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Conversations with D. T. Suzuki

PART II

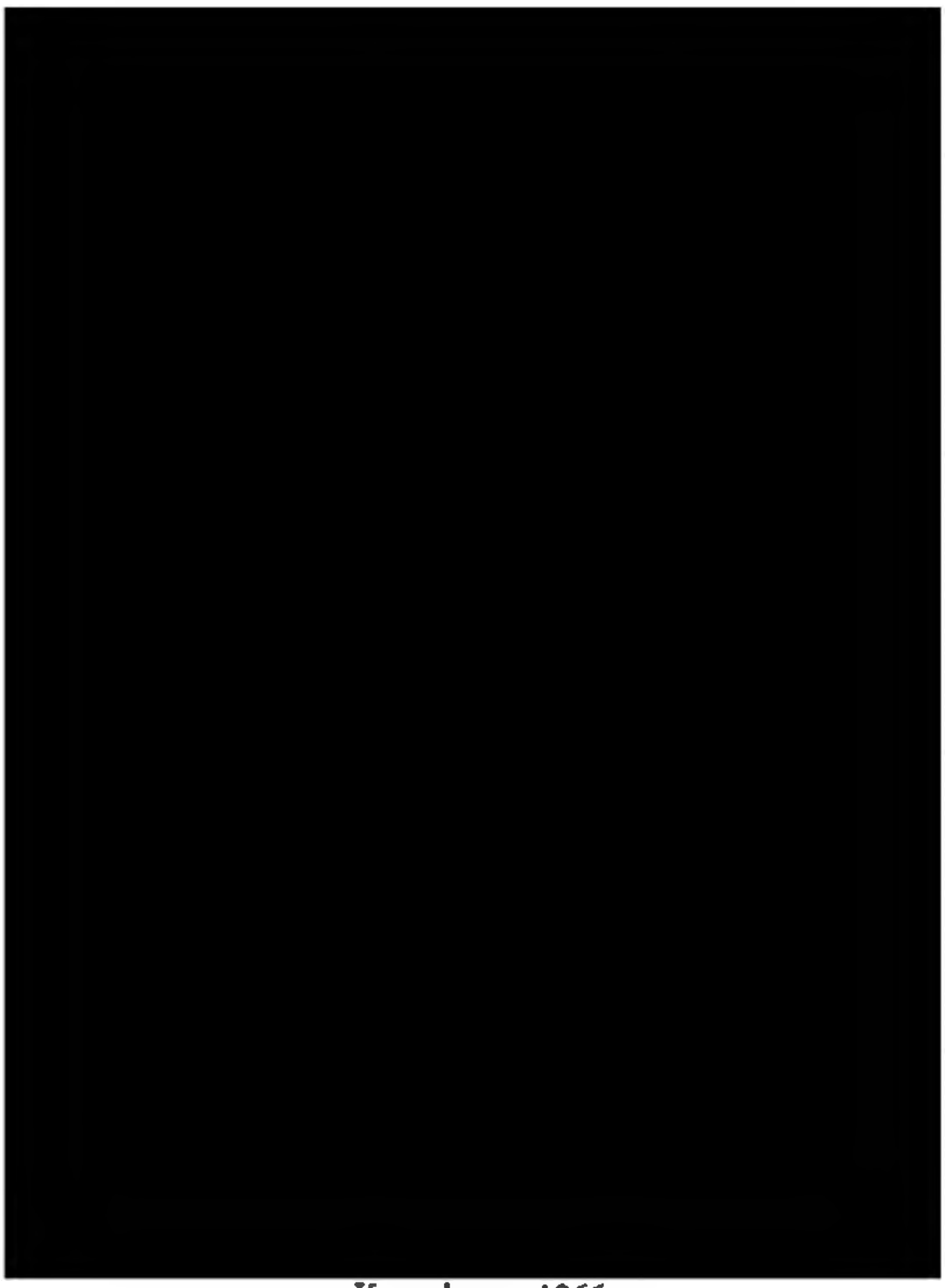
D. T. SUZUKI AND WINSTON L. KING

Dialogue 2

The projected second conversation did not take place that fall, indeed not till the next spring (March 23, 1966), because of a period of illness on Dr. Suzuki's part. On this occasion we were accompanied by Miss Kudō Sumiko, Dr. Suzuki's "secretary at a distance" so to speak, who often helped him with research and other matters connected with his writing.

We arrived at about three in the afternoon—the best time of the day for him, Miss Okamura had told us—in Kita-Kamakura, a few miles from the famous Kamakura Buddha image and about an hour by train from Tokyo. Dr. Suzuki's house was on a hill, a hundred steps from the temple grounds just below—a hundred steps that he often climbed up and down himself. The temple grounds in turn were about a five-minute walk from this station. (The tape records an occasional train whistle, as well as the old fashioned clock's stroke of four, that afternoon.)

King: When we were talking in Karuizawa at our last meeting, I brought up the subject of transcendence in Christianity and Buddhism. You remarked then that it was a big subject and would take quite some time. So I'll start off with that now. This troublesome term "transcendence" is used whenever we talk of religions of whatever sort. Therefore, I want to ask a *double* question: In Buddhism how is "transcendence" defined? *What* is transcendent; and *to* what does one "transcend"?



Kamakura, 1966

Suzuki: When we talk about transcendence, or about "transcending" something, we create a new opposition. So by transcending "this," another something is created. In Buddhism, especially in Zen, "transcending" is not to go out of this thing, but to be in it and yet not in it.

So when we *talk* about "to be" or "not to be," they are opposed. But for this opposition to be transcended in Buddhism means that they are unified.

King: Is there any point in trying to describe this new state of unification?

Suzuki: Yes, "This." To *describe* this state, *that* is opposition. It is one, but yet not one. It is simply "this."

King: Just *this?*

Suzuki: Yes.

King: In this sense then, anything we call "transcendent" might include what is transcended.

Suzuki: But you see when you say "include," the problem is, if it's *this* it's not *that*. When we say that God "created" the world, then God is always standing outside the world. Sometimes we may say in a pantheistic manner, that God is *in* the things that he created. But that is not it. We can say both in, and also out. When we Buddhists talk about God, we would say that God is *not* in these things, but at the same time God *is* in these things. But more than that, God *is* these things.

If I say that this hand is God, yes, God is all those things which he created. If creation and God are identified then we can say that everything created by God is *God*. But it is not that. A hand is a hand. A hand is a created thing. But at the same time it is God. Then how do you describe *that state?*

King: That's what I'm asking *you*. (*Laughter*) How can the particular thing (like a hand, or an individual being, or any particular object) maintain its own *integrity* as a distinct thing if it is not to be distinguished *fundamentally* from Suchness or Emptiness[7], or God?

Suzuki: But that is the trouble. When we say "Suchness" we think that there is "something" here. And when there is "Emptiness" this is all gone, you might think. Then when the hand is God, the hand is a hand, and God is God; the hand is not included in the Godness of things. The hand is a hand, standing by itself individually. But this individuality *itself* is God—in a sense, universality. Therefore, we can't say: "This is a hand" without particularizing this hand as distinguished from other things. Just "this." So that to understand "this" you have to *become* the hand itself. The hand "does this." But when we are "doing this," we are thinking, "The hand is moving, the hand is doing something." Well, that is wrong. Just "this." Just "this."

King: In such a situation how can *any* distinctions or choices be

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[7] Emptiness of the Void (*Śūnyatā*) is a term used by Mahāyāna Buddhism to indicate the Absolute Reality, beyond all characterizing attributes or descriptive adjectives.

made? I know that from the viewpoint of enlightenment, differences, at least in the ordinary sense, do not pertain. But in the practical life where one has to deal with particulars, how then, if one says, God or Suchness equally is the cup of tea, or to use your illustration, when Eckhart says a flea is equally as much God as I, how can we make the value distinctions we must necessarily make? How does Buddhism guide us here?

Suzuki: That is the trouble. When we appeal to words, and we have nothing but words, that difficulty comes out. That is how (by words) one thing, distinguished as a particular, becomes an entity or such as it is. Therefore, you want to be a hand, and to move (with) the hand. And then we say "move with the hand," "become the hand," "I am in the hand and move." No, not that way. In moving the hand the whole world moves. "Just this."

King: But how does this give me any guidance as to which way I should move that hand, or what I should do with that moving hand?

Suzuki: As long as you are looking from the outside this can never be solved. So we say "be the hand, become the hand." Even when you say "become"—it is not that. That presupposes two things. "Just this." When you see here the pine tree growing, just be the pine tree. Don't say "I am a pine tree, and I am growing like a pine tree in its Suchness." Just be a pine tree. Its growing is just flowers blooming and sticking out and when it rains it's all drenched in the rain.

King: But again: My problem here is that this state you describe is of that awareness which comes to the enlightened person. For most of us who have not yet arrived there, we still need some practical guidance for deciding what is good or bad, or better or worse.

Suzuki: Yesterday we were talking about the same subject. We are to become aware of it. Jung talks about the collective unconscious. I'd like to go beyond that, to the cosmic unconscious we might say. Something comes out of that cosmic unconscious, and opens up, unfolds in our ordinary mind as it is called, and then we realize what it is.

King: You say "something comes from the cosmic unconscious"—and I think that I quite agree with you in not finding Jung's "collective unconscious" quite satisfactory. I think Jung still remains too much on the merely psychological level. Now this something that comes from the cosmic unconscious into our ordinary awareness, is this in any

sense like what the Christian means by "grace," which comes not of his asking or doing, but is present in his very living, in the life that surrounds him?

Suzuki: Something like that. In this case what shall we say? In Christianity, we say it is due to God and grace, when that awareness comes to us. So we have to wait for God, till he is in a favorable mood, then he will reveal it to us.

When we say that, however, *that* awareness is not on the same plane as our ordinary sensations or awareness or logical discourses move on. It is something coming out, but that "outside" is only one's way of describing it. But when Eckhart says that God's isness is my isness—well, I once talked with Tillich about that identification. He talked so much about "participation." But participation is not enough. It is *identity*. When we "participate," sympathy goes out my mind and transplants itself into the object of my sympathy. I say that "participation" never takes place, could never take place, unless there is something in the object which is the same as myself. That is why I can "participate." When I participate with, or in any object, the object also participates in me. So the participation is not (really) participation, it is *identity*. And when you are aware of *that,* you have it, you have enlightenment.

King: But this would *not* be the identity of the obliteration of all difference?

Suzuki: No. My object of sympathy remains there. And yet when that takes place there is just one, there are not two.

King: Then I presume that you would find Dr. Tillich's language about symbols somewhat unsatisfactory, because he likes to say that the symbol "participates" in the reality which is beyond it. Someone said to me that when Dr. Tillich went to see the stone-garden at Ryōan-ji (in Kyoto),[8] he said: "These stones are a *symbol* of the world." And, said my friend, "That showed that he was not a Zen Buddhist, because for the Zen Buddhist, to meditate upon these stones, to put oneself in rapport with them, that *is* reality, that *is* the world." But Dr. Tillich remained at one remove, in saying that they were a symbol *of* the world, with a remaining duality.

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[8] World-famous Zen garden with its fifteen stones set asymmetrically in a raked gravel enclosure.

Suzuki: Duality always remains (in such a case); the symbol and that which is symbolized. There are always two. When I see the stone, I am the stone, there is no word, no I, no stone. Just identity itself.

King: Is the stone "you," then, also?

Suzuki: Yes. So it's not symbolization. The stone participates with *me* or in *me*. So I heard, when I was talking with that stone garden master—the temple-master—about a visitor, I forget the name . . . She said, that when she sees this stone, she feels that the stone is alive. When one can say that, then *I* say, "Something at the back of his awareness is alive."

Okamura: You mean the lady from Kyoto who said the stones have "illnesses," like people.

Suzuki: No, breathing. The stones are breathing.

Okamura: I thought she said that the stones have "illnesses," they can become sick.

Suzuki: (*Laughing*) Well, I don't know whether the stone breathes, or the stone is sick, it doesn't matter. There was something at the back of the mind which made her say that, even though she is not aware of it. But Zen wants to have *everyone* of us aware of that something. Awareness does not stick to something outside of yourself. "Just this."

King: This would mean then, that strictly speaking, you have no "symbols" in Zen, at least in Tillich's sense. If it isn't "reality" then it isn't a symbol either. "Symbol" is a half-way term that is unsatisfactory.

Suzuki: No symbols. It's a *stone* there.

King: What is the function then of the many rituals, I might say "symbols," that are found in Zen temples? Do they have any *real* relation to the heart of Zen, in your view?

Suzuki: When Zen expresses itself to this world of particulars, symbolization may take place. We have to make distinctions. When we make distinctions, it is not definitely bad; but when we talk about *Zen itself* before it becomes symbolization, something is moving and this moving is to be caught, taken hold of.

But for instance in Zen ceremonies we have what we call *segaki,* when all the hungry ghosts are fed. When that ceremony takes place we have a pile of rice. We are all eating it but (at the same time) we are giving it to the hungry ghosts. The hungry ghosts are supposed to take

part in the feast. But that in a way is a symbolization, because we are *all* hungry ghosts. And since all the hungry ghosts are coming there, it becomes by symbolization a kind of objectivist "prayer."

That is to say, generally when we pray we have some object we wish to attain by that praying; by the grace of God, somehow (our prayer should have) a consequence. But there is one kind of prayer which has no object coming out of it, but which is simply prayer. "Eternal prayer" we might call it, prayer which never comes to fruition, which has no result whatever. That (kind of) prayer is in this hungry-ghost-symbolizing ceremony.

King: As I read what you and others have said of "Emptiness" and "Suchness" my impression is that these terms are used to indicate complete freedom from any sort of limitation, restriction, or constraint that conceptualization would place upon reality. Now I am interested here to know whether this has any relation to what Alfred North Whitehead used to call the "antecedent" nature of God. The "antecedent" nature of God was pure potentiality, it was infinite. Everything, anything *could* be. Then, Dr. Whitehead went on to say, when potentiality becomes actualized in the world of form, it is *limited*. By taking one actual form, other actual forms are impossible for it. It has taken on a definite character.

And he suggested that there is a kind of current, or momentum, in the world order, which makes a reversal back to the original state, so to speak, impossible. Once gone in *this* direction, reality cannot retrace its path. Now my impression is, and perhaps it is wrong, that Buddhism seeks to keep *both* potentiality and actuality together; to say that actuality has infinite potentiality and is not limited in Whitehead's sense in having fewer and fewer possibilities open.

Suzuki: In that case, though, we can say that potentiality is actuality, Zen especially doesn't like to explain it that way. This is left to theology. Then in order to have this potentiality and actuality, when we have this objectless prayer, that prayer is already coming to its fruition. This *is* actuality. But as to potentiality, when we make this objectless prayer, that is pure and simple potentiality. Yet that potentiality *itself* is actuality.

I often say zero equals infinity. Well, zero implies infinity and infinity is zero itself. Well, infinity is actuality, we might say, and zero is potentiality—nothing coming into form, nothing there, but that

(nothing) *contains* all kinds of infinities. Therefore that is not just emptiness, it is (also) fullness. Therefore the objectless prayer itself is actuality.

King: To that extent would you perhaps agree with Sōtō Zen[9] when it says that the act of meditation itself is the achievement in us of the Buddha-nature?

Suzuki: Yes.

King: I wanted to ask a further question about the term "pure experience," as it is used in Buddhism. You have used it sometimes, I believe, and I heard Dr. Nishitani Keiji[10] use the term in a seminar. What I am asking here, is this: How is the "pure experience" of a child before it reaches the age of conceptualization, or perhaps that of an animal, or perhaps direct sense impressions which have not been conceptualized, different from the "pure experience" of enlightenment? What is added in enlightenment?

Suzuki: I don't know exactly what William James meant by "pure experience" but if I could have a chance to talk with him now this would be the pure experience, the act itself. When a cat is eating food it does not ask whether the food is good or if another cat is eating. It does not make any comparisons, it just goes on eating until it is finished. When it is finished it does not ask for any more but goes away and takes a nap.

Now this pure experience is the act itself. But human beings' "experiencing" is not real experiencing. We separate the act from experience itself, and see whether it is a "pleasant" thing. This is only the mere liking to have it, too, therefore "let others participate in our pleasure itself," and so forth. That is not pure experience. Pure experience is that I just do this. This is pure experience, absolute experience we might say.

King: Then does this mean that one must go back in life to the childhood level?

Suzuki: Exactly. That is what Christ said: Be childlike and go to heaven. Confucius and Chinese Taoists all said to be like children.

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[9] Sōtō Zen is a non-koan school of Zen, contrasted to Rinzai Zen which uses the enigmatic koan word of the meditation master to meditate upon and solve.

[10] Dr. Nishitani Keiji, noted Zen philosopher, professor emeritus of Kyoto University.

But to be "like children," to remain animal-like or childlike is not enough. Intellect must develop. *Then,* one goes back to a childlike state. Not to become a child simply, but a child with all its intellectual possibilities fully developed and yet childlike too. So Confucius said when he was 70, "Well, I am 70 now, and I do anything I like and yet I don't go beyond the limits (of Heaven's decrees)."

And another thing: Japanese Buddhists say: "Be dead, (even) when you are alive and do whatever you like, and that will be all right." Be dead, thoroughly dead to all but experience, dead to all other things. Absolutely this, that's all right. That's childlike.

King: You say one should not go back and be a "mere" child, and he cannot be a mere animal.

Suzuki: That will never do.

King: How then is the work that the intellect has done in the meantime included in *satori*[11]? How does it enrich satori?

Suzuki: We can say the child was childlike, or animal-like. The child by developing all the intellectual powers in his possession, and by virtue of full development returns to this (childlike state). So going back to this state *after* this (intellectual development) is not the same (as mere childlikeness). If you become a child and ignore all this, you are not a "human being," human beings are unchildlike, unanimal-like; they use *all* their intellectual powers.

Intellectual powers do not come into collision with this principle of satori itself. Satori is running underneath all these experiences which lead up to childlikeness. That is something very difficult to understand.

Therefore, be dead, thoroughly dead, even when alive. That means alive even though all those intellectual powers are dead. Kill them all and come back to the childlike state and leave off this intellectual life. Then you are what you ought to be.

King: Does the condition of a person, intent on what he is doing, so thoroughly intent that he forgets time and space, or that he is John Smith or Henry Jones, or that he is studying "history," or "archeology," or "painting," or what have you, when he becomes unaware of anything going on around him, does *this* have any of the quality of this direct childlike experience?

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[11] Japanese term for enlightenment.

Suzuki: Psychologically I think it has. I know a friend who is a mathematician. When he has a mathematical problem he forgets everything else, and is absorbed in it. Sometimes it takes a week, sometimes a month, sometimes a year or sometimes many years he says. And when he is thus thoroughly absorbed, one day he awakens and has the answer.

He once asked me whether *that* was satori. And, being a mathematician, how satori comes to one; that is, on the average, in how many weeks or how many days, and other things like that. But I said, "No, satori has nothing to do with time duration. Satori is by itself." So psychologically it may be the same process we go through (in the case you mention) but metaphysically it is not so.

King: Does the subjective knowledge, my own *knowledge* of my boundness, or my situation, free me? This comes again, I suppose, from my background in the West, where we feel that it is not sufficient to be *aware* that one is in a "bound" condition. He must somehow break the actual chain.

Now I would accept it as fact that if one has certain limitations and *recognizes* them, he transcends them in *some sense,* is "free" from them to a degree. But in a more ultimate way, although I may be aware that I have certain limitations, this does not free me from those limitations in the absolute sense. I am still bound by them in a real sense.

As a man I cannot jump to the moon. I cannot be a genius if I am not born that way. Awareness of these limits frees me from them *emotionally,* and I can live with my limitations without attachment to them, without worry about them. Yet I am not completely master of them.

Suzuki: According to Zen, when my fingers are clasped, my finger and thumb (thus), this is a limitation to my going back and closing (my hand) in some other way. But when *doing* this I am free, I am creative, even in the midst of all the "limitations," all the possible obstructions that I have to "fight with" in ordinary words. When I *think* this out, I can't squeeze this way, and this (other action) is *hard*. But when we just do it, even with all such limitations, we are quite free. This is pure experience.

When this finger is moving this way it is "free"; and when the hand is that way I am "*un*free." This is the objective word. But when doing

this itself I am absolutely free, just as when God said, "Let there be light." The same creativity, the same absolute liberty or freedom is there.

King: This is freedom then within the given nature of things. And the wisdom of Zen is finding out what one's given nature is and not trying to work against the grain, or going against the current.

Suzuki: No, it is not against. There is no such idea. Just this.

King: Are there then *any* dualities left to Buddhism? I know how much has been said in Zen against any dualities in any form at any level.

Suzuki: Yes, I also have the same questions. The dualities are all there. Because of my intellectual development, this is a "finger," this is a "face," this is "you," this is "I" and so on. That you can't deny. They are just as they are.

King: But the question that I wanted to ask is a little different from that perhaps. Let me put it differently: not conceptual duality altogether, but *existential* duality, say between enlightenment and non-enlightenment.

Ordinary experience tells one that there are things like rivers and mountains, separate from himself out there. Then he does some Zen meditation and becomes aware that this is not quite the whole story. But in the end, says Zen, one comes back to realize that rivers are rivers, mountains are mountains, that is that, and I am I.

Now in *between* this beginning of meditation and the end, there may have been a tremendous effort made, a long time of discipline, a re-making of oneself or at least a new realization of one's self. Is there in this sense any *existential* duality between the unenlightened person and the enlightened one? We may say that they are ultimately the same, i.e., the unenlightened have the Buddha-nature too, but one has to get from the "one" to the "other" somehow.

Suzuki: Well, this is it. When we reach the childlike life, with our grown-up experience piling up, and we finally come to enlightenment, when there is enlightenment, all those things have *nothing* to do with it. "Just this." Like God said, "Let there be light." When he said the very word, when he gave that command, all the world was already there. Then our conception of time enters there, and we conceive of things developing from the atom, animals developing from amoeba, and the like. But that is our time-conception inserted into God's "Let

there be light." When that word came out, already the worlds were there, in completeness. But then our time sense enters into it and we are misled, one might say. In pure enlightenment the pure experience is just the first moment. Therefore everything is there.

King: So when one comes to enlightenment he is then aware that "I was already there but didn't know it."

Suzuki: Yes. Yes.

I often say it this way: We were ejected from Eden because we came to have the knowledge of good and evil. But Eden, according to me, was an animal world. So we were not ejected, we intellectually developed, and we are now going on (in) this world.

But (we are told) "Paradise," this animal Eden-world, is to be gained again. Paradise *re*gained. Paradise in my way (of thinking) is not needed. We are right here, *this* is Paradise, we are moving in it, we are living it.

King: I had an uncle who grew up in a religious home but had reacted against it. He used to say, as many others have said, that to sit around all day long on a cloud, playing a gold harp, would be infinitely tiresome. He didn't say he wanted to go to hell, but he didn't want to go to heaven at any rate.

Suzuki: That is the most interesting part. But we say it gets so tiresome, it is monotonous. If we're tired of it we must go to hell. (*Laughter*) There it would be more interesting.

King: One more question if I may ask it. In your book on Buddhism and Christian mysticism, in which you deal with Eckhart, I was interested in your description of the two attitudes toward the self which are roughly characteristic of East and West.

You say: The Western is a "perpendicular," aggressive, against, kind of Selfhood; that of the Buddhist East is represented by the horizontal line, implying the infinite and eternal. There is here no sense of opposing one self to another.

You then comment that the West has to crucify *its* self, get rid of its self in a violent sort of way; but that this is not a problem for the East, where the term is more fittingly "enlightenment."

Now the question I want to ask is this: Are there peculiar, special, difficulties which the East has with respect to what we call the "self"? Is there in the assertion that there *is* no self, an *inverted* form of egoism?

I am thinking of a cartoon in which there were two small boys who came from Quaker families. And one said as he cocked his fist belligerently, "*My* father is more humble than *thy* father." Obviously, he was proud because his father was humble. Are there dangers of that sort here in the East? Is the East proud because it has no "self" to be proud of? I repeat: Is there *another* form of egoism here?

Suzuki: Yes, if egoism is understood that way it is dangerous. This is to *deface* ego altogether, then we can't talk about responsibility. And whatever the individual stands for will come to nothingness.

Okamura: But Dr. King means that from the very start you referred to the fact that there is no ego in the East and they use the term "enlightenment." But in the West they have in Christianity the crucifixion which is the symbol of crucifying the ego. In other words, they recognize the ego, therefore they have to crucify it. This is your conception of it.

Suzuki: Yes.

Okamura: Now Dr. King wants to know whether in the East there is difficulty with any *other* forms of ego. Don't you have any problems of the ego in the East?

Suzuki: Yes, just as much as in the West.

Okamura: What *kind?* He wants to know what kind of ego problems?

Suzuki: Oh, I see. Just as much as in the West. (*Laughter*)

King: But different we hope. (*Laughter*)

Suzuki: Yesterday we were talking about the question of challenge. Toynbee talks about challenge. Nature challenges us and we fight with it, we try to control nature. But in this challenge of nature, there is something "evil" to push back. But in the East, China and Japan (I don't know much about other countries), we try to be *in* Nature, we don't try to *challenge* nature. Nature "challenges" us, but even when Nature challenges us, we don't say something in me goes against nature. And even when we "challenge" Nature in a way, instead it (really) is that Nature is created in a way which we consider to "challenge" us.

When we make water go *down,* this is water's *nature.* But sometimes we make water go upwards. But this is not "controlling" water, or putting water under my "subjection"—this (too) is according to Nature, for in nature it runs down this way.

If it were *against* water's nature, water would never go up, this way. Only when this nature is utilized, and we ask this water "Will you go up this way instead of that way?" and somehow by all kinds of devices we can make water go up this way. Even then we are not "controlling" nature, we are in obedience to the law of nature itself.

King: Even when we make water go up?

Suzuki: Yes. Yes. It is the same thing. But the way of looking at it is different.

King: Would this also apply to the encounter of one human being with another?

Suzuki: Yes, in Christianity this "challenge" idea for instance is so very strong, I would say, in the love of enemy (for example). But (even in love) the enemy is there, challenging. Well, in Buddhism, there is no enemy, so what shall I say. (*Laughter*)

Mrs. King: That sounds as if there are no troubles here.

King: If there are no troubles here then Buddhist countries are heaven on earth.

Suzuki: There is trouble here too, yes, . . .

Mrs. King: Surely man has ego problems here too!

Okamura: Mrs. King is not persuaded that there is no ego problem in the East. She won't take your word for it so you'll have to explain.

Suzuki: No explanation is needed.

(*General laughter*)

Dialogue 3

I can no longer recall when and how the third dialogue was arranged. We arrived, my wife and I, on a fine May afternoon (May 15, 1966) when the pink azaleas around Dr. Suzuki's house were in full bloom. Though the dialogue was a little shorter this time than the last, it was as animated, on his part, as before—as though it were a first-time-ever event. Indeed my dominant impression, as I look back on it, is how fully alert he was that afternoon, both in mind and heart.

King: I was interested to note in the last issue of the *Eastern Buddhist* in a review of Dumoulin's *History of Zen Buddhism* you say that years ago you called Zen "mystical," but that you now feel that such a

description was a mistake. You go on to say that there is nothing "mystical" or "hidden" about Zen, because it is direct and plain.

Now I have been used to thinking of "mysticism" as fundamentally an immediate sense of direct experience of reality. It seems to me since the terms "direct or immediate experience of reality" would apply to Zen, that one may call it mystical.

Suzuki: If mysticism is defined as something immediate, without any medium, it's all right; but when it is understood to be something hidden "behind" what we actually see, then Zen is not mysticism. But when you so define it I quite agree with you. If nothing is hidden, everything is plain, everything is open, nothing is behind (appearances), if it all shows out, then in *that* sense Zen is a mysticism, or not a mysticism, *either* will do.

King: Sometimes in *Western* mysticism, and perhaps in mysticism in general, there *is* a sharp line drawn between the mystical state and ordinary consciousness. Sometimes there seems to be a "blotting out" of the sense of individual separateness; one becomes united with the Ultimate Reality in a timeless, distinctionless unity. Then he comes "out" from that state, but that experience of unity is the core of it. Now would that type of awareness be fundamentally different from what you understand Zen satori to be?

Suzuki: Well, my friend, Nishida Kitarō, who is dead now, used this phrase very much: contradiction is absolute identity. That is something a Christian theologian used, is it not, coincidence in opposition?

King: Yes, the coincidence of opposites, *coincidentia oppositorum*.

Suzuki: That is what is apparent, but when we say to "unite with something," to *unite* with something may not be quite right. This something itself, when you realize you *are* that "something" which you thought to be *different* from yourself, higher and superior perhaps; when you go through that experience you find that you are it (i.e., that "something"). That's what Zen emphasizes, and it is manifested everywhere.

My friend had another way of expressing it. I don't know how to translate it into English. It's "Action itself is substance." Substance is not something separate from action. Action is substance and substance is action, which in Zen experience can be called "the action of intuition, the action of perception." Action itself *is* perception.

When we say, "There is something real, something substantial,

something which acts," when it is conceived like that, action is one thing and the actor is another. Action and actor are separated. In such a case there is no Zen. In Zen the act is the actor, and the actor is the act. When *that* is experienced, there is Zen.

King: Is there in Zen, at the same time as this experience of *identity* of actor and action, still an awareness of difference also?

Suzuki: Yes, identity takes place.

King: This was somewhat Bergson's emphasis, that the realization of a situation was after the living act itself.

Suzuki: There is no difference. When you become *aware,* it is already too late, Zen would say. Therefore, while that experience itself is taking place, then you can't *say* anything. When you are aware of it, then that is *after* the experience.

Therefore Zen wants to be quiet, to say nothing. That is agnosticism, in a way. Agnosticism: "I don't know. I can't say. It cannot be expressed."

But to remain silent, that is not good either. Because when "silence" is there, it *too* is something. Therefore, when we experience, we try to express it. But when we *try* to express it, then the expression is separated from the experience itself.

King: A few moments ago I suggested that "mysticism" has a state in which the identity of self and the something else is "blotted out." Now Teresa says that at the moment when the mystic sense of unity reaches its height, all the "faculties are suspended." When he comes back to a more normal type of consciousness, it is still illumined by the memory of the moment of unity. But that moment itself is now past.

My understanding of Zen, however, is that the satori awareness penetrates the most ordinary act. That even though one comes back from it, from unity to diversity, somehow even diversity is then penetrated by unity.

Suzuki: That is a contradiction inherent in human nature. I want to *say* something. But when I say something, that "something" is already gone, it is not there. Yet it is human nature to say something about it. So that is finally, then, how humanity contradicts itself. Kierkegaard says, "Truth itself is subjectivity." That is very fine.

King: And that would be slightly different then from the Teresan mysticism, where there is a separate moment in which differences are blotted out.

Suzuki: Yes, Zen differs from mysticism. In *mystical* experience there is something mystically experienced, that special experience which is something different from all ordinary experiences. But in Zen, *ordinary* experience itself is mystical experience. Thus, when mysticism emphasizes the special features of mystical experience, it is different from Zen.

King: You lived for a good many years in America and talked with a good many people about Zen. What did you find were the main obstacles to understanding Zen? What I'm *really* asking then: If Zen is very specially Japanese (as I think it is), how is it to be disengaged from the Japanese-Eastern-Buddhist pattern and be made meaningful to the West?

Suzuki: I don't think we can say that Zen has a specially Japanese character, or Chinese or Indian. It is everywhere. I would say that Eckhart, for instance, was one of the most prominent Zen men in the West! When I read his sermons, everything he says is Zen. This little German book is about the German mystic Suso, and it is nothing but Zen that this little book contains.

John of the Cross is another. And there is St. Benedict who has this experience of a kind of Zen. And St. Teresa too, to a certain extent. The whole expression is different but otherwise it is the same. So it is universal.

But what I think is this: What is most characteristic of the Western mind, is that it works most wonderfully when things have separated themselves as individuals. That is to say, *after* God created the world. But Zen wants to plunge into the state of Chaos, or undifferentiation, or the altogether undifferentiated, (what existed) even before God said, "Let there be light."

Now where was God before he created the world? To see God when he has not yet created the world—that is where the Eastern mind wants to plunge in. But Christians think there is no need, no necessity, no compulsion to go before[12] that (i.e., the creation). "I am satisfied with the light when it comes out from God's command. Nothing else is needed."

But the Eastern mind wants to know (about what was) before that. Therefore, it says with Christ: "Before Abraham was, I am." This cor-

[12] Not necessarily in a time-space sense.

responds with the koan: "Show me your face before you were born."

Where was my face before I was born? That is a contradiction, absurdity itself. But there was something. Birth, and before birth, when there was no sense of time yet. "When there was no sense of time yet"—that is already wrong. Where time-space—I say time-space together, I like to have them together, instead of time *and* space—has not come into existence. Well, where am I?

That question is itself a contradiction. But that contradiction itself ceases to be a contradiction when you have your satori. And that is not restricted just to the Eastern mind. Everybody can have it.

The Western mind is far more intellectual than the Eastern mind. And the intellect always deals with things separated into individuals, by logic, mathematics, physics, etc. (In all those things) the Western mind far excels the Eastern mind.

But somehow the Eastern mind wants to plunge itself into a state of things which has not yet taken place, actually been created. That is the difference. As far as the "mind" itself is concerned, there is no difference whatever. For instance, Emerson was a Zen man. He must have had it.

King: Then when you extend the Zen quality or satori experience to those who are not necessarily Buddhist, you are suggesting that the particular religious tradition, or one set of names or terms, makes no difference?

Suzuki: No, it can be turned into Zen. One must simply be conscious of it.

Bergson talked of "absentmindedness." This absentmindedness, there is a very fine point about it. We are living as we do nowadays, within restrictions; all kinds of restrictions are surrounding us. When we want to move, "Is this all right, or is this not all right?" Restricted in every possible way. But Bergson says, "Laughter takes place when one forgets those restrictions." "Absentmindedness" he calls it.

So that absentmindedness comes from a source much deeper than those restrictions. Something we might call as Jung does "the collective unconsciousness." But I say the collective unconsciousness is not deep enough, it is psychological; we must go down to the cosmic unconscious, the metaphysical unconscious.

That something comes out, bursts out, (from this unconscious) that I call the "basic fundamental absentmindedness."

King: Basic, fundamental absentmindedness—that's very good!

One more question: In your mind does the contemporary situation in which men are progressively more and more cut off from contact with nature, pose a threat to the achievement of the Zen quality of life? What will take its place?

Suzuki: I didn't hear that very well.

King: I'll repeat it. Does the fact that modern man, who increasingly lives in big cities away from nature and any contact with the natural order of things, where it is very difficult to achieve physical quietness or separation—is this in your view a threat to his ability to achieve a Zen quality of life?

Suzuki: You see we live a very busy life but at the same time, we can find some hours with ourselves. That is to say, if you want to, you can exclude your self from the rest of the people in the morning for half an hour, or an hour in the evening too. And in the weekends, Saturdays and Sundays, when you can be away from the city you can come into contact more intimately with nature. So this Zen way of training the mind, by spending some quiet hours with yourself, that is very fine. That can be done in the West, in the North, and in the East, *anywhere* I think.

Okamura: I think what Dr. King wants to know is whether being exposed to nature is essential in coming to some understanding of Zen. Could we live in apartments in the midst of concrete streets, and still come to some understanding of Zen?

Suzuki: If possible, away from the concrete paved streets. (*Laughter*)

Okamura: But are the trees, and birds, and flowers necessary to Zen?

Suzuki: Even in the middle of the city the *moon* still shines!

We knew in our hearts that we would never see him again, though on parting we did speak gay, confident words about another meeting. (He had said he had work enough to do to last him until he was 100 years old, at least!) Our last view of him as we went down the hill from his house that day to catch our train, was of his slight figure standing at the front entrance beside Miss Okamura, waving us a friendly goodby.

Two months and one week later, on July 12, 1966, Dr. Suzuki died after a very brief illness at the age of ninety-five years and nine months. His ashes were given memorial-service honors on the day before we left Japan.