

Zentatsu-roshi
Suzuki-roshi's personal history
11 Dec. 1971 S.F.

All of us right now feel some special feeling. Our great teacher Suzuki Shunryu Daiocho is gone and we don't know quite what to do. Some of us I think are worried about how he is. I think anyone who knew so well how to take care of himself in life knows how to take ~~care~~ care of himself in death. And we're worried about ourselves, how we can continue. Not so much of him is actually gone; he left as much with us as any human being can leave. So, what is a teacher? A teacher is someone who shows you how to teach ~~yourself~~ yourself. So a teacher ~~must~~ must have very little ego. Somehow ~~A~~ Suzuki-roshi knew himself before he came here, knew himself in Japan, so when he came here he knew you. So the best way you can express your gratitude and your grief is to know yourself. A story I told during the ~~xxxx~~ sesshin, which I like, is about Chuan-tse (?) and, Chuan-tse is the sort of number two man in Taoism after Lao-tse. There's a story of how when his wife died he was found by a friend later in the day sitting behind his house banging on a bowl and singing. His ~~xxxx~~ friend said, how can you be banging on a bowl and singing when your wife just died? And he said something about she had a complete life and now she ~~is~~ gone and that's all. But still, I don't ~~think~~ think ~~xx~~ every day he banged on a bowl and sang. During the sesshin we banged on our bowls, a bit. I think that in many small ways like this, our feeling from a long time will express itself.

Anyway, first of all, a teacher is an ordinary human being. Suzuki-roshi, his relationships with ~~his~~ his students were what I would call unconditioned relationships, as much as possible. During sesshin too, I discussed, maybe there are three kinds of

unconditioned relationships. One is your relationship to Buddha, another is your relationship to your teacher, and the third is your relationship to yourself. A teacher is to make those three relationships work for you. To work for you, he doesn't usually go to the movies with you or, I don't know, he doesn't do the ordinary things you do with another person, the more conditioned things. Like the most conditioned relationship would be between husband and wife, which is one of the reasons it's such a difficult relationship. But if you spend a lifetime with somebody, maybe that relationship will become unconditioned. So when Suzuki-roshi first came here, we couldn't find out much about him, because who he was as an ordinary man we just didn't talk much about. We called him sensei because the Japanese congregation called him sensei, so we didn't know what sensei meant but we called him sensei. ~~That~~ And after a while some of us realized that ~~x~~ we didn't know what he was but he was pretty unusual. ~~We~~ We found out probably that he must be a roshi so we started calling him roshi. Since I've been to Japan I've found out a little about his background.

I guess his grandfather was a farmer in the Shizuoku area; that's near the base of Mount Fuji, and I think pretty much an ordinary farmer. Maybe he probably was in a village area, a slightly more important farmer than other farmers, or ~~xxx~~ otherwise he wouldn't have had a son go into the priesthood. He probably lived in a farmhouse of which the total area of maybe twice this room; it was a big farmhouse, ^a rather successful farmer, but there's an enormous amount of space in such a farmhouse. We're finding moving into the apartment next door ^{that} that we lived in Japan in, ~~p~~ that we lived in, primarily in

two rooms, an eight tatami room and a six tatami room, and we had considerably more space than we have in this/^{great big}apartment next door with lots and lots of rooms. There's no place to put anything, it's jus..well, anyway... It's unbelievable. And we found in our eight tatami and six tatami house that not only could we live there, but we could have whole other families, like Paul and Ruthie and Benjamin Discoe all live with us for a month without much problem at all, plus a third/^{person}~~family~~ lived upstairs, a third family. So anyway, such a house is already something that we don't know what it's like, because it's a in which everything and an organic part of a culture, ~~xxxxxx~~ everybody has a place and everybody, each moment knows what to do with their mind and body, without falling back on, on their own psychology or something. In an ordinary farmhouse, once you're used to Japan, ~~the~~ refinement in such~~y~~ a farmhouse, I don't think there's anything anywhere in the United States equivalent on any level. Refinement and the sense of how to live that's in that Japanese farmhouse.

So Suzuki-roshi's father became a priest and must have been a very good one, because his disciple, Gyokujun Soun (?) Daiocho became the leading roshi of the Soto sect. So Suzuki-roshi's father was a roshi, but when Suzuki-roshi was a young man, a boy actually, I don't remember exactly, eight or six or something like that, I have all this information somewhere, but he, since ~~he~~ spent so many years not really talking about it I spent a long time not really remembering what I do know, but anyway, somewhere when he was pretty young he was sent to his father's disciple to study. His fathers' disciple was I guess an extraordinarily powerful man. I saw his bow, he was also an archer,

Roshi

and ~~he~~ had this bow which/~~he~~ said would you bend this bow, he said, so I took this bow, it's something like about that big you know, anyway almost nobody could string it or pull it, I mean nobody. Suzuki-roshi said he never met another person who could string the bow his teacher used. And Suzuki-roshi was rather the opposite, you know, Suzuki-roshi was very strong and energetic, as we found at Tassajara, and ~~Suzuki-roshi was~~ very much in touch with exactly how to use his energy and work, but still ~~he~~ was quite a frail man compared to his teacher. I visited the temple where ~~the~~ Suzuki-roshi's teacher's teacher, ~~this~~ father's teacher and his father and Gyokujun Soun Daiocho all have their ashes and where I believe some of Suzuki-roshi's ashes will go. It's a beautiful temple, one of the most beautiful buildings I've ever been in. It comes from a lumber, the area's a mountain area, you come up through a dirt road through a ~~sort~~ of rice paddy and there's a pretty steep embankment with these ^{like} huge/redwood trees that stand up, cypress, some kind of Japanese cypress, and there's these steps that go up, and in Japanese temples, say that this is the temple entrance, and ~~the~~ gate is, the gate could be anywhere in a country temple, say the gate is over here, you come up and maybe you could park your car ~~and~~ ^{of} walk here, usually there's steps, and the purpose of the steps, almost always is to prepare you to enter the temple. So, as you walk, and particularly if you can make it go up a hill, they like that, cause it slows you down. So you step and you step and step, and by the time you're at ~~the~~ the top of the steps there's some different pace. And then, they don't just make a path that sort of goes across~~x~~ like this to the door, because they make your body define the architecture, to define the space, and ultimately

the space is a mandala, originally the temples are based on mandalas. A lot of that's lost now, but ~~originally~~ the idea there is that your movement describes the space. So the path will go this way, and maybe somewhere else, but anyway it will go over and then over, and your movement through the compound defines the actual space. In fact the gate here is usually not a gate to anything, it's just, you know, and there may be or may not be a wall, and it's never closed usually, and generally you can't close it. So, anyway... But in this beautiful temple are these huge columns of this red wood, kind of redwood, and the local carpenters who built it were superb, ~~it~~ is the site of a story Suzuki-roshi told several times, many of you must know it, about the pickles. You know the story? Anyway, this is what Roshi calls his first minor enlightenment or kensho or minor, ~~xxxxxx~~ some kind of experience which turned him ~~xxxxxx~~ about. And he was, I don't know how old, ten or eleven, and living in that strict kind of life that you live in with a teacher, in Japan particularly, everybody becomes rather mischievous, and Roshi often used to say, I don't know why but you get so mischievous, anyway, they ~~xxxx~~ didn't like, the teacher always, in fact Suzuki-roshi's teacher used to have, I mean Suzuki-roshi's father used to have ^{him} ~~them~~ go out and wait for ~~x~~ vegetables ~~x~~ the farmers would throw away. They'd throw them into the stream, so Roshi'd have to go out and sit on a bridge and wait for them to float, you know, by, and ~~x~~ he'd get the vegetables and bring them to the temple, and in fact, when I first heard this story, ~~when~~ I first started practicing, I used to get my wife rather upset, because at the Farmer's Market I used to pick up cabbages ~~th~~at the trucks had run over and try to get them clean, you know.

(Laughter). Anyway, Gyokujun Soun Daiosho was pretty strick about using all the food. So they had some spoiled pickles, and no-one wanted to eat the spoiled pickles, pickles are already kind of spoiled, you know, the way they make them, but... So anyway, ~~the~~ students ^{there were} (living there, four or five students) decided to hide the pickles. So ~~they~~ took them and they went out into the garden of ~~the~~ ^{this} temple which I visited, and they went under a tree and they buried them, and they put dirt over it. Anyway two days later, in came Gyokujun-~~Soun~~san, a roshi, whatever, and ~~a~~ he had these pickles; he said, look what I found in the garden. (Laughter). Please cook them, or please serve them tomorrow morning or something. So, they really didn't know what to do, so they washed them as carefully as possible and then they boiled ~~them~~, and, uh, boiled spoiled pickles are just a very unusual dish. So they served them the next day, and all the young boys sat there sort of tremulously ~~ix~~ and watched, and he just ate them without hesitation. So Suzuki-roshi took some and tried it, and steeled himself for some terrible experience, but just chewed and swallowed and that was all there was to it, he didn't have to think, good or bad, he just chewed ^{them} and swallowed them, and it was a big experience for him. ~~Anyway~~, so when we got to this temple, the first thing I said, where'd you bury the pickles? (Laughter) And he couldn't remember, he looked around, this tree?, no, I don't know. So anyway, one tries to find out the history that way. To me, that was an important part of ~~this~~ history. He couldn't remember. Someone else I know was at ~~ax~~ lecture. He'd never met Suzuki-roshi before, and Suzuki-roshi, after the lecture, came out and waited a few minutes, and ~~the~~ these people came out, and he turned to the one man ~~and~~ who was coming out and he said, so ~~a~~ he went

with him and they walked into a little back room and as soon as they got in Suzuki-roshi faced him and then took his finger and pointed right at his forehead, three times, and then turned and walked out. Well, for nearly six or seven years now, this man has thought, what was that all about? Some special Soto teaching or something. And a few weeks ago he came and visited Roshi. For six years now it's bothered him, what that meant, you know. So he thought, now he'd better ask Roshi about it. So he went up and he said, and he asked him about it, and Roshi said, I don't remember. (Laughter).
 Daioshho

Anyway, he was with Gyokujun Soun/for a long time, who was, as I said, probably would have been head of the Soto sect, I think he was next in line, but he died rather young, maybe in his fifties? something like that, so Suzuki-roshi had to take over his temple when he was thirty-one and there was some criticism of him, maybe he was too young to do such a thing, but he made up his mind to try to do it, and he managed somehow. And he had another teacher called Kichizawa-roshi, who actually, in Suzuki-roshi's temple, near the end of his teacher's life, the teacher moved from this temple with the beautiful red/wood pillars and went to another temple, somewhat bigger, not much bigger, but somewhat bigger, which originally had been a training monastery and it's now the temple that his son, Hoichi-san is head of. So when his teacher died, Suzuki-roshi had to take over this temple, and the other temple eventually was taken over by a dharma brother of Suzuki-roshi's, which Suzuki-roshi had been head of before, and now the temple with the beautiful redwood pillars is, the head priest of it is one of Suzuki-roshi's disciples. So Suzuki-roshi took over this temple,

and Kichizawa, well anyway, this temple is head of two hundred? or several hundred other temples, there's a sort of system in the Soto sect of, there's temples, and then there's a group of head temples, and then there's a group of Head temples, and I think, Rinzo-in is a Head of about some forty or fifty head temples which under them have a total of two hundred or so temples, something like that, and then there's another level above that, and then finally, Sojiji. Well, one of the sub temples of Rinzo-in, the head of it was the second teacher of Suzuki-roshi, Kichizawa-roshi, so in the hierarchy Suzuki-roshi was higher up, so when Kichizawa-roshi came to that temple Suzuki-roshi was the head priest. And Suzuki-roshi was always rather embarrassed, you know: you're my teacher so (please, you) do service, but ^{Kichizawa} Suzuki-roshi always refused, because, in... Dr. Conze talked about this the other day, is that, about persona and person; he didn't talk about Japan, but it applies. In Japan they don't have ~~that~~ the sense of person so much as persona, as mask, and so you just play your role, you don't have to worry about who you are, as what you are under certain circumstances. Anyway, Kichizawa-roshi, um, was I guess a pretty great scholar. I first heard about him in more detail when Suzuki-roshi and I met Ruth Fuller Sasaki. She began talking and then somehow, ~~she said~~ and then she said, oh yes I visited a temple there because there was a famous scholar who had a book I wanted and I tried to talk him out of it, and Suzuki-roshi said, Ah, that was Kichizawa-roshi, my teacher, you came to (unclear: this temple?) So the library that Kichizawa-roshi had is still kept I believe at Rinzo-in, but he was, I believe the Dogen expert in ^{Soto} the sect at that time. Suzuki-roshi studied with him ~~in the sect~~

for many, many years. So, he came, anyway, let's see, where are we? So Roshi had, from a young boy, been interested in coming to America, and his first person he got to be a Buddhist I believe actually was an English lady who'd been, the equivalent of Anna and ~~the~~ king of Siam, she'd been the woman who was the tutor of the emperor of Manchuria, I believe, and when Japan went into Manchuria, this woman ceased being the tutor of the emperor of Manchuria, or his son, and she came ~~to~~ Japan, and some interesting stories about ~~this~~, I'll make it very brief, is, Roshi studied English with her and finally moved into her house to help her, while he was a college student, I believe at Komazawa, Daiga(?) , Komazawa University, and the woman had this beautiful Buddha that the emperor, or somebody, I think the emperor had given her, and she had no idea what it meant. So she kept it on a ~~shelf~~ ⁱⁿ or/the tokonoma or something, ~~the~~ tokonoma's the place where you display scrolls, and she also kept her shoes there, (isn't that right?), Peter's talked to the Roshi about some of this, so anyway, she kept her shoes there, and ~~Roshi~~ Roshi was ~~just~~ horrified, you know, he was just a young priest, but he was pretty..., didn't like putting it.... ~~xxxxxxxxxxx~~ and of course, in Japan since they live on tatamis, which is not a floor, it's a living surface, your feet have to be at least as clean as your face all the time. Very strong feeling about dirty feet. I mean ^{it's} ~~they~~ ^{they} just ~~can't~~ understand foreigners, how our feet get dirty, and our fingers ~~xxxxxxxx~~, toenails, it's just unbelievable. Anyway, to ^{put} your shoes in the tokonoma, you know, it's bad enough that nowadays everybody puts television sets, but to put your shoes in the tokonoma with this fantastic Buddha was too much. So, Roshi didn't say any-

thing, and ~~the~~ way he treated her is, I think, very close to the way he'd like us to practice Buddhism, is he just treated the Buddha the way it should be treated, the way you'd treat your own inner nature, with some care, some way, some unconditioned way. We must do something, so, you know, we offer incense or something. We have to express in some way, have to take some activity, so he offered incense, and he would maybe brush the shoes off or I don't know, anyway... (laughter). He began to offer incense, and she laughed ^{at him} ~~about it~~ and teased him about it for a long time. ^{But} Finally, she began offering incense too, and pretty soon she became a Buddhist. So, he wanted to come to America, because he ~~had~~ some feeling that uh... well I feel that throughout the orient there's a feeling that the culture is deeply disturbed by the west, and there's some feeling on the one hand, that we must take care of our spiritual tradition, and the other is, I think, interesting that something Dr. Conze said, which I think is also true is that consciously or unconsciously, the orient's way of fighting back is to bring their spiritual tradition here. For whatever reason he had some deep feeling about coming to America. But also, Suzuki-roshi, for those of you who were at Sokoji, the other temple with us, he just, he never rejects anything, students, or people or situations, he just keeps doing, until they sort of, if they have to go away they somehow disappear by themselves. So he had many responsibilities, ^{quite a few} ~~many~~ temples, and he repaired various temples and did things and he never got a chance to come, and then he was asked to come to America, at some point, because Sokoji over here, the Japanese congregation Soto Zen temple needed a priest. And I think the first time he

~~refused~~ was asked he refused, and he'd also been asked to be head of some monastery in Japan and he felt he was too young to be head of it and he refused that also and a year later or some time later the position at Sokoji was still open and his friend asked him again and he decided to come. So, who came, the background out of which Roshi came is very lucky for us. He wasn't, uh, in some ways it's very lucky, ^{for instance} he wasn't a Kyoto person, very interested and involved in the culture of Kyoto and such like; he was a person whose culture is Japanese but primarily Buddhist culture. And through~~x~~ his two teachers and through the years ~~x~~ he spent with Kichizawa-roshi studying Buddhism, he prepared himself, maybe partly without knowing prepared himself for himself, to understand Buddhism thoroughly and deeply. In Japan I don't think he really had a way to express his understanding. So he came here, out of Japanese culture, with~~x~~ Buddhist culture, deeply a part of ~~x~~ it, and found that we were ready to listen and study with him and he ~~x~~ stayed. (Tape turned)

Suzuki-roshi's personal history.....

....culture so much is... Well, the whole problem with sangha is, it concerned me for a long time, and the real reason I went to Japan was to study, to ~~learn~~ look at the culture there, because the ~~culture~~ sangha is based on the culture; then yesterday Dr. Conze talked, with some fierceness, even, about how education is no longer possible, you know, that education depends on the contact between an older person and a younger person, some contact where you know the person, and so you need maybe three or four or ~~x~~ five students to a teacher, ten, but certainly not four hundred or three hundred or whatever he has facing him there. So when Roshi came here he came out of a culture in which

Buddhism work~~ed~~s, and he tried, throughout his lifetime here with us ~~xxxxxxx~~ not only to teach us Buddhism, but to give some us/~~x~~ sense of what a culture is, and often he said, used to say, you must be Americans, can't reject your own culture. So in some way, he tried, ~~the~~ Zen Center is maybe, ~~xxxx~~ many people feel too Japanese or something like that, but we almost have no culture in which Buddhism can flourish here, so he tried to give us some sense of how to live, 'cause if you don't have any way to live, how can you express Buddhism or your own nature? So he tried to give us everything that he was, is, every, he tried to give us a sense of how to live, how to have culture and that means simply, things as simple as how you pick/~~things~~^{some} up. At the same time he tried to give us so much from all his time and all his space, giving us time and space, giving us our own time, Buddha's time for being Buddha, and our own space. He also tried to move in our space and to let us move in our space, and particularly in the first years when we built a kind of foundation for the practice, he wouldn't ever tell us what to do; he'd suggest some small thing and maybe if there were twenty students one or two would hear him, or three or four, would hear what he said, you know, just as he was ready to leave after a service, and, maybe, hold your cards differently or when you bow such and such, or you should have some such attitude. So maybe two or three people would hear him, actually, 'cause the rest are thinking, I have to go to work or my breakfast is... you know, something. And then only one or two would remember, but maybe they'd try to start doing it, and a year later, maybe ten of the twenty would be doing it; and then at some point when there was some feeling that it was moving, and we'd picked up on the ~~hint~~^{in our own space} in our own way, /in our own time, then he'd say

some other little hint. So... somehow he tried to make those two things possible for us.

I saw an obituary in the newspaper and it made me feel a sense of loss quite different from the experience of being here this last week. It was outside that some public person was gone. But here in Zen Center, he's not really gone, you know; of course he's, for people who ~~have been~~ his disciples and have been with him for a long time, there's a very clear sense of his being in us, is that that's what those three intimate relationships are, unconditioned, intimate relationships, is that you get to know your own self deeply, working with a teacher and working with what it means to have some thing called Buddha, which is some ultimate possibility for human beings. So, after you've been his student for awhile it's not even necessary to see him very often or at all because you know exactly what to do. So ~~that's~~ the fact that he's gone now doesn't change that. But we worry about him, a little. But for those of you who didn't know him so well he's created a way of life here, feeling for life here, that you can participate in, that if you participate in you're participating in what he thought ^{was} most real and essential. He did almost everything he wanted to do here in his lifetime and, so, I thought maybe he would choose to die on December 8th, which is Buddha's nirvana day, but he surprised me, and the sesshin began, and in my, I have some bad habit of being a little late, 'cause I know exactly how much time and if some unusual thing happens it makes me thirty seconds late or something in the zendo, so I was almost late for the beginning of sesshin, and I have to go in and bow, offer incense and I have to walk around the room. So I did that and the bell went, and as I finished they came and got me, and I went up to the room

and spent about ten minutes with Roshi while he was fairly conscious and then slowly he went away, very gently, and couldn't tell at what point, ^{I could,} /I knew exactly when he let go, but I couldn't tell at what point he actually was gone, and he died right after the first period of the sesshin began. So... it was a very kind time of him to choose, 'cause we could do the sesshin then. So, we had breakfast, and went on with the sesshin. So if you, so we, somehow we want to express how we feel, you know, our gratitude or, if you can express your gratitude to him everyone will express their gratitude to you, and some way that's part of our life, part of our practice, just continuing ~~a~~ ~~the~~ practice is the best way, but for forty-nine days we've added one extra period of zazen in the morning and one extra ~~priz~~ period in the evening, afternoon, if you want to join us for ~~z~~ those forty-nine days, sitting, and every Friday evening for seven weeks we have a small extra chant for Suzuki-roshi, and tomorrow of course is the funeral service, here, in this room, which will last half an hour to an hour and then there'll be an opportunity to offer incense, and ~~a~~ Monday morning Suzuki-roshi will be cremated.

So what he would have wanted was for us to continue his way, to continue what really isn't his way but is Buddha's way or the way of the sangha, and of course we must find some way for the sangha to exist here, but the Buddhist sangha is probably the oldest institution in the world, and this is the first real one in the West, and Suzuki-roshi brought here to us really, and he would, clearly his life activity is to ~~a~~ try to continue and make a sangha work in America, and he would have wanted us to treat each other as Buddha. Of course sometimes you are angry

midpoint
are before
in America

with a person, and if anger communicates something, be angry.

When I say treat each other as Buddha, I don't mean going around with a saintly look on your face. That's a terrible way, you know. But to remember, to relate to each person's Buddha nature as much as possible, that's exactly what a teacher does, that's why I say a teacher's relationship with you is unconditioned.

When I saw him, the last words I had with him really were about three days before he died, and I went to his room, he'd asked me to come to his room every ^{morning} ~~morning~~ and say good morning, so I did that, and he had a service the same time we had a service, he'd have his door opened, and though he couldn't come down for the service he would wash his face and drink his orange juice, so that was his service, and then I would come up after the service here and say good morning, and about three days before he died, his hearing was failing, in the evenings sometimes he'd be more alert, but his mornings it was more pronounced, ~~and~~ and his hearing, it was difficult for him to hear and quite difficult for him to talk, and so we were trying to converse about something ~~and~~ he wanted and I wanted to speak about and it was a little difficult, and Okusan said, "I'll answer," because she'd discussed, so his wife and I talked a little bit and worked it out, what the problem was, and then I turned to him and I said, "Where will I meet you?" And this little hand came out from under the covers, and went, and bowed to me, so... anyway, with Buddha, Suzuki-roshi has entered nirvana, whatever. Thank you.

transcribed by Barry Eisenberg 