

THE ROAD TO MANDALA

BY MICHAEL McCUSKER

His teacher said he should die in North America. North America was a mandala; everything was there. 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 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 a candle, his teacher urged. There was no other purpose for a priest.

His name was Suzuki Katsumi. He had been a monk two years, and a year before that he had helped build a pagoda dedicated to world peace in Ceylon, the island nation of Sri Lanka. He left Japan with six other monks. He arrived in North America on the anniversary of his youngest uncle's death attempting to crash his warplane 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 almost a year and spent a winter in a cabin on an island in Puget Sound. After a month of nonviolent protest against construction 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 building 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 had 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 on three sides. The open side faced the ocean. There 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 past incarnation, Suzuki the Nuclear Engineer. When he spoke of his former self 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 anyone 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 dramatically opposite Monk Suzuki's and he chanted in a more obscure and specialized idiom. He helped design nuclear power plants and engineering systems.

He is 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 the holy land of Ceylon to climb a holy mountain and there met a Japanese monk who told him that a pagoda 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 Suzuki 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 prairies and woods, walking 25 miles each day, chanting each mile.

He went to Canada afterward. He helped organize a cultural exchange between Indians living in Canada and their counterparts in Japan, the Ainou, who had been dispossessed of their ancestral islands by the Japanese invaders more than a thousand years ago.

He lived in Vancouver, British Columbia, for six months, then wintered on Quadra Island in Puget Sound. He lived in a cabin and spent the days watching eagles as they hunted in the sky over the island.

In the spring he came down to Ground Zero. That was the name of a group that had formed to nonviolently protest, halt or otherwise confound construction of a Trident nuclear submarine base outside Seattle. Each day he spent with the group he walked to a fence surrounding the project and chanted.

After a month he started along the coast for California. Sitting on the 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 him it was that simple. Happy people do not make war upon one another. They do not despise, cheat, lie or do harm to each other. Chanting, he said, was the beginning of harmony and sharing.

Suzuki is a monk of the sect known as Japan Buddha Sanga, which studies only ancient Sanskrit and has been involved in nonviolent protest against war for more than half a century. During World War 2 most of its members were in jail or exile. After the war they built 40 peace pagodas throughout Japan.

Suzuki said that an international peace conference was planned by several groups in Japan. The conference was

"I am respect to you"



HOKUSAI

to be held in either Tokyo or Hiroshima. He favored Hiroshima: "Americans remember Pearl Harbor. Japanese remember Hiroshima. Every year there is International Conference Against Atomic War in Hiroshima. Every August 6, when bomb drop. In Japan spiritual conference not propaganda. Not technique. Very spiritual. We hope to make religious nonviolence against all kinds of war. Peace movement in Japan and the world split so many times like cells in body. But body is whole. We want to make peace whole again."

California was more immediate. He was going to help the American Indian Movement in a three-prong demonstration that started with a marathon. The tribes had run from San Francisco to Los Angeles. Each day runners from several tribes — including, Suzuki said, a tribe from Japan — ran 10-mile relays for a daily total of 100 miles. He would join them in Los Angeles where the Indians and their supporters would split up into three caravans.

The first caravan would go to Diablo Canyon for a large demonstration against a nuclear power station the utilities would like to build on Indian land.

The second group planned a longer journey. It was going to the Black Hills in South Dakota. "Businessmen want uranium like ancestor wants gold 100 years ago," Suzuki said. "Government say land belong to Sioux, but under ground belong to government."

The final caravan would go up the Kalamis River near Crescent City. "Last year FBI kill two Indians for salmon fishing. This year become more excitement."

He would join the third group. "One monk go to Diablo Canyon. Another monk go Black Hills. If I choose I go to Diablo as former nuclear engineer. But it make no difference. Anyplace

I go it is the same. Canada, Oregon, Washington, California; it make no difference."

He said that he and the other monks who worked for peace followed the Lotus Flower Sutra. Written as a proclamation of the Buddha, this part was Suzuki's guide and his goal: "Those who are not saved, I will save. Those who are not free, I will set free. Those who are not comforted, I will comfort."

He told the story of another monk, who was his spiritual example. "Long time ago one monk not very smart. He is poor in the head. He always do same action. He meet people and he bow and he say, 'I am reverence and respect to you. I never look down on you because someday you practice Buddha's dharma and become Buddha. I am respect to you.' Some people think he crazy monk. Some people throw rocks to him and he run away. But he all the time turn around and bow and he say, 'I am respect to you.' More rocks come and he run, stop, bow and say, 'I am respect to you.' All the time, everywhere he go, he always do same action. This dumb monk, he smarter than all the rest of the people. He is Buddha before reincarnation. We are following same action. Chanting and beating drum. This how we meet businessman and soldier. We bow and make respect to them. Sometimes they throw rocks to us. But no matter. Somebody already punched at me. I was very glad."

He even seemed pleased that some Americans called him a "Jap."

"Jappa in Sanskrit mean Chant," he said. *Jappa Mara* is holy necklace for chanting. So they call to me 'Jap', is what I am and what I do. I am laughing when I am called Jap."

Like many others Suzuki felt the immediate future would be one of catastrophe. Almost everything was coming to crisis at once: overpopulation and worldwide food shortages; pollution of the skies, the oceans, rivers and lakes that sickened and killed natural life as well as increasing numbers of humans; energy shortages that, combined with the rest, might conceivably drive desperate nations into series of wars that culminate in a war more horrible than any the world had experienced. He also believed that natural disasters would increase and add millions to the casualty lists. But unlike other doom prophets, Suzuki believed that the disasters were only a prologue to a new age greater than any other. The human race would come to full fruit; the brain and the soul would finally be united. Already he saw glimmerings. The political uprisings throughout the world were not radical, he said. They were simple demands that humanity reverse its headlong rush to oblivion.

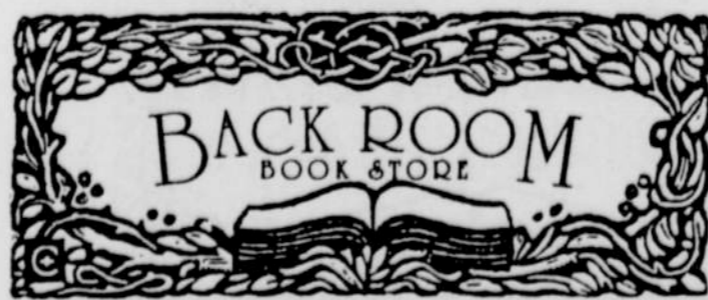
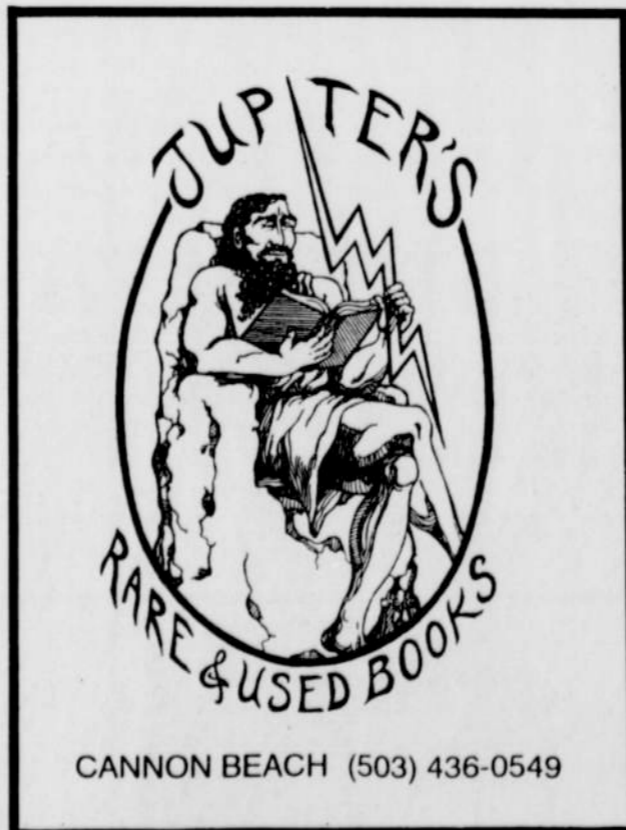
Although he accused the industrial nations of over consumption and waste, within his own country and the United States he saw examples of lifestyles based on conservation and sharing and the use of natural energy sources. These he called New Age. They were New Age ideas, New Age people — his eyes were fixed past the rubble of the past century. He said that everywhere he went he looked for the New Age. And because he believed so strongly in the New Age, he did not fear the time of troubles just ahead.

Suzuki's life was the mirror of his beliefs. It might be said that he walked his talk. His ministry was the road.

"I am hippie monk," he said. "No home. No temple. No money. Just walking. Sometimes hungry. Sometimes cold. Sometimes doubt. Sometimes jail. Jesus say, 'Don't keep food, money, clothes. Keep walking and believe in God.' New Age people don't need heroes. We already have Jesus, Mary and Buddha. The Jones Family, Charles Manson, Sun Moon and Billy Graham all imitation."

Before he went back on the road he said that the United States was a mandala, that every ingredient for the future was within its borders, the people, the ideas and the strength to endure and ultimately prevail over the hard times ahead. But he said that all the hateful 'isms' that cripple humanity must be ruthlessly excoriated; racism, sexism — these had to be eliminated if the human race is to pull together and create the New Age.

Until then. "Each moment is a miracle," he said.



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