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Shunryu Suzuki

Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind:

Informal Talks on Zen Meditation and Practice

148 pp. 40th anniversary ed. 2010. Shambhala Publications, 2011. First published in 1970.

The beauty of *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind: Informal Talks on Zen Meditation and Practice* (1970) is in its simplicity and accessibility. "In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few" (1). Shunryu Suzuki (1904–71) raises the bar by lowering it. From his lectures at the San Francisco Zen Center and the Tassajara Zen Mountain Center, editor Trudy Dixon derived a three-part arrangement to explain zazen (sitting): right practice, right attitude, and right understanding. Each part is dotted by Suzuki's quotations, elegant segues in topic, such as right practice's "posture," "breathing," and "bowing." The classic disquisition corrects potential misunderstandings about mastery and effort and meaning: We don't attain enlightenment; our natural state is enlightened (that is, Buddha-like). We practice zazen with ease and as routine, not with effort and through asceticism. We unite the discontinuous with the continuous, such as focusing on our inhales and exhales while enfolded in the lotus position. But zazen is more than sitting; it is "whatever you do. . . . when you are you" (68). The teaching is "just to live, always in reality, in its exact sense" (77). When we see and accept things as they are now, we will "see things as they should be" (122). Suzuki removes the bar, and his enduring text just marked its semicentenary. —Lisa Thaler, author of *Look Up: The Life and Art of Sacha Kolin*, 4 January 2021