

5/25/74

Friends,

I was recently given Volume XII, 1973 of the Zen Center publication Wind Bell. At the very end of the magazine was a short paragraph asking the readers to submit any personal recollections of Suzuki-roshi to the Zen Center Office. I realize some time has passed since the publication of that particular Wind Bell and I also am aware that you may no longer be compiling the information you requested at that time. I am also cognizant of the fact that what I am going to tell you may fall well outside of the kind of "personal recollection" you were seeking. I never actually met Suzuki-roshi. In fact, I never heard of him until after he had died. What I am going to relate to you however, is a brief story of my encounter with a Zen master who lived over 2,000 miles away but with whom I first learned of Zen.

Since as far back as I can remember I have been interested in the study of religion. I was brought up to respect all of the worlds faiths and was spared the agony of over dogmatic parents. I began reading every book on Religion I could get my hands on at about the age of ten or eleven. My quest took me through every religious belief known to man. I studied the occult, the mystic and the metaphysical. I was constantly seeking for the key to the spirit, the Way of Liberation. In the Winter of 1973 I read a book about Zen. The book was written by a man called Suzuki-roshi. It was entitled, "Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind." I can not honestly say that the impression given me by the book was in any way dramatic or earth shattering. Rather, it was intensely subtle. At the time of the first reading of the book I was really unaware of any effect whatsoever. Soon, however, I found myself sitting Zen, and walking Zen. I was suddenly reading Buddhist Sutras with a religious ardour.

I do not understand Zen. I do not know who I am. When I sit in Zazen my little mind is like a thunderstorm. What I do know is that having tasted the Zen of Suzuki-roshi I will enter the stream of Zen never to wander madly over mountain paths going farther and farther afield. Through his book Suzuki-roshi made me see that my eyes were closed. I can not begin to tell you what the words he spoke in his book have meant to me. Is it not wonderful that I could hear the words of such a one as Suzuki-roshi!

Suzuki-roshi's Zen is vast. Having heard his Zen from afar I can attest to the greatness of his understanding, wisdom and compassion. I read and re-read his book. I sit in the manner he told us to sit. Still, I am as a stone. As the Zen masters of old have said, "I stink of Zen." I talk Zen, think Zen and argue Zen. How far I am from the Truth. This being so, I still have deep faith in the words of Suzuki-roshi. If someone should ask me "Who is your master?" I would foolishly point to Suzuki's book and say, "there is my Master."

Living in the Midwest I have few or no chances whatsoever to come in direct contact with a living master. So I read and practise on my own. All my questions are answered by Suzuki's book. It is a truly marvelous book! Even if I had know him, I think I would still read it and try to practise it.

This letter has gone on long enough. I'm sure you are quite weary of my stupidity. I hope, however, you understand to some extent what I was trying to say. He was a breath of fresh air, a cooling breeze, a soft and gentle wind that spread over the entire land. Even too a piece of wood like myself. Thank you for listening.

GASSHO Wesley Williams