

EDWARD CONZE

A Personal Tribute

Owing to my sudden move from Britain to the U.S.A., the invitation to contribute to this memorial number of *The Eastern Buddhist* reached me too late to say anything that could do justice to the actual importance of D. T. Suzuki as a religious leader of genius. All I can do is to offer a small autobiographical note.

In 1937, at the age of 33, the bottom had fallen out of what I then thought was my world. My political faith had collapsed under the impact of Stalinism and of what I had observed in Spain, my marriage had failed, my job seemed distinctly bleak, I had even started to consult psychoanalysts, and there seemed nothing left that I could live for. Then one day I happened to look into the window of one of the bookshops opposite the British Museum, my curiosity was aroused and just on chance I bought the third volume of *Essays in Zen Buddhism*. For weeks thereafter I retired each day into Hampstead Heath, devoured each page of the book again and again, and rapidly acquired all of Suzuki's other works one by one.

What had happened was that D. T. Suzuki had revived an earlier interest in Buddhism. It had begun with a reading of the Tauchnitz edition of Lafcadio Hearn's *Gleanings in Buddha-Fields* when I was 13. It was renewed again through contact with Buddhist scholars when, at the age of 21, I was a student in Heidelberg. It is noteworthy that I have always been much more attracted by Suzuki's exposition of the metaphysical profundities of the Mahayana than by his account of the practicalities of Zen. This is probably due to my German origin and background, for most non-Asian scholars working on *Prajnaparamita* have so far been Germans. To

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me it is a measure of the greatness of the man that Suzuki should have made the Mahayana equally palatable to two such divergent national mentalities as the German and the Anglo-Saxon. Because, since the Buddha himself was neither a German nor an Englishman, it may well be that both the metaphysical and the practical interpretation are equally near to His original doctrine.

Under the impulse of D. T. Suzuki's message I then withdrew into a private wood belonging to a Quaker friend of mine in the New Forest, and practised as much meditation as can be practised in this evil age. Then I emerged again, went to Oxford, and published a number of books in which I have tried to transmit the understanding of the Mahayana, and particularly of the *Prajñāparamita*, which D. T. Suzuki had first conveyed to me. His assurance, once by word of mouth and once by letter, to the effect that he thought that I had actually "understood Buddhism," has given me great happiness and encouragement. For me therefore Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki will always remain a charismatic figure who raised me from a living death and has enabled me to lead a meaningful life for nearly three decades. And what he has done for me, that he has done for many others also.