



Happy Birthday, Suzuki Roshi

ON THE WEEKEND OF MAY 21–23, we celebrated the 100th birthday of Zen Center’s founder, Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, at City Center, Green Gulch Farm and Sokoji Temple. Throughout the weekend, it became ever more apparent what a great influence this unassuming priest from a small temple in Japan had on a large number of people—even many who had never met him. One indication of this was the world map displayed in the City Center hallway with stickers indicating the existence of zendos in Suzuki Roshi’s lineage. From Rinso-in, his home temple in Japan, to San Francisco, his teaching has spread across the United States (with approximately 50 centers), to Europe, and even to South Africa. The seeds planted by a mind of not-knowing in the fertile ground of things-as-it-is have flourished in ways that could never have been imagined when Suzuki Roshi first came to this country in 1959.

The event began on Friday evening with a reception at City Center. Next door at the conference center was a display of memorabilia: calligraphy by Suzuki Roshi (including the original “Tathagata” from the cover of *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind* and the yucca leaf brush used to write the character), photographs from his life and the ongoing practice at Zen Center, temple documents and ritual objects. There were also videos of him shown throughout the weekend. (The professional quality of the exhibit was the work of Mimi Manning, who curated the show with impeccable taste.)

At one point in the evening, 100 sparkling candles were lit on a very large cake, co-abbots Linda Ruth Cutts and Paul Haller made welcoming statements, and we all sang "Happy Birthday."

The next morning we gathered, as we do every Saturday at 6:30, for zazen and service, celebrating our teacher's anniversary with our ongoing practice of his way. The regular Saturday morning lecture was given by Suzuki Roshi's son and dharma heir Hoitsu Suzuki Roshi. Hojo-san, as he is often called at Zen Center, has been a much loved friend and teacher to us for many years, often willing to travel from Japan to help us with ceremonies and his wise and gentle presence. His lecture is included in this issue of the *Wind Bell*.

Later that afternoon there was a formal ceremony in the Buddha Hall to commemorate Suzuki Roshi's anniversary. Abbot Paul Haller officiated, and was joined at the altar by Genko Akiba Roshi, the administrative head of the Soto School in North America, Hoitsu Suzuki Roshi and a number of Suzuki Roshi's early students, among whom were: Sojun Weitsman (Berekeley Zen Center and former abbot of SFZC), Jakusho Kwong (Sonoma Mountain Zen Center), Katherine Thanas (Santa Cruz Zen Center), Senior Dharma Teacher Blanche Hartman, Paul Discoe, Jane and Peter Schneider, Edward Brown and Phillip Wilson. The formal offerings were accompanied by cymbals and statements of gratitude from Zen Center's first generation.

Saturday evening many of us drove to Green Gulch Farm for Skit Night. Skit Nights are a long-standing tradition at Zen Center, often marking the middle of a practice period or monastic intensive. They give us a chance to show off our talents (or good intentions) and to poke gentle fun at ourselves, lest we take ourselves too seriously.

On Sunday morning, at Green Gulch, in lieu of the regular public lecture, some of Suzuki Roshi's original students spoke of their lives with him. And on Sunday afternoon a pilgrimage of sorts was made to Sokoji Temple in Japantown. It was the Sokoji congregation to which Suzuki Roshi originally came to minister, before he met the odd collection of beats and hippies who eventually settled down to become Zen Center. The current temple is a few blocks away from the original, which, after years of disuse, has been remodeled as a residence for seniors. We were welcomed by the Sokoji congregation (a number of whom had known Suzuki Roshi) with a ceremony and reception and a celebration of our common roots.

The final event of the weekend was a meeting of representatives of sanghas in Suzuki Roshi's lineage. Eighteen groups were represented, including ones from Illinois, New York, Washington and British Columbia, as well as several from the Bay Area, and a couple of sub-groups within San Francisco Zen Center (the People of Color group and the Meditation in Recovery group). Michael Wenger, vice president in charge of dharma group

support, chaired the informal discussion, emphasizing SFZC's desire to be of service, especially to newer groups and those without a resident teacher. Some of the topics addressed were: greater access to information about individual groups (through the electronic media and other forms of communication); fundraising; the importance of making dharma available without proselytizing; facilitating entrance to practice for a larger population; and ways to continue communication and assistance between groups. A tentative decision was made to continue meeting on an annual or bi-annual schedule. Michael's office will be taking responsibility for following through with this.

It was a weekend which gave a concrete example of the interdependency of all phenomena. Those who prepared the food, who cleaned the rooms for the many guests, who created the invitations and cards and memorial book, those who came from far away to attest to the influence of one man's practice on their lives—all of these many people and those many more who could not be with us, helped to create an event and celebration much greater than the sum of the parts. Things-as-it-is, in Suzuki Roshi's phrase, is the work innumerable labors. And the fruit of these labors is gratitude—for our founder, for our practice and for each other. ~

ROSALIE CURTIS



The weekend-long celebration included a well-curated exhibit of memorabilia of Zen Center's life with Suzuki Roshi.