

## Letters from Suzanne

*In April 2001 Suzanne Scott stopped at Pine Mountain Temple on her way to Shasta Abbey, where she was going to try her vocation to be a monk. She had retired from her job as a lawyer and sold her house in Texas shortly before and had all her belongings in her car. Her intended overnight visit turned into a three-week stay, which she used to reflect on the big transition she was making. Over the years she and Rev. Phoebe corresponded several times, until Suzanne's weakening physical condition made it impossible for her to write any more. Rev. Master Meiko, from the Portland Buddhist Priory, visited her frequently, gave her much spiritual support, and was with her during her final days. Here are parts of the letters to Rev. Phoebe, giving us some inkling of how deeply she practiced.*

Dear Reverend Master Phoebe,

This is a sad letter for me to write. After only 2 ½ months at Shasta Abbey I became very ill and had to leave, and I do not know if I will be able to return. At first I believed I was having trouble adjusting to the altitude, but I seemed to be getting weaker rather than stronger. After a trip to the ER and a grueling week of tests, the internist said I had restrictive pulmonary disease (i.e. I can't get enough air into my lungs to supply my body with oxygen) and recommended I return to sea level and consult a specialist for further evaluation and treatment.

So I have come to my cousins in Tillamook, OR, which is close to Portland with its excellent medical facilities. The doctor I am seeing said he doesn't think lung disease alone can account for all my problems and feels I may have something akin to post polio syndrome, which is causing muscular weakness. In a few weeks I'll be seeing a neurologist and begin another series of tests.

I hated to leave the Abbey, but Rev. Kodo convinced me that my health had to be the first priority and that if my condition permitted I could come back any time. As far as my training was concerned, I was doing okay—sometimes it was very hard but I had the faith to keep going. I hope I can still retain that faith under these even more difficult circumstances. I still meditate several times a day but sometimes I get so depressed when I think how quickly my world fell to pieces. It's hard to find all acceptance, but I am trying. I won't give up, NO MATTER WHAT!

Thank you for all your kindness, in gassho, Suzanne

*A month later Suzanne wrote:*

When I told Rev. Master Eko that I was fearful because of my deteriorating health, he told me to sit very still right in the middle of the fear. In one sentence he gave me the task of a lifetime. I keep trying and sometimes it works, but not because of anything I do, because I do not know what I am doing—I sit and keep trying. There seems to be a subtle difference between letting go of the fear and

trying to push it away that I do not understand, but perhaps that will come in time. You have given me a lot to think about—yes, I am stubborn, and all my life I have felt I have to prove my worth over and over again (I suspect it is a common problem). Way down inside me there is a deep black pit of self-hatred, that must be karma—it was there even when I was a small child and all my difficulties seem to lead back to it. Can I ever learn to sit still right down there in that pit? I do not know but I guess I will find out.

*After she moved into a care facility:*

Gradually I have been able to build up my sitting time until I can do the full 40 minutes comfortably. I always sit first thing in the morning and cherish the time when I can be at peace and draw closer to the Unborn. Rev. Master Eko told me, “IT is closer than your breath”, and although I know he was telling the absolute truth it is a statement so vast and mysterious it is like one of the Rinzai koans; enough to make you want to bang your head against the wall in frustration at your inability to understand. But I won't quit looking—I know IT is there, even if I can't see IT, and that alone is such a comfort.

*By January, 2004 her handwriting is difficult to read:*

I am all settled in Tillamook now, have made new friends and found new activities to keep me busy. Once a week I do volunteer work at the St. Vincent de Paul thrift shop, and have taken a number of art classes at the community college. Although I no longer have enough strength in my hands to push a needle through multiple layers of fabric, I can still embroider, knit, crochet and do other crafts.

One of my favorite activities is redecorating my altar every month. I had not really done that much before, but about a year ago a friend who had moved into an apartment here from a much larger home gave me some candle sticks, several flower vases and candles in many different colors. That started me off and now every month I redo it to reflect the season and the major festival being celebrated. It is an act of devotion for me to make the altar as beautiful as possible.

And I am still meditating, doing my 40 minutes first thing in the morning, when I am physically at my best. The meditation continually develops and the longer I do it the more wonderful I find it to be. Habitual ways of thinking and acting, that have made me miserable for years, are weakening and I feel more at peace with myself. A few weeks ago I realized that there is no reason to worry or fret over what may or may not happen in the future, how my condition will progress, how long I will live, what experience of enlightenment I will have—everything happens when the causes and conditions are ripe, not a minute sooner or minute later, so all I have to do is sit quietly and do my training. Knowing that the Unborn IS, even though I catch only little glimpses of IT, I am contented with things as they are, because they are just as they ought to be for me. Reading this over, it sounds quite incoherent, but I find it hard to

communicate accurately what is going on in my training. I did get an opportunity to go to the Abbey for the Segaki Retreat, and managed pretty well, although I had to rest a lot. It was good to be there again, if only for a short time.

*In the spring of 2005 Suzanne became ill with cancer, she died on October 12, 2005. We will miss her and are grateful for her example.*

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