

SOMEI TSUJI

The Man of Zen

Gutei was a Zen master of ancient China. He was in agony because he couldn't attain enlightenment. Then he happened to meet the Zen master, Tenryū.

When Tenryū met Gutei, he lifted up one finger and at that very moment, Gutei was enlightened. From that time on, when people came to ask Gutei about the Dharma, he would raise one finger and say nothing.

When Gutei was aware of death approaching, he said to those gathered around him, "I received this one-finger-Zen from Tenryū. I used it all my life, but did not exhaust it." So saying, he passed away.

(*Keitokudentō-roku*, Vol. XI)

I am always reminded of those last words of Gutei when I think of any one of Daisetz Suzuki's great achievements.

It was in his seventeenth or eighteenth year that Dr. Suzuki was initiated into the Zen discipline by Setsumon Rōshi in the Kokutaiji Temple of Toyama Prefecture. At twenty-one, he came under the guidance of Kōsen Rōshi of Engakuji Temple at Kamakura. Here he remained until 1892 when Kosen Rōshi died. Dr. Suzuki then went on to pursue his Zen study under Sōen Rōshi who was heir in Dharma to the late Kōsen. In December, 1895, he was enlightened. Sōen then conferred on him the *koji-gō* (a title granted to an accomplished lay Buddhist), "Daisetz," which had also been the name of a great Zen master (a brother master to Gizan Rōshi and Kōsen Rōshi's master) who had been famous for his severity in training disciples. So harsh was he that they all called him, "Daisetz, the Terrible." Kōsen himself trained under this master for a while.

Sōen granted Dr. Suzuki this *koji-gō* most probably because he saw in Dr. Suzuki an immense capacity for propagating the Dharma. All his life Dr. Suzuki used the name "Daisetz" as a lay Buddhist;

it seemed as if people forgot his real name, Teitarō. Also, Dr. Suzuki called his cottage *Yafarya-an*, derived from the Zen words, “*yafarya*” 也風流 (where there is no elegance, even there, there is elegance), which was also written in Kōsen’s death *gatha*.

While I had no opportunity to inquire of Dr. Suzuki the relation between his “*Yafarya-an*” and Kōsen’s last *gatha*, I cannot help feeling that they were closely related to each other. Does this not reveal that Dr. Suzuki all his life had a firm consciousness of being the heir to Kōsen and Sōen? Dr. Suzuki’s learning, his thought and his merits of propagating Buddhism throughout the world were consistently based on that experience which was the source of his productivity.

Perhaps this is why Dr. Suzuki’s essays are hard to understand and yet have special appeal for us. I think this may also be the case with Dr. Nishida, though his is clearly the stand of a philosopher. As compared with Dr. Nishida, Dr. Suzuki expressed himself as a Zen man.

While reading the *Asahi Journal*, I noticed that Dr. Suzuki was referred to by the courtesy title of “Rōshi” in a review by a professor introducing Dr. Suzuki’s recent book, *Tōyō no Kokoro* (The Oriental Mind). Elsewhere Dr. Suzuki was called “Reverend” in a brief essay written by the editorial writer of the *Asahi*. Strictly speaking, however, from the standpoint of the Zen sect, these titles do not apply. It seems hard for people in general to decide whether Dr. Suzuki should be regarded as a scholar or as a Zen master. I myself have often been asked, “Is Dr. Suzuki a Zen master or not?”

Though estimating his merits as a Buddhist scholar is not in my line, if I give my impressions of his essays, his words, and his appearance, I would like to say that Dr. Suzuki was conscious of himself not only as a scholar but also as a Zen man or a Buddhist. His profound and wide learning, thinking and culture, based on the very experience of his spiritual awakening, were widened and deepened by his Bodhisattva spirit and activities. All this, I think, made possible Dr. Suzuki’s unique and great accomplishment in Buddhist studies and global missionary activities.