



AUNTIE'S NOTES

Calendar of Events
on pages 4 and 5
Chess Tournament for Kids
on page 6
Mystery Reviews
on page 8

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Vol. 14, Number 1 • February/March 1999

An Interview with David Chadwick

Dispelling Buddhism's "Rosy Cloud"

By Mitch Finley

David Chadwick is the author of **Thank You and OK! An American Zen Failure in Japan** (\$13.95 paperback) and is one of the most widely recognized authorities on Zen Buddhism in the United States. His new book is **Crooked Cucumber: The Life of Suzuki** (\$26.00 hardback). Auntie's publicity director Mitch Finley interviewed David Chadwick by phone at his home in northern California.



Auntie's: David, how did you happen to write this new biography?

David Chadwick: Literally millions of people are familiar with Suzuki Roshi's book, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, and thousands of people met him and were affected by him. But very little was known about him as a person. I

had collected a lot of stories through the years and had met some people in Japan who knew him, and I decided it was time to get this stuff down, or it was going to be too late.

Auntie's: Where did the title, **Crooked Cucumber**, come from?

Chadwick: That was the nickname his master called him. Crooked cucumbers are useless, they are dug back into the ground, so it's like calling him useless.

Auntie's: How did you happen to meet Suzuki?

Chadwick: I came to the San Francisco Zen Center in 1966, with this sort of hippie exodus. I was from Fort Worth, Texas, and I had been living in Mexico, and I had done civil rights work, and been with Students for a Democratic Society, and hitchhiked around, and taken LSD. I had dropped out of college in my first year, but I liked what some of these student groups were doing.

continued on page 5

continued from page 1

After some experiences in Mississippi and other parts of the country, with the civil rights movement, I was just trying things out. I lived in New Orleans for a while. When I came out to San Francisco I was looking for people to meditate with, and I had some idea of getting a guru.

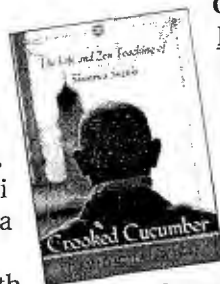
Especially because of some of my experiences on LSD, I thought that meditation would be a better way to know myself than drugs. Among the places I went was the San Francisco Zen Center, and I stayed and studied with Suzuki Roshi for five years, and he ordained me as a priest before he died in 1971.

Auntie's: What was your relationship with Suzuki like?

Chadwick: I talked with him a lot. Most people were quieter than me, but I tended to ask him a lot of questions and drive him places, so I got to know him.

Auntie's: What happens when Buddhism is transferred to a whole new western culture?

Chadwick: Buddhism is a universal religion, like Christianity, and what they do is move from culture to culture. Every culture Buddhism has moved into has been completely different. India, China, Korea, Tibet, Vietnam, Thailand, they're all totally different. All they have in common is Buddhism. So coming to America, Buddhism is taking on different forms and finding itself.



Auntie's: So Buddhism hasn't found itself in page 1 America, yet?

Chadwick: No, but you know something? Once religions find themselves they start getting fossilized.

Auntie's: Do you think your book will be of use to readers besides those interested in Zen Buddhism?

Chadwick: That remains to be seen, but *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* certainly had wide appeal. Suzuki was not sectarian or dogmatic, he had a very broad approach. This isn't a book meant to canonize Suzuki Roshi, but to open the discussion wider and show that he had to deal with problems just like everybody else. I hope the book dispels some of the idealism that keeps Buddhism in a sort of rosy cloud.

Auntie's: We're looking forward to hosting you at Auntie's.

Chadwick: Thank you, I'm looking forward to being there. I love Spokane.

David Chadwick will discuss and read from his new book on Tuesday, Feb. 23, at 7:30 p.m. at Auntie's.