



## Not Always So: Practicing the True Spirit of Zen

By Shunryu Suzuki, Edward Espe Brown, Zen Center San Francisco

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### Practising the true spirit of Zen.

*Not Always So* is based on Shunryu Suzuki's lectures and is framed in his own inimitable, allusive, paradoxical style, rich with unexpected and off-centre insights. Suzuki knew he was dying at the time of the lectures, which gives his thoughts an urgency and focus even sharper than in the earlier book.

In *Not Always So* Suzuki once again voices Zen in everyday language with the vigour, sensitivity, and buoyancy of a true friend. Here is support and nourishment. Here is a mother and father lending a hand, but letting you find your own way. Here is guidance which empowers your freedom (or way-seeking mind), rather than pinning you down to directions and techniques. Here is teaching which encourages you to touch and know your true heart and to express yourself fully, teaching which is not teaching from outside, but a voice arising in your own being.

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## **Editorial Review**

### Amazon.com Review

If you can imagine Zen Existentialism, *Not Always So* is it. Part instruction manual for Zen practice and part philosophical meditation, Shunryu Suzuki's teachings emphasize being-in-the-world. He does not point toward a singular enlightenment-event as a burst into higher consciousness. Rather, he suggests a more experiential enlightenment that finds meaning in a full awareness of the present. For example: "If you go to the rest room, there is a chance for enlightenment. When you cook, there is a chance for enlightenment. When you clean the floor, there is a chance to attain enlightenment."

Shunryu Suzuki was an important emissary of Zen Buddhism to the United States. Establishing a Zen center in San Francisco in the 1960s, he attracted many noted pupils, including this book's editor, Edward Espe Brown. In fact, *Not Always So* is Brown's collection of Suzuki's teachings during his last years, in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

No doubt some readers will want to wrestle with the often paradoxical nature of Zen teachings. And those from the Western philosophical tradition may find vast differences between the Western system that takes its cue from Descartes' *cogito* and the Eastern one that emphasizes the destruction of the ego. Says Suzuki: "It is just your mind that says you are here and I am there, that's all. Originally we are one with everything." While the book does not wrestle with cultural-philosophical differences, it is nevertheless a good introduction to Zen. Suzuki's teachings tend to flow from simple stories, usually drawn from his own experiences. It's almost entirely free of the jargon that clutters many books on Buddhism, and the teachings are communicated with clarity and brevity. --*Eric de Place*

### From Publishers Weekly

Contrary to Zen's principle of "nothing special," Brown (*The Tassajara Bread Book*; *Tassajara Cooking*) has indeed produced something very special: an edited collection of talks by beloved Zen Master Shunryu Suzuki, who died in 1971. It is impossible to overestimate the sustained impact of Suzuki's 1970 classic, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, a world-renowned bestseller. Brown, ordained by Suzuki in 1971 after six years of study under him, has edited transcriptions that both read well on the page and capture the style, humor and solid grasp evident in the first volume. But this is no *Zen Mind* sequel, and will prove highly valuable to anyone, rank novice or zazen master. These 35 talks, delivered shortly before Suzuki's death from cancer, sparkle with simple freshness and familiarity: "Our tendency is to be interested in something that is growing in the garden, not in the bare soil itself. But if you want to have a good harvest, the most important thing is to make the soil rich and cultivate it well. The Buddha's teaching is not about the food itself but about how it is grown, and how to take care of it." Suzuki's messages are like deceptive pools of water, shimmering with surface possibilities that provoke stronger swimmers to aim for the depths. Suzuki, too, beckons us to the deeper reaches of learning, becoming "a wise, warm-hearted friend, [and] an unseen companion in the dark." Again we are blessed with more of his superb vision.

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### From Library Journal

Suzuki, who died in 1971, came to the United States in the late 1950s to teach the practice of Soto Zen, the Japanese school of Buddhism emphasizing sitting meditation. His introductory talks in the now classic *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* brought the teachings of this beloved first abbot of the San Francisco Zen Center to a

generation of Americans hungry for more satisfying spiritual nourishment. Collected in *Branching Streams Flow in the Darkness*, Suzuki's lectures provided both the master's well-known, down-to-earth advice on practice and his difficult-to-locate insights into monastic life. In this latest collection, Brown, Suzuki's student and author of *The Tassajara Bread Book*, presents carefully edited transcripts of talks selected from the period shortly before the great teacher's death. Frequently enigmatic and always iconoclastic, the resulting brief essays will help readers deepen their practice. An essential purchase for most public and academic libraries. James R. Kuhlman, Univ. of North Carolina Lib., Asheville  
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#### **Kirk Fonseca:**

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