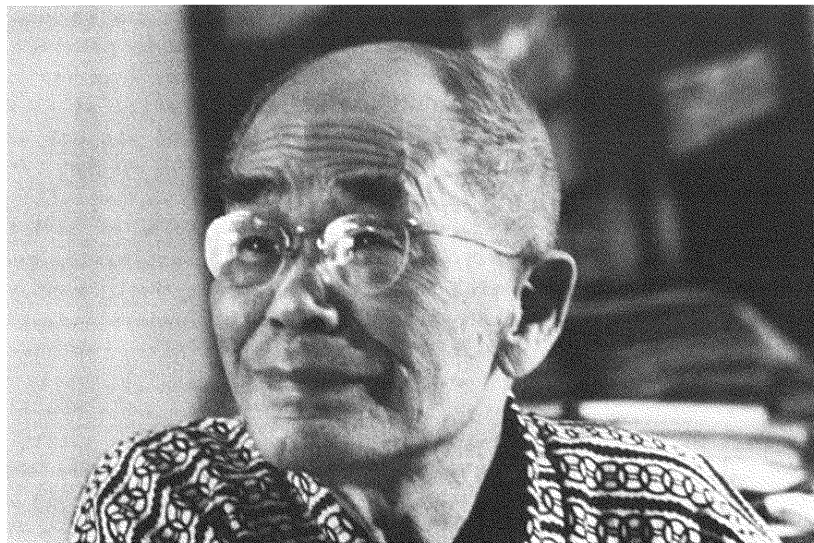


ZEN NOTES



DAISETZ TEITARO SUZUKI 1870 - 1966

By Mary Farkas

The most notable figure in modern Zen died quietly July 12th in Japan, where he had been living since 1958. If one were to take 1866 as the year in which Japan began to look toward the West, and to move toward it in thought, Dr. Suzuki's life just about spans its first century. Certainly he was Japan's greatest interpreter to the West of all time.

Although Dr. Suzuki is credited with some thirty books in English, and many articles, very little about his own life or personal, as opposed to philosophical or religious, ideas appear in them. The Middle Way of

November, 1964 recounts his "Early Memories" in his own words, but apart from this vivid and touching memoir, I can recall no detailed account he has given of his own experiences.

A record of the bare facts of his life appears in the introduction to *The Essentials of Zen Buddhism*. This anthology of the writings of Dr. Suzuki, edited by Bernard Phillips, and prepared under Dr. Suzuki's personal supervision, published by E.P. Dutton, New York 1962, is the source from which some of the facts given here have been established, as it is the nearest to

a definitive biography so far prepared in English, *The Essentials* is a comprehensive, selective, one-volume introduction to Dr. Suzuki's view of Zen. Dr. Phillips has long been an educator in the field of religion and philosophy, so this book is probably the best guide to Dr. Suzuki's thoughtworld the student is likely to have in the near future.

As Zen is taken for granted in Japan, there is little need to "present" it to the Japanese public. (Dr. Suzuki was asked to present *The Essence of Buddhism* to H.M. the Emperor of Japan on April 23rd and 24th, 1946. A transcript of his talks was published by the Buddhist Society of London that year.) Until Dr. Suzuki began to present it to the West, there had been practically no attempt on the part of any Japanese to do so. A work published in 1913 by Kaiten Nukariya, *The Religion of the Samurai*, did attempt this, but it had no popular success. As Dr. C.G. Jung says in his foreword to Suzuki's *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, Nukariya's attempt was unsuccessful in helping us understand the "satori" experience (the main subject of Dr. Suzuki's presentation--"Satori is the *raison d'être* of Zen, and without it there is no Zen") because "Presumably Nukariya is speaking to Western rationalism, of which he himself has acquired a good dose, and that is why it all sounds so flatly edifying." Some later writers have taken the way Jung then recommends: "The abstruse obscurity of the Zen anecdotes is preferable to this adaptation: *ad usum Delphini*; it conveys a great deal more, while saying less." "It is far better," Jung continued, "to allow oneself to become deeply imbued beforehand with the exotic obscurity of the Zen anecdotes, and

to bear in mind the whole time that *satori* is a *mysterium ineffabile*, as indeed the Zen masters wish it to be. Between the anecdotes and the mystical enlightenment there is, for our understanding, a gulf, the possibility of bridging which can at best be indicated but never in practice achieved." On this remark Jung has added a note which could stand as an apology for all writers on the subject; "If in spite of this I attempt 'explanations' in what follows, I am still fully aware that in the sense of *satori* what I say can only be useless. I could not resist, however, the attempt to manoeuvre our Western understanding at least into the proximity of an understanding--a task so difficult that in so doing one must take upon oneself certain crimes against the spirit of Zen."

Suzuki's *Japanese Buddhism*, originally published in 1938 by the Japan Travel Bureau, Tokyo, presented to the West what the Japanese at that time thought would be of interest about Buddhism. In 1958 he added what was thought would be of interest on Zen. In the end Zen was given equal weight with Japanese Buddhism, for, to the foreigner, Zen now seems to be the "essence of her (Japan's) finest culture" as Sir George Sansom put it. Thus the title of the revised work became *Zen and Japanese Buddhism*.

I note this as evidence that in presenting Zen to the West Dr. Suzuki has also become Japan's greatest interpreter. For Dr. Suzuki has included in his writings not only his interpretation of Zen but also a survey of the most distinctive elements of her culture, the arts and crafts, and such specialized and distinctive features as swordsmanship, ink-painting, calligra-

phy, tea ceremony, and floral arrangements. On the way, the minor arts of Japan have become almost synonymous with Zen, largely because of Dr. Suzuki's presentation of them in works like *Zen Buddhism and Its Influence on Japanese Culture* (perhaps his most attractive work to the general reader). Originally published in 1938 in Kyoto by the Eastern Buddhist Society, this work was revised and enlarged to become *Zen and Japanese Culture*, as part of the Bollingen Series, Pantheon, New York, 1959.

In 1936, when Dr. Suzuki lectured at Columbia University, where Professor Ryusaku Tsunoda was Curator of the Japanese Collection, one of our members who had gone to hear his lecture said she was disappointed that his talk was mostly about tea ceremony. "That is what Americans think Japan is," Sokei-an remarked, "so he must give them that."

As an indication of what Dr. Suzuki would, if uninfluenced by this consideration, have elected to present was suggested when a few days prior to this lecture at Columbia University, he was invited by Sokei-an to address the members of the Institute (then the Buddhist Society of America). On this occasion Dr. Suzuki spoke concerning the history of Buddhism and the difference between its expression in India and China, a subject to which he has given much attention. By this time, as was noted by Professor Tsunoda, Dr. Suzuki already had sixteen books in the Columbia University Library. Those on Zen, which were the first to attract the American public, beginning with the *Essays in Zen Buddhism, First Series*, in 1927, and continuing through the second *Essays*, 1933 and the third *Essays*, 1934, *An Introduction to Zen Bud-*

dhi sm, 1934, *The Training of the Zen Buddhist Monk*, 1934, *Manual of Zen Buddhism*, 1935, and *Zen Buddhism and its Influence on Japanese Culture*, 1938, really laid the whole base of the West's knowledge of Zen. The image of Zen presented in these works is what has attracted modern people to the subject. Whereas in Japan the study of Zen (not koan study) concerns the doctrines of Mahayana Buddhism, the sutras, and philosophical positions taken by various schools and sects, the *essence* of Zen Dr. Suzuki presented is a Zen of dynamic confrontations and satori. As a professional writer, Dr. Suzuki was driven to present the material that could find an audience. Had his works all, like the *Lankavatara Sutra*, 1932, *Studies in the Lankavatara Sutra*, 1930, been addressed to scholars, the story of Zen in America might have been another one.

Dr. Suzuki's first works in English were written in the last century. One was a translation of *The Gospel of Buddha* which Paul Carus had compiled. The second, *A New Interpretation of Religion*, contained a statement of what Buddhists were supposed to believe, based on a pamphlet brought back to Japan by Soyen Shaku from his trip to America in 1893, to attend the World Parliament of Religions. It was through him that Dr. Suzuki, at 27, went to America to work for Paul Carus, in La Salle, Illinois, where he remained for more than ten years. During this period he contributed articles and reviews to the *Monist*, translated the *Tao Te Ching*, Soyen Shaku's *Sermons of a Buddhist Abbot* (his talks to Americans), and Ashvaghosha's *Discourse on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana*. He also wrote a *Brief History of Early Chinese Philosophy* and *Outlines of Mahayana*

Buddhism.

Dr. Suzuki's decision to become a writer seems to have been influenced by the fact that his father was something of a scholar and a minor writer who had published a short history of Europe.

Actually his father was a physician, as had been his father and grandfather. All had died young. This rather unusual circumstance was the cause of Dr. Suzuki's turning to Zen. In his own words, from "Early Memories":

"Of course, it was no very unusual thing in those days to die young, but in the case of a physician under the old feudal regime it was doubly unfortunate, since the stipend his family received from his feudal lord was cut down. So my family, although of samurai rank, was already poverty stricken by my father's time, and after his death when I was only six years old we became even poorer owing to all the economic troubles which befell the samurai class after the abolition of the feudal system.

"To lose one's father in those days was perhaps an even greater loss than it is now, for so much depended on him as head of the family--all the important steps in life such as education and finding a position in life afterwards. All this I lost, and by the time I was about seventeen or eighteen these misfortunes made me start thinking about my karma. Why should I have these disadvantages at the very start of life?

"My thoughts then started to turn to philosophy and religion, and as my family belonged to the Rinzai sect of Zen it was natural that I should look to Zen for some of the answers to my problems."

Like Sokei-an, whose interest in philosophy and religion was nurtured during his university days in Tokyo, Dr. Suzuki combined Zen study with his formal education. He began under Imagita Kosen (about whom he has written a biography in Japanese) who was the Abbot of Engakuji in Kamakura, a thirty-mile walk from Tokyo. Kosen gave him the koan *Sekishu* ("The sound of one hand") at their second meeting, when Suzuki was 21 and Kosen was 76 ("a very big man, both in stature and personality").

A year later Kosen died and was succeeded by his favorite disciple, Soyen Shaku, who became Suzuki's teacher and changed his koan to Mu, which after four years of painful struggle led to *kensho* (described in a note as the first glimpse of satori or enlightenment).

At the time Soyen Shaku became Suzuki's teacher in the spring of 1892, he had just returned from a visit to Ceylon to study Theravada Buddhism and had already received his *inka shōmei* ("certificate to become a Rōshi") at 25. He also had studied western subjects at Keiō University, which was an unusual thing for a Zen priest to do. Many people criticized him for this step, including Kōsen Rōshi, Suzuki notes, who told him that western studies would be of no use to him at all (My previous information on this was that Kōsen Rōshi sent him there! Ed.). As Soyen Shaku was a very strong willed person, he not only did not pay attention to the criticism but determined to go to America in 1893 and later returned for a longer visit, during which young Suzuki joined him as interpreter.

Suzuki's emphasis on the first satori experience in his writings reflects the great significance it had



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in his own case. After a long struggle it was in December, 1896 that the "crisis or extremity" in solving his first koan came for the 26 year old Suzuki, "When it was finally settled that I should go to America to help Dr. Carus with his translation of the *Tao Te Ching*. I realized that the *rohatsu-sesshin* (Dec. 1st-8th) that winter might be my last chance to go to *sesshin* and that if I did not solve my koan then I might never be able to do so. I must have put all my spiritual strength into that *sesshin*.

"Up till then I had always been conscious that *Mu* was in my mind. But so long as I was conscious of *Mu* it meant that I was somehow separate from *Mu*, and that is not a true *samadhi*. But towards the end of that *sesshin* about the fifth day, I ceased to be conscious of *Mu*. I was one with *Mu*, identified with *Mu*, so that there was no longer the separateness implied by being conscious of *Mu*. This is the real state of *samadhi*.

"But this *samadhi* alone is not enough. You must come out of that state, be awakened from it, and that awakening is *Prajna*. That moment of coming out of the *samadhi* and seeing it for what it is--that is *satori*. When I came out of that state of *samadhi* during that *sesshin* I said, 'I see. This is it.'"

Suzuki returned to Japan from America in 1909. He became a professor of English at Peer's University in Tokyo and also at Tokyo Imperial University. In 1911 he married an American woman, Beatrice Lane, who shared his interest in Buddhism and wrote a number of articles and several books. Her *Mahayana Buddhism*, originally published in 1938 (she died in 1939) went into a third edition in 1959.

For ten years more Suzuki studied

Zen with Soyen Shaku until he died in 1919.

Dr. Suzuki's residence in Japan was mostly at Engaku-ji except in the nineteen twenties when he moved to Kyoto to become professor of the philosophy of religion at Otani University. There he founded *The Eastern Buddhist* (1921) in which many of the articles which later formed the basis of his books were originally included. His major books in English were published during a twelve year period beginning with the *Essays in Zen Buddhism, First Series*, 1927. This was followed by *Studies in the Lankavatara Sutra*, 1930, *The Lankavatara Sutra*, 1932, *Essays in Zen Buddhism, Second Series*, 1933, *Essays in Zen Buddhism, Third Series*, 1934, (Mrs. Sasaki read proof on this one), *The Training of the Zen Buddhist Monk*, 1934, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, 1934, *Manual of Zen Buddhism*, 1935, *Zen Buddhism and Its Influence on Japanese Culture*, 1938. In 1936, as previously noted, he visited the United States and England and lectured in both places.

During the war he lived quietly in Kamakura. After the war, Rider and Company began the publication of his complete works in English for The Buddhist Society of London.

In 1949 he headed once again to the West. After the East-West Philosophers' Conference in Hawaii, he continued at the University of Hawaii for a year. In 1950 he taught at Claremont College in California and then went on a tour of American Universities sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation.

Dr. Suzuki has been criticized by "square" Zennists for the controversial position he has taken, I think first in his *Zen and Japanese Buddhism* (1958) in its opening chapter entitled:

“What is Zen? Not Dhyāna but Prajñā.” This chapter does not advocate omitting meditation practice as nonessential, as those who do not wish to have to go through its discipline take it to suggest, but rather emphasizes the cultivation of *prajñā* (“the highest form of intuition we humans are in possession of”) over the “concentrated state of consciousness *dhyāna* characterizes in order to “bring about the awakening of a higher spiritual power so as to come directly in contact with reality itself.” This is Dr. Suzuki’s presentation of the position of the Sixth Patriarch’s Zen, further elaborated in *The Zen Doctrine of No Mind*. (London, Rider, 1949, later reappearing in the selections from it included in *Zen Buddhism*, edited by William Barrett, New York, Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956). Dr. Suzuki concludes:.... “From the above statements (concerning Zen Buddhism’s emphasis on the attainment of enlightenment) it will be clear that Zen Buddhism, while it has not severed itself from practicing *dhyāna*, puts its principal emphasis on attaining enlightenment, thus following Buddha’s example as well as his teaching. Dhyāna practice is no doubt an important step towards the enlightenment-experience, but Zen Buddhism does not believe that it is the only approach to the final goal of all Buddhist discipline.”

A further attempt to clarify his point of view occurs a few pages later, when he says, “Prior to Enō (The Sixth Patriarch), *dhyāna* appeared somehow separated from *prajñā*. Though *prajñā* was not ignored by any means, the successive patriarchs seemed to put stress unwittingly upon *dhyāna* in accordance with the Indian tradition. In truth they never neglected *prajñā*, only they

did not so expressively, so consciously, so decisively, insist upon the all-importance of *prajñā* in connection with *dhyāna*.”

Although Dr. Suzuki was sometimes claimed to be the opponent of “square” Zen’s emphasis on meditation practice as the major “approach to the final goal of all Buddhist discipline” he did practice it. I am indebted to Dr. Stunkard for an anecdote on this subject. In the course of a routine examination (Dr. Stunkard for many years was Dr. Suzuki’s personal physician) he could not fail to observe the muscular development of the lower abdomen characteristic only of “sitting” Zennists. When he rallied Dr. Suzuki about this, reminding him of the position about it he was known for, Dr. Suzuki replied: “It’s a habit.”

Dr. Suzuki has pinpointed his first acquaintance with this habit in his “Early Memories.” A teacher in the school Dr. Suzuki was attending at the time he was in his late teens was a pupil of Kosen Imagita Roshi and gave the young Suzuki a copy of Hakuin’s *Orategama* (now translated by Dr. R. D. M. Shaw, Allen and Unwin, 1963, under the title of *The Embossed Tea-kettle*). In order to find out more about it Dr. Suzuki decided to visit a Zen master, Setsumon Rōshi, who lived a considerable distance away.

“I arrived without any introduction,” Dr. Suzuki tells, “but the monks were quite willing to take me in. They told me the Rōshi was away, but that I could do *zazen* in a room in the temple if I liked. They told me how to sit and how to breathe and then left me alone in a little room telling me to go on like that. After a day or two of this the Rōshi came back and I was taken to

see him. Of course at that time I really knew nothing of Zen and had no idea of the correct etiquette in *sanzen*. I was just told to come and see the Rōshi, so I went, holding my copy of the *Orategama*.

"Most of the *Orategama* is written in fairly easy language, but there are some difficult Zen terms in it which I could not understand, so I asked the Rōshi the meaning of these words. He turned on me angrily and said, "Why do you ask me a stupid question like that?" I was sent back to my room without any instruction and told simply to go on sitting cross-legged...."

I first met Dr. Suzuki in August, 1950. At that time he was in Los Angeles. When he heard from another of Soyen Shaku's disciples, Nyogen Senzaki, that I was in California, he sent for me and I spent an afternoon visiting him. A matter of considerable interest to him and to Nyogen Senzaki also was the untimely death, in 1945, of Sokeian, whom I felt they rather blamed for permitting himself to go at the age of 63.

In the fall of that year, when Dr. Suzuki reached New York, Lawrence B. Chow was able to arrange for him to give a series of twelve talks at the Church Peace Union, through Henry A. Atkinson, its head. This was, by the way, one of the first Protestant groups in America to welcome a Buddhist lecturer. A Quaker group at Pendle Hill, Pennsylvania, also took an interest in Dr. Suzuki and other Buddhists from Japan.

It was at these lectures, which continued until January 13, 1951, that the audience was collected that later attended Dr. Suzuki's seminars at Columbia University. Here was the nucleus of the Zen "rage" that filtered from the intelligentsia (psychiatrists, artists, writers, thinkers) to the beatniks and students. At the Columbia lectures, some of which I attended, the main subjects were the same as those with which Dr. Suzuki began the second of his lectures in 1946 to the Emperor of Japan on *The Essence of Buddhism*.

"There are two pillars," he said, "supporting the great edifice of Buddhism, the Daichi, or Maha Prajna, the Great Wisdom, and the Dai Hi, or Maha Karuna, the Great Compassion." His following words to the Emperor might also have been addressed to his Western audience as a description of the burden of what he was trying to convey to them. "The climax of Buddhist philosophy is reached in the Kegon conception of Jiji-mu-ge (literally, each thing no hindrance). As I see it, this is the summit of oriental thought as

developed by the finest Buddhist minds, and represents Japan's contribution to world philosophy." (A summary of this theory was given in Mrs. Sasaki's pamphlet, *Zen, a Religion*.)

The next six years were those in which Dr. Suzuki became a world personality and attained the popular success of being profiled in the New Yorker, pictured in a high fashion magazine, and featured in Time. There was something about this diminutive gentleman of Japan whose religious name *Daisetz* means "great humility" that captured the imagination of the Westerners, many of whom felt he personified the image of the man of Zen he had done so much to create in their minds.

A story very frequently told of how he conformed to this idea of Zen that is current in the public mind was recounted in *The Sciences*, March 1966.

"What is the nature of that state of consciousness which mystics define as meditation? How does it differ from the state of being simply awake, or asleep?"

"Some insight into the difference is provided by an anecdote about Dr. Daisetz Suzuki, the great Zen philosopher. At the age of 86, he attended a conference on Zen and Psychoanalysis. During one particularly long session, he sat motionless with his eyes closed, apparently asleep. Suddenly a gentle breeze came and wafted some papers on the table at which he sat. Instantly, the philosopher's hand reached out and secured them after they had passed right by seemingly more alert participants."

Actually, Dr. Suzuki's ability to nap anywhere, anytime (see Zen Notes Vol. I, No. 7 for an example) is shared by many Japanese, and some others. Although described by some current researchers as "meditation", it is more probably related to another phenomenon reported in a recent book, "*Sleep*", by Gay Gaer Luce and Julius Segal, who question whether the capacity to fall asleep easily and at will is not a genetic endowment. They note that a primitive tribe, the Yahagans "fall asleep effortlessly, remaining observant, and yet ignoring distractions. They sleep lightly, awakening rapidly and easily, at once alert and fresh. Even during sleep every member of the tribe seems to know what is going on, and on awakening shows a remarkable understanding of what has happened during his sleep."

The anecdote at the same conference (arranged by Erich Fromm in Mexico and later written up in *Zen and Psychoanalysis*) that appeals to me most

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was reported by Dr. Albert (Mickey) Stunkard, head of the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania and a long-time Zen student. In this story someone asked Dr. Suzuki's opinion on man's tendency to regress, the man wishing to be a child sitting on his mother's lap, the child sitting on his mother's lap wishing to be back in the womb. Dr. Suzuki is alleged to have replied: "I am thinking about that man wishing to be a child sitting on his mother's lap, wishing to be a baby and I am thinking about that baby wishing to be back in his mother's womb and I am thinking--How nice for that baby!"

Since his middle eighties, Dr. Suzuki has been famous. But he never became rich. Dogged by poverty in his early years, the young Suzuki was obliged to leave school for a time as he could not pay the fees. Later when he returned, helped by an older brother, it is reported that in a conversation with two of his best friends, one Kitaro Nishida, the other, Yakichi Ataka, that they were discussing their futures. Nishida said he was going to be a philosopher (he became Japan's greatest); Suzuki's election was to be a writer. The third decided he would be a rich business man and support the two others. Apparently, he kept his promise. In the Preface to the *Essays, First Series*, Dr. Suzuki gives his acknowledgment: "The publication of these *Essays* in book form is principally due to the most liberal encouragement, both material and moral, of Mr. Yakichi Ataka, of Osaka, who is an old friend of the author's and who has not forgotten the pledge half-seriously and half-dreamily made in our youthful days."

In that same preface Dr. Suzuki states something of his own purpose in writing about Zen: "... as a tentative experiment to present Zen from our common-sense point of view and as a direct lineage of Buddhist faith as first proclaimed or rather realized by the Buddha, I hope I have worked towards removing some of the difficulties usually besetting us in the mastery of Zen thought. How far I have succeeded or how utterly I have failed--this is naturally for the reader to judge."

From where I sit now, the best summation I have heard of Dr. Suzuki's nearly fourscore years of Zen is that phrased by Zuigan Goto Roshi to Vanessa Coward, "He led many to the gate."

PHOTOGRAPH by BARBARA MORGAN

DAISETZ TEITARO SUZUKI ON ZEN

Currently available books only are listed here. Others are long out of print and often not in libraries. If you have some question about any of these we will try to answer it.

Essays in Zen Buddhism, First Series
Soft cover. Grove Press, Inc., New York, 1961, 376 pages.

Essentials of Zen Buddhism
Edited and with an Introduction by Bernard Phillips, E.P. Dutton and Co. Inc., New York, 1962, 536 pages.

An Introduction to Zen Buddhism
Soft cover, Grove Press, New York, 1967
132 pages.

Manual of Zen Buddhism
Soft cover, Evergreen Original E-231, Grove Press, New York, 186 pages.

The Training of the Zen Buddhist Monk
Kyoto, Eastern Buddhist Society, Washington Square Press, 1963, 161 pages.

Zen and Japanese Buddhism
Tokyo, Japan Tourist Bureau, 1958,
144 pages.

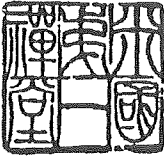
Zen and Japanese Culture
Bollingen Series LXIV, Pantheon Books Inc., New York, 1959, 536 pages.

Zen Buddhism
Selected writings edited by William Barrett. Incorporates selections from *The Zen Doctrine of No-Mind*. Soft cover. Anchor Doubleday, A90, New York, 1958, 294 pages

Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis
Edited by Erich Fromm, "Lectures on Zen Buddhism", Harper and Bros., New York, 1960. Grove Press, New York, 1963, pp. 1-76

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First Zen Institute of America
113 E30 Street
New York, New York 10016
(212-686-2520)

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