

Does a Dog Have Buddha Nature?

On the afternoon of May 26, 2022, we had our first very hot day of the season, peaking at 93 degrees. It had been just about thirty minutes ago that I'd taken a few tabs of LSD when a friend began messaging me that they were having an awful day at work and just needed someone to vent to. I knew they happened to work at a nearby restaurant, so I decided, without telling them, that I would walk over and take up a table in their section to lighten their afternoon load a little bit. Only, I had forgotten that on occasion I tend to overheat on LSD rather easily, and had further forgotten about the heat of that afternoon. Luckily, I had planned ahead for other activities and already had a camelback ready to go, so I headed out the door into the blazing sun, already baring down at 91 degrees.

I arrived to the restaurant about 15 minutes later. The trip had definitely commenced. I asked to be seated in my friends section and was just on time for the only table clearing. My friend was surprised to see me, and incredibly thankful. I informed them of my situation, and that they need not worry about, or tend to me much, just a salad and a water so as to appear relatively normal while peaking on LSD in a crowded restaurant whose A/C was waking from its winter hibernation, unprepared to keep up with the heat of the newly warming season and the bustling kitchen.

Bees. That's when I first experienced humans as bees. Not for their work, but for their dizzying playfulness. There was not, yet there was, a uniform hum, a drone. It was the busy buzzing of the waves of each particular bee soaring through the room as pure vibration. The light they exuded, the sounds they formulated out of that opening near the bottom of their faces, the stillness of their motion and the motion of their stillness, beings being the local-hidden variables of the scene at large, becoming the mark of an always already absent present trace-wave of spooky action influenced by the physical element of their very present reality; beings quintessentially here and now, perpetually anticipating a state of becoming small echoes of the past. The buzz of the crowd and the intensity of all the light were focused into a two-way perspective with a single breath as a cool sensation passed over my skin. In this moment, I wondered how our new puppy was doing at home alone unsupervised. I closed my eyes and took another breath, and out of a thick fog—a dark cloud in the Space of awareness—there arose the koan,

“Does a dog have Buddha nature?”

To which I responded, “Rrrroughly!” I began giggling to myself, appearing allegedly alone and crazy in a crowded restaurant. Soon after this I received my salad and my water and officially became my own particular buzzing buffer amongst the busy bees.

Having already bypassed the construction zone of deconstruction, and the tangle of words which become new thorns in our sides, I knew first that a dog is not literally a Buddha, an enlightened man or woman, so it can't therefore quite have Buddha nature because it is a dog, and only a Buddha is Buddha in a world of human exceptionalism. Beyond the silly, it is actually more that the dog we are considering is not a dog. A dog is a concept. The nature of the thing, the reality of what it is, is that it is a rrruff—rrruff.

So if a dog is not a man, he can't therefore be an enlightened one with the title Buddha, however, if a dog is not a dog set up against the linguistics of human exceptionalism and instead lives within the same broader consciousness as a Buddha, then this rrruff-rrruff has the same access to that same unbounded nature of awareness which the Buddha inhabits and inheres. Thus, roughly speaking, a dog does have Buddha nature; though roughly speaking, the nature is not the Buddha's.

In fact, to consider that a dog does not have Buddha nature would be to confirm the false notion that the dog is just a separate thing stuck inside the bone-box protecting your brain; a separate consciousness there instead of the same consciousness here. To consider that a dog does not have Buddha nature is to consider that you are a rider sitting atop an elephant, that there is out there, separate from you, everything else that is happening. That you can only hope to reason, to reach for the rational point where you are logically the observer of it all, watching yourself ride the deterministic elephant, all while overlooking the fact that you as a rider on an elephant requiring that there be an observer to the observed is a set of devised ideas—just ask your Ego.

The mind, like the dog, is not something that is divided up, and then ridden like an unconscious elephant. This would be to say that the fountain of our very ~~being~~ becoming has an isolated energy, and that this disjointed source, the blind leading the blinded, will carve the only proper and determined path ahead until you find it deep within, whatever yourself is, to make the rare and rational, actionable decision to reroute your dog-walking elephant. We don't really know what it is that we are aware of, there's just the goings on and the goings off in the path we wear; and that is saying too much of the matter.

Moreover, one must ask, who is in control of the dog or the elephant? What watches the dog watch the dog for the dogs sake? There is no observer inside the dog observing the goings on of the dog, there is just the rrruff.

And then if you are not, if rarely, in control of the elephant, who is to say the elephant is in control of itself? Who or what observes the elephant for the elephants sake? Where is control for you in any of this? If there is none to be found then is the world just randomized determinism? Well, randomized determinism is just another notion.

Just as the clouds happen, your thoughts happen. The elephant is not happening to you, what is happening is what you do, and what you do is what is happening.

A dog roughly having Buddha nature is also born out of the story of when the buddhist master Jōshū was asked this very question, to which he responded, “No.” Or more accurately, in the Chinese,

“Mu.” Several problems arise from this, namely what is the meaning of the word “No.” For, when asked on another occasion, Jōshū responded “Yes.” Both answers sound as meaningful as “dog.”

Therefore, utilizing Jōshū’s humorous homophone and honing into the heart of Zen, one may answer the question, “Does a dog have Buddha nature,” by stating that, “Yes, the cow does.” Or, “Moo.”

So I finished my salad, and I buffered the service for about 45 minutes, helping attune the atmosphere to a calm hover. My temperature had relaxed and the peak was done, but the heat outside was still rising, so I headed straight home instead of going on my earlier planned post-initial-peak walk. I got home and essentially collapsed onto the sofa, basking in the cooled air of the front room. After a moment of chilly bliss I sat up to see my front room in a blur, as if looking through a diffuse piece of glass—dizzy from the head rush, when I was then asked,

“What is the sound of one hand?”

To which I greeted the blur, waving at that three-quarter wall now coming into focus, “Hello!” I sort of felt like I was going to fall over, the heat outside had really been getting to me, (definitely *not* the LSD). Again, the question was presented,

“What is the sound of one hand?”

To which I replied, “A tree falling in the forest.”

If a hand waves, does it make a sound? If a hand waves at a blurred wall and no-one is around to hear it, does it wave it’s conscious Hello at all? For a time now I had been contemplating the question of whether or not a tree makes a sound when it falls in a forest if no one is around to hear it. Through the practice of Zen so far I had determined that it did indeed make a sound as far as the concept of sound goes, but that it would be more that it is a vibrational communication, and likely a biological and chemical one as well; which is just a different level of vibration. Later that Summer I would argue this in my essay, *When Quantum Trees Fall*.¹ Six months after I published that essay, the journal *Nature* released an article proving, more or less, that very answer by utilizing methods of Science-3. They stated in their article, titled, *Stressed plants ‘cry’ — and some animals can probably hear them; Microphones capture ultrasonic crackles from plants that are water-deprived or injured*²,

“We found that plants usually emit sounds when they are under stress and that each plant and each type of stress is associated with a specific

¹ Shenefelt, Christopher., “*When Quantum Trees Fall*,” *The Quantum Moiré*, 2022., c2, pp. 46-55

² Marris, Emma., “*Stressed plants ‘cry’ – and some animals can probably hear them, Microphones capture ultrasonic crackles from plants that are water-deprived or injured.*,” *Nature* 616, 229 (2023), doi: <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-023-00890-9>

identifiable sound. . . While imperceptible to the human ear, the sounds emitted by plants can probably be heard by various animals such as bats, mice, and insects.”

Thus, “Does a tree have Buddha nature?”

“Bark! Bark!”