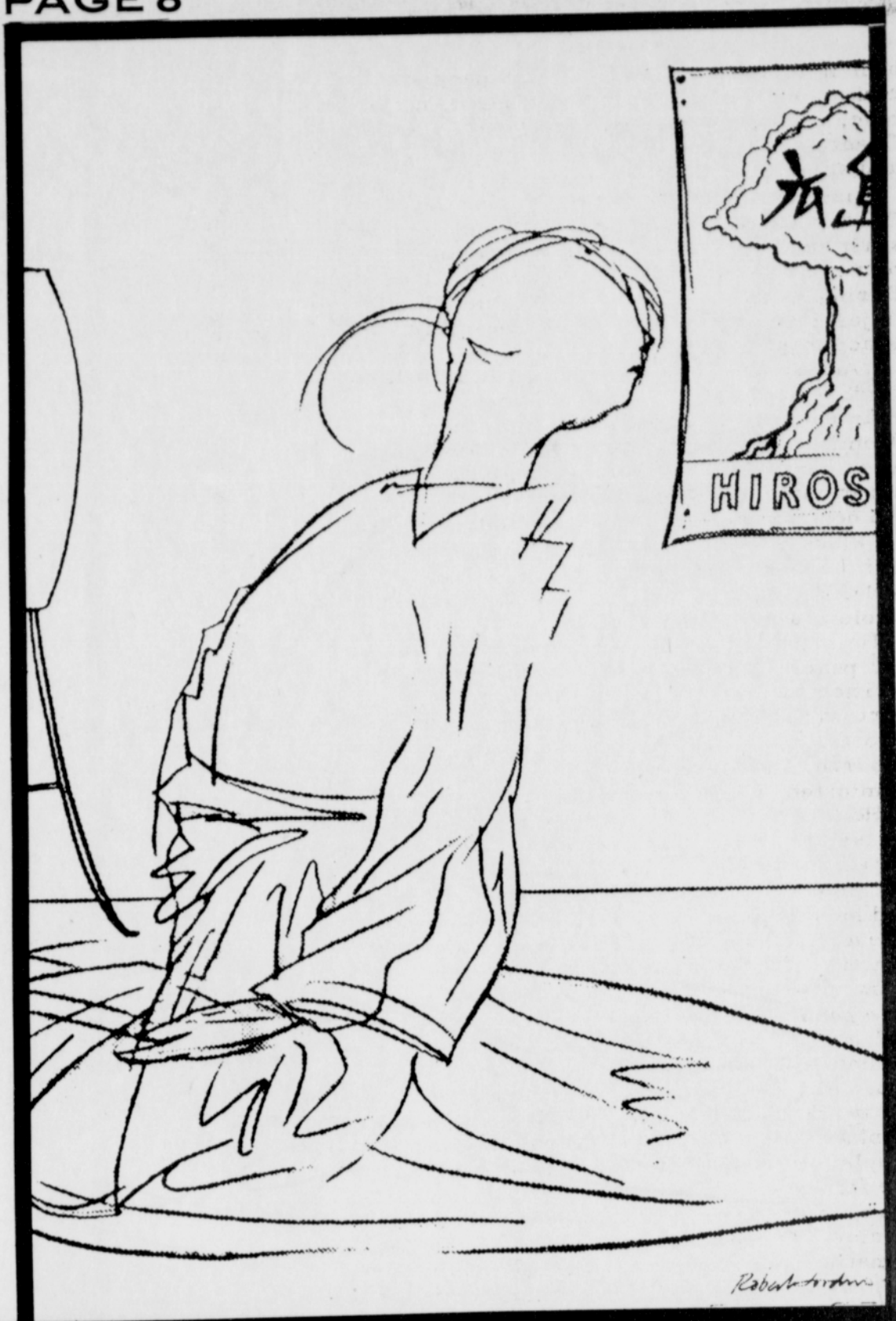


# THE ROAD TO MANDALA

His teacher said he should die in North America. North America was a mandala. He had spent his life in Japan. He had been a nuclear engineer before he took the vows of a Buddhist monk. His life was devoted to peace and a belief that a new age was approaching, preceded by a time of disaster that would clean away the rot of the old. The United States was particularly important to the future, his teacher had said. The shadows that would cross the Earth before the brightness would darken the United States first. Prophecies were not guarantees but paradoxes, his teacher warned. Only the hard work and sacrifice of men and women who cherished peace and harmony would light the darkness. Anything less and the Earth would soon be as dead as its moon. He must be like a candle, his teacher urged. There was no other purpose for a priest.



ROBERT JORDAN (AFTER YOSHITOSHI, C. 1890)

His name was Suzuki Katsumi. The year before he became a monk he had helped build a peace pagoda in Ceylon, the troubled island nation of Sri Lanka. He left Japan for North America with six other monks and arrived the day his youngest uncle was killed during World War II attempting to crash his airplane into an American warship. For three months he walked across the continent with American Indians who sought redress for broken promises and forsaken treaties. He lived in Canada for a year and spent a winter in a cabin on a Puget Sound island. After nonviolent protest against construction and operation of a nuclear submarine base near Seattle he hitchhiked down the Oregon coast toward California, where he was to join the Indians once more, this time in an effort to halt the siting of nuclear power plants on treaty lands and to prevent the ravaging of the Black Hills for uranium.

He wore his monk's robes wherever he went, even standing alongside a road. His vestments were startling: over a gown white as bone was a robe more orange than a sunset. At his sandaled feet was a small Boy Scout haversack that was filled with rice wrapped in cellophane plastic, fresh tabi socks, a toothbrush and a half-filled pouch of cigarette tobacco he found on the roadway. He did not raise his thumb at passing cars, only his eyes while he patiently beat on a small drum and chanted.

He stayed three days at an old motel near Arch Cape as a guest of its owner. Several times a day he walked across a meadow that sloped above the beach and sat on a wood bench surrounded by spruce trees and salal bushes. There, facing the ocean he beat his drum and chanted for hours. The chant was his single contribution, his weapon and his prayer.

Suzuki the Monk hardly resembled his former incarnation, Suzuki the Nuclear Engineer. When he spoke of his past it was briefly and only to make a point; the point was generally that he had come so far around from what he had been, so could anybody else. The point was that he had been wrong, and now he felt he was doing what needed to be done.

Briefly: the former Suzuki had been in love with money and technology. He was ambitious and intensely competitive. His vision of the future was spectacularly opposite Monk Suzuki's, and he chanted in a more obscure and specialized idiom. He helped design nuclear power plants and engineering systems.

He was not sure when he first noticed his own core was suffering a meltdown. He thought he had lost his soul. He went to India, the ancient holy land where the Buddha was born, to find himself. He visited temples and followed the travels of Gautama. He went to Ceylon to climb a holy mountain and there met a Japanese monk who told him that a pagoda devoted

to peace was being built on the mountain. He thought he would stay and help only a few days. He was on the mountain a year; and afterward he became a monk.

Almost a year later he received information from the United States that American Indians were walking across the country from San Francisco to Washington, D.C. His spiritual master had told him many times that the United States was a vital key to the future. Peoples and religions from every part of the world had immigrated to the United States. Such diversity thrown so closely together could erupt in explosion or cohabit as a model of harmony. That was where his work should be. Do not come back to Japan, the old monk told the younger monk. Die in North America.

By the time he reached the United States the Indians had already walked to Illinois. There he joined them, and for three months he stayed with them, sleeping in woods and prairies, walking twenty-five miles each day, chanting each mile.

Sitting on the wood bench overlooking the Pacific Ocean he explained the importance of his chant. It was not the words so much as the repetition, he said. The repetition emptied the mind and opened the soul. Na Mumyo Ho Ren Kyo. Over and over, and over again.

"Inner happiness" was the result of chanting. "And happiness spread from one to many." To

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