

BOOK REVIEWS

THE FIELD OF ZEN. By Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki. Ed. by Christmas Humphreys.

The Buddhist Society: London, n.d., 105 pp.

SHIN BUDDHISM. By D.T. Suzuki. Harper & Row: New York, 1970, 96 pp.

The Well of Awareness

MY title comes from page 70 of the first of these books by Dr. Suzuki, *The Field of Zen*. Edited with Foreword by Christmas Humphreys, it is published in hardcover by The Buddhist Society and in paperback by Harper & Row (New York: Perennial Library, 1969, 105 pp.). The other book under review is *Shin Buddhism*. Throughout their author's lifetime his name in the English-speaking world was so nearly synonymous with "Zen Buddhism" that it is fortunate to have one of these two posthumous volumes move, as did several published during his lifetime, outside Zen proper. This way they give us, together, the measure of the man: a man who, having tunnelled deeply in his own tradition, emerged on vistas that disclosed in other traditions—Shin, Mahayana Buddhism generally, Christianity—unmistakable profundities, but ones that discernibly bore the marks of the Zen angle from which he spotted them. I shall begin (after positioning the books as books) with the Zen perspective itself, and then proceed to the way Shin looks from that perspective.

The Field of Zen is a memorial to its author compiled by the Buddhist Society of London from transcribed talks he delivered to it and articles that appeared in its journal *The Middle Way* between 1953 and 1964. Christmas Humphreys' obituary in *The Times* at Dr. Suzuki's death provides an appropriate preface to the book; Dr. Suzuki's own first essay follows it as a natural companion-piece. Titled "Early Memories," the latter casts its eye over the life as seen from within, concentrating on early influences. Both essays are moving, and present life-summaries not readily accessible in print. The remaining fourteen essays range over a variety of Zen-related topics held together, as I shall indicate, by a discernible framework. The other book, *Shin Buddhism*, consists of five lectures Dr. Suzuki gave in the spring of 1958 under the auspices of the New York Buddhist Church.

THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

I begin with *The Field of Zen*. Even before opening the book one admires its title. "Field" is the perfect word, both because Zen (grounded in Buddhist co-dependent origination and Mahayana's *sunyata*) is emphatically a 'field theory,' and because the word in its 'field and stream' sense connotes the natural world which Zen so transparently loves. On getting into the book one finds no surprises; one would not expect to, all the essays having appeared in print previously. What exceeds expectation is the coherence with which Dr. Suzuki's overview emerges from what is, in form, a miscellany. In my understanding of it, and my own words, this overview is as follows: Zen is both method and goal, both aimed at transcending dualism. The dualism to be transcended can be conceived in two ways. Conceived logically the dualities are retained in their transcendence; the transcending act turns them into polarities that blend like *yin* and *yang* in the circle that encompasses them. Chronologically the dualities appear as penultimate; they are the dichotomies that precede the transcendence which, again without obliterating them, transmutes them into different guise. Between the first and last conditions there stands, logically and often chronologically as well, a middle condition—examined in some detail by Arthur Koestler in *The Invisible Writing* and *The Act of Creation*—in which the dualities vanish altogether. But this is way-point only; the dualities must return in fused polarity. "Immanence and at the same time Transcendence. . . . Constant communion and at the same time constant differentiation. There are two things, and at the same time one thing. Two are not two, two are one, one is two" (p. 16).

Dr. Suzuki plays this basic paradigm—(a) *dualism*, superseded by (b) *undifferentiated unity*, superseded in turn by (c) *fused polarities*—across a wide board which can be diagrammed as follows:

	1. <i>Christianity</i>	2. <i>Asia</i>	3. <i>Buddhist experiences</i>	4. <i>Buddhist attributes</i>	5. <i>Pure Land Buddhism</i>	6. <i>Zen Buddhism</i>	
a. <i>Dualism</i>	D (The Fall)	U	A	L	I	S	M
b. <i>Undifferentiated unity</i>	Godhead	South Asia: India	Samadhi	Dhyana	Honen	Soto	
c. <i>Fused polarities</i>	Creation	East Asia: China & Japan	Satori	Prajna	Shinran	Rinzai	

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Elucidation and comments on this schematization:

1. *Christianity*. Chronologically the Christian column should read “Godhead—Creation—The Fall,” but to make it fit with the other (Asian) columns I had to distort this sequence. The discrepancy arises because Dr. Suzuki approaches his Asian material historically or psychologically (from man’s side) and Christianity ontologically (from God’s side, so to speak). Creation adds to the Godhead by providing the tincture of differentiation needed for full self-knowledge. “Godhead [involves] the kind of knowledge which exists before subject and object come up” (p. 69). “For God to know Himself He must negate Himself, and His negation comes in the form of the creation of the world” (p. 15).

2. *Asia*. “Going through [the world of becoming] is something that never changes. The Indians . . . indulged too much in the . . . static side. . . . The Chinese practical mind sees [that] the ‘becoming’ aspect is not neglected. To see being in becoming and becoming in being, that is enlightenment” (p. 19).

Again: “The Indian way of thinking is to be immersed in . . . sameness. . . . Indians think of . . . uniformity as something separate from the endless waves of consciousness. . . . The Buddha’s [read ‘East Asian’] way of thinking is that this sameness is no more, no less, than the infinite series of consciousness-waves. Sameness . . . is not separate from the manifoldness of the waves” (p. 75).

Though India’s *tantras* and certain other formulations of *advaita* keep the contrast here from being categorical, Dr. Suzuki is safe, I think, in seeing at least a difference in emphasis between South and East Asian spirituality. Documentation is available from many quarters, a useful summarizing essay being Wing-tsit Chan’s “Transformation of Buddhism in China,” *Philosophy East and West* (VII, 3 and 4, 1957–1958).

3. *Buddhist Experiences*. “Consciousness [sinking] back into itself . . . is . . . *samadhi*, . . . psychologically a complete state of unconsciousness” (p. 17), elsewhere characterized as total “unification of consciousness” (p. 25). “Satori consists in not staying in . . . oneness, but in awakening from it and being just about to divide itself into subject and object. Satori is the staying in oneness and yet rising from it and dividing itself into subject-object. . . . The oneness dividing itself into subject-object and yet retaining its oneness at the very moment that there is the awakening of a consciousness—this is satori” (p. 24).

“Satori” is used by other Zennists to denote undifferentiated as well as differentiated unity—Stace’s introverted as well as extroverted mysticism—but

Dr. Suzuki is entitled to his usage which, in these volumes at any rate, he employs consistently.

4. *Buddhist Attributes*. "The aim of dhyana is to attain a quiet, tranquilised equilibrium which is called *samadhi*. . . . Samadhi corresponds to a state of trance; nothing comes out of this evenness of consciousness. . . . Prajna . . . awaken[s] from the torpidity of *dhyana*. . . . Prajna is awakened consciousness" (p. 97). This is the way the author usually distinguishes between *dhyana* and *prajna*, but the distinction is not always consistently maintained. On page 69, for example, we find that in "prajna-knowledge . . . the Godhead has not turned itself into the God-Creator." This links prajna to the middle position in Dr. Suzuki's sequence, to undifferentiated unity rather than terminal, fused polarity.

5. *Pure Land Buddhism*. "The Honen School . . . repeats . . . Nembutsu . . . many times. . . . When rhythmic . . . sound is repeated, consciousness attains a state of uniformity or sameness or equilibrium. . . . Shinran . . . emphasized saying [Nembutsu] just once. [He] thought that . . . when uniformity is reached, from this very last Nembutsu the awakening of something comes out of this uniformity. . . . Uniformity must break and this breaking comes when the last Nembutsu is realised" (pp. 73-74).

6. *Zen Buddhism*. The author is, appropriately, less categorical in fixing his typology on the main branches of Zen, but he tends to pair Soto with *dhyana* and Honen, and Rinzai with *prajna* and Shinran. "Two schools . . . developed in Zen. The first emphasized Dhyana; the other Prajna. The first is known as the Soto school and the other as Rinzai" (p. 95).

This is the conceptual framework. Beyond it language either retires, having gone as far as it is able—one function of the oft-invoked "Have a cup of tea!" is to lay it to rest—or, alternatively, language is used in atypical, incongruous ways. Chapter 4, titled "Mondo," remarks on these ways, with examples. It shows language working obliquely, in ways inviting comparison with Kierkegaard's indirect communication and John Austin's speech-acts. In either case, "absolute emptiness is beyond all conception" (p. 59). "Behind . . . language there is something higher which makes use of language" (p. 82).

Transition from the foregoing to *Shin Buddhism* is easy and natural, not only because *The Field of Zen* contains a chapter on Shin but because Dr. Suzuki was far more imbued with Shin sentiments than the West realized. When the cover of *Shin Buddhism* proclaims its perspective as "Japan's major religious contribution

to the West," one is likely to suspect publisher's extravagance, but on page 15 one finds that the hyperbole derives from Dr. Suzuki himself. "Of all the development Mahayana Buddhism has achieved in the Far East," he writes, "the most remarkable one is the Shin teaching of the Pure Land school." If this seems like a surprising verdict from a man who devoted his life to unveiling Zen, not Shin, to the West, the surprise lessens when one sees how closely the two approximate in its author's eyes. "Going to the Pure Land is not an event which takes place after death" (p. 71). "Pure Land is right here, . . . in this dirty earth itself. . . . Those who have eyes can see it around them" (p. 17)—or "in ourselves" (p. 40)—at any moment. We have already seen that Dr. Suzuki identifies Shinran's single utterance of *Nembutsu* as joining to the world the unity Honen's continuous repetition evokes but is apt to leave self-contained. As for the *tariki* (other-power) which the Pure Land school emphasizes against the *jiriki* (self-power) of work-out-your-salvation-with-diligence forms of Buddhism, this distinction, too, dissolves in the solvent of Suzuki's duality-transcending gaze. Shin and Zen enter the mystery of the *tariki-jiriki* complex through opposite doors, but like doors marked "Men" and "Women" in semi-Westernized Japanese baths, they open onto a single pool. Not only must self-effort be exhausted before other-power will be invoked with requisite earnestness ("we will never grasp Amida's arms until we exhaust everything we have in our efforts to reach the other end" [p. 66]); because it is the sincerity with which other-power is invoked that makes it available, what the subject does and what comes to him from without are inseparably entwined. Furthermore, "the fact that we seek the treasure somewhere outside proves that it is in every one of us. If the treasure were not in me already I would never think of gaining it" (FZ, p. 80).

Is this more Zen than Shin? A recent notice of the book emanating from England answers in the affirmative: Dr. Suzuki "has a version of Shin," it tells us, "which seems to be highly subjective and different from what is commonly understood." My own understanding of Shin is slight, but my perception of Dr. Suzuki's relation to it is, notwithstanding, different. Historical traditions have their identities, but these do not consist of adamant conceptual cores or essence. (A recent study—"The Essence of Christianity," by S. W. Sykes, *Religious Studies*, VII, 4, December 1971—makes this point perspicaciously.) To connect with even a fair segment of human mentalities, traditions must be pliable; they must lend themselves, not indefinitely but considerably, to alter-

native interpretations. When the above-quoted notice contends that Dr. Suzuki departs from Shin as “commonly understood,” it is doubtless correct, but I have never read Dr. Suzuki for common understandings. I am sure that the “*nab mab ub mi dub vab*” that washed around me as a boy near Shanghai as the local Chinese variant of “*Namu Amida Butsu*” would have drawn from its utterers, mostly illiterate, an interpretation substantially different from the one Dr. Suzuki came to see in it. What doesn’t go down smoothly with me is the characterization of Dr. Suzuki’s interpretation as “highly subjective.” This suggests that what he says of Shin is imposition more than discernment, distortion more than revelation and so in the last analysis misleading. The fact that the lectures in question were delivered under Shin auspices, which church thereafter proceeded to publish them with endorsement rather than rejoinder by The Reverend Hozen Seki, President of the American Buddhist Academy who testifies to “the immensity of Dr. Suzuki’s knowledge *and wisdom* on Buddhism” (pp. 10–11, italics mine), suggests that at least some Shinnists feel otherwise.

The notice I have now twice quoted sees Shin, which “centers around the supernatural Amida Buddha, god of compassion and grace,” as “the opposite of Zen.” But that notice emanates from the West, which is not irrelevant here. If subjectivity and ‘reading in’ are at stake, I personally am inclined to suspect more of these in the quoted reviewer’s perception of the Japanese religious complex than in Dr. Suzuki’s account of Shin. The English reviewer sees Pure Land’s centering around compassion and grace as “the opposite of Zen,” but just this morning, in reading in *Zen Notes* (December 1971) the life of Sokatsu Shaku, teacher of my own Zen teacher Zuigan Goto Roshi, I find that his recovery from severe diabetes and a stomach-ulcer in later life “was entirely due to his faith in Great Compassion (*Daijibishin*).” I do not find it in me to see this *Daijibishin* as “opposite” to the *Oyasama*, translated identically as “great compassion,” that is central to Shinshu teachings.

In what may have been Thomas Merton’s last essay (an Introduction to the English Translation of *The Shen Hui Records*, as yet unpublished), he refers to the effect of “writers like Suzuki . . . upon thinkers like Heidegger, Tillich, Fromm and others”—Jung would have been a natural addition to the list. In this connection I find worth repeating a quotation I cited elsewhere once previously: historian Lynn White’s prediction that “It may well be that the publication of D.T. Suzuki’s first *Essays in Zen Buddhism* in 1927 will seem in future generations

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as great an intellectual event as William of Moerbeke's Latin translations of Aristotle in the thirteenth century or Marsiglio Ficino's of Plato in the fifteenth."

What I find myself wanting to say is that the wonder of "this truly great man," as Christmas Humphreys accurately acclaims him, is not accidentally related to his being Japanese, or in wider context, East Asian. In the essay by Thomas Merton just cited a remarkable statement appears. "The religious genius of the Far East, China and Japan, is the *only one* that has so far achieved . . . perfect resolution of any possible conflict between 'action and contemplation' " (italics Father Merton's). Reviewing books on two traditions by a single Japanese author tempts me to venture that the East Asian religious genius is likewise, I shall not say "the only one that has achieved resolution of conflict between traditions;" only, "the one that augurs best for such achievements." We cherish Zen for its piquing counterpoise to duality, but Zen, in addition to having influenced the East Asian mind, was also, of course, conceived by it. Is it not proof-of-the-pudding that Zen, seeing—as Kegon (Hua Yen) puts it—*jiji muge bokkai*, "completely harmonious and unobstructed interpenetration and interconvertibility of all things with one another" everywhere, sees this also in the relation between Zen and Shin, and that Shinnists at some level, products of the same East Asian outlook, agree. Would it not be paradoxical if the outlook that produced Ryobu Shinto (Buddhist Shinto) and endless other accommodations and adjustments did *not*, in last resort, put Zen and Shin together?—together being, of course, where they were originally, in Tendai, before Hieizan tumbled into the Kamakura period. Had Dr. Suzuki been looking for arguments, he could have cited Obaku Zen in which faith is more prominent than in either Soto or Rinzai and where obeisance to Amida is daily practice.

The books are not without flaws. Most of these are typographical; *Shin Buddhism* in particular is carelessly put together for a book carrying the imprint of Harper & Row: "dont' " (p. 41), "inot" (p. 69), "than" for "that" (p. 69). Granted that suffering figures prominently in Buddhist thought, the "suffffering" inflicted on us on page 41 is excessive. Beyond these typographical slips there is a badly garbled sentence on pages 15–16 which reads: "The Pure Land school started in India toward the end of the fifth century, when the White Lotus Society was organized by Heineng or *Eon* in Japanesee and his friends in 403 A.D." Recalling that the book was constructed from taped lectures, we can surmise that Dr. Suzuki's original wording probably read as follows: "The Pure