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The Stone Bridge of Jōshū

In the *Hekigansha*, one of the most important writings of Zen literature, there is a passage as follows:

A monk asked Jōshū, "The stone bridge of Jōshū is famous. But what I see is just a log bridge. Why?" Jōshū answered, "You see only the log bridge, but cannot see the stone bridge." The monk asked, "What is then the stone bridge?" Jōshū answered, "That which lets the asses and horses pass."

The stone bridge of Jōshū represents the ever-functioning dynamic spirit of Zen — Zen in action — which has been transmitted, from mind to mind, from generation to generation, in the history of Zen.

Throughout his long life of ninety-five years, Dr. Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki lived a life of the stone bridge in the exact sense Jōshū meant.

It is a well-known fact that he exerted his effort in expounding the meaning of the enlightenment experience, *satori*, and the importance of *prajñā* (Wisdom) in Zen. *Satori*, in other words, means awakening to *prajñā*.

Thanks to his effort no one doubts today the importance of the enlightenment experience in Zen. Therefore, it is quite understandable that, given this importance, the attainment of enlightenment is apt to be taken as the ultimate goal of Zen practice.

However, if one simply aims at the attainment of enlightenment and is gratified with it, he does not really understand the full purport of the meaning of *satori* experience.

As Dr. Suzuki so correctly pointed out, enlightenment is important, but its importance lies in the fact that it is not merely the moment of fulfilment of one's long cherished aspiration but it is the moment of his rebirth, the beginning of his spiritual life as a new

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being, to live not for himself but with other sentient and insentient beings, to share their sufferings and sorrows with them, and to help them become enlightened so that they too can liberate themselves from the bondage of troubles and pains, their anxieties and their feeling of meaninglessness. In other words, with his awakening to *prajñā*, his new life with and for the people begins in direct response to the irresistible urge of *karuṇā* (Compassion), the immediate self-expression of *prajñā*. This kind of life is called the life of the Bodhisattva, which Jōshū, in his plain but graphically concrete Zen term, calls his "stone bridge."

In this sense, after his enlightenment experience, Dr. Suzuki walked the way of the Bodhisattva throughout his life with his undaunted, tireless spirit. By virtue of his version of Jōshū's stone bridge, not only asses and horses but people in the West as well as in the East, irrespective of the difference of nationality, color, race, class, culture, language, intelligence, age, sex, profession, richness and other worldly values, were able to deliver themselves from the shore of ignorance to the other shore of truth.

In the East, around the time he began to write about Zen, it was a fact that Zen was just for practicing. Any intellectual elucidation or noetic approach was considered somewhat blasphemous or at least useless and obstructive.

Of course, so far as Zen experience is concerned, as long as it is something to be experienced, practice is important. But if no noetic elucidation is allowed, there is a danger, in Zen practice, of falling into a kind of seemingly mystical state of self-complacency, a Zen sickness, which is a far more harmful obstacle to real *prajñā* awakening.

Since even intellection—*vijñāna* in Buddhistic terms—is one of the functions of *prajñā*, it ceases to be a hindrance, if it does not assert its conceited claim for supremacy and is operated in its legitimate function by a person who has achieved its mastery by awakening to *prajñā*. On the contrary, intellection will serve as one of the most efficient tools to discern the nature of enlightenment experience and promote the correct understanding of Zen practice.

It is true that you cannot make a horse drink water, but you can at least lead him to the water. Any effort, therefore, to contrive means and ways—*upaya*—to take him to the water is meaningful because it will give him a chance to drink when he wants it. In this sense Dr. Suzuki's elucidation of Zen through his voluminous writings was illuminating and helpful for those who were in need of guidance and instruction. His style of writing in Japanese was extremely plain, clear, and readable. Without using difficult Buddhistic terms unnecessarily, his works were permeated with profound wisdom. He wrote with a touch of warmth, which was a reflection of his personality, so that people could feel themselves closer and more intimate with the spirit of Zen which had been existing intrinsically in their veins but which they had erroneously taken as something mysterious and incomprehensible that belonged entirely to the possession of a selected few.

His noetic approach was more appealing and instructive to the younger Japanese who, being brought up in the rationalistic Western way of education, did not feel so syntonic with the traditional authoritative atmosphere of Zen, even though they respected its value.

Generally speaking, his books not only stimulated those in the temple, but also helped common people appreciate Zen as a traditional asset benefiting their own lives. His contribution in this regard is quite significant in view of the present state of Japanese culture which is being "modernized" under the strong influence of the West, because any change could not be successfully accomplished in any country not attuned to its basic cultural assets embedded in the hearts of its people.

To the West, where analytical, intellectual ways of thinking had traditionally prevailed, his analytical way of elucidation was not nearly as strange as it was to the East. However, the subject he introduced to the West was not something with which Western minds were familiar. Therefore, it was quite understandable that people in the West at first took what he talked about as just another esoteric product of the mysterious East.

It seems a strange but interesting coincidence that in the year of

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1900, when he published in the United States his first book in English about Zen, *Açvagosha's Discourse on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana*, Freud published his first book on psychoanalysis, *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

But perhaps this is not so strange or accidental. Because, though they did not know each other at all and were not aware what they had in common, they had started on the same mission, the criticism of the pathology of modern Western culture, especially of the supremacy of reason, to which both offered remedies in their own way. Freud stressed the meaning of the unconscious, the forces of emotion, as opposed to the conscious, the power of reason, and their conflict as the source of neurosis. Suzuki specifically clarified the dichotomous and discriminating nature of reason at the source of human suffering.

Because of Freud's audacious and ruthless exposure of the problem, Western minds began to open their eyes to the alienation of man from his wholeness as a human being as revealed in the form of numerous cases of psychic disturbances. The forerunners of Freud, Nietzsche, Marx, and Kierkegaard had foreseen the phenomenon even though it had been well covered by the glory of the materialistic achievements called progress.

Freud's approach to the solution of the problem was by means of psychoanalysis. It was guided by the principle of bringing the unconscious into consciousness, the unreasonable into the realm of reason, that is, according to his phrasing, "Where there was *id*—there shall be *ego*."

In that sense he was still in the traditional rationalistic cultural pattern of the West. With all his colossal laborious works in psychoanalysis, however, he came to a pessimistic conclusion about the future of human civilization because he found by his critical observation the existence of the self-destructive tendency which he believed intrinsic in human nature. He concluded also, by his rationalistic thinking, that religion is an illusion and a sort of infantilism.

Suzuki's contribution in this regard was, of course, the way of Zen. He stressed the importance of awakening, and he used the word "conscious" as Freud used it. However, in his case, what he means

by conscious is different from Freud's notion of bringing the libidinal unconscious into consciousness. Suzuki's term means to become conscious of "the Cosmic Unconsciousness," which is achieved by awakening to *prajna*.

As Buddhism essentially originated from the realistic observation and understanding of the state of mankind as suffering, it can agree with Freud in the respect that man's state of existence is pessimistic at present as well as in the future so long as man is driven by his self-destructive tendency which is ultimately rooted in his ignorance.

According to Buddhistic understanding, man's existential state of suffering comes out of two kinds of ignorance, both of which are inseparably related. One is the ignorance of the fact that he is alienated from the Buddha Nature, and the other is the ignorance of the truth of the existence of the Buddha Nature in every human being. In short, man is ignorant of his ignorance of the Buddha Nature he is bestowed with. And just because of this ignorance, he surrenders himself blindly to the instinctual impulses which are governed by the principles, in Freud's terms, of pleasure and death. The more he is driven by these impulses and pursues their fulfilment, even with the resistance of reason by way of repression, the more he is alienated from his real self. The way by which man can liberate himself from his self-alienation, according to Zen Buddhism, is not by repression or sublimation through reason, but by breaking through his ignorance and realizing the Buddha Nature through his experience of awakening to *prajna*. In this sense, even though Zen, as a school of Buddhism, shares the same view of the existential state of mankind with Freud, it begins to develop its own doctrine of liberation from the very point where Freud ended with pessimism. It helps man to see his original face, according to its expression, to have a rebirth as a whole human being and to enable him to attain a new spiritual life beyond the death and pleasure principles, transcending the dichotomy of reason at the same time. To experience this and live in it, helping others to get enlightened, is the religious life of Zen. For Suzuki, the religion he believed in and practiced is not an illusion or infantilism. Religion is for him the way of maturity and realism

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in the sense that one can live his life fully with it as a new whole being helping his fellow men to restore their wholeness.

At that time when the West was beginning to be colored by the rosy notion of progress based on the belief in the supremacy of reason, it was most opportune that a message was conveyed from the East. Zen stated that by becoming aware of his state of self-estrangement resulting from the supremacy of reason, man is able to free himself from his ignorance so that he can realize his Buddha Nature. In that sense it is nothing to be afraid of to be exposed to the emptiness and meaninglessness of his existential state, for it is to be taken as the turning point that opens the way for his ultimate awakening to *prajñā* as prepared in Zen. This was the message conveyed by Suzuki in person to the world—a message for the resurrection of man himself.

Perhaps more than any other group, those engaged in the treatment of the mentally disturbed became keenly sensitive to the sickness of Western civilization as a direct result of their observations in their offices. While Freudian therapists were more or less negativistic and skeptical or indifferent towards Zen because of their libidinal orientation, other psychiatrists or psychotherapists whose minds were not limited by theories but more open to psychic reality, showed their interest in what Suzuki talked about. Among them Jung was the first one who recognized and appreciated the meaning of Zen experience. In his foreword to Suzuki's *Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, he stated, "The only movement inside of our civilization which has, or should have, some understanding of these endeavors is psychotherapy." He compared Zen experience with the mystic experiences of Meister Eckhart and John Ruysbroeck and interpreted it as a process of individuation, his term for "becoming whole." However, he made an understandable reservation by stating that "Great as is the value of Zen Buddhism for understanding the religious transformation process, its use among Western people is problematic." Whether its use among Western people is problematic or not is a question to be answered in the future. But if Suzuki did not feel the value of its use for the West in respect to "becoming whole," what would be the

meaning of his life-work dedicated to Zen's transmission to the West? Personally I would rather like to stress another statement of Jung's, "I have no doubt that the *satori* experience does occur also in the West." Because I believe, so far as the Cosmic Unconscious is concerned in which *satori* takes place, it is all-embracing and boundless beyond the differences of culture. Even though he is conditioned by culture, man has the intrinsic potentiality to make a leap and free himself from his attachment to cultural prejudices, the product of discrimination, by becoming conscious of the Cosmic Unconscious which is universal. Following Jung, Karen Horney, through her personal contact and discussions with Suzuki, became very much interested in Zen. Her holistic approach to man himself and her basic concept of the real self with her stress on the importance of intuition in therapy, all urged her to study and absorb eagerly what Zen had consummated. In her trip to Japan with Suzuki, the memory of which is still vivid in my mind, she met and exchanged opinions with quite a number of Zen masters. Even though she had been considered as one of the leaders of the culturists group, she, as a person, was much greater than her theory. As she felt herself congenial and had so much in common with Zen, she was anxious to develop her ideas by thought stimulation experiences in Japan. Unfortunately due to her sudden death, what she got from this trip became unavailable for us. After her death, Suzuki had a series of lectures and discussions with her group that was led by Harold Kelman.

In 1957, Suzuki was invited to a conference in Mexico by Erich Fromm. Their encounter resulted in the publication of a book, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*. It was quite a meaningful event, because while originating in different cultures and at different times, Zen and Psychoanalysis had been sharing the same function of restoring man as a whole being in this modern age of split personality and anxiety, and they were brought into direct contact for collaboration to confirm mutually their common end.

Thus, his incessant activities for elucidation and transmitting Zen in the East and West began to bear fruit during the latter part of his life. It is a most outstanding fact that all through the long

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years of his pioneering activities, he worked practically single-handed. In that sense, he was alone and independent, although he had the helpful assistance and personal care of Miss Mihoko Okamura until his death. The way he opened was followed and cultivated by many others including R. H. Blyth, Alan Watts, R. DeMartino and P. Kapleau.

One evening, when I was staying with him in Ipswich, near Boston, I happened to ask him, while we were seated talking, "What is Hyakujō's "Sitting alone on the summit of Mt. Ta-hsiung'?" As a reply, he suddenly raised himself with tremendous agility, and sat cross-legged in the chair. I can never forget my experience that his whole body suddenly looked grander and radiated an enormously overwhelming power at that moment. There I witnessed the forcefulness and dignity of his aloneness.

In 1952, he was still chiefly stressing the importance of *prajñā* in his lectures. But in my view, he was actually teaching us *karuṇā* by his daily conduct. One evening I was telling him of my experience with a patient who had made a radical break-through after painful effort and suffering. I was dumbfounded to find him in tears. After a while, he said, "How grateful I feel for what you have done!" Here I felt his great concern with human suffering. From the depth of his heart, he could not help feeling grateful for any help in liberating people from their sufferings. Hence his utterance of gratitude on behalf of my patient who, for him, was not a stranger at all, but a kinsman in the sense that he was also a human being anxiously struggling for the realization of his Buddha Nature. I was strongly moved at that moment by the effusion of his sincere desire—the expression of *karuṇā*—to free people from their suffering as well as their ignorance. His words penetrated deep into my heart, and his voice is still ringing in my ears awakening me to the real meaning of my work as a doctor.

In the later days of his life, he became more and more explicit in expressing the significance of *Karuṇā* in his lectures and writings. Especially after working on the English translation of *Kyō-gyō-shin-shō* (Teaching, Act, Faith, Enlightenment) by Shinran, one of the

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most important texts of Pure Land Buddhism, he stressed the meaning of the Great Act, a dynamic expression of *karuṇā* which is really the actual functioning of *prajñā* to enable man to attain rebirth as a whole being.

The words he left on his death bed were, "Don't worry!" "Thank you!" "Thank you!" To the last moment in his life, he did not wish to make people suffer for his sake despite the extreme pains he was suffering from his disease, and he never ceased to feel grateful for everything that is given, even death. In that sense, he himself was the example of what he taught us throughout his life, compassion and grand affirmation.

He closed his life here in this world. But, look! For those who can see it, the stone bridge of Jōshū is ever present.