

“Outwardly, Be Open; Inwardly, Be Deep”: D. T. Suzuki’s “Eastern Outlook”

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“OUTWARDLY, be open; inwardly, be deep.” These were the words of Suzuki Daisetsu (1870–1966), the well-known author of such works as *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, *Living by Zen*, and *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist*. If it were possible to describe in a single line the qualities of a man as unusual and complex as D. T. Suzuki, this short sentence would be perhaps the closest one could get.

Suzuki was a true “man of the world,” one of those rare individuals who was familiar with and comfortable in both the East and the West. Although a follower of the way of Zen, he was deeply versed in Mahāyāna Buddhism, Taoism, and other Asian spiritual traditions. He spent a total of nearly twenty-five years in the countries of the West, particularly the United States, and was married to an American woman. As someone who stood between the disparate cultures of East and West and yet incorporated both in his life, Suzuki aspired

* *Translator’s note*: There is an earlier article by the author with a similar title but different content: “Soto wa hiroi, uchi wa fukai: Suzuki Daisetsu to Nishida Kitarō” 外は広い、内は深い—鈴木大拙と西田幾多郎 (Outwardly, be open; inwardly, be deep: Suzuki Daisetsu and Nishida Kitarō) in *Hikaku shisō kenkyū* 比較思想研究 26, pp. 6–19 (Ueda 1999). Suzuki first used the expression “Outwardly, be open; inwardly, be deep” in the book *Tōyōteki na mikata* 東洋的な見方 (The Eastern Outlook), vol. 5 of *Suzuki Daisetsu: Zoku zen senshū* 鈴木大拙・続禅選集, published by Shunjūsha (Suzuki 1963), p. 106.

above all else to explore and express the true significance of Asian culture *in* the world and *for* the world. Regarding himself as “a Japanese world-citizen,” Suzuki urged Japan toward a greater awareness of the world at large, and demonstrated to the West the meaning of the East through the example of his own life. He labored ceaselessly to inspire the world with a new spirit by elucidating the truth of human existence that underlies all cultures.

On July 12, 1966, Suzuki’s ninety-six year life came to an end when he succumbed to complications from an intestinal blockage. As he lay dying, his Japanese-American secretary, Mihoko Okamura, asked him, “Would you like something?” He answered, “No, nothing, thank you.” These were his final words.

Once, late in his life, someone asked Suzuki, “Sensei, have you ever wondered what happens after death?” Suzuki replied, almost as if he were talking to himself, “More important than that, what about ‘right here, right now’? After death is rather too late, isn’t it?” Having lived out his life working always and everywhere in the here and now, Suzuki departed this world with the words, “No, nothing, thank you.” He left behind over thirty works in English and a forty-volume *Collected Works* in Japanese. His greatest legacy, however, was his very being as a man of Zen. What, then, is the significance of Suzuki’s thought and life for us now, forty years after his death?

In the introduction to his final book, *Tōyōteki na mikata* 東洋的な見方 (The Eastern Outlook),¹ published in 1963 when he was ninety-two years old, Suzuki wrote as follows: “The essays in this volume are recent pieces composed in Japan following my return. Thus, I believe, they can be seen to represent where I have arrived in my thought.” The phrase “following my return” refers to Suzuki’s return to Japan after a nearly ten-year period when he lived overseas, from June 1949 until November 1958. The year 1949 was only four years after Japan’s defeat in the Second World War, and the year that Suzuki, then seventy-nine, published his seminal historical study of Zen philosophy, *Rinzai no kihon shisō* 臨済の基本思想 (The Fundamental Thought of Linji). After leaving Japan his first stop was the University of Hawai‘i, where he stayed for some time to deliver a series of lectures. He next embarked on a tour of American universities at the invitation of the Rockefeller Foundation, then spent a five-year period as a guest professor at Columbia University lecturing on topics like Zen Buddhism, Japanese culture and Buddhism, Asian thought and culture, Huayan philosophy, and Zen philosophy and religion.

¹ Suzuki 1963.

During this period he made a few short trips to Japan, and in 1953 and 1954 traveled to Ascona, Switzerland, to attend the Eranos Conferences (to which he was the first Japanese ever to be invited). In May 1958, he delivered a lecture as the Far Eastern representative to the Religion exhibit of the Brussels World's Fair. He also made several other trips to Europe.

Viewed from the perspective of religious and cultural history, it is quite significant that, so soon after the end of World War II, the victor nations of North America and Europe should have wished to learn more about the spiritual traditions of East Asia from Suzuki, a figure rooted in the thought and practice of Zen and Mahāyāna Buddhism. This interest, moreover, was not a mere passing curiosity about things Asian or foreign, but a sustained inquiry into the deep nature of world culture that continued throughout the years of Suzuki's university-level lectures.

In contrast, the Japanese intellectuals who shaped the country's postwar thought were, during this same period, dismissing or denying traditional Japanese culture (this was, of course, partly in reaction to the nationalistic ideologies that had given rise to the war). The situation was intensified by the fact that in the political polarization that accompanied the Cold War, the majority of Japanese intellectuals adopted rigid ideological positions in support of either the American or the Soviet side, leading to a confrontation that tolerated no compromise on a wide range of social issues. The result was an inner void that ate away at the social and spiritual fabric of Japanese life; the after-effects of this are being felt even today. The few intellectuals who understood the value of the traditional culture were unable to influence the prevailing mood.

In 1960, a little over a year after his return from his long stay abroad, the ninety year-old Suzuki departed on a one-month visit to India at the invitation of the Indian government. In 1961, he completed an English translation of the first four fascicles of Shinran's *Kyōgyōshinshō* 教行信証 (Teaching, Living, Faith, and Realization),² commissioned in 1956 by Higashi Honganji. The following year, he published, with co-editor Akizuki Ryōmin, a revised edition of the recorded sayings of his favorite Zen master, Zhaozhou Congshen 趙州從諗 (778–897).³ In 1963, *Tōyōteki na mikata* appeared, the last in the long line of Suzuki's publications that had started nearly seventy years earlier in 1896 with his first book, *Shin shūkyōron* 新宗教論 (A New Theory of Religion).

² Ibid. 1973.

³ Suzuki and Akizuki 1964.

The deeper significance of *Tōyōteki na mikata* can be discerned in Suzuki's introductory statement, quoted above, that "the essays in this volume . . . can be seen to represent where I have arrived in my thought." By this statement, Suzuki no doubt intended only to suggest that the essays expressed the point he had arrived at in his thought following his ten-year stay in Europe and the United States at a point so late in his life. Yet, for Suzuki, these years abroad were simply a continuation of the way he had lived his life ever since his youth. In that sense, we can say that what *Tōyōteki na mikata* truly represented was Suzuki's thought as it had developed through the experiences of his entire lifetime. Thus, in order to understand his thought and its significance for us today, we must begin with an overview of the life experiences that shaped that thought.

What was the essential quality of the life that Suzuki lived? The nature of his adult life was irreversibly shaped by two major influences in his youth. One was his practice of Zen; the other was his first extended stay in the United States.

Zen

Suzuki was born in Kanazawa (present-day Ishikawa Prefecture, on the coast of the Sea of Japan) to a samurai family that served as family physicians to the Honda clan, who were powerful retainers of the *daimyō* of the Kaga Domain. Suzuki's given name was Teitarō 貞太郎. His father died when Suzuki was six years old, placing the family under financial constraints that eventually forced Suzuki to leave the Fourth Higher Middle School (the equivalent of a modern college, and the place where he first met his lifelong friend, the philosopher Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎 [1870–1945]) and take a position as an English teacher. In 1891, after having taught English for a time, he departed for Tokyo to begin studies at Tokyo Imperial University (present-day Tokyo University). He seems to have been experiencing some deep inner questioning at the time, since soon after his arrival in Tokyo he commenced serious Zen practice under Imakita Kōsen 今北洪川 (1816–1892), the master of Engakuji 円覚寺 monastery in the nearby town of Kamakura 鎌倉. Suzuki was twenty-one at the time. Following the death of Kōsen the next year, Suzuki continued his practice under Kōsen's successor, Shaku Sōen 釋宗演 (1859–1919).

It was from Sōen that Suzuki received the lay-practicer name "Daisetsu" 大拙. The character for *setsu* 拙 means "clumsy" or "guileless," while in Zen

the *dai* 大 (which usually means simply “large”) indicates something beyond all comparison. The name “Daisetsu” can thus be interpreted to mean “from the guileless emerges something incomparable.” This name may have been given to him because, in the course of his Zen practice, he demonstrated to Sōen a certain scale of personality and freedom from all artifice. Or, perhaps, it was Sōen who perceived these qualities in his young student. In any event, the practice of Zen that Suzuki began under Kōsen and Sōen became his life-long path of “living by Zen,” both in Japan and during his long residences abroad.

Zen practice consists of two basic elements: *zazen* 坐禪 (sitting meditation) and *sanzen* 參禪 (personal guidance in meditation under a Zen master). Let me briefly explain these two elements. In *zazen*, one assumes a sitting posture that is completely straight and upright, with the body and mind fully alert and yet fully at rest: you look at nothing, you think of nothing, and you do not use your hands. (We can understand how significant an act it is to sit still and do nothing when we consider the effects that our distinctively human existence—characterized by its erect posture that frees our hands to do as they like—have had upon the world, with environmental destruction being just one example.) As we deepen in this stillness of body and mind, we undergo a process of opening, an infinite opening that encompasses and yet transcends the entire world. This is, in essence, a clarifying of the true place and true nature of our being.

Zen practice, however, is not simply about “doing nothing.” From the state of stillness, exemplified by the sitting posture, one must once again stand up and act in the everyday world. In Zen, the first step in learning to manifest the world of stillness in the world of action is the *sanzen* interview. *Sanzen*, which involves a question-and-answer exchange with the master, provides the Zen student with the basic pattern for applying the silent awareness of *zazen* to an active engagement with the phenomenal world of self and other. *Sanzen*, in essence, is about becoming truly able to answer the question, “Who are you?” Ultimately the problem to be resolved is the meaning of human freedom.

Life in the West

In 1893, Shaku Sōen attended the World’s Parliament of Religions in Chicago, where he presented a paper on Buddhism translated into English for him before his departure by his young disciple Suzuki. While at the Parliament, Sōen made the acquaintance of Dr. Paul Carus (1852–1919), a German-

American philosopher who lived in LaSalle, a town near Chicago, and published works on philosophy and religion. Upon his return to Japan, Sōen urged the twenty-six year-old Suzuki to travel to the United States to help Carus with Buddhist translation work. Thus, in 1897, Suzuki left for America, where he resided for nearly ten years, returning to Japan only in 1909 after a final year in Europe.

In Japanese, the word for “foreign land” is *gaikoku* 外国, which literally means “outside country.” For the Japanese at that time, *gaikoku* were indeed seen as strange, outside places far across the seas, and, to some extent, Suzuki must have shared in that feeling. Moreover, Suzuki went to America not simply to sightsee or study for a short period of time, but to live as a long-term resident and take on a regular job as a translator, editor, and proofreader at Paul Carus’s Open Court Publishing Company. Suzuki’s ten-year stay, in other words, was a full experience of ordinary, everyday American life, almost completely away from any contact with other Japanese. It was during this decade that Suzuki became thoroughly grounded in the world of Western culture. One primary shift that occurred was that, for him, English was no longer a foreign language; we will return to the significance of this later.

Suzuki’s experiences in LaSalle had the unintended benefit of preparing him for the later founding of the English-language Buddhist academic journal, *The Eastern Buddhist*. Suzuki’s eye for academic excellence in an article, for example, was honed by his involvement with Open Court’s two periodicals, *The Monist* and *Open Court*, which were among the most sophisticated scholarly journals of the day. Thus, for Suzuki, the experience of life and work in the United States was in no sense an inferior way of “living by Zen.” Indeed, this experience in many ways helped shape the very nature and course of his future vocation as an exponent of Zen in Japan and the West.

The direction that Suzuki’s life was developing in was further set by his decision to marry an American woman. In 1911, not long after his return to Japan, Suzuki married Beatrice Erskine Lane (1878–1939), whose acquaintance he had made in America and with whom he shared many common interests. This marriage was a definitive statement to those around him of the distinctive path he intended for his life. For Suzuki, the marriage meant that English would be the language not only of his everyday life and work, but also of his more human, “I and thou,” interactions (particularly his intimate communications with his wife). Given that we are able to conceptualize our understanding of the world, of our experiences, and of our own existence only through the medium of words, Suzuki’s decision to utilize English as the

language of both his outer and inner life had a profound significance not only for his own personal thought but also for the development of Zen thought as expressed by Suzuki. As I will discuss in greater detail later in this essay, it was Suzuki who first succeeded in expressing Zen in English, or in showing that speaking in English could itself be Zen.

In 1910, the year after he returned from the West, Suzuki began teaching at the Peers' School (Gakushūin University). In 1921, at the age of 51, he moved to Kyoto to take up a professorship at Otani University, where he established the Eastern Buddhist Society and, with editorial help from his wife Beatrice, began publication of *The Eastern Buddhist*.

In this way, Suzuki's early development as a thinker was shaped by his unique experiences with Zen and the world of Western culture. The connection between the aspects of Zen and of Western culture was not always a seamless one, however. Suzuki explained what he saw as the basic difference between the two cultures: "In the West, the starting point of thought lies after the division of things into two (dualism), while the East, in contrast, starts from before the division of things into two (nondualism)."⁴ The most radical expression of this Eastern existential outlook is Zen. The Western dualistic standpoint is that flowers, trees, and stones are outside objects with respect to the human observer. In the East, however, "when we see a flower or a tree or a stone, unless that flower or stone sees us, true seeing does not occur. True seeing does not take place."⁵ "The Western mind dismisses this, saying that it is inconceivable. But it is from this very place of the 'inconceivable' that the Eastern mind sets out."⁶ "The Western outlook begins with God's declaration 'Let there be light,' and the subsequent differentiation of the world into light and darkness. The Eastern outlook is most concerned, not with words like 'Let there be light,' but with that which precedes *all* words."⁷

Suzuki had experienced that there were fundamental differences between the way that the respective cultural traditions of East and West formulated their perceptions of reality. But it was not his intention to compare or contrast the two, with claims that "East is East and West is West." For Suzuki, the difference was not one that could be adequately dealt with through mere comparison. As someone deeply rooted in Zen and yet who had also largely

⁴ Suzuki 1963, p. 6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

internalized the culture of the West, Suzuki was himself keenly affected by the entire issue of the differences between East and West.

This was not a problem that could be resolved through a superficial East-West eclecticism, or alleviated by the cultural enrichment that might result from a convergence of the two civilizations. The problem was one directly related to the matter of religion—to the fundamental ways of thinking that determine the very nature of our human existence in the world. Suzuki's special situation as a man who knew both Zen and the West was one that presented him with often conflicting demands. The West urged him to "think carefully and behave rationally," while Zen demanded that he "stop hesitating and just act, leaving rationalization behind." Suzuki's training had been in traditional Japanese Zen, but he was attempting to live by Zen in a new world that knew nothing of this traditional practice. The question of how to live a Zen-based life in the Western cultural sphere was not one that would resolve itself in a natural and harmonious way with the mere passage of time. On the contrary, it was an arduous challenge that Suzuki struggled with for his entire life. In a sense, this religious search was his particular response to the new and historically unprecedented cultural milieu that emerged when nineteenth-century Japan encountered the West, just as the response of Natsume Sōseki 夏目漱石 (1867–1916) was through literature and that of Nishida Kitarō was through philosophy.

In the person of Suzuki, Zen and Western life—these hitherto separate worlds whose basic incompatibility became clear when expanding global contacts during the nineteenth century finally brought them together—were able to establish a meaningful connection. This connection was made possible by the new historical conditions that had arisen at that time, and was simultaneously an expression of those new conditions. Suzuki lived out his life at the point where these historical forces in Zen and Western civilization intersected, and accepted as his personal vocation the task of addressing, from a comprehensive spiritual perspective, the problems that arose out of this intersection. Suzuki's attempt to combine Zen and Western life into some sort of living relationship was intended not only to test his own possibilities as an individual who occupied the ground between the two cultures, but also, and more importantly, to explore the possibilities for an integrated new world where East and West were dynamically connected at their very foundations, and where human existence would take on entirely new dimensions of scale and depth. Suzuki's lifelong investigation of these questions was conducted with himself as the chief experimental subject. If Zen and Western life could not be brought into

a viable relationship, it would have meant for Suzuki—given his fundamental ties with both traditions—a veritable rending of the fabric of his own being. Or it might better be said that Suzuki opened up his own being to the point where it rent of itself, yet the tensile strength of that being was such that he was able to continue his search for a viable new relationship.

For Suzuki, a particularly important aspect of this ongoing search was the role played by thought. Special attention should be paid to this point. Thought is that which conceptualizes the relationships between differing cultures and brings us to a realization of our place in these interrelationships. In the eyes of the world, Zen needed a “solid philosophical system” to support it. As Suzuki commented to Hisamatsu Shin’ichi 久松真一 (1889–1980), in a letter dated January 13, 1954, “An international Zen requires, in addition to praxis, a system of thought. And it must not be a flimsy one. Zen must not be self-satisfied.”

Given that the traditional Zen attitude toward philosophical thought was one close to rejection, the novelty of Suzuki’s view is clear. Suzuki was not claiming that Zen *is* philosophy. Once, for example, when discussing Zen with the philosophers Nishida Kitarō and Nishitani Keiji 西谷啓治 (1900–1990), he grabbed the table he was sitting at and rattled it, saying, “Zen is like *this!*” (the rattling sound, like a primal noise made by the collapse of an old world and the birth of a new one, is said to have deeply affected Nishida and Nishitani). One could say that this is a complete expression of Zen. At the same time, however, if “Zen is like *this*,” the question then arises as to what such a Zen might mean for a man like Suzuki, who lived in a world where Zen embraced both East and West. It was precisely because he lived in such a world that he was compelled to elucidate this problem, and it is here that thought played a necessary role. The speculative endeavor was also part of Suzuki’s own self-realization as a man of both East and West. Zen is not philosophy. However, in the world, it must become philosophy.

Zen, going straight to the point, would no doubt say that there is no meaning in the rattling of a table. To which Suzuki would respond, “When you say it has no meaning, what *is* this ‘no meaning’?” This is the point where thought begins. To do nothing more than rattle a table and say “Zen is like *this*” would be, in Suzuki’s view, an example of the self-satisfaction that he condemned. When, in his introduction to *Tōyōteki na mikata*, Suzuki stated that “the essays in this volume . . . can be seen to represent where I have arrived in my thought,” he was implying, first, that he had finally “arrived” at a place where

he felt he could answer his lifelong questions, and, second, that these answers were in the form of “thought.” Also implied was that, since these answers were arrived at only after tirelessly repeated efforts, Suzuki was satisfied that they adequately addressed the issues.

The Eastern Outlook

What kind of thought, then, are we talking about? As mentioned above, Suzuki gave his final book, the book wherein he presented the conclusions of his lifetime of thought, the title *Tōyōteki na mikata* (The Eastern Outlook). This fact suggests that “Eastern” is the single key concept best expressing the fundamental character of Suzuki’s mature thought.

However, we must be careful not to rush to the conclusion that Suzuki was using “Eastern” in the ordinary sense of the word. He was, in fact, quite wary about much that is generally associated with the cultures of the East. He was, for example, critical of the tendency toward emotionalism, and urged Easterners to learn from the rationality of the West (I will consider this in more detail below). He disapproved of the contemporary state of Japanese society, and, as noted above, even cautioned traditional Zen against falling into an unwarranted complacency. Why, then, does he stress the “Eastern”? Why does he find this concept necessary? What, indeed, does the term “Eastern” mean for Suzuki?

In Suzuki’s view, simply because one was an Asian did not mean that one was “Eastern”; being an Easterner, that is, was not in itself a sufficient condition. Indeed, Easternness, in the sense that Suzuki meant it, was a mode of being that had already been largely forgotten by the Japanese of his time, despite the fact that they were Easterners in the geographical sense. In *Tōyōteki na mikata*, Suzuki was not preaching Easternness to the Western world; rather, he was urging upon his Japanese readers a greater self-awareness from a more universal perspective. Consciousness of oneself as being just a Japanese was not sufficient. The true issue, as Suzuki made clear in the book’s introduction, was the potential for “a contribution from the East to the world culture that is certain to come.”⁸ From the very beginning, therefore, Suzuki’s focus was upon the world, upon the profound meaning of “the East” that, for the sake of the emerging new culture, must not be allowed to disappear.

⁸ Ibid., p. 1.

Suzuki, as mentioned above, regarded himself as “a Japanese world-citizen.” A Japanese who is an imitation Westerner is not a world-citizen, just as a Westerner is not a world-citizen if he or she remains simply a Westerner. Nor by “world-citizen” did Suzuki mean what might be referred to as an “international citizen.” What turned the Japanese Suzuki into a world-citizen was not simply his long residence abroad or his marriage to an American woman. The essential factor in becoming a true world-citizen is that one be fully open to the world. This, in turn, necessitates a fundamental openness of the self. What made this possible for Suzuki was his profound Zen realization that “originally, there is no East or West,” and that “mind is without form and pervades the ten directions.”

This brings us back to the question: From the perspective of such a realization, what might world-citizen Suzuki’s use of the term “Eastern” signify? Let us examine several passages that indicate something of the meaning and scope of this concept.

“I had pitched my tent in the middle of the Central Asian desert. Peering out of the opening, I saw the vast firmament filled with countless stars, and in that moment I experienced satori.” This is the story of an Englishman, which I heard fondly recalled by the man himself. In these times of killing, confusion, and rampant materialism, how I would like to see an Easterner—a Japanese—who is like this.⁹

This passage appears in *Tōyōteki na mikata*, toward the end of the chapter “Tōyōteki naru mono” 東洋的なるもの (That Which Is Eastern). It is especially significant that Suzuki chooses an Englishman to exemplify the quality of “Easternness” that he seeks in Easterners themselves (particularly in the Japanese). In so doing, Suzuki emphasizes the point that “that which is Eastern”—although an outlook that has, traditionally, been nourished in the cultures of the East—exists as a potential in all human beings, and is thus equally available to Westerners like this Englishman. If we genuinely turn our minds and eyes from the earth to the starry skies above, and then with those very minds and eyes look at the earth anew, this alone would surely

⁹ Ibid., p. 131. *Translator’s note*: The Englishman in question was most likely Sir Francis Edward Younghusband (1863–1942), who is mentioned later in the present article. In his youth, Younghusband was an enthusiastic explorer and empire-builder, but later in his life, because of experiences like the one described here, became deeply interested in Asian spirituality, inter-religious dialogue, and world peace.

effect a qualitative change upon our mundane human existence. It was Suzuki's deepest hope that such an "Eastern" transformation of consciousness might allow modern humanity, exhausted by war and economic competition, to breathe more easily and find salvation in the present age. That the question of salvation had become such an urgent one was a reflection of the distortions of the modern age.

When Suzuki spoke of the Eastern way, I believe that what he had in mind for humanity was a type of "counterculture" on a global scale. His intention was not to replace what presently exists, but to provide it with an essential counterpart. In Suzuki's view, the vital driving force for this counterculture could be supplied only by Zen, the source of that which is not-culture. It is important to keep in mind here that Suzuki's way of expressing Zen was sometimes surprising to those who had fixed notions of what Zen is all about. For example, he once mentioned a short exchange between a mother and child that formed the title of an American book:

"Where did you go?"

"Out."

"What did you do?"

"Nothing."¹⁰

That is all there is to the conversation, but, in it, Suzuki sees Zen. Suzuki cites this, not as an analogy for Zen, but as a full expression of Zen in and of itself. "The child ran and played, and when he got hungry he came home. That's interesting! Whatever he might have been doing, it was simply doing nothing. Running and playing are vigorous activities, but in a child's life they're not the least bit exhausting—they're just 'nothing.' This is Zen's *yuge jizai* 遊戲自在—playing in utter freedom."¹¹ The necessity for this at the very core of our being alive is what Suzuki's "Eastern outlook" is all about. For world-citizen Suzuki, Zen did not have to be "Zen." Suzuki saw, in the child's answer "Nothing," the *mu* 無 (nothing) of Zen. And, in the *mu* of Zen, he saw the child's "Nothing." It is here that *mu* has true life.

Yet what Suzuki was doing went beyond even this. In imagining the child's activities, Suzuki was *enjoying* himself. "That's interesting!" he says. Only Suzuki could have taught Zen in this way, both to Westerners and to Japanese.

¹⁰ Smith 1957.

¹¹ Nishitani 1975, pp. 394–95.

When the occasion called for it, these “living sermons” of Suzuki could be quite incisive. Once in his later years when he was back in Japan on a visit from America, Suzuki was called upon one evening by some former students from Gakushūin University. Someone who was there at the time recalled that one of the former students asked Suzuki, “Can Americans understand Zen?” “Sensei’s reply was simple and direct: ‘I wonder if *you* understand?’ There was not so much as an instant’s hesitation in his response. I doubt if the student who drew this response has ever forgotten it.”¹² In this way, Suzuki had the ability to bring people into contact with the truth in a manner suitable to the occasion. When Suzuki spoke in America, he was not doing so in a way that only a Japanese or an Asian would understand.

All three examples cited above—the Englishman in the desert, the child and his “Nothing,” and Suzuki and his reply to the former student—show Suzuki’s intention to move beyond a view of “Easternness” that would limit it to the East. The deep implications of this must be taken into account when attempting to grasp Suzuki’s understanding of this concept.

There is another important point, alluded to above, that must be considered in more detail here. Suzuki quite clearly criticized and rejected a certain concept of “the Eastern.” His emphasis was always upon “the Eastern outlook” as a wellspring that nourishes the quality of human existence, and thus as something of irreplaceable significance for the world. However, as mentioned above, Suzuki was a severe and unrelenting critic of the emotionalism that is often considered part of the “ethnic mentality” of the Japanese, and of the intellectual ambiguity and disdain for logic that commonly characterize the Japanese social milieu. “The main weakness of the Japanese mentality as I see it is its lack of respect for rational thought. One conspicuous outcome of this shortcoming is a type of ‘emotional nondiscrimination’.”¹³ For Suzuki, with his experience of Western culture, the clear failings that the Japanese had to overcome included “their overemotional nature, their tendency to conform, their inability to think for themselves, and their inadequately developed powers of reason.”¹⁴ Suzuki constantly stressed the importance of learning from the rationality of the West, saying that “we should, in the Western manner, think matters through thoroughly, and only then act.”¹⁵ “We in the

¹² Ibid., p. 196.

¹³ Suzuki 1963, p. 158.

¹⁴ Ibid. 1967–71, vol. 21, p. 196.

¹⁵ Ibid. 1963, p. 47.

East must master duality.”¹⁶ “The facile emotionality of the East must be discarded. In place of it, we must learn Western-style rationality.”¹⁷

That said, Suzuki goes on to stress that, despite its importance, “duality alone can never plumb the depths of life,”¹⁸ “nor can it bring a sense of full resolution.”¹⁹ Suzuki touches here upon something central to our existence as human beings, and when he uses his term “Eastern,” he does so with an eye to this deeper aspect of the human condition. We must learn duality, Suzuki emphasizes, yet we must not be satisfied with duality alone. Relying only on duality “breeds the exclusivity and egotism that are its undesirable characteristics,”²⁰ and these are characteristics that must be overcome. Since duality is something we as humans cannot avoid, we must come to see that the world of the “two” (discrimination) is supported by the space which surrounds the “two” and by the sense of that which is prior to the “two” (nondiscrimination). We must open in ourselves a path to the boundless margins and bottomless spaces that are the ground of human existence. This is the essence of the Eastern outlook. That which is “prior to the ‘two’,” Suzuki states, “is sensed in the East. It is known without knowing.”²¹ It is a universal quality, but, since it is the East that first directed its attention to this nondiscriminative aspect of reality, Suzuki labels it “the Eastern outlook.”

Thus Suzuki employs the word “Eastern” in two radically different meanings. In one sense of the term, “the Eastern” is something of unique value and significance; in the other sense, it is something to be overcome. The two meanings are not, however, completely unrelated. Easternness of the undesirable type can be seen as that which results when, under certain circumstances, Easternness of the desirable type is misdirected.

A case in point is provided by the concept of nondiscrimination (*mufunbetsu* 無分別). In the passage quoted several paragraphs above, Suzuki criticizes the “emotional nondiscrimination” (*jōteki mufunbetsu* 情的無分別) of the Japanese as a shortcoming to be eschewed. Originally, the word *mufunbetsu* is a Mahāyāna term indicating the nondiscriminative wisdom (*mufunbetsuchi* 無分別智) that transcends the dualistic, discriminative thought

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 130.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 8.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., p. 7.

associated with attachment to the notion of a substantial self (*ātman*). Nondiscriminative wisdom is thus the wisdom of liberation, and it is generally in this sense that the term *mufunbetsu* is used by Suzuki. However, nondiscrimination, precisely because it is nondiscriminative, can, when misapplied, transform into “emotional nondiscrimination”—that is, nondiscrimination that lacks, rather than transcends, dualistic discrimination. Such nondiscrimination is an expression of “Easternness of the undesirable sort.”²² In order to overcome this undesirable Easternness and actualize true Easternness, Suzuki says, “we must not give in to senseless outbursts of ethnic emotionality, but must, on the one hand, seek to control emotionality through rationality, and, on the other, strive to deepen our feelings.” For the Eastern outlook to be acceptable to the West, it is necessary that the Japanese themselves “broaden their intellectual boundaries and deepen their spiritual insight to the greatest possible extent.”²³ Emotionality must be tempered through reason, knowledge, and intelligence (this being accomplished through intellectual training), while the feelings must be deepened and spiritualized (this being accomplished through religious praxis). Suzuki himself was a living example of this ideal.

Generally speaking, a cultural tradition can, on the one hand, give rise to things of enduring value through the efforts of the individual, and, on the other, it can produce, like a kind of sediment, the anonymous mentality known as “ethnicity,” a mentality that turns the individual into a nameless entity swept along by the group. Nondiscrimination can be a priceless benefit for individuals who have attained it through inner cultivation, or it can be a terrible detriment for individuals who have allowed it to swallow them up in an unreflective mass psychology. The extreme qualitative difference between these two expressions of nondiscrimination is quite striking; a similar sort of dichotomy can be seen with respect to the fundamental Buddhist concept of *anātman*, “no-self.” Suzuki emphasized the unique significance of the positive manifestation of nondiscrimination even as he criticized the negative manifestation. His distinctive term for the former was the “discrimination of nondiscrimination.”²⁴ This became one of the most fundamental concepts in Suzuki’s Zen philosophy.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 129.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

The Discrimination of Nondiscrimination

“The wheel of function has never turned; should it turn, it invariably gives rise to duality.” This saying, from the famous Zen koan collection *Biyān lù* 碧巖錄 (The Blue Cliff Record), was often quoted by Suzuki. The first part points to the state prior to any sign or manifestation, prior to any trace of movement, while the second part declares that when movement begins, then everything separates into two, into endless duality and distinction and discrimination between subject and object, matter and mind, and so on. As a Zen expression, the emphasis is on the former part of this saying, “the wheel of function has never turned”—the message being that, because when the “wheel of function” turns it invariably gives rise to duality, one should strive for an immediate grasp of the nondual, undifferentiated world of “the wheel of function has never turned.”

For Suzuki, however, “duality is the given lot of humanity, something we cannot escape.”²⁵ As an inescapable part of human existence, “it must be thoroughly understood.” Nevertheless, he says, duality is not absolute; indeed, “discrimination as *just* discrimination is not possible; we must not forget that, within it, nondiscrimination is ever present.”²⁶ In this way, Suzuki accords equal weight to both the first and the second halves of the saying, and situates the reality of human existence in the dynamic interplay between the two. This dynamic is one of “from duality to nonduality” and “from nonduality to duality.” Or, perhaps, it could be better characterized as a dynamic of “discriminating without discriminating,” or of “nondiscrimination informed by discrimination.” Although these expressions may have a paradoxical ring, the point is that we must recognize both the necessity of discrimination and the relative nature of discrimination. In these two aspects is manifested the true nature of our existence as human beings.

The distinctly Eastern tendency to value the nondiscriminative, “wheel of function has never turned” side of the equation is one that Suzuki attempted to balance with his concept of the “discrimination of nondiscrimination,” in which the two disparate sides—the nondualistic “Eastern outlook” and the dualistic rationalistic outlook—were integrated in an overall way that revealed their profound interrelation. The expression “discrimination of nondiscrimination” was not one traditionally found in the East, but a neologism

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

created by Suzuki, inspired by the Eastern outlook. Of course, the two words, "discrimination" and "nondiscrimination," both have long histories of use as Buddhist terms, as in the saying, "Through discrimination, attain knowledge; through nondiscrimination, attain wisdom." They are also used as ordinary Japanese words (although it is interesting to note that in everyday Japanese usage, unlike in Buddhism, "discrimination" has the positive nuance of "discernment," and "nondiscrimination" the negative nuance of "lacking in good sense"). These two traditional concepts were not joined, however, until Suzuki's realization of a new mode of human existence incorporating the full potential of both Zen and "the world." The discriminatory aspect of the "discrimination of nondiscrimination" is one that encompasses all of the various dualities of Western thought: subject and object, matter and spirit, being and nothingness, sacred and profane. While encompassing these, however, the balance provided by the nondiscriminatory aspect of the "discrimination of nondiscrimination" allows them to be known in a nondual manner. In this process, dualism is enveloped, relativized, and detoxified by "the discrimination of nondiscrimination," and the "dual" becomes that through which the "discrimination of nondiscrimination" can concretely manifest.

Nondiscrimination alone cannot encompass the "two," for there *is* no "two" in nondiscrimination. But the "two" does exist in Suzuki's "discrimination of nondiscrimination." Toward the realm of Western logic, Suzuki can say, "Not discrimination, but the discrimination of *nondiscrimination*"; toward traditional Eastern thought, he can stress, "Not *nondiscrimination*, but the *discrimination* of nondiscrimination." Suzuki's expression thus points toward the realization of a new world in which both sides are brought together through a constructive critique of their imbalances. The concept of the "discrimination of nondiscrimination" allows a breath of fresh air into the world of discrimination, and provides a framework for the foundation of a habitable land in the realm of nondiscrimination.

Merely voicing a new concept like the "discrimination of nondiscrimination" is not enough to validate it, of course (just as criticizing it is not enough to invalidate it). Suzuki's movement between East and West opened a new world, and it was as an articulation of this new world that he spoke of the "discrimination of nondiscrimination." The true content of this expression lies in the dynamic of coming and going between East and West, a dynamic that one might describe in the following terms. While doing one's utmost from a Western orientation to manifest the good, one takes that in Zen which is immanent and yet undeveloped, draws it forth to the point where it is amenable to the

structures of Western thought, then allows it to emerge, in a form still free of cultural definition, into the Western world, where it undergoes a type of inversion in which it enfolds the Western world and thereby takes on an identity as a definable world of its own.

In the historical context of Suzuki's world, the dynamic of the "discrimination of nondiscrimination" comprised a response from the traditional East to the Western world that had shaken it out of its slumber, a response that the West was capable of hearing. And, at the same time, it offered an answer to the problematic of the West itself, an answer capable both of contributing to the new world order and of subjecting East and West to an existential reinterpretation, based on a more three-dimensional reading of human existence.

As mentioned above, Suzuki's dynamic of the "discrimination of nondiscrimination," unlike the straight-ahead dynamic of Zen nondiscrimination, includes the workings of speculative thought. It is, moreover, a living dynamic grounded equally in the worlds of the East and the West. It is thus of no interest to those Japanese who identify themselves completely with the West, or to those Westerners who see in non-Western lands, not places to be appreciated for their unique and different values, but merely regions that have yet to undergo Westernization. However, this very lack of concern on the part of such people is in itself a source of concern, given the cultural pluralism of the contemporary world, rich in diverse influences. In this sense, Suzuki's dynamic of the "discrimination of nondiscrimination" is, in its underlying motivation, a pioneering initiative providing a kind of prototype for the present-day movement toward recognizing the mutual differences between the various cultures of North and South, East and West. Furthermore, by reawakening us to the rich depths that give meaning to the inner differences distinguishing East from West and North from South, it may provide guidelines for responding to the extreme standardization that is spreading throughout the world, leveling before it all cultural differences. Or, perhaps, Suzuki's concept of "East and West" as two different but compatible spheres has already been overtaken by the globally standardized world of today. If that is so, if it has forever been left behind, then it is important to realize *what* has been left behind, *what* has been lost to us. In that case, Suzuki's "Eastern outlook" will provide us with a clear rearview mirror.

Let me summarize my points so far. For Suzuki, the Eastern way of thinking was not an outlook limited to the geographical East. Although it arose in the traditional cultures of Asia, the quality of "Eastern thinking" itself is a basic potential available to anyone. This quality had, in fact, been largely forgotten

in contemporary Japan owing to the modern forces of industrialization and commercialization, but, in Suzuki's view, it had spread from its historical origins in Asia outward into the world at large, where it served as a distinctive and valuable complementary force in other cultures.

Suzuki himself had a deep personal experience of the differences between East and West. When, for example, he made broad comparisons of Western dualism and Eastern nondualism with statements like, "In the West, the starting point of thought lies after the division of things into two, while the East, in contrast, starts from before the division of things into two,"²⁷ he was engaging in neither oversimplification nor stereotyping. Rather, he was identifying in the barest existential and philosophical terms the essential factors that distinguish the two cultural worlds. Suzuki, a man whose travels between East and West had made him a citizen of both with direct experience of their differing potentialities, attempted in his own life to shape these potentialities into an integrated continuum that would deepen the human dimension of both cultures. For Suzuki, this was not simply a matter of unifying East and West. Rather, having deepened the connection between the two through his own life experience, Suzuki was attempting to create a new world synthesis from the profoundest levels of human existence—a world based on a humanity renewed from its very depths.

In this new world that would emerge from the space between dissimilar cultures, the cultures would either complement one another or produce, from the emptiness between them, a related culture, adding color and variety to life and overcoming the danger of a "clash of civilizations." Such clashes arise when there is an encounter between two cultures that, usually for religious reasons, refuse to enter the space between them, maintaining instead their original positions as they confront each other waving the flags of righteousness and nationalism. Conflict may also appear inevitable when cultural differences between two civilizations intensify as contact leads to confrontation. In such situations, cultural multiplicity may well be advocated, but what more often occurs is the superficial standardization of an ever-increasing globalization, accompanied under the surface by a festering nihilism that gives rise to sudden outbursts of violence whenever national and ethnic tensions heighten.

Against this backdrop, Suzuki took upon himself the task of transmuting the hopelessness of nihilism into the tranquility of Buddhist emptiness, and the tension of confrontation into the attraction of cultural variety. His thought,

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

and the existential testimony to it provided by his life in the world, are certain to remain profoundly meaningful as we move into the twenty-first century. Moreover, his book, *Tōyōteki na mikata*, will undoubtedly inspire its Japanese readers to think about what the culture of Japan and the Far East might have to contribute in a truly open world.

Suzuki and Poetry

In his travels between East and West, Suzuki's comings and goings were, in effect, a back and forth movement that deepened the foundation of the two cultures' relationship. From this deepened base emerged a new world that both transcended and enveloped East and West, and was itself transcended and enveloped in a world of infinite openness. We have seen how Suzuki expressed his vision of the true mode of human existence in such a world with the concept of the "discrimination of nondiscrimination," and we have examined what this concept implies. We have also seen how it critiques the respective traditions of East and West, urging upon the East "not nondiscrimination, but the *discrimination* of nondiscrimination," and upon the West "not discrimination, but the discrimination of *nondiscrimination*," and how, at the same time, it points the way to the creation of a rich, integrated world.

What this paradoxically phrased concept points to is something quite fundamental. "The discrimination of nondiscrimination" was not, for Suzuki, a mere notion, ideal, or theory, nor was it simply the way he personally related to the world. It was the awakened thought of humanity's true way of being, a fact testified to by the truth and integrity of Suzuki's own life. When Suzuki commented that "in the world, Zen must become philosophy," he did not mean "philosophy" in the sense of scientific reasoning or philosophical speculation. The validity of a scientific theory is established on the basis of its objective merits as an explanatory mechanism; the "person" of the scientist who proposes it is not considered relevant. In the case of philosophy, which concerns the study of the whole (cosmology, metaphysics), of the human condition (existentialism), and of knowledge itself (epistemology), the philosopher's personal view of life and the world are certain to be reflected in any system of thought that he or she proposes, and yet the depth and logical consistency of the thought itself is of central importance. When the subject is religion, however, or the meaning of human existence, then the "person" of the speaker becomes deeply relevant, and the question arises as to whether or not that speaker is a living exemplar of what he or she is talking about. This

question is not always relevant, of course—in many cases, the thought is indeed what is important, and the speaker need not exemplify it. Yet, when one listens to religious thought as expressed in words, one's impression and understanding of that thought is shaped by one's sense of the speaker behind those words, and, in this regard, one can view the speaker as an exemplar of his thought.

I would like to introduce our consideration of Suzuki, the man, with a comment he once made about poetry: "Religion is seeing the poetry even in little everyday things."²⁸ Assuming that the concept of the "discrimination of non-discrimination" does in fact express a basic human truth, then, for Suzuki, one of its most important manifestations is poetry. The depth of his feeling for poetry is indicated by the simple line "poetry is religion," written in English in Suzuki's own hand, that was found among his notes. For Suzuki, poetry was "the creative imagination that can perceive the infinite in this finite world."²⁹ The words of Suzuki quoted at the beginning of this essay, "outwardly, be open; inwardly, be deep"³⁰—words that reflect his own way of being—have a poetic rather than a philosophic ring to them. Whereas philosophic argument progresses in a logical sequence that can be followed by the intellect, poetry may express, in less than a single line, the deepest of meanings, to be sensed by the intuition.

Suzuki perceived in the West something very similar to the "Zen is poetry" concept. After reading the Nobel Prize acceptance speech of the great French poet Saint-John Perse (1887–1975), Suzuki commented, "When you understand poetry, the hellish flames of power-lust and ego-attachment die out of themselves, and it is as though you are enjoying a leisurely nap surrounded by nature."³¹ Suzuki was also deeply moved by the words of the French philosopher and mystic Simone Weil (1909–1943), who wrote that although the workers need bread and butter, more than that they need poetry. He remarked, "Only someone like Simone Weil could have said this."³²

These sorts of statements indicate something of the quality of Suzuki's thought. The most direct evidence of this, however, remains Suzuki's authenticity as a human being. His thought on the question of how we as human

²⁸ Ibid. 1997, p. 243.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 238.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 106.

³¹ Ibid., p. 239.

³² Ibid., p. 241.

beings should live, a question touching upon the central issues of life and death, cannot be separated from the one who produced that thought. Those who actually knew Suzuki, both Westerners and Easterners, saw the validation of his thought in the integrity of its source, the man himself. His lectures, his speeches, indeed his very words and actions left an indelible impression on most people who saw and heard him. Not a few of those who met him regarded the encounter as a life-transforming experience.

What sort of person was Suzuki? Although space limits the scope of my considerations, I would next like to examine several facets of Suzuki the man, both in society and as an individual, in the context of his interactions with others and in the context of the history of his times, particularly the period around World War II.

Suzuki and the English Language

One of the most intriguing features of Suzuki's life in society was his use of the English language, and it is this aspect that I would like to focus upon now. Zen and Western culture, with all their dissimilarities, were the two decisive forces that determined the course of Suzuki's life and the nature of his work. How to integrate the two was the fundamental problem of his entire career. His basic approach in accomplishing this integration was "expressing Zen in English." Let us examine the important implications of this.

As mentioned above, for Suzuki, English was no longer a foreign language. It was the language of his everyday life, of his work, of his personal relationships, and of his thought. He kept his journal in English, he addressed his house cat in English, and he conversed in English with Mihoko Okamura, the Japanese-American woman who served as his secretary during the last fifteen years of his life. His final words were spoken in English. Considering that our understanding of self and world and our relationships with people and things are all conceived of in the form of language, we can easily see how significant it was that Suzuki used English in all of these areas. Although he was almost perfectly bilingual, for him this was not simply a matter of linguistic skill, but rather of putting into practice in a creative and concrete way his desire to integrate, for the first time in history, Zen and Western culture. Suzuki was, in fact, the first person to ever communicate Zen in English. He is often described as having transmitted Zen to the West, but the significance of the fact that he did so *in English* is almost entirely overlooked. This is a topic I will consider in further detail below.

The fact that Suzuki was skillful in English does not account for his ability to speak of Zen in English. He was able to do so, not because of his linguistic abilities, but because he truly *lived* in Zen. This is the core point. Suzuki was not simply translating Zen into English, nor was he merely using English to talk about Zen and transmit facts about it. His use of English had itself *become* Zen. This is why it resonated so directly in the minds of his listeners, and why so many of the Americans who knew him personally commented upon the fresh feeling his words left them with.³³ I believe that Suzuki's expression of Zen in English corresponds in significance to the expression of Zen in Japanese by Dōgen 道元 (1200–1253) in his *Shōbōgenzō* 正法眼藏. It was the first time in its history that Zen was made available to the world at large, and the first time that the world, in *its* history, came into contact with living Zen in an understandable form.

In this way, Suzuki's life comprised the temporal and physical crossing point for the first true encounter between Zen and the world. Suzuki's role expanded and became something of a historical phenomenon in itself with his second extended stay in the West during the 1950s, but already decades earlier Suzuki's work had attracted the attention of important European scholars. To give merely one example, Rudolf Otto (1869–1937), author of the great theological work *Das Heilige* (The Idea of the Holy; 1917)³⁴ and one of the few Western Europeans at the time who not only possessed a great knowledge of Zen but also showed a genuine feeling for the tradition, was deeply impressed by Suzuki's articles on Zen and Mahāyāna Buddhism in *The Eastern Buddhist*, the journal established by Suzuki in 1921. One of these articles, "Some Aspects of Zen Buddhism,"³⁵ was the basis for Otto's 1922 essay, "Über eine besondere Form des japanischen Buddhismus" (Concerning One Special Form of Japanese Buddhism).³⁶ In his addendum to the second edition of *West-östliche Mystik* (Mysticism East and West), his comparative study of Meister Eckhart (1260–1328) and the Indian Vedānta master Shankara (788–820), Otto, taking his cue from Suzuki's "superb" article "The Ten Cow-Herding Pictures,"³⁷ wrote that the affinity between Zen and Meister Eckhart was particularly evident in the way that neither stopped with the One, but pressed on toward infinite openness.

³³ See, for example, Abe 1986.

³⁴ Otto 1917.

³⁵ Suzuki 1922.

³⁶ For an English translation, see Otto 1924.

³⁷ Suzuki 1923.

Returning to the question of the significance of Suzuki's expression of Zen in English, we should first note that traditionally Zen has always been communicated through the Chinese language. In modern Japan, of course, the Japanese language has also been used, but Sino-Japanese has remained the language of the technical vocabulary. (At present, much of the classical Zen literature has been rendered into modern Japanese, but this too is largely because of the influence of Suzuki.) In any event, ever since the Tang dynasty, the traditional language of Zen has been Chinese, with Chinese expressions like *kuoran wusheng* 廓然無聖 (vast emptiness, nothing holy) adopted into Japanese with nothing more than a change in pronunciation. Zen has, in other words, found its embodiment in the Chinese language. To be sure, the nature of Chinese makes it particularly suitable for the expression of Zen, and Suzuki was fully aware of this.

Zen has always had a paradoxical relationship with words. There are many Chinese expressions emphasizing that, in essence, Zen is not a matter of words, that it transcends all language. These expressions include *yanyu daoduan* 言語道斷 (the path of words is cut off) and *yanquan buji* 言詮不及 (verbal explanations fall short). That which can be expressed in language, be it Chinese or English, is not in itself Zen. This brings to mind Meister Eckhart's teaching, "When you speak about God, you are telling lies and sinning."³⁸ Yet that which is not of words, that which is beyond all words, then becomes words. This is the activity of Zen. Eckhart too speaks of this when he refers to the birth of God's Word in the soul that is silent.³⁹

Despite the emphasis upon wordlessness that has characterized Zen throughout its history, it is the Chinese expression of Zen that the tradition has come to be most identified with. One of the most significant aspects of Suzuki's use of English to communicate Zen was that it cut this bond between Zen and Chinese. Freed from the language that until then had defined it, Zen departed for a time from all words and returned to its original nonverbal (or preverbal) experience, and was then reexpressed in the words of the English language. This particular manifestation of the basic activity of Zen could only have been accomplished by a man like Suzuki, who both lived in Zen and spoke English with near-native proficiency. With this, the original dynamism

³⁸ From Eckhart's sermon, "Renovamini spiritu" (Sermon 83; Quint 1993, vol. 2, p. 190).

³⁹ As in the sermon "This Is Meister Eckhart, From Whom God Hid Nothing": "While all things were wrapped in peaceful silence . . . a secret word leaped down from heaven, out of the royal throne, to me." See Blakney 1941, pp. 95–102.

of Zen, that of “leaving words, then emerging in words,” found expression in the world. It was a dynamic of “freedom from speech” to “freedom to speak.” The latter is a freedom of a far deeper type, given the centrality of language to our existence as human beings. Thus, English speakers who heard Suzuki talk on Zen didn’t simply understand his words, but rather, through his English, came in direct contact with Zen as a living tradition. We might say that, in Suzuki, Zen returned to its source through the route of expression in English.

Suzuki’s expression of Zen in English also provided the impetus for a new movement, opposite to that of return to the source and toward the formation of a system of Zen thought. “Zen thought” was a notion first proposed by Suzuki. English, like any other language, is attended by a characteristic *Weltanschauung*; the English-speaking community has developed a distinct system of interpreting the world, in the context of which the meaning of what is said in English takes form. Since cultures consciously shape, in the form of their linguistic production, the worldview through which they develop, it is impossible to successfully express Zen in English without a deep encounter, inner and outer, with the philosophies, ideologies, and religions (principally Christianity) of the English-speaking world. Suzuki’s studies in these areas were, in fact, prodigious in both scope and volume. Among the works he read, to name just a few, were those of William James (1842–1910), Paul Tillich (1886–1965), Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955), Simone Weil (whom Suzuki had noticed before she became known in Japan), and Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973).

A “world-Zen” must strive to establish a comprehensive thought system of its own, ascertaining where it stands in relation to the various thought systems of the West and devising a viable relationship with them. This is something that Suzuki was clearly conscious of. In the letter to Hisamatsu cited above, Suzuki comments that Zen needs a solid system of thought, without which it risks complacency. The “thought” of which Suzuki speaks corresponds, in the Mahāyāna scheme of things, to the “teachings” (sutras and treatises) that Zen has always tended to contrast itself with, as in the saying that Zen is “a separate tradition outside the teachings.” Zen, moreover, sees itself as having precedence over the teachings, since the teachings are based on the spiritual insights that originally emerged from the *dhyāna* meditation that is the heart of Zen. However, the Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhist cultural context in which Zen developed as a tradition was completely different from the cultural context of the English-speaking world in which Suzuki was active. This

new context required the creation of a new philosophical thought system and a special vocabulary, with expressions like “spiritual realization” and “the discrimination of nondiscrimination.” Then, having developed this explanatory system of thought, Suzuki had to reiterate that “Zen is *not* philosophy.” He could manage this, even as he continued to explain Zen in philosophical terms, only because he was a living example of that Zen which is not philosophy. Quite a few of his Western listeners intuited something of this even as he just stood on the rostrum during his talks; several examples will be presented later in this essay. It was because of this that when Suzuki spoke of Zen, his words did not become entangled in the characteristic logic of the English-speaking world but instead passed through it to directly touch his audience. Suzuki’s expression of Zen in English was a manifestation of the dynamic in which Zen returned to its source and then emerged anew as thought.

Suzuki as an Individual

I would next like to take up several incidents that reveal something of what Suzuki the person was like.

In the period immediately after the Second World War, when Japan was in need of large amounts of lumber for reconstruction, trees were being felled at a great rate. Many were cut even on the hill in Kamakura where Suzuki resided. Seeing this, he is said to have commented, “People will go crazy, cutting so many trees.” It is a sign of Suzuki’s penetrating insight that over a half-century ago, when environmental destruction was not the problem it is today, he was able to speak such words, seeing beyond the contemporary need for lumber to the long-term implications that such tree-cutting might have for humanity. Suzuki’s words reflected his fear that the destruction of the natural environment would not only rebound upon the humans who live within that environment, but, more importantly, that it would change the very nature of our being. It was a fear of a twisting or distortion of our humanity, making humans no longer quite human. This is not simply a matter of “cutting so many trees”—it could equally be said of “manufacturing so many cars” or “producing so many cosmetics.” At the ground of the present superficial, globally standardized world with its drive toward “more, more, and even more,” a void has opened up that is pulling us into madness. Suzuki was seeing that far ahead.

Not long after the Second World War, Suzuki wrote an essay entitled “Maō no sengen” 魔王の宣言 (Proclamation of the Demon King).⁴⁰ It is for Suzuki

⁴⁰ This essay appeared in Suzuki 1946.

an unusual piece, a story written from the perspective of the Demon King, who, satisfied for the time being after having instigated World War II and encouraged people to slaughter each other and lay waste to the earth they live upon, lays plans for the final destruction of humanity. He hits upon the idea of miniaturizing the nuclear bomb as a perfect way to realize this goal and assure his final victory. Delighted, he says to himself, "Soon nuclear weapons will be like toys. Then, I'll call together my followers and we'll sing the song of our victory over human beings." After a while, however, he grows uneasy, wondering if people might not experience a spiritual awakening and forsake war, a development that would mean defeat for the Demon King. He thereupon resolves to marshal all his demonic powers to resist his "unseen opponent, his greatest enemy," the Great Compassion that emanates from spiritual realization.

Thus, we have Suzuki, a mere year after World War II ended with Japan's unconditional surrender following the atom bombing of two of its cities, writing about the miniaturization of nuclear weapons. Here, too, we see his almost frightening powers of insight. At a time when the trend was toward the production of larger bombs, resulting finally in the development of the hydrogen bomb, Suzuki foresaw the possibility of miniaturized bombs and the dangers they held for the destruction of humankind. And for that reason, throughout his remaining years Suzuki promoted the spiritual realization that was the greatest fear of the Demon King. Nowadays, over a half-century from the end of World War II, the miniaturization of nuclear weapons is a critical issue and war an ongoing problem despite unending calls for peace. As research on miniature nuclear weapons continues under the rationale that they have tactical battlefield use, fears grow that these weapons could fall into the hands of terrorists.

According to his secretary, Mihoko Okamura, Suzuki commented that "to stop war, five minutes is enough." That is, if the political leaders of a nation, figures influential with the public, or the citizenry would just decide not to wage war, then war would disappear. Or, to state it the other way around, war will *not* disappear unless such a decision is made. Objectively speaking, it is not the case that confrontations between nations or ethnic groups (often religiously defined ethnic groups) will inevitably lead to war, regardless of how serious the confrontations might be. The path of compromise through negotiation is always open; war only results when the parties break off talks and attempt to settle the conflict through military force. The resort to arms is usually done in the name of God or of justice, but what is actually at work is the

self-centeredness of the national or ethnic leaders. Often a kind of “docking” takes place between the individual ego of the leader and the collective ego of the citizenry or ethnic group, and when this occurs the will to avoid warfare disappears. Based on humanity’s age-old acceptance of warfare and its conviction that sometimes combat is justified, the ego under certain social and historical conditions gives rise to an actual *desire* to go to war.

The reason why war repeatedly breaks out despite the ever-present potential for the peaceful resolution of even the most serious of conflicts is that one or more of the parties involved actively wants war. That desire, in turn, is driven by self-will. War is often attributed to confrontations between nations, ethnic groups, or religions, but such confrontations—although they may provide a trigger for war—do not in themselves constitute the *cause* of war. The true cause lies in the self-will that seeks to advance itself by suppressing opposition through military force. War is not a historical necessity. If the leaders would, for the sake of the world and the sake of humanity, restrain their self-will (if they would, in other words, come to a spiritual realization), then the potential exists to end all war. The importance of doing so must be emphasized for as long as there are leaders in the world willing to resort to military force.

This, of course, brings up the question of Suzuki’s own behavior with regard to war. There is at present much unfounded criticism of Suzuki’s thought and behavior during the wars that Japan was involved in while he was alive, particularly the Pacific War of December 1941 to August 1945. In the years that I knew Suzuki, his stance was consistently antiwar, and I would like here to cite several incidents indicating that, during the Pacific War, his position was the same.

At the time when war broke out between the two nations, Suzuki was a professor at Otani University in Kyoto. At a faculty meeting immediately after the start of hostilities, Suzuki is reported to have commented, “This means the destruction of Japan. And the ones who are bringing this destruction upon it are the militarists and [State] Shinto.” At these words a tense, unsettled feeling filled the room, according to Kitanishi Hiromu 北西弘 (1925–), an Otani professor of history who was present there.⁴¹ Suzuki, with his years of residence in America, was well aware of America’s strength as a nation and felt compelled to inform his university colleagues of the danger of Japan’s position, though he must have known what the consequences would have been if

⁴¹ Kitanishi 2006.

his statement had come to the attention of the government authorities. He was, in effect, urging the other faculty members to look ahead to the end of the war, and prepare themselves to endure until then.

Suzuki's attitude toward his students was the same. As the war continued, student deferments were eventually halted, and many young men from the universities were conscripted and sent to the battlefields. Otani held a sending-off gathering for the university's departing students, with Suzuki chosen to give the address. As he stood at the podium, he was silent for a time, perhaps at a loss for words to say to the young men about to depart for the fields of death. His silence must have impressed a sense of gravity upon the students. Finally, he began to speak, saying, "How tragically unfortunate this is. What possible reason do young Americans and young Japanese have to kill each other? How long will this absurd war go on? But someday it will come to an end. When it does, it will be the job of you young people to create a new world and a new age. So you must not die during this war. You must come back alive, even if that means being taken prisoners of war."

Suzuki's address, so different from the war-promoting speeches that were customary at such gatherings, deeply affected not only the newly conscripted students but also everyone else present. His words are still remembered today. Suzuki's talk as quoted above was recorded by Hino Kenshi 日野賢之, a temple priest whose father, a former Otani student present at the gathering, repeated Suzuki's statement "on numerous occasions." Many other former students recall Suzuki's words in almost exactly the same way.

It was not simply because of his opposition to the war that Suzuki was able to address the students in this manner. Nor was it simply because he possessed the courage to oppose the ruling military authorities. It was due, more fundamentally, to Suzuki's spiritual realization, from which his words emerged naturally in a manner appropriate to the occasion. There was about Suzuki something that directly impressed upon those who came into contact with him a clear sense of the truth and integrity of being truly human. This was the case whether before, during, or after the war, and held equally for both Japanese and Westerner.

One day in September 1946, a little over a year after Japan's defeat in the war, four Englishmen called upon Suzuki. The signs of wartime destruction were everywhere around them as they made their way from Tokyo to Suzuki's home in Kita-Kamakura 北鎌倉. For these Englishmen, every one of whom was in Japan for some reason connected with the war, the visit was not a simple outing or cultural excursion. Each of them had long been interested in

Suzuki's English writings on Zen and was making the trip to meet the man himself. One of them was R. H. Blyth (1898–1964), who had first come into contact with Suzuki after moving to Japan in the late 1930s and was deeply impressed with both his character and his Zen teachings. Blyth wrote a well-known series of books on subjects like *haiku* and Zen, all of which were dedicated to Suzuki as an expression of his unending respect. Another of Suzuki's guests that day was Christmas Humphreys (1901–1983), a British barrister and the founder of the Buddhist Society in London, who was in Japan at that time in connection with the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal. Humphreys, who had first met Suzuki in London in 1936, devoted himself to the republication of Suzuki's English works following his departure from Japan.

A photograph taken on the occasion shows the English visitors standing together with Suzuki—a group of men brought together around the person and presence of Suzuki, in search of something transcendent in the midst of a world of constant change and turmoil. This gathering of like-minded men from the opposite sides of the earth brings to mind one of Suzuki's favorite expressions, "The world is my home."⁴² Suzuki, his feet set firmly on the ground and his thin frame free of excess weight, radiates a quiet feeling of kindness and spirituality that seems to connect those around him in gentle bonds of tranquility, peace, and trust.

Suzuki was a man who lived his life as a person fully engaged in the world. His true legacy, even more than the enormous body of Japanese and English writings that he left behind, was his very presence as a human being. This presence was conveyed not merely through his actions—his standing, his walking, his sitting—but more importantly through a special feeling or atmosphere that seemed to surround him. This existential quality has been commented upon by many who met him, and I would like, by way of conclusion, to present the testimonies of two people who were affected by Suzuki in this way.

In the summer of 1936, Suzuki attended the World Congress of Faiths, held in London. The organizer, the famous British explorer and spiritualist Sir Francis Younghusband (1863–1942), wrote as follows upon the "captivating" Dr. Suzuki:

⁴² *Translator's note*: This is part of a phrase, "To do good is my religion / The world is my home," that Suzuki often used when writing pieces of calligraphy. Although the source is uncertain, there is a poem by Walter Malone (1866–1915) entitled "The World Is My Home," and a famous quote from Thomas Paine (1737–1809) that says, "My country is the world, and my religion to do good." *Rights of Man*, Chapter 5.

There must have been about the Buddha some subtle, elusive quality . . . [a] charm which must surely have captivated those who knew him in his lifetime. May I give an example of what I mean? A Japanese Buddhist, Susuki [*sic*], attended the World Congress of Faiths in London 1936. He delivered an excellent address. But it was not the address which impressed the Congress; it was himself. It was the charm of his personality which captivated his audiences. He had studied the teachings of Buddha. He had taught the teachings of Buddha. But he had gone much further than this. He had saturated his whole life with the teachings of Buddha and in his own way he expressed those teachings so that everyone who saw or heard him was drawn to him and disposed toward Buddhism.⁴³

Younghusband was this deeply moved by Suzuki on this first encounter between the two men, even though in 1936 Suzuki was not yet the internationally well-known figure that he was from the 1950s. The “excellent” talk Suzuki delivered was amplified, in Younghusband’s eyes, by Suzuki’s very physical movements like walking to and speaking at the podium. This physical presence, “saturated . . . with the teachings of Buddha,” was in fact an existential testimony that was superior to the teachings themselves, and was able to express the teachings in a direct and vital manner. Christmas Humphreys and the young Alan Watts (1915–1973) were two other attendees at the Congress who were profoundly impressed by Suzuki, and were later to work in close association with him.

In his final years, Suzuki made the acquaintance of the Trappist monk, theologian, and poet Thomas Merton (1915–1968), “the greatest twentieth-century spiritual writer that America has produced,” according to the Jesuit priest and Zen historian Heinrich Dumoulin (1905–1995). Merton, an avid reader of Suzuki’s books, had started a correspondence with him and collaborated on a short dialogue published as “Wisdom in Emptiness.”⁴⁴ Suzuki sensed a kindred spirit in Merton, and therefore traveled to New York in June 1964, just prior to the Fourth East-West Philosophers’ Conference at the University of Hawai‘i, especially to meet the monk. Merton, then Master of Novices at the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky, received special permission to leave the monastery for the occasion. Later, he wrote:

⁴³ Younghusband 1951, p. xii.

⁴⁴ Merton 1968, pp. 99–138.

UEDA: OUTWARDLY, BE OPEN; INWARDLY, BE DEEP

One had to meet this man in order to fully appreciate him. He seemed to me to embody all the indefinable qualities of the “Superior Man” of the ancient Asian, Daoist, Confucian, and Buddhist traditions. Or rather in meeting him one seemed to meet that “True man of No Title” that . . . the Zen Masters speak of. And of course this is the man one really wants to meet. Who else is there? In meeting Dr. Suzuki and drinking a cup of tea with him I felt I had met this one man. It was like finally arriving at one’s own home.⁴⁵

Suzuki and Merton spent two days together in quiet brotherhood, with no words necessary to communicate their deepest thoughts. This was the only meeting between the two men, but for both the encounter transcended the limits of time. Two years later Suzuki passed away, drifting off like a fragrant breeze with the words, “No, nothing, thank you,” but his presence is with us still.

(Translated by Thomas Kirchner)

⁴⁵ Abe 1986, p. 122.

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