

## *Why Did the Dragon Come to the West?*

*The Life,  
Times  
and Teachings  
of Shunryu  
Suzuki Roshi*

*By Bill Redican*

*Many, many thanks  
are due to Gil Fronsdal,  
pictured here, and to  
all of his collaborators  
at the Sati Center for  
organizing and hosting  
this conference, which  
enabled so many to meet  
Suzuki Roshi again or for  
the first time.*



**I**N MAY OF 1959, Shogaku Shunryu Suzuki came from Japan to begin his work in San Francisco. In May of 1998, more than two hundred people came to Palo Alto to learn about and reflect upon his life, his teachings, and his profound effect on the lives of so many people. Entitled "The Life, Times, and Teachings of Shunryu Suzuki Roshi," the conference was organized and hosted by **Gil Fronsdal** and sponsored by the Sati Center for Buddhist Studies in conjunction with the Stanford Center for Buddhist Studies.

The conference was held on May 30 and 31 at the Lucille Stern Community Center in Palo Alto. Twenty-one speakers gave one or more scheduled presentations, several more made written contributions,

many former students offered personal recollections on Suzuki Roshi's life and teachings, and five short films about Suzuki Roshi—created by film students at San Francisco State University—were premiered. Photographs were displayed of Suzuki Roshi, his family, his teachers, and the temples where he had practiced in Japan.

Perhaps the strongest sense of those who attended and participated in the conference was the deep affection and appreciation felt for this "most selfless man," as an early student described him—a reflection of the sincere openness and humanity of this teacher. The conference evoked many of the means by which he taught Buddha's way. It proved to be less compelling for many of his former students to recall the specific content of his teachings than it was to remember how he moved Tassajara rocks or put on his sandals or laughed.

**Okusan (Mitsu) Suzuki Sensei**—Suzuki Roshi's widow, now 84, sent a letter to the conference from Japan, where she is living with the family of her daughter Harumi. **Kazuaki Tanahashi** translated her letter for the conference. Okusan described Suzuki Roshi as a person free from desire, except for the desire to transmit the buddha way. Okusan said she learned Buddhist practice just by watching him. In his last summer at Tassajara he worked until exhausted, and Okusan implored him, "You are cutting your life short!" He answered, "If I don't cut my life short, my students will not grow." If his life had not been ended by cancer, he might have carried out his dream of retiring in Berkeley and discussing buddha dharma all night long.

The conference was also honored by the presence of **Hoitsu Suzuki Roshi**, a son of Suzuki Roshi and current abbot of his father's former temple, Rinsoin, in Japan. **Kazuaki Tanahashi** translated Hoitsu's presentation. Hoitsu described his father as having a quick temper, especially as viewed through the eyes of a young son, but he eventually understood that his father became upset when his children "showed our big ego, when we were insensitive to other people." Shunryu gently taught Hoitsu how to chant sutras, and he took him to hear the dharma talks of the most prominent *Shobogenzo* scholar of the time, Kishizawa Ian. Kishizawa Roshi's talks were completely incomprehensible to the young boy, but Hoitsu distinctly remembers his formal voice and manner. Hoitsu treated the conference to a parody of a Toshiro-Mifune-style voice thundering, "Dogen Zenji, high ancestor!"

This conference was the first major gathering in which Suzuki Roshi's life has been viewed from a historical and biographical perspective. We now have a much clearer understanding of how his early experiences influenced his life and his teaching, and how it was that he came to complete his life's work in San Francisco. The presentations of

Professors Carl Bielefeldt and Richard Jaffe (reprinted in this issue of *Wind Bell*) described the changing social, political, and religious environment of Japan during Suzuki Roshi's early life.

David Chadwick gave an overview of the first part of his forthcoming biography of Suzuki Roshi, *Crooked Cucumber: The Life and Zen Teaching of Shunryu Suzuki*. ("Crooked Cucumber" was a nickname given the young Shunryu by his first master, Gyokujun So-on.) David spoke about the period of Suzuki Roshi's life from his birth to his departure for America. His biographical work has revealed many surprising aspects of Suzuki Roshi's life. For example, few in America would have suspected how extensive Suzuki Roshi's academic background and Zen training were. He graduated from the distinguished Komazawa University second in his class (with a major in Buddhist and Zen Philosophy and a minor in English), completed a graduation thesis on a chapter of the *Shobogenzo*, practiced at both Eihei-ji and Sojiji monasteries, and studied with several of the leading Soto Zen masters of Japan. David also described the extreme poverty and discrimination that the son of a Buddhist priest would have endured in the early 20th Century in Japan.

David spoke about the roots of many aspects of Suzuki Roshi's personality and character: his early love of animals and nature, his quick temper, and his remarkable absentmindedness. His experiences in college had a deep impact on Suzuki Roshi: He realized that formal education involves explanation, whereas actual education consists of letting a moment simply exist without explanation.

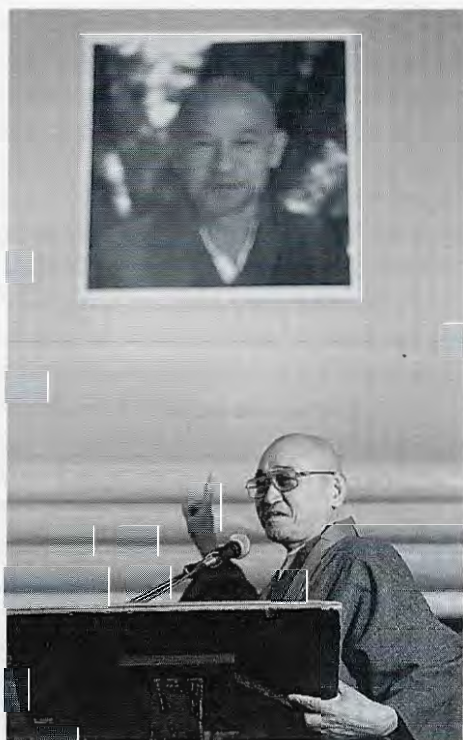
A large part of the conference was devoted to recollections offered by several of Suzuki Roshi's earliest students, many of whom are now senior dharma teachers themselves. Gil Fronsdal, in organizing the conference, felt it was important to preserve not only Suzuki Roshi's teachings but the perspectives of his earliest students in America as well.

His students spoke with eloquence and deep feeling of their love for Suzuki Roshi as well as their appreciation of his faults. For **Reb Anderson**, Suzuki Roshi was a teacher who allowed his students to bring themselves fully to him, with all the vulnerability and trust that such openness entails. **Ed Brown** described serving Suzuki Roshi a nearly raw potato and watching him eat it with grace and aplomb. **Blanche Hartman** said he made her feel that it was all right to be exactly who she is. He never allowed her to give him more respect than he gave her. But he also told her sternly: "Don't ever imagine that you can sit zazen. That's a big mistake. Zazen sits zazen." **Les Kaye** described Suzuki Roshi as a fisherman on a vast ocean who used neither bait nor hook, yet his students were eager to jump into his boat. **Laura Kwong**

recalled how he taught her how to bow: "Put your head on the earth at the same time you lift [your hands], so you're lifting Buddha's feet, you're lifting your life, or you're lifting truth. But you must always put your head on the earth and lift at the same time." **Yvonne Rand** brought the yucca leaf that Suzuki Roshi had used as a sumi brush to write "*tathagata*" for the original cover of *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. She described her beloved teacher as someone who met each of his students with great respect, without bias, and with a radical presence. **Kazuaki Tanahashi** spotted Dogen lurking in the fields of Suzuki Roshi's teachings, ready to leap out and pounce upon delusions. **Katherine Thanas** felt completely met and acknowledged by Suzuki Roshi. He taught her to "follow the yes" within. One of his essential teachings that she recollected is to become one with whatever we do. **Mel Weitsman** recalled Suzuki Roshi walking up to him and saying simply, "It is enough to be alive."

Limitations of space prevent summarizing all of the presentations here, but the full proceedings are being edited for future publication. Copies of the five short films shown at the conference are now available on one VHS tape for sale at all three Zen Center bookstores.

*"I was so close to Shunryu Suzuki," his son Hoitsu Suzuki is saying, "so I couldn't really understand him. Later I came to the United States and I was shocked at how much you love him. So you put up [his] photograph so high up there. But in our temple he's just down there [points lower]—just the ordinary place. (laughter)*



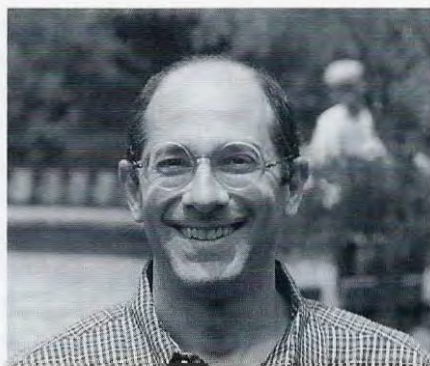
# Suzuki Roshi and the Modern Soto Denomination

Sati Conference May 30, 1998

by Prof. Richard Jaffe

IT IS A PLEASURE TO BE HERE TODAY to speak about Suzuki Roshi and the Soto denomination during the modern era. As many of you know, I am now teaching about East Asian religions at North Carolina State University. My path to becoming a Buddhist scholar passed through Zen Center, where I practiced full-time from 1979 to 1985. My years of practice have undoubtedly shaped my choice of research questions. In fact, the topic of my dissertation, clerical marriage in modern Japanese Buddhism, was catalyzed by a passage in *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* that stayed with me for many years. Suzuki Roshi states: "Here in America we cannot define Zen Buddhists the same way we do in Japan. American students are not priests and yet not completely laymen. I understand it this way: that you are not priests is an easy matter, but that you are not exactly laymen is more difficult." [*Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, p. 133.]

Although I did not realize it when I first read that passage, Suzuki Roshi was alluding to the self-description given by Shinran, the founder of Shin Buddhism, in the *Kyogyoshinsho* [*The True Teaching, Practice, and Realization*]. In the passage Shinran mentions that he, along with other disciples of his teacher, Honen, had been sent into exile and now was "neither monk nor layman." Suzuki Roshi's statement intrigued me, and I became deeply interested in how American Zen students came to practice in such a way. In reflecting on Suzuki Roshi's life and teachings after having spent several years studying the emergence of the openly married clergy among the so-called "monastic denominations" in modern Japan, I see that Suzuki Roshi was not just describing American Buddhism in that passage, but modern Japanese Soto Zen as well. Indeed, it may well be that one reason Suzuki Roshi was comfortable in the United States was precisely because the complexities of a hybrid half-monk, half-lay practice were more openly acknowledged here than in Japan.



*Former S.F. Zen Center practitioner Richard Jaffe returned to the Bay Area to give a talk at the conference.*

Suzuki Roshi, born in 1904, grew up during a watershed period in the history of Japanese Buddhism. Soto Zen and the Japanese clergy as we now know them are in crucial ways the product of the massive social and institutional engineering that occurred after the Meiji Restoration in 1868. It is possible that had those changes not occurred Suzuki Roshi would not have been born; his son, Hoitsu, would not be the abbot of Rinsoin; and we would not refer to him as Shunryu Suzuki Roshi. In addition, the Soto denomination would possibly also have a very different structure than it has today. It might not be composed of two head temples—Eiheiji and Sojiji—with “one essence”; or be headed by a single Chief Abbot (*Kancho*) drawn alternately from the ranks of the Sojiji and the Eiheiji wings of the denomination.

Beginning in the last decades of the Edo period (1603-1867) and continuing through the Meiji period (1868-1912), state and local authorities, bent on utilizing the resources of the temples and monasteries for their own ends, recarved the landscape in which Buddhism was practiced. Suzuki Roshi belonged to a generation of clerics forced to wrestle with the implications of these massive changes. It seems to me that one reason why he may have been so successful here in the United States, where there were no models for the kind of Zen community that he was trying to build, is that he had come of age in a period when Japanese Buddhism, including Soto Zen, was also being rebuilt. In order to better understand Suzuki Roshi’s life and teachings, it is useful to know more about the changes and challenges that Soto clerics of his generation faced.

One of the most profound changes confronted by the Buddhist clergy during the modern period was the loss of status. “Status” has multiple meanings, of course, referring to one’s actual state-recognized position in the formal social structure and in the broader sense to the value given to one’s position by fellow subjects. In both senses the

Buddhist clergy "lost status" during the modern era. In an effort to modernize Japan and keep better control of the populace, the Meiji oligarchs dismantled a centuries-old system of social status in which the Buddhist and Shinto clergy had held a relatively high position. Exempted from certain responsibilities, favored by more lenient treatment for minor legal missteps, entrusted with a quasi-governmental position by the Edo authorities, the Buddhist clergy had received many perquisites. Under the new Meiji regime, both the Shinto and Buddhist clergy were thrown back into the restructured social system as ordinary subjects. Their legal privileges were abolished, and the government ceased to enforce adherence to the Buddhist precepts. At the same time, state recognition of Buddhist clerical status was ended, the Buddhist clergy also lost their draft deferment, and, along with all other clerics, were denied the right to run for public office. As a result, ordination was no longer a public act that changed one's position in society. Instead it became a private decision, much like choosing to be a teacher or stone mason; entering the clergy became a job choice and nothing more.

In 1872 the Buddhist clergy were also ordered to take surnames. While perhaps to us today this is no big deal, it is important to remember that for hundreds of years in East Asia people, at least superficially, had abandoned family identity when they entered the clergy. Severing family affiliation by giving up one's surname was a considerable sacrifice, but an essential part of joining the clergy, an act that is called *shukke*, "leaving home," in Japanese. Some Buddhist clerics clearly found the order to take a conventional surname hard to bear. In order to circumvent the spirit of that law, some Buddhists took the surname Shaku (Shakyamuni), as in Shaku Soen, D. T. Suzuki's teacher, or Fukuda (the Japanese pronunciation of the characters meaning "field of merit"), the name selected by the Jodo monk Gyokai of the Zojoji in Tokyo. Suzuki Roshi's father, Sogaku, who became abbot of the temple Zoun'in in 1891, would have been among the first generation of clerics to keep their surnames after ordination.

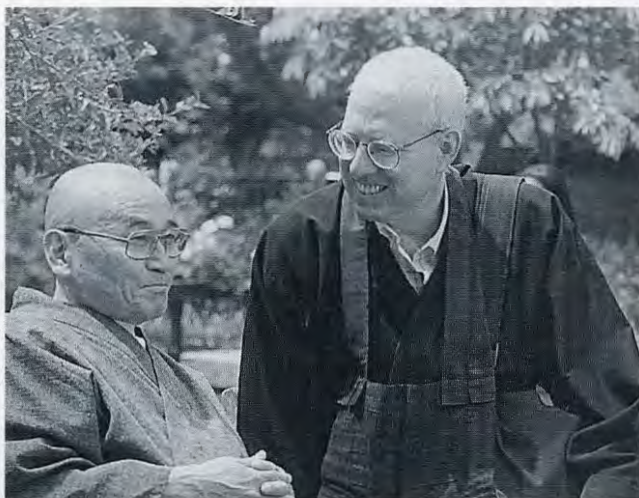
Suzuki Roshi would have been part of the second generation of clerics legally allowed to keep their father's surname after he was ordained in 1917 under Gyokujun So-on. This brings us to another big change that clerics like Suzuki Roshi had to come to grips with—he was the son of a cleric, born in a Soto temple. From the Meiji authorities' perspective, Suzuki Roshi's birth in a Buddhist temple in 1904 was legal because in 1872 they had issued an edict that abolished penalties for clerics who ate meat, married, grew their hair, or wore non-clerical clothing.

But although those violations of clerical standards were tolerated by the state, after 1878 each Buddhist denomination was rendered free to determine standards of deportment for its clergy. By 1885 the Soto leadership had disseminated a strict ban on the lodging of women in temples and had warned its clerics to continue to abide by Soto precepts with regard to eating meat, marrying, and so on. The leaders made clear that they did not want the clergy marrying and tried to stop the spread of that practice among the Soto clergy. The ban on lodging women in temples remained part of Soto sect law until 1906, when it disappeared from the new Soto Constitution. Thus the marriage of Suzuki Roshi's father to the widow Shima Yone at the turn of the century and their cohabitation at the temple Shoganji were violations of Soto regulations. They were not alone in their disregard for the ban. By the end of the Meiji period in 1912 it is estimated that more than half of the Soto clergy were married, much to the dismay of those in charge of the denomination. Included in the ranks of Soto leaders that opposed clerical marriage was Nishiari Bokusan, the teacher of an important influence on Suzuki Roshi, Kishizawa Ian. Nishiari's adamant resistance to clerical marriage, meat eating, abandoning the tonsure, and not wearing clerical garb should give you a sense of how great the shift in world-view was in the transition from Nishiari's generation to Suzuki Roshi's.

Having been born into a temple family at the turn of the century—when it was still a violation of denominational rules and was stigmatized by many parishioners—must not have been easy. Most temple marriages remained unofficial at best, and it is believed that the majority of temple wives were only married into temples because their other marriage prospects were poor. Suzuki Roshi's teacher, Gyokujun So-on, is a good example of how Soto clerics circumvented the disapproval of the leadership and the parishioners. According to David Chadwick's biography of Suzuki Roshi, So-on never married, but for years he lived with a woman at Rinsoin. The relationship was apparently tolerated by the parishioners as long as it remained informal.

Without an official marriage, however, temple wives had no legitimate claim to the temple should their husband die before appointing a successor. Many of these wives and their children stood one cleric away from destitution. In addition, the children of these frequently semi-covert marriages were the subject of derision, something that Suzuki Roshi probably experienced first hand. As late as 1917 the pro-marriage advocate and future abbot of Sojiji, Kuriyama Taion, describing the lot of temple wives and children wrote: "The children born at temples are called Venerable Rahula. The temple wife and mother of the children is called Princess Yashodhara. Or it is common to call her Daikoku (God of





*Hoitsu Suzuki and Michael Wenger at the Suzuki Roshi conference*

the Kitchen) or Bonsai (Buddhist Wife). They endure vehement reproaches that truly are the extremes of insult. Are these not unavoidable phenomena during the transitional period in which the problem of clerical marriage remains unresolved?" [Kuriyama Taion, *Soryo kazokuron* (*On Clerical Families*) (Tokyo: Oju Gedo, 1917). Rahula was Prince Siddhartha's son, and Princess Yashodhara was Prince Siddhartha's wife.]

The debate over clerical marriage continued well into the 1930s—some Japanese Buddhists complain that the issue of clerical marriage is still not resolved today—when, on the verge of the Pacific War, the Soto Assembly adopted some limited protections for temple wives and children.

In terms of the Soto organizational structure in general, Suzuki Roshi also would have experienced numerous dramatic changes and witnessed frequent struggles as the denomination tried to adapt to the institutional restructuring of Meiji and the growing imperialism of the Japanese state. At the start of the Meiji period, in an effort to create a more centralized religious bureaucracy, Meiji bureaucrats created the chief abbot (*Kancho*) system, with each denomination of Buddhism having one chief abbot. As part of the process of centralization, each denomination was forced to compile a description of sectarian organizational procedures and sect regulations for approval by the government. The process of defining these rules for very diverse organizations was a daunting task that sparked much fighting between factions within the different denominations.

The institutional reshuffling resulted in problems for the Soto denomination. When Eiheiji was named the sole head temple of the Soto denomination soon after the restoration, this reignited the old rivalry between the Sojiji and the Eiheiji wings of the denomination. Sojiji partisans bitterly opposed the move. Although a truce was signed in 1872, the in-fighting continued to plague the Soto denomination through the 1890's. At one point, the Sojiji faction threatened to secede completely, but the Meiji government forced the two parties to a joint conference. The result was a final declaration in 1895 that the denomination had two head temples with one essence and two patriarchs, Dogen and Keizan. After resolving the dispute a denominational headquarters, the Shumuchō, was established in Tokyo. Although by Suzuki Roshi's lifetime the fight between the two factions had ended, great bitterness persisted on both sides.

Finally, Suzuki Roshi was trained in a Soto denomination whose leaders were increasingly supportive of Japanese imperialism in continental Asia. During the first decade of the twentieth century some Soto leaders became strong proponents of missionary activity in Korea. Takeda Hanshi, the Soto cleric who had become the first inspector general of Soto missionary activity in Korea in 1908, was a strong advocate of Buddhist involvement there. Kitano Genpo, who was abbot of

*Dan Welch, Taigen Leighton and Kaz Tanahashi at the conference*



Eiheiji while Suzuki Roshi practiced there, succeeded Takeda as the inspector general of Soto missionary activity in Korea, assuming that position in 1911.

Soto leaders also staunchly repudiated the leftist activity of Soto clerics. The anarchist Soto cleric Uchiyama Gudo stood at the other end of the political spectrum from Takeda Hanshi. In a series of privately published tracts, Uchiyama denounced the emperor system, criticized the draft, and called for the redistribution of wealth to impoverished tenant farmers. In 1909—Suzuki Roshi would only have been five at the time—Uchiyama was arrested for publishing unauthorized books. The next year, when a plot to murder the emperor was discovered, one of the main conspirators was found to possess some of Uchiyama's writings. Uchiyama was sentenced to die for his alleged involvement in the plot and was executed along with other conspirators in 1911. The Sotoshu expelled Uchiyama from the order in 1910 and called a meeting at which the abbots of both head temples were reprimanded by the government. The report on the meeting issued by the Soto denomination concluded that honoring the emperor and protecting Japan were indispensable aspects of Japanese Buddhism. This attitude remained an important and unquestioned element of the Soto ethos through the war years. [Information on Takeda and Uchiyama is drawn from Ishikawa Rikizan, "The Social Response of Buddhists to the Modernization of Japan: The Contrasting Lives of Two Soto Zen Monks," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 25, No. 1-2 (forthcoming). For more on Uchiyama see Brian (Daizen) A. Victoria, *Zen at War* (Weatherhill, New York and Tokyo, 1997, pp. 38-48).] No doubt Suzuki Roshi would have had to find some way to accommodate the growing jingoism of the Soto leadership during the first half of the twentieth century.

Time will not allow me to detail other important developments in the Soto world during Suzuki Roshi's Japan years. I think that it is clear from this brief presentation, however, that in a number of ways, Suzuki Roshi was part of a generation of Soto clerics who needed to create new forms for dealing with such things as legal clerical marriage, temple inheritance from father to son, and new institutional structures like the denominational headquarters. Having grown up in the midst of all those changes must have made Suzuki Roshi a little more adept and agile when he came to the United States, where there were even fewer precedents on which to rely.



*Carl Bielefeldt at  
the Suzuki Roshi  
conference*

## *Soto Zen at the Beginning of the 20th Century*

*Sati Conference May 30, 1998*

*BY Prof. Carl Bielefeldt*

**G**IL TOLD ME THAT I WAS TO SPEAK about the intellectual world of Soto Zen at the beginning of the 20th Century, when Suzuki Roshi was coming of age. I won't be able to talk in broad terms about Soto Zen intellectual life, but I would like to touch on a few people who were particularly important for Suzuki Roshi himself.

Suzuki was born in 1904, in the late Meiji period (1868–1912). He came of age in the Taisho period (1912–1926). This was a *very* volatile time, not only institutionally for Japanese Soto Zen Buddhism, but also intellectually. It was a time when Soto Zen, like Buddhism in general and Japanese culture in general, was going through extraordinary intellectual change. The Taisho period, for example, is often known as a kind of window of liberalism in Japan—a period between the Russo-Japanese War and the Pacific War in which Japanese society experimented with socialism, communism, democratic forms, party politics, and so forth. This is the time just when Suzuki Roshi would have been a young man living in Tokyo, the center of all social and intellectual ferment.

In Buddhist terms, this is really the period in which we see the development of modern Japanese Buddhism. Intellectually speaking, this development goes in two directions: internationalization and popularization. Japanese Buddhism had been persecuted at the beginning of the Meiji period, back in the second half of the 19th Century, and was forced to reconsider itself. It had a very problematic status in society, and it realized that its old forms of teaching and understanding itself had to be redone. Thus we see, throughout the last part of the 19th Century and into the early decades of the 20th Century, an extraordinary effort by all the schools of Japanese Buddhism to rethink themselves.

Part of this evolution involved thinking of themselves as Buddhists rather than, for example, as Jodo-Shin-shu Buddhists or Soto Zen Buddhists. That is to say, Japanese Buddhists stepped back and looked at the Buddhist tradition as a whole for the first time and formulated their place within this much larger Buddhist tradition. So we see, at this time, new forms of Buddhist scholarship that had never existed in Japan: scholars going to Europe and India, studying Sanskrit, Pali, and eventually Tibetan, and trying to understand Buddhism in a broad international mode. This was a mode that they were learning from the

*Bill Redican tells Della Goertz how to order tapes of Suzuki Roshi lectures. (See Page 47 for information.)*



new scholarship on Buddhism being done in Europe and America.

This was one element of the internationalization. But another very important element was placing Buddhism within the context of religion. Religion, or *shukyo*, the term by which the Japanese now speak of religion, was not a traditional category of understanding. Buddhism was not considered a *religion* by Japanese Buddhists until the 19th Century, when they studied Western scholarship—in which the category “religion” was found—and translated the term into Japanese. So for the first time, Japanese Buddhists were asking themselves, “What is Buddhism as a religion? What is religion?” They became very interested in the new “science of religion,” as it was called, in comparative religion, and in the philosophy of religion. They tried to reimagine Buddhism as a whole and their own particular sectarian traditions in terms of this category. “What does it mean to be a religion? What kind of a religion are we?” This was a new, international, and modern understanding of Buddhism as religion.

The second major direction of the development of modern Japanese Buddhism was popular outreach. Buddhists of the Edo period (1600–1868) had been enfeoffed by the government with their own congregations, their own property, and their own self-contained institutional units. Now, in the Meiji period, when they were disenfranchised and thrown into open competition for believers and for the resources of the community, they began to develop new ways of reaching out to that community: new forms of publishing, preaching, and organizing new groups—in short, new approaches to teaching that were directed toward the lay populace in a manner that had never really been tried before.

Soto-shu (the Soto school) was right at the center of this kind of new movement in Buddhism. During this time, we see the development of new forms of scholarship: modern textual studies of the *Shobogenzo*, for example. We see Soto scholars trying to understand Soto Zen within the broader context of Buddhism, by treating it in relation to Indian and Chinese Buddhism. Soto scholars also reformulated the religion as a philosophy. The study of Dogen became prominent during the first years of the 20th Century. And we see Soto very much engaged in public outreach.

At the end of the 19th Century, the Soto-shu published a work called the *Shushogi*, which brought together passages from Dogen’s *Shobogenzo* that were particularly appropriate for lay teaching. *Shushogi* was the subject of many commentaries, lectures, and books sponsored by the Soto-shu to bring Soto teachings to the lay public. The school launched new magazines of various kinds and started new study groups for both monks and laymen.

Suzuki Roshi, then, grew up in a world where things were changing very rapidly. And Soto Zen was reaching out in a way that he would later invoke in a very different context.

Suzuki was ordained in 1917 and took *shiho* from his master Gyokujun So-on in 1926, the year he entered Komazawa University. This was the first year of the Showa era—the era we just completed with the death of the Showa Emperor Hirohito in 1989—a time of great openness and change in Japanese society. For the Soto-shu, it was perhaps noted especially as the year in which the famous Japanese philosopher Watsuji Tetsuro published his book *Shamon Dogen* (Dogen the Monk), which is often held up as the first work to bring Dogen to the Japanese general public as a great religious thinker.

When Suzuki Roshi entered Komazawa in 1926, the university itself was in the process of transforming itself into a modern private university. Komazawa, located in Tokyo, traces its origins back to the 16th Century, to an institution called Sendarin, a study center for Soto monks established in a monastery in Tokyo named Kichijoji. Monks during the Edo period went there to be trained in Soto studies. In the Meiji period, this institution was transformed into something called the Soto-shu Daigakurin (later Soto-shu Daigaku). This school introduced more systematic and modern studies not only of Soto but of Buddhism in general. The year before Suzuki Roshi entered, the institution changed its name to Komazawa University, signaling that it was now not simply an institution for monks to study Buddhism, but a modern private university as well. It has become a quite prominent private university in Tokyo and flourishes to this day.

Already in the Meiji period, before Suzuki Roshi attended, the then Soto-shu Daigakurin had been the center for the training of Buddhists who were interested in the new, more international style of study—scholars like Kimura Taiken and the famous Ui Hakuju. The latter was, for many years, a professor at Tokyo University and then Tohoku University. He was one of the leading early Japanese authorities on Indian Buddhism, but he was also very closely connected to the Soto-shu. Indeed, after he retired from Tokyo University, he became a professor at Komazawa University and eventually became its head.

Similarly, in Zen studies, one notes scholars such as Yamado Kodo, who produced the first modern dictionary of Zen Buddhism. Of particular importance for Suzuki Roshi was a teacher by the name of Oka Sotan. Oka Sotan was born in 1860 and became a professor at the Soto-shu Daigakurin. He was the first lecturer in a very important new movement that was started at Eihei-ji at the beginning of the 20th Century—a series of lectures on the *Shobogenzo* that greatly transformed the

Soto-shu understanding of Dogen and the *Shobogenzo*. Oko Sotan went on to become the head of Komazawa University and was one of the leading figures in the teaching of *Shobogenzo* in the early 20th Century. Oka Sotan was the teacher of Gyokujun So-on, Suzuki Roshi's first teacher.

So in the 1920s, when Suzuki Roshi came to Komazawa, the school had a number of important scholars working on the creation of new international Buddhist studies in Japan—scholars like Omori Zenkai, a very interesting man who spent a lot of time in the United States. Omori was very interested in the philosophy of religion and comparative religion. He was teaching at Komazawa when Suzuki was a student there.

Also at the University was Tachibana Shundo, a scholar of Pali who had studied in Europe and South Asia and eventually did a dissertation at Oxford. Some of you may have come across his book, *The Ethics of Buddhism*. It was published in 1926—the year that Suzuki Roshi came to Komazawa.

And there were also scholars working on the new Soto Zen studies, especially focused on Dogen and the *Shobogenzo*—for example, Ando Bun'ei and Jimbo Nyoten, who together produced a very important work that brought together the most famous traditional commentaries on the *Shobogenzo*. By Suzuki Roshi's day, a student could read texts of the *Shobogenzo* together with the commentaries of masters going back to the Kamakura period—a very important resource for transforming Soto Zen studies.

And scholars were also interested in Soto Zen as a philosophy—for example, Okada Giho, who was a professor at Komazawa and eventually became the head of Komazawa University. He went on to publish an extensive and systematic account of the *Shobogenzo*. That is to say, he treated *Shobogenzo* as a systematic philosophy in parallel with Western philosophers like Kant and Hegel, and he tried to lay out the philosophical system of the *Shobogenzo*.

People were also interested in the *Shobogenzo* as religious teaching. Especially important at this time at Komazawa was a man named Eto Sokuo, who was probably the foremost figure in producing the new *Shobogenzo* studies that still continue to this day. He was a specialist in the *Shobogenzo*, and in fact edited the first popular version of the *Shobogenzo*. But he taught a very broad approach to Soto Zen within the context of Buddhist studies. And he did another thing that's important to remember about these scholars: he emphasized the combination of scholarship and practice. That is, typically these scholars were also monks, had their own temples, and tried in greater or lesser degrees





Phil Wilson and David Chadwick

(depending upon the individual) to integrate their study of the *Shobogenzo* with their Buddhist practice.

Perhaps the most interesting and important of this type of scholar at Komazawa at the time Suzuki Roshi attended was the president of the University, Nukariya

Kaiten. He was a man who, very early on, went to Europe and the United States and studied there for several years. While abroad, he published what was really the first well-known book about Zen Buddhism in English, *The Religion of the Samurai*. I don't know if any of you have come across this book, but I encourage you to look it up. It's fascinating.

Nukariya Kaiten combined scholarship with the popularization of Soto. He was very active in trying to re-explain Soto to a lay audience in common terms. In fact, the very year that Suzuki Roshi came to Komazawa, Nukariya published a short book called the "*Shoshin Mondo*," ("*Questions and Answers about True Faith*"), in which he tried to lay out, for everyone, simple principles of Soto Zen as a religion. This book actually became quite controversial. In the years following its publication, Nukariya got into a considerable debate with Harada Sogaku and other people who said, "Soto Zen is not so simple. You can't just package it for laymen like that. This is just pop Zen, and we won't have anything to do with it!" It was quite a debate—called the True Faith Debate—and continued throughout the 1920's, when Suzuki Roshi was studying at Komazawa. He would undoubtedly have been exposed to this debate.

Nukariya Kaiten was Suzuki Roshi's academic advisor at Komazawa, and when Suzuki Roshi graduated he wrote a graduation thesis under him. It's entitled, "*Raihai tokozui no maki o chushin to seru Dogen-zenji no shukyo*," ("*Dogen-zenji's Religion as Seen Especially in the 'Raihai Tokozui' Chapter of the Shobogenzo*"). This chapter,



Yvonne Rand

as many of you know, is quite famous. The main theme of the chapter is the importance of submission to the master.

But much of Dogen's text is taken up with the question of the status of women and his attack on those who regard women as inferior. Accordingly, it has been held up by the women's movement in Soto-shu as an example of the founder's sense of egalitarianism in regard to gender issues. Recently I got a copy of Suzuki Roshi's graduation thesis from Komazawa University. I haven't had a chance to read it yet, but I did look to see whether he was a champion of women's rights. It turns out



Ed Brown, Alan Winter and Les Kaye at the Suzuki Roshi Conference

he wasn't very interested in that issue. He was much more interested in the relationship between master and disciple in general.

But one of the interesting things about that thesis is that Suzuki clearly reflects Nukariya Kaiten's interest in treating Soto Zen as religious experience. He frames the entire essay around this subject. Clearly Suzuki Roshi was interested at this time in *shukyo keiken* (religious experience), a category that had been borrowed from Western philosophers like William James, and in his thesis he cited thinkers like Watsuji Tetsuro and Nishida Kitaro as his sources, along with his advisor Nukariya Kaiten. So he was obviously reading the new literature of Japanese philosophy at this time.

Suzuki Roshi studied a chapter of the *Shobogenzo* in his graduation thesis, but his deeper study of the *Shobogenzo* seems to have taken place *after* he left Komazawa. In 1930, he graduated and went to Eihei-ji for a short period of training. At Eihei-ji he was assigned as attendant to a

famous monk named Kishizawa Ian. This was the beginning of a long association between Suzuki Roshi and this older monk.

Kishizawa Ian was perhaps the leading interpreter of the *Shobogenzo* of his day. He had been a student of the most famous Meiji scholar of the *Shobogenzo*, Nishiari Bokusan, who was also the teacher of Oka Sotan. Nishiari was, in some ways, the leading figure of the Soto-shu in the 19th Century, not only as a scholar but also as an appointed *daikogi* (master lecturer) at the new religious academy called the Kyobu-sho. This had been established by the Meiji government to provide for the study and administration of Buddhism and Shinto. Nishiari represented Soto-shu teaching at that academy and eventually went on to become the abbot of Sojiji and the head of the Soto-shu. But he's best known for the work that he did on the *Shobogenzo*, especially a famous commentary called the "*Shobogenzo keiteki*," which still, to this day, is probably the favorite commentary for most *Shobogenzo* scholars.

Kishizawa Roshi, Suzuki Roshi's mentor at Eihei-ji, was born in 1865. His career was not typical of Soto monks at this time. That is to say, he started out in a secular career as a school teacher and then, after studying with Nishiari Bokusan, converted to Buddhism and was ordained at the age of 32. He received *shiho* (dharma transmission) from Nishiari at the age of 36. Kishizawa went on to become abbot of several temples and then to take up residence at Eihei-ji, where Suzuki Roshi met him, as what is called a *seido* (former abbot).

Kishizawa Roshi lectured at Eihei-ji for thirteen years in the *Genzo'e*, as it's called (the lecture series on the *Shobogenzo*). He published prolifically: he wrote on the five-rank theory of Soto-shu, on the Soto-shu precepts, and so on. But he's best known for a very large commentary on the *Shobogenzo*. During the years that Suzuki Roshi was studying with him, Ian Roshi was lecturing constantly on the *Shobogenzo* in what he called *kattoshu* ("collections of tangles"). He would write about different fascicles of the *Shobogenzo* and publish them in various places, and eventually his lectures were brought together many years later in what I believe to be the most extensive commentary ever done on the *Shobogenzo*, his twenty-four-volume work entitled "*Shobogenzo zenko*."

After studying with this renowned teacher, Suzuki Roshi returned to his own temple, Zoun'in, and then to Rinsoin. But Kishizawa Roshi also left Eihei-ji a couple of years after Suzuki Roshi. He moved to a temple called Gyokudenin, which was located in Shizuoka just a few miles from Rinsoin. And there he set himself up and continued his lectures on the *Shobogenzo*. Suzuki Roshi then commuted to Gyokudenin to study with Kishizawa Roshi from 1932 right up until the latter's death in 1955, soon after which Suzuki Roshi himself left for America.



## *Suzuki Roshi's Teaching of Shikantaza*

*Sati Conference May 31, 1998*

*BY Reb Anderson*

**F**OR 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. A great deal of his teaching was intended to help us understand what it means to practice just sitting in its true sense. He also told us that his main job as a Zen priest was to encourage people to practice just sitting.

He would often say that our practice is just to sit. Then he would say that that may sound easy, but that actually it is rather difficult to understand what it means to just sit. In order to help us understand what this just sitting really is he went on to say that it is just to be ourselves. Finally, he made it clear, at least to me, that we could not just be ourselves by ourselves alone. We can only just be ourselves and thus realize the just sitting practice of the buddha ancestors by practicing in the same manner as the entire universe and all beings. Perhaps other Soto Zen teachers have taught just sitting in this way, but I have not

heard it so clearly from anyone but Suzuki Roshi. I deeply appreciate the way he stressed this point.

Suzuki Roshi taught that in order to actualize our way of just sitting by being ourselves, we must express ourselves fully. So paradoxically, realizing the selflessness of just sitting depends on full self-expression. Full self-expression in turn can only be realized by meeting and practicing together with all living beings in the entire universe. Therefore, he taught that to realize the full function of the practice of just sitting, we must go and meet face to face with our teacher. Such meetings offer the opportunity to settle completely into the truth of just sitting. Only when we meet intimately with another person can we fully be ourselves. As the *Lotus Sutra* says, "Only a buddha together with a buddha can thoroughly master the buddha dharma."

My understanding of Suzuki Roshi's teaching of just sitting is that it encompasses a dynamic interdependence between two dimensions: an intrapsychic aspect and an interbeing or interpersonal aspect. According to this view, I see Shakyamuni practicing upright sitting under the bodhi tree and attaining the way as only part of the story of just sitting. Only when he met his students and they attained the way together was the full function of the selfless practice of just sitting realized.

So in our practice of just sitting we cannot actually fully be ourselves unless we go to see the teacher and the teacher cannot fully be himself unless he comes to meet us. Suzuki Roshi was a teacher who taught that sometimes we have to disagree and argue with our teacher and that sometimes we have to surrender to our teacher. Similarly, the teacher must sometimes disagree with us and must sometimes surrender

*Della Goertz  
and Betty Warren  
at the Suzuki  
Roshi conference*



to us. This interbeing aspect of just sitting generously encompasses all agreement and disagreement.

To be fully ourselves in this formal student-teacher relationship both must assert themselves completely and recognize each other fully. You will sometimes disagree with your teacher and at the same time you must surrender to your teacher. Your teacher, of course, must bring herself to meet you and must surrender to you. The only way that you can fully be yourself is if your teacher and ultimately all beings come to meet you. When Suzuki Roshi was alive meeting with him was a very high priority in my life. I made a big effort to bring myself to meet him but often as soon as I made this strong effort to assert myself in his presence I became aware of my anxiety and vulnerability and wanted to get away. However, when I didn't present myself strongly, if I was with him half-heartedly, I didn't feel the need to escape. It was only when I presented myself whole-heartedly to him that I felt most vulnerable. When Suzuki Roshi ordained me as a priest he gave me the name Tenshin Zenki. On that day he told me that Tenshin means "Reb is Reb," and then he said, "People may have a problem with that but there is no other way." Today the way I understand his teaching is that when Reb is fully Reb, when you are fully you, we are completely vulnerable. To what are we completely vulnerable? When we are completely ourselves we are vulnerable to the entire universe. The second part of my name, Zenki, may be translated as "the whole works." In just being fully ourselves, Tenshin, we open ourselves to the working of the entire universe, Zenki. This name describes how the entire universe works thoroughly through each person in the practice of just sitting. Over the years I gradually came to understand what a wonderful gift he gave me in that name. Tenshin Zenki is actually a gloss for shikantaza. So now I see that just sitting is not something that I can do by myself. It is not something that Suzuki Roshi could do by himself either. It is something that we do together. We practice it together when we bring ourselves completely to our meeting and completely assert ourselves while completely recognizing each other.

In discussing with a friend the various views of just sitting, he recalled that famous story of the blind men feeling the elephant. One person says the elephant is a wall, another person says the elephant is a huge leaf, another says it is a rope and another says it is a tree trunk. When he said that I thought to myself, "But in this case, there really isn't such a thing as an elephant."

There is not actually something out there that is just sitting. It is just that we may enter the reality of this wonderful practice by giving ourselves entirely into a situation where "the other" comes and meets

us entirely. But since the other meets us entirely just sitting can't be a thing. What we do is not just sitting. Just sitting is the dynamic interdependence of what we give and what comes to meet us. That is not a thing. Nobody knows what that is. Even all the buddhas together cannot fully measure it. However, we can throw ourselves into it. Although I say throw ourselves into it, even this is not a unilateral activity. We still need to have a significant other whom we meet face to face. Therefore, it is not so easy to throw ourselves into such a practice because we may feel anxious or afraid of the unknown possibilities of such concerted activity. Nevertheless, we still have to jump wholeheartedly into the unknown reality of just sitting. There is a story about the great master Yaoshan just sitting. His teacher Shitou, practicing together with him, asked, "What are you doing?" Yaoshan replied, "I'm not doing anything at all." Shitou said, "Then you are just idly sitting." Yaoshan replied, "If I were idly sitting I would be doing something." Finally Shitou said, "You say that you are not doing anything at all. What is it that you are not doing?" Yaoshan said, "Even the ten thousand sages don't know."

I recently saw a good example of the practice of just sitting in the form of the Olympic women's figure skating. These young women—actually 14 to 16 year old girls—fully expressed themselves. They asserted themselves with extraordinary energy, strength, precision and grace. What was so touching to me was, that at the very moment of their fullest self-assertion, they simultaneously surrendered to the entire universe. At the moment of most powerful self-expression—when they were flying through the air performing amazing feats of turning through time and space—at that very moment they were completely vulnerable to the whole world. They were vulnerable to falling on the ice, they were vulnerable to nineteen judges' minute and severe scrutiny, they were vulnerable to their parents and their coaches. A billion people were watching them. Right in the midst of their transcendent whole-heartedness they were completely vulnerable and open to the support and love of the entire world. It is this concerted and cooperative activity of all beings that the practice of just sitting celebrates and realizes.

After their performances these young champions were interviewed. They were shown tapes of their performances. At the point of their total impeccable self-expression and complete openness to the universe, they were asked what they were thinking at that moment. As I remember, they weren't able to say; they didn't know what it was they were "not doing." As Yaoshan said, "Even the ten thousand sages don't know what just sitting is."

Senior Dharma Teacher  
Sojun Mel Weitsman  
hits the makugyo for  
service during the Sati  
Conference



## Suzuki Roshi's Practice of Shikantaza

Sati Conference May 31, 1998

BY Sojun Mel Weitsman

**I** REMEMBER READING a description of shikantaza by a contemporary Japanese Zen master. He described shikantaza as a very special kind of practice in which you sit zazen so hard that sweat pours out of your body. You can sit for only about half an hour because it's so intense. And when I read that I thought, "Boy, that's not the shikantaza that I know anything about or ever heard anything about from Suzuki Roshi!"

I wasn't thinking that such intense zazen is a wrong practice of shikantaza. But it does seem to me that this is elitist shikantaza or Olympic-style shikantaza: trying to accomplish some great feat. Suzuki Roshi always talked about shikantaza as one's day-to-day, moment-to-moment life of selflessness.

One of the main themes of Suzuki Roshi was, "Don't be selfish." At Sokoji, when we were in the middle of a sesshin—maybe my first or second one—for some reason or another he said, "You people don't know how selfish you are." And I thought, "Is that the right word? Maybe he means *selfless*." So that was a turning word for me too, because I really understood that the central teaching of Suzuki Roshi was not to be selfish.



It's a very simple phrase. It's something that our mother always tells us, right? "Don't be selfish." But in Buddhism we learn to be *selfless*—no self. "Be selfless." But Suzuki Roshi said *selfish*, which has a connotation that is a little more personal and is one that we don't like so much.

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 activity with no selfishness—just doing the thing for the thing—that was his shikantaza. We usually say that shikantaza means "just sitting." And that's true. Just putting on your shoes too. But this "*just*" has a special meaning. It means "without going any further" or "without adding anything extra."

When we go about our daily activities we always have a purpose. If I go to the store, I want to buy something. So I have a purpose. And that purpose motivates me to go to the store. But while going to the store, I'm living my life step by step. It has something to do with going to the store and the motivation to do so, but it's totally separate at the same time. It's just this step, this step, this step, totally living the life of walking within walking.

We're always doing something, making up a story about our life. And making up this story about our life is okay. This is our dream.



*Katherine  
Thanas and  
Gil Fronsdal  
at the  
Suzuki Roshi  
Conference*

*Peter  
and Jane  
Schneider  
at the  
conference*



We've been talking about the dream. Everybody has a dream. We have a dream of going to the store. Every thought is a dream. But the shikantaza, or the "just doing," is the selfless activity of just doing *within* the dream. In other words, we move and then we rest. We move and then we rest. Life is a movement and a rest. But in our practice we move and rest at the same time. Within our movement is perfect stillness. Stillness and movement are the two aspects of this life.

I think about shikantaza as a state in which our thought and our activity have no gap. When an athlete is skiing in the Olympics and performing an outstanding feat [Mel is referring to Reb's immediately preceding lecture], body and mind have no gap. Thought and activity are one. The athlete isn't thinking *about* something. The thought is the activity and the activity is the thought.

But shikantaza doesn't require a highly motivated spectacular event like Olympic skiing. It should be our day-to-day, moment-to-moment activity. The simplest activity. And this is what we recognized in Suzuki Roshi. When we say, "This is what he was like," we mean that his shikantaza was right there for all of us to experience. It was not spectacular, yet there was something so wonderful about it. We couldn't put our finger on it. Just putting on his sandals or the simple act of standing up and sitting down. We all do that, but there was something about putting on his sandals that was exactly the same as skiing in the Olympics. It had exactly the same quality.

Shikantaza is rather undefinable. How do we practice shikantaza? It is the very simple practice of lack of selfishness, of lack of self-centeredness, and of just doing. As Reb said, if you put yourself totally into an activity, the universe meets you and confirms you and there's no gap between you and the universe.

That's my understanding. Thank you.