JAKUSHO KWONG

Jakusho Kwong is standing at the gate of a California vineyard under clear skies while half a dozen students question him about the jurisdiction of the Zen teacher. The morning work at Sonoma Mountain Zen Center has just ended, but no one is eager to leave the unseasonable January sunshine for the climb back to the Community House for lunch. While American Zen students have learned to question the teacher-student dynamic, investigating new terms for a relationship that has a long and dogmatic history has its awkward moments nevertheless. Kwong's students hesitantly probe the extent to which the authority of the Zen teacher should preside in all areas of life and how this might apply to their own situations. Putting down his pruning shears, Kwong stretches his arms out toward a grid of dormant grapevines as t-shaped and austere as the unmarked graves of a Benedictine cemetery. Responding directly to their hesitation, he shouts "Welcome Dharma USA!"

According to Kwong, the Buddhist teachings are only now beginning to enter the United States. To cultivate the American Buddha fields, he says, requires confusion, change, even deep despair. "The first two decades of Zen in America were about the meeting of Japanese and American cultures. Because we were so new to the form, we leaned on our teachers, projected everything onto them, and in some ways lost our center point. This is the beginning of a digestion period." Then laughing, he adds: "It's always *just* beginning. Everything is always *just* beginning."

Carrying tools and sweaters, Kwong and his students start up to the top ridge of the land, passing groves of scrub oak and peeling eucalyptus. "Isn't that wonderful work?" Kwong asks of no one in particular. But a fine-featured woman answers, "Hard for someone afraid of making mistakes." Every snip of the pruning shears requires choices that affect the yield of the five-acre crop. In the fall the palomino grapes will be harvested, sold to a local

winery, and made into mediocre sherry. In an almost inaudible voice, Kwong says, "The vineyard is good to you."

A Chinese-American, Bill Kwong was born on November 14, 1935, in Santa Rosa, California, near Sonoma Mountain. He spent his childhood in Palo Alto and his early adulthood in San Francisco and Mill Valley. It was a sign of completion, not coincidence, another cycle revealed, when he returned to his birthplace with his wife, Laura, and their four sons to start this residential Zen center in 1973. A Soto priest, he is abbot of the community's Soto Zen Buddhist temple, Genjoji—the Way of Everyday Life Temple. The name comes originally from the writings of Dogen Zenji (1200–1253), which have influenced Kwong's own teachings, although now Genjoji commonly refers to the community as a whole.

To the American who still turns East to authenticate all things Buddhist in the West, Kwong, with his Chinese features, embodies the classic look of a Bodhisattva. Zensan Jakusho, the Buddhist name given Kwong by his teacher, Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, means "Zen Mountain Gleaming Calmness." "When I'm very old," says Kwong, "I'll be called Zen Mountain."

Although Kwong's Zen training took place entirely in the United States and mostly in downtown San Francisco, his own center evokes the legendary mountain monasteries of Far Eastern Buddhism. Located in the heart of California's wine country, the center houses fifteen to twenty lay students in rustic cabins clustered on the north slope of Sonoma Mountain overlooking the Valley of the Moon. A large zendo converted from a barn accommodates one hundred additional members who live in the surrounding area and come regularly for meditation, retreats, and classes. Sitting on a rise and partially hidden by bamboo and redwood, the zendo appears and disappears in the morning fog like the images in a Chinese landscape painting. Everything here is modest, unassuming, like Kwong himself.

In his early twenties Kwong started looking at Chinese painting and noticed that "all the ones with heart were done by Zen monks. And they were just very simple," he explains, "like the ink painting of the black and white persimmons. There are only persimmons, not quite in a row, done with the least amount of effort and the least amount of thought and with just the utmost simplicity. There's a phrase in a Zen story about the person sleeping who, in the middle of the night, gropes for the pillow. That's the metaphor. That gesture. Real ordinary. It wasn't the Sung dynasty paintings with all the

flashy technique—they're beautiful—but it was the emptiness, the nakedness, that moved me."

In the Community House hangs a picture of a very different kind. It is a framed poster of the colossal thirteenth-century bronze Buddha at Kamakura, in Japan, and behind it lies the story of Kwong's first encounter with his teacher. In 1958 Shunryu Suzuki Roshi came from Japan to serve the Japanese-American congregation at Sokoji, the Soto Zen temple in San Francisco's Japantown. The Kwongs had been living in Palo Alto, reading D. T. Suzuki and listening to Alan Watts on the newly invented FM radio. The poet visionaries of San Francisco, fomenting the social revolt of the 1960s, were polarizing forces into "hipsters" and "squares." Inspired by the hipness of Zen and lured by the promise of a benevolent and radical life, the Kwongs moved to the city. Shortly afterward, with more curiosity than conviction, Kwong wandered into the Japanese Zen temple wearing dirty dark clothing and heavy boots. "I always dressed in black then," he says. Then staring down at his baggy black pants and the black work jacket worn by Japanese monks, he laughs at another cycle—from Beat black to Zen black.

At Sokoji he had expected the traditional mats and cushions used in Japanese meditation halls. Instead rows of wooden pews filled an ungainly room. "It looked like a Sunday school. Suzuki Roshi entered the room and I just stood there thinking, this is very square. He noticed me but I didn't even turn my head to acknowledge him, my ego was so big. I waited for him to get to the altar, and then I looked up and all he was doing was arranging the flowers, and I said, 'This is really square.'" On his way home, passing through the final hour of a Japantown street bazaar, he saw the Buddha poster discarded in an alleyway. He carried it home and tried to put it in the closet, but it was too large. Finally, not knowing what else to do with it, he hung it on the kitchen wall, and to this day he credits it with calling him back to Suzuki Roshi.

Kwong and his wife, Laura, attend zazen regularly, rarely leaving Sonoma Mountain. A small exuberant woman, Laura is also Chinese-American and since 1982 has been a full-time Zen student. From their house to the zendo is a ten-minute walk down the narrow Sonoma Mountain Road. Jakusho walks quickly with his torso bent slightly forward and his feet straddled far apart. For the dawn and evening zazen, they arrive in full-length robes.

In the redwood zendo there is nothing to look at, no gross distractions to

entertain and amuse the mind; the message that resonates from the thirty-foot-high walls seems to be: "No looking out, go inside, go deeper, and then deeper."

It's 5:00 A.M. Outside the zendo, a wake-up attendant gently shoves a suspended log into the center of a big bronze gong to announce dawn zazen. Making their way through the woods, students silently file into the zendo through the double barn doors. They bow to their empty seats, turn, bow to their dharma brothers and sisters, and begin two forty-minute meditation periods during which a falling leaf can sound like thunder. Meditation is followed by a standard Soto Zen Buddhist morning service at which Kwong Roshi officiates. The Heart Sutra is chanted in both English and Sino-Japanese. The recitation of the lineage lists each teacher in Kwong's line back through ninety-one generations. On the altar is a photograph of Suzuki Roshi, the same well-circulated picture that is on the back of the slim volume of his only collected lectures, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. It portrays an intensely calm face with a highly arched, almost quizzical left eyebrow. Walking up to the altar to offer incense, Kwong comes eye to eye again and again with his watchful teacher.

He has not employed the customary prerogatives of the Japanese temple abbot. He has no private attendants, nor has he ordered the theatrical build-up of gongs that signal an abbot's entries and exits to and from the zendo or the drumrolls used to announce a master's talks. Greeting people informally, he makes a slight bow more as an instinctive expression of his own humility than in imitation of Asian custom. A young man from Germany recalls that on his first visit to the center he walked by Jakusho, who was sitting outside his house. "He was bald and sitting quietly. I asked if he knew where I could find Kwong Roshi. I thought he was the master's gatekeeper."

On a recent winter morning, Kwong stood near the bedded vegetable garden and watched students hurrying from the zendo into the Community House for breakfast. It had been so cold during meditation that students could see their own breath. Says Kwong: "They're hard practitioners, Zen students. And they strive toward some kind of perfection. The practice is so difficult, so severe and uncompromising. It was so cold in the zendo and everybody was sitting. And to sit for hours and be impeccably perfect. Maybe perfection is one of the sicknesses that we have to get over. And to realize that, especially in the Soto school, it takes a long, long time. And it's an

attitude toward life. It doesn't come in a big flash but in very subtle ways. Zen students tend to get stuck in the perfection of the form. It took me a long time to let go of it. I'm still relaxing into it. Students become attached to the sitting form, to the perfection of form. When they are beginning to learn zazen—and even when they've been practicing for some time—they forget the spirit behind the form. When someone points a finger at the moon, something initiated the finger to point to the moon. And spirit is like that. It's behind the action, behind the form. Suzuki Roshi taught the spirit of the form. If it doesn't have spirit, it's dead. Without the spirit you don't have the authenticity. Many Americans left their Judeo-Christian heritage because they felt that the spirit behind the ritual was dead. And when they came to Zen it was a new form, so it felt alive. But if you only perfect the form without getting the spirit, Zen is just as dead. When the spirit is alive you can see changes in people's lives and this is expressed outside of the zendo."

"Zen is tough," acknowledges Kwong Roshi. "At every turn the wandering mind is thrown back on itself." And getting the spirit has sometimes been made especially difficult by Sonoma Mountain's rural isolation. Efforts to promote the assimilation of Buddhadharma into the American mainstream through businesses, restaurants, publications, and academic or social institutes are missions that Kwong has so far left to others. The smallness of this center, with its atmosphere of rural containment, has been experienced as both pure and problematic. Not many Americans attracted to Zen have been prepared to sacrifice worldly pleasures to pursue with all their might a life that is like a sleeping man groping for a pillow. And as yet Kwong has shown little inclination toward making the practice more enticing or easing the demands made on residents.

Sonoma Mountain Zen Center is run on an annual budget of about $50,000. Membership dues and contributions are subsidized by resident fees of $325 per month. To meet their financial needs, students work outside the community. The hours allocated for employment are from nine to six, Monday through Thursday, almost double what they were a few years ago. Still, residents are expected to attend the monthly retreats, which vary in length from one to seven days, as well as the one-month July intensive. Most employment is therefore limited to odd jobs that pay little, preventing members from pursuing professional careers. This sacrifice of a career or trade for Zen training has traditionally defined the role of monkhood.

The integration of monastic values and secular living has helped define Zen in the United States, but it hasn't been an untroubled marriage, either at Sonoma Mountain or elsewhere. Like other residential Zen communities, Genjoji has tried to merge the monastic and the secular by implementing the intensity of monastic practice within secular communities of men, women, and children. As in orthodox monasticism, a strict routine not only regulates and bonds the life of the community but supplies the fundamental mechanism that undercuts personal need. Adherence to an impersonal schedule offers the first roadblock to surrender. "The schedule is itself a vital and dynamic way of rounding off the edges of egocentric and selfish behavior," says Kwong. "It is not just a routine. The ego is the grist and the schedule is the active grinding stone that wears us down and uncovers our buddhanature. The schedule also implies the rules and regulations. But people get caught in a literal association of 'schedule' with sequential time slots. There is tremendous resistance to the schedule but I think it is the same as that fear of meeting God that Thomas Merton writes about in *The Desert Fathers*. The schedule is designed to invoke buddhanature, to encounter the Buddha within. That is very frightening."

Balancing financial support, school buses, and PTA meetings with this schedule has been difficult at best. Individual routines can be negotiated but always against the prime virtue of community activity. Partly because of these strictures, the residency has been almost entirely transient. It is the nonresidents, who have no formal commitment to daily zazen or the morning work period, who provide a stable constituency.

On Saturdays nonresidents come to the center for a morning of zazen, work-practice, dharma talk, and lunch. In the zendo Kwong takes his place next to the altar, which faces rows of meditation cushions placed on perfectly aligned straw mats. Addressing the assembly of practitioners, Kwong says, "In the past, when we've read about zazen practice, we've discussed the ways that the old masters would say '*shikan taza* is *just* sitting' or '*just* let your mind follow your breath.' Today I think it's okay to describe how I—or Jakusho—sits. I notice everytime I sit down, I try to make a mark, a commitment to the mind-sitting posture, and I mark this spot with my bottom as well as my knees. If you watch a hen sit on her nest, she really sits. She doesn't have to think too much, so that's perfect. Then the movement you do from left to

right, nestling into your place, is marking Buddha's spot. That's *your* spot. You're sitting on it. Not my spot but your spot. *You* sit on it."

He often reminds students that "Zen is nothing but this life." From his spot his life is the Soto way, cultivated by *just* sitting, a steady, undramatic form of single-minded meditation. "Don't chase after thoughts," he explains, "and don't push them away. Just let them come in and go out like a swinging door." In *just* sitting there is no system through which one advances, no objective measures of progress, which often leaves students feeling that they are getting nowhere. Having realized the teachings of Zen, there is no place to get to, so getting nowhere is precisely where you want to go. For the goal-oriented American novice, however, this can prove too frustrating. "The heart of meditation is basically the expression of who you are," says Kwong. "This is the point: to fathom all the intricate layers of who we *think* we are until we become fully who we are."

While the common distinctions between Soto and Rinzai schools are often defied by particular teaching styles, Kwong embodies the classic attributes of his lineage and in particular the teachings of Dogen Zenji. Prior to Dogen, enlightenment was considered the fruit of practice. In Dogen's teachings practice itself expresses enlightenment, and the practice of Zen is zazen. Zazen is not confined to a black cushion, however; rather, daily activity is centered in the serenity of zazen. Dogen spoke of "practice-enlightenment," fracturing the singular quest for realization into practice as daily life. Adamantly antisectarian, he idealistically hoped for a universal Zen and would not allow his disciples to identify with any Zen school. But to challenge the preoccupation with enlightenment in thirteenth-century Japan was so radical that, ironically, his insight became the cornerstone of the Japanese Soto school.

Formal zazen occupies the essential place in Kwong's teaching. The mechanics of zazen are simple but so fundamental that Kwong stresses them continually and will get up during zazen to correct sitting posture. The ideal position is full-lotus with both feet turned up on opposite thighs. Less strenuous versions are common, but the full-lotus creates the most solid foundation and most effectively reduces back and shoulder strain. In all of the formal postures, the buttocks and knees sink firmly into the ground, the back straight and unsupported, the eyes lowered, and the head bent slightly for-

ward. In Soto Zen the hands are placed in the cosmic mudra—left hand resting on right palm with the thumbs barely touching. "In this mudra the hands are then placed three-fingers' width below the navel," Kwong explains. "This is the tanden, considered the power spot of the body. The Chinese translation of this spot is 'the field of essence.' This hand mudra enshrines this temple area of the body."

Over and over Kwong emphasizes posture and breathing, not because they have a beneficial effect on the mind but because "In Zen the mind-body dichotomy is the ultimate delusion: to sit well is to be well," he says. "It is like the phrase about horsemanship: above the saddle no rider, below the saddle no horse. That's zazen. That's present. No subject, no object. So we can't know what's happening. Only afterward, we say, 'Oh, that was a good sitting.' Recently I looked up the word 'present' in an American dictionary and it means 'before being'; that's zazen. When the body sits well, the mind is in the body. Then there's not much thinking. And when this whole chest area is in alignment, it's like an orchestra—the heart, the lungs, the spine, the kidneys, the liver—and it makes wonderful music. And you feel this energy coming out and that's the feeling of sitting well. Not sitting well reflects the conditioned mind. When the hand mudra rises, for example, it is a sign of emotion; if it is too tight and your fingers jam, there is too much mental tension. If it is too relaxed and the mudra collapses, it means the sitter is spaced out, asleep, or in some way not present. When the trunk area breaks and you get a concave posture, there is too much mental activity, like Rodin's *The Thinker*."

"And breath sweeps mind," says Kwong, referring to the inherent capacity of breathing to cleanse the mind. "Breath will cut through thinking because you have to let go to breathe. The power of breath is beyond the discriminating mind. Numbers are primarily used when your mind is very active and you need some kind of handle for your meditation practice. Your exhalation breath is your strength breath and you count 'one' and exhale. Then 'two'—inhale, 'three'—exhale, and so forth to ten. When you get to ten, you go back to one and start again. There are variations but this is the basic way of counting. The method in breath-counting is a way of occupying the mind so that the mind doesn't occupy you. Even though we say 'one, two, three,' the sequence is really just one, one, one. It is not dependent on memory or consciousness. Even though it sounds linear, this repetition becomes

mantric and in this way releases the sequential mind. Each time you exhale, the exhalation is compassion. It is the breath of giving or letting go. The inhalation is receiving. It is like birth and death. Inhaling is being reborn. It is saying I am capable of taking in life." After doing zazen for some thirty years Kwong has begun counting breaths again. "It's very difficult to count numbers, but actually you're counting your existence and something wonderful happens."

For several years Kwong has been concentrating on the quality of zazen in forms other than sitting meditation. "As the Chinese Master Sekito Kisen said, 'Anyway you do it is okay, but the most important thing is to realize your own buddhanature.' Sitting cross-legged cannot be for everybody. Even Hakuin Zenji had some students reciting mantras because they couldn't sit," he explains. "And I feel we should apply skillful means to the form and accommodate those who are sincere. So now I'm paying more attention to walking meditation, bowing practice, and mantra. Not as substitutes for zazen but in addition to zazen. Bowing practice is very good for angry people and for people who are very closed and withdrawn. Bowing practice brings their energy forward. You need energy for practice. We talk about the silent illumination of Soto Zen. But too often the silent illuminators are sleeping. They lack the energy of activity. If they are not sleeping they are thinking. But that's about the same thing. Every year there is a man who comes from Iceland to the July intensive. He has terrible arthritis and for one month he sits every zazen period in a chair. He proved to me that you can attain shikan taza in a chair."

Kwong considers group practice essential to Zen training, and the annual July retreat not only provides a month of group practice for nonresidents but also intensifies practice for the residency. "There are people who practice at home, and they do practice sincerely, but if they don't practice with a group of people their edges stay too rough. There are people who like the dharma but they don't like Buddha or the sangha. Or they like the Buddha but they don't want the dharma or the sangha. Each is one of the three refuges. And in many ways, the sangha is the hardest to cut. But the altruistic act is dependent on sangha. Compassion cannot be realized without practicing with others."

At Sonoma Mountain the week-long retreats demand fourteen hours a day of zazen. Students sit through formal meals served in the zendo, sit with

mounting pain in the knees and the shoulders; they maintain silence, drink no coffee, and sleep on hard surfaces, all without the comfort of complaint. Psychically locked in the zendo, they *just* sit with the state of their own minds, however calm or turbulent, however fearful or courageous. Few survivors emerge from their first retreat without some sense of heroic achievement and often are congratulated for just sticking it out. But what happens when after the fifth or tenth time the mind is quieted but never released, even for a moment? "No problem," says Kwong Roshi. "Keep sitting." Or when the barriers of conceptual thought are broken and one is free enough to fly? "No problem. Keep sitting." Or when familiarity itself makes the hold on the practice fragile? "Zen practice can get so boring and usually nobody talks about that," Kwong says impishly, as if at last divulging one of Zen's great secrets.

Shortly after Kwong's birth his family left Santa Rosa for Palo Alto, where Bill was the fourth of five children in the only Chinese family in a white neighborhood. Barred from the United States by the Chinese Exclusion Act, his parents had come here illegally from the province of Canton. His father, Dr. Chin Kwong, had been a respected doctor there, and the move to America deprived him of his medical credentials as well as the social status that his profession enjoyed in China. In Palo Alto he prescribed ancient remedies to those adventuresome enough to try snake skins, ground bones, dried roots, and herbal powders. Cut off from his heritage and alienated from the Chinese communities in California, Dr. Kwong became an exacting patrician in his own house, determined to inculcate his children with a Chinese education. The children grew up speaking Chinese, and every afternoon after public school they had to attend "Chinese school." Jakusho refers to Chinese school as if it were some impersonal institution organized by a local community center, when in fact it was the afternoon program devised by Dr. Kwong, carried out in his own house and for the sole purpose of educating his own children. Calligraphy, reading, spelling, and writing were the principal subjects.

"It was horrible. Two schools a day. And my father was so severe and we couldn't play and we just wanted to be like the other kids. The more Chinese culture was imposed, the more separate we felt. My father only took me through grade four because he got so fed up with me. I didn't like Chinese

school because I was beaten for not doing well—it was a syndrome. Once I couldn't eat dinner and was locked in the attic. He was really harsh," says Kwong, rubbing the top of his head as if to comfort old memories. "One day my mother was cutting the head off a chicken like they did in the old days—you did it at home—and she said, 'Would you like to learn Chinese or would you like to get your head cut off?' In Chinese the expression 'head cut off' is very common. She was kidding, but instinctively I put my head on the stump even before I knew it. My body just walked right up there. She was really shocked and from then on my father stopped teaching me. Because of my father's own difficulties and his lack of confidence as an alien, life was very hard for him. Of course we didn't understand then. Being young Chinese-Americans we wanted to be like everyone else. We didn't want to be different."

Kwong speaks thoughtfully, rotating a ceramic tea bowl cupped in his large hands. His words are punctuated by pauses and characterized by the wide vowel sounds common to the Chinese-American dialect. "Going to Chinese school was a training, although it was a horrible training. My father hit me on the head with his knuckles. He liked me a lot so I got hit more. He wanted me to be stronger. I wasn't very strong. That was another thing that motivated me to study Zen."

As each of the five Kwong children turned eleven, they spent summers with their mother in the commercial aster fields that once surrounded Palo Alto. These were virtually subsidized by child labor and underpaid Chinese immigrants. The first year the Kwong children worked free as "apprentices," the second year they lied about their ages, and at thirteen they were legitimate employees, earning thirty-five cents an hour with increases up to sixty-five cents as the years went by. "We had to pick all the buds off of each stem; the buds were called suckers and we had to go through acres and acres of flowers to pick off all the buds, not once but two or three times. There were endless fields and we had to pick those suckers. It made the flowers grow taller and the blooms bigger. That was a training, too. I see that now. We had to work from six in the morning to seven at night every day through the entire summer. My mother made all the kids do this. It was a way to earn money. Very boring. Out in the fields, hot, pray for rain. Listening to the song of the passing ice-cream trucks. Talking to yourself. So what do you do with the mind all day? What does a young person do? How do you keep alive? And

you have to keep working. That really was a kind of training. And staying in one place. We had to sit on these little wooden stools. You can't move that fast. You can't walk. You have to get up early and sit on your butt all day. Just like now! Sitting all day from dawn to dusk. Same thing, see what I mean? My karma didn't change that much," he says, laughing. With raised eyebrows and wide eyes, he looks, as he often does, totally surprised by what strikes him as most obvious.

Dr. Kwong had attracted a number of clients on the margins of white culture, and by the early 1940s bohemians and artists were coming to his office regularly for herbal cures. Some noticed a shy boy drawing in the corner, and unlike his family or teachers they suggested that making art was a good thing. "Confusion at home, confusion in the world, confusion everywhere," he explains. "You look for some place to hide. So it was in my art. There was no art expressed through my father. He wrote with brushes like any Chinese. But I would notice those brushes. Art was sane. It was an oasis for me. Some resting place."

While he was studying commercial art at San Jose State College, he met Laura, who was then attending San Francisco State College. "This was 1955 or so. At San Jose, there was nothing happening, but Laura began telling me about the Beats and the Upanishads." Laura's parents were also immigrants from Canton but, unlike the Kwongs, raised their six children in the protective refuge of San Francisco's Chinatown. Her father was a cook, an accountant, and a commercial artist, a combination she describes as "Chinese survival." When she was eight her family moved six blocks to the adjacent Italian neighborhood of North Beach. By the time she entered high school, North Beach and Greenwich Village were fast becoming the continental outposts for the Beat generation. She attended high school outside her home district, which was her first immersion into non-Chinese culture. She says, "I felt excluded. I felt angry and then I felt sad. I didn't want to join them if they didn't want to join me. Then I didn't want to go back to the Chinese community because Chinese people didn't prepare me for the bigger world, so I got mad at them. I felt their world was too small and I didn't know if I wanted this one. Naturally I'm wondering if anyone knows of anything different. So you can imagine I'm looking at these strange people in North Beach with beards and penetrating eyes and thinking they must be feeling like I do because they don't seem to fit either."

In the fall of 1957 Laura and Bill decided to marry. The following Memorial Day he was in a near-fatal car accident. After staying up late for several nights studying for exams, he had gone to visit Laura in San Francisco. "We stayed up late talking philosophy," he says—or as Laura's version has it, "We were talking about the philosophy of free love." In any event, on his way home Bill fell asleep at the wheel and smashed the car into a steel girder on a freeway overpass. The patrolman who finally stopped saw a completely vertical car, with Kwong hanging upside down out of the front window, his foot caught in the steering wheel. When he got to the hospital doctors found his back smashed, his crushed foot as big as an elephant's, and bits of glass stuck all over his body. "That was an awakening. That was my memorial. I wasn't the same afterward."

One immediate effect of the accident was that it unleashed his impatience with academic conventions; he became critical of the department of art education and was finally expelled for refusing to comply with the dress code required for student teaching. After that he began his own personal exploration of art, recognizing in the simplicity and emptiness of Chinese Zen paintings a sensibility that would shape the rest of his life.

Once married, the Kwongs lived in Palo Alto. Never having obtained his teaching certificate, Bill went to work as a mailman. One day as he was delivering the mail, he noticed an English story in a Japanese newspaper about the new abbot of Sokoji. He recalls that "Suzuki Roshi had given a talk about liberation, and a student had asked him, 'If you believe in that, why do you keep your bird locked up in a cage?' And Suzuki Roshi just opened the door and the bird flew out the window." The empty birdcage remains a compelling image for Kwong; but through the fifties, he typified the Zen enthusiast who was more attracted to the stories than to the formal practice, and to a lifestyle that simulated the freedom of the enlightened masters.

Bill and Laura's first son, born in July 1959, was named after Ryokan, the eccentric and beloved eighteenth-century poet-priest who called himself Daigu, "Great Fool," and left his mountain hermitage to play with the village children and pick flowers, bowing on his way to all laborers and with special veneration to farmers. Shortly after Ryokan Kwong's birth, Laura went to work part-time while Bill stayed home with the baby and painted. Together the couple engaged in the casual, experimental atmosphere of Beat living, wearing black, playing drums on their doorstep, hanging out in coffee shops,

and denigrating the importance of materialism and money. When they moved to San Francisco in 1960, to an apartment on Octavia Street two blocks from Sokoji, they again enveloped themselves in Beat camaraderie. Exploring the early inklings of communal life, they shared whatever they had, fed whoever was there, and gave money to friends who needed it. Dinner guests often stayed for the night and sometimes for days. This was a celebration of "*satori* Zen"—a promise of liberation through spontaneity—and it was the only Zen they knew. In North Beach, California, 1960, the Kwongs were not alone in confusing a carefree bohemian way of life with the freedom of mind taught by the Buddhists; D. T. Suzuki's books had provided scriptural authenticity, and Alan Watts had taken up his post as Mill Valley's resident Zen avatar.

D. T. Suzuki and Alan Watts captivated their audiences with the possibility of spontaneous liberation, but their work contains little about the formal discipline of Zen that generates and grounds this experience. They have been criticized for their failure to present formal Zen by members of the first generation of practitioners, but in neither case can their influence in the United States be overestimated. It was precisely their liberal, visionary commitment to transmit Zen independent of its cultural identity that eased Zen into the intellectual life of the West and directly inspired the training that followed.

D. T. Suzuki talked a lot about satori, also called *kensho*. Shunryu Suzuki Roshi rarely mentioned it. And the shift from the earlier Suzuki to the later parallels the shift in the West from Zen philosophy to Zen practice. The word *kensho* consists of two characters: *ken*, "seeing into," and *sho*, "one's own nature." In Zen it describes the sudden moment of letting go of the individual, small, ego-bound self. Having let that self go, what is left is that self which is not, and has never been, a separate entity. "By its nature, this essential Self is inseparable from all that exists. It is not subject to the distinctions of inside and outside, of I and you, of subject and object," says Kwong. According to Buddhist doctrine, this buddhanature is the essential nature of all phenomena without exception; the dropping away of body and mind reveals this essence, considered the state of original enlightenment.

For D. T. Suzuki as for the Rinzai sect, the quest for sudden enlightenment lies at the heart of Zen. In Rinzai some "opening" experience is a prerequisite for understanding. It is the first step, without which the most devoted efforts to grasp the Zen teachings will remain superficial, the object of faith contin-

uing to reside outside oneself. In Dogen's Zen, by contrast, no one moment is targeted as the goal of practice; Soto Zen is the way of gradual, not sudden, enlightenment. The differences between Soto and Rinzai have never held that much sway in the United States, but D. T. Suzuki's emphasis on satori initially defined Zen for Westerners. Satori provided a powerful—and romantic—attraction to Zen; as a concept of spontaneous liberation it triggered an image that Americans could grasp. In the midst of an enigmatic philosophy, emerging from an enigmatic culture, satori was something to *get*, something to *have*, something to *go for*—all of which contributed to the psychological pitfall of what the late Tibetan teacher Trungpa Rinpoche called "spiritual materialism." Disengaged from the prosaic rigors of daily practice, satori became both finite and dramatic. And with its allusions to abrupt dislocations of time and space, it provided descriptions familiar to a generation experimenting with consciousness-expanding drugs.

By the early sixties San Francisco was rapidly emerging as Planet Earth's Aquarian spa. In the midst of California's excess of New Age alternatives, Zen training outdid its reputation for paradox. The association between consciousness-expanding drugs and satori highs and no-mind mind-states had already assured its iconic status in the counterculture. Jack Kerouac's *Dharma Bums* (1958), one of the counterculture's most consecrated texts, radiated a glorious vision of the "rucksack revolution" in which Zen lunatics would sanctify the universe with prayer, dance, drugs, meditation, and free love in the floating zendos of the mountains. Ironically the dharma bum whom Kerouac used as his model was the poet Gary Snyder, who was back in Kyoto sitting rigorous seven-day sesshins in a Rinzai monastery. In sesshin the hour-by-hour discipline of precise uniform activity is nothing less than a frontal attack on "doing your own thing."

Alan Watts, who along with Kerouac was preeminently responsible for advancing Beat Zen, referred to Japanese monastic training as "Square Zen." In his 1958 essay "Beat Zen, Square Zen and Zen," Watts in fact disputed both extremes, savoring only the simplicity of the early Chinese masters, but that did nothing to diminish his tremendous influence over the Beat generation.

In the early 1960s some Zen readers in San Francisco began moving away from Beat Zen and toward the benevolence of Shunryu Suzuki Roshi. Some of the self-styled explorations of consciousness had become pretty weird,

and for those who found flying through infinity on their own a little too scary, the formality of Zen training looked more and more like a resilient safety net rather than a padded cell. "Beat Zen," Kwong Roshi says in retrospect, "was a complete misunderstanding! Like saying that nothing matters. Just sit there and nothing matters. But without practice, without form, you can't get at the heart of it. The form of Beat Zen was wild spontaneity, but that didn't replenish. Too many leaks. So that was the despair of the Beats. It was completely different from formal Zen in that way. Beat Zen was high and low. Zen is even. Beat Zen was knowing that something was missing and therefore searching for something else." Somewhere in the haze of parties, bongo drums, and satori highs, Kwong recognized the need for discipline. As he explained to Laura, all the texts said a teacher was necessary for Zen studies. Laura had read the same texts but admitted that she had missed that part. It was the same part missed by a lot of Zen readers.

With familiarity rapidly slipping away from even its own natives, San Francisco in 1958 must have seemed particularly strange to a Japanese abbot who had grown up dreaming of one day coming to America. And yet legitimate high priests were just what the mecca of San Francisco needed. Born in 1904, Shunryu Suzuki Roshi was the son of a Soto priest and roshi. It had become customary in Japan for the sons of priests to follow their fathers' footsteps, becoming their disciples, and taking over their temples. But in the first of a series of divergent moves, Suzuki left home at the age of thirteen to study with his father's disciple, Gyokujun So-on Roshi, master of Zoun Temple. Although the other young novices from that time all ran away from So-on's temple to escape the harsh demands of its formidable master, Suzuki stayed until he was nineteen. So-on Roshi then sent him to the high school attached to Komozawa University, where he later did his undergraduate studies. From there Suzuki went on to become a monk at Eiheiji and then Sojiji, the two main training monasteries of the Soto sect. In the meantime So-on Roshi had become the abbot of Zoun-in, a major mother temple responsible for two hundred subtemples. Suzuki was only thirty-two when So-on died, and despite argumentative disputes among the laity and priests as to whether one so young could lead this extensive temple, he went on to succeed So-on as abbot.

Suzuki Roshi was one of very few Buddhist priests publicly to oppose the rise of militarism in Japan prior to the Second World War. Even after the mil-

itarists took control of the government, he continued to publish lectures warning against the consequences of aggressive military policies. Following Japan's defeat, the occupational government of the United States uniformly revoked the teaching licenses of all Zen Buddhist priests because of their categorical support for the war effort. Suzuki Roshi appealed, using his publications to prove his dissidence. His license to teach Zen, which had never been used, was reinstated by the United States government.

In 1958 Suzuki Roshi accepted a three-year position as the resident priest of Sokoji in San Francisco. Still standing on the corner of Laguna and Bush streets, Sokoji is a conspicuously dilapidated 1890s wooden building on a block that has been notably upgraded since Suzuki Roshi first arrived. The Star of David, set into stained-glass windows, recalls the building's original use as a synagogue, as does the Hebrew writing carved into the cornerstone, now partially hidden by a rusty drainpipe. The Japanese community bought the synagogue in 1934 and nearly lost it during the Second World War, when virtually its entire membership was interned in inland camps for Japanese-Americans. In panic and humiliation, the parishioners of Sokoji had gathered up children and aging parents, abandoned their homes, shops, and possessions, and turned themselves in for relocation to barbed-wire camps patroled by armed guards. As part of his own hurried preparations to evacuate, the head Japanese priest had judiciously entrusted Sokoji to an Indian Hindu priest and arranged for the mortgage to be maintained by payments sent by parishioners from the camps. With its crumbling black dome towers and peeling gray balustrade, Sokoji looks today like a grand abandoned bird's nest; a long time in the coming, a new temple was recently built a block away.

When Suzuki Roshi first arrived he did zazen alone each morning. Traditional Buddhist services were performed later in the day for the Japanese congregation, who showed little interest in zazen. When Americans inquired about Zen meditation, he told them that he sat at 5:40 in the morning and that anyone was welcome. Soon young Americans were showing up to sit with him. Some were barefoot and some hadn't been to bed yet.

It was these earnest Westerners showing up for dawn zazen, not his Japanese parishioners, who tapped Suzuki Roshi's immense and subtle talent for Zen training. Their openness, their naivete, their clumsy American bighearted willingness presented a kind of beginner's mind—not at all free in the true Buddhist sense but relatively free from ideas about Zen training.

"Because I came to love Suzuki Roshi so much," Kwong says, "I stopped questioning the formal, rigid style of Zen practice. He was just very present. And ordinary. That was his special quality. The projection made him a superhuman being. But actually he was just present and just ordinary and no more and no less. And that's why I say that he was the first person I ever met. Unqualified. Just wonderful. And you came away feeling the same way. That was the dharma transmission whether we knew it or not. We were receiving something and we were being received. Many times there was resistance to the form, but I knew that the form was good. I didn't fight it externally, but I could feel the resistance in my body; it just wasn't comfortable. And you think everything takes so long. The bowing and the chanting takes so long. Gotta do nine more bows. The aggressive mind, the speedy mind, isn't used to this, so you think: we could be doing other things, like eat, or go home."

Just as he had used art as a way of withdrawing from the world, Kwong initially used zazen as a way of withdrawing from himself. "Zazen was my oasis. My misunderstanding was that I took it for a refuge, in the sense of escape. I just conked out, closed my eyes, and went away somewhere. Not into an emptiness but into a blankness. And I thought, this is it. Many people when they start sitting think the same way. In blankness you're not present. In emptiness you are dynamically present. Your body and mind are together. In the first eight years of sitting, I had a lot of sleepiness, a tremendous amount," he says, drunkenly swaying his torso in demonstration. "I didn't know how to express myself verbally, so I withdrew into a kind of stupor."

Sleepiness during zazen is in fact common. In Japanese monasteries unsolicited blows to the shoulders are still the standard antidote. Chinese monks warded off drowsiness by practicing with rocks on their heads. But sometimes, says Kwong, "sleepiness in zazen practice is necessary for a certain period of time. A lot of Zen students have a difficult time relating to other people. The form can be like a protective shell. It can make you feel like you're safely isolated from others. But as you get more grounded and confident through the practice, you can step out a little more, be less paralyzed, express your feelings, and at the same time become more present in the practice within everyday life."

Kwong sought to protect the fragile refuge he had found in zazen by perfecting the form of Zen practice. Because of its exacting style, Japanese Zen easily lends itself to a preoccupation with form. Perfecting the form can be-

come an obsession that subsumes the practice. Kwong calls it "a Zen sickness," in which the messy emotional interior is obscured by an aura of excellence and the elasticity of a relaxed mind rigidifies into a moribund "perfection." "I used to push in a very macho way. I could sit full-lotus longer than anyone. I wanted to be 'the best sitter.' It was like a competition, which is okay for a while. The form itself is okay. But each person has his own relationship to it. Maybe someone else doesn't have to compete. I had to do that. That was my karma—the set of conditions that I came to Zen with. I found myself trying to outsit everybody until I realized—what am I doing?" Quoting a passage in the *Platform Sutra* by Hui Nêng, the Sixth Patriarch of Chinese Zen, Kwong reflects on his early quest for perfection:

> Sentient beings are immobile
> Inanimate objects are stationary
> He who trains himself by exercise
> to be motionless
> gets no benefit
> other than making himself as still
> as an inanimate object.

Facing his students in the zendo, Kwong recalls his first ten years of sitting practice: "I think I was trying to become an inanimate object. This kind of inanimate object or blankness in the Zen school is a Zen sickness. When we sit, we are not just trying to make our minds blank or trying to be motionless but we're expressing our buddhanature. The Sixth Patriarch is not belittling zazen practice but giving us some deep instruction on what can happen. It's possible to spend ten or fifteen years—or even more—becoming an inanimate object. Zazen is subtle motion. The *Platform Sutra* asks, 'How will I ever get to the platform?' But everybody's on the platform. This whole room is the platform. You don't get up to it, you don't climb it, you're it. Your body is the *Platform Sutra*. I imagine that for the teacher it is equally as hard as for the student because we're a team. I'm not over here and you're not over there. So we come here for the dharma talk and the bells ring, we make bows, light incense, and we feel like we're on some kind of platform. The idea is to lift, to erect our platform. And then I sit down and I do what I do, and some people are trying to do zazen. That's good. But people want so much. We want to be someone else. 'I want to be stronger.' 'I want to be more directed.' 'I want to

be superwoman.' But it's not possible. You must accept your condition. But 'accept' is *active*. Who you are is active. Passive acceptance—that's the immobile, inanimate Zen. It's not the Zen I'm talking about. There's passion here. Spirit for the quest. This is important: the sincerity of our quest and how we go about it. It's a long path. Are you prepared? Do you want to walk on this path? Don't think about it too much. *Just* walk! C'mon, let's go! That's Zen."

Shortly after Kwong started sitting in 1960 he had jukai, the ceremony of receiving the Buddhist precepts. Suzuki Roshi performed the ceremony with no prior explanation, telling his students, "No problem. You'll learn later." Kwong says, "We didn't even know what it meant to have jukai because it was all in Japanese. And in a way that was good because it kept us pure. It was his way of protecting our 'beginner's mind.' At the time of the ceremony, you're given a square, biblike cloth called a rakusu, which represents the Buddha's robe. *Raku* means 'to hang' or 'encircle.' *Su* means 'child.' So to take the Buddhist precepts is to become Buddha's child and to live with beginner's mind." Suzuki Roshi said, "In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities; in the expert's mind there are few."

The following year, 1961, the Kwongs' second son, Cam Shunryu, was born, and a year later came Evri, who was named after *The Everyman*, a trimaran sailboat used in a peace-keeping mission in the Pacific to protest nuclear testing. Jakusho supported the family from 1960 to 1968 as a window designer and sign painter for Cost Plus Imports. Laura stayed home those years with three baby boys and wondered if Zen meditation might ease her day.

By 1964 the Kwongs had outgrown the Octavia Street apartment, and they moved across the Golden Gate Bridge to Mill Valley. Jakusho left each morning to bike over the bridge in time for 5:40 zazen. Cost Plus didn't open until nine, leaving a gap between meditation and work during which Suzuki Roshi invited him to stay for breakfast; soon he was teaching Jakusho how to cook. In Zen monasteries the position of *tenzo* or monastery cook is one of the most venerated and is given to a senior monk. Soto tenzos today still follow the detailed instructions that Dogen Zenji outlined in the thirteenth century. These include how, when, and where to clean and prepare rice, how not to waste even one grain, how to use inedible vegetable stems for broth, how to clean and place the kitchen utensils, and how to let go of one's per-

sonal likes and dislikes of certain dishes. "See the pot as your own head," advised Dogen. "See the water as your lifeblood."

"One time, I had just made some rice gruel," recalls Kwong, "and Suzuki Roshi asked me if I knew how to make rice gruel, and I said, 'Of course I do.' And he proceeded in minute detail to tell me how to make rice gruel, and I told him I already knew how to make it. It's very difficult being a student. It was only in retrospect that I thought, what a fool! I should have just listened and received."

Another time Suzuki Roshi asked, casually, if Jakusho had finished washing the sink. He assured the master that he had. Suzuki Roshi then poured a pot of tea leaves into the clean sink. Only later did Jakusho realize that washing the sink, like birth and death, has no absolute beginning and no absolute end.

One year at *rohatsu*, the Zen retreat that commemorates Shakyamuni Buddha's enlightenment on December 8th (at Genjoji it commemorates Suzuki Roshi as well, who died on December 4th, 1971), Kwong told of having had breakfast with Suzuki Roshi and Katagiri Roshi. "We were all sitting at the table, and it was not like having breakfast with a friend. It was more like a formal interview. I had hair then and it was all standing up on end. I was real uptight and I thought I was relaxed. That's how I was. When Suzuki Roshi stood up, that was my signal to wash a particular cup. And this teacup was a valuable temple treasure. So when I went to pick it up of course I used two hands, and somehow—I didn't drop it—the teacup dropped itself. You know how those things go? You're sure you didn't drop it. You're positive you didn't drop it, but somehow the teacup left the table. And it went through the back of the chair. And I missed it and it fell to the floor and broke! And I felt *so* bad. And then Katagiri Roshi went, 'Oh oooooh.' And then Suzuki Roshi went 'oooooooh, oooooooh, ooooh, ooh oh.' It was like an alternating chorus. I was very attached to the teacup. Then my mind started working: maybe they'll throw it away and I can keep it. I could glue it back together! Suzuki Roshi came over and we picked up all the pieces. And he took the pieces and he stuffed them into the garbage so deep that even my mind couldn't get at them."

With more and more Japanese roshis arriving in the United States, and Zen training centers developing from Hawaii to New York, the Beat Zen of Watts

and Kerouac continued losing ground to Square Zen, which by the mid-sixties was rapidly becoming the one and only true Zen. More than one hundred Westerners were packing Sokoji for sesshins, and thirty to forty students were coming regularly for dawn zazen. Suzuki Roshi's zazen students had incorporated themselves into San Francisco Zen Center in 1962, and in 1966 Zen Center purchased Tassajara Hot Springs, a one-hundred-year-old resort deep in the California coastal mountains south of Monterey. This was the first Zen monastery in North America and has continued to be known by its Spanish name, Tassajara. The original summer programs were soon extended to year-round residency, and the three-hour car ride between San Francisco and Tassajara became a common run for Suzuki Roshi and his senior student and future successor, Richard Baker.

Kwong anticipated living at Tassajara but was instructed not to leave Mill Valley. "Tassajara is not for you," Suzuki Roshi told him. The timing was not right, Kwong realizes now. "Not just because of my family and my commitments in Mill Valley, but because of my own fragility, too. Of course, I would go there for practice periods, but I did not move there. From then on, I realized I had to let Suzuki Roshi go. I loved him so much. As he became busier and busier, I saw him less and less. There was a kind of weaning process going on."

In 1969 Zen Center vacated Sokoji, leaving the temple to function once again solely as a parish center for the Japanese community. A fifty-room dormitory at 300 Page Street in San Francisco, formerly a Jewish women's residence, became the new home for the center as well as for Suzuki Roshi and his wife. The following year Laura had jukai with Suzuki Roshi, receiving the name Shinko Musho, which means "Heart Fragrance Empty Nature." That same year Jakusho became a monk. "Suzuki Roshi said, 'I would like you to become a monk.' When he said that, it scared the hell out of me and, at the same time, I felt it was a great honor. I had no thoughts of becoming a monk, although I identified with Roshi very much. But stability was needed, and we were all lay students and when one becomes a monk, obviously that defines your life."

With ordination Kwong acquired the status of a "Zen professional" and was offered a teaching position in the psychology department of Sonoma State College. For its tolerance of a hip, alternative, and "flakey" curriculum,

the college had already been dubbed "Granola State." A woman who has studied with Kwong for sixteen years first met him in a classroom there. Eager to explore her own Chinese-American roots, she registered for a course called Chinese Identity and ended up listening to lectures on Buddhism and learning zazen.

In the fall of 1970 Suzuki Roshi appointed Jakusho head monk for the annual three-month practice intensive at Tassajara. This was the last training period while Suzuki Roshi was alive. It was directed by Dainin Katagiri Roshi, who had come from Japan to help Suzuki Roshi and who later formed the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center. Because Jakusho had been teaching at Sonoma State, Suzuki Roshi asked him to give talks during this training, although these were not the usual responsibility of the head monk. "The head monk," explains Kwong, "is the example for the community and is empowered to lead the group in that sense. But sitting up on the altar and giving these talks, I began thinking that maybe I should try, eventually, to become a good teacher. Suzuki Roshi never mentioned 'satori' or 'enlightenment' or 'Zen teacher' or 'dharma heir.' 'Dharma heir' was a new name. It had not been in our vocabulary and it was nice that way. No one thought about it." But the vocabulary took on sudden significance when Suzuki Roshi told Jakusho, "You will be my dharma heir."

By the time Jakusho started his transmission studies, Suzuki Roshi was already suffering from liver cancer. "In the beginning of 1971, I would go to his room at Page Street where we would practice calligraphy together. Suzuki Roshi would write out a word. The first word was *dō*, which means 'same.' I knew the character in Chinese—intellectually. But he kept saying, 'We're the same.' I had been looking at the character, but not the meaning behind it. He was trying to teach me that the student and master are the same, that we are both Buddha. But I was stuck in the literal, relative meaning, not grasping the spirit. I only got it after he died. We also wrote out the names of the patriarchs in the lineage. But they were like Iceland to me, very far away. One morning we were in his room doing calligraphy and he was so sick that his brush dropped out of his hand. From that day on, I didn't go back. I wanted to prolong his life, and I felt too unworthy to bother him. Now I realize that that was an incorrect Zen attitude. The character said 'same.' My delusion was that I was not worthy, that if I bothered him less, he would live longer. I

was attached to his life, but not to the life of a Zen master. In retrospect I see that a mature Zen student would have continued to go to the lessons and to confront and accept the life given from dying."

Six months before he died Suzuki Roshi told his students, "My teacher died when I was thirty-two years old. So I was not so lucky in this point. I want to live as long as I can. I was weak. I didn't think I would live more than sixty. But now I've become greedy because of you. Ten years more. I am asking the Buddha to give me ten years more. Then you will be forty, fifty."

But Suzuki Roshi did not get his wish, and he left behind many senior students, including Richard Baker and Jakusho, still in their mid-thirties. He had lived in America for just twelve years, a complete cycle according to Chinese calculations. By the time he died, Zen practice had been stripped of its inscrutability, rescued from the hip elitism of Zen lunacy, and firmly planted on American soil. Two weeks before his death, Suzuki Roshi installed Richard Baker as abbot of San Francisco Zen Center. Jakusho never completed formal transmission with him.

Although the transmission ceremony is both the experience and the affirmation of a process that is not bound by past, present, or future, difficulties arise if a teacher dies in the midst of transmission teachings. Since the preparations and the ceremony itself are intrinsic to unifying that "sameness" between teacher and disciple, it is not easy for someone else to step in and complete the process. "To probe and test me," says Kwong, "Suzuki Roshi had confided in me that he was going to give Baker Roshi transmission. He was testing my response to receiving transmission. This was the year before he told me that I would be his dharma heir. He was slowly and subtly preparing me and others for my transmission by including me in activities and giving me more responsibilities. Before he died, he asked the board of directors to see that my transmission was taken care of, but they didn't know what to do."

Suzuki Roshi made a similar request to Hoichi, his eldest son and first dharma heir. Eventually, in 1978, Kwong did receive formal transmission from Hoichi, but at the time of his father's death, Hoichi himself was only thirty-two years old and had no idea how to interpret his father's pleas. On a visit to Genjoji in 1984, Hoichi Suzuki told students, "Many, many times my father said to me before he died, 'You must help Jakusho with dharma trans-

mission.'" In the redwood zendo, wearing the brown robe that had been given to him by Suzuki Roshi, Jakusho sat weeping through Hoichi's talk. "Technically Jakusho received dharma transmission from me," said Hoichi. "But in heart, it was from my father through me."

In 1972, one factor that contributed to the ambiguous status of Jakusho's transmission was the absence of any handwritten document that testified to Suzuki Roshi's intentions. This option had been used in Japan to counter the false claims of careerist monks, although written documentation did not automatically allay suspicions and offered no provision in the event of sudden death. Furthermore, the term "dharma heir" was sometimes used quite casually by teachers, allowing for some genuine ambiguity as well as deception. To encourage an exceptionally talented or devoted disciple, a teacher might say, even to a relative beginner, "You will be my dharma heir." But the actuality depends on the student's maturation, and the shift needed from potential to actualization is not always similarly assessed by teacher and disciple. In Japan dharma transmission had become so corrupted by the priesthood that the claims falsely attributed to deceased teachers by disingenuous priests accounted for a relatively minor part of the spiritual disintegration. The purposeful implantation of Japanese Zen in the United States, however, offered a rare opportunity to bring the best and leave the worst behind. Well intentioned as it was, this selective effort has contributed to a false assumption of spiritual purity that illuminates every offense as if it had never before occurred in the very human history of Zen. Partly because of the corruption in Japan and the impulse to protect Zen in the United States, Suzuki Roshi's failure to provide written documentation for Jakusho was interpreted by some Japanese and American Zen clergy as a clear indication that Jakusho was not qualified for transmission. He was never suspected of self-serving abuse, but it was thought that perhaps with too much American innocence he had taken the indirect subtleties of a Japanese Zen master at face value. For two years following Suzuki Roshi's death the matter of Kwong's transmission was held in abeyance.

According to Soto custom, Kwong's failure to receive dharma transmission jeopardized his authority to teach. But he did become the priest of the Mill Valley Zendo, where his priestly functions included officiating at passage-of-life ceremonies and Buddhist services. Priestly ordination itself

does not entail teaching, and at the Mill Valley Zendo Kwong continued his weekly talks in the capacity of senior student, not authorized Zen teacher.

During this time Jakusho became increasingly alienated from San Francisco Zen Center. His initial offers to share the responsibilities of the community with Baker Roshi were not acknowledged. With no one to champion his cause, the absence of written documentation from Suzuki Roshi seemed to aggravate his ambiguous status. According to Richard Baker, however, it was actually quite the reverse. By Baker's account, if Suzuki Roshi had spelled out his intentions it would have sealed Kwong's commitment to complete the transmission process with Baker himself. "Suzuki Roshi knew that Jakusho had problems with me," explains Baker Roshi, "and he didn't want to tie his hands in this way. He wanted him to be free to leave Zen Center and to choose who to work with. That had its difficulties, but Suzuki Roshi knew he wasn't doing Jakusho any favors by forcing his commitment to me." Furthermore, while Richard Baker had demonstrated a brilliant talent for administration, Kwong had not. Suzuki Roshi had kept Kwong away from the administrative side of running the center, which made it all the more problematic for Suzuki's successor to find a role for him there.

Most of Suzuki Roshi's original students had their problems with Baker. Twelve years after his installation as abbot of San Francisco Zen Center, Baker Roshi resigned under pressure from his students, ushering in an era of examination that explicitly questions the nature of dharma transmission. But as Kwong sees it, "Suzuki Roshi was a hard act to follow," and from the beginning the myths of dharma transmission did not serve Baker well. "We wanted Baker Roshi to be like Suzuki Roshi," Kwong says. "But that was not fair. Baker Roshi was an extrovert, the opposite of Suzuki Roshi; he was young, and Suzuki Roshi was the mythic old wise man; Suzuki Roshi was a subtle Japanese and very profound, and Baker Roshi was typically American, smart and cerebral. And I felt that in some way because Baker Roshi was so American, part of Suzuki Roshi's message was that if Baker Roshi could attain Bodhi Mind, any American could. But I could not relate to Baker Roshi as a teacher. We had been peers, dharma brothers. And I could not accept the distinction after Suzuki Roshi died. I tried. We all tried, including Baker Roshi. When Suzuki Roshi installed Baker Roshi as abbot of San Francisco Zen Center, he asked all of us to call him 'roshi.' And we did. We

served his meals first and tried to walk out the door behind him, although often he made us go first. It was a difficult time for everyone. Very few of us shared Baker Roshi's interest in or capacity for corporate organization, and we had a kind of cultural prejudice against it and didn't appreciate its value. But for myself, I knew I had to do something. But I got no support for leaving and no support for staying.

"Suzuki Roshi always kept me out of the picture. Even when we were carrying his casket, my picture wasn't there. I was there, carrying the casket, but in the background. Or like telling me, 'You can't go to Tassajara.' So that gave me a long period to flower without pressure. The spotlight went onto Baker Roshi, and this little flower was left to grow at his own pace. In retrospect I am very grateful for this. But that gratitude came slowly, only with maturation."

Kwong moved to Sonoma in 1973 without the support of his peers. In the wake of Suzuki Roshi's death, the community became the vehicle for the propagation and support of the late master's work. For those senior students who elected to stay on, loyalty to the community and to Suzuki Roshi's dharma heir was inseparable from commitment to the late master. Dharma transmission, as it was understood at that time, confirmed a sacred unity between Suzuki Roshi and Baker Roshi that bequeathed unquestionable authority. To leave San Francisco Zen Center was tantamount to a break with the old master himself. Striking out on his own, Kwong was criticized for being self-centered and immature and for playing teacher before his time. "For eleven years I had been so closely affiliated with Zen Center that when I left there was a tremendous vacuum. But when I went back to visit it was like I had the plague. Not many people wanted to talk to me." As Kwong understands it, there was never any possibility of a break with his teacher, no matter what form his life took. And his position at San Francisco Zen Center was untenable, a conclusion shared even by his critics.

The year before he died, Suzuki Roshi had asked Jakusho to give a dharma talk to the general assembly at Page Street. He had given talks at Tassajara but Suzuki Roshi hadn't been there and, as Kwong says, "It's easy to talk when the master's not there." For this talk, he prepared all week long. As the evening approached, his nerves began to quiver. Half an hour before his talk was scheduled, Suzuki Roshi casually said to him, "I think I'll give the

talk this evening." The subject was the enlightenment poem of the ninth-century Chinese master Tozan Zenji. Afterward Suzuki Roshi gave Jakusho a copy of the poem in Japanese with his own translation underneath.

> Do not try to see objective
> world
> You which is given as an
> object to see
> is quite different from you yourself.
> I am going my own way
> and I meet myself
> which include every-
> thing I meet.
> I am not something which I can
> see (as an object)
> When you understand self which include every-
> thing you have your true way.

Almost twenty years later Kwong says, "In retrospect I see that this poem, and Suzuki Roshi's giving it to me, helped me go on my way. But not 'my way' in a personal sense. That 'way' includes everything. I never felt separated from Suzuki Roshi. Because I felt that there was no invitation from Zen Center, I had to do something. To start a little sitting group."

Sonoma was a logical move. Kwong's students at Sonoma State had been rising at 4:00 A.M. every Wednesday to drive to Mill Valley for his morning talks at the Wisteria Way Zendo. At Baker Roshi's suggestion, Sterling Bunnell, an old friend of Suzuki Roshi's, offered Jakusho the eighty-acre parcel of land to start a Zen center. Laura returned to Sonoma State to start an independent career as a psychologist. Following Jakusho's Zen path suddenly felt like walking down the street ten steps behind her husband. She maintained her sitting practice, but for the first five years stayed away from the administrative and social concerns of Sonoma Mountain Zen Center.

With his move to Sonoma, Kwong relinquished all formal ties to San Francisco Zen Center. It was his conviction that his commitment to his teacher did not require him to remain loyal to his teacher's dharma heir and to a community increasingly informed by Baker's vision. "I think the fact that I had started transmission studies helped give me the confidence to leave. I felt that I had some kind of empowerment—however fragile—some

edge over the others who felt that they had to stay because of Suzuki Roshi. When he was alive I couldn't go anywhere, physically, because I felt that I had to be near him. After he died others felt that they had to stay in the house that he built, in his center, near his presence."

At around the same time that the Kwongs moved to Sonoma, Japanese teachers in both the United States and Japan agreed that Jakusho should continue transmission teachings with Kobun Chino Roshi, who had come to San Francisco in 1967 to help Suzuki Roshi and was then heading a lay-people's group in Los Altos. Chino Roshi recently said from his home in Taos, New Mexico, that when he examined the calligraphy that Jakusho had been doing for his transmission studies, "There was no doubt about Suzuki Roshi's intentions." For five years Jakusho traveled two hundred miles to Los Altos one day a week. It was understood that the transmission ceremony would be performed in Japan by Suzuki Roshi's son Hoichi, who would stand in as a replacement for his father. Within that ceremony, Kwong says, "something very vital happens. And it has also been happening ever since you met your teacher. Some wisdom and knowledge and experience are being transmitted to you in a very intimate way. Subliminally. Much later you realize what he gave you, but at the time it's happening, no one knows. Then there are the bowls and robes and calligraphy that verify that transmission has happened. Studying for the transmission ceremony is itself a form of advanced practice. Studying the way you fold your bowing cloth, how one end goes over the other, or the different ways of bowing and why you bow. Learning to laugh and cry at the same time, learning what the sages said to each other, studying the Zen literature, being asked questions, being on the spot. Just the intimacy. Mind to mind and heart to heart. After that, each person's practice is to cultivate that. For the rest of our lives. The whole transmission is the tip of a lighted incense stick pointing directly at you."

At Sonoma, Kwong was Zen priest, senior student, and, since his credentials had not yet been validated, unofficial teacher. "I knew I had to continue the transmission study, but I didn't realize how much it was a study of myself. Those early years were like a foggy dream. I wasn't empowered yet. I hadn't been sanctioned by the Buddhas and the patriarchs. It was like a bardo state in between leaving San Francisco Zen Center and arriving in Sonoma; I was already here, but I hadn't arrived yet. To have a community was very difficult. It scared me half to death. I am such a lazy person, I knew I had to practice

with others. But I didn't know how to plant the seeds and I didn't know how to do my role."

In other words, Kwong was left with the role of leader without the authority needed for effective functioning. His ambiguous position fueled an uneasy accord between Zen training and communal living. Attracted by Kwong's gentle nature, students availed themselves of a permissive social structure. In the absence of clear leadership, spiritual or political, the hope that strong practice would generate guidelines was undermined by divisive self-interests. From every angle—Kwong, his students, community, Zen practice, Zen in America—too much was too new.

Incapable of the patriarchal severity of his own father, Kwong passively hoped that his students would respond to a soft and reasonable style. "The way my father taught me was through unwarranted punishment. I saw it as his own anxiety being projected out to the children. It was not just. I knew I had to find another way. But because I was subjected to such punitive measures, I always gave students the benefit of the doubt. I was not mature enough to be sure of my own needs and feelings. But I did not want to project this on the students the way my father had on me. When I look back, I see how valuable a training this was. When you select your own friends they usually perpetuate your own delusions. But in a community you are stuck with each other. This is the difficulty and the richness of community."

Kwong says now that one problem in the early days was that he took Suzuki Roshi's cow-image too literally. In *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, Suzuki Roshi talks about order and control in everyday life: "Even though you try to put people under control it is impossible. You cannot do it. The best way to control people is to encourage them to be mischievous. Then they will be controlled in a wider sense. To give your sheep or cow a large, spacious meadow is the way to control him. So it is with people: first let them do what they want and watch them. This is the best policy. To ignore them is no good; that is the worst policy. The second worst is trying to control them. The best one is to watch them, just to watch them, without trying to control them."

"In those days," says Kwong, "I was more focused on the exterior—what are the students doing? Now, I'm focusing more on the interior—what am I doing? And the control of these cows is *this* cow," he says, placing his palm flat against his chest. "How am I doing? How am I practicing? Now I can say to them, 'I don't think your practice is so strong. I want you to do more. I demand more of you.' That was hard for me to say."

In 1976 Kwong developed testicular seminoma, a cancer he associates with personal confusion. "The community was going," he says, "but something was not working right. I wasn't able to communicate with the people. I had let anyone come into the community. In a way that was compassionate, in a way foolish. But I thought that was my job, and our rules and regulations weren't as strict as other Zen communities because I was trying to provide for people. If I saw someone having a difficult time, I would change the rule. When I got sick, I felt that being able to express myself better would help make me well again. Also, my teacher had cancer, and there was my love for my teacher and still not knowing how to let go of him. Every good teacher is going to take a fall. Without exception. The star falls out of the sky. It's the law. It's the dharma. When it's happening, I don't wish it on anyone. It's a very painful time. And the healing process takes an equal amount of time. But it's God's grace."

By the doctors' account he had "the best cancer," and they were optimistic about its surgical removal. From his hospital bed in San Francisco he watched the Kurosawa film *Ikiru*, which just happened to come on television the night before the operation. *Ikiru* means "to live." A petty bureaucrat with no ambition, no passion, no interests—in short, no life—has stomach cancer. The film opens with an x-ray of an inoperable tumor and the words: "This is the cancer of our hero." From that grim beginning follows the story of a man who at the age of sixty is brought to life by the awareness of his death. This man was to be Kwong's personal guide through the wilderness of his disease. "The most important teaching for me was that I realized what an ass I was," says Kwong. "I could sit for a long period of time, for four hours in full-lotus, and didn't seem afraid of the unknown. I could really do that, but I felt like *I* had mastered something. As I got closer and closer to the gate of death, I felt that *I* was ready to go. I forgot about my wife, my family, my students, my friends. You see how selfish and ignorant I was? I am very much a part of this whole environment and I thought *I* was ready. That was a teaching. I had too much pride. Then with the cancer, I couldn't even sit down for zazen. The practice was completely taken away and I was just in a tailspin. Everything was out of control. No more control. So I was really lucky. '*Big* Luck!' Mrs. Suzuki said."

He was also really angry. Having identified the cancer as a growth of repression, for the first time he openly chastised students who had misused the center, who had not pulled their share of the work load, who were not

practicing, who had violated the rules against drugs and liquor, or who curried favor with him while deceiving others. He was angry, too, at his own inability to say what he felt. The perfect alignment of a cushion to a tatami mat, or the perfect alignment in zazen of the back to the neck—these were the lines that Kwong knew. But the lines between himself and the students—the lines of authority—had remained hazy.

"After the cancer came," he says, referring to it as if it had been a season of hard rain, "I knew I would get better by being more expressive, more communicative." He also became less friendly. Students were asked to leave as the community underwent its first purge. Bitterness and betrayal flared up on both sides. Students were as angry with his attempts to seize control of his pasture as they had been with his failure to do so before. "That's the double bind for the teacher: the students themselves know that authority helps cut the confusion. But they resist it at the same time. There must be a benevolent or compassionate intention behind the authority—that's crucial for the teacher—although the students generally will not distinguish between this and their associations of repressive authority. There was an in-group of six or seven students who had been here for three or four years. They were not sincere Zen students. And they wanted to run the community in their own way. But it was still hard to make the decision that it was better—both for the community and for them—that they leave. This is a kind of rite of passage for every teacher. Even Shakyamuni Buddha had great difficulties with his sangha. That's why one of the five great sins in Buddhism is messing with the sangha."

Even with successful surgery, Kwong knew his life would be at risk until he remained cancer-free for six years. In the face of what he perceived as a do-or-die choice, his health and confidence strengthened rapidly, and within a year he was ready for the transmission ceremony. In December 1977 he went to Los Altos to tell Kobun Chino the news. "Five years of study," says Kwong, "and Chino was patiently waiting for me to tell him when I was ready, and the day I decided he jumped up and down and said, 'Let's call Hoichi in Japan!'"

Feeling ready is not independent from the teacher identifying the readiness, indicating, as in this case, something of the self-revealing nature of transmission. From a relative view, the ego is so disinclined to let go of itself that a teacher is necessary to help the disciple discover what already exists. Yet as nothing is "added," nothing is given. Therefore from an absolute view,

one can only transmit the dharma to oneself; this is what allows for self-proclaimed recognition, however suspect it may sometimes appear.

Kwong's own recognition of readiness was affirmed by Kobun Chino, who completed studies started by Suzuki Roshi. But while no one could ever replace Suzuki Roshi as Kwong's root—or heart—teacher, the original plans for the ceremony called for Hoichi Suzuki to officiate as a vehicle for his father. But at the last minute he consulted Kojun Noiri, also known as Haku-san, "White Mountain," a renowned teacher, Dogen scholar, and respected authority on the transmission ceremony, and Noiri Roshi had told him: "You cannot be a stand-in; can you sign the signature of a dead man?"

Jakusho did not learn that Hoichi would not be able to stand in for his father until he arrived in Japan in the winter of 1978. "So my attachment to doing it the way I thought it was supposed to be done just went out the window. I just let it go. Because I loved Suzuki Roshi so much, I was being cut off again, to stand on my own without attachment. That was very interesting. I am Suzuki Roshi's dharma heir and, in a technical sense, I am Hoichi's disciple. Now, in the twentieth century, people just pay money to get their certificates, but Noiri Roshi was very pure. So instead of representing the ninetieth generation in the lineage, I represent the ninety-first. Suzuki Roshi was my teacher and one of my jobs is to establish and continue his lineage. If I had a dharma heir, I would be very happy. When I reflect on this, it is a very big burden. But it would mean that my job is complete in a sense."

With his transmission Jakusho became a *sensei*, or teacher. In June 1978, with Hoichi present at Sonoma Mountain, Kwong Sensei was installed as abbot of Genjoji, which until that time had been guided—as stated in the daily liturgy—"by the founder of this temple, Shunryu Suzuki Roshi." In the Soto school, the ascent to abbot is accompanied by the title *roshi*, which means "old teacher." Kwong waited another eight years before using it. By then he was fifty-one.

Ten years after being installed as abbot Kwong says, "Now I realize that because of the karmic conditions of a dharma heir, after the transmission ceremony his or her path has been sealed. They cannot go back in the same way. It doesn't matter if they have a temple or if they are in a hermitage or a brothel. They are stuck with that karma. How they wish to manifest it is up to them. If they don't manifest it there is tremendous suffering, for themselves and for others.

"Inner conviction has come together with the license. Things are clearer.

In a bigger way, I think of everything as the teachings. So that the difficulties I had coming into my own authority here in the community were also part of the transmission. The most important thing I see for the future is to deepen the practice. When the teacher becomes good, it makes the students good. When the students become good, they make the teacher good. They are the same."

The resolution of Kwong's status did not eliminate the difficulties faced by secular students trying to adhere to a monastic routine. Nor did it stabilize the residency. "The big difficulty is continuity," Kwong says. "I've been disappointed when people have left. I used to think it was a failure on my part. Now I'm just disappointed. I understand more that some will stay and some will leave. It can be very strange when a student leaves. You've shared something very intimate over a period of years and then it's over. Either the ending wasn't clear or there was a tizzy or your hearts are in different directions. But when they leave, they have to find something equally intimate, and until they do they will not have left."

At Sonoma Mountain some residents have left and later returned, if not to live, at least to sit regularly. Some former residents have never returned to the zendo but come to help with carpentry, electrical work, or gardening. Some have stayed away, and stayed angry, but have continued to live in the immediate area, posing a dilemma particular to the American Zen communities. In Japan monks dissatisfied with their lot in one monastery pack their eating bowls into their sacks and move on to another, unencumbered by possessions, jobs, or family. But in the United States relocation becomes problematic for parents who would prefer to remain in the area for the sake of their children, especially in rural areas, where social contact between former and current students is inevitable.

Although the Sonoma Mountain center's board of directors votes on major community decisions and a residential council governs the daily functions of the community, the abbot holds the ultimate authority and can veto decisions made at any level. In this respect Kwong has recreated Suzuki Roshi's structure for San Francisco Zen Center, which conformed to the tradition of granting power to the abbot. In Japan the Soto bureaucracy is vast, and temples and teachers under the aegis of Soto headquarters are responsible to a higher organizational authority. The Soto school even has its own tribunal court which decides ethical as well as organizational matters. Tech-

nically Sonoma Mountain, as well as other Soto centers in the United States, is part of this Soto system, but in fact distance has made Japanese jurisdiction virtually inoperative. Furthermore, in Japan teachers are guided by tradition, by lineage, by their own teachers, by their elders and peers, while in the United States, for the most part, they remain isolated, as Kwong's situation so poignantly demonstrates. This isolation, together with the attempt to tailor Japanese customs to American democratic values, has led students in the United States increasingly to delegate themselves as a kind of congressional balance to the highest authority. The question at stake—and it is a crucial one—is to what extent can Zen become integrated into the American system of democratic organization without jeopardizing the idiosyncratic intimacy of the teacher-student relationship.

The fundamental authority assigned to the Zen teacher is based on a shared agreement among students that the teacher has realized something about the nature of life that they have not, and, furthermore, that the teacher can guide them to their realization better than they can guide themselves. In small centers like Kwong's, it is almost impossible to separate spiritual from organizational authority; but where the lines between spiritual and political domains *can* be drawn, the question that keeps reappearing is: once the students grant the Zen teacher the authority of wisdom, then what, if anything, can they legitimately define as their jurisdiction, and how effectively can they operate as a witness to the functioning of a teacher? At Sonoma Mountain, while he continues to hold all the sanctioned authority, Kwong now participates more in council discussions and has made greater efforts to negotiate community policies with the council.

Kwong's administrative style has still drawn some criticism. A young man recently appeared at the center with an unusual readiness for Zen training and Kwong arranged for him to work on the grounds for a monthly stipend. A member of the council complained: "Roshi set up this council and encouraged us to make decisions. Then he comes along and does what he wants." This is a familiar complaint at Zen centers. But learning to sit on the council without getting attached to decisions is not so different from learning to sit on the cushion without getting attached to thoughts. There are other parallels as well: one releases the controls and at the same time takes full responsibility; one is fixed in a sense of groundedness and yet open and flexible. On the cushion or in the conference chair, students are encouraged

to do their very best—without worrying about results. "Students are always inclined to confine Zen practice to the zendo," explains Kwong, "but organizational work is one of the simplest ways of affecting practice in everyday life."

Kwong plots the relations between students and teachers along horizontal and vertical lines. The horizontal axis represents the sangha, the community of practitioners, and the vertical axis the lineage of teachers. Kwong hopes that on the horizontal plane students will develop a greater sense of trust in each other and experiment more consciously with the applications of Buddhist teachings to social relationships. "I used to let anyone into the community," he says. "Now, another voice is coming out: 'Don't come here for social reasons, don't misuse this place. Come to realize who you are and to help all people.' The sangha must support dharmic relations. Now I think it's necessary to make a distinction between friendships and dharmic relationships." At the same time the vertical plane, the lineage of teachers, must be expressed with the authority appropriate for the role of lineage holder. "Ultimately, the vertical and the horizontal are the same. They must intersect at one point. Maybe that's where the collapse has been."

Kwong also sees great advantages to creating horizontal lines of communication among teachers as well as students—"to protect each other from going astray, because we're all so very young." He has frequently warned against dependency on external models and has urged students to internalize their practice. "If anything appears, it can disappear. This is the universal law," said Kwong Roshi in a talk delivered in 1985. "Sometimes I sit by the window and smoke cigarettes and drink coffee and think about what to say to people. I'm not much of a thinker. I don't sit and think for a long time about something. Then I read the text we've been studying. How to put it all together? I guess, maybe in one way I got pretty good at putting it all together, like a summary, and presenting it. And there's a lot to read; there's a lot to learn. But for me the most important thing is what is yours? What can you call your own? And to share that with each other. Not what Suzuki Roshi said, or Maezumi Roshi said, or Katagiri Roshi said. What you say. What it means to you. That's the only way. Zen teachers are human beings, too, and all of us struggle just like you do to know it firsthand, to have no illusion about study or about some religion doing it for you."

In residential communities, even when spiritual aspiration remains dor-

mant, the expectation of "religion doing it for you" often goes hand in hand with the sacrifice of worldly comforts. One man in his early thirties came to Sonoma Mountain following the dissolution of his marriage. For several years he worked at odd jobs to maintain the residency fee and followed the schedule. When an opportunity came to work full time at a local school, he took it, describing it as his first "real work" in several years. Kwong insisted that he maintain the center's schedule or leave. Establishing an adult identity through income and "meaningful" work, though, suddenly looked more rewarding than the residential regime. As Kwong put more pressure on him, the student became more critical of the rules and of Kwong's refusal to compromise. As exceptions had been made in the past, he interpreted Kwong's decision as a personal assessment of his commitment to Zen practice, and Kwong did nothing to contradict this impression. The young man finally moved out of the community with the intention of being a nonresident member. Brooding as he packed his bags, he explained: "Basically, the problem is that I'm not a monk and I'm tired of living like one. Here, it's give, give, give, but you don't feel like you're getting anything back." According to Kwong, to give without investment and without reward expresses the Bodhisattva's vow and defines the rule that governs practice in and out of the zendo.

Ordaining monks has been Kwong Roshi's prerogative since his abbot installation but he has considered this step only recently. "I'm slow," he explains softly. "That's my style. And I want to make sure. We've been here more than a decade without monks. It's important to have monks, to help contain the energy. There's been too much coming and going. When someone is ordained, that puts a priority on their life. A definite direction. It is that person's livelihood. And it makes stability more possible for others. Then we could consider a more extensive livelihood project and students would not have to work outside the community. That too would stabilize and contain the energy of the practice."

Laura Kwong is one of several students considering ordination. "The feminist movement made me too self-conscious to follow my husband. And I got into some kind of competition. Then I realized with all this fight, who cares what it looks like? I am involved with Zen and it so happens that my husband is a teacher and it so happens that my situation is set, so I will use this situation to actualize my life. I used to think that I could never become a monk because I'm too small, too much of a beginner. But it would really

make me feel that I'm putting myself out there, saying, 'This is my work and it is from this that I give.' I also used to think I shouldn't be Roshi's closest disciple. I thought he should have his own monk, but then that's what's happening now. I'm more trusting."

With his own shift from thinking about those cows to thinking about this cow, Kwong has come to inhabit his own authority with greater ease and has relied less on the authority of Zen form. He has been talking more about the need to be relaxed, a recognition he attributes to his friendship with the Korean Zen Master Seung Sahn, more commonly known as Soen Sa Nim. "Soen Sa Nim is very relaxed and his practice is one hundred percent. Years ago, Suzuki Roshi used to say to me, 'You should appreciate your own heritage, that you're Chinese.' In those days, I was trying to become more Japanese. Soen Sa Nim brought me back to my own roots. Korean style is much closer to Chinese than Chinese is to Japanese. Koreans are very passionate people, very human. They talk loudly; that's just how they are. The Japanese are very wonderful, too. They talk softly; they're very formal, very conservative. But Soen Sa Nim brings out that real human quality that for me is a sense of being more relaxed."

One Saturday morning Kwong urged his students, "Be friendly to yourself. I'm trying to be more friendly to myself. More relaxed. No more 'be perfect Zen.'" At the same time, he has warned that while trying to be perfect is trying too hard, "we can't afford to let go of being 'perfect' until we gain a sense of confidence. We can restructure the forms but not the actual practice of Zen. The practice is just the practice and can't be defiled. It's impeccable because each person has to do it himself, from where he or she is. The practice is perfect but we think we're not perfect. By realizing our practice in our everyday life we realize our own 'perfection,' which includes our 'imperfection.'"

Parallel to Kwong's rejection of "be perfect Zen" are his experiments with practices outside the Japanese Soto tradition. When he first started Genjoji, he imitated Suzuki Roshi whenever possible. The format for Buddhist services, the selection of liturgy, zendo procedure, and so on were all replicated from his own studies. Only in retrospect has he been able to compare that era of Genjoji to San Francisco's Chinatown, where certain customs have become rigidly fixed though in China they have evolved and changed. But re-

structuring the forms of Zen has not diminished Kwong's relationship to Suzuki Roshi, whose benevolence, according to Kwong, not only continues but has increased with time. In fact, the latest addition to Sonoma Mountain is a *stupa*, or shrine, that marks the ashes of Suzuki Roshi. The stupa is a two-ton rock selected by Kwong from the Tassajara Creek, which runs through the grounds of the monastery that Suzuki Roshi founded. Wading knee-deep in the creek, Kwong rejected rocks laced with quartz and colored by minerals in favor of something very ordinary. The rock was hauled out of the creek and loaded onto the back of a rented four-ton flatbed for—as Kwong puts it—"his" trip to Sonoma Mountain. "He had to travel with his face down," Kwong explains apologetically. The rock stands in a natural circle of small oak trees on a flat ledge overlooking the Valley of the Moon and changes so radically from every angle that it resanctifies the very act of looking. "I wanted to make it as simple as possible," says Kwong, kneeling by its base as he gathers small brown oak leaves and places them in a straw basket.

Suzuki Roshi's ashes were divided between Tassajara and Japan. In 1984 Hoichi Suzuki Roshi arrived at Sonoma Mountain with some of his father's ashes from Rinso-in for a traditional "ashes ceremony." On an April Sunday morning, hundreds of guests gathered as a bronze gong tolled 108 times to initiate the formal procession to the stupa. After Soen Sa Nim opened the ceremony with a Korean chant, Kwong Roshi, followed by senior students and family members, placed the ashes in the ground, using, each in turn, a pair of redwood chopsticks that had been made by Hoichi the day before. Standing before the stupa Hoichi used a series of karate-like mudras to ignite and release his father's spirit. As the wind came up some guests looked apprehensively at the sky; others, including Suzuki Roshi's widow, just smiled. Mrs. Suzuki had often said that wind was the element most characteristic of her husband and that it manifested whenever he was present at an important event. To the continuous accompaniment of the Heart Sutra, everyone took turns making their offering to Suzuki Roshi, dipping a bamboo ladle in tubs of artesian well water and pouring it over the rock. In true Zen style, the highly ritualized ceremony opened and closed a cycle in a transmission that has no beginning and no end.

The ceremony was all the more poignant for coming at a time of turmoil at San Francisco Zen Center over the resignation of Baker Roshi; it offered a respite from doubt and from the labored and often self-conscious efforts to

transmit the dharma to America. And the picnic that followed even approached Kerouac's vision of tribal Zen. More subdued than the wilder antics of Zen lunatics, East or West, it still expressed a particularly American version of celebration, with people sprawled around the grounds on colorful blankets, children running through the woods, and students playing banjos and guitars well into the night. At the end of the long day, Kwong said, "The longer you practice, the more you practice not for gain but for the sake of gratitude. Gratitude becomes the biggest treasure and practice is a way of returning it."

The next morning zazen was cancelled, and the Kwongs brought Hoichi to the Community House for a late (8:00 A.M.) breakfast. Sitting at a long table under the Kamakura Daibutsu poster, Jakusho and Hoichi contributed their own jocular commentaries on the ceremony, rating the gongs, bells, and chants for accuracy and precision. Hoichi ate his pancakes with chopsticks and, unaware of the no-smoking rule, lit up a cigarette and drank more coffee. Soon he was joined by everyone who smoked and some who usually didn't. A young woman who had recently joined Sonoma Mountain asked Hoichi if he thought that his father had made some mistakes. "A Zen master's life," answered Hoichi, "is one continuous mistake." Kwong Roshi laughed the loudest.

Three years later, Sonoma Mountain hosted a picnic for all the centers affiliated with Suzuki Roshi's lineage, and it started off with a slow-moving *gatha* walk to the stupa. "That rock is like a ballast, an anchor," says Kwong. "Buddhists say there is merit in erecting stupas and pagodas. I believe that. For me, the stupa seemed to purify the land and the community. We have problems. But they no longer seem big."

The meditative gatha walk is similar to zazen in that it is so concentrated on *just* walking that it breaks the mental expectation of going anywhere. Introduced to the community by Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Zen master, it is one of several practices that Kwong has adopted in the past few years. "I am trying to be more experimental," he says. "I am trying to find out what works. With confidence and maturity, I was able to give up my attachment to the Soto Zen form, to doing things as close to the way Suzuki Roshi did them. What is the form? No one has the answer. I used to think that some other teachers had the 'right' answer or had the 'right' form. Now I know that we are all in the same boat, trying to keep these teachings alive in this aggressive land of confusion."

THE CASE

A monk asked Joshu in all earnestness, "Has a dog Buddha nature or not?"
Joshu said, "Mu!"

MUMON'S COMMENTARY

For the practice of Zen, you must pass the barrier set up by the ancient masters of Zen. To attain to marvelous enlightenment, you must completely extinguish all the delusive thoughts of the ordinary mind. If you have not passed the barrier and have not extinguished delusive thoughts, you are a phantom haunting the weeds and trees. Now, just tell me, what is the barrier set up by the Zen masters of old? Merely this Mu—the one barrier of our sect. It has come to be called "The Gateless Barrier of the Zen Sect."

Those who have passed the barrier are able not only to see Joshu face to face, but also to walk hand in hand with the whole descending line of Zen masters and be eyebrow to eyebrow with them. You will see with the same eye that they see with, hear with the same ear that they hear with. Wouldn't it be a wonderful joy? Isn't there anyone who wants to pass this barrier? Then concentrate your whole self, with its 360 bones and joints and 84,000 pores, into Mu making your whole body a solid lump of doubt. Day and night, without ceasing, keep digging into it, but don't take it as "nothingness" or as "being" or "non-being." It must be like a red-hot iron ball which you have gulped down and which you try to vomit up, but cannot. You must extinguish all delusive thoughts and feelings which you have cherished up to the present. After a certain period of such efforts, Mu will come to fruition, and inside and out will become one naturally. You will then be like a dumb man who has had a dream. You will know yourself and for yourself only.

Then all of a sudden, Mu will break open and astonish the heavens and shake the earth. It will be just as if you had snatched the great sword of General Kan. If you meet a Buddha, you will kill him. If you meet an ancient Zen master, you will kill him. Though you may stand on the brink of life and death, you will enjoy the great freedom. In the six realms and the four modes of birth, you will live in the samadhi of innocent play.

Now, how should you concentrate on Mu? Exhaust every ounce of energy you have in doing it. And if you do not give up on the way, you will be enlightened the way a candle in front of the Buddha is lighted by one touch of fire.

Yamada Koun