

TO ACTUALLY PRACTICE SELFLESSNESS

Shunryu Suzuki Roshi
August Sesshin Lecture
Wednesday, August 6, 1969, San Francisco

A Note on the Lecture and the Suzuki Roshi Archives Project, by Charlie Korin Pokorny

About ten years ago, a concerted effort to transcribe all available audio recordings of Suzuki Roshi was completed. Michael Wenger initially proposed this Archives Project to the San Francisco Zen Center Board of Directors, who embraced it wholeheartedly. William Redican oversaw the daunting task of transcribing over three hundred lectures, with volunteer help provided by a number of Zen Center resident practitioners. Copies were made and placed in SFZC libraries.

About three years ago, I asked Dana Velden, the corporate secretary at that time, if the wonderful treasury of Suzuki Roshi's teachings could be made available to the public through the SFZC website. Wouldn't it be great to share the fruits of his dharma offerings, as well as the prodigious labor of the Archives Project, online? A few weeks later, after conferring with the Officers and Directors, she asked me if I would be willing to administer a blog, posting both the audio recordings and the transcripts of Suzuki Roshi's teachings in chronological order. David Chadwick had done a great deal of work to organize a digital library of the Archives Project, including not just the audio files and transcripts but photos and videos as well. Tim O'Connor-Fraser set up the blog as part of the SFZC website and we were on our way. Soon after, I also started pulling out a short quote from each talk to be posted on our Suzuki Roshi Facebook page and Twitter feed.

Suzuki Roshi's teachings continue to touch many people in many ways. So far, we have posted about 250 of the transcripts and audio files online, with about 130 left to go. David Chadwick continues to work on the Archives Project as new audio recordings are unearthed and as advances in audio technology have improved the ability to recover corrupted media files. It has been wonderful to spend time with the teachings in this way and even more wonderful to make them freely available online. Suzuki Roshi had long been interested in the possibility of sharing the practice of Zen with Westerners and when he finally arrived in America, he had a great deal to offer.

Although he was a Japanese priest trained in Japan, once Suzuki Roshi came here and spoke in English, his teachings were not really Japanese Zen anymore. In conversation with his American students, his teachings became something else, something that wasn't exactly "American" either. Such points of cultural interface in the Buddhist tradition are often relatively brief but can exert a deep and lasting influence. They hold a rich potential to touch us deeply. What repeatedly comes through in Suzuki Roshi's talks is the depth and unwavering sincerity of his engagement with what is most essential about practice and the Buddha Way and how to most effectively convey that in America. He offers a profound sense of practice and a deeply grounded, but also free and joyful, way of being alive. It is also instructive to see how Suzuki Roshi's teachings evolved over the years, as he continued throughout his life to look deeply at himself and to completely meet those who came to him seeking the Way.

The transcription project endeavored to produce verbatim transcripts in which every intelligible word of Suzuki Roshi was recorded. These transcripts, quite wonderfully, also include notations for Suzuki Roshi's frequent laughter as he spoke, a significant dimension of his dharma in its own right. What is so funny?



Suzuki Roshi and Richard Baker at Tassajara, 1967

Photo by Tim Buckley

The talks that have been published in *Wind Bells* and in books such as *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, *Not Always So*, and *Branching Streams Flow in the Darkness* have been edited by dedicated, senior Zen practitioners in the lineage of Suzuki Roshi. Editing Suzuki Roshi's talks was extremely important in making his teachings accessible and also potentially less prone to misinterpretation.

The talk included here is perhaps the first unedited, verbatim transcript to be published in a *Wind Bell*. While the edited versions of Suzuki Roshi's talks are more suitable to a broader dissemination of his teachings, these raw transcripts offer a slightly different glimpse of Suzuki Roshi. It can be more difficult to read this unedited content, but it comes with its own particular intimacy, including Suzuki Roshi's effort and struggle to work with the English language. Some passages simply are unclear, which can actually allow for a variety of meanings, some perhaps just beyond the edge of the sayable. You can also listen to this talk by accessing the blog online at <http://suzukiroshi.sfzc.org/dharma-talks/1969/08/06>. Enjoy the laughter!

Charlie Korin Pokorny was ordained as a priest by Reb Anderson in 1999. He practiced as a resident at Tassajara and Green Gulch Farm for 12 years and now lives with his family in Sebastopol. He currently teaches at the Institute of Buddhist Studies and is director of the Sōtō Zen Buddhist Association.

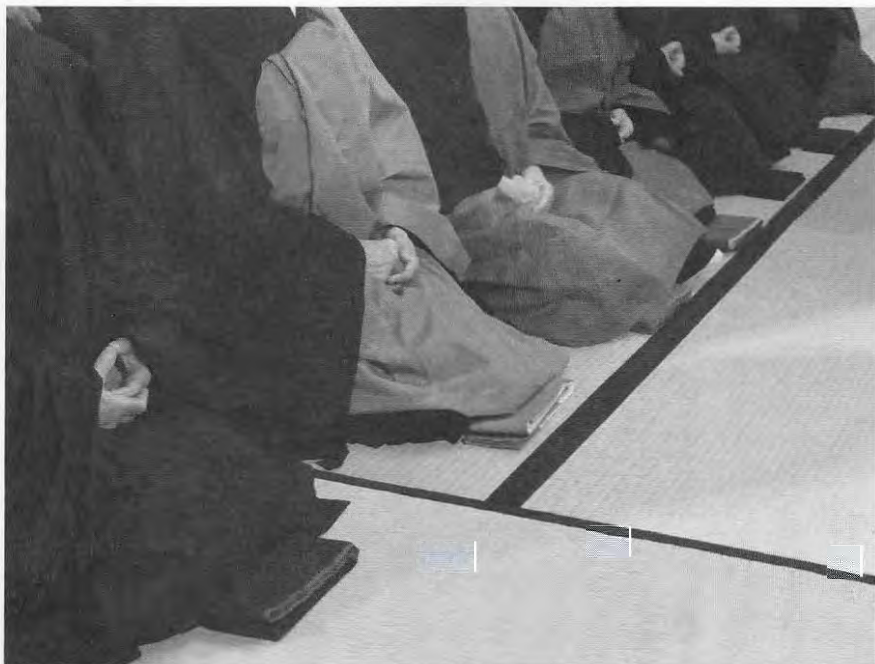


Photo by Shundo David Haye