone days of the month, I still have my mind in some style of cage. But it is a large cage and only infrequently do I run into a bar. However, on these pressured days it is as if the bars of my cage are moved in to a foot in front of my face—and I am looking at them cross-eyed!”

When Roshi gave me back the notebook, he wanted me to see something. I was surprised when he opened a heavy book to show me the ferocious faces of angry temple guardians. I smiled in recognition of myself.

“March 21 Your Visit

“I do not think I really need to tell you how much it meant to us to have you come to our home. You know and you came, and the atmosphere has become fuller and deeper with your presence.

“There is a line from *The Cat Who Walked By Himself* by Rudyard Kipling which says, “for I am the cat who walks by himself and all places are alike to me.” That may be

true, but we are especially happy here. For us this home represents a new way of living rather than just another house. It is so true as Tony said so well: we got here as quickly as we could! We didn't even know that we were coming to you remember?"

We had moved into an apartment complex just a couple of blocks from Sokoji Temple. We had a miniscule patio with a small bit of garden area. There I had planted a few hardy plants and we installed two rocks we had commandeered from a creekside. The stones were modest, hardly big enough to be called boulders, but moss still grew on the surfaces. "You must be proud of your stones," Roshi said, and I was surprised. Pride was not something I associated with Zen practice. But I *was* fond of the stones.

In the living room one whole wall was made of white painted concrete blocks. I had outlined three of them and filled in two more with contrasting paints. Suzuki Roshi looked at the wall and said, "I did not know you were a painter." Suddenly I was a painter!

I was not much of a cook and had prepared a simple meal, the main dish which was Swedish meatballs. It's hard to believe that I had not yet realized that our Zen diet was to be vegetarian. But the Zen way is to eat whatever is served, and Okusan and Roshi ate the meatballs as easily as if they were rice balls.

April 12 "About that phone call...!"

"Are you teasing? To phone late in the evening and ask a question we had decided to give *up* asking one year ago—because of you? Your timing forced me to face the dilemma which I had banished to the outer limits of my mind last summer. Do you remember in the weeklong sesshin how you several times brought up the issue of LSD—-and mostly laughed at it? It was for me painful and bewildering. It had been my

experience under LSD two years prior which I felt had brought me to your teaching. To hear you brushing off the deepest experience of my life as if it were some “kick” or flight of fancy was most unnerving.

“Let me explain that I had LSD only one time, for one day, six months after Aaron was born. At that time I took it as medicine, but it is difficult for me to think of it as medicine. Before taking it as therapy I was extremely distressed emotionally—angry, horrified at this anger and as a result, suicidal. I was suffering from a severe post-partum depression.

“The experience with LSD revealed to me my own undreamed of strengths, the basic unity of life, and the possibility of the better expression of this unity in my everyday life. It is extremely difficult to explain what occurred, for the deepest part of the experience is completely beyond words. And even in the most profound moments of that immeasurable day, I felt the existence of an even deeper truth, a complete understanding which I could not quite grasp.

“Coming back to my everyday self, I was full of reverence for living, for all life, and it seemed as though I could never ‘forget’ all that I had just ‘remembered.’ But I could not seem to practice what I had just learned as well as I’d hoped, and I was often ashamed of myself for not being an adequate expression of the truth I had experienced.

“Tony was aware of the deep change in me, more so than people who had not been so aware of my previous anxiety. He began to save money and plan for his own experience under LSD which became financially possible six months later. (This was not black market material, so we paid \$500 apiece.)

“Now you must know that there is no universal LSD experience. Each person will react in a different way, cling to a different moment, having his own fears, pride, past experiences. Yet I find some people who have had LSD acting as though we each had the same experience and are complete.

“There are many hallucinations during the day, but these are not present in the deepest moments. Hallucinations have to do with the senses, and it is possible to go deeper than this. But from listening to people tell about their LSD or related psychedelics experiences, it seems to me that many persons cling to or fly from these hallucinations rather than letting them come in and go out.

“One great problem about learning from one’s LSD experience is that there are many delusions under the experience, and if you do not get under them, beyond that level of experience, you become confused. Many people are bombarded by their own delusions for eight hours and regain their everyday consciousness without having a glimpse at what is really going on.

“Now after my experience, I had first felt no need to try again. The research associate who had been with me that day told me that it is impossible to explain in words the kind of experience that I’ve been through, but that Buddhism tries. So several months later when I began to feel a need to deepen my understanding, I began to read about Buddhism. But it was not intellectual understanding that I really hungered for, so I started to go to the Buddhist Church of America in San Jose. I tried sincerely to embrace it, but it offered no way to go on with the search as far as I could tell. It seemed basically the same as Christianity, but with a different savior. And though I did receive

deep satisfaction in the expression of my religious feelings through Buddhist ritual, it was not the thing I'd most hoped for.

"I'd no idea Zen was being practiced here or I'd have come immediately. It took another year and a half to find you. During that time I tried once more the psychedelic experience. The second time it was at home with morning glory seeds. That experience pointed up one good point: I had no training and no teacher. I realized that one could go on indefinitely, not quite getting the point. Do you know why I stopped? Now please listen carefully. Not because I feel the drug is dangerous, evil or foolish. I'm frankly quite grateful to this so-called medicine, but I did not want to become satisfied with half-truths and continue to be a halfhearted expression of our deepest self. I saw that many people who have taken the drug continued to take it with no significant progress, no real deepening of their experience. Most importantly, they did not appear to be deepening their *expression* of their understanding.

"At first I had thought we needed merely to repeat the experience with the drug. Then I realized that would be inadequate without some guidance. And I found no one who could guide me in the use of the drug, because there was no one I met who seemed to have had some deeper understanding of the drug experience than I did. Thus LSD and such agents looked like a dead end road for us.

"I had grasped enough from LSD to know that this small self is but a shallow inadequate expression of the true self. This understanding went hand-in-hand with a deep unexplainable religious feeling."

In the notebook Suzuki Roshi wrote in the margins:

“There is no wholehearted perfect expression in our conscious realm of our life, for “deep self” is beyond our conscious world. In conscious activity, the more you try to express yourself, the more you become unable to do so.

“By “understanding” you mean “perfect understanding” which is conscious and unconscious, mental and physical in its deepest sense. The reactions of your husband and children to your unconscious expression are your “TEACHERS.”

The notebook had continued:

“Then one Thursday morning I met you, and your way became the direction. There was no question but to follow you. There were no reservations in my mind: you were my master.

“I began to feel that LSD had been a means to an end, that is, the opening up of my understanding served to bring me to Zen. And I was extremely grateful to LSD for that because I really don't see how we can have thought to look for a teacher without this beginning. However, LSD or no, I know that meeting with you would have been quite enough to start us in our practice. It is simply that I wonder how I would have dreamed of such a thing as going to meet a Zen master.

“Several months after beginning to sit with you, sesshin arrived, and you spoke several times about LSD in your lectures during our week-long zazen. It really threw me into confusion and grief. I wanted to accept whatever truth you would bring me to face, but I asked myself how I could turn my back on the experience which had kindled my religious feeling and given me enough of my self to begin this search. It was as if you were throwing something sacred in the dust and laughing about it. I thought that if I

followed your way, I would be denying something—oh, I was hurting. Once, twice, three times you almost sneered at LSD in your talk, and I didn't know how to understand what was happening. Was I attached to an experience, I asked myself? But oh, one has to be true to their truest experience or it is all too ridiculous, I moaned.

“During one unforgettable zazen that week I almost bowed and walked out of the zendo. I was thrown into extreme contradiction. You were the master, no doubt of it, but I felt you were making a big mistake. My emotions and reason said you didn't understand... and then I resolved it in that moment: you didn't understand. Why should you understand? If I understood my LSD experience, as best as I could, that was all there was to it. Let go of it and go on.

“I remembered you saying to us all one Wednesday night in lecture that we always expect you to be a teacher, and that sometimes we should be teacher and you should be student. On this point, then, I mustn't expect you to be teacher, I decided. This L.S.D. experience had come and gone and needed no explanation and it asked for no defense. It was a part of me, and even if I chose to laugh at it in order to be on the surface following you completely, the reality of my experience could not, would not, be dispensed with.

“From then on I never thought as much about LSD. But I haven't forgotten its role in my understanding. That would be a delusion of my ego. In this writing I haven't attempted to describe or explain that day three years ago when I took LSD. If ever you ask, it would be meaningful to try, but remember you tell us, do not be curious. You will not tease me? Well, actually I am ready to be teased by now, I realize. So tease away—with deep sincerity.”

At the end of the section, Suzuki Roshi wrote the following:

“Thank you; you gave me better understanding about L.S.D. and how you studied the way of taking L.S.D. is very interesting.

“It was your way of study of L.S.D that lead you to Zen as well as L.S.D. It will be the way you study Zen that will help you in its true sense, and not me. Sometimes I shall be your teacher and some time you two will be my teacher. If so after all we are all good friends.

“Thank you again for your sincere advice.”

April 3 Sunday Morning

“This last exchange was one of those experiences which seems so bad at the time and turns out to have been so good. How I worried about whether I had made a mistake by trying to write about L.S.D., or whether I’d said it so poorly that you’d misunderstood. (And you gave that lecture about Dogen telling one follower, “You are not my disciple!”)

“After all it turned out to be a very meaningful and encouraging exchange. Maybe partly it feels so right *now* because it seemed quite *not* right for several days, those tense days before you reassured me.”

Friday, April 8

“Thank goodness for being able to write in this notebook because sometimes I am overwhelmed by you yourself and cannot speak so well to you in the moment. Later I might be able to speak to you, but later is sometimes *quite* later because I don’t always

see you so often. With this book I can speak as soon as I have a moment, rather than wait until we are together again.

“This evening you spoke of Dogen’s master advising him to seclude himself with a small group of disciples and to keep Zen pure for the descendants. I am still not clear about the implications of what you were saying to us....

“I had asked a question sent to Zen Center by a young man in Niagara Falls. He wanted to know if he could be your disciple. We have no tradition concerning the master-pupil relationship. I’ve never seen this quite so clearly before, and I never realized what a problem this must be for you—and for us.

“Please forgive us if we are sometimes insensitive in this important understanding. You see, we are used to simply paying a fee, signing a registration card to officially make someone our teacher. Or we are used to signing a church registry and becoming a member of the flock. And so this vital relationship between master and pupil is of a deeper quality than any relationship that exists in our culture. We will be quite clumsy about this, I’m afraid, for some time to come.

“May I ask you a question please on this topic? In Japan is there some mutual choosing by teacher and pupil alike? In other words, does a master somehow acknowledge that he accepts a pupil as a disciple? Does he sometimes reject pupils? If this acceptance or rejection occurs, is it quite obvious, or is it very subtle?

“(You once told me I had a subtle mind, but most usually I feel as subtle as a rhinoceros!)”

Here I drew a rough sketch of a rhino, and under it Suzuki Roshi wrote:

“You are right. Don’t try to be a smart fox or a monkey.”

April 12 “Good Problem”

“Tony and I love to remember you saying that someone might look at a man who has a wonderful wife and fine children as being very fortunate, when actually in this very area he has his problem. “Good problem” someone might say. Since that Wednesday night lecture, we have enjoyed looking at many things in our lives, or the lives of others, as *good* problems. It is very amusing, but quite helpful!

“One good problem I have is that I am never alone. I long to have time alone, but it seems almost continually there is someone—or more—with me. And usually they require no small amount of my attention, be they my children, other family members or friends. It seems like a luxury if Tony and I are alone together—or if I might find an hour a day of quiet undistracted time all alone. But even so, there are so many things that I should do in that time that I can never quite feel I use it well enough.

“Number one, I usually feel first that I want to write to you, but often I recognize this wish as being deeper than the wish to write. It is a wish to express, or be, a part of myself that is still only a soft quiet urge. And so I usually try to leave the pen and be still, and try some other way — of which many are waiting.

“You know I am not at all organized—well, not very. My housework shows it (though I notice some gradual improvement). One of my very good problems is being elected secretary. It is ironical. This poor typist had always avoided such responsibility, but I guess not enough people are aware of my inefficiency, and so here I am secretary. Secretary of Zen Center, the most valuable entity in my life. Already it has proved to be

very painful because I have made such mistakes, and it has added to the pressure of 'what should I do first in the precious hour alone?'

"Yet in this position I have opportunity for experiencing things I love: exchanging letters with sincere people, growing more aware of the past, present and future Zen Center, coming in closer contact with the members, and in some barely noticeable way doing some small things for you. (The latter is the thing I would most want to do, but of course the most difficult because it is based on my deepest feelings, and yet there is little I can ever do to hope to be of service to you.)

"I have just had the desire to tear out this page because of that last sentence. But if I were speaking with you, I couldn't tear it out! Instead I should explain it better if I can. I didn't mean that now I actually do anything for you. Only for a day or two I had even supposed I would be able to be of service to you. But only too soon I realized that the only way really to serve you in a meaningful way is simply to make my effort in *anything* I am doing. Make my effort doing the dishes, washing Aaron's face, folding the laundry.

"My 'good problem' of being secretary points up a truth applicable to all areas of my life. That is, those things which give us pleasure can bring us pain. We must make our attempt to do what is expected of us even though it may be far below the standard we would hope to live up to. I have to start where I am and work from there rather than wait until I learn this, that, and the other thing. If we took on no activity until we felt we were prepared adequately, it would be like saying 'I refuse to live until I understand life completely and can live it perfectly.'"

Suzuki roshi underlined the sentences in the above paragraph in red pencil. The notebook entry went on:

“Always I’ve dreaded my lack of great intelligence being shown to anyone—especially myself. My ego dreaded very much knowing it was not particularly smart. I still find myself cringing when I do something rather stupid. But at least it seems I’m not trying to avoid situations that illustrate my lack of brilliance, nor am I so apt to cover up my mistakes. For instance, I make myself grit my teeth, straighten my back and hand you this notebook, with awareness of the shallow understanding it attempts to express on these emotion scrawled pages.

“I hope this notebook is not too great a burden on your own time ‘alone’.”

At the bottom of the page Roshi wrote:

“Please continue it.”

This page in the notebook is especially valuable for the drawing Suzuki Roshi made in the right margin, a long thin cave with two figures sitting zazen at the bottom with boulders overhead and birds flying free high above.

April 16

“Sadness”

“I cannot find the words to express this feeling because it is quite beyond my own understanding. This great sadness came after your departure because it seems as if I have never quite done the right thing for you—and now you are gone. It seems as if I have neglected you, and unawareness has made it impossible for me to do ‘something’ (?) which I should have done for you. I’ve no idea what it is that I feel I’ve neglected! Yet this feeling is so deep as if I should have known, as if I should know now. The grief

deepens as I am afraid that I shall never completely.... Completely what? What? Oh, I wish I knew! My thoughts cannot reach my feeling.”

Finally, one evening on the drive to Los Altos I had the nerve to tell Suzuki Roshi what I was beginning to be concerned about. Keeping my eyes on the red taillights ahead of us, I confessed my misgivings. “I am worried about my strong feelings for you. It seems almost like being in love. It can’t be alright.”

Without hesitation, Roshi gave me his answer. “You can feel whatever you do for your master. I have enough discipline for both of us.”

April 18

“Good Feeling”

“It seems always I’m writing about confused or sad feelings. Perhaps I should tell you of last night merely because it had such joy. In Kahlil Gibran’s book *The Prophet* in his selection concerning friendship, he expressed the following:

‘...And let your best be for your friend.

If he must know the ebb of your tide,

Let him know its flood also.’

“Last night there was a flood of good feeling, and I simply let it refresh me. I tried not to evaluate it or understand it intellectually, and this morning I feel deeply refreshed. But now I will think about it!

“Tony sat across from me, writing letters, grading papers. The radio was on playing popular music. The sounds of the music and of Tony turning pages, writing, tapping the table, these sounds I seemed to hear with my whole body. The vibrations

registered on the entire surface of my body and seemed to penetrate me. I really felt like a body, a receiving place for vibrations. It was very enjoyable to be a body.

“I kept watching Tony and it felt as though I completely loved him, with no little barriers of needs or expectations invisibly coming between us. At first he was involved in his activity, and it felt like I was absorbing him almost in the way of absorbing sounds. I could feel that when he looked at me his thoughts were in his eyes. That is, he was not completely seeing me, but was looking through ideas at me.

“Gradually, the more he met my eyes and felt the unabashed joy which I was smiling, he began to enter into his looking. It seemed a veil was lifting from his eyes, and we were really seeing each other. Truly the looking and seeing, from one pair of eyes to another, seemed to be *one* activity. It wasn't at all like two individuals looking at each other. When he returned to his work, I could still really see him.

“Now one thing missing in this experience was that I simply sat and enjoyed it. The dishes need to be washed and a pile of clothes waited to be put away, yet I couldn't seem to try to do these things because I thought if I stepped back into my 'role' it would push this feeling away. But I felt I should not indulge myself if I couldn't continue my work. About this I have concern.

“It was already late in the evening when this all occurred. It was time to go to bed if we were to meet the next day without undue drowsiness. At first I'd sit up longer as I was drinking so deeply in the good feelings, after having felt bad for some time; days or weeks it seemed I was feeling very low. But I thought if I sit up later than usual that would surely be attaching to the good feeling and that would be unwise. So happily I went to sleep and happily awoke this morning.

“You said a teacher can sometimes help a student by suggesting what is important and what is not so important. Will you try to tell me if things like this are misleading, or should they be encouraging, or should one simply pass over them and not be much interested? Some time ago I wondered about this, and I think I need your suggestion.”

At the bottom of the page in red pencil Roshi wrote:

“Well balanced life! Perfect happiness!”

April 28

“Irrational Me”

“This afternoon I visited a friend who has an intellectual approach to things, quite noticeably, and the encounter was very revealing about myself. This friend questions herself thoroughly and is intent on knowing the reasons for each feeling she has. She takes great care in researching her thoughts and actions.

“She had questions of course for me, as well. For some time I found myself groping for answers. When she was out of the room for a moment and I was alone, I suddenly had a wave of insight into me: I am an irrational person. For some reason this perception filled me with such a good feeling that I jumped to my feet, feeling both relief and gratitude. At once it seemed to me that my irrationality may be the most troublesome thing about being me, but at the same time it seemed to be a very good thing—perhaps my greatest asset!

The last phrase above was underlined in red by Roshi. The notebook continued:

“I tried to tell my friend what I was feeling, but it did sound like nonsense. I gave up trying to explain it, but I did not give up feeling very glad.”

Across the bottom of the page Roshi wrote in red pencil:

“Your practice holds you and your happiness.”

May 12

“It seems I will never be able to speak alone to you again. How fortunate that I can appeal to the pages in this book to sputter out my feelings. I’m not serious when I say ‘never’ again will there be that opportunity, but it is true I must face the fact that I must share these Thursday drives. How I am spoiled. The funny part is that months ago I was aware of what a privilege it is to drive you and I thought it should be shared. I didn’t want to grow too attached to the drive. So I tried very hard to find other drivers to take turns with because I didn’t want to be unfair. But surprisingly (and fortunately for me!) it turned out that no one was available! I simply gave up worrying about sharing you on Thursdays and just drove you gratefully myself.

“Now Evelyn and Mike want to drive you in their car, and pangs of my conscience say I should arrange it so they can drive you. Am I spoiled? Oh, you can be sure I am trying to tell myself that I am not, because I am not so good at this kind of sacrifice. Should you shout at me or hit me with the stick?”

At the bottom of the page Suzuki Roshi printed in red:

“SPEAK NO WORD! DO NO DOING!”

May 15

“The Bows”

Suzuki Roshi underlined the title in red pencil.

“Today I sensed a very deep seriousness, a profound religious feeling in your manner before lecture today. Though your words were priceless as well, it was your attitude during the sutra that especially penetrated my mad monkey mind and affected me deeply. When we did the bows, I did feel the bows were really happening, as though they were life happening to itself.

Roshi underlined the last phrase above.

“When the bowing had passed, I felt I would not be so terribly ashamed to die. For it seemed that if never before or after the bowing was I vitally aware of my activity, that moment had been enough to say, ‘Yes, I lived it.’ Now to practice being alive....”

Same day “Zazen”

Roshi underlined the title.

“Just the beginnings of zazen are happening. Yes, your understanding tells us all zazen is zazen. But it is hard to think of my zazen usually as much more than sitting in a proper posture while continuing to distract my mind with frivolous thoughts. I know that Big Mind is not at all perturbed by my pettiness, yet I do feel distracted and silly in my small mind.

“Just very recently, however, I have calmed down. The rambling thoughts have stopped being so persistent, and following the breathing has become—for dear moments—an actuality. Partly I think I have been imagining I would find some state of ‘sameness’ in zazen. I knew it was not quite right to expect such a thing, an unchanging (excuse the word) activity of breathing. But now I can begin to experience that each breath is new, and to have faith in the newness and follow it.”

Yosemite National Park Excursion

It was with great pleasure that Tony and I drove Suzuki Roshi and his wife Mitsu to Yosemite. The little red Volkswagen bug proved to be ideal when we reached the meadow; standing up in the back, Roshi could stick his head and shoulders out of the open roof and marvel at the great boulders. As soon as we stopped at Yosemite Falls, he was out of the car and bounding ahead of us, soon clambering up the rocks and out of sight. We were surprised, but Mitsu seemed to expect it. When he returned to us, he was jubilant, full of the experience of the great waterfall.

We spread a blanket on the grass and settled down for our picnic lunch. I had made cheese sandwiches, about as Japanese as the Swedish meatballs. Luckily Mitsu had fixed yummy rice balls to share. "We don't mind cold food if we can have something hot to drink," said Roshi as he poured the tea. He took a bit of a rice ball and set it down an arm's length from the blanket. "This way the ants won't want to bother us."

On the way home we stopped for refreshment at a diner. Roshi's cup was a big heavy restaurant mug, and when he lifted it, he did a double take because of the cup's weight. "You are not so careful with your cups," he added with a smile, referring to Americans washing dishes. I nodded in embarrassed recognition.

It was a day to remember with gratitude. We were delighted when at a later date he gave a lecture about the waterfall. Marion recorded it, and it is in *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* under the title "Nirvana, The Waterfall." He described how the water breaks into droplets on the way down but returns to the river as one. Nirvana.

July 6 “Lasting Sadness”

“Though we spoke of this together on Monday, I’ll include it here for later days remembrance.

“It has helped me to know that the deep underlying sadness which has become so basic to my life is not a misconception to be worked through or a stage to be ‘waited through,’ but rather a truth to accept and work from. It is fortunate to have had your comments because I certainly had been wondering why I was letting myself go down such a dark path. Now this sadness is more gentle and less black because I am accepting it and not being critical of myself for experiencing it. What seemed like an ending becomes a real beginning.

“I mentioned that I now know I would continue forever making my effort even without your existence, but how difficult it must be for someone to be without a teacher. Because of your expression of the teachings I have renewed courage and a deeper understanding of our true nature. Because you understand it I can just begin to understand it myself.

“Accepting the sadness has seemed to have had a bearing on my behavior, on my reactions to things happening in my environment. I don’t feel so critical of other people. The petty angriness that I cannot accept in me seems not to have flared up. Perhaps this new mildness and calmness in my feelings will only be temporary, and I will resume my grouchy ways, but I will know it is not necessary to react in that manner. A great deal of my anger seems to have come from my thrashing around about the sadness in life, fighting it.

“As long as I deny the sadness, or oppose it, there is no chance to experience it completely and become one with it. When I become one with the sadness, there I find the calmness of my mind.”

Date? Torn Out Pages

It is with chagrin that I admit I tore out the pages of the next entry, but not before Roshi had read them and made his perfect response. Now at this later date, I feel I should do my best to recapture the gist of what I had written. It was offered to Suzuki Roshi in the spirit of “sometimes I will be your teacher.” I believed I should share with Roshi the impression I had of Richard Baker. I wrote that I thought maybe the cultural differences between Americans and Japanese might cause Roshi not to see Dick Baker clearly. Maybe Dick Baker might come across differently viewed through a Japanese perspective. From my perspective he was not warm like Suzuki Roshi himself. I found him to be cold, and I told Roshi that Dick was somewhat of a snob. I said he didn’t reflect Roshi’s way and wouldn’t adequately express Roshi’s teaching. I questioned Dick’s sincerity, and I said he somehow didn’t seem trustworthy.

While I waited to hear back from Roshi I was anxious. What would he think of what I had dared to say? Finally the answer came. After evening zazen Roshi was holding the notebook. With a smile he rapped me over the head with it and handed it back. “You are as naughty as Dick Baker!” he said.

As usual, Roshi’s response said it all.

December 9

“Big Ego!”

“Oh, ho! What a big ego this woman has! I must work harder at believing in nothing. Yes, that is a great problem. I have too much ‘idea’ and ‘feeling’ about what is Buddhism and what is the way of true practice. It is time to go beyond all these ideas and confront Buddha directly. Ha! But I have no idea how, have I? Maybe I can begin by not clinging to my present notions.

“I didn’t realize how static my understanding has become recently. It is surely necessary for me to allow truth to grow and change. I have put an iron band around my understanding and it pinches. Thank goodness for the pinching feeling. Pain certainly does bring about our chance to grow.

“Oh, I’m still confused, but much more gladly, and without resentment. You know we emphasize one side of the teaching if the person is clinging too much to the other side of reality. Well, I have been too concentrated on my own way-seeking mind, ‘my’ effort, ‘my’ understanding, etc. Now I have a new attitude based on Buddha—or God—or Buddha-nature. Whatever we call it, it is more than me, and I can trust it completely, trust that my effort is Buddha’s without so much self-criticism or self-centeredness.

“It is a religious feeling which makes things no easier, perhaps, but more sincere. Partly this feeling came from your still smiling face at the head of the stairs after Thursday zazen. I was glad to see you able to smile through my confusion, through my egotism, through all my theories and half-baked ‘ideas,’ past all the obstacles I’ve built for myself, into our true nature. Your very simple and uncomplicated communication, be it a smile or a simple meeting of the eyes, has the effect of piercing through my small

self. Sometimes when I seem the most 'deluded,' it takes only the sound of you clearing your throat to break through my home-grown confusions.

"Helpful in re-directing my stumbling, too, has been the writing of Meister Eckhart, the Christian mystic. He was challenged and tried as a heretic because his teaching was so deep and profound. He speaks of God in a way Christians usually do not. His understanding of God had him almost burned at the stake, but his interpretation is rather close to the Buddhist concept of Buddha-nature. It has been helpful to me because of his unself-centered idea being expressed in a different context than the way I've been thinking. (Coincidentally, Eckhart was born in 1260, not too far from the birth of Dogen!)

"Please take these pages to know I am not banging my head against the wall right now. My apologies to you for letting myself drag my feet in the mud. It's just fine to walk in the mud, perhaps, but really, I do play in it too long.

"Thank you for your patience. There is an abundance of patience, and I shall be having some, too, for myself. There is a great abundance of whatever is needed!"

Epilogue

The opportunity to drive Roshi, and to keep the notebook, changed as Zen Center became busier, what with the campaign to start Tassajara Zen Mountain Center and the growing number of students. But equally distracting was the fact that Tony and I started a school, Shire School, and it took a great deal of our time and energy. Tony had been uncomfortable teaching in traditional graded schools, and Shire School was to be more directed to individual student needs. We believed it would be a better experience for

Rhonda and Aaron than public school. However, because it was considered a “hippy” school, having started in the Haight Ashbury, the City shut us down several times for building code violations. Eventually the school itself became so chaotic we no longer felt it served the needs of our children. At the end of the year, we headed to the mountains with the goal of teaching in a one-room school in Sawyer’s Bar.

The school had only eight students, two of which were our own. We lived in Sawyer’s Bar two years, going to Tassajara in the summers, helping to start a children’s program there. Eventually we missed Roshi and the sangha so much that we made the move back to the city Zen Center. We moved into a flat right next door.

I’d hoped to see Suzuki Roshi often, but when I’d call to make an appointment with him, his close attendant would discourage me. “Is it important, Toni? He has so little time. He’s very busy training young priests,” Yvonne Rand explained truthfully. I soon decided my reason for wanting a visit wasn’t that important after all.

A student from Santa Barbara approached Tony and me about a Zen group he was starting there. He said the group could use some older students and he invited us to join them. It sounded like a good move for the children who were being harassed in the rough neighborhood around Zen Center. This was important enough to seek a visit with Roshi.

Mitsu graciously served us tea then left us alone. As soon as I told Roshi about the proposed move, I started to cry. Roshi smiled and said, “Put some honey in your tea.” I did so, and my tears kept flowing. “Put some more honey in your tea,” he said. I did, but I kept crying. “Put some more honey in your tea,” he repeated, and I finally had to smile. I was reminded of the sweetness of our life.

“I don’t want to go,” I said, though it was obvious.

“Go. I will come later,” he said, almost as if it were true. “I will retire at your temple.” He was smiling warmly. I knew it was just candy he was offering, but it gladdened my heart. Wishful thinking can be so sweet.

Neither of us knew yet that he was dying.