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In the Winter of 1970, at the age of 34, my life seemed to have fallen to pieces. My work as a theater director had become meaningless and my marriage was in crisis. My life had lost meaning and purpose. I felt as though I was living in a wasteland, the ability to experience pleasure and satisfaction having vanished.

I knew that the problem existed within me, not out there, and I believed some spiritual practice would offer me the solution. I had long since lost my childhood enthusiasm for Jesus and no return seemed possible. Living in San Francisco, in 1970, the alternatives were plentiful.

The literature of Zen Buddhism had long intrigued me, and I began sitting at the San Francisco Zen Center. The practice made no sense to me, yet somehow I found myself returning regularly. At some point, I discovered that there was the possibility of having a private interview with Suzuki Roshi and I arranged for that to happen.

The protocol for a dokusan interview was explained by a senior student, and at the appointed time I entered Roshi's interview room, performed the required prostrations and settled myself in seiza for the interview. I began to tell Roshi about what a disaster my life had become. As I went on citing the awful particulars, he began to chuckle. I remember thinking it strange that he should be responding to my sad tale with laughter, and even stranger that I did not feel at all offended.

Strangest of all, I found myself laughing along with him, and by the time I had finished my story we were both laughing heartily.

There was a pause. I felt quite disoriented. Then I asked Roshi what I should do. "Sit zazen," he replied. "Life without zazen is like winding your clock without setting it. It runs perfectly well, but it doesn't tell time." Another pause. Roshi rang his bell and the interview was over.

During this same period, I was meditating and studying with an Indian Hindu Guru named Swami Rama. For reasons unknown to me, Swami Rama seemed impressed with me. Perhaps it was because I was quite adept at hatha yoga. Whatever the reason, Swami Rama invited me to come live with him at his ashram in India. The promised results of practice with the Swami were extravagant: out of body travel, knowledge of past lives, the ability to make oneself invisible.

On the one hand, I had a handsome, charismatic guru promising occult powers; on the other, an unassuming little Japanese man telling me that if I sat diligently for a long while I might someday learn how to tell time. I was torn, and to add to my dilemma, when I told the yoga teacher who had introduced me to Swami Rama about my uncertainty, he said I was passing up the opportunity--not of a lifetime--but of many, many lifetimes. "There are nine supremely enlightened men on the planet," he told me. "There have always been nine, there will always be nine. Never more nor less. Swami Rama is one of the nine. I'm sure your Japanese fellow is a nice

man, but I doubt that he is one of the Nine." (Suzuki Roshi, I'm sure, would have agreed.)

How, in my bewilderment, I had the good sense to choose Zen, I will never know. That Winter I traveled to Maui, where I spent three months at the Maui Zendo, practicing with Bob Aitkin (not yet Aitkin Roshi) and Katsuki Sekida. In the Autumn of 1970, I participated in a three month ango at Tassajara, practicing with Tatsugami Roshi. In the Spring of 1971 I became a student of Maezumi Roshi. I never saw Suzuki Roshi again. His picture still sits on my personal altar and I feel inexpressible gratitude toward him for setting me on the path.

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David-

Here's an anecdote that
may be suitable for your
project.

Be well,

