

101 Zen Stories

Abraham Lincoln once asked one of his secretaries, "If you call a tail a leg, how many legs does a horse have?"

"Five," replied the secretary.

"No," said the President, "The answer is four. Calling a tail a leg doesn't make it a leg."

A group of frogs were traveling through the woods, when two of them fell into a deep pit. All the other frogs gathered around the pit. When they saw how deep it was, they told the two frogs that they were as good as dead.

The two frogs ignored the comments and tried to jump up out of the pit with all of their might. The other frogs kept telling them to stop, that they were as good as dead. Finally, one of the frogs took heed to what the other frogs were saying and gave up. She fell down and died.

The other frog continued to jump as hard as she could. Once again, the crowd of frogs yelled at her to stop the pain and just die. She began jumping even harder and finally made it out. When she got out, the other frogs said, "Did you not hear us?" The frog explained to them that she was deaf - she thought they were encouraging her to jump out of the hole the entire time.

Hogen, a Chinese Zen teacher, lived alone in a small temple in the country. One day four traveling monks appeared and asked if they might make a fire in his yard to warm themselves. While they were building the fire, Hogen heard them arguing about subjectivity and objectivity.

He joined them and said: "There is a big stone. Do you consider it to be inside or outside your mind?"

One of the monks replied: "From the Buddhist viewpoint everything is an objectification of mind, so I would say that the stone is inside my mind."

"Your head must feel very heavy," observed Hogen, "if you are carrying around a stone like that in your mind."

Source: Zen Flesh, Zen Bones

According to an ancient Indian fable, a mouse was in constant distress because of its fear of the cat. A magician took pity on it and turned it into a cat. But then it became afraid of the dog. So the magician turned it into a dog. Then it began to fear the panther. So the magician turned it into a panther.

Whereupon it was full of fear for the hunter. At this point the magician gave up, and turned it into a mouse again saying, "Nothing I do for you is going to be of any help because you have the heart of a mouse."

Gasian instructed his adherents one day: "Those who speak against killing and who desire to spare the lives of all conscious beings are right. It is good to protect even animals and insects. But what about those persons who kill time, what about those who are destroying wealth, and those who destroy political economy? We should not overlook them. Furthermore, what of the one who preaches without enlightenment? He is killing Buddhism."

Source: Zen Flesh, Zen Bones

A farmer got so old that he couldn't work the fields anymore. So he would spend the day just sitting on the porch. His son, still working the farm, would look up from time to time and see his father sitting there. "He's of no use any more," the son thought to himself, "he doesn't do anything!" One day the son got so frustrated by this, that he built a wood coffin, dragged it over to the porch, and told his father to get in. Without saying anything, the father climbed inside. After closing the lid, the son dragged the coffin to the edge of the farm where there was a high cliff. As he approached the drop, he heard a light tapping on the lid from inside the coffin. He opened it up. Still lying there peacefully, the father looked up at his son. "I know you are going to throw me over the cliff, but before you do, may I suggest something?" "What is it?" replied the son. "Throw me over the cliff, if you like," said the father, "but save this good wood coffin. Your children might need to use it."

Source: Zen Stories To Tell Your Neighbors

Sozan, a Chinese Zen master, was asked by a student: "What is the most valuable thing in the world?" The master replied: "The head of a dead cat." "Why is the head of a dead cat the most valuable thing in the world?" inquired the student. Sozan replied: "Because no one can name its price."

Source: Zen Flesh, Zen Bones

There was once a holy man who lived in a state of ecstasy, but was regarded by everyone as insane. One day, having begged for food in the village, he sat by the roadside and began to eat when a dog came up and looked at him hungrily. The holy man then began to feed the dog; he himself would take a morsel, then give a morsel to the dog as though he and the dog were old friends. Soon a crowd gathered around the two of them to watch this extraordinary sight. One of the men in the crowd jeered at the holy man. He said to the others, "What can you expect from someone so crazy that he is not able to distinguish between a human being and a dog?" The holy man replied, "Why do you laugh? Do you not see Vishnu seated with Vishnu? Vishnu is being fed and Vishnu is doing the feeding. So why do you laugh, oh Vishnu?"

The warty frog and the prize goldfish met one summer afternoon in the temple pool. "Don't you realize how beautiful I am?" bubbled the goldfish flashing her wispy tail. The frog made no reply. "I can understand your silence," gloated the goldfish. "I am not only graceful in my movements but I also enhance the golden rays of the sun." Again, neither answer or movements from the frog. "Say something," demanded the goldfish just as a waiting crane speared the sparkling fish and flew into the sky. "Bye bye," croaked the frog.

Source: Zen Fables For Today

In ancient India there was a King called Janaka, who was also a sage. One day Janaka was taking a nap on his flower-strewn bed with his servants fanning him and his soldiers standing guard outside his door. As he dozed off, he had a dream in which a neighboring King defeated him in battle, took him prisoner, and had him tortured. As soon as the torture began, Janaka woke with a start to find himself lying on his flower-strewn bed with his servants fanning him and his soldiers on guard. Once again he dozed off and had the same dream. And once again he woke up to find himself safe and

comfortable in his palace.

Now Janaka began to be disturbed by several thoughts: While he was asleep, the world of his dreams had seemed so real. Now that he was awake, the world of the senses seemed real. Which of these two worlds is the real one, he wanted to know.

None of the philosophers, scholars, and seers he consulted could give him an answer. And for many years he searched in vain, till one day a man called Ashtavakra knocked at the door of the palace. Now, Ashtavakra means "entirely deformed or crooked," and he got that name because that is exactly what his body had been from birth.

At first the King was not disposed to take this man seriously. "How can a misshapen man like you be the carrier of a wisdom denied to my seers and scholars?" he asked.

"Right from my childhood, all avenues have been closed to me - so I avidly pursued the path of wisdom," was Ashtavakra's reply.

"Speak, then," said the King.

So this is what Ashtavakra said: "O King, neither the waking state nor the dream state is real. When you are awake, the world of dreams does not exist and when you dream the world of the senses does not exist. Therefore, neither is real."

"If both the waking and the dream states are unreal, then what is real?" asked the King.

"There is a state beyond these two. Discover that. It alone is real."

A university student while visiting Gasan asked him: "Have you ever read the Christian Bible?" "No read it to me," said Gasan. The student opened the Bible and read from St. Matthew: "And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They toil not, neither do they spin, and yet I say unto you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. . . . Take therefore no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself." Gasan said: "Whoever uttered those words I consider an enlightened man." The student continued reading: "Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened." Gasan remarked: "That is excellent. Whoever said that is not far from Buddhahood."

Source: Zen Flesh, Zen Bones

Socrates believed that the wise person would instinctively lead a frugal life. He himself would not even wear shoes; yet he constantly fell under the spell of the marketplace and would go there often to look at all the wares on display.

When one of his friends asked why, Socrates said, "I love to go there and discover how many things I am perfectly happy without."

There was a group of elderly gentlemen in Japan who would meet to exchange news and drink tea. One of their diversions was to search for costly varieties of tea and create new blends that would delight the palate.

When it was the turn of the oldest member of the group to entertain the others, he served tea with the greatest ceremony, measuring out the leaves from a golden container. Everyone had the highest praise for the tea and demanded to know by what particular combination he had arrived at this exquisite blend. The old man smiled and said, "Gentlemen, the tea that you find so delightful is the one that is drunk by the peasants on my farm. The finest things in life are neither costly nor hard to find."

Yamaoka Tesshu, as a young student of Zen, visited one master after another. He called upon Dokuon of Shokoku. Desiring to show his attainment, he said: "The mind, Buddha, and sentient beings, after all, do not exist. The true nature of phenomena is emptiness. There is no realization, no delusion, no sage, no mediocrity. There is no giving and nothing to be received." Dokuon, who was smoking quietly, said nothing. Suddenly he whacked Yamaoka with his bamboo pipe. This made the youth quite angry. "If nothing exists," inquired Dokuon, "where did this anger come from?"

Source: Zen Flesh, Zen Bones

Many centuries ago in Japan, an ex-warlord and his best friend were riding their horses down a dusty road when a light rain came, that quickly passed. Then they saw a beautiful rainbow appear in the sky, and eventually came to where one side of the colorful arc touched down on the ground. It was right beside the road, where a monk was sitting below a blossoming plum tree. The two pulled their horses to a halt, in order to ask the monk some questions about the local area, when they noticed that there were tears streaming down his face, and he was smiling.

The ex-warlord asked, "Why do you cry, friend?"

"Because you can finally see me," answered the monk.

Gettan used to say to his companions, "When you have a talking mouth, you have no listening ears. When you have listening ears, you have no talking mouth. Think about this carefully."

Source: Zen Antics

Wise man say, "You don't realize how much your hair weighs until you shave it all off. You don't realize how much your fears weigh until you release them."

A Quaker had this sign put up on a vacant piece of land next to his home: THIS LAND WILL BE GIVEN TO ANYONE WHO IS TRULY SATISFIED.

A wealthy farmer who was riding by stopped to read the sign and said to himself, "Since our friend the Quaker is so ready to part with this plot, I might as well claim it before someone else does. I am a rich man and have all I need, so I certainly qualify."

With that he went up to the door and explained what he was there for. "And are you truly satisfied?" the Quaker asked.

"I am indeed, for I have everything I need."

"Friend," said the Quaker, "if you are satisfied, what do you want the land for?"

The Buddhist nun called Ryonen was born in the year 1779. The famous Japanese warrior, Shingen, was her grandfather. She was considered one of the loveliest women in the whole of Japan and a poetess of no mean talent, so already at the age of seventeen she was chosen to serve at the royal court, where she developed a great fondness for Her Imperial Majesty the Empress. Now the Empress died a sudden death and Ryonen underwent a profound spiritual experience: she became acutely aware of the passing nature of all things. That was when she made up her mind to study Zen.

But her family wouldn't hear of it. They practically forced her into marriage but not before she had

extracted from them and from her future husband the promise that after she had borne him three children she would be free to become a nun. This condition was fulfilled when she was twenty-five. Then neither the pleas of her husband nor anything else in the world could dissuade her from the task she had set her heart on. She shaved her head, took the name of Ryonen (which means "to understand clearly"), and set out on her quest.

She came to the city of Edo and asked the Master Tetsu-gyu to accept her as his disciple. He took one look at her and rejected her because she was too beautiful. So she went to another master, Hakuo. He rejected her for the same reason: her beauty, he said, would only be a source of trouble. So Ryonen branded her face with a red-hot iron, thereby destroying her physical beauty forever. When she came back into Hakuo's presence, he accepted her as a disciple.

Ryonen wrote a poem on the reverse side of a little mirror to commemorate the occasion:

As a handmaid of my Empress
I burnt incense
to give fragrance to my lovely clothes.
Now as a homeless beggar
I burn my face
to enter the world of Zen.

When she knew her time had come to depart this world, she wrote another poem:

Sixty-six times have these eyes beheld
the loveliness of Autumn...
Ask no more.
Only listen to the sound of the pines
when no wind stirs.

The great Buddhist saint Nagarjuna moved around naked except for a loincloth and, incongruously, a golden begging bowl gifted to him by the King, who was his disciple.

One night he was about to lie down to sleep among the ruins of an ancient monastery when he noticed a thief lurking behind one of the columns. "Here, take this," said Nagarjuna, holding out the begging bowl. "That way you won't disturb me once I have fallen asleep."

The thief eagerly grabbed the bowl and made off -- only to return next morning with the bowl and a request. He said, "When you gave away this bowl so freely last night, you made me feel very poor. Teach me how to acquire the riches that make this kind of light-hearted detachment possible."

"Oh boy! Oh boy!" cried the monk-on-probation who had just cracked the Zen Master's favorite (and valuable) drinking cup.

The frightened youngster went to the Zen Master and asked, "Why must there be death?"

The Master answered, "Death is natural. It comes to all persons and things. We should not greet it with fear or meet death with anger. Why do you ask?"

"Because, Master, death has come upon your cup."

Source: Zen Fables For Today

One day Hasan of Basra saw Rabi'a al Adawiya near the riverside. Casting his prayer mat on the water,

he stepped on to it and said, "O Rabi'a, come let us pray together."

Rabi'a said, "O Hasan, why have you set yourself up like a salesman in the bazaar of this world? You do this because of your weakness."

With that she threw her prayer mat into the air, flew up on it, and said, "Come up here, Hasan, so that people may see us."

But that was more than Hasan could accomplish, so he was silent. Rabi'a, wishing to gain his heart, said, "O Hasan, a fish can do what you did and a fly can do what I did. The real work lies beyond both of these; that is what we must occupy ourselves with."

Buddha was once threatened with death by a bandit called Angulimal.

"Then be good enough to fulfill my dying wish," said Buddha. "Cut off the branch of that tree."

One slash of the sword, and it was done! "What now?" asked the bandit.

"Put it back again," said Buddha.

The bandit laughed. "You must be crazy to think that anyone can do that."

"On the contrary, it is you who are crazy to think that you are mighty because you can wound and destroy. That is the task of children. The mighty know how to create and heal."

There once lived a great warrior. Though quite old, he still was able to defeat any challenger. His reputation extended far and wide throughout the land and many students gathered to study under him. One day an infamous young warrior arrived at the village. He was determined to be the first man to defeat the great master. Along with his strength, he had an uncanny ability to spot and exploit any weakness in an opponent. He would wait for his opponent to make the first move, thus revealing a weakness, and then would strike with merciless force and lightning speed. No one had ever lasted with him in a match beyond the first move.

Much against the advice of his concerned students, the old master gladly accepted the young warrior's challenge. As the two squared off for battle, the young warrior began to hurl insults at the old master. He threw dirt and spit in his face. For hours he verbally assaulted him with every curse and insult known to mankind. But the old warrior merely stood there motionless and calm. Finally, the young warrior exhausted himself. Knowing he was defeated, he left feeling shamed.

Somewhat disappointed that he did not fight the insolent youth, the students gathered around the old master and questioned him. "How could you endure such an indignity? How did you drive him away?"

"If someone comes to give you a gift and you do not receive it," the master replied, "to whom does the gift belong?"

Source: Zen Stories to Tell Your Neighbors

"Tattoo inside your eyelids this reminder: 'you are the messenger, not the message. You are just like everyone else.' "

This was the advice given by a charismatic Zen teacher to a class of Zen teachers-in-training.

"What do you mean?" they asked her.

"I'll begin with a story about a besieged town that was surrounded by enemies who would slaughter all the inhabitants if help didn't arrive. Just when things looked hopeless, a messenger slipped through enemy lines with the message that the army of the Shogun would attack in the morning and drive off the invaders.

"The townspeople were so enraptured with this news that they treated the messenger like a hero. And after the Shogun's army left, they elected the messenger mayor. Though a pleasant fellow, the messenger turned out to be a thoroughly inept leader and was soon sent away in disgrace.

"The lesson here is never confuse the message--which is the precious gift of Buddha--with the messenger. You are only a messenger.

"When you stun an audience with the wisdom of a lecture, when your students cede to you the molding of their minds, when you are treated as someone special, focus on the message inside your eyelids:

You are the messenger, not the message.
You are just like everyone else."

Source: Zen Fables For Today

A farmer whose corn always took the first prize at the state fair had a habit of sharing his best corn seed with all the farmers in the neighborhood.

When asked why, he said, "It is really a matter of self-interest. The wind picks up the pollen and carries it from field to field. So if my neighbors grow inferior corn, the cross-pollination brings down the quality of my own corn. That is why I am concerned that they plant only the very best."

A Zen student came to Bankei and complained: "Master, I have an ungovernable temper. How can I cure it?"

"You have something very strange," replied Bankei. "Let me see what you have."

"Just now I cannot show it to you," replied the other.

"When can you show it to me?" asked Bankei.

"It arises unexpectedly," replied the student.

"Then," concluded Bankei, "it must not be your own true nature. If it were, you could show it to me at any time. When you were born you did not have it, and your parents did not give it to you. Think that over."

Source: Zen Flesh, Zen Bones

A philosopher asked Buddha: "Without words, without the wordless, will you tell me truth?"

The Buddha kept silence.

The philosopher bowed and thanked the Buddha, saying: "With your loving kindness I have cleared away my delusions and entered the true path."

After the philosopher had gone, Ananda asked the Buddha what he had attained.

The Buddha replied, "A good horse runs even at the shadow of the whip."

Source: Zen Flesh, Zen Bones

The master at the school for archery was known to be a master of life just as much as of archery.

One day his brightest pupil scored three bull's-eyes in a row at a local contest. Everyone went wild with applause. Congratulations poured in for pupil -- and master.

The master, however, seemed unimpressed -- almost critical even.

When the pupil later asked him why, he said, "You have yet to learn that the target is not the target."

Traveler: "What kind of weather are we going to have today?"

Shepherd: "The kind of weather I like."

Traveler: "How do you know it will be the kind of weather you like?"

Shepherd: "Having found out, sir, that I cannot always get what I like, I have learned to always like what I get. So I am quite sure we will have the kind of weather I like."

Two monks were washing their bowls in the river when they noticed a scorpion that was drowning. One monk immediately scooped it up and set it upon the bank. In the process he was stung. He went back to washing his bowl and again the scorpion fell in. The monk saved the scorpion and was again stung. The other monk asked him, "Friend, why do you continue to save the scorpion when you know it's nature is to sting?"

"Because," the monk replied, "to save it is my nature."

Source: Zen Stories to Tell Your Neighbors

When the spiritual teacher and his disciples began their evening meditation, the cat who lived in the monastery made such noise that it distracted them. So the teacher ordered that the cat be tied up during the evening practice. Years later, when the teacher died, the cat continued to be tied up during the meditation session. And when the cat eventually died, another cat was brought to the monastery and tied up. Centuries later, learned descendants of the spiritual teacher wrote scholarly treatises about the religious significance of tying up a cat for meditation practice.

Source: Zen Stories to Tell Your Neighbors

"Thank God we took a mule with us on the picnic because when one of the boys was injured we used the mule to carry him back."

"How did he get injured?"

"The mule kicked him."

One day a young Buddhist on his journey home, came to the banks of a wide river.

Staring hopelessly at the great obstacle in front of him, he pondered for hours on just how to cross such a wide barrier. Just as he was about to give up his pursuit to continue his journey he saw a great teacher on the other side of the river. The young Buddhist yells over to the teacher, "Oh wise one, can you tell me how to get to the other side of this river?" The teacher ponders for a moment looks up and down the river and yells back, "My son, you are on the other side."

Source: A Lighter Side of Buddhism

It is said that soon after his enlightenment the Buddha passed a man on the road who was struck by the Buddha's extraordinary radiance and peaceful presence.

The man stopped and asked, "My friend, what are you? Are you a celestial being or a god?"

"No," said the Buddha.

"Well, then, are you some kind of magician or wizard?"

Again the Buddha answered, "No."

"Are you a man?"

"No."

"Well, my friend, what then are you?" The Buddha replied, "I am awake."

Source: The Teachings of the Buddha by Jack Kornfield

One day God took the form of a human male, in order to walk through the world and see how His/Her children were faring. He soon came upon an old ascetic who had spent his entire adult life in severe bodily mortification and forceful mental disciplines.

The ascetic had gained a certain degree of clarity of his senses from his prolonged practice and realized that the man casually walking by his cave was fully established in awareness of the inner Divine Self. Painfully unwinding his body from his rigid posture, the ascetic bowed before God and said, "Great-Souled One! I perceive you are an illumined master. Pray tell me, honorable sir, how long it will take me before I realize my inner Divine Nature?"

God smiled warmly and laughingly replied, "You are doing well! At your present rate of progress, you will realize your inner Divine Self with just one more lifetime of similar effort."

The ascetic, terrified, in shock, cried, "Another lifetime of this horror?! How can I endure this boredom, this agony, this pain for another day, let alone another lifetime! How horrible! You have cursed me this day! Begone from this place, you imposter! Never would I believe such as you."

God smiled lovingly at him and walked on, soon coming upon an idiot splashing in the river, laughing and singing. This woman's primary activity every day was to cry out, "God! How I love God! God! I love God! God!" This foolish one never took the slightest care for her physical needs, never cared if she were fed, clothed, housed. She never noticed if she were clean or dirty, hot or cold, wet or dry. She might have been locked up in a padded cell in our modern age, but in those days, people saw that she was harmless and therefore tolerated her and occasionally gave her a crust of bread or some old, half-rotten fruits or vegetables to eat.

This idiot was attracted by the radiance of this handsome stranger, came up out of the water, bowed before him and said, "How wonderful! God has sent by a Great-Souled One. I have been enjoying myself so much of late I had nearly forgotten I have a goal. I began my quest to realize enlightenment long ago but of late have become distracted by this constant joy welling up inside. Seeing you just now reminded me of my journey and I was wondering if you could tell me how long it will be before I realize my inner Divine Nature?"

God smiled warmly and laughingly replied, "You are doing well! At your present rate of progress, you will realize your inner Divine Self with just seventy more lifetimes of similar effort."

"Seventy lifetimes of similar effort!" cried the idiot with perfect joy. "How wonderful! What a flawless boon you have today bestowed upon me!"

The idiot was so filled with joy at the prospect of another seventy lifetimes of such bliss that the last doubt fled from her mind; her last question melted into the joy that was her life; her ignorance was irrevocably crushed; she attained the highest state of enlightenment instantly.

A martial arts student approached his teacher with a question. "I'd like to improve my knowledge of the martial arts. In addition to learning from you, I'd like to study with another teacher in order to learn another style. What do you think of this idea?"

"The hunter who chases two rabbits," answered the master, "catches neither one."

Source: Zen Stories to Tell Your Neighbors

Once upon a time, twins were conceived. Weeks passed and the twins developed. As their awareness grew, they laughed for joy: "Isn't it great that we were conceived? Isn't it great to be alive?"

Together the twins explored their worlds. When they found their mother's cord that gave them life, they sang for joy!

"How great our mother's love is, that she shares her own life with us!"

As weeks stretched into months, the twins noticed how much each was changing.

"What does it mean?" one asked.

"It means our stay in this world is drawing to an end," said the other.

"But I don't want to go," said one. "I want to stay here always."

"We have no choice," said the other. "But maybe there is life after birth."

"But how can there be? We will shed our life cord and how can life be possible without it? Besides, we have seen evidence that others were here before us, and none of them has returned to tell us there is life after birth. No, this is the end. Maybe there is no mother after all."

"But there has to be," protested the other. "How else did we get here?"

"How do we remain alive? Have you ever seen our mother?" said one. "Maybe she only lives in our minds. Maybe we made her up because the idea made us feel good."

So the last days in the womb were filled with deep questioning and fear. Finally, the moment of birth arrived. When the twins had passed from their world, they opened their eyes and cried for joy -- for what they saw exceeded their fondest dreams.

A Zen monk named Ichhi labored his whole life in the kitchen of the great monastery at Lake Hakone. He deemed himself a failed monk because he had been assigned the koan of "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" since his earliest days in the congregation and had never been able to solve it. It was now fifty-five years of seeming failure, and he was nearing the end of his lifetime.

But as he lay dying he suddenly realized that he cradled a great peace in his soul. Gone was the striving for enlightenment, gone was the stridency of his loins, and gone was the haunting koan -- for he had found the stillness of no longer striving in this exquisite silence alone in the attic in the soft dark at the end of his life.

It was only then, when there remained no more questions nor need for answers (or even the need for breathing) that Ichhi heard at last the whooshing silence of one hand clapping.

Four monks decided to meditate silently without speaking for two weeks. By nightfall on the first day, the candle began to flicker and then went out. The first monk said, "Oh, no! The candle is out." The second monk said, "Aren't we not suppose to talk?" The third monk said, "Why must you two break the silence?" The fourth monk laughed and said, "Ha! I'm the only one who didn't speak."

Source: Zen Stories to Tell Your Neighbors

A man traveling across a field encountered a tiger. He fled, the tiger after him. Coming to a precipice, he caught hold of the root of a wild vine and swung himself down over the edge. The tiger sniffed at him from above. Trembling, the man looked down to where, far below, another tiger was waiting to eat him. Only the vine sustained him.

Two mice, one white and one black, little by little started to gnaw away the vine. The man saw a luscious strawberry near him. Grasping the vine with one hand, he plucked the strawberry with the other. How sweet it tasted!

Source: Zen Flesh, Zen Bones

A martial artist knelt before his master sensei in a ceremony to receive the hard-earned Black Belt. After years of relentless training, the student has finally reached a pinnacle of achievement in the discipline.

"Before granting you the belt, you must pass one more test," the sensei solemnly tells the young man.

"I'm ready," responds the student, expecting perhaps one more round of sparring.

"You must answer the essential question, 'What is the true meaning of the Black Belt?'"

"Why, the end of my journey," says the student. "A well-deserved reward for all of my hard work."

The master waits for more. Clearly, he is not satisfied. The sensei finally speaks: "You are not ready for the Black Belt. Return in one year."

As the student kneels before his master a year later, he is again asked the question, "What is the true meaning of the Black Belt?"

"A symbol of distinction and the highest achievement in our art," the young man responds.

Again the master waits for more. Still unsatisfied, he says once more: "You are not ready for the Black Belt. Return in one year."

A year later the student kneels before his sensei and hears the question, "What is the true meaning of the Black Belt?"

This time he answers, "The Black Belt represents not the end, but the beginning, the start of a never-ending journey of discipline, work and the pursuit of an ever-higher standard."

"Yes," says the master. "You are now ready to receive the Black Belt and begin your work."

A great festival was to be held in a village and each villager was asked to contribute by pouring a bottle of wine into a giant barrel. One of the villagers had this thought: "If I pour a bottle of water in that giant barrel, no one will notice the difference." But it didn't occur to him that everyone else in the village might have the same thought. When the banquet began and the barrel was tapped, what came out was pure water.

Once upon a time there was a stonecutter. Each day he went up to the mountains to cut stones. And while he worked he sang, for though he was a poor man, he desired no more than he had, so he had not a care in the world.

One day he was called to work on the mansion of a nobleman. When he saw the magnificence of the mansion, he experienced the pain of desire for the first time in his life and he said with a sigh, "If only I were rich! Then I would not have to earn my living in sweat and toil as I do now."

Imagine his astonishment when he heard a voice say, "Your wish has been granted. Henceforth, anything you desire will be given to you." He did not know what to make of the words till he returned to his hut that evening and found in its place a mansion as magnificent as the one he had been working on. So the stonecutter gave up cutting stones and began to enjoy the life of the rich.

One day when the afternoon was hot and humid, he happened to look out his window and saw the King go by with a large retinue of noblemen and slaves. He thought, "How I wish I were a King myself, sitting in the cool of the royal carriage!" His wish was promptly carried out and he found himself reclining in the comfort of the royal carriage. But the carriage turned out to be warmer than he had assumed it to be. He looked out of the carriage window and began to marvel at the power of the sun, whose heat could penetrate even the thick walls of the carriage. "I wish I were the sun," he said to himself. Once again his wish was granted and he found himself sending out waves of light and heat into the universe.

All went well for a while. Then on a rainy day, he attempted to pierce through a thick bank of clouds and could not. So he got himself changed into a cloud and glorified in his power to keep the sun away -- till he turned into rain and found, to his annoyance, a mighty rock that blocked his path so he was obliged to flow around it.

"What?" he cried. "A mere rock more powerful than I? Well, then I wish to be a rock." So there he was standing tall upon a mountainside. He barely had time to rejoice in his fine figure, however, when he heard strange clipping sounds proceeding from his feet. He looked down and, to his dismay, found a tiny human being sitting there engaged in cutting chunks of stone from his feet.

"What?" he shouted. "A puny creature like that more powerful than an imposing rock like me? I want to be a man!" So he found he was once again a stonecutter going up into the mountain to cut stone, earning his living in sweat and toil but with a song in his heart because he was content to be what he was and to live by what he had.

Once a group of beggars afflicted with leprosy came to the assembly of Zen master Bankei, a great-hearted teacher of the masses. Bankei admitted them to his company, and when he initiated them, he even washed and shaved their heads with his own hands.

Now as it happened, there was a certain gentleman present, the representative of a baron who had faith in Bankei and had already built a temple in his province where the teacher could train disciples and lecture to the people.

Revolted by the sight of the Zen master shaving the heads of untouchables, the gentleman hurriedly brought a basin of water for Bankei to wash his hands. But the master refused, remarking, "Your disgust is filthier than their sores."

Source: Zen Antics

Mind studies was a lay self-improvement movement influenced by Zen. One day a follower of Mind studies came to Zen master Shosan to ask about the essentials of Buddhism. The Zen master said, "Buddhism is not a matter of using your discursive intellect to govern your body. It is a matter of using the moment of the immediate present purely, not wasting it, without thinking about past or future. "This is why the ancients exhorted people first of all to be careful of time: this means guarding the mind strictly, sweeping away all things, whether good or bad, and detaching from the ego.

"Furthermore," Zen master continued, "for the reformation of mind it is good to observe the principle of cause and effect. For example, even if others hate us, we should not resent them; we should criticize ourselves, thinking why people should hate us for no reason, assuming that there must be a causal factor in us, and even that there must be other as yet unknown casual factors in us.

"Maintaining that all things are effects of causes, we should not make judgments based on subjective ideas. On the whole, things do not happen in accord with subjective ideas; they happen in accord with the laws of Nature. If you maintain awareness of this, your mind will become very clear."

Source: Zen Antics

An old man says he complained only once in all his life -- when his feet were bare and he had no money to buy shoes.

Then he saw a happy man who had no feet. And he never complained again.

Settan once wrote a set of guidelines for Zen monasteries:

"An ancient said that Zen study requires three essentials. One is a great root of faith. The second is a great feeling of wonder. The third is great determination. If one of these is lacking, you are like a tripod missing a leg. Here I have no special stipulations. I only require that you clearly recognize that everyone

has an essential nature that can be perceived, and that there is an essential truth that everyone can penetrate; only then will your determination continue. And there are sayings at which to wonder. If people go off half aware and half awakened, they cannot really succeed in Zen. It is imperative to be careful and thoroughgoing."

Source: Zen Antics

A wise Zen frog was explaining to the younger frogs the balance of nature: "Do you see how that fly eats a gnat? And now (with a bite) I eat the fly. It is all part of the great scheme of things."

"Isn't it bad to kill in order to live?" asked the thoughtful frog.

"It depends . . ." answered the wise frog just as a snake swallowed the Zen frog in one chomp before the frog finished his sentence.

"Depends on what?" shouted the students.

"Depends on whether you're looking at things from the inside or outside," came the muffled response from inside the snake.

Source: Zen Fables For Today

Raven took his perch on the Assembly Oak and addressed a special meeting of the Tallspruce community, saying, "It's time for me to be moving on."

Porcupine asked, "Where will you be going?"

Raven said, "Where cedar roots stand bare in the creek."

A hush fell over the circle. Grouse could be heard sniffing.

At last Porcupine asked, "Do you have any last words for us?"

Raven said, "Trust."

Source: Zen Master Raven

Tajima no Kami was fencing master to the Shogun.

One of the Shogun's bodyguards came to him one day asking to be trained in swordsmanship.

"I have watched you carefully," said Tajima no Kami, "and you seem to be a master in the art yourself.

Before taking you on as a pupil, I request you to tell me what master you studied under."

The bodyguard replied, "I have never studied the art under anyone."

"You cannot fool me," said the teacher. "I have a discerning eye and it never fails."

"I do not mean to contradict your excellency," said the guard, "but I really do not know a thing about fencing."

The teacher engaged the man in swordplay for a few minutes then stopped and said, "Since you say you have never learned the art, I take your word for it. But you are some kind of master. Tell me about yourself."

"There is one thing," said the guard. "When I was a child I was told by a samurai that a man should never fear death. I therefore faced the question of death till it ceased to cause me the slightest anxiety."

"So that's what it is," said Tajima no Kami. "The ultimate secret of swordsmanship lies in being free from the fear of death. You need no training. You are a master in your own right."

A Zen master named Gettan lived in the latter part of the Tokugawa era. He used to say: "There are three

kinds of disciples: those who impart Zen to others, those who maintain the temples and shrines, and then there are the rice bags and the clothes-hangers."

Gasán expressed the same idea. When he was studying under Tekisui, his teacher was very severe. Sometimes he even beat him. Other pupils would not stand this kind of teaching and quit. Gasán remained, saying: "A poor disciple utilizes a teacher's influence. A fair disciple admires a teacher's kindness. A good disciple grows strong under a teacher's discipline."

Source: Zen Flesh, Zen Bones

One day Chuang Tzu and a friend were walking by a river. "Look at the fish swimming about," said Chuang Tzu, "They are really enjoying themselves."

"You are not a fish," replied the friend, "So you can't truly know that they are enjoying themselves."

"You are not me," said Chuang Tzu. "So how do you know that I do not know that the fish are enjoying themselves?"

Source: Zen Stories To Tell Your Neighbors

"I am going to pose a question," King Milinda said to Venerable Nagasena, "can you answer?"

Nagasena said, "Please ask your question."

The king said, "I have already asked."

Nagasena said, "I have already answered."

The king said, "What did you answer?"

Nagasena said, "What did you ask?"

The king said, "I asked nothing."

Nagasena said, "I answered nothing."

Source: The Little Zen Companion

A group of frogs were hopping contentedly through the woods, going about their froggy business, when two of them fell into a deep pit. All of the other frogs gathered around the pit to see what could be done to help their companions. When they saw how deep the pit was, the rest of the dismayed group agreed that it was hopeless and told the two frogs in the pit that they should prepare themselves for their fate, because they were as good as dead. Unwilling to accept this terrible fate, the two frogs began to jump with all of their might. Some of the frogs shouted into the pit that it was hopeless, and that the two frogs wouldn't be in that situation if they had been more careful, more obedient to the froggy rules, and more responsible.

The other frogs continued sorrowfully shouting that they should save their energy and give up, since they were already as good as dead. The two frogs continued jumping as hard as they could, and after several hours of desperate effort were quite weary. Finally, one of the frogs took heed to the calls of his fellows. Spent and disheartened, he quietly resolved himself to his fate, lay down at the bottom of the pit, and died as the others looked on in helpless grief. The other frog continued to jump with every ounce of energy he had, although his body was wracked with pain, and he was completely exhausted. His companions began anew, yelling for him to accept his fate, stop the pain and just die. The weary frog jumped harder and harder and wonder of wonders! He finally leapt so high that he sprang from the pit. Amazed, the other frogs celebrated his miraculous freedom and then gathering around him asked, "Why did you continue jumping when we told you it was impossible?" Reading their lips, the astonished frog explained to them that he was deaf, and that when he saw their gestures and shouting, he thought they were cheering him

on. What he had perceived as encouragement inspired him to try harder and to succeed against all odds.

There was once a huge dragon in China who went from village to village killing cattle and dogs and chicken and people indiscriminately. So the villagers called upon a wizard to help them in their distress. The wizard said, "I cannot slay the dragon myself, for magician though I am, I am too afraid. But I shall find you the one who will."

With that he transformed himself into a dragon and took up position on a bridge so everyone who did not know it was the wizard was afraid to pass. One day, however, a traveler came up to the bridge, calmly climbed over the dragon, and walked on.

The wizard promptly took on human shape again and called to the person, "Come back, my friend - I have been standing here for weeks waiting for you!"

When the Greek philosopher Diogenes was captured and taken to be sold in the slave market, it is said that he mounted the auctioneer's platform and loudly said, "A master has come here to be sold. Is there some slave among you who is desirous of purchasing him?"

Daiju visited the master Baso in China.

Baso asked: "What do you seek?"

"Enlightenment," replied Daiju.

"You have your own treasure house. Why do you search outside?" Baso asked.

Daiju inquired: "Where is my treasure house?"

Baso answered: "What you are asking is your treasure house."

Daiju was delighted! Ever after he urged his friends: "Open your own treasure house and use those treasures."

Source: Zen Flesh, Zen Bones

A merchant in Baghdad sent his servant on an errand to the bazaar and the man came back white with fear and trembling. "Master," he said, "while I was in the marketplace, I walked into a stranger. When I looked him in the face, I found that it was Death. He made a threatening gesture at me and walked away. Now I am afraid. Please give me a horse so that I can ride at once to Samarra and put as great a distance as possible between Death and me."

The merchant - in his anxiety for the man - gave him his swiftest steed. The servant was on it and away in a trice.

Later in the day the merchant himself went down to the bazaar and saw Death loitering there in the crowd. So he went up to him and said, "You made a threatening gesture at my poor servant this morning. What did it mean?"

"That was no threatening gesture, sir," said Death. "It was a start of surprise at seeing him here in Baghdad."

"Why would he not be in Baghdad? This is where the man lives."

"Well, I had been given to understand that he would join me in Samarra tonight, you see..."

One day there was an earthquake that shook the entire Zen temple. Parts of it even collapsed! Many of

the monks were terrified.

When the earthquake stopped the teacher said, "Now you have had the opportunity to see how a Zen man behaves in a crisis situation. You may have noticed that I did not panic. I was quite aware of what was happening and what to do. I led you all to the kitchen, the strongest part of the temple. It was a good decision, because you see we have all survived without any injuries. However, despite my self-control and composure, I did feel a little bit tense - which you may have deduced from the fact that I drank a large glass of water, something I never do under ordinary circumstances."

One of the monks smiled, but didn't say anything.

"What are you laughing at?" asked the teacher.

"That wasn't water," the monk replied, "it was a large glass of soy sauce."

Source: Zen Stories To Tell Your Neighbors

"Monks, I will teach you the parable of the raft - for getting across, not for retaining. It is like a man who going on a journey sees a great stretch of water, the near bank with dangers and fears, the farther bank secure and without fears, but there is neither a boat for crossing over, nor a bridge across. It occurs to him that to cross over from the perils of this bank to the security of the farther bank, he should fashion a raft out of sticks and branches and depending on the raft, cross over to safety. When he has done this it occurs to him that the raft has been very useful and he wonders if he ought to take it with him on his head and shoulders. What do you think, monks? That the man is doing what should be done to the raft?"

"No, lord."

"What should that man do, monks? When he has crossed over to the beyond he must leave the raft and proceed on his journey. Monks, a man doing this would be doing what should be done to the raft. In this way I have taught you Dharma, like the parable of the raft, for getting across, not for retaining. You, monks, by understanding the parable of the raft, must not cling to right states of mind and, all the more, to wrong states of mind."

Source: Teachings of the Buddha by Jack Kornfield

The disciples asked the master to speak to them of death: "What will it be like?"

"It will be as if a veil is ripped apart and you will say in wonder, 'So it was You all along!'"

A famous teacher took his pupils into a clearing in the forest that was known as a home for wild monkeys. There he took a hollow gourd with a small hole and inserted sweetened rice (a favorite of monkeys). Then he chained the gourd to a stake and waited with his class. Soon a very large monkey approached, sniffed the rice, inserted his paw, and screeched in frustration when he was unable to withdraw his paw (now a fist) through the narrow opening.

Just then a leopard approached and hearing the monkey screeching decided to have monkey for his dinner. "Let go of the rice. Run!" screamed the pupils, but to no avail because the monkey in his hunger for the rice, refused to let go and was as a consequence caught and eaten by the leopard.

"What was the trap that killed the monkey?" asked the master. "Rice," said one student. "The ground," said another. "No," replied the wise teacher. "The trap was greed."

Source: Zen Fables For Today

A lion was taken into captivity and thrown into a concentration camp where, to his amazement, he found other lions who had been there for years, some of them all their lives, for they had been born there. He soon became acquainted with the social activities of the camp lions. They banded themselves into groups. One group consisted of the socializers; another was into show business; another was cultural, for its purpose was to carefully preserve the customs, the tradition, and the history of the times when lions were free; other groups were religious -- they gathered mostly to sing moving songs about a future jungle where there would be no fences; some groups attracted those who were literary and artistic by nature; others still were revolutionary, and they met to plot against their captors or against other revolutionary groups. Every now and then a revolution would break out, one particular group would be wiped out by another, or the guards would all be killed and replaced by another set of guards.

As he looked around, the newcomer observed one lion who always seemed deep in thought, a loner who belonged to no group and mostly kept away from everyone. There was something strange about him that commanded everyone's admiration and everyone's hostility, for his presence aroused fear and self-doubt. He said to the newcomer, "Join no group. These poor fools are busy with everything except what is essential."

"And what do you think is most essential?" asked the newcomer.

"Studying the nature of the fence."

A man approached the Blessed One and wanted to have all his philosophical questions answered before he would practice. In response, the Buddha said, "It is as if a man had been wounded by a poisoned arrow and when attended to by a physician were to say, 'I will not allow you to remove this arrow until I have learned the caste, the age, the occupation, the birthplace, and the motivation of the person who wounded me.' That man would die before having learned all this. In exactly the same way, anyone who should say, 'I will not follow the teaching of the Blessed One until the Blessed One has explained all the multiform truths of the world' - that person would die before the Buddha had explained all this."

Source: The Teachings of the Buddha by Jack Kornfield

A great and foolish King complained that the rough ground hurt his feet, so he ordered the whole country to be carpeted with cowhide.

The court jester laughed when the King told him of his order. "What an absolutely crazy idea, Your Majesty," he smiled. "Why all the needless expense? Just cut out two small pads to protect your feet!"

Once there was a monk who was an expert on the Diamond Sutra, and as books were very valuable in his day, he carried the only copy in his part of the world on his back. He was widely sought after for his readings and insight into the Diamond Sutra, and very successful at propounding its profundities to not only monks and masters but to the lay people as well.

Thus the people of that region came to know of the Diamond Sutra, and as the monk was traveling on a mountain road, he came upon an old woman selling tea and cakes. The hungry monk would have loved to refresh himself, but alas, he had no money. He told the old woman, "I have upon my back a treasure beyond knowing -- the Diamond Sutra. If you will give me some tea and cakes, I will tell you of this great treasure of knowledge."

The old woman knew something of the Diamond Sutra herself, and proposed her own bargain. She said, "Oh learned monk, if you will answer a simple question, I will give you tea and cakes." To this the monk readily agreed. The woman then said, "When you eat these cakes, are you eating with the mind of the past, the mind of the present or the mind of the future?"

No answer occurred to the monk, so he took the pack from his back and got out the text of the Diamond

Sutra, hoping he could find the answer. As he studied and pondered, the day grew late and the old woman packed up her things to go home for the day.

"You are a foolish monk indeed," said the old woman as she left the hungry monk in his quandary. "You eat the tea and cakes with your mouth."

Source: A lighter side of Buddhism

One day a man approached Ikkyu and asked: "Master, will please write for me some maxims of the highest wisdom?"

Ikkyu took his brush and wrote: "Attention."

"Is that all?" asked the man.

Ikkyu then wrote: "Attention, Attention."

"Well," said the man, "I really don't see much depth in what you have written."

The Ikkyu wrote the same word three times: "Attention, Attention, Attention."

Half-angered, the man demanded: "What does that word 'Attention' mean, anyway?"

Ikkyu gently responded, Attention means attention."

Source The Little Zen Companion

Two Zen debaters, reputedly the best in all of Japan, were to meet in verbal combat in Edo at the great celebration honoring the birth of Buddha. For this event scholars flocked from as far away as Hokkaido to marvel at the brilliance of these teachers.

During the competition, first one master would prevail on one day and on the next day the other master would counter, until by the end of the fourth day they were even.

Each of these masters traveled with retinues of supporters, who cheered their champions and pampered them like minor princes.

During the night of the fifth and final debate the two great adversaries parried and thrust at each other, to the delight and cheers of their separate retinues. As each master would score a telling point, he would puff himself up and walk in a circle to the applause of his supporters.

All of which was fine until a great explosion ripped through the hall, an explosion so great that all the lanterns and candles were blown out. When order and light were restored, it was discovered that both of the masters had exploded - making a huge mess over the altar and ceiling and even those sitting in the front rows.

Some friends of mine had arranged for an encounter between two prominent visiting Buddhist teachers at the house of a Harvard University psychology professor. These were teachers from two distinctly different Buddhist traditions who had never met and whose traditions had in fact had very little contact over the past thousand years. Before the worlds of Buddhism and Western psychology could come together, the various strands of Buddhism would have to encounter one another. We were to witness the first such dialogue.

The teachers, seventy-year-old Kalu Rinpoche of Tibet, a veteran of years of solitary retreat, and the Zen master Seung Sahn, the first Korean Zen master to teach in the United States, were to test each other's understanding of the Buddha's teachings for the benefit of the onlooking Western students. This was to be a high form of what was being called "dharma combat," (the clashing of great minds sharpened by years of study and meditation), and we were waiting with all the anticipation that such a historic encounter deserved.

The two monks entered with swirling robes - maroon and yellow for the Tibetan, austere grey and black

for the Korean - and were followed by retinues of younger monks and translators with shaven heads. They settled onto cushions in the familiar cross-legged positions, and the host made it clear that the younger Zen master was to begin. The Tibetan lama sat very still, fingering a wooden rosary (mala) with one hand while murmuring, "Om mani padme hum," continuously under his breath.

The Zen master, who was already gaining renown for his method of hurling questions at his students until they were forced to admit their ignorance and then bellowing, "Keep that don't know mind!" at them, reached deep inside his robes and drew out an orange. "What is this?" he demanded of the lama. "What is this?" This was a typical opening question, and we could feel him ready to pounce on whatever response he was given.

The Tibetan sat quietly fingering his mala and made no move to respond.

"What is this?" the Zen master insisted, holding the orange up to the Tibetan's nose. Kalu Rinpoche bent very slowly to the Tibetan monk near to him who was serving as the translator, and they whispered back and forth for several minutes.

Finally the translator addressed the room: "Rinpoche says, 'What is the matter with him? Don't they have oranges where he comes from?'"

The dialog progressed no further.

Mark Epstein, Thoughts without a Thinker

A gifted young painter of extraordinary talent had been apprenticed to a renowned painter, who when he recognized the boy's gifts became intensely jealous.

"No, that is not the way to do it!" he would shout. "You will do better painting houses than pictures."

Slowly the boy's confidence ebbed. No matter how hard he tried, the painter found fault and humiliated the boy in front of the other students.

One day the painting assignment was goldfish. The boy closed his eyes and called up a splendid fat fish from his uncle's pond. This he painted.

"No. No. No!" screamed the teacher and threw the boy's picture into the water, where to everyone's amazement the painted fish proceeded to swim away.

One night, under the starry sky, the circle was quiet and members seemed pensive. Badger broke the silence and said, "You know, I can't visualize myself expiring completely."

Raven said, "A ghost."

Badger said, "Even ghosts are not impermanent, though, are they?"

Raven said, "Take care of your miseries now, and they won't abide."

Source: Zen Master Raven

Nan-in, a Japanese master during the Meiji era (1868 - 1912), received a university professor who came to inquire about Zen.

Nan-in served tea. He poured his visitor's cup full, and then kept on pouring.

The professor watched the overflow until he no longer could restrain himself. "It is overfull. No more will go in!"

"Like this cup", Nan-in said, "you are full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?"

"Mother, what is water?" asked the baby fish of the mother fish.
"Water is what you swim in. Water is what you're mostly made of."
"But where is it?"
"All around you."
"But I can't see it," said the baby.
"Of course you can."
"Where?"
"Everywhere."
"And I'm made of water?"
"Mostly."
"And after I die..?"
"You go back to being water," said the mother.

Soyen Shaku, the first Zen teacher to come to America, said: "My heart burns like fire but my eyes are as cold as dead ashes." He made the following rules which he practiced every day of his life.
In the morning before dressing, light incense and meditate.
Retire at a regular hour. Partake of food at regular intervals. Eat with moderation and never to the point of satisfaction.
Receive a guest with the same attitude you have when alone. When alone, maintain the same attitude you have in receiving guests.
Watch what you say, and whatever you say, practice it.
When an opportunity comes do not let it pass you by, yet always think twice before acting.
Do not regret the past. Look to the future.
Have the fearless attitude of a hero and the loving heart of a child.
Upon retiring, sleep as if you had entered your last sleep. Upon awakening, leave your bed behind you instantly as if you had cast away a pair of old shoes.

Source: Zen Flesh, Zen Bones

Tanzan and Ekido were once travelling together down a muddy road. A heavy rain was still falling. Coming around a bend, they met a lovely girl in a silk kimono and sash, unable to cross the intersection. "Come on, girl," said Tanzan at once. Lifting her in his arms, he carried her over the mud. Ekido did not speak again until that night when they reached a lodging temple. Then he no longer could restrain himself. "We monks don't do near females," he told Tanzan, "especially not young and lovely ones. It is dangerous. Why did you do that?"
"I left the girl there," said Tanzan. "Are you still carrying her?"

Source: Zen Flesh, Zen Bones

The master sculptor surveyed the different blocks of marble at the quarry. In his lifetime he had learned that there existed a "suchness" to every piece of stone. Finding that suchness and releasing it to its true life had been the secret of the sculptor's success.
"Ah-ha," he would say. "There is a heroic figure locked in that piece and a saint trapped inside that other one. But where will I find the stone from which I will sculpt my masterwork, a glorious statue of the Buddha?"
He had been searching for what he called the "Buddha block" for over forty years and now he felt his energies waning. He had traveled to the great quarries of the world: Italy where Michelangelo had mined

his stone, Vermont where the stone glowed with light, and to obscure regions of the mountains of China. Nowhere could he find that one perfect slab from which he knew he could release the most perfect likeness of Buddha.

He consulted experts from around the world. He hired a specialist to scour obscure areas. No success. In search of consolation, he sought out a local Zen priest, who headed a small temple just at the end of his street. When he explained his fruitless search, the priest smiled and said, "No problem."

"Do you mean you can tell me where I might find the perfect material from which I can release the Buddha of my dreams??" said the excited sculptor.

"Of course."

"Where?"

"Over there," said the priest, pointing to a stone well in the courtyard.

The excited sculptor ran to the well and looked down. There he saw his own image looking back at him.

After Bankei had passed away, a blind man who lived near the master's temple told a friend: "Since I am blind, I cannot watch a person's face, so I must judge his character by the sound of his voice. Ordinarily when I hear someone congratulate another upon his happiness or success, I also hear a secret tone of envy. When condolence is expressed for the misfortune of another, I hear pleasure and satisfaction, as if the one condoling was really glad there was something left to gain in his own world.

"In all my experience, however, Bankei's voice was always sincere. Whenever he expressed happiness, I heard nothing but happiness, and whenever he expressed sorrow, sorrow was all I heard."

Source: Zen Flesh, Zen Bones

There is a mountain, far beyond the plains and hills, whose great summit overlooks the dark valley and the open seas.

Neither cloud nor deep mists ever hide its calm face. It is above the shadows of day and night.

From the vast plain, no man can behold it. Some have seen it but there be few that have reached its feet.

One in many thousand years gathers his strength and gains that abode of eternity.

I speak of that mountain top, serene, infinite, beyond thought.

I shout for joy!

One day, a man beheld through the opening of a cloud, the calm face of the mountain. He stopped every passer-by, that would stay to give an answer, and inquired of the way that would lead him beyond the mists. Some said take this path, and others said take that path. After many days of confusion and toil, he arrived among the hills.

A man, full in years, wise in the ways of the hills, said, "I know the way. You cannot reach the mountain, O friend, unless you are strengthened by the power that comes from the adoration of the image in yonder shrine."

Many days passed in peaceful worship.

Tired of worship, he asked of men that seemed great with understanding.

"Yea," said one, "I know the way. But if you would gain the fulfillment of your desire, carry this on you. It will uphold you in your weariness." He gave him the symbol of his struggle.

Another cried, "Yea, I know the way. But many days of contemplation must be passed in the seclusion of a sanctuary, with my picture of eternity."

"I know the way," said another, "But you must perform these rites, understand these hidden laws, you must enter the association of the elect and hold fast to the knowledge that we shall give you."

"Be loud in the song of praise of the reflection that you seek," said another.

"Come, follow me, obeying all things I say. I know the way," cried another. Eventually, the calm face of the mountain was utterly forgotten. Now he wanders from hill to hill, crying aloud, "Yes, I know the way, but..."

There is a mountain, far beyond the plains and hills, whose great summit overlooks the dark valley and the open seas.
Neither cloud nor deep mists ever hide its calm face. It is above the shadows of day and night.
From the vast plain, no man can behold it. Some have seen it but there be few that have reached its feet.
One in many thousand years gathers his strength and gains that abode of eternity.
I speak of that mountain top, serene, infinite, beyond thought.
I shout for joy!

J. Krishnamurti

A certain lord who studied Zen from Bankei was young and fond of martial arts. One day he decided to test the master's "gut" by suddenly attacking him with a lance as he sat quietly. The Zen master calmly deflected the trust with his rosary. Then he said to the lord, "Your technique is still immature, your mind moved first."

Source: Zen Antics

A farmer requested a Tendai priest to recite sutras for his wife, who had died. After the recitation was over the farmer asked: "Do you think my wife will gain merit from this?"
"Not only your wife, but all sentient beings will benefit from the recitation of sutras," answered the priest.
"If you say all sentient beings will benefit," said the farmer, "my wife may be very weak and others will take advantage of her, getting the benefit she should have. So please recite sutras just for her."
The priest explained that it was the desire of a Buddhist to offer blessings and wish merit for every living being.
"That is a fine teaching," concluded the farmer, "but please make one exception. I have a neighbor who is rough and mean to me. Just exclude him from all those sentient beings."

Source: Zen Flesh, Zen Bones

The Zen master Mu-nan had only one successor. His name was Shojū. After Shojū had completed his study of Zen, Mu-nan called him into his room. "I am getting old," he said, "and as far as I know, Shojū, you are the only one who will carry on this teaching. Here is a book. It has been passed down from master to master for seven generations. I have also added many points according to my understanding. The book is very valuable, and I am giving it to you to represent your successorship."
"If the book is such an important thing, you had better keep it," Shojū replied. "I received your Zen without writing and am satisfied with it as it is."
"I know that," said Mu-nan. "Even so, this work has been carried from master to master for seven generations, so you may keep it as a symbol of having received the teaching. Here."
They happened to be talking before a brazier. The instant Shojū felt the book in his hands he thrust it into the flaming coals. He had no lust for possessions. Mu-nan, who never had been angry before, yelled: "What are you doing!" Shojū shouted back: "What are you saying!"

Source: Zen Flesh, Zen Bones

"The purpose of a fishtrap is to catch fish, and when the fish are caught, the trap is forgotten.
The purpose of a rabbit snare is to catch rabbits. When the rabbits are caught, the snare is forgotten.
The purpose of words is to convey ideas. When the ideas are grasped, the words are forgotten.
Where can I find a man who has forgotten words? He is the one I would like to talk to."

Chuang-Tsu

When Mamiya, who later became a well-known preacher, went to a teacher for personal guidance, he was asked to explain the sound of one hand. Mamiya concentrated upon what the sound of one hand might be.

"You are not working hard enough," his teacher told him. "You are too attached to food, wealth, things, and that sound. It would be better if you died. That would solve the problem."

The next time Mamiya appeared before his teacher he was again asked what he had to show regarding the sound of one hand.

Mamiya at once fell over as if he were dead.

"You are dead all right," observed the teacher, "But how about that sound?" "I haven't solved that yet," replied Mamiya, looking up. "Dead men do not speak," said the teacher. "Get out!"

Source: Zen Flesh, Zen Bones

Rabbi Isadore was a wise teacher. A student asked, "How is one to know the precise time when night ends and day begins?"

One student volunteered, "It is when one can distinguish between a dog and a sheep in the far distance, that is when day begins."

Another said, "It is when you can tell the difference between a fig tree and a date tree, then night is fully gone."

"No, it is neither of those things," said the Rabbi. "It is when you can see your brother or sister in the face of a stranger. Until then, night is still with us."

The great Taoist master Chuang Tzu once dreamt that he was a butterfly fluttering here and there. In the dream he had no awareness of his individuality as a person. He was only a butterfly. Suddenly, he awoke and found himself laying there, a person once again. But then he thought to himself, "Was I before a man who dreamt about being a butterfly, or am I now a butterfly who dreams about being a man?"

Source: Zen Stories To Tell Your Neighbors

During the Kamakura period, Shinkan studied Tendai six years and then studied Zen seven years; then he went to China and contemplated Zen for thirteen years more.

When he returned to Japan many desired to interview him and asked obscure questions. But when Shinkan received visitors, which was infrequently, he seldom answered their questions.

One day a fifty-year-old student of enlightenment said to Shinkan: "I have studied the Tendai school of thought since I was a little boy, but one thing in it I cannot understand. Tendai claims that even the grass

and trees will become enlightened. To me this seems very strange."

"Of what use is it to discuss how grass and trees become enlightened?" asked Shinkan. "The question is how you yourself can become so. Did you even consider that?"

"I never thought of it that way," marveled the old man.

"Then go home and think it over," finished Shinkan.

Source: Zen Flesh, Zen Bones

A water bearer in India had two large pots, each hung on each end of a pole which he carried across his neck. One of the pots had a crack in it, and while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water at the end of the long walk from the stream to the master's house, the cracked pot arrived only half full. For a full two years this went on daily, with the bearer delivering only one and a half pots full of water to his master's house. Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, perfect to the end for which it was made. But the cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do.

After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, it spoke to the water bearer one day by the stream. "I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologize to you."

"Why?" asked the bearer. "What are you ashamed of?"

"I have been able, for these past two years, to deliver only half my load because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your master's house. Because of my flaws, you have to do all of this work, and you don't get full value from your efforts," the pot said.

The water bearer's heart went out to the old cracked pot, and in his compassion he said, "As we return to the master's house, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path."

Indeed, as they went up the hill, the old cracked pot took notice of the sun warming the beautiful wild flowers on the side of the path, and this cheered it some. But at the end of the trail, it still felt sad because it had leaked out half its load, and so again it apologized to the bearer for its failure. The bearer said to the pot, "Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of the path, but not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always known about your flaw, and I took advantage of it. I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back from the stream, you've watered them. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate my master's table. Without you being just the way you are, he would not have this beauty to grace his house."

"I once saw a child coming towards me with a lit torch in his hand. 'Where have you brought the light from?' I asked him. He immediately blew it out and said to me, 'Oh Hasan, tell me where it has gone and I will tell you whence I fetched it.'"

Hasan Basri

Kansan left home when he was nine years old. He had a brilliant mind and studied both Buddhist and Confucian classics. Inspired by one of the books he read, for a time Kansan devoted himself to the study and practice of esoteric Buddhism in western Japan. Later he went to the capital city of Edo, where he perused the massive Buddhist canon.

After nearly two decades of these studies, Kansan finally went to see a Zen teacher. Well versed in Buddhist practices, Kansan mastered the Zen teachings in two years of intensive work.

Subsequently Kansan was sent to take over the abbacy of a temple in southern Japan. When he arrived, he found that drinking and carousing were so common in the area that the temple itself was accustomed to supplying visitors with wine, as if it were a lounge.

On the day that Kansan formally took over the abbacy of the temple, he destroyed every single wine jar, ashtray, and serving table. After that, guests were treated with a single cup of plain tea. Three years later, Kansan retired. He disappeared into the mountains, putting a sign over the door of his hut that simply said, "Content."

Source: Zen Antics

A little bear cub was confused about how to walk. "What do I do first?" he asked his mother. "Do I start with my right foot or my left? Or both front feet and then my back feet? Or do I move both feet on one side and then both feet on the other?"

His mother answered, "Just quit thinking and start walking."

Grey Wolf attended meetings sporadically, and when she came she usually sat silent during the question period. However, she came to hear Brown Bear and spoke up, saying, "We dedicate our sutras to the enlightenment of bushes and grasses. This doesn't seem so likely somehow." Brown Bear chuckled and said, "They are very patient."

Source: Zen Master Raven

There was an ancient mysterious wall which stood at the edge of a village, and whenever anyone climbed the wall to look onto the other side, instead of coming back he or she smiled and would jump to the other side, never to return. The inhabitants of the village became curious as to what could draw these people to the other side of the wall. After all, their village had all the necessities of living a comfortable life.

They made an arrangement to where they would tie a person's feet, so that when he or she looked over and wished to jump, they could be pulled back.

The next time someone tried to climb the wall to see what was on the other side, they chained her feet so that she could not go over. She looked on the other side and was delighted at what she saw, and smiled. Those standing below grew curious to question her and pulled her back, but to their great disappointment she had lost the power of speech.

"Those who have Seen cannot say. That which has been Seen cannot be painted, cannot be reduced to words. But still each one has to give a try - and the world goes on becoming more and more beautiful because of these efforts."

Osho

Joshu went to a place where a monk had retired to meditate and asked him: "What is, is what?"

The monk raised his fist.

Joshu replied: "Ships cannot remain where the water is too shallow." And he left.

A few days later Joshu went again to visit the monk and asked the same question.

The monk answered the same way.

Joshu said: "Well given, well taken, well killed, well saved." And he bowed to the monk.

Mumon's comment: The raised fist was the same both times. Why is it Joshu did not admit the first and approved the second one? Where is the fault? Whoever answers this knows that Joshu's tongue has no

bone so he can use it freely. Yet perhaps Joshu is wrong. Or, through that monk, he may have discovered his mistake. If anyone thinks that the one's insight exceeds the other's, he has no eyes.

The light of the eyes is as a comet,
And Zen's activity is as lightening.
The sword that kills the man
Is the sword that saves the man.

Source: Zen Flesh, Zen Bones

The student approached the master and queried, "Master? When I was young, I desired for my family and loved ones to be proud of me. Were you ever the same way?"

"Yes," the master answered.

"Why did you desire this?" the student asked.

"So that they would feel they had more reason to love and accept me," said the master. "And the reason I desired this was so that I in turn would feel I had sufficient reason to love and accept myself. That was what was at the root of it. But then one day, I woke up and realized, 'What if I bypass all of that and learn to unconditionally love and accept myself, without requiring anyone else's love, acceptance or approval in order to feel good about myself? Then my happiness will no longer be dependent on outer circumstances, but will be as constant as my own heartbeat resounding strongly within my chest.' Thus began my quest for Self-realization."

"And you never desired them to be proud of you after that?" asked the student.

"My ego did, but I no longer completely identified myself with my ego as I had. And I no longer cared what others thought in the same way. I respected it, and honored it, but no longer gave it so much weight or paid so much attention to it," the master replied, smiling. "And never had I felt so free, as when I finally released myself in this way..."

Torio Tokuan said, "Do not consider yourself elevated in comparison to ordinary people. Those who are commonplace just rise and fall on the road of fame and profit, without practicing the Way or following the Way.

"They are only to be pitied, not despised or resented. Do not give rise to judgemental thoughts by comparing yourself to them: do not give rise to ideas of higher and lower.

"This is the attitude needed to enter the Way of the sages and saints, buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Therefore we place ourselves in the state of ordinary people, assimilating to the ordinary, while our will is on the Way, and we investigate its wonders."

Source: Zen Antics

Zen Master Tenkei used to admonish his followers, "You should be genuine in all things. Nothing that is genuine in the world is not genuine in Buddhism, and nothing that is not genuine in Buddhism is genuine in the world."

He would also say, "See with your eyes, hear with your ears. Nothing in the world is hidden; what would you have me say?"

Source: Zen Antics

Many centuries ago, there was an old Native American who was called Dancing Bear, who belonged to a tribe now known as the Sioux. He had lived a life with much enjoyment of the little things, and as the years passed he began to feel pulled to go to a tall mountain that his tribe would pass by in their travels once a year. He found himself wondering what it would be like to climb to the top of that snow-capped mountain, and to be so very close to the golden sun, the vast sky and the moon.

And so the next time his tribe traveled by the mountain, he told his family that he was going on a vision quest. When asked if they would be physically seeing him again, he said probably not -- that he felt ready to enter the spirit world, and they were accepting and respectful of it.

And so he left on a cloudless morning when the sun had just peeked over the horizon, enjoying the solitude and the beauty of nature all around him. Sometimes he chanted softly, or said a prayer, or stopped to look at something.

That evening he came to the base of the mountain where he found a cluster of tall oak trees, and he sat below one as the stars shimmered overhead... and after enjoying the sights and sounds and smells of nighttime for a while, he quickly went to sleep.

He dreamed of the sun and the moon becoming one.

The next morning as the sun bathed him he started the arduous journey uphill, feeling the air get cooler and cooler, and was glad that he had worn his furs. Then he reached where the snow began, and the wind became extremely chilly. Though he began feeling very tired he was determined to reach the top, and so on and on he went.

Finally he walked up a knee-deep snow-drift that was near the crest, when he stumbled, and rolled down the steep slope for quite some distance. When he finally reached the bottom where the slope evened off his body ached, he had snowed down his furs, and could no longer feel his fingers or feet due to the numbing cold.

As he sat there catching his breath he watched two large wolves emerge from a nearby group of trees and cautiously approach him. His heart leaped and his instincts screamed at him to run, but instead he laughed and said, "So are you two the ones who are to deliver me to the spirit world? I am ready." And as he smiled and laughed the wolves sensed his lack of fear, and the friendly sound in his voice, and though they were very hungry and didn't completely understand why, they sensed that he was a friend. And so they walked close to him sniffing and then rubbed up against him, letting him pet their fur that had never before been petted by human hands. And again he laughed, as the sun overhead grew brighter and brighter until it was all-consuming.

Gutei raised his finger whenever he was asked a question about Zen. A boy attendant began to imitate him in this way. When anyone asked the boy what his master had preached about, the boy would raise his finger. Gutei heard about the boy's mischief. He seized him and cut off his finger. The boy cried and ran away. Gutei called and stopped him. When the boy turned his head to Gutei, Gutei raised up his own finger. In that instant the boy was enlightened.

When Gutei was about to pass from this world he gathered his monks around him. "I attained my finger-zen," he said, "from my teacher Tenryu, and in my whole life I could not exhaust it." Then he passed away.

Mumon's comment: Enlightenment, which Gutei and the boy attained, has nothing to do with a finger. If anyone clings to a finger, Tenryu will be so disappointed that he will annihilate Gutei, the boy, and the clinger of all things.

Gutei cheapens the teaching of Tenryu,
Emancipating the boy with a knife.
Compared to the Chinese god who
pushed aside a mountain with one
hand

Old Gutei is a poor imitator.

Source: Zen Flesh, Zen Bones, The Gateless Gate

Hoan said: "The past and future Buddhas, both are his servants. Who is he?"

Mumon's comment: If you realize clearly who he is, it is as if you met your own father on a busy street. There is no need to ask anyone whether or not your recognition is true.

Do not fight with another's bow and
arrow.
Do not ride another's horse.
Do not discuss another's faults.
Do not interfere with another's work.

Source: Zen Flesh, Zen Bones

"You should step back and investigate. How do you step back? It is not a matter of sitting there ignoring everything, stiffly repressing the body and mind so that they are like earth and wood--that will never do any good. When you want to step back, if there are any sayings you do not understand, or stories you do not comprehend, they are then right before you. Step back and see for yourself why you do not understand."

Zen Master Foyan, Zen Essence

The emperor, who was a devout Buddhist, invited a great Zen master to the Palace in order to ask him questions about Buddhism. "What is the highest truth of the holy Buddhist doctrine?" the emperor inquired.

"Vast emptiness... and not a trace of holiness," the master replied.

"If there is no holiness," the emperor said, "then who or what are you?"

"I do not know," the master replied.

Source: Zen Stories to Tell Your Neighbors

A Chinese emperor known for his foul temper entered the bedroom of his soon-to-be-bride, who was one of the most beautiful women in all of China. She was being made to marry him against her will, as her parents were forcing her into it. Little did the emperor know however that she had also been taught by wise sages as a child. She sat expressionless, staring at the wall.

"Hello, pretty," he said to her, but she didn't respond.

"I said hello to you, and you will respond when I address you, do you understand me??" he snarled. But still, she didn't reply.

Most people would have answered him by now, so despite himself he grew curious, and gruffly asked, "What is it you are thinking?"

Finally she answered him. "Two things. One, that I do not wish to marry you because you are so callous

and mean-spirited. And the other thing, is that I was wondering if you have it within your power to have a certain something changed."

"What?!" the emperor exclaimed with outrage. "You bitch! How dare you question my authority! ... But ... I admit I'm curious. Since I have it within my power to snap my fingers and whatever I command within my kingdom will be obeyed, what is it you are wondering if I could change?"

"Your attitude," she replied. And with that she got up and walked out of the room, leaving him in stunned silence.

We are what we think.

All that we are arises with our thoughts.

With our thoughts we make the world.

Speak or act with an impure mind

And trouble will follow you

As the wheel follows the ox that draws the cart.

We are what we think.

All that we are arises with our thoughts.

With our thoughts we make the world.

Speak and act with a pure mind

And happiness will follow you

As your shadow, unshakable.

Dhammapada, The Sayings of the Buddha

Two Nazi soldiers were standing and talking in the concentration camp in Auchwitz, when a Jew walked up to them and said, "I'm not going to follow your orders anymore." One of the soldiers promptly pulled out his pistol and shot the man until he was dead.

"Why did you do that?" asked the other soldier.

"It's routine," he replied.

A Zen master named Gisan asked a young student to bring him a pail of water to cool his bath.

The student brought the water and, after cooling the bath, threw on to the ground the little that was left over.

"You dunce!" the master scolded him. "Why didn't you give the rest of the water to the plants? What right have you to waste even one drop of water in this temple?"

The young student attained Zen in that instant. He changed his name to Tekisui, which means a drop of water.

Source: Zen Flesh, Zen Bones

In the early days of the Meiji era there lived a well-known wrestler called O-nami, Great Waves.

O-nami was immensely strong and knew the art of wrestling. In his private bouts he defeated even his teacher, but in public he was so bashful that his own pupils threw him.

O-nami felt he should go to a Zen master for help. Hakuju, a wandering teacher, was stopping in a little temple nearby, so O-nami went to see him and told him of his trouble.

"Great Waves is your name," the teacher advised, "so stay in this temple tonight, Imagine that you are those billows. You are no longer a wrestler who is afraid. You are those huge waves sweeping everything before them, swallowing in all their path. Do this and you will be the greatest wrestler in the land."

The teacher retired. O-nami sat in meditation trying to imagine himself as waves. He thought of many different things. Then gradually he turned more and more to the feeling of the waves. As the night advanced the waves became larger and larger. They swept away the flowers in their vases. Even the Buddha in the shrine was inundated. Before dawn the temple was nothing but the ebb and flow of an immense sea.

In the morning the teacher found O-nami meditating, a faint smile on his face. He patted the wrestler's shoulder. "Now nothing can disturb you," he said. "You are those waves. You will sweep everything before you."

The same day O-nami entered the wrestling contests and won. After that, no one in Japan was able to defeat him.

The Zen Master Hoshin lived in China many years. Then he returned to the northeastern part of Japan, where he taught his disciples. When he was getting very old, he told them a story he had heard in China. This is the story:

One year on the twenty-fifth of December, Tokufu, who was very old, said to his disciples: "I am not going to be alive next year so you fellows should treat me well this year."

The pupils thought he was joking, but since he was a great-hearted teacher each of them in turn treated him to a feast on succeeding days of the departing year.

On the eve of the new year, Tokufu concluded: "You have been good to me. I shall leave tomorrow afternoon when the snow has stopped."

The disciples laughed, thinking he was aging and talking nonsense since the night was clear and without snow. But at midnight snow began to fall, and the next day they did not find their teacher about. They went to the meditation hall. There he had passed on.

Hoshin, who related this story, told his disciples: "It is not necessary for a Zen master to predict his passing, but if he really wishes to do so, he can."

"Can you?" someone asked.

"Yes," answered Hoshin. "I will show you what I can do seven days from now."

None of the disciples believed him, and most of them had even forgotten the conversation when Hoshin called them together.

"Seven days ago," he remarked, "I said I was going to leave you. It is customary to write a farewell poem, but I am neither a poet or a calligrapher. Let one of you inscribe my last words."

His followers thought he was joking, but one of them started to write.

"Are you ready?" Hoshin asked.

"Yes sir," replied the writer.

The Hoshin dictated:

I came from brilliancy
And return to brilliancy.
What is this?

This line was written one line short of the customary four, so the disciple said: "Master, we are one line short."

Hoshin, with the roar of a conquering lion, shouted "Kaa!" and was gone.

Wealthy patrons invited Ikkyu to a banquet. Ikkyu arrived dressed in his beggar's robes. The host, not

recognizing him, chased him away.

Ikkyu went home, changed into his ceremonial robe of purple brocade, and returned.

With great respect, he was received into the banquet room. There, he put his robe on the cushion, saying, "Evidently you invited the robe since you showed me away a little while ago," and left.

An aging Hindu master grew tired of his apprentice complaining, and so, one morning, he sent him for some salt. When the apprentice returned, the master instructed the unhappy young man to put a handful of salt in a glass of water and then to drink it.

"How does it taste?" the master asked.

"Bitter," spit the apprentice.

The master chuckled and then asked the young man to take the same handful of salt and put it in the lake. The two walked in silence to the nearby lake, and once the apprentice swirled his handful of salt in the water, the old man said, "Now drink from the lake."

As the water dripped down the young man's chin, the master asked, "How does it taste?"

"Much fresher," remarked the apprentice.

"Do you taste the salt?" asked the master.

"No," said the young man.

At this, the master sat beside the young man who so reminded him of himself and took his hands, offering, "The pain of life is pure salt, no more, no less. The amount of pain in life remains the same, exactly the same. But the amount of bitterness we taste depends on the container we put the pain in. So when you are in pain, the only thing you can do is to enlarge your sense of things... Stop being a glass. Become a lake."

One day Zen master Shosan said of a certain individual, "So-and-so is a great practioner, is he not? He says that no matter what kind of plague he may die from, he wants to die as calmly as if he were taking a walk in the neighborhood."

One of his students in the group said, "He just thinks that way - he's not the kind of man to do Zen practice."

The master said, "Even if that is so, still he is a man with the seed of great Zen practice."

Source: Zen Antics

A long time ago in China there were two friends, one who played the harp skillfully and one who listen skillfully. When the one played or sang about a mountain, the other would say: "I can see the mountain before us." When the one played about water, the listener would exclaim: "Here is the running stream!" But the listener fell sick and died. The first friend cut the strings of his harp and never played again. Since that time the cutting of harp strings has always been a sign of intimate friendship.

Source: Zen Flesh, Zen Bones

"Happiness is the absence of the striving for happiness."

Chuang Tzu

Zen master Tetsuo was so famous for his brush painting that many people came to him just to study art. He always used to tell prospective students, "You must remember the saying, 'If you want to avoid depending on society, don't let criticism and praise disturb your heart.' When you can cultivate your art without leaving any mundanity at all in your chest, then mind and technique will naturally mature, and you will eventually be able to arrive at the subtleties. This is the way out of darkness into light."

Once a distinguished Confucian scholar and statesman came to visit Tetsuo. Observing the Zen master executing a painting, the scholar noted that every move of the master's arm and brush was in conformity with classical principals of calligraphy.

When he remarked upon this, the Zen master explained, "In terms of correctness of mind, calligraphy and painting are one. When I make a painting. If so much as one cane of bamboo or one leaf on a tree is even slightly off from the way the stroke should be, I tear the whole thing up and throw it away, then put aside my brush, sit quietly, and clarify mind."

Source: Zen Antics

Once there lived a village of creatures along the bottom of a great crystal river.

The current of the river swept silently over them all -- young and old, rich and poor, compassionate and cruel -- the current going its own way, knowing only its own crystal self.

Each creature in its own manner clung tightly to the twigs and rocks of the river bottom, for clinging was their way of life, and resisting the current what each had learned from birth.

But one creature said at last, "I am tired of clinging. Though I cannot see it with my eyes, I trust that the current knows where it is going. I shall let go, and let it take me where it will. Clinging, I shall die of boredom."

The other creatures laughed and said, "Fool! Let go, and that current will throw you tumbled and smashed across the rocks, and you will die quicker than boredom!"

But the one heeded them not, and taking a breath did let go, and at once was tumbled and smashed by the current across the rocks.

Yet in time, as the creature refused to cling again, the current lifted him free from the bottom, and he was bruised and hurt no more.

And the creatures downstream, to whom he was a stranger, cried, "See a miracle! A creature like ourselves, yet he flies! See the Messiah, come to save us all!"

And the one carried in the current said, "I am no more Messiah than you. The river delights to lift us free, if only we dare let go. Our true work is this voyage, this adventure."

But they cried the more, "Savior!" all the while clinging to the rocks, and when they looked again he was gone, and they were left alone, and began making legends of a Savior.

Seung Sahn would say, "When you eat, just eat. When you read the newspaper, just read the newspaper. Don't do anything other than what you are doing."

One day a student saw him reading the newspaper while he was eating. The student asked if this did not contradict his teachings.

Seung Sahn said, "When you eat and read the newspaper, just eat and read the newspaper."

Source: Essential Zen

Zen students are with their masters at least ten years before they presume to teach others. Nan-in was visited by Tenno, who, having passed his apprenticeship, had become a teacher. The day happened to be rainy, so Tenno wore wooden clogs and carried an umbrella. After greeting him Nan-in remarked: "I

suppose you left your wooden clogs in the vestibule. I want to know if your umbrella is on the right or left side of the clogs."

Tenno, confused, had no instant answer. He realized that he was unable to carry his Zen every minute. He became Nan-in's pupil, and he studied six more years to accomplish his every-minute Zen

There once lived a samurai who was plagued by a large and clever rat who had the run of the house. This annoyed the samurai to no end so he went to the village to buy a cat. A street vender sold him a cat that he said would catch the rat, and indeed the cat looked trim and fit. But the rat was even quicker than the cat and after a week with no success the samurai returned the cat. This time the vender pulled out a large and grizzled cat and guaranteed that no rat could escape this master mouser.

The rat knew enough to stay clear of this tough alley cat, but when the cat slept, the rat ran about. Half the day the rat would hide, but the other half he again had run of the place. The samurai brought the cat back to the vender who shook his head in despair saying he had given the samurai his best cat and there was nothing more he could do.

Returning home with his money, the samurai happened upon a monk and sought his advice. After hearing the samurai's story the monk offered him the services of the cat that lived in the temple. The cat was old and fat and he scarcely seemed to notice when he was carried away by the doubtful samurai. For two weeks the cat did little more than sleep all day and night. The samurai wanted to give the cat back to the temple but the monk insisted he keep him a while longer assuring him the rat's days were close to an end. The rat became accustomed to the presence of the lazy old cat and was soon up to his old tricks even, on occasion, brazenly dancing around the old cat as he slept.

Then one day, as the rat went about his business without any concern, he passed close by the cat who swiftly struck out his paw and pinned the rat to the floor. The rat died instantly.

Source: The Thirty-Six Strategies of Ancient China

"When enlightened Zen masters set up teachings for a spiritual path, the only concern is to clarify the mind to arrive at its source.

It is complete in everyone, yet people turn away from this basic mind because of their illusions."

Zen Master Yuanwu

"Why must I meditate in order to achieve enlightenment?" demanded the prince of his teacher. "I can study. I can pray. I can think on issues clearly. Why this silly emptying of the mind?"

"I will show you," said the teacher, taking a bucket of water into the garden under the full moon. "Now I stir the surface and what do you see?"

"Ribbons of light," answered the prince.

"Now wait," said the teacher setting the bucket down.

Both teacher and boy watched the calming surface of the water in the bamboo bucket for many minutes.

"Now what do you see?" asked the teacher.

"The moon," replied the prince.

"So, too, young master, the only way to grasp enlightenment is through a calm and settled mind"

Source: Zen Fables for Today

"On a certain night Jim, Mike, Ron and Dave died. Shortly thereafter they all found themselves walking on a beaten path. It seemed right to follow the path. Finally they came to a dividing point. One path veered to the left; the other to the right. They stood a moment pondering what to do when suddenly a man in white appeared and gave them instructions.

"Welcome, my friends," he said. "You are approaching your new home and I am here to instruct you as much as is permitted. You notice that there are two paths before you. One of them takes you to Heaven, a place more beautiful than you can imagine. The other takes you to Hell, a land full of darkness, despair and wretched individuals. All I can tell you at this point is that you are to choose a path, but once you reach your destination you cannot turn back. Once you get to Heaven you will stay there or once you get to Hell you will stay there. One more word I can say. Do not be frightened for that reward which you get in the end will be that which you deserve. Go forth confident that if you have led a just life that you will reap as you have sowed. You must proceed one at a time and each walk the path alone."

After saying this the man disappeared. The four were astonished at this somewhat random method of reaching heaven or hell. Finally, they decided that they must go forward and drew straws to determine who would go first.

Jim got the first opportunity and chose the path on the right. He thought that perhaps this would lead to heaven because the "right" is always associated with "good." But as he proceeded he heard the fierce sound of wild animals, clouds seemed to hide the sun and the earth seemed to shake.

He became very frightened and thought, "Maybe I have chosen the wrong path." He turned around and went back to the beginning and told the others of his experience. Then he decided to try the left hand path instead. As he ventured forth on it he saw more ominous signs. He kept wondering how far he could go before he could not turn back and with each step he became more and more frightened until he was forced to retreat back to the beginning.

Seeing that Jim could not make a firm decision as to which path to take Ron and Dave suggested to Mike that he now take his turn. Mike, however, was paralyzed with fear for, according to Jim's story, neither path sounded very heavenly. "I'm going to think about it awhile," he said. "Someone else can take a turn." It was now Ron's turn and he said, "I'm picking the right-hand path and not turning back." He followed through with his decision and went past the sound of wild animals and through the darkness and storm clouds until he eventually found himself in a place of unspeakable beauty and peace. He assumed he was in Heaven and rested there.

It was now Dave's turn to move onward. Jim said he thought he heard a wild animal eating Ron and a chill of concern spread through them all. Dave was not sure he was making the right decision, for he chose the path to the left. He thought within himself: "No matter what happens I'll go forward on this path and make the best of it."

As he proceeded things went from bad to worse. There were horrific shrieks from wild animals and storm clouds with fierce thunderbolts were everywhere. Still he proceeded until he reached a sign that said "Hell." Behind him the path disappeared and there was no retreat. Before him was a depressing place dark and stormy, full of inhabitants living in run down shacks. The people lived in constant fear of attacks from the animals and also roaming gangs that stole whatever they could get their hands on.

Everywhere he went he was told that this was a land cursed by the devil and that things are going to get worse for all eternity.

Dave thought long and hard within himself. "I promised myself that I would not retreat from this path and would make the best of it. I refuse to listen to these voices of doom. Within myself there is no hell and my conscience is clear. So why should there be Hell on the outside?"

From that point on Dave went forth in confidence and taught the people that they did not have to live in the run down shacks and that they could change their circumstances so they would not have to live in fear. He also questioned their belief that the land was cursed by the devil. A handful of people took hope and listened, but the rest were afraid and even looked upon Dave as an enemy fearing he would make things even worse than they were.

Dave gathered the people who would listen. They refused to accept the slum they were given as a final resting place and made blueprints of new beautiful homes. The best land they could find was an uninhabited swamp. They drained it and built their homes and a beautiful city with teeming gardens and

landscapes. The gangs did not bother them for the inhabitants supported and protected each other. The wild animals became friends for the people nurtured them. Even the dark clouds and storms began to subside and bright sunny days became a common sight.

The people who were against Dave saw what had been accomplished and they took courage and one by one other parts of Hell became transformed into beautiful cities and landscapes. After a period of time there was nothing but beauty and peace as far as the eye could see.

Dave surveyed the now beautiful land and came to the realization: One more thing needs to be done. He walked over to the original entrance and found that old sign which said "Hell" and tore it down and replaced it with one that said "Heaven." As he did so another path with a fork in it appeared and so did the man in white. His look caught Dave's eye and he said, "I think you know what you must do."

Dave looked back and said, "I see I must choose again."

"Correct," said the man.

"Before I proceed, can you tell me the fate of the other three?"

The man answered: "Ron is in the city that resembles the place that you have created. He has one regret and that is he wishes that he had a part in creating it. When the desire becomes strong enough he will be given another path to choose and will wind up in a place called 'Hell' as you did, and be given an opportunity to build Heaven."

Jim and Mike are still paralyzed with fear, afraid to make a decision. They are the ones who are truly in Hell, yet sooner or later they must proceed onward.

"And what lies ahead for me?" asked Dave.

"The unknown," said the man.

Dave felt a twinge of fear at the statement, yet was glad at the same time. And with no hesitation, he proceeded down the path leading to the right.

Two panicky city dwellers found themselves lost in the high timber. After wandering for a day and a night, they came upon an old hermit.

"How do we find our way back to civilization?" they asked the hermit.

"I could tell you but you'd still get lost," replied the hermit

"What should we do?" they asked.

"Go with the flow."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Go with the flow. You see that stream over there. Just follow it. Streams go into creeks and creeks go into rivers and rivers go through towns. Also along the way you'll have water to drink and berries to eat."

"Is that what Zen people mean when they say 'go with the flow'?"

"Yes and no," replied the Hermit proceeding along his way.

Source: Zen Fables for today

One day a fisherman was laying on a beautiful beach, with his fishing pole propped up in the sand and his solitary line cast out into the sparkling blue surf. He was enjoying the warmth of the afternoon sun and the hope of catching a fish.

About that time, a businessman came walking down the beach trying to relieve some of the stress of his workday. He noticed the fisherman sitting on the beach and decided to find out why this fisherman was fishing instead of working hard to make a living for himself and his family.

"You're not going to catch many fish that way," said the businessman, "You should be working harder rather than laying on the beach!"

The fisherman looked up, smiled and replied, "And what will my reward be?"

"Well, you can get bigger nets and catch more fish!" was the businessman's answer.

"And then what will my reward be?" asked the fisherman, still smiling.

The businessman replied, "You will make money and you'll be able to buy a boat, which will then result in larger catches of fish!"

"And then what will my reward be?" asked the fisherman again.

The businessman was beginning to get a little irritated with the fisherman's questions. "You can buy a bigger boat, and hire some people to work for you!" he said.

"And then what will my reward be?"

The businessman was getting angry. "Don't you understand? You can build up a fleet of fishing boats, sail all over the world, and let your employees catch fish for you!"

Once again the fisherman asked, "And then what will my reward be?"

The businessman was red with rage and shouted at the fisherman, "Don't you understand that you can become so rich that you will never have to work for your living again! You can spend all the rest of your days sitting on this beach, looking at the sunset. You won't have a care in the world!"

The fisherman, still smiling, looked up and said, "And what do you think I'm doing right now?"

There was once a general of war who had spent his entire life fighting in campaigns for many kings. Now at the end of his career, he became tired of fighting. He had spent a lifetime perfecting his skill in all the arts of war and his skill was famous, but he was weary and had but one wish: to spend the rest of his days studying archery, the one art of war he had not mastered.

The general did not want to learn archery in order to be a better fighter, but rather to study and reflect. He had heard of Master archers, living in distant monasteries, who spend a lifetime doing nothing else but perfecting their skill. Their life appealed to him, and so he retired from fighting and began to search for the Master archers.

After a long journey the general found a monastery where the monks were devoted to archery. He entered the monastery and begged to join them and pass the remainder of his days on this earth studying archery. For 10 years that is what he did.

Then, when he had perfected his skill as an archer, the abbot of the monastery came to the general and said, "It is time to leave." The general was shocked and he protested, saying that his life in the world outside the monastery was over. His only desire was to remain within the monastery walls and continue to meditate on the bow, the arrow, the target.

The general argued and pleaded with the abbot, but the abbot was resolute. He insisted that the general must leave. To advance his skill, it was necessary for the general to go out into the world and teach what he had learned.

And so he left the monastery. Once outside, the general had nowhere to go; he decided to return to the village of his birth.

It was a long journey over many lands, but finally he neared the village. As he walked through the surrounding forest he noticed a bull's-eye on a tree, with an arrow in the exact center. The general was surprised by this and even more so when he noticed more trees with bull's-eyes and arrows in the center. Soon he came to the farmlands and there saw many barns and homes with bull's-eyes and arrows dead center. He became agitated and walked quickly into the village center. There, on every wall of every building was a bull's-eye with an arrow right in the center.

The peace he had gained from his years of monastic life was gone. He was indignant to find that after 10 years of study and reflection there lived an archer more skilled than he. Quickly, he approached the elders of the town and demanded that the archer responsible for this perfection meet him at the edge of town by the mill, in one hour.

The general waited by the mill, but as the hour approached no one came. There was, however, a young girl playing by the river. The girl noticed him and came over.

"Are you waiting for someone?" she asked, looking up at the general.

"Go away," he said, irritated.

"No, no," said the girl, "you look like you're waiting for someone and I was told to come and meet

someone here."

The general looked unbelievably at the little girl and said, "I'm waiting for the Master archer responsible for the hundreds of perfect shots I have seen."

"Well, that's me then," said the girl.

The general, feeling more indignant still, looked skeptically at the girl. Finally, he said, "If you are telling the truth, then explain to me how you can get a perfect shot every single time you shoot your arrow."

"That's easy," said the girl, brightening. "I take my arrow and I draw it back very tight in the bow. Then I point it very, very straight and let it go. Wherever it lands I draw a bull's-eye."

Shoichi was a one-eyed teacher of Zen, sparkling with enlightenment. He taught his disciples in Tofuku temple.

Day and night the whole temple stood in silence. There was no sound at all.

Even the reciting of sutras was abolished by the teacher.

His pupils had nothing to do but meditate.

When the master passed away, an old neighbor heard the ringing of bells and the recitation of sutras.

Then she knew Shoichi had gone.

Source: Zen Flesh, Zen Bones

There is a story of a farmer whose horse ran away. That evening the neighbors gathered to commiserate with him since this was such bad luck. He said, "May be."

The next day the horse returned, but brought with it six wild horses, and the neighbors came exclaiming at his good fortune. He said, "May be."

And then, the following day, his son tried to saddle and ride one of the wild horses, was thrown, and broke his leg. Again the neighbors came to offer their sympathy for the misfortune. He said, "May be."

The day after that, conscription officers came to the village to seize young men for the army, but because of the broken leg the farmer's son was rejected. When the neighbors came to say how fortunately everything had turned out, he said, "May be."

Dongshan asked Yunju, "What are you doing?"

Yunju said, "I am making soy paste."

Dongshan, "Are you using some salt?"

Yunju said, "I turn some in."

Dongshan asked, "How does it taste?"

Yunju said, "Done."

Source: Essential Zen

"Tell me the weight of a snowflake," a coal-mouse asked a wild dove.

"Nothing more than nothing," was the answer.

"In that case, I must tell you a marvelous story," the coal-mouse said.

"I sat on the branch of a fir, close to its trunk, when it began to snow - not heavily, not in a raging blizzard - no, just like a dream, without a sound and without any violence. Since I did not have anything better to do, I counted the snowflakes settling on the twigs and needles of my branch. Their number was exactly 3,741,952. When the 3,741,953rd dropped onto the branch - nothing more than nothing, as you say - the

branch broke off."

Having said that, the coal-mouse flew away.

An aged monk, who had lived a long and active life, was assigned a chaplain's role at an academy for girls. In discussion groups he often found that the subject of love became a central topic.

This comprised his warning to the young women: "Understand the danger of anything-too-much in your lives. Too much anger in combat can lead to recklessness and death. Too much adoration in religious beliefs can lead to close-mindedness and persecution. Too much passion in love creates dream images of the beloved - images that ultimately prove false and generate anger.

"To love too much is to lick honey from the point of a knife."

"But as a celibate monk," asked one young woman, "how can you know of love between a man and a woman?"

"Sometime, dear children," replied the old teacher, "I will tell you why I became a monk."

Source: Zen Fables For Today

Once Zen master Bankei spent several nights sitting under a crucifix in an execution ground, testing his Zen mind. After that he lay down on an embankment surrounding a corral. Now it so happened that there was a warrior in the corral beating a horse. Seeing this, Bankei hollered, "Hey! What do you think you are doing?"

This happened three times before the warrior stopped and got off his horse. Approaching the Zen master, he now saw that Bankei was not an ordinary man. The warrior said, "You were yelling at me. Do you have something to tell me?"

Bankei said, "Rather than beat your horse for being unruly, why not chastise yourself and train your own mind right?"

Source: Zen Antics

Two men, both seriously ill, occupied the same hospital room. One man was allowed to sit up in his bed for an hour each afternoon to help drain the fluid from his lungs. His bed was next to the room's only window.

The other man had to spend all his time flat on his back. The men talked for hours on end. They spoke of their wives and families, their homes, their jobs, their involvement in the military service, where they had been on vacation. And every afternoon when the man in the bed by the window could sit up, he would pass the time by describing to his room-mate all the things he could see outside the window.

The man in the other bed began to live for those one-hour periods where his world would be broadened and enlivened by all the activity and color of the world outside. The window overlooked a park with a lovely lake. Ducks and swans played on the water while children sailed their model boats. Young lovers walked arm in arm amidst flowers of every color of the rainbow. Grand old trees graced the landscape, and a fine view of the city skyline could be seen in the distance.

As the man by the window described all this in exquisite detail, the man on the other side of the room would close his eyes and imagine the picturesque scene. One warm afternoon the man by the window described a parade passing by. Although the other man couldn't hear the band -- he could see it in his mind's eye as the gentleman by the window portrayed it with descriptive words. Then unexpectedly, a sinister thought entered his mind. Why should the other man alone experience all the pleasures of seeing everything while he himself never got to see anything? It didn't seem fair.

At first thought the man felt ashamed. But as the days passed and he missed seeing more sights, he

allowed his envy to erode into resentment and it soon turned him sour. He began to brood and he found himself unable to sleep. He should be by that window -- that thought, and only that thought now controlled his life.

Late one night as he lay staring at the ceiling, the man by the window began to cough. He was choking on the fluid in his lungs. The other man watched in the dimly lit room as the struggling man by the window groped for the button to call for help.

Listening from across the room he never moved, never pushed his own button which would have brought the nurse running in. In less than five minutes the coughing and choking stopped, along with that the sound of breathing. Now there was only silence -- deathly silence.

The following morning the day nurse arrived to bring water for their baths. When she found the lifeless body of the man by the window, she was saddened and called the hospital attendants to take it away. As soon as it seemed appropriate, the other man asked if he could be moved next to the window. The nurse was happy to make the switch, and after making sure he was comfortable, she left him alone. Slowly, painfully, he propped himself up on one elbow to take his first look at the world outside.

Finally, he would have the joy of seeing it all himself. He strained to slowly turn to look out the window beside the bed.

It faced a blank wall!

The man asked the nurse what could have compelled his deceased roommate who had described such wonderful things outside this window. The nurse responded that the man was blind and could not even see the wall. She said, "Perhaps he just wanted to encourage you."

A certain Zen teacher celebrated with his students, drinking sake and whiskey until after midnight, then rose next morning before dawn. Peevish, he expressed annoyance that his American students had not risen in time to do zazen before morning service. When they murmured that their sluggishness might be accounted for by all the drink, the teacher snapped, "Sake is one thing, and zazen is another! They have nothing to do with each other!"

Source: Essential Zen

Once there was a baron who was extremely fond of chrysanthemums. He had the whole rear garden of his mansion planted with them, and spent a lot of time and effort cultivating them.

In fact, the baron paid more attention to the care of his chrysanthemums than to his wife and concubines. Many of his retainers were punished for inadvertently breaking off a blossom. In short, the baron's passion for chrysanthemums made life miserable for everyone around him.

On one occasion, when a certain retainer accidentally broke off a blossom, he was ordered into confinement by the furious baron. Enraged by this treatment, the retainer resolved to disembowel himself in protest, according to the traditional warrior code.

Now it so happened that Zen master Sengai heard of this and hastened to intervene, preventing the retainer from committing suicide over such an affair.

Not content with a temporary measure, Sengai resolved to effect a permanent solution. One rainy night when the chrysanthemums were in full bloom, Sengai sneaked into the baron's garden with a sickle and cut down every single chrysanthemum.

Hearing a strange sound from the garden, the baron looked out and saw someone there. Rushing out wielding his sword in great alarm, he demanded to know what Sengai was doing. The Zen master calmly replied, "Even weeds like this eventually become rank if they are not cut."

Now the baron realized how wrong he had been. It was like awakening from a dream. From that time onward, he no longer raised chrysanthemums.

Source: Zen Antics

A hermit was meditating by a river when a young man interrupted him.

"Master, I wish to become your disciple," said the man.

"Why?" replied the hermit.

The young man thought for a moment. "Because I want to find God."

The master jumped up, grabbed him by the scruff of his neck, dragged him into the river, and plunged his head under water. After holding him there for a minute, with him kicking and struggling to free himself, the master finally pulled him up out of the river. The young man coughed up water and gasped to get his breath.

When he eventually quieted down, the master spoke. "Tell me, what did you want most of all when you were under water."

"Air!" answered the man.

"Very well," said the master. "Go home and come back to me when you want God as much as you just wanted air."

The Zen teacher's dog loved his evening romp with his master. The dog would bound ahead to fetch a stick, then run back, wag his tail, and wait for the next game.

On this particular evening, the teacher invited one of his brightest students to join him - a boy so intelligent that he became troubled by the contradictions in Buddhist doctrine.

"You must understand," said the teacher, "that words are only guideposts. Never let the words or symbols get in the way of truth. Here, I'll show you."

With that the teacher called his happy dog. "Fetch me the moon," he said to his dog and pointed to the full moon. "Where is my dog looking?" asked the teacher of the bright pupil.

"He's looking at your finger."

"Exactly. Don't be like my dog. Don't confuse the pointing finger with the thing that is being pointed at. "All our Buddhist words are only guideposts. Everyman fights his way through other men's words to find his own truth."

Source: No Zendo

A man by the name of Jonas angered the shape-shifting wizard Oster one night when Oster appeared as an old man at Jonas' door, and Jonas refused to take him in. So Oster put this curse on him: that if the next stranger who came to Jonas' house did not give his name, then Jonas would die. And the first stranger who came after Oster left was a skilled harpist by the name of Deth. That harpist gave Jonas everything he asked for: songs, tales, the loan of his harp, the history of his travellings. But when Jonas asked him for his name, that name, as Jonas heard it, was Death. And every time Jonas despairingly asked him for his name again, the harpist could give him only one word -- Death. So in fear of Oster, and in despair of the curse, Jonas felt his heart stop as Deth was playing a sad melody on his harp, and he died.

Sekiso asked: "How can you proceed on from the top of a hundred-foot pole?"

Another Zen Teacher said: "One who sits on the top of a hundred-foot pole has attained a certain height but still is not handling Zen freely. He should proceed on from there and appear with his whole body in the ten parts of the world."

Mumon's comment: One can continue his steps or turn his body freely about on the top of the pole. In

either case he should be respected. I want to ask you monks, however: How will you proceed from the top of that pole? Look out!

The man who lacks the third eye of insight Will
cling to the measure of the hundred feet. Such a
man will jump from there and kill himself. Like a
blind man misleading other blind men.

Source: Zen Flesh, Zen Bones

Once there was a monk who specialized in the Buddhist precepts, and he kept to them all his life. Once when he was walking at night, he stepped on something. It made a squishing sound, and he imagined he had stepped on an egg-bearing frog.

This caused him no end of alarm and regret, in view of the Buddhist precept against taking life, and when he finally went to sleep that night he dreamed that hundreds of frogs came demanding his life.

The monk was terribly upset, but when morning came he looked and found that what he stepped on was a overripe eggplant. At that moment his feeling of uncertainty suddenly stopped, and for the first time he realized the meaning of the saying that there is no objective world. Then he finally knew how to practice Zen.

Source: Zen Essence

"In the realm of fundamental activity there is no self; there is no world. Self and world arise from this foundation and return to this foundation. If we are clear in the arising and disappearing of self, then we can find our way home in any situation. When we willingly dissolve ourselves into relating, then the subsequent arising of self can be free from desire and attachment. Peace and completeness are not distant promises, but the natural condition from which we arise and to which we return.

The personal self that we identify with is an ephemeral appearance in the activity of life. Clinging to an "I am" self perpetuates the belief in a separate, objective world around us. It can create distance in our intimate relationships and diminish the vitality of experience. When we believe we are separate from our experience, alone in our relationships, then dropping our attachments is a long and difficult process. As we continue to learn that our foundation is relationship, that from the beginning self and separation are an illusion, we can step free in a heartbeat. Then the primacy of relationship is relating and the vividness of experience is experiencing. Many teachings emphasize that dissolving our illusion of an "I am" self is the essential practice of Buddhism. We will return to this insight again and again and again."

Source: AZC Dharma Talk - Self and No Self

"When we live our life contrary to the inner guidance of our Soul, our actions often have a disharmonious effect upon ourselves, others and the Earth. This is why the evolution of individual human consciousness is intimately linked with the future of this planet. In light of this, the crisis of all physical illness, emotional imbalance and planetary upheaval has but one ultimate purpose: to provide an opportunity that will motivate us to realign our body, mind and emotions with the infinite love, wisdom and healing of our Soul. Therefore, whenever we gather the courage to do whatever it takes to end the war within, we contribute directly and immediately to our own healing and transformation as well as to the peace that our world cries out for."

"You must be the change you want to see in the world."

Mohandas Gandhi

One morning, a young man came to the Master saying, "Master, I wish to understand my path on earth better. I wish to know why it is that I seem to carry my past and re-live it again and again. Why is it that I cannot get past my past?"

The Master smiled at the young man who seemed to be earnestness itself. "Go forward into the Maze in the garden. But carry this backpack as you walk the maze. It will help you stay focused and balanced. Be careful as it is quite heavy though," the Master said.

The young man took the backpack from the Master who handed it over quite easily. But when the young man had it firmly in his grasp he was astonished at how heavy it really was! Placing the shoulder straps over his arms and bent over from the sheer weight of the pack, he strode towards the Maze. He was surprised to see it was not a garden maze, but was built of silk panels that were nearly translucent. The young man paused before entering the maze and then stood and walked into it. Immediately he found himself facing a solid wall of silk. However, he could see just enough through the silk to other areas of the maze to make out others there at the same time. He could "see" them and hear them but they were not part of his path.

The weight upon his shoulders reminded him of why he was there, so he put the thoughts of the others out of his head. Walking forward, he found himself hopelessly trapped. It seemed that no matter which direction he walked, there was no way to proceed forward. Baffled, the young man sat down and pondered his situation.

'The Master told me to walk the maze but it seems unwalk-able. Yet, there are others here who are obviously ahead of me. They must have figured out a way to get through this section. How did they do that? Are they smarter than I am? Did they cheat? Did they crawl under the silk, as that would be really a simple matter and who would ever know?'

The young man weighed his options and then rose, deciding to not sneak under the silk. As he stood and turned, an opening appeared before him as though by magic and he moved forward.

Soon, he faced another series of solid silk panels and could see no opening or direction to walk other than the one he had come from. Again he sat down and thought of his situation. He had gotten through the first test he felt, by reflecting upon his options and then choosing to take the one that was for his highest good. Stating again his affirmation that he would desire to walk the maze only with positive intent he stood, ready to face his opening. But none was there. He still faced a blank series of panels.

The young man was baffled. He had felt that surely he would be rewarded as before for his desire to proceed only within his highest good.

The weight of his backpack cut into his shoulders, bringing him sharply back to reality. What was it that weighed so much? What had the Master placed in it to weigh it down? Rocks? Bricks? It did not feel hard and unforgiving like those items, it felt soft yet heavy. What could possibly be soft and yielding yet heavy enough to weigh him down like this?

Pulling the backpack off of his shoulders, he opened it and peeped inside. 'The Master did not tell to not look,' he reasoned. It was EMPTY! Yet it had weight!

'How could this be', he wondered. Picking it back up, he again felt how heavy it was yet it was empty! Again he glanced inside and this time felt with his hands. Empty!

But the weight!!!

Placing it upon his shoulders he stood. He asked himself what it was that he had just learned from this experience. He heard a voice clearly say, 'Look inside of you, young man, for the weight lies there,' he

was told.

As he walked he looked at his life and his path. He thought of his childhood and the friends and enemies who had caused him harm. He thought of how stuck he had been by their feelings of him, their attitudes towards him. He remembered how angry he was with one particular boy who had taunted him unmercifully. This boy was hated to this day by the young man. The pack became even heavier as the student re-created and re-lived the experience within his mind and heart.

'Ahhhh. I understand now. I carry the weight of that which burdens me. I am the weight! I therefore have it within me to unburden myself as well.' The student was joyous with this insight and then saw and walked his way through a series of panels of silk.

He thought of how he could unburden the weight of those he still despised and resented for their treatment of him. He knew that they were not there with him in the maze so he could not expect them to say, 'I am sorry' and thus lessen the weight and allow him to go forward easily.

'I forgive you, wherever you are,' he found himself saying to his own amazement. The weight of the pack lessened immediately and he was able to walk without bending forward at the waist.

'Ah ha!' the young one exclaimed. 'Through my intent to forgive, I unburden myself of this weight which hinders my journey. But how can this be? For they were the ones who wronged me. Yet my forgiving of them unweights me?' The young one's head swum with the implications. And another series of openings appeared before him in the panels of silk. His pack was considerably lighter, but still weighed enough for his mind to stay focused upon it.

'Oh, Great Spirit, I ask you to help me see what it is that you are showing me here. How do I make my way through this maze? How do I release myself of the full weight that I carry with me?' It was at that moment that a beam of sunlight hit him squarely in the face, warming him.

He suddenly realized that his pack had lightened again with the warmth of the sun! 'What does this mean, God? Why do you lighten my pack with sunlight? What are you showing me?'

It was then that he found himself remembering a "woman" that he had kissed when he was thirteen. It was his first kiss of adulthood and he remembered her clearly. His heart raced with the remembrance of her taste upon his lips and his love for her. His pack lightened considerably this time.

'Thank you God for your considerable wisdom in this. I see now how I am to unburden myself completely. It is through my loving AND forgiving those who have been in my way and have wronged me previously. It is not their wronging of me that has hindered me. It is my holding on to that wronging that has stopped me. By seeing myself as one who has been wronged, I could not go forward in the maze. And by seeing myself as one who was without love, I could not lessen the weight of the pack. As I forgive and bring love within me, I make my journey easier.'

The young man felt his heart swell in size as he felt these insights. He felt his heart race with joy, as it knew its lesson to him was being heard.

The pack weighed nothing now and the young man took it off and held it lightly in his hands. He stood before a solid silk wall now and could see neither an opening nor his way to where he had just come from. He was surrounded by solid silk!

However, instead of panicking, he sat and breathed in this mantra:

"I Am the light and the Way. I carry within me all manner of healing and knowing. It is through this healing and knowing that I make my way through this earthly maze. I am able to carry forth of the journey through this maze and I am able to release my entrapment. I alone have the ability to solve this riddle and I ask now to have it done. I breathe in full acceptance of my path and its possibilities, God. I recognize that I was the impediment, not anyone or anything else. I am LIGHT and I am LOVE. Thus being so FREES me and allows me to soar above the physical realm. In this I re-discover myself which is my True Self, God. Thank you for helping me to see this. I so love you."

At this, the young man felt his feet rise slightly above the earth! He floated above the silk panels and could clearly see the others stuck within the maze. Their darknesses were carried around in their own packs and held them stuck. His head swum with the implications of what was happening to him at that moment. But he focused not on that, but on the fact that he was flying! He was soaring! He was above the earth in his lightness! He was outside of the Maze!

Spying the ground around the maze, he thought of being there and staying outside of the maze. And at

once, he was. By thinking it and seeing it, it became.

The Master was at his side as he touched down.

"Master, thank you for placing my weight so severely upon my shoulders as you did. Were it not so heavy, I would have gladly carried it longer and longer for it would have not hindered me all that much. But as it weighed me down so greatly, I had to get rid of the weight first before I could do anything else." "How did you free yourself of your weight?" the Master asked. His face was alight with joy and love as he did so.

"I found myself forgiving those who had wronged me, Master. It was my pain in response to their actions that made me hold on to the pain inside of myself. When I let it go, Master, I watched it soar away from me and felt myself growing lighter." The student's face shone with love as he spoke.

"Ah," said the Master. "And what of the maze itself? That is impossible to walk through. There is no way out."

"Oh, Master. The most beautiful thing happened. I began to fly after losing the weight. I saw myself as light and love itself as I found it within me to forgive and forget those that had harmed me, had wronged me. It was my darkness that had caused my weight and it was my lightness that freed me to fly. By BEING light and love I floated, Master, and found myself outside of the maze. I was freed from its confines; above its entrapments. Master, I see now that I cause my own weight, that I hold me down. That I keep me trapped in my past. That I, alone, am responsible for the manner in which I walk this maze. By releasing those entrapping thoughts, those weighting down feelings and allowing me to feel love and light, I soared above it all. Did I do wrong by getting out of the maze in this way, Master?" The young man was earnestness itself as he awaited the Master's answer.

"What do YOU feel, young one?" the Master answered with a smile. "Do YOU feel freed from the Maze?" With that, the Master strode away before hearing the other's reply. He knew that whatever the young one answered would give him further insight into his own journey.

Once three scholars on the way to the civil service examination stopped to buy refreshments from a woman who sold pastries by the wayside. One man was calm and quiet, while the other two argued over literature. The woman asked where they were going. The latter two told her they were going to take the civil service examination. She said, "You two scholars won't pass the exam: that other man will." The two men swore at her and left.

When the results of the examination turned out as the woman had predicted, the two scholars who had failed went back to find out how she had known they would not pass, while the third man would. They asked her if she knew physiognomy. "No," she said, "all I know is that when a pastry is thoroughly cooked, it sits there quietly, but before it's finished it keeps on making noise."

Source: Teachings of Zen

Once upon a time there were two merchants, who were friends. Both of them were getting ready for business trips to sell their merchandise, so they had to decide whether to travel together. They agreed that, since each had about 500 carts, and they were going to the same place along the same road, it would be too crowded to go at the same time.

One decided that it would be much better to go first. He thought, "The road will not be rutted by the carts, the bullocks will be able to choose the best of all the grass, we will find the best fruits and vegetables to eat, my people will appreciate my leadership and, in the end, I will be able to bargain for the best prices." The other merchant considered carefully and realized there were advantages to going second. He thought, "My friend's carts will level the ground so we won't have to do any road work, his bullocks will eat the old rough grass and new tender shoots will spring up for mine to eat. In the same way, they will pick the old fruits and vegetables and fresh ones will grow for us to enjoy. I won't have to waste my time

bargaining when I can take the price already set and make my profit." So he agreed to let his friend go first. This friend was sure he'd fooled him and gotten the best of him - so he set out first on the journey. The merchant who went first had a troublesome time of it. They came to a wilderness called the 'Waterless Desert', which the local people said was haunted by demons. When the caravan reached the middle of it, they met a large group coming from the opposite direction. They had carts that were mud smeared and dripping with water. They had lotuses and water lilies in their hands and in the carts. The head man, who had a know-it-all attitude, said to the merchant, "Why are you carrying these heavy loads of water? In a short time you will reach that oasis on the horizon with plenty of water to drink and dates to eat. Your bullocks are tired from pulling those heavy carts filled with extra water - so throw away the water and be kind to your overworked animals!"

Even though the local people had warned them, the merchant did not realize that these were not real people, but demons in disguise. They were even in danger of being eaten by them. Being confident that they were helpful people, he followed their advice and had all his water emptied onto the ground.

As they continued on their way they found no oasis or any water at all. Some realized they'd been fooled by beings that might have been demons, and started to grumble and accuse the merchant. At the end of the day, all the people were tired out. The bullocks were too weak from lack of water to pull their heavy carts. All the people and animals lay down in a haphazard manner and fell into a deep sleep. Lo and behold, during the night the demons came in their true frightening forms and gobbled up all the weak defenseless beings. When they were done there were only bones lying scattered around - not one human or animal was left alive.

After several months, the second merchant began his journey along the same way. When he arrived at the wilderness, he assembled all his people and advised them - "This is called the 'Waterless Desert' and I have heard that it is haunted by demons and ghosts. Therefore we should be careful. Since there may be poison plants and foul water, don't drink any local water without asking me." In this way they started into the desert.

After getting about halfway through, in the same way as with the first caravan, they were met by the water soaked demons in disguise. They told them the oasis was near and they should throw away their water. But the wise merchant saw through them right away. He knew it didn't make sense to have an oasis in a place called 'Waterless Desert'. And besides, these people had bulging red eyes and an aggressive and pushy attitude, so he suspected they might be demons. He told them to leave them alone saying, "We are business men who don't throw away good water before we know where the next is coming from."

Then seeing that his own people had doubts, the merchant said to them, "Don't believe these people, who may be demons, until we actually find water. The oasis they point to may be just an illusion or a mirage. Have you ever heard of water in this 'Waterless Desert'? Do you feel any rain-wind or see any storm clouds?" They all said, "No", and he continued, "If we believe these strangers and throw away our water, then later we may not have any to drink or cook with - then we will be weak and thirsty and it would be easy for demons to come and rob us, or even eat us up! Therefore, until we really find water, do not waste even a drop!"

The caravan continued on its way and, that evening, reached the place where the first caravan's people and bullocks had been killed and eaten by the demons. They found the carts and human and animal bones lying all around. They recognized that the fully loaded carts and the scattered bones belonged to the former caravan. The wise merchant told certain people to stand watch around the camp during the night.

The next morning the people ate breakfast, and fed their bullocks well. They added to their goods the most valuable things left from the first caravan. So they finished their journey very successfully, and returned home safely so that they and their families could enjoy their profits.

The moral is: One must always be wise enough not to be fooled by tricky talk and false appearances.

Source: Buddhist Tales - Jataka Stories

Once when Zen master Bankei was about to leave a temple in the capital where he taught from time to time, a certain gentleman came requesting that the master postpone his departure. A certain baron had a question and wanted to see the Zen master in person on the morrow to resolve it. Bankei assented and put off leaving.

The next day, however, the gentleman came again, this time with a message that the baron has some urgent business to take care of and could not come and see the master. The baron had asked the gentleman to relay his question to Bankei, then report the Zen master's answer back to him.

When he heard the gentleman out, Bankei said, "This matter of Zen is difficult to convey even by direct question and direct answer; it is all the more difficult to convey by messenger."

The Zen master said nothing more. Speechless, the gentleman withdrew and departed.

Source: Zen Antics

Goso said: "When a buffalo goes out of his enclosure to the edge of the abyss, his horns and his head and his hoofs all pass through, but why can't the tail also pass?"

Mumon's comment: If anyone can open one eye at this point and say a word of Zen, he is qualified to repay the four gratifications, and, not only that, he can save all sentient beings under him. But if he cannot say such a word of true Zen, he should turn back to his tail.

If the buffalo runs, he will fall into the trench;

If he returns, he will be butchered.

That little tail

Is a very strange thing.

Source: Zen Flesh, Zen Bones

"People who study the path today do not understand the great way --- they only strive to fulfill greed and ambition. At the very outset of their inspiration to study the way, their initial understanding is already mistaken.

The way is the path of fundamental purity: for immense aeons, and even up to the present day, it has no gain or loss, no new or old, no light or dark, no form or name. It is not more in the buddhas and not less in ordinary people. To insist on calling it the way is already defiling; to say something is accomplished by methods of learning the way is what I have called mistaken. It was for lack of choice that the ancients referred to people heading for transcendence as students of the way. The study is that there is nothing to study; the way is that there is nothing to be a way. Since there is nothing to study, there is no clinging; since there is nothing to be a way, there is no following. If one idly slips and says the word Buddha, one must simply wash one's mouth for three years --- only thus can one be called a real student of the way. Nan-ch'uan said, "The way is not the province of knowing, nor is it the province of unknowing. Knowing is false consciousness, unknowing is indifference. If you truly arrive at the way without doubt, it is like cosmic space --- how can you insist on affirmation and denial?"

Suh-chung (d. 1386), Teachings of Zen

When Buddha was in Grdhrakuta mountain he turned a flower in his fingers and held it before his listeners. Every one was silent. Only Maha-Kashapa smiled at this revelation, although he tried to control the lines of his face.

Buddha said: "I have the eye of the true teaching, the heart of Nirvana, the true aspect of non-form, and the ineffable stride of Dharma. It is not expressed by words, but especially transmitted beyond teaching. This teaching I have given to Maha-Kashapa."

Mumon's Comment: Golden-faced Guatama thought he could cheat anyone. He made the good listeners as bad, and sold dog meat under the sign of mutton. And he himself thought it was wonderful. What if all the audience had laughed together? How could he have transmitted the teaching? And again, if Maha Kashapa had not smiled, how could he have transmitted the teaching? If he says that realization can be transmitted, he is like the city slicker that cheats the country dub, and if he says it cannot be transmitted, why does he approve of Maha-Kashapa?

At the turning of a flower
His disguise was exposed.
No one in heaven or earth can surpass
Maha-Kashapa's wrinkled face.

Source: The Gateless Gate

Remember the words of the musician who was asked which was greater, knowledge or wisdom. "Without knowledge," he answered, "I could not play the violin. Without wisdom, I could not play the music."

Joshu once asked Nansen, "What is the Way?" Nansen answered, "Ordinary mind is the Way." "Then should we direct ourselves toward it or not?" asked Joshu. "If you direct yourself toward it, you go away from it," answered Nansen. Joshu continued, "If we do not try, how can we know that it is the Way?" Nansen replied, "The Way does not belong to knowing or not knowing. Knowing is illusion, not-knowing is blankness. If you really attain to the Way of no-doubt, it is like the great void, so vast and boundless. How, then, can there be right and wrong in the Tao?" At these words, Joshu was suddenly enlightened.

Mumon's poem

Hundreds of flowers in spring, the moon in autumn,
A cool breeze in summer, and snow in winter;
if there is no vain cloud in your mind
For you it is a good season.

Source: Teachings Of The Buddha by Jack Kornfield

Notere Bisera journeyed to see the sage Ishu at his remote hermitage in the mountains. Upon arriving, he said to Ishu, "I seek enlightenment."

Ishu nodded and reached out his hand, saying "Pull my finger."

Notere raised an eyebrow, but went ahead and pulled his finger. Ishu farted, and Notere was suddenly enlightened.

Once upon a time, a young fish asked an old fish: "Everyone talks about this thing they call 'ocean.' What the heck is it?"

The older and wiser fish answered: "The ocean is this thing that surrounds you on all sides."
The younger fish didn't understand: "There's nothing around me! Why can I not see this 'ocean?'"
"Of course you cannot," the old fish was patient. "The ocean is both inside and outside of you. You were born in the ocean and chances are you will die in it. The ocean flows around you, just as your own skin does."

Confucius once said, "Fish forget they live in water; people forget they live in the Tao." We all live in the ocean of Tao. It flows over us; it is within us and all around us. It enfolds us like our own skin, and yet we cannot perceive it... indeed, most of us have no idea what it is. Let us think of Tao as the universal flow of reality. This will take us another step toward true understanding of Tao.

Source: Tao Stories

Taibai once asked Baso, "What is Buddha?"
Baso answered, "Mind is Buddha."

Mumon's poem

A fine day under the blue sky!
Don't foolishly look here and there.
If you still ask, "What is buddha?"
It is like pleading your innocence while clutching stolen goods.

Source: Teachings Of The Buddha by Jack Kornfield

A monk asked Zen master Bankei, "Is it not harmless to joke around in spontaneous moments of levity?"
Bankei said, "Its all right if you want to lose trust."

Source: Zen Antics

The Prime Minister of the Tang Dynasty was a national hero for his success as both a statesman and military leader. But despite his fame, power, and wealth, he considered himself a humble and devout Buddhist. Often he visited his favorite Zen master to study under him, and they seemed to get along very well. The fact that he was prime minister apparently had no effect on their relationship, which seemed to be simply one of a revered master and respectful student.
One day, during his usual visit, the Prime Minister asked the master, "Your Reverence, what is egotism according to Buddhism?" The master's face turned red, and in a very condescending and insulting tone of voice, he shot back, "What kind of stupid question is that!?"
This unexpected response so shocked the Prime Minister that he became sullen and angry. The Zen master then smiled and said, "THIS, Your Excellency, is egotism."

Source: Zen Stories To Tell Your Neighbors

Roshi Kapleau agreed to educate a group of psychoanalysts about Zen. After being introduced to the

group by the director of the analytic institute, the Roshi quietly sat down upon a cushion placed on the floor.

A student entered, prostrated before the master, and then seated himself on another cushion a few feet away, facing his teacher. "What is Zen?" the student asked. The Roshi produced a banana, peeled it, and started eating. "Is that all? Can't you show me anything else?" the student said. "Come closer, please," the master replied. The student moved in and the Roshi waved the remaining portion of the banana before the student's face. The student prostrated, and left.

A second student rose to address the audience. "Do you all understand?" When there was no response, the student added, "You have just witnessed a first-rate demonstration of Zen. Are there any questions?" After a long silence, someone spoke up. "Roshi, I am not satisfied with your demonstration. You have shown us something that I am not sure I understand. It must be possible to TELL us what Zen is." "If you must insist on words," the Roshi replied, "then Zen is an elephant copulating with a flea."

Source: Zen Stories To Tell Your Neighbors

The Prince of Wu took a boat to Monkey Mountain. As soon as the monkey's saw him they all fled in panic and hid in the treetops. One monkey, however, remained, completely unconcerned, swinging from branch to branch---an extraordinary display!

The Prince shot an arrow at the monkey, but the monkey dexterously caught the arrow in mid-flight. At this the Prince ordered his attendants to make a concerted attack. In an instant the monkey was shot full of arrows and fell dead.

Then the King turned to his companion Yen Pu'i: "You see what happened?" he said. "This animal advertised his cleverness. He trusted in his own skill. He thought no one could touch him. Remember that! Do not rely on distinction and talent when you deal with men!"

When they returned home, Yen Pu'i became the disciple of a sage to get rid of everything that made him outstanding. He renounced every pleasure. He learned to hide every "distinction." Soon no one in the Kingdom knew what to make of him. Thus they held him in awe.

Source: The Way Of Chuang Tzu

Once upon a time, a very long time ago, the four-footed animals made the lion their king. There was a gigantic fish that roamed the oceans, and the fish made him their king. The birds were attracted to beauty, so they chose the Golden Swan as their king.

King Golden Swan had a beautiful golden daughter. While she was still young, he granted her one wish. She wished that, when she was old enough, she could pick her own husband.

When his daughter was old enough, King Golden Swan called all the birds living in the vast Himalayan Mountains of central Asia to a gathering. The purpose was to find a worthy husband for his golden daughter. Birds came from far away, even from high Tibet. There were geese, swans, eagles, sparrows, humming birds, cuckoos, owls and many other kinds of birds.

The gathering was held on a high rock slab, in the beautiful green land of Nepal. King Golden Swan told his lovely daughter to select whichever husband she wished.

She looked over the many birds. Her eye was attracted by a shining emerald-green long-necked peacock, with gorgeous flowing tail feathers. She told her father, "This bird, the peacock, will be my husband."

Hearing that he was the lucky one, all the other birds crowded around the peacock to congratulate him. They said, "Even among so many beautiful birds, the golden swan princess has chosen you. We congratulate you on your good fortune."

The peacock became so puffed up with pride, that he began to show off his colorful feathers in a fantastic strutting dance. He fanned out his spectacular tail feathers and danced in a circle to show off his beautiful tail. Being so conceited, he pointed his head at the sky and forgot all modesty, so that he also, showed

his most private parts for all to see!

The other birds, especially the young ones, giggled. But King Golden Swan was not amused. He was embarrassed to see his daughter's choice behave in this way. He thought, "This peacock has no inner shame to give him proper modesty. Nor does he have the outer fear to prevent indecent behavior. So why should my daughter be shamed by such a mindless mate?"

Standing in the midst of the great assembly of birds, the king said, "Sir peacock, your voice is sweet, your feathers are beautiful, your neck shines like an emerald, and your tail is like a splendid fan. But you have danced here like one who has no proper shame or fear. I will not permit my innocent daughter to marry such an ignorant fool!"

Then King Golden Swan married his golden daughter to a royal nephew. The silly strutting peacock flew away, having lost a beautiful wife.

The moral is: If you let pride go to your head, you'll wind up acting like a fool.

Source: Buddhist Tales

National Teacher Daito Kokushi, whose honorific name means "Great Lamp. Teacher of the Nation," was one of the founders of the renowned O-To-Kan school of Rinzai Zen. He died in the fourteenth century. According to the custom of ancient Zen Schools, Daito disappeared from the monastery after his enlightenment, to mature his realization hidden in the midst of the world. It was not until years later that he was discovered living under a bridge in Kyoto, in the society of homeless beggars. From there he became a teacher of the emperor. Daito once wrote a poem about his life as an outcast:

When one sits in meditation,
one sees the people
coming and going
over the avenue bridge
as trees growing deep in the mountains.

Source: Zen Antics

Goshu came to Zen master Yui-e and said, "I have been studying Zen for many years, but have not yet succeeded. Please give me some guidance."

Yui-e said, "There is no secret trick to Zen study. It's just a matter of freedom from birth and death."

Goshu asked, "How does one pass through birth and death to freedom?"

Raising his voice, Yui-e said, "Your every passing thought is birth and death!"

At these words Goshu went into ecstasy, feeling as if he had put down a heavy burden.

Source: Zen Antics

When Bankei was preaching at Ryumon temple, a Shinshu priest, who believed in salvation through repetition of the name of the Buddha of Love, was jealous of his large audience and wanted to debate with him.

Bankei was in the midst of a talk when the priest appeared, but the fellow made such a disturbance that Bankei stopped his discourse and asked about the noise.

"The founder of our sect," boasted the priest, "had such miraculous powers that he held a brush in his hand on one bank of the river, his attendant held up a paper on the other bank, and the teacher wrote the

holy name of Amida through the air. Can you do such a wonderful thing?"

Bankei replied lightly: "Perhaps your fox can perform that trick, but that is not the manner of Zen. My miracle is that when I feel hungry I eat, and when I feel thirsty I drink."

Source: Zen Flesh, Zen Bones

A monk asked Joshu, a Chinese Zen master: 'Has a dog Buddha-nature or not?'

Joshu answered: "Mu." [Mu is the negative symbol in Chinese, meaning "No-thing" or "Nay".]

Mumon's comment: To realize Zen one has to pass through the barrier of the patriarchs. Enlightenment always comes after the road of thinking is blocked. If you do not pass the barrier of the patriarchs or if your thinking road is not blocked, whatever you think, whatever you do, is like a tangling ghost. You may ask: What is a barrier of a patriarch? This one word, Mu, is it.

This is the barrier of Zen. If you pass through it you will see Joshu face to face. Then you can work hand in hand with the whole line of patriarchs. Is this not a pleasant thing to do?

If you want to pass this barrier, you must work through every bone in your body, through every pore in your skin, filled with this question: What is Mu? and carry it day and night. Do not believe it is the common negative symbol meaning nothing. It is not nothingness, the opposite of existence. If you really want to pass this barrier, you should feel like drinking a hot iron ball that you can neither swallow nor spit out. Then your previous lesser knowledge disappears. As a fruit ripening in season, your subjectivity and objectivity naturally become one. It is like a dumb man who has had a dream. He knows about it but cannot tell it.

When he enters this condition his ego-shell is crushed and he can shake the heaven and move the earth. He is like a great warrior with a sharp sword. If a Buddha stands in his way, he will cut him down; if a patriarch offers him any obstacle, he will kill him; and he will be free in this way of birth and death. He can enter any world as if it were his own playground. I will tell you how to do this with this koan:

Just concentrate your whole energy into this Mu, and do not allow any discontinuation. When you enter this Mu and there is no discontinuation, your attainment will be as a candle burning and illuminating the whole universe.

Has a dog Buddha-nature?
This is the most serious question of all.
If you say yes or no,
You lose your own Buddha-nature.

Source: Zen Flesh, Zen Bones

"The boat is coming to take me home because I have failed in my studies here at the monastery," said the boy to his teacher. "What can I say to my family?"

"Say that you did your best and that is as much as anyone can do," answered the teacher.

"But I wanted to be a famous monk and teach others."

"You can."

"How?" asked the sad boy.

"Live from your heart. I will show you. Do you see that boat making its way across the lake with the sun setting behind it?"

"Yes."

"Do you see its wake spreading across the lake? See how the boat looks like the apex of a golden triangle as the wake fans out from its bow."

"Sort of."

"Squint," said the teacher. "That boat is you as you leave the monastery. The lake is your life. The wake is the effect that you will have on the world. Each ripple triggers another ripple, which triggers another. By constantly striving to live as wise and loving of a life as you can, you can teach the path of love to everyone you meet simply by being yourself; a few of these people will pass on your good example to others. Thus the expanding golden wake of good works begets other good works. Most important, notice how each ripple catches the sun and bounces its light back to heaven..."

"Would you come home with me and explain all of this to my father?" asked the boy.

Various Zen stories

From: <http://www.rider.edu/~suler/zenstory/zenstory.html>

& <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Agora/7948/Zen.html>

The Gates of Paradise

A soldier named Nobushige came to Hakuin, and asked: "Is there really a paradise and a hell?"

"Who are you?" inquired Hakuin.

"I am a samurai," the warrior replied.

"You, a soldier!" exclaimed Hakuin. "What kind of ruler would have you as his guard? Your face looks like that of a beggar."

Nobushige became so angry that he began to draw his sword, but Hakuin continued: "So you have a sword ! Your weapon is probably much too dull to cut off my head."

As Nobushige drew his sword Hakuin remarked: "Here open the gates of hell!"

At these words the samurai, perceiving the master's discipline, sheathed his sword and bowed.

"Here open the gates of paradise," said Hakuin.

The Present Moment

A Japanese warrior was captured by his enemies and thrown into prison. That night he was unable to sleep because he feared that the next day he would be interrogated, tortured, and executed. Then the words of his Zen master came to him,

"Tomorrow is not real. It is an illusion. The only reality is now."

Heeding these words, the warrior became peaceful and fell asleep.

Worse than a Clown

There was a young monk in China who was a very serious practitioner of the Dharma.

Once, this monk came across something he did not understand, so he went to ask the master. When the master heard the question, he kept laughing. The master then stood up and walked away, still laughing.

The young monk was very disturbed by the master's reaction. For the next 3 days, he could not eat, sleep nor think properly. At the end of 3 days, he went back to the master and told the master how disturbed he had felt.

When the master heard this, he said, "Monk, do u know what your problem is? Your problem is that YOU ARE WORSE THAN A CLOWN!"

The monk was shocked to hear that, "Venerable Sir, how can you say such a thing?! How can I be worse than a clown?"

The master explained, "A clown enjoys seeing people laugh. You? You feel disturbed because another person laughed. Tell me, are u not worse than a clown?"

When the monk heard this, he began to laugh. He was enlightened.

Time To Learn

A young but earnest Zen student approached his teacher, and asked the Zen Master:

"If I work very hard and diligent how long will it take for me to find Zen."

The Master thought about this, then replied, "Ten years."

The student then said, "But what if I work very, very hard and really apply myself to learn fast -- How long then ?"

Replied the Master, "Well, twenty years."

"But, if I really, really work at it. How long then ?" asked the student.

"Thirty years," replied the Master.

"But, I do not understand," said the disappointed student. "At each time that I say I will work harder, you say it will take me longer. Why do you say that ?"

Replied the Master, "When you have one eye on the goal, you only have one eye on the path."

Transient

A famous spiritual teacher came to the front door of the King's palace. None of the guards tried to stop him as he entered and made his way to where the King himself was sitting on his throne.

"What do you want?" asked the King, immediately recognizing the visitor.

"I would like a place to sleep in this inn," replied the teacher.

"But this is not an inn," said the King, "It is my palace."

"May I ask who owned this palace before you?"

"My father. He is dead."

"And who owned it before him?"

"My grandfather. He too is dead."

"And this place where people live for a short time and then move on - did I hear you say that it is NOT an inn?"

Looking Good

A Zen abbot went dressed in rags to the door of a rich man and was turned away with an empty bowl. So he returned in his formal robe of office and was invited in and served a sumptuous meal.

Removing his robe and folding it, he placed it on front of the feast and departed with the words, "This meal is not for me; it is for the robe."

Recruiting an Assistant

One day abbot Chao Chou found a monk behind the meditation hall and asked him, "Where have all the virtuous ones gone?"

"They have all gone to work," the monk said.

Chao Chou handed the monk a knife. Stretching out his own neck he said, "My responsibilities as abbot are many; I wonder if you could please cut off my head for me."

The monk ran off.

Yes and No

According to The Platform Sutra, Shen Hui asked the Sixth Patriarch: "When you sit in meditation, High Master, do you see or not?"

The Master hit him three times with his stick and asked: "When I hit you, does it hurt or not?"

"It both does and does not hurt."

"I both see and do not see."

"How can you both see and not see?"

The Master said: "What I see are the waverings and wanderings of my own mind. What I do not see is the right and wrong and good and bad of other people. This my seeing and not seeing."

An Insolent Wayfarer

In ancient times it was customary for a traveling monk seeking lodging at a Zen monastery to engage in dharma combat with the abbot or head monk. If the wayfarer won the debate, he could stay; if not, he had to seek quarters elsewhere.

Once a master assigned his attendant to engage in such an encounter with a traveling monk, who challenged him to a silent debate. It so happened that this attendant had but one eye.

Soon the wayfarer returned to the master, saying, "Your man is too good for me. I must journey on. I held up one finger to symbolize the Buddha. But he held up two fingers for the Buddha and the Dharma. So I held up three fingers for the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. But then he held up a clenched fist to indicate they were all one - so I ran to indicate I am no match for him."

When the traveler who spoke these words left, the attendant arrived - angry and out of breath. "Where is that rascal?" he demanded. "First, he insulted me by holding up one finger to indicate I had only one eye. Determined to be polite in spite of that, I held up two fingers to indicate that, on the other hand, he was blessed with two eyes. But he just kept rubbing it in, for next he held up three fingers to indicate that all together there were only three eyes among us. So I went to hit him and he ran off! Where is he hiding?"

Serving Others

A Sufi teaching story tells of a man who prayed continually for the awareness to succeed in life. Then one night he dreamed of going into the forest to attain understanding. The next morning he went into the woods and wandered for several hours looking for some sign that would provide answers. When he finally stopped to rest, he saw a fox with no legs lying between two rocks in a cool place. Curious as to how a legless fox could survive, he waited until sunset when he observed a lion come and lay meat before the fox. "Ah, I understand," the man thought. "The secret to success in life is to trust that God will take care of all my needs. I don't need to provide for myself. All I have to do is totally surrender to my all-sustaining God." Two weeks later, weakened and starving, the man had another dream. In it he heard a voice say, "Fool. Be like the lion, not like the fox."

A Wishing Tree

There is a parable about a poor man walking through the woods reflecting upon his many troubles. He stopped to rest against a tree, a magical tree that would instantly grant the wishes of anyone who came in contact with it. He realized he was thirsty and wished for a drink. Instantly a cup of cool water was in his hand. Shocked, he looked at the water, he decided it was safe and drank it. He then realized he was hungry and wished he had something to eat. A meal appeared before him. "My wishes are being granted," he thought in disbelief. "Well, then I wish for a beautiful home of my own," he said out loud. The home appeared in the meadow before him. A huge smile crossed his face as he wished for servants to take care of the house. When they appeared he realized he had somehow been blessed with an incredible power and he wished for a beautiful, loving, intelligent woman to share his good fortune. "Wait a minute, this is ridiculous," said the man to the woman. "I'm not this lucky. This can't happen to me." As he spoke...everything disappeared. He shook his head and said, "I knew it," then walked away thinking

about his many troubles.

The Thief and the Zen master

One evening, Zen master Shichiri Kojun was reciting sutras when a thief entered his house with a sharp sword, demanding "money or life". Without any fear, Shichiri said, "Don't disturb me! Help yourself with the money, it's in that drawer". And he resumed his recitation.

The thief was startled by this unexpected reaction, but he proceeded with his business anyway. While he was helping himself with the money, the master stopped and called, "Don't take all of it. Leave some for me to pay my taxes tomorrow". The thief left some money behind and prepared to leave. Just before he left, the master suddenly shouted at him, "You took my money and you didn't even thank me?! That's not polite!". This time, the thief was really shocked at such fearlessness. He thanked the master and ran away. The thief later told his friends that he had never been so frightened in his life.

A few days later, the thief was caught and confessed, among many others, his theft at Shichiri's house. When the master was called as a witness, he said, "No, this man did not steal anything from me. I gave him the money. He even thanked me for it."

The thief was so touched that he decided to repent. Upon his release from prison, he became a disciple of the master and many years later, he attained Enlightenment.

Obeying

The master Bankei's talks were attended not only by Zen students but by persons of all ranks and sects. He never quoted sutras not indulged in scholastic dissertations. Instead, his words were spoken directly from his heart to the hearts of his listeners. His large audience angered a priest of the Nichiren sect because the adherents had left to hear about Zen. The self-centered Nichiren priest came to the temple, determined to have a debate with Bankei. "Hey, Zen teacher!" he called out. "Wait a minute. Whoever respects you will obey what you say, but a man like myself does not respect you. Can you make me obey you?" "Come up beside me and I will show you," said Bankei. Proudly the priest pushed his way through the crowd to the teacher. Bankei smiled. "Come over to my left side." The priest obeyed. "No," said Bankei, "we may talk better if you are on the right side. Step over here." The priest proudly stepped over to the right. "You see," observed Bankei, "you are obeying me and I think you are a very gentle person. Now sit down and listen."

Getting hold of emptiness

Sekkyo said to one of his monks, "Can you get hold of Emptiness?"

"I'll try," said the monk, and he cupped his hand in the air.

"That's not very good," said Sekkyo. "You haven't got anything in there!" "Well, master," said the monk, "please show me a better way."

Thereupon Sekkyo seized the monk's nose and gave it a great yank.

"Ouch!" yelled the monk. "You hurt me!". "That's the way to get hold of Emptiness!" said Sekkyo.

Blind man with lantern

An old Zen master always told this fable to unserious students: Late one night a blind man was about to

go home after visiting a friend. "Please," he said to his friend, "may I take your lantern with me?" "Why carry a lantern?" asked his friend. "You won't see any better with it." "No," said the blind one, "perhaps not. But others will see me better, and not bump into me." So his friend gave the blind man the lantern, which was made of paper on bamboo strips, with a candle inside. Off went the blind man with the lantern, and before he had gone more than a few yards, "Crack!" -- a traveler walked right into him. The blind man was very angry. "Why don't you look out?" he stormed. "Why don't you see this lantern?" "Why don't you light the candle?" asked the traveler.

The Ghost

The wife of a man became very sick. On her deathbed, she said to him, "I love you so much! I don't want to leave you, and I don't want you to betray me. Promise that you will not see any other women once I die, or I will come back to haunt you." For several months after her death, the husband did avoid other women, but then he met someone and fell in love. On the night that they were engaged to be married, the ghost of his former wife appeared to him. She blamed him for not keeping the promise, and every night thereafter she returned to taunt him. The ghost would remind him of everything that transpired between him and his fiancée that day, even to the point of repeating, word for word, their conversations. It upset him so badly that he couldn't sleep at all. Desperate, he sought the advice of a Zen master who lived near the village. "This is a very clever ghost," the master said upon hearing the man's story. "It is!" replied the man. "She remembers every detail of what I say and do. It knows everything!" The master smiled, "You should admire such a ghost, but I will tell you what to do the next time you see it." That night the ghost returned. The man responded just as the master had advised. "You are such a wise ghost," the man said, "You know that I can hide nothing from you. If you can answer me one question, I will break off the engagement and remain single for the rest of my life." "Ask your question," the ghost replied. The man scooped up a handful of beans from a large bag on the floor, "Tell me exactly how many beans there are in my hand."

At that moment the ghost disappeared and never returned.

Shooting the target

After winning several archery contests, the young and rather boastful champion challenged a Zen master who was renowned for his skill as an archer. The young man demonstrated remarkable technical proficiency when he hit a distant bull's eye on his first try, and then split that arrow with his second shot. "There," he said to the old man, "see if you can match that!" Undisturbed, the master did not draw his bow, but rather motioned for the young archer to follow him up the mountain. Curious about the old fellow's intentions, the champion followed him high into the mountain until they reached a deep chasm spanned by a rather flimsy and shaky log. Calmly stepping out onto the middle of the unsteady and certainly perilous bridge, the old master picked a far away tree as a target, drew his bow, and fired a clean, direct hit. "Now it is your turn," he said as he gracefully stepped back onto the safe ground. Staring with terror into the seemingly bottomless and beckoning abyss, the young man could not force himself to step out onto the log, no less shoot at a target. "You have much skill with your bow," the master said, sensing his challenger's predicament, "but you have little skill with the mind that lets loose the shot."

Destiny

During a momentous battle, a Japanese general decided to attack even though his army was greatly outnumbered. He was confident they would win, but his men were filled with doubt. On the way to the

battle, they stopped at a religious shrine. After praying with the men, the general took out a coin and said, "I shall now toss this coin. If it is heads, we shall win. If tails, we shall lose. Destiny will now reveal itself." He threw the coin into the air and all watched intently as it landed. It was heads. The soldiers were so overjoyed and filled with confidence that they vigorously attacked the enemy and were victorious. After the battle, a lieutenant remarked to the general, "No one can change destiny." "Quite right," the general replied as he showed the lieutenant the coin, which had heads on both sides.

It will pass

A student went to his meditation teacher and said, "My meditation is horrible! I feel so distracted, or my legs ache, or I'm constantly falling asleep. It's just horrible!"

"It will pass," the teacher said matter-of-factly.

A week later, the student came back to his teacher. "My meditation is wonderful! I feel so aware, so peaceful, so alive! It's just wonderful!"

"It will pass," the teacher replied matter-of-factly.

Full awareness

After ten years of apprenticeship, Tenno achieved the rank of Zen teacher. One rainy day, he went to visit the famous master Nan-in. When he walked in, the master greeted him with a question, "Did you leave your wooden clogs and umbrella on the porch?"

"Yes," Tenno replied.

"Tell me," the master continued, "did you place your umbrella to the left of your shoes, or to the right?"

Tenno did not know the answer, and realized that he had not yet attained full awareness. So he became Nan-in's apprentice and studied under him for ten more years.

In Your Hands

A young man caught a small bird, and held it behind his back. He then asked, "Master, is the bird I hold in my hands alive or dead." The boy thought this was a grand opportunity to play a trick on the old man. If the master answered "dead", it would be let loose into the air. If the master answered "alive", he would simply wring its neck. The master spoke, "The answer is in your hands".

Accommodating the water

A Taoist story tells of an old man who accidentally fell into the river rapids leading to a high and dangerous waterfall. Onlookers feared for his life. Miraculously, he came out alive and unharmed downstream at the bottom of the falls. People asked him how he managed to survive. "I accommodated myself to the water, not the water to me. Without thinking, I allowed myself to be shaped by it. Plunging into the swirl, I came out with the swirl. This is how I survived."

Holy Man

Word spread across the countryside about the wise Holy Man who lived in a small house atop the mountain. A man from the village decided to make the long and difficult journey to visit him. When he arrived at the house, he saw an old servant inside who greeting him at the door. "I would like to see the wise Holy Man," he said to the servant. The servant smiled and led him inside. As they walked through the house, the man from the village looked eagerly around the house, anticipating his encounter with the Holy Man. Before he knew it, he had been led to the back door and escorted outside. He stopped and turned to the servant,

"But I want to see the Holy Man!"

"You already have," said the old man. "Everyone you may meet in life, even if they appear plain and insignificant... see each of them as a wise Holy Man. If you do this, then whatever problem you brought here today will be solved."

Is that so?

A beautiful girl in the village was pregnant. Her angry parents demanded to know who was the father. At first resistant to confess, the anxious and embarrassed girl finally pointed to Hakuin, the Zen master whom everyone previously revered for living such a pure life. When the outraged parents confronted Hakuin with their daughter's accusation, he simply replied "Is that so?" When the child was born, the parents brought it to the Hakuin, who now was viewed as a pariah by the whole village. They demanded that he take care of the child since it was his responsibility. "Is that so?" Hakuin said calmly as he accepted the child. For many months he took very good care of the child until the daughter could no longer withstand the lie she had told. She confessed that the real father was a young man in the village whom she had tried to protect. The parents immediately went to Hakuin to see if he would return the baby. With profuse apologies they explained what had happened. "Is that so?" Hakuin said as he handed them the child.

The monastery

There once was a monastery that was very strict. Following a vow of silence, no one was allowed to speak at all. But there was one exception to this rule. Every ten years, the monks were permitted to speak just two words. After spending his first ten years at the monastery, one monk went to the head monk. "It has been ten years," said the head monk.

"What are the two words you would like to speak?"

"Bed... hard..." said the monk.

"I see," replied the head monk.

Ten years later, the monk returned to the head monk's office. "It has been ten more years," said the head monk. "What are the twowords you would like to speak?"

"Food... stinks..." said the monk.

"I see," replied the head monk.

Yet another ten years passed and the monk once again met with the head monk who asked, "What are your two words now, after these ten years?"

"I... quit!" said the monk.

"Well, I can see why," replied the head monk. "All you ever do is complain."

Dreams

Chuang Tzu, ancient Chinese Taoist, once experienced a dream in which he was a butterfly fluttering to & fro. In the dream he had no awareness of his individuality as a person; he was simply a butterfly. Suddenly, he awoke and found that once again he was a human laying in bed. But then he thought to himself, "Was I before a man who dreamt about being a butterfly, or am I now a butterfly who dreams about being a man?"

Buddha and mind

A renowned Zen master said that his greatest teaching was this: Buddha is your own mind. So impressed by how profound this idea was, one monk decided to leave the monastery and retreat to the wilderness to meditate on this insight. There he spent 20 years as a hermit probing the great teaching. One day he met another monk who was traveling through the forest. Quickly the hermit monk learned that the traveler also had studied under the same Zen master. "Please, tell me what you know of the master's greatest teaching." The traveler's eyes lit up, "Ah, the master has been very clear about this. He says that his greatest teaching is this: Buddha is NOT your own mind."

Helping people

Upon meeting a Zen master at a social event, a psychiatrist decided to ask him a question that had been on his mind. "Exactly how do you help people?" he inquired. "I get them where they can't ask any more questions," the Master answered.

Enlightenment after death

The Emperor asked Master Gudo, "What happens to a man of enlightenment after death?"
"How should I know?" replied Gudo.
"Because you are a master," answered the Emperor.
"Yes sir," said Gudo, "but not a dead one."

Carrying in the mind

Two traveling monks reached a river where they met a young woman. Wary of the current, she asked if they could carry her across. One of the monks hesitated, but the other quickly picked her up onto his shoulders, transported her across the water, and put her down on the other bank. She thanked him and departed. As the monks continued on their way, the one was brooding and preoccupied. Unable to hold his silence, he spoke out. "Brother, our spiritual training teaches us to avoid any contact with women, but you picked that one up on your shoulders and carried her!"
"Brother," the second monk replied, "I set her down on the other side, while you are still carrying her."

The order of things

A rich man asked a Zen master to write something down that could encourage the prosperity of his family for years to come. It would be something that the family could cherish for generations. On a large piece of

paper, the master wrote, "Father dies, son dies, grandson dies."

The rich man became angry when he saw the master's work.

"I asked you to write something down that could bring happiness and prosperity to my family. Why do you give me something expressing like this?" "If your son should die before you," the master answered, "this would bring unbearable grief to your family. If your grandson should die before your son, this also would bring great sorrow. If your family, generation after generation, disappears in the order I have described, it will be the natural course of life. This is true happiness and prosperity."

Religious significance

When the spiritual teacher and his disciples began their evening meditation, the cat who lived in the monastery made such noise that it distracted them. So the teacher ordered that the cat be tied up during the evening practice. Years later, when the teacher died, the cat continued to be tied up during the meditation session. And when the cat eventually died, another cat was brought to the monastery and tied up. Centuries later, learned descendants of the spiritual teacher wrote scholarly treatises about the religious significance of tying up a cat for meditation practice.

The Zen master and the general

During the civil wars in feudal Japan, an invading army would quickly sweep into a town and take control. In one particular village, everyone fled just before the army arrived - everyone except the Zen master. Curious about this old fellow, the general went to the temple to see for himself what kind of man this master was. When he wasn't treated with the deference and submissiveness to which he was accustomed, the general burst into anger. "You fool," he shouted as he reached for his sword, "don't you realize you are standing before a man who could run you through without blinking an eye!" But despite the threat, the master seemed unmoved. "And do you realize," the master replied calmly, "that you are standing before a man who can be run through without blinking an eye?"
