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Michael Goldberg, dir. *A Zen Life: D. T Suzuki.* DVD. Toronto: Marty Gross Film Productions, Inc., 2006. 77 mins.

Reviewed by Michiko Yusa (University of Western Washington)

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D. T. Suzuki: Zen in Dialogue

The year 2006 celebrated the fortieth anniversary of the death of Daisetz T. Suzuki, for which occasion the producer Michael Goldberg must have taken up this special project. The timing was felicitous in numerous ways for this DVD contains many interviews with those who personally knew Suzuki. The film covers the ninety-six years of Suzuki's life, his academic career, and his philosophy in roughly chronological order. It contains rare film clippings, hard to find voice recordings, and private photographs, to which the viewer would have no access otherwise.

What makes this film unique and special are the ample personal accounts by those who knew Suzuki. As such, it secures a very special place in the Suzuki archive. We are allowed into the personal world of Suzuki, who enjoyed the company and acquaintance of Gary Snyder, John Cage, Huston Smith, Robert Aitken, Donald Richie, Joseph Campbell (as narrated by Phil Cousineau), Mihoko Okamura, and many others–all of whom are well known in their respective fields. Through these personal accounts, the viewer has the rare privilege to be permitted a virtual glimpse into what it would have been like to encounter Suzuki personally. The film also reveals the depth of Suzuki's humanity. The wisdom and insight contained in this film are so inexhaustible that one must watch it over and over again. It must have been an extraordinary challenge for the producer to edit the huge corpus of information available.

As a teaching tool, this DVD is most effectively adopted to supplement any of Suzuki's writings. Presently, in my advanced Japanese language class students are reading his 1942 essay entitled "Death," taken from the *Suzuki Daisetz ZenshÅ«* (1968, volume 7) in the original Japanese. The living images and sounds surrounding Suzuki's life depicted in this film enliven the reading material for the students. If your aim is to get to know Suzuki in more depth as a person, this DVD would go well together with *A Zen Life: D. T. Suzuki Remembered*, edited by Masao Abe (1986). Because of its length (seventy-seven minutes) as well as the richness of information contained in it, I would suggest that this DVD be shown in two class periods. However, it would be ideal if students can watch it at their own pace, so that they can stop it, take notes, and think about what they saw before they move to the next segment. It can also be effectively adopted in an introductory course on world religions.

For those who may consider adopting this DVD as a teaching material, the chapter breakdown may be helpful to get a bird's-eye view of the content. The introduction ("Modern Japan in a Historical Context") covers, from a global perspective, the historical background of the time Suzuki was born and raised. "The Early Years" (subdivided into "Suzuki's Childhood," "Zen Studies," and "Ten Years in America and London") offers a cursory coverage of Suzuki's early years; his "kenshÅ" experience at Engakuji prior to his move to the United States in 1897; his work at *Open Court* in LaSalle, Illinois, for the next ten years; and his return trip to Japan via London, 1908-

1909. Chapter 3, "Return to Japan" (covering "Teaching," "Marriage," "Books," and "Satori"), depicts how Suzuki's personal life and career unfolded in Japan. He continued to write for a Western audience, and in 1936 he attended the World Congress of Faiths in London. Through his sustained effort, Zen ideas, including "satori" (enlightenment), became familiar to Western readers. The following chapter, "World War II and After" (with subsections entitled "Matsugaoka Library," "Western Students," and "Hawaii East West Philosophers' Conference"), depicts how Suzuki survived the war years, isolated at Engakuji in Kamakura and engaged in writing to be published in postwar years. A new chapter of his life began following the conclusion of WWII, as Westerners actively sought to learn about Zen from Suzuki. Suzuki willingly responded to interest expressed by Western "students" of Zen.

In chapter 5,"Back to America" (which includes sections on "Columbia University," "Mihoko Okamura," "Beat 'Writers,' " "Freedom," "LSD," and "Meditation"), the film examines the period in which Suzuki was most active in the United States, teaching at Columbia University, 1951-57, and becoming the authority of Zen Buddhism to the West. Zen inadvertently became "fashionable" as it was "adopted" by the Beat generation of artists. "Comparative Religions" (subdivided into "Zen," "Pure Land Buddhism & Christianity," and " 'Self Power' and 'Other Power"') deals with the similarities and differences between Buddhism and Christianity. It introduces the discussion of "jiriki" (self power) and "tariki" (other power) as two modes of attaining "salvation." Chapter 7, "Zen and Psychoanalysis" (covering "Erich Fromm," "Cuernavaca," and "The Ego"), recounts the discussion Fromm and Suzuki had concerning Zen and its relationship to archery. Fromm, who first had thought of archery as a "weapon" of killing, realized the deeper principle of "self identity" that Zen speaks of and the two became close friends. Finally, "The Latter Years" (including segments "Back to Japan," "Travels," "Hu Shih," and "Life and Death") treats the very last years of Suzuki's life, including a mismatched debate between Suzuki and Hu, as Suzuki was talking as an enlightened religious man and Hu as a scholar of Buddhism. The DVD also contains an extra ten minute excerpt from a newly discovered interview of Suzuki by Huston Smith.

If one wants to understand what Zen teaches, this DVD does not intend to offer an answer; rather, it presupposes a minimum knowledge of Zen. However, a first-time viewer can still benefit from the film, under proper guidance of an instructor, as Suzuki touches on important Zen ideas. For instance, in Smith's interview, Suzuki says: "In practical life, as long as we live in a relative world, we get attached to something good or something bad, something beautiful or something not so very beautiful. We get attached to the dualistic view of reality. But underneath, or in, or with the relative world, we have another world, which is not relative, which transcends but at the same time, in it, that is, with the relative world. That world, I may call a 'transcendental realm.' In that world, there is no attachment. There is no good, no evil, no beauty, or no ugliness." To this, Smith comments in retrospect: "Bringing the opposite together–that's not the way it seems most of the time. But that's the way it is. Coming to see that in every moment would be the realization of a master."

Among the interviewees, especially informative for me was Albert Stunkard, a professor of psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania, who had meditated at Engakuji immediately following the end of WWII, and shared many rare stories about Suzuki. For instance, he tells us of Suzuki's enlightenment experience: The awakening "finally happened. What it was was walking up the same old stairs towards the 'mountain gate' [of Engakuji Temple], he [Suzuki] said, 'as I had walked up the stairs, I had the conviction that I was the same as the trees on the side of stairs, and it wasn't that I had stopped being myself but I was the trees.' " He also tells us that Suzuki was very much impressed by the film *High Noon* (1952), and said to him, " 'Oh, this was a wonderful movie. The sheriff [marshal] was a real Zen man!"'

Because the profound friendship that developed between Thomas Merton and Suzuki has been of my interest for a long while, I was glad to see the film clippings of Merton. In one of them, Merton is talking to a group of Catholic clergies concerning interreligious dialogue. Merton says: "That's a thing of the past now–to be suspicious of other religions and to look always at that which is weakest in other religions and always at what is highest in our own religion. This double standard in dealing with religions has to stop. One must no longer judge Buddhism by what is secondary or base, but on the contrary, find that which is most rich and valid for us. And that, for example, is found in Zen and in what is most advanced within meditation." And again, in the recording of Merton's final talk (December 10, 1968), he says: "Both Christians and Buddhists agree that the root of man's problem is that consciousness is all fouled up, and that he does not apprehend reality as it truly and really is, and that the moment he looks at something, he begins to interpret it in ways that are prejudiced and predetermined to fit a certain wrong picture of the world, in

which he is as an individual ego and the center of things."

These statements by Merton clearly suggest why mutual respect grew between these two men. Merton affectionately wrote about his 1964 encounter with Suzuki in his *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (1968): "It was my good fortune to meet Dr. Suzuki and to have a couple of all too short conversations with him. The experience was not only rewarding, but I would say it was unforgettable.... I had known his work for a long time, had corresponded with him, and we had had a short dialogue published, in which we discussed the 'Wisdom of Emptiness' as found comparatively in Zen and in the Egyptian Desert Fathers. On his last trip to the United States I had the great privilege and pleasure of meeting him. One had to meet this man in order fully to appreciate him.... I did feel that I was speaking to someone who, in a tradition completely different from my own, had matured, had become complete and found his way. One cannot understand Buddhism until one meets it in this existential manner, in a person in whom it is alive."[1]

Suzuki, steeped in both Eastern and Western cultures, was a unique spokesperson for Zen. Aitken recalls that Suzuki scolded Nakagawa SÅen Roshi, Aitken's first Zen master, for not understanding that "Westerners have different needs and different tolerances." It was in this context that Suzuki said to the general Western audience that " 'zazen [seated meditation] was not needed.' " But to serious students like Stunkard, he was most attentive. Suzuki gave him the incense burner that he had used when he was a student, saying "'it is much better to use incense. Incense is very effective in doing meditation. You get incense that burns for half an hour and then, when it is all over, you realize this and you don't have to distract yourself by looking at a clock."'

Stunkard tells us that a group of people once asked Suzuki if a person of satori experiences suffering. To this, Suzuki replied: " 'When my wife died, I shed bitter tears.' " They retorted by asking what the use was of being enlightened, to which Suzuki replied: "'My tears had no roots."' Stunkard remembers that "he said it in a way that it really conveyed the kind of serenity and understanding that went way beyond the words."

Concerning the perennial problem of violence, killing, and terrorism that continues to plague the world today, Suzuki, being asked about Mahatma Gandhi's idea of nonviolence, stated: "Well, it is a very important idea. But at the same time, that cannot be practiced unconditionally." He referred to two examples, the suppression of Russian people under political machinery and the WWII extermination camps, and concluded that in these cases "violence is to be met with violence." Snyder adds a commentary to this: "No life, no death. No being, no nonbeing. No killing, no non-killing. It would be a mistake, it will be a very deep mistake, to think that having understood that I can kill something. Having understood that, you choose not to kill–unless you have to."

The depth and the scope of reflections that this film elicits in each viewer are hardly possible to describe in detail in a review of this nature. Let it suffice to say that this film is a *tour de force* in its genre. It is a must for every university library and every person interested in spiritual development. Goldberg deserves a heartfelt deep appreciation from those for whom spirituality is an essential and indispensable part of reality. In response to Eric Prideaux, Goldberg explained his motive in making this film. He said it was not to "proselytize," or get "people into Zen or into Buddhism," but rather just "respect it and understand it a bit."[2] His sensitive well-nuanced hermeneutical approach is obviously the key to the success of this film. It will speak to those who would want to rediscover Suzuki in his true being as well as the message he tried to communicate.

Notes

[1]. Thomas Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (New York: New Directions, 1968), 60-62.

[2]. D. T Suzuki, "An Ambassador of Enlightenment: The Man Who Brought Zen to the West," *The Japan Times*, November 16, 2006.