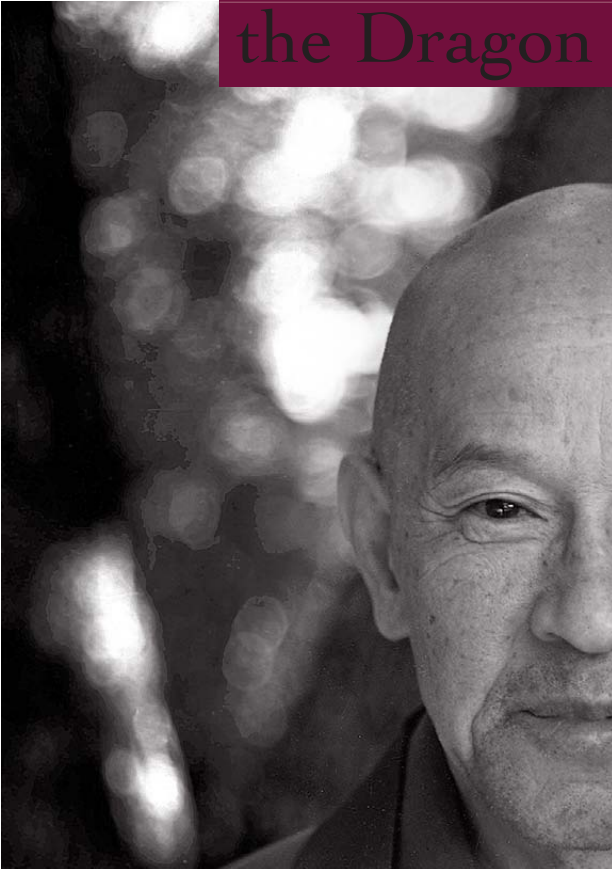


Remembering the Dragon



Recollections of Suzuki Roshi by his Students

Remembering the Dragon



“This book is an offering of
Suzuki Roshi’s teaching to all who may find it of help.
He wrote “the world is its own magic.”
May the magic of his Zen spirit continue
to bring joy and freedom to all.”

Dairyu Michael Wenger
Beginners Mind Temple

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INTRODUCTION

In 1959, Shunryu Suzuki came to San Francisco from Japan to become the priest at Soko-ji, the Japanese-American Soto Zen Temple. By the time he died in 1971, he had brought Zen practice to a broad segment of Western society. His Western Zen students called him Suzuki Roshi, giving him the Japanese title for a Zen Master. It is said that he laughed hard when they began calling him this.

Now, over thirty years after his death, Suzuki Roshi's immediacy as a teacher continues: in books such as *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, audio recordings of his teaching, and the photographs, films, and letters that survive. Most of all, his teaching continues in the memories and teachings of those who studied with him.

This book presents stories of some of the memorable encounters his students and family had with Suzuki Roshi. They depict an extraordinary (but also quite ordinary) person who deeply affected those who knew him.

*When you say "Yes!"
you forget all about yourself
and are refreshed into some new self.
Before the new self becomes an old self,
you should say another "Yes!"*

Suzuki Roshi

Suzuki Roshi tried to say "Yes!" in every encounter. Many people found that their encounter with him "refreshed" them into some new self. I hope that these stories, along with the pictures and quotes, help keep Suzuki Roshi alive and refresh all who encounter him in this way.

Kojun Gil Fronsdal

“I sit at 5:30 in the morning, and you are welcome to join me.” That is what Suzuki Roshi said. As simple as that.

Fortunately for many of us, he not only sat at 5:30 in the morning. He also sat at 5:30 in the afternoon.

But in teaching and exemplifying Buddhism, he didn't just sit. He chanted. He ate oryoki with ceremonial bowls. He bowed. And on and on.

Suzuki Roshi brought form to American Buddhism. And he brought emptiness. He brought “Form is emptiness; emptiness is form.” He didn't bring the idea of practice; he brought the practice of practice.

—Rick Fields



Ordinary people adore something holy instead of something common. This is the difference between Buddhism and most religions.

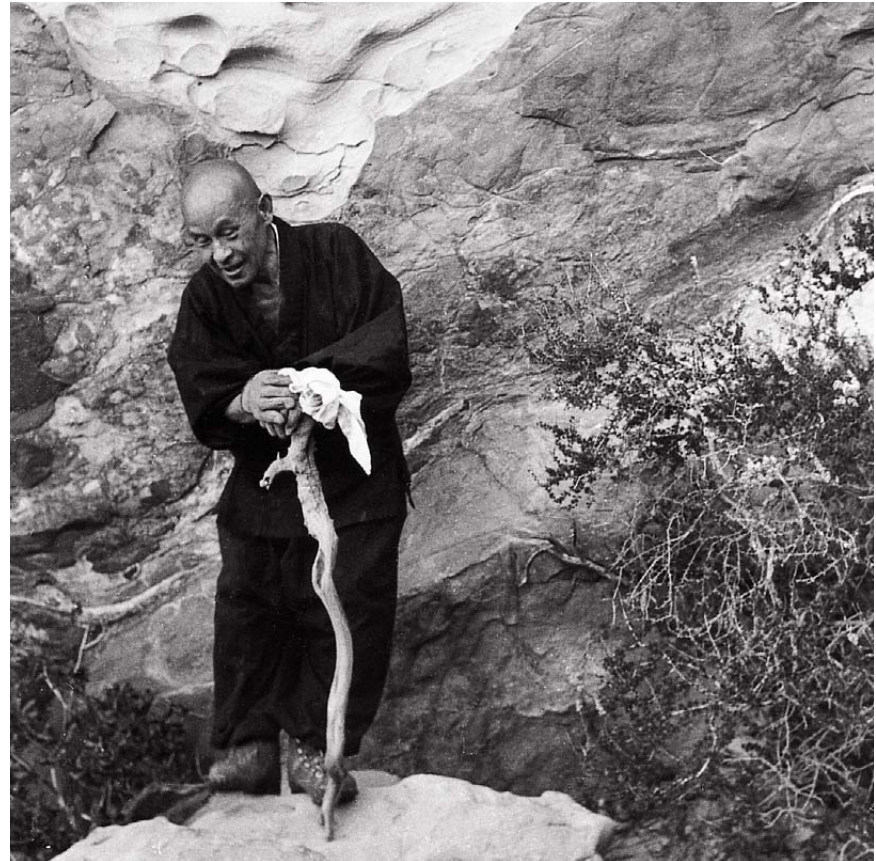
August 15, 1966

My father looked quite frail, like he would be blown away when the wind blew. But inside he had something very strong that had been nurtured since he was very young. I don't think that he demonstrated his strength and aspiration to other people. He appeared completely ordinary.

My father promised his temple members that he would go to the United States for three years and then return. But he told his American students that he would stay in America until he died. After staying in America for thirteen years and dying here, his ashes went back to Japan.

I believe he was very happy to have people in America who understood the way he was pursuing.

—Hoitsu Suzuki Roshi



*We should be very grateful
before we have something.*

September 1969

You should have seen the people who came to practice at Soko-ji: insane American kids, flower children, hippies, macrobiotic fanatics. At any other practice place in the world, we wouldn't have been allowed in the front door. But Suzuki Roshi used to bow to us all. At the end of zazen, as people were filing out of the zendo, Roshi bowed to every single person. He would look you in the eye and bow to you, and you would bow back. The first time he did this to me, he didn't look at me; he looked through me. I disappeared when he looked through me. I can't describe it because I was unprepared for it. He bowed and I bowed.

I remember Suzuki Roshi saying something like, "We bow to Buddhas. We bow to each other. We bow to dogs." We bow to everything.

—Rick Fields



*Because we are changing
moment by moment,
I don't exist.*

July 24, 1971

An important influence for Suzuki Roshi was that he grew up in poverty. His father was a Zen priest and he grew up in his father's very poor temple. His father would pick old vegetables up off the road or out of the creek. Suzuki Roshi said that his father would make meals out of these vegetables even if they were decomposing. His father would say, "Everything has Buddha Nature."

When Suzuki Roshi lived in San Francisco, he sometimes picked vegetables up off the street outside the local grocery store. If he bought vegetables he would sometimes buy the old vegetables because he was sorry for them.

I believe there were three crucial decisions that Suzuki Roshi made in his childhood. The first was his decision to become a priest. He himself explained that he did this because of the historical persecution of Buddhism in Japan that he heard about from his father. He experienced this himself in school: the other kids made fun of him because he was a priest's son. He was ridiculed at school for his poor clothes. During recess he would stay in the classroom instead of playing with the other kids. His childhood years were very unhappy.

His sister has said that Suzuki Roshi regarded his classmates as the enemy. When he was about ten or eleven he decided to become a monk, partly because of an "us versus them" mentality.

The second major decision was to leave the small town where he lived. One of his teachers in elementary school told him: "There are no great people here; if you want to be a great man, you will have to leave this part of Japan." Also, Suzuki Roshi did not feel he could learn Zen from his father. His father's temple was not a training center.



Great Zen masters are monks who had a difficult time in their early life.

March 28, 1970

The third decision was to study Zen with his father's disciple Gyokujon-So-on Roshi. Impressed and enamored with this big monk, he decided when he was eleven or twelve to go live at Gyokujon's temple. His parents said that he was too young, but he protested that he had made up his mind and that his father had himself decided to become a monk when he was young. So the parents talked it over and agreed to let him go.

Suzuki Roshi was committed to Gyokujon, and remained his devoted disciple even though he suffered a great deal of abuse under him, including constant ridicule. Suzuki Roshi said that the abuse continued unrelentingly until Gyokujon died. Toward the end of Roshi's own life, he said, "When I offer incense for my father I feel sad, but when I offer incense for my master the tears stream down my cheeks." The love Suzuki Roshi felt for his teacher was mixed with some very painful feelings as well.

—David Chadwick



Even though the experiences I had under my master were very very hard ones, they are all beautiful and unselfish true ones.

May 17, 1966

Suzuki Roshi became a temple abbot at the young age of 27. Soon thereafter he was married for the first of three times. He didn't really want to be a family man. He wanted to be a monk. He was very idealistic.

Very few people knew about his first marriage until recently. We don't even know her name. Their marriage was brief because she had tuberculosis. The marriage was something of a business arrangement: she had to do the work of a temple wife, which was considerable. Since, with her illness, she couldn't do her job, she had to return to her family. Suzuki Roshi couldn't take care of her at the temple. This was quite upsetting to everyone, but in the circumstances of the times this seems to have been what had to happen.

Suzuki Roshi said that his most important experience in his first position as abbot involved the first funeral he performed. It was for a very wealthy patron of the temple who had just died, the patriarch of his family. For the funeral, Suzuki Roshi wore a plain black robe because he preferred that more austere approach. The family was insulted. Suzuki Roshi had disgraced them by not wearing fancy robes as the previous abbot would have.

Through this experience Suzuki Roshi came to realize that he should not be attached to austerity. He was basically a very austere person. That is what made his libertarian streak work so well, because he personally was such a perfect example of good conduct (as long as you weren't one of his children).

— David Chadwick



*The virtue of endurance is greater
than the merit of asceticism.*

September 14, 1969

Suzuki Roshi liked to tell stories about his epiphanies or little enlightenments. It is commonly believed that he did not talk about enlightenment or put any importance on it. This may have started with Huston Smith's preface to *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. Huston Smith recounts asking Suzuki Roshi why satori doesn't play a role in the book. Suzuki Roshi's wife, who was present, leaned toward Prof. Smith and said, "It's because he hasn't had it." Suzuki Roshi batted his wife with his fan in mock consternation and answered, "It's not that satori is unimportant, but it's not the part of Zen that needs to be stressed."

Actually, Suzuki Roshi talked about enlightenment quite a bit. I did a computer search through all the currently available transcripts and found some 780 uses of the word "enlightenment."

One important epiphany that Suzuki Roshi talked about occurred while he was hanging out with his fellow students at the Komazawa Yoka prep school. He offered to smuggle out a melon from a food storage room. He entered the room and, just as he had a nice ripe melon in his hands, someone turned the light off. He turned around and walked right into a steel hook, which lodged above his left eye. He couldn't move. He just stood there in the dark, gradually calming himself, with blood dripping on his school uniform. He waited for over an hour until someone came to his rescue. He later said it was a pivotal experience for him. He had attained an inexpressible calm as he waited in pain.

—David Chadwick



In our everyday life, you always have a chance to have enlightenment. Whatever you do. If you go to the restroom, there is a chance to attain enlightenment. If you cook, there is enlightenment. If you clean the floor, there is enlightenment.

June 9, 1971

One cannot talk about Suzuki Roshi's life in Japan without saying that his second wife, the mother of his children, was murdered by a monk whom Kishizawa Roshi, Suzuki Roshi's Zen teacher at the time, had insisted he keep at his temple. The monk had been severely traumatized by the war and was clearly mentally ill. All three children and their mother, everybody had urged Suzuki Roshi to get rid of the monk. But Suzuki Roshi would hear none of it, perhaps out of duty to Kishizawa Roshi.

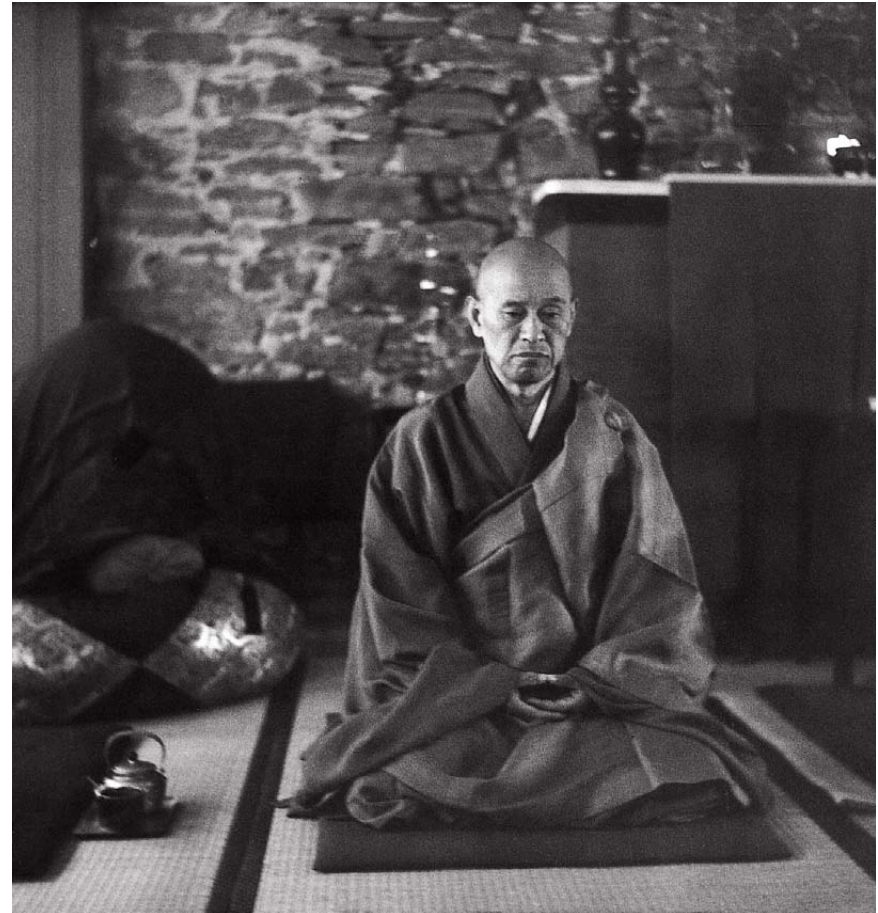
Her death was a turning point in Suzuki Roshi's life. People said that he got softer after that and started listening better.

—David Chadwick

A monk who was staying at our temple killed my mother. At the time I was away, playing with my brother. Suzuki Roshi, my father, was also away at the time. After this tragic accident, my father said, "Don't be resentful of the monk who killed her. Just be resentful of me."

I think that what he meant was that he was feeling responsible and very apologetic.

—Hoitsu Suzuki Roshi



*Unless you can endure the bitterness of defeat,
you cannot be really strong.*

June 25, 1970

My husband was a very kind person who was free from desire. While at Zen Center, he was very humble, living a simple life. He didn't complain and he didn't demand anything. His only desire was to transmit the Buddha Way. He just wanted to teach one more person and to have just one day or even one moment to pass on the Buddha Dharma and Dogen's teachings. That was all that was on his mind.

When the hippies started to visit Soko-ji, Suzuki Roshi said that they were very important; they were looking for the Way with all their lives. He said we should not relax on guiding them. When he told himself this he was very, very serious.

In the summer of 1971, when teaching at Tassajara for the last time, he had bloody sweat and bloody urine every night. And he kept on giving teisho, dharma talks. It brings tears to me to remember how hard it was for him. But he would say, "If I don't shorten my life, I can't mature my students."

—Okusan Suzuki



*Sooner or later we die,
and we will go to the same place we go
when we sit zazen.*

July 30, 1965

I came to the United States in 1962 as a 23 year-old Pure Land Buddhist priest. I was not happy doing memorial and funeral services for the Japanese-American community. I was depressed and ready to go back to Japan.

Then one day, a very cute Zen priest walked into the bookstore I was visiting in Japantown. He seemed to notice my painful state of mind and so invited me to come sit zazen with him. I sat with Suzuki Roshi from 1963 to 1966.

One day Suzuki Roshi gave a talk in which he said, "Today izzu... Today izzu, mmm, today izzu today. Today is... today istoday is notto yesterday. Today is notto tomorrow." Then he walked toward one of the people in the front row. He grabbed him and said, "Do you understand?" Then he smiled and explained, "That's all today."

I was astonished. One of my frustrations was that I could not speak much English. But here Suzuki Roshi had given a talk with just five English words. I understood that I could speak English – I could use five words. Five words! It had such an impact. Something in me dropped. I realized I could be a little useful. That is what led me to stay in America.

One evening Suzuki Roshi came knocking at my door asking for some tea. He enjoyed the tea and stayed in my apartment for a few hours. Then he thanked me and left. Later I found out he had run away from a meeting at Soko-ji. He had said he was going to the bathroom but then didn't come back. It was the meeting where Soko-ji's board of directors had asked him to choose between being the priest for the Japanese-American members of the temple or the Caucasians who were not formal members. Apparently he had kept saying the same thing again and again. He said, "I go along with the people who come to zazen meditation."

—Koshin Ogui



Even if you attain enlightenment, you will have the same troubles. You cannot flee from your difficulties. If you know the meaning of the difficulties you have, the difficulties will help you. If you do not know the meaning of them, they do not help. Same thing with zazen. If you do not know the meaning of everyday practice, then zazen will not help you.

July 21, 1971

One day in the early 1960's, Suzuki Roshi asked, "Would you help me?" I was amazed that he asked me this; I knew that he was a very, very capable guy. I answered, "Yes, Reverend Suzuki, how can I help you?" I figured he wanted me to move some furniture. But he said, "I'd like you to give a class – a lecture every Sunday to the Sunday school at Soko-ji."

Well, in those days I had terrible stage fright. I didn't say this to Roshi. There was something about him that, if he asked something, I always said yes.

I found a collection of Jataka Tales, stories about the Buddha in his different lives when he appeared as different animals. I memorized some of these to tell the kids at Soko-ji.

But during the first class, as I started telling one of the stories, one of the kids starting telling me, "Go home. We don't want you. Go home Yankee." As a nation, the United States had been terrible to the Japanese-Americans during World War II. These kids knew about this because their parents had lived through it. And I represented the oppressor of their parents.

I felt guilty about what had happened to the Japanese-Americans. But I didn't say anything. I looked over at Reverend Suzuki, who was sitting in on the class, and he said, "They mean 'Go on! Give the talk!'" So I started again, and the kids in the front row were all relaxed and they said, "GO HOME! GO HOME!" Again I looked over to Reverend Suzuki and again he indicated I should go ahead. So I did.

Reverend Suzuki came to these classes for about a month. He would just sit there and I would give the talk. Pretty soon the kids and I began to get along. After the first month, Reverend Suzuki would miss a couple of classes; then he would miss some more until finally he didn't come at all.

—Phil Wilson



In its wide sense, everything is a teaching for us: the color of the mountain, the sound of the river, or the sound of a motorcar. Each one is a teaching of Buddha.

August 25, 1968

When I remember Suzuki Roshi, I mostly remember blood, sweat, tears and pain. Lots of pain.

I first met Suzuki Roshi in May, 1961. I had just arrived in California from Europe. I had an idealized picture of what a Zen master should be and what Zen Buddhism was about. I was anxious to meet a real Zen master.

I learned about Suzuki Roshi at Soko-ji in Japantown and went there one evening during evening zazen. I waited in the office for the session to end. I was shocked when the door opened and a group of people in blue jeans and work shirts came out. At the end of the line was a small man in black robes. He was completely different from what I had expected. I'm not saying that I was disappointed, but I had no feeling that this person was going to make such a profound difference in my life from that evening on.

Since I had made the effort to come to the temple, he kindly said, "Let's sit together." He showed me the sitting posture and we sat together for about half an hour. At the end, we returned to his office and I said to him, "Please tell me about Zen." He answered, "Fine. If you'll come here tomorrow morning at 5:45, then I will teach you about Zen."

I started going at 5:45 a.m. and after a couple of weeks I still hadn't learned anything about Zen. Impatient, I went to him and said, "I have been coming for a couple of weeks and you haven't said a word to me."

And he replied, "Well, no. You should come in the evening as well." So I started going morning and evening and on Saturday and Sunday. Instead of going on vacations I went to sesshins. This went on for two years, and I still had not learned about Zen. So I confronted him. And he said, "You know, I think you should go to Eihei-ji in Japan."

So I arranged to take three months off from work. About a week before I was due to leave for Japan, I told him, "You haven't even ordained me yet."



Just do it. That is our way, you know.

January 12, 1968

“Oh,” he said, “no, I haven’t. We’d better do it.” So he called his wife and my wife as witnesses and we had a short little ceremony. “Well, now you’re a priest,” he said.

I went to Japan not knowing anything. I didn’t know how to eat with a rice bowl. I’d never worn an okesa. I hardly knew a word of Japanese. The three months at the Eihei-ji training monastery were very, very painful and very, very difficult. They included being hospitalized three times for malnutrition. I have a catalog of horrors that I carefully wrote down.

I returned to San Francisco after three months and said to Suzuki Roshi, “You know, that was pretty mean, what you did to me. It didn’t teach me anything.” Roshi replied, “No, but I want you to start giving lectures about it. But not about those bad things you told me.”

So I persisted with him for another year or so. Then I said, “Look. It has been nearly four years. You still haven’t taught me what I am doing.” In answer, he said, “You know, I really don’t know what I’m doing. You should really go and study with someone who does know what they’re doing.” So I said, “You mean Japan again?” He said, “Yes.”

He wrote down the names of five people saying, “These are the only people I know that may be able to help you. But I only know the Soto School. I don’t know about teachers in the Rinzaï school.”

I left six weeks later. When I arrived in Japan, two of the people had already died, one was too ill to take a student, the other lived in distant Shikoku. But I was fortunate, very fortunate indeed, that one of them, Sawaki Kodo-roshi, was just alive. I was able to study with him for two months before he died. And for this I had given up my job, my life, and my house.

So there was nothing to do but to go back to Eihei-ji for a longer period.

—Grahame Petchey



You should not stay at the edge of the teaching. You are quite free, but you should enter our teaching. Don't try to understand it just intellectually or by means of experience only. Experience, of course, is important, but a more important thing is the confidence to believe in yourself. And you should be faithful to what you feel and to what you think. You should not fool yourself. It is quite alright to say, "I cannot agree with you," or "I cannot accept the teaching." That is how we make our understanding deeper and deeper.

August 18, 1966

I remember that Suzuki Roshi was always immediate. He was only concerned about the small everyday things. He was not interested in personal history. Nor was he interested in reasons.

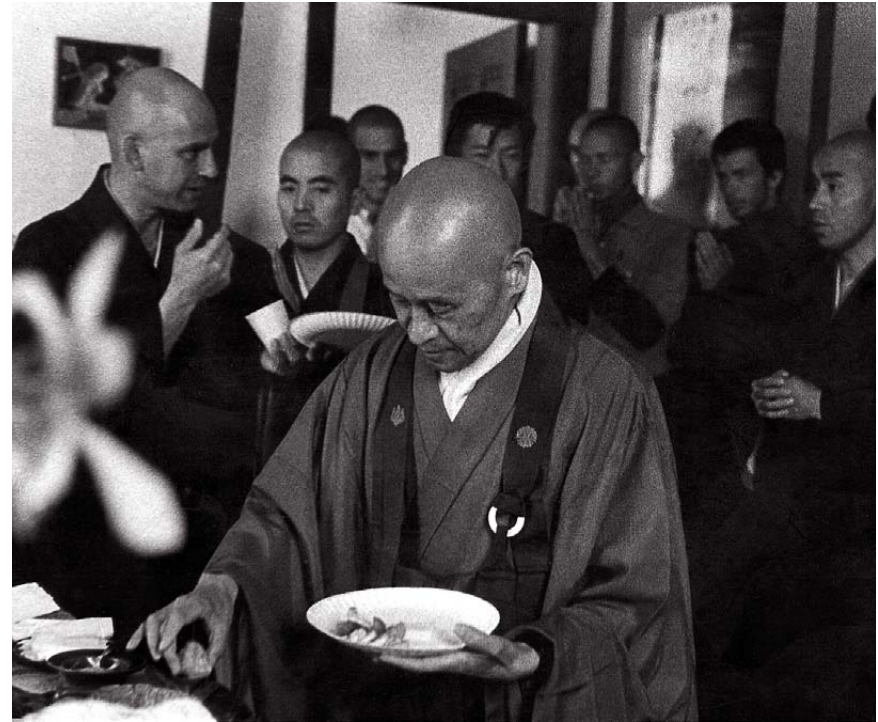
I first met Suzuki Roshi at Soko-ji in 1967. I had gone there to talk with him about something that was important to me. About three sentences into what I had to say, he stood up and said, "Let's go sit."

I didn't have any idea what sitting was, but I went with him. He showed me how to sit cross-legged and adjusted my posture. Then he sat next to me for what seemed a long time. Probably it was five minutes. Afterwards he said I should continue to sit like that back at home. He added, "Light a stick of incense as it will help you concentrate."

Once when I was his jisha, or attendant, I went with Suzuki Roshi to the first party at the end of a sesshin. I sat across from him and, as the sake came, he poured some into the cup. I drank it all and he refilled it, laughing. This was repeated many times and by the end of the party I was fully saturated. The next day I couldn't get up to attend to him. Around the middle of the day, I saw him and he asked me how I was. I told him that I was feeling really bad. He laughed and explained, "Maybe you shouldn't drink."

I remember one evening, Suzuki Roshi gave a lecture about his death. He began on some other topic and changed to say that even though he felt younger inside, his time was coming. After we left the zendo, he said to me, "Maybe I was too hard on them."

—Jane Schnieder



*So the moment you enter the zendo,
you should forget everything
and be ready to start a new life.*

February 1, 1970

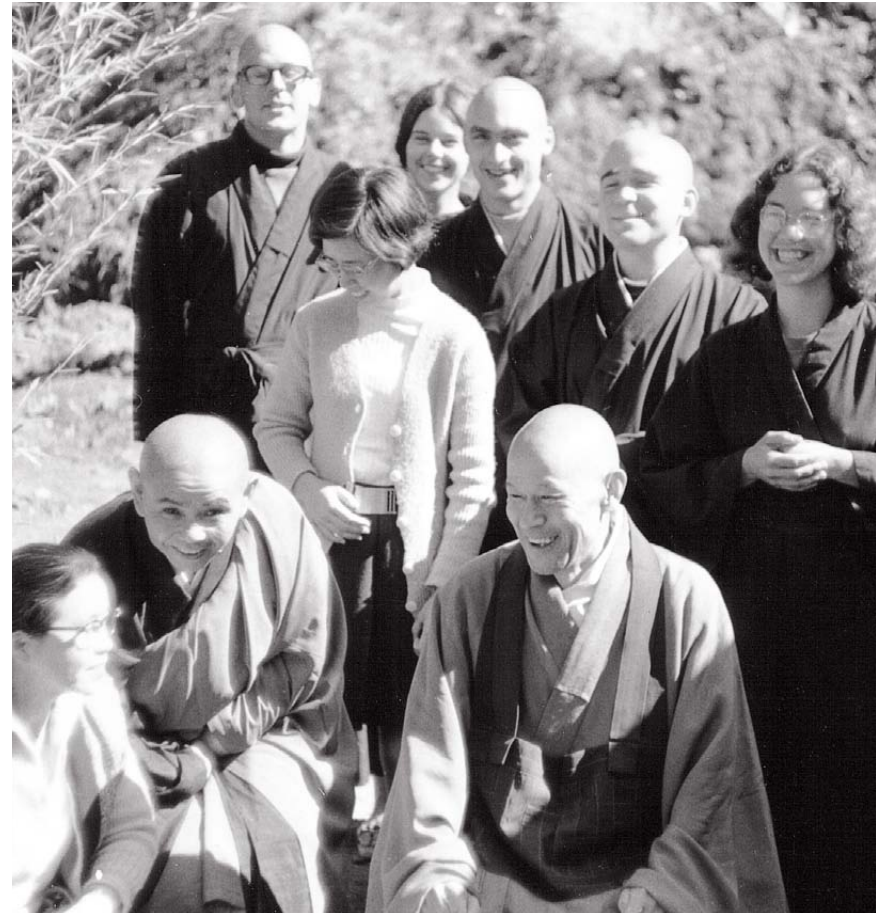
When I was at Tassajara in the 1960s, I was having a lot of trouble with anger. Actually, I was not having much trouble with it, other people at Tassajara were having trouble with my anger. I thought that it was good to be sincere, and if you felt angry, then be angry, don't cover it or repress it.

Then one time when I was talking with Suzuki Roshi in his cabin he said, "Well, Ed, you can get angry if you want." Then, after an impeccably timed pause, he politely added, "But don't." I felt permission to be who I was while being instructed to rein in my anger.

Roshi was, for the most part, quite polite. Once, at Tassajara, a student asked him, "Why haven't you enlightened me yet?" Roshi answered politely, "I'm making my best effort."

I remember that once, during a shosan ceremony, a student asked Roshi, "What do you feel when I serve you food in the zendo?" Suzuki Roshi answered, "I feel like you are offering me your entire being, your most perfect love."

—Ed Brown



When we respect something, we will find the true life of it. With big mind, and with pure sincerity and respect, love could be real love. Love separated from these factors will not work.

January 4, 1970

At first, my personal experience of being with Suzuki Roshi was very difficult. I couldn't understand him. He used Japanese Zen terms that I didn't understand. His use and pronunciation of English was a struggle for me to understand.

It was common for many of us listening to his dharma talks to ask at the end of the lecture, "What did he say? What was that all about?"

As I spent time with him, I eventually started to understand something of his appeal, why he was so inspiring. It was that he expressed the finest qualities of a human being. This included poise. If you look at the photographs of Suzuki Roshi, you can see how he carried himself. He had poise and confidence. Being around him you were simply encouraged by that poise. He was patient. He was a good listener. He was very generous. He was courteous in a society that was becoming less and less courteous. He was very gentle. And he had a deep humility.

I never saw the strict side of Suzuki Roshi. He may have used the *kyosaku* in Japan and maybe sometimes in America, but what I saw was that he always used a feather. Maybe that is what we needed. He was very gentle with us.

Most of all, his manner demonstrated integrity. Integrity is what he seemed to be expressing with his whole being. He had a clear sense of what he was doing, of his values, of what he stood for, and what he was trying to do. He never wavered.

He also had a sense of humor. He had met my mother and knew her to be a strong personality. Once when I was visiting Suzuki Roshi at Zen Center, he invited me to lunch. I said, "Thank you very much but I can't. I promised my mother I would have lunch with her." Roshi then jumped up and exclaimed, "Your mother! I surrender!"

—Les Kaye



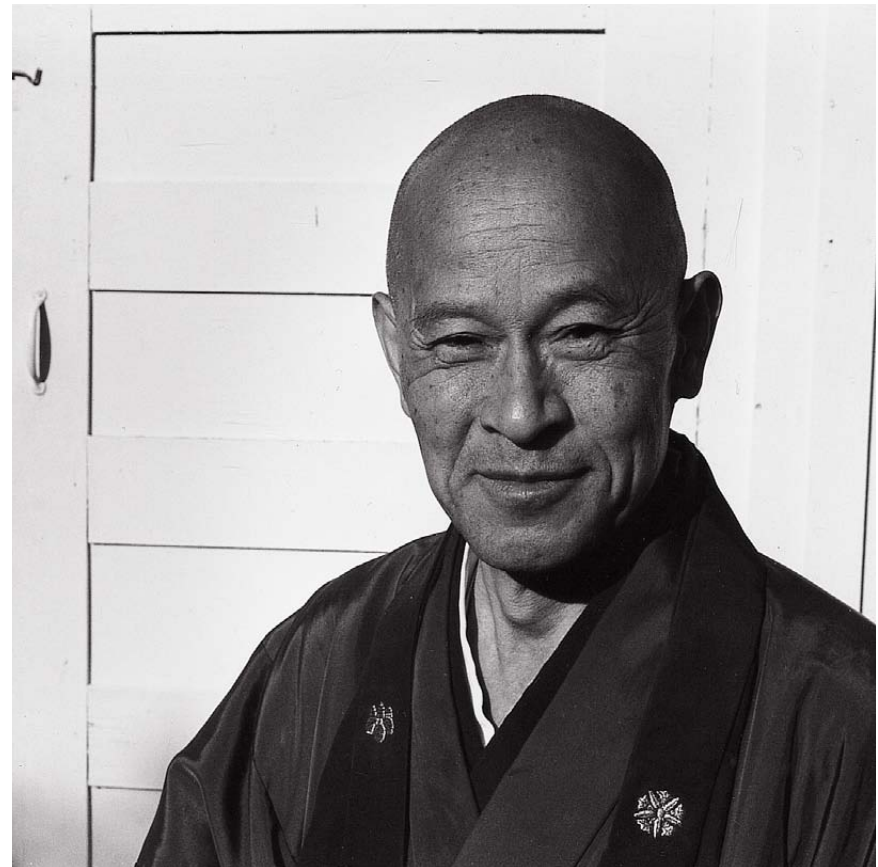
If you become too serious, you will lose your way.

November 22, 1969

When I listened to Suzuki Roshi's dharma talks, his openness drew me to him. When he talked, he took away all my distress. Instead of closing in and making me feel as if I should be a certain way, he took it all away. So any way that I was was OK. Any funny, weird, incomplete way anyone was was OK. And, I think that is true for all of us who met him, that we felt so acknowledged. I had never been that met or that acknowledged in my life. There wasn't anything I needed to prove.

People used to say that they would go in to see Suzuki Roshi for dokusan, and afterwards they didn't have any problems.

—Katherine Thanas



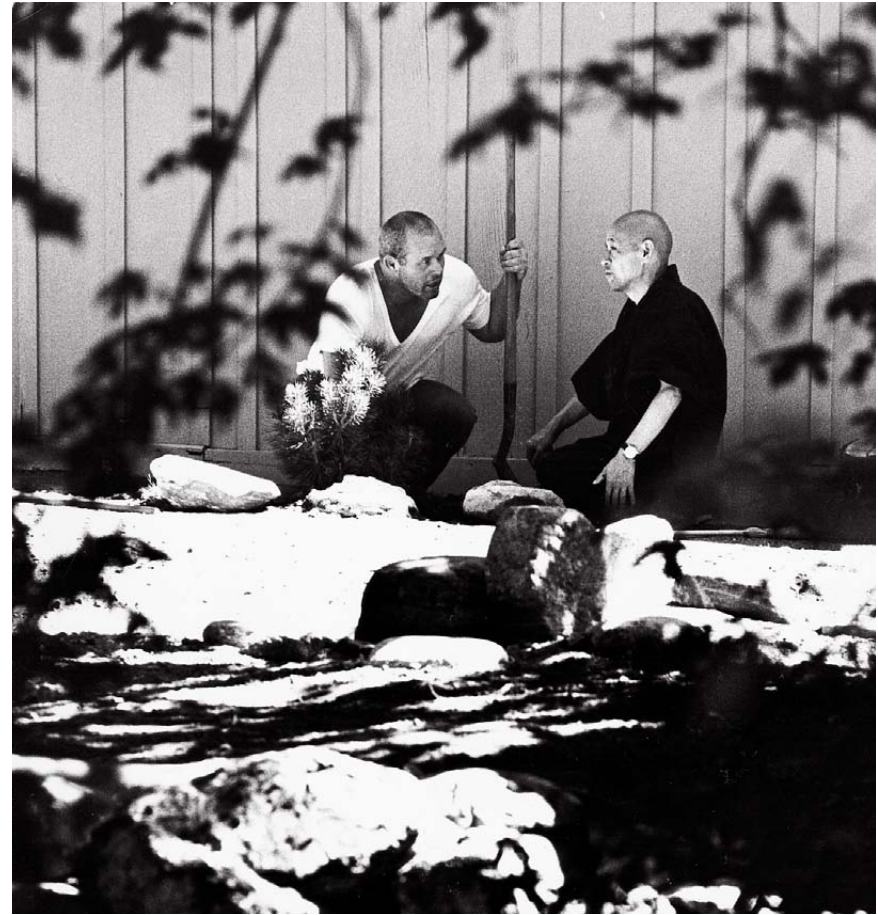
*When plants grow up into the sky, the sky does not care.
The sky is always ready to accept things. Our big mind
should be like the sky. We should accept things as it is,
and we should not discriminate between things as the
sky does not discriminate.*

November 13, 1969

At some point while I was studying with Suzuki Roshi, I realized that I could totally depend on him. He was always going to be there for me. But at some point I saw that I hadn't made a comparable commitment to him. I think it was because I was scared of how much I was drawn to Zen practice and life.

People were getting ordained and I was wondering about doing this as well. Then one day I went up and said to him, "Inside there's a yes and a no." And he said, "Follow the yes."

—Katherine Thanas



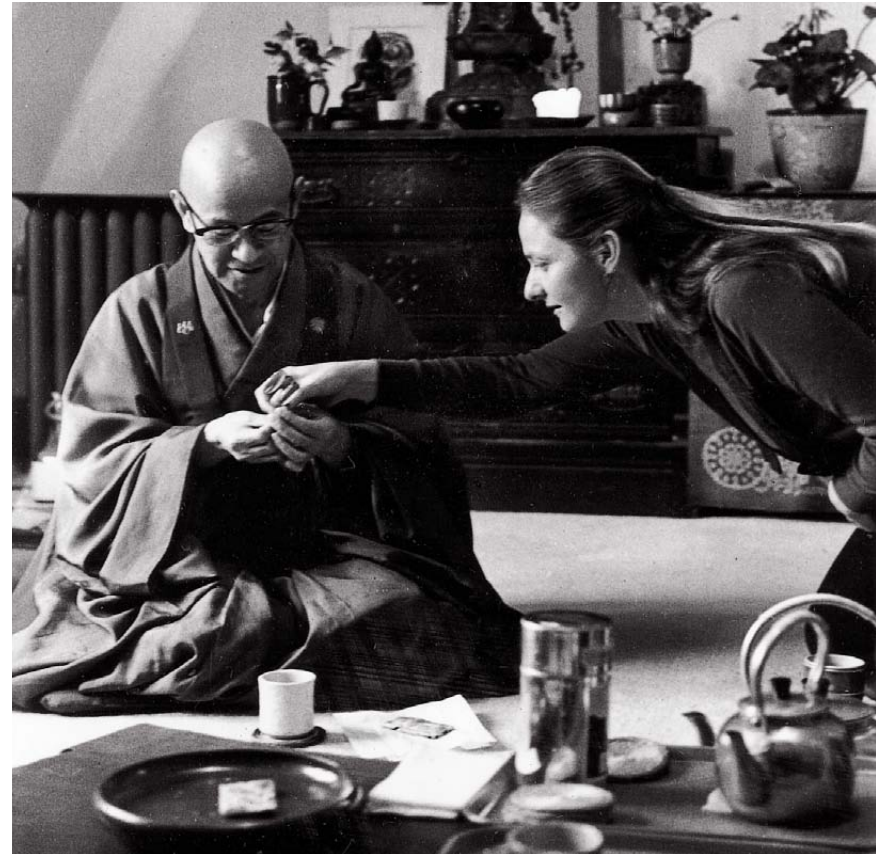
The secret is just to say "Yes!" when someone asks you to do something. Jump up from your seat. Then there is no problem. It means you will be yourself without sticking to an old self. When you say "Yes!" you forget all about yourself and are refreshed into some new self. And before the new self becomes an old self, you should say another "Yes!"

April 20, 1969

Once Suzuki Roshi said, “I do not understand what you do about sex. I don’t get it. It doesn’t make any sense to me. Don’t talk to me about it.” Saying this, he gave us a kind of permission to not talk to him about this very troublesome part of our lives. We just did what we did, which was suffering.

I remember being very puzzled by this announcement. From then on I began watching his conduct as closely as I could. What I came to appreciate was that he was very strict with himself. For all his openness and the very big pasture he gave his students, he was very strict with himself. Over the years it seemed that he got more and more strict. The deeper he was in his own practice, the stricter he was.

—Yvonne Rand



*Even though we are strictly observing our way,
at the same time we should be completely
detached from rituals and robes.
Do you understand?*

July 26, 1969

One time, the students of Pacific High School, a rural alternative school in the Santa Cruz mountains, invited Suzuki Roshi to bring some of his students and turn the school into a Zen Monastery for a few days. A group of us went with him. We drove in and found that the place was a pigsty. It was filthy. So we spent the first day cleaning.

When everything was clean, we had a simple oryoki meal. It was a chaotic meal with the students spilling their bowls and dropping their chopsticks.

Afterward, Suzuki Roshi gave zazen instruction, and then we sat and we sat and we sat. It was an intense version of a sesshin. I couldn't believe his strictness. In a normal sesshin there would be some practice that would give our legs a break after sitting for three or four periods of zazen. But here we just kept sitting.

In his first lecture to the students, he said, "You want to change the world. You want to bring about peace in the world. And you don't even know how to eat your lunch."

The students just fell away. We got to be a smaller and smaller group. He had some sense that a few of these students would understand toughness and he was willing to risk it. By the end of our days, we were a very small group. But I remember the last meal, which was utterly calm and still. Nobody dropped their chopsticks. We all ate with a very settled mind. And then we packed up our zafus and cleaning rags and went home.

—Yvonne Rand



It is very silly to do something because people may admire you. It is your practice, not their practice. So you should be very independent.

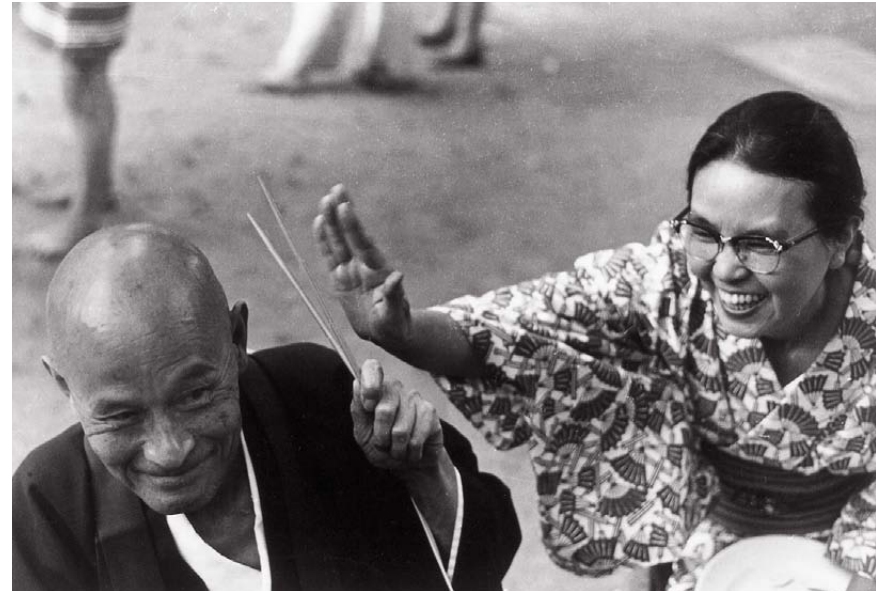
July 25, 1971

First of all I want to suggest that Suzuki Roshi was not infallible and that he had faults. We should be careful not to deify him. I don't think he would feel good about that. He used to say, "Each one of us is half good and half bad." And he included himself. Because he was always working on his shortcomings, we didn't see them as shortcomings. We saw them as his practice. I think it was because he could see his own faults so clearly that he was so sympathetic with us.

There were times when Suzuki Roshi was angry and showed it. But he always said, "When I'm angry, I do it to express something. But I don't hold onto my anger. I am not attached to my anger. I am not really angry at you. I'm just giving you something to work with."

There is the wonderful story of when, during a lecture, he jumped off his teaching platform in reply to someone asking, "Why are we sitting here in zazen when other people are out protesting the Vietnam War?" He took his teaching stick and started beating the person next to the questioner yelling, "Dreamer! Dreamer! Dreamer!"

—Mel Weitsman



Which is the stronger person? Is it easier to beat up someone, or is it easier to be patient while being beaten?

April 22, 1967

Suzuki Roshi gave me “turning words,” short teachings that had a profound effect on me. Once he just walked up to me and said, “Just being alive is enough.” This statement gave me a new dimension to the way I thought and still remains a koan for me.

Another time I asked him, “What is nirvana?” He replied, “Just seeing one thing through to the end.”

Speaking to the core of what he taught, Suzuki Roshi would say, “I can’t give you anything but my Zen spirit.”

—Mel Weitsman



There is nothing new for us to study. But Buddha's teaching will give light by which you can know yourself. The light by which we can see ourselves like a mirror is Buddha's teaching.

July 6, 1971

In early March, 1971, Suzuki Roshi was going to Portland, Oregon, to lead a weekend sesshin. I went along as his attendant. The first morning I was carrying the kyosaku around the meditation hall when my dear teacher, sitting zazen, keeled over. He stayed down. I went over and asked, "Roshi, what is the matter?" He answered, "I don't know. I feel terrible." So we got him up and he went back to the house where we were staying. He told me to stay and help finish the sesshin.

That evening when I returned to the house, he said, "I have this very bitter taste and a very painful stomach." He wanted to finish the sesshin, which we did the next day.

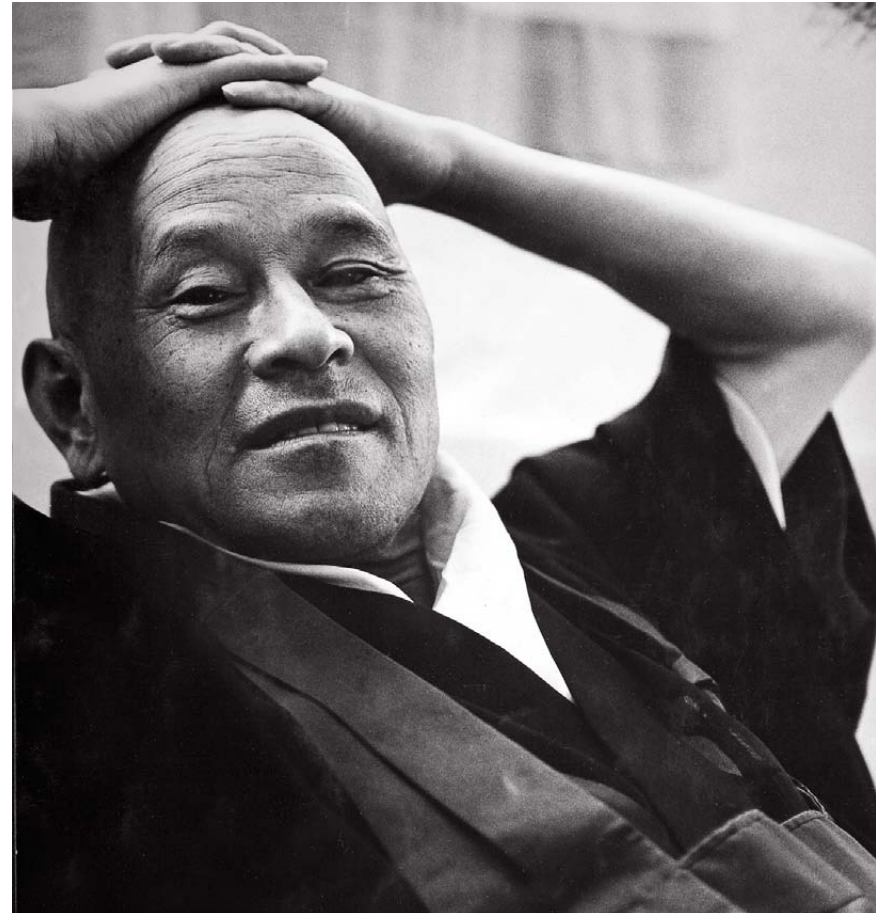
When we returned to the San Francisco Airport Mrs. Suzuki and Yvonne Rand were waiting for us with a wheelchair. Asked if he wanted the wheelchair, he replied, "No! I am a Zen Master." When he finally got home and to his room he did something I never saw him do. He walked into his room, took off his koromo and just dropped it on the floor. I thought, "Wow. He must really be suffering."

A doctor told us to bring him to the hospital. We carried him out of Zen Center on a stretcher. He had his gallbladder removed. It was malignant but he didn't tell us that.

After the surgery he got better and better. Actually, he seemed healthier than he had been in a long time. But that spring, during one Saturday morning talk, all of a sudden he seemed to turn to me and said really strongly, "Things teach best when they are dying."

Later that summer his skin yellowed. We thought he had hepatitis. He stopped giving dokusan and Dharma talks. For a while he went to the zendo. Peter Schneider and I would cross our arms and hold hands to make a seat and then carry him up and down the stairs to the zendo. But after a while he stopped going to the zendo.

—Reb Anderson



*For the religious mind there is no fear of death.
The fear of death exists in the realm of thinking
or emotions. When you attach to something,
that is the beginning of being afraid of death.*

July 30, 1965

For the last two hundred years in Japanese Soto Zen, the understanding of most teachers has been that shikantaza, literally translated as "just sitting," was Dogen Zenji's essential practice. In accord with this mainstream understanding, Suzuki Roshi established shikantaza as our essential practice as well.

But Suzuki Roshi was unique among all the teachers of shikantaza that I have encountered in saying that shikantaza, or zazen, is to just be ourselves.

—Reb Anderson



*Our practice is a practice of settling oneself
on oneself, which means to always have a
new, fresh experience of your true self.*

December 13, 1970

One of Suzuki Roshi's main teachings was, "Don't be selfish." In the middle of my first or second sesshin, he said, "You people don't know how selfish you are."

Suzuki Roshi's simple day-to-day activities – the way he would sit down and stand up, eat his dinner, walk, put on his sandals – this was his expression of shikantaza. Everyday activities with no selfishness.

—Mel Weitsman

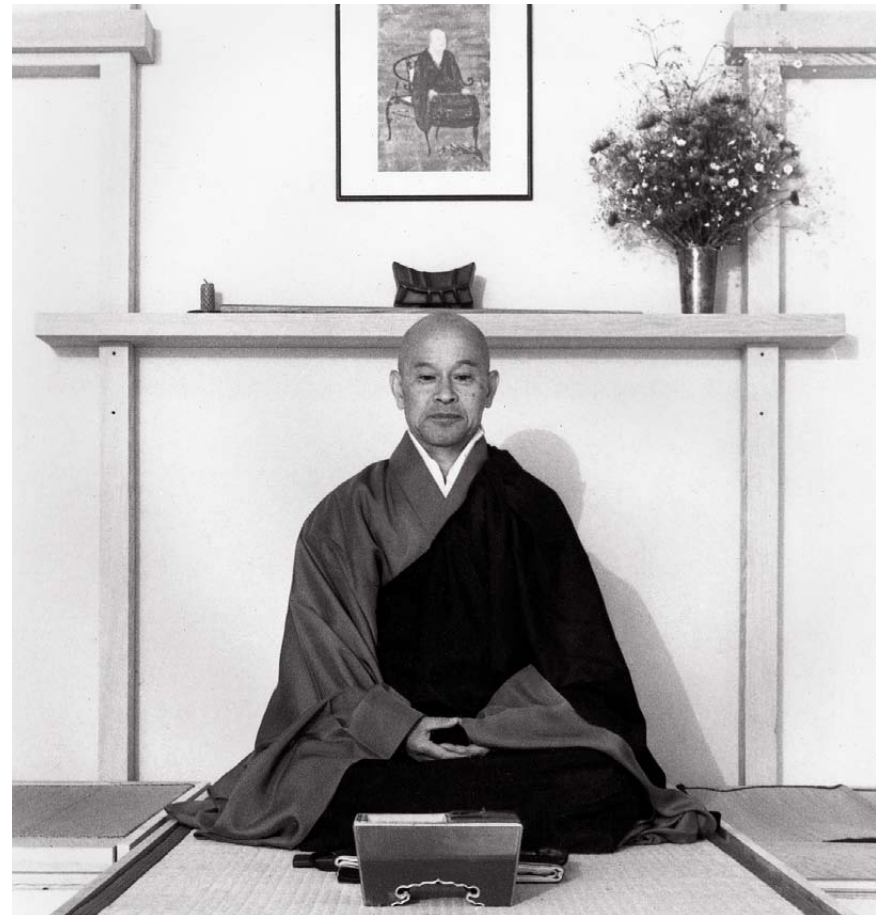


*As long as you are trying to improve yourself,
having some core, substantial idea of self,
that is a wrong practice.*

January 10, 1971

Suzuki Roshi was very encouraging when I felt discouraged and like a bad student. But one day, in a sesshin, I had the feeling, “Hey! I’ve got it. I think I am doing zazen. Wow!” So I went to tell him about it. He was very different that day. He said, “Don’t ever imagine that you can sit zazen. That’s a big mistake. Zazen sits zazen.”

—Blanche Hartman



Just to follow your breathing doesn't make sense. If you are very kind with your breathing, then, one after another, you will have a refreshing feeling in your zazen. And when you have a warm feeling in your practice, that is a good example of the great mercy of Buddha.

February 23, 1971

Right in the middle day of one of the early sesshins at Tassajara, when everyone was experiencing extreme pain in every part of the body, Suzuki Roshi said, “It doesn’t get better later.”

—Dan Welch

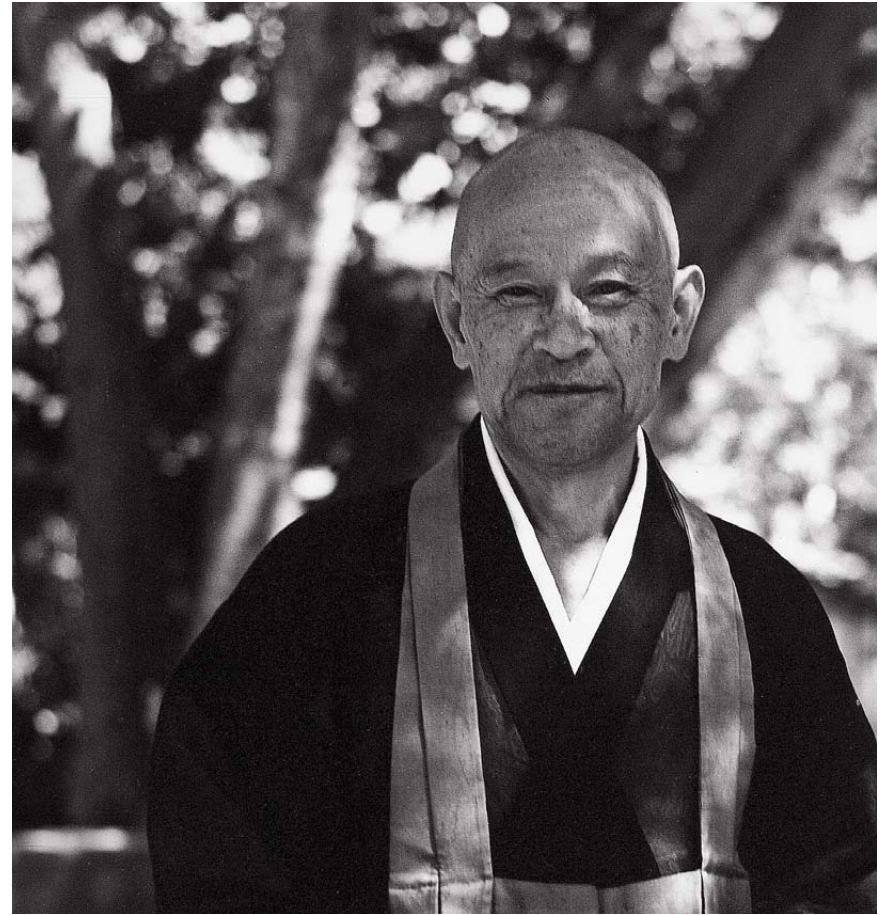


*Things that exist are imperfect. Nothing is perfect.
But in those imperfect things there is a perfect reality.*

September 1969

Once when I was Roshi's attendant, or jisha, I came down with a cold. When I came to his room, he noticed my cold and said, "Oh, you sit down, please." He pulled out a bottle of sake and poured it into a big bowl, which he heated up on his stove. Then he broke an egg and beat it into the bowl. He said, "Drink this." I drank it, and he said, "Okay. Go back to bed."

—Peter Schneider

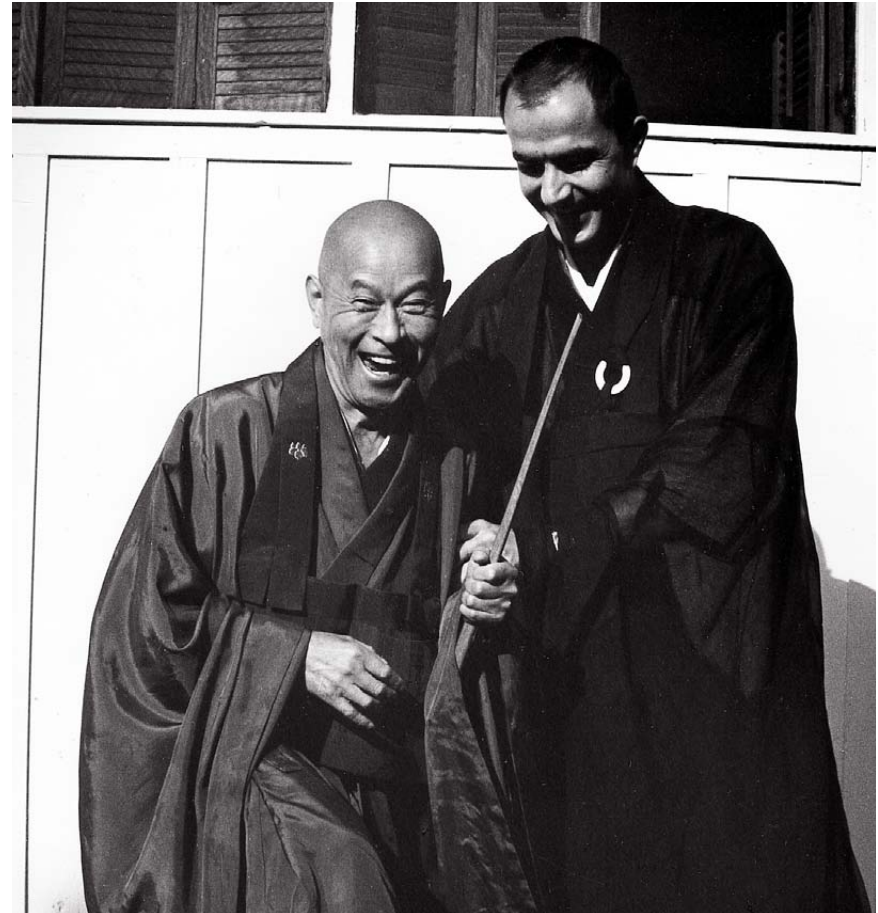


*It is not necessary to be a great man, but we
should be good enough to help our neighbors.*

March 28, 1970

After a wedding at Tassajara, there was a celebration with a band. Lew Richmond was playing keyboard, David Chadwick was playing guitar and singing, and someone else was on the drums. Suzuki Roshi was sitting on the corner of the platform playing a kazoo.

—Blanche Hartman

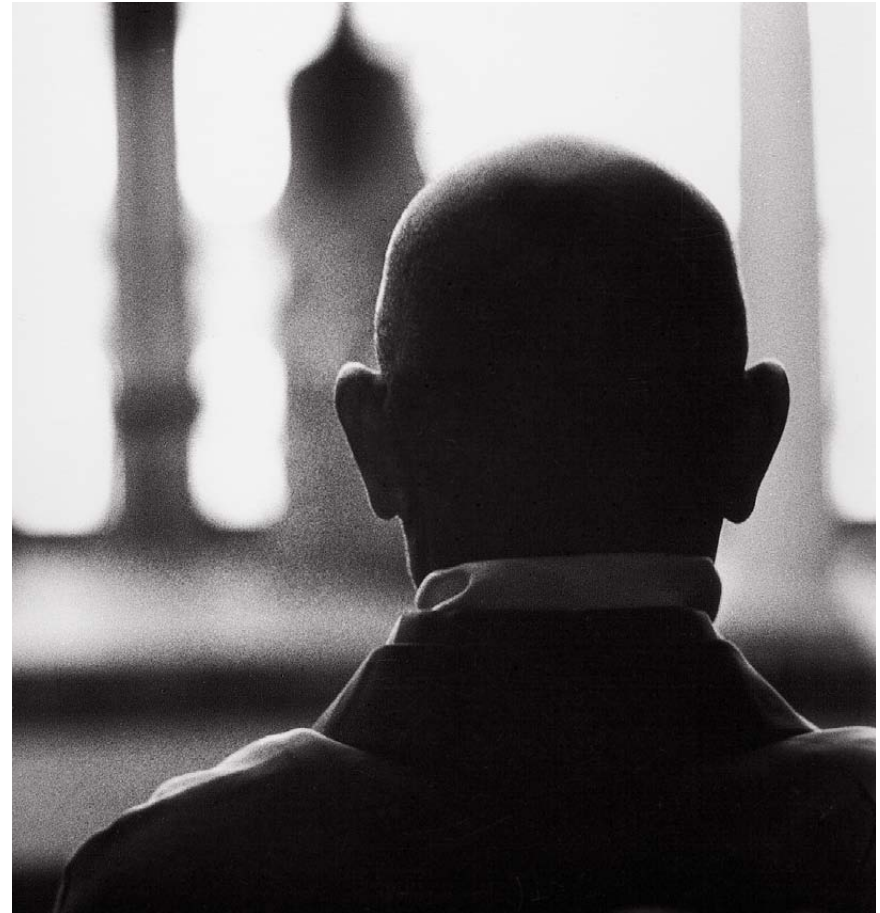


Beginner's Mind is everything.

August 4, 1970

But what happens if something happens to you,
and you can't be our teacher any more?

—Student



That cannot happen. I am always with you forever.

December 7, 1967

The stories in this book were told by Suzuki Roshi's students and family at a weekend conference in Palo Alto, California, in May, 1998. We heard stories and memories from those who knew him, and assessments of him by scholars and Dharma teachers. We listened to his recorded voice in Dharma talks and watched him in film footage. The walls of the meeting hall were filled with photographs from throughout his life.

Bill Redican's devoted work made this book possible. The stories were selected from his transcripts of the conference. Suzuki Roshi's words were chosen from Bill's compilation of quotes from Suzuki Roshi's lectures. A deep bow of gratitude to Bill for his tireless work.

Further bows of gratitude go to Evan Winslow Smith for his enthusiasm in designing the book, to Nancy Van House for her generous help with editing, to Kim McLaughlin and ABC Printing for their care and support in printing the book, to Michael Wenger for his support and encouragement, and to Simon Turkalj for, among other things, helping to formulate the idea of this book.

I also wish to thank the many people who helped organize and who participated in Sati Center's Suzuki Roshi conference. The Sati Center for Buddhist Studies and the San Francisco Zen Center enthusiastically supported the conference and underwrote the production of this book.

Many thanks also to the many photographers of these pictures, including Minoru Aoki, Bob Boni, Tim Buckley, Alan Marlowe, Katherine Thanas, and Rowena Pattee.

G.E.

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issued by the Deberny & Peignot foundry in Paris in 1912.



Do you know the story of the dragon? In ancient China, there was a person who liked dragons very much. He talked about dragons to his friends, and he painted dragons, and he bought various kinds of dragons. So the dragon thought, "If a real dragon like me visited him, he may be very happy." So one day the real dragon sneaked into his room. He didn't know what to do! Whaah!

For a long time, we have been like him. That should not be our attitude. We should not just be dragon's friend; we should be the dragon himself. Then you will not be afraid of any dragon.

Suzuki Roshi

Suzuki Roshi drew this dragon in his diary on his way to America in 1959.