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All the work in these two months was directed toward the opening of the summer practice period in July and August. Three jobs took priority over all others. Though urgently needed, the building of a new kitchen and other jobs had to wait. The first was putting in a new floor for a zendo on the ground floor of the dormitory building. This became a bigger job than was expected because the sixty-year-old building had slid toward the stream and everything was out of level. This first zendo seated thirty-six students and was not adequate for the overflow work crews who came down from Zen Center for the weekends. So the deck on the east side of the building which overlooked the intersection of the two streams was turned into an outside extension of the zendo that seated another thirty-five students. This was also used while the new floor was being laid. During the practice period this first zendo and deck were further rebuilt and modified and were used as the guest dining room during the fall guest season. This winter it will serve as the common room for the students.

The second job was turning the upstairs level of the same building into a dormitory for male students. This also we thought would be a small job, but the replastering and painting took several weeks. The third job was converting the former office, bar and lounge into the main zendo which would seat seventy people. This was completed the night before the opening ceremony. All of the construction on the zendo was being done while Suzuki Roshi was completing work on the caved-in bridge wall. Tassajara remained open to guests during the rebuilding and remodeling. The kitchen had to prepare three meals a day for the forty guests in addition to the vegetarian meals for the students.

At the same time in San Francisco we were trying to cope with the quantity of applications for the practice period that were coming in. More than two hundred applications were received—many more than we had expected—and daily, people came into the office at Zen Center or walked or drove into Tassajara over the trails and the precipitous road, asking if they could stay for the practice period. We required of the prospective students some experience in zazen, straight-forwardness, an ability to convince us of a serious interest in Zen, the balance to respond quickly and honestly to disconcerting questions, the willingness to sit first at Zen Center or with some other Zen group, and finally the determination necessary to sit through the three (now five) days of tangaryo (all day sitting, with breaks only for meals, to face oneself and one's reasons for wanting to practice Zen life). Out of all the applicants about 85 were chosen. Only 70 of these students were willing to enter the first tangaryo; about 55 stayed through it; by August there were 68 students and 4 priests.

SUZUKI ROSHI WRITES ON THE PRACTICE PERIOD

Through the practice period Buddha's way will be known in America. The practice period originated with Buddha's sangha (community of disciples) during the rainy season in India when the monks could not go wandering from village to village begging and teaching. In Japan only certain Zen temples are given the privilege of being able to hold practice periods. Now this indispensable practice has begun in America and it must not be discontinued. Each year we must have at least one practice period; it is indispensable for the students at Zenshinji and for the existence of Zenshinji itself. Strict observation of the practice period with qualified teachers and qualified students is one of the foundations of Zen Buddhism and is the most important reason we started Tassajara.

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Opening Ceremony. The Buddha has just been installed on the altar by Abbot Suzuki Roshi (in the center) and Bishop Sumi Roshi (in the light robe). Chino Sensei on the right is beating the large heart shaped mokugyo (wooden fish) leading the chanting of the Shingyo (Prajna Paramita or Heart Sutra). The sound of the mokugyo is like a deep heart beat beneath the chanting. In front of the mokugyo is the large bell which begins the chanting and bowing.

There are not many teachers in this world, and there are many students. Of course teachers and students are not different, but we must begin with a teacher. The teacher works and practices under the same conditions as the students. But there is some difference. The student perceiving this difference is shown the way to the Buddha in himself and the Buddha in his teacher. This is the most fundamental way to help others. So direct contact with the teacher, listening to his lectures, working with him, receiving personal instruction, is very important. By this we can go beyond any physical, mental or emotional ideas we have about practice. It is possible to practice by yourself, but when we practice in a group we can help each other; and by practicing with people under the same conditions we can eliminate self-centered practice. When there are not many teachers, group practice is the only way possible to have direct contact with a teacher.

The purpose of group practice is not the observation of rules and rituals. Although the rules do allow you to focus on your practice, and to live according to the essentials needed to practice together, the purpose is to obtain freedom beyond rules and ceremony, to have naturalness, a natural order of body and mind.

To live in this world means to exist under some condition moment after moment. We should have the flexibility of mind to adjust our being to these conditions so that when we do change our attitude or circumstances, there will still be a fundamental imperturbability to our minds and bodies. This imperturbability gives us absolute freedom and we should practice our way until we obtain this. Group practice is the short cut to the imperturbable mind which is beyond concepts of personal or impersonal, formal or informal.

At first group practice seems restricting, but later you will find the freedom in it. At the same time, of course, it is easier to observe some rules rather than to practice your individual way or to practice in various ways. A person may be said to be a good Zen student if he knows his own way in its true sense; but it is very difficult

to know what your own way is. For finding what your own way is, group practice is best. For example, a woman will go to a store thinking that she knows exactly what she wants. But when she gets there and sees all those things, she may no longer know exactly what she wants. So she may buy many things, and end up wasting money. So we limit our life to find our true way. It may be how to know your way in the grocery store! Of course the best way is to use something when you have it; and if you buy things, at least you can use them until you know why you don't want them. Then you will have some sense of choosing things as your own.

So through group practice you find out how to know your own way. For example, Buddhist ceremonies are too complicated to do perfectly and so in our observance of them we can see our own way and not just the way of the ceremony. And in learning to accommodate ourselves to the practice of others and to our teachers, we will find out how to communicate with others and with all worlds and their various Buddhas. This is not just verbal communication. It is more direct than that. It is person to person and beyond any specific way. This is known as the Bodhisattva's way.

THE FIRST PRACTICE PERIOD

In the evening before the practice period opened, the first ordination ceremony at Zenshinji took place when Dick Baker had his head shaved, was given the name Zentatsu Myoyu, and was appointed Shuso or head student for the first practice period. The next day at one o'clock, Bishop Sumi Roshi, Suzuki Roshi, Katagiri Sensei, Kato Sensei, and Maezumi Sensei opened the practice period and installed the Buddha in the zendo. This ceremony gave the students a sense of respect for the tradition which brought Buddhism and the teachers to them, and also an awareness that what is Japanese in Zen cannot be made American all at once. If the tree that has been transplanted at Tassajara is stripped of its branches and bark it will die, but if it is nourished and allowed to take root the new soil of America will subtly bring the tree into accord with its new life.



Bishop Togen Sumi Roshi, Head of the Soto Zen School in America, with Suzuki Roshi and Chino Sensei preparing for the Opening Ceremony.