

## Study Questions

### Karida Buddhist Sangha Beginning Meditation Course

Suzuki, Shunryu. Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind. New York: Weatherhill, 1993.

The purpose of these study questions is to prompt you to think about the writings. Feel free to discuss any of these questions with a Karida mentor through email. You may want to print out these pages to go into a notebook. This is also a convenient place to keep any responses your mentor may make.

**1. Posture (page 25).** Some people say that the mind and the body are different. Some say they are one thing. Suzuki says, "Our body and mind are both two and one." What evidence from your own experience can you cite to support any of these positions?

**2. Breathing (Page 29).** Concentrating on breathing is an exercise in paying attention to each moment of life. According to Suzuki this concentration brings us to "no idea of time and space." This state of calm mind is the opposite of "clock-watching;" give some examples of these states of mind from your own experience.

**3. Control (Page 29).** Suzuki urges us to not try to control our thoughts. If we try to not have thoughts in order to calm our mind then we end up thinking about not thinking. Already we are defeated. Instead Suzuki recommends returning our mind to focus on breathing. Comment on these issues from your own experience of meditation.

**4. Mind Waves (Page 34).** Suzuki makes a distinction between what he calls "little mind" and "big mind." Describe your understanding of his idea.

**5. Mind Weeds (Page 36).** As we develop our meditation practice Suzuki says that we encounter "mental weeds." What is the best way of dealing with these "weeds?"

**6. The Marrow of Zen Page 38).** Who is most likely to succeed in their practice of meditation: one who finds it difficult or one who finds it easy? Explain your answer.

**7. No Dualism (Page 41).** Our meditation practice always begins with dualism. Describe what this statement means.

**8. Bowing (Page 43).** According to Suzuki bowing is very important. However, his comments on the subject are very "Eastern" and laced with many references to Buddhism. Can you explain in "Western" non-Buddhist terms the possible value of bowing?

**9. Nothing Special (Page 46).** When Suzuki says, "For a mother with children, having children is nothing special." What does he mean?

**10. Single-minded Way (Page 53).** What does it mean in Suzuki's terms, "to express our sincerity?"

**11. Repetition (Page 53).** According to Suzuki what is the value of repetition in our meditation practice?

**12. Zen and Excitement (Page 57).** Suzuki advises against getting excited about your meditation practice. He even goes so far as to advise practicing meditation only once a week! Explain his reasoning.

**13. Right Effort (Page 59).** In your own words explain what it means, "to practice zazen with no gaining idea."

**14. No Trace (Page 62).** What does Suzuki mean by the expression "leaving a trace of your thinking?"

**15. God Giving (Page 65).** Matt. 6.2 "When therefore you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full." Compare this teaching of Jesus to what Suzuki is saying about giving. Is it the same? Is it different?

**16. Study Yourself (Page 76).** Suzuki warns against attachment to teachings and teachers. Yet he sees them as valuable. Explain how he can see them as valuable and at the same time dangerous to our meditation practice.

**17. Mistakes in Practice (Page 71).** What are some of the ways that you can tell whether or not your meditation practice has become inadequate?

**18. Limiting Your Activity (Page 75).** Do you think that Suzuki's warning against a meditation practice directed toward an object is similar to Islam, Judaism, and Christianity's admonitions against idolatry?

**19. To Polish a Tile (Page 80).** How do you polish a tile so that it becomes a jewel? Suzuki tells you how in this essay.

**20. Constancy (Page 63).** Where does true knowledge come from?

**21. Communication. (Page 86).** According to Suzuki what is the best way of expressing yourself? What is the best way of listening to others?

**22. Negative and Positive (Page 90).** Explain how our meditation practice can be both formal and informal at the same time.

**23. Nirvana, The Waterfall (Page 92).** Describe the understanding that Suzuki expresses that he believes will help us not fear death and enjoy life.

**24. Traditional Zen Spirit (Page 99).** Suzuki warns us against trying to attain enlightenment. Why then, should we bother to meditate at all?

**25. Transcency (Page 102).** If we cannot accept the idea that everything changes then we will never have a calm mind. Give some examples of how American culture either supports or does not support the idea that everything changes.

**26. The Quality of Being (Page 104).** On one hand Suzuki seems to be saying that we are all independent of each other. On the other hand he seems to be saying that we are all part of each other. Explain what his meaning.

**27. Naturalness (Page 107).** Naturalness is being in perfect harmony with other beings. How does Suzuki propose that we acquire this trait?

**28. Emptiness (Page 110).** Suzuki uses the term "emptiness" throughout the book. This emptiness is a difficult concept to discuss. Perhaps it is indescribable and can only be known by direct experience. Write about your current understanding of this difficult concept.

**29. Readiness, Mindfulness (Page 113).** Suzuki says that we cannot learn wisdom but that it comes out of mindfulness. What is mindfulness?

**30. Believing in Nothing (Page 116).** Suzuki says that we should begin with enlightenment, proceed to meditative practice, and then to thinking. What do you think he is trying to communicate?

**31. Attachment, Non-attachment (Page 118).** Suzuki says that, "We should accept things just as they are." Is it possible to follow this idea and at the same time be an activist in trying to correct the ills of society?

**32. Calmness (Page 121).** What do we need to do in order to live a life that is art no matter what we do?

**33. Experience, Not Philosophy (Page 123).** What is the practice of Zazen?

**34. Original Buddhism (Page 125).** According to Suzuki, where do we find the true teachings of Buddhism?

**35. Beyond Consciousness (Page 127).** Why does Suzuki say, "We must firmly believe in our true nature?"

**36. Buddha's Enlightenment (Page 131).** What does it mean to "see Buddha Nature in various beings and in every one of us?"

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