

from the JAPANESE INTRO TO ZMBM

Matsu Zaki's - translated by Ann Overton and Ekai Korematsu

Suzuki-roshi did not like to talk about himself. Although his attitude was very strict towards his family and his students, he was very gentle and kind towards others. Many people remembered his good deeds. They never saw his angry face or heard his angry voice. Roshi's eldest son, Hoitsu-roshi, present abbot of Rinsoin, talked about his childhood with his strict father. "When I was lazy or when I forgot something, it would make him furious and he would scold me very angrily. And one time I was given an empty rice bowl with chopsticks, and my father said, 'You go away and don't come back.' It happened at dusk. I was thrown out. And I was crying and walking around the temple many times. I begged his pardon, crying and walking around the temple again and again. I asked for his pardon with a loud voice, but all the doors to the temple were closed, and there was no response. Around midnight my mother came out and together we went before my father and she asked him to forgive me. I remember it as though it was yesterday."

On the other hand, when Suzuki-roshi was in elementary school he heard his classmates talking about catching frogs in the mountains and he slipped out of the classroom and went to the place where the frogs were and scared them away before the children could catch them.

From an early age he was naturally gifted with the compassion of a Bodhisattva. Pictures of his face, taken during that time he was at Zen Center, show his loving gentleness, and they also show a strong faith and determination behind this gentle ness. We can see these qualities in the pictures.

Another story goes-one month before Suzuki-roshi passed away, his son Hoitsu came to stay with him for a while. One day Suzuki-roshi was lying in bed, feeling some nostalgia for his childhood. While looking at the palm of his hand he said to his son, "With this hand I have been playing; I never imagined coming to the United States and playing with this hand. I never thought it would happen." His son said, "Why don't you come back to Japan to recover?" "Hmmm. I want to go back to Japan even if I have to crawl back." On hearing this, Hoitsu asked the doctor if it was possible. The doctor said it was. Hoitsu told Roshi what the doctor said. Suzuki-roshi said, "Don't say foolish things. There's no way I would go back. Can't I even joke with you?" and he laughed. Already his illness was very serious. After an examination, the doctor did not look hopeful. Suzuki-roshi asked the doctor what kind of illness it was: "I have a cough, is it pneumonia?" The doctor shook his head. Suzuki-roshi said, "I have followed a religious path, and I am a Zen monk. The matter of life and death is my practice. I am prepared. Please tell me the truth." There was moment's pause. "Perhaps cancer?" The doctor said yes. Roshi was quite calm. "Will I live one year?" "No". "How long?" "About three months." "If that is so, I have something to do. I must do it immediately." Pause. "However, Doctor, I don't think what you said was totally a lie, nor totally the truth. But I can see clearly that there is something I must do now."