

DHARMA TALK BY KUSHIN MAYLIE SCOTT

MARCH 25 1990

Our good friend and teacher Maurine Stuart died four weeks ago tomorrow in Cambridge and I wanted to talk about her today. I want to begin by reading a quote from Maurine that heads the chapter that Lenore Friedman wrote about her in *Meetings with Remarkable Women*. "Dogen Zengi said, 'If you cannot find a true teacher, it is better not to practice.' What did he mean by that? what I feel at this moment is that our practice, whatever it is, is our teacher. Life is our practice. If we listen deeply to what is going on, if we're involved down to the very bottom with our life situation, this is our most venerable teacher, 'Life is Roshi.'" That's very much Maurine's spirit, 'Life is Roshi.'

Maurine, teacher of the Cambridge Buddhist Association (CBA), came out of both the Rinzai and Soto traditions, subtly combining both. I met her for the first time in 1984 when she came out to the Bay Area for the first time and we had our first women's sesshin. She was rather short and kind of square and she had make-up on. She was not at all like what I had expected. Later, when I first saw the Zen Center (CBA), which was also her house, I was surprised. It was brimming with things, extremely comfortable, extremely oriented to making life pleasant for everyone who was in it. I realized that I had all kinds of images to throw away. And that was one of the things that Maurine was wonderful at doing, breaking down images. We are hardly aware sometimes we're carrying them, but they get in the way of our life. In certain ways, she was extremely traditional; in other ways, the way she carried the form was uniquely her own.

That was my first encounter with a gentle sesshin. And for the first time I really understood that you don't have to primarily suffer in sesshin. (Laughter.) And she brought her wonderful ways with her in kinhin, everybody close-close, same step. It would be like one body, and many feet. All women and this wonderful embrace of her presence and closeness, kept us. She had powerful intuition about who you were and could find and appreciate a person very quickly and just move in, in whatever way was right.

The two things I remember from the talk we had scheduled for after the sesshin were that the women were so surprised at the degree of safety they felt, just women being with women. They hadn't anticipated the feeling of safety that would come from that. Safety and warmth. As Maurine says "Women warm women." The other aspect was this wonderful example of a woman embodying the form of the tradition in her own shape. That was something that I think all of us felt that we really needed to see. She sat all through this talk, and said nothing, because that's not her style to talk about it, she's very emphatic about that.

Life is to be lived, not to be analyzed, not to be talked about, to be lived. 'Life is Roshi.' That certainly was her teaching.

Her presence was her teaching. Interesting to think about: what is presence? A person's presence has something to do with their roots and what they are rooted in. The Lotus Sutra again and again described the Buddhas that have always existed, always, from beginning to end and have never failed to be there.

Shakyamuni perceived that the Buddhas were there, he understood that the Buddhas were there, and he found a way to tune in to what was already there. And that was his great teaching.

Another story in the Lotus Sutra is about a poor man who has a rich friend who sews a jewel inside the poor man's coat. And the poor man doesn't know that the jewel is there. So he goes through life, and is very poor, and there are many hardships, and finally he comes again into the presence of this rich friend. The friend says, "Look, what has all the trouble been? Open your shirt. There it is." Maurine's presence, the way she walked, you understood how she carried the jewel. You never failed to see how she was carrying it, even when she dropped it. It was what her life was about.

The way she began life was not easy. And she had her share of troubles, personal troubles. She really used her difficulties, and the afflictive emotions, and their troubles thoroughly, and used them to really define, as she says, that place of stability, of inner instability, through which to interpret the turbulence of life. So, the turbulence of life was there, but she had this deep place that filtered through. And as it filtered through, that's where you got the warmth. There was anger in her life, she was a passionate woman, and she just kept going through it. She said to somebody, "No matter what comes, good or bad, don't make a move to avoid it." She was very careful about what she did with her anger. I think she used the energy of it to keep herself on a deep kind of plumbing of the depths.

She went in for a routine check up sometime in 1987 and discovered that she had cancer of the liver and of the intestine. Just a little before we'd had a sesshin, around June of '87. In her and my last dokusan, she said suddenly, "Maylie, are you prepared to die?" And I didn't know what to say. It was the kind of question that sometimes the teacher gives you and you know at the moment of the question the enormous impact, and you don't know how it's going to work out. You understand fully that you have been given something. I had no idea, of course, at the time it was given, what the extraordinary teaching would be that followed. She was very determined that she was going to maintain the quality of her life. Not through any kind of denial of illness, but through a very complete acceptance of it.

The sesshins for women had ended in '88 and she began to give Green Gulch sesshins. She gave a lecture in January '89 at Green Gulch where she talked about her illness. I'm going to summarize some of that talk.

"Life, death, health, illness are one. The true face of the universe includes all things in it. There are many healers in the world, but the healers do not heal us. The healing is already there, in the wholeness. The goal of healing is to help the person in need of healing to realize the wholeness. At the deepest level, there is no sickness. The highest use of the human psyche is not for cure but for the transcendence of the conditional events we call health and disease, and birth and death. The

state of highest health is beyond harm, beyond all ephemerality; it is the suchness and the "is"ness of every moment, the now that is the only time there is."

She said she felt both sick and not sick, but she had never felt sick except for the aftermath of the major operation. That her life had been pain-free, energetic, and vital. What she tapped was the realm of beyond conditions of life and death and her goal was beyond health and sickness, nothing to be gained, nothing to become, only the present moment, a state of health-wholeness and oneness-that transcends the problem at hand.

After she died we grieved and we talked. And I realized that there is something about a teacher that just makes the world more comfortable, a more comfortable place. And one doesn't have to see the teacher all that much even, but just knowing that the teacher is there changes the whole landscape in some imperceptible but extremely important way.

The Lotus Sutra talks about Buddha fields in a very baroque description, that where Buddhas are jewels are everywhere and flowers come down from the air. I think it's a kind of metaphor for this wonderful comfort that we feel from somebody whom, at a certain level, we wholly trust, as being a pointer to our heart's desire.
