

What is the Meaning of Zen?

Ironically, I've arrived here roughly at a loss for words. I've spent some time considering what to say here, diving back into old notebooks, and journals, and pieces of art, lectures by various Masters, what have you, and all the messages are always beautifully the same; in an elegantly linguadextrous manner, they, sometimes at great length, advise you to stop talking about it; anything you have to say about it is nonsense. There's nothing you can say of your encounter that's not a conceptual justification of what ~~was~~ is. Alan Watts said of this,

“There is another saying, that the student who has attained Satori goes to Hell as straight as an arrow. No Satori around here! Because anybody who has a spiritual experience, whether you get it through Za-zen, or LSD, or anything, you know, that gives you that experience, if you hold onto it and say, “Now, I've got it!” —ffspst!—it's gone out the window. The minute you grab the living thing it's like catching a handful of water; the harder you clutch, the faster it squirts through your fingers. There's nothing to get hold of. Because you don't need to get hold of anything. You had it from the beginning. Of course, you can see that by various methods of meditation. But the trouble is that people come out of that and brag about it.”¹

I have typically approached LSD therapeutically. Initially it was indeed for psychotherapy, though as time would unfold I would discover that it has implications for physical therapy as well in terms of pain and fatigue reduction, for someone with a central nervous system as alive and dysfunctional as mine, or an immune system with dysfunctional white blood cells, it may just be an unexpected key to the pangs of the problem.

After my first LSD trip in 2019 it would be three years before I would take it again. I did so because just a few weeks before the three year anniversary I had fallen into an inexplicable depressive slump, and the weight of all my pains seemed to be over-whelming to the point of suicidal ideation. I could recognize then that it was not the same as it had been in the years before, but it was so constant again, overcasting any other thought I had, and consuming any task I needed or wanted to complete, that I knew if I just had one more trip it would do the trick. If there was a struggle in my meditation practice it was cutting through the immensity of pain flares.

Notwithstanding, in the summer of 2022 I would learn that it is not a struggle of any sort of practice or method I use, or any limitation of my own being, but that there is a difference between a stone Buddha, and a living Buddha,

¹ Watts, Alan., *Zen Bones*, 1967, online at <https://www.organism.earth/library/document/zen-bones>

“In Zen, there is a difference made between a living Buddha and a stone Buddha. If you go up to a stone Buddha and you hit him hard on the head, nothing happens, you break your fist or your stick. But if you hit a living Buddha, he may say, “Ouch!” And he may feel pain, because if he didn’t feel something he wouldn’t be a human being. Buddha’s are human, they are not Devas, they are not Gods. They are enlightened men and women. But the point is, that they are not afraid to be human, they are not afraid to let themselves participate in the pains, difficulties, and struggles that naturally go with human existence.”²

I was no longer afraid to be this pain-ridden human with dark and unrelenting, no respawn desired, do not resuscitate, I’m just opt out now ‘cause that wall looks nice at 85MPH, or that’s probably a high enough bridge, type thoughts. These struggles are a natural part of the experience, because they can’t not be.

As the days turned to minutes, and the minutes into years, and the years into milliseconds, and the milliseconds into millennia, my meditation practice was really taking on that keenly key and crooked form. Full-body dissolution was commonplace—disproving a reality set to switches—as I soured high above creating my cloud solitude, time a funny object, space a melody, and the ebb and floe of the undercurrent of the Void.

From my journal:

(June 19, 2022)

“My experiences with the void were not the first. I had already been there on three separate occasions across three LSD trips. The void had asked me some Zen koans I had heard, but never bothered to answer for myself during my meditation practice.”

As time had gone on in this sitting zen way, having devoted so much of my time to counting my breaths and gathering the senses and realizing the queer labor in all of that, I had first found myself in a park one summer afternoon while on LSD. It was May 22, 2022, in the early afternoon at seventy-two degrees with a partly cloudy sky, as well as steady winds with gusts up to 28MPH.

By now it had been some time since I had learned of the Zen koans, but it had never occurred to me to provide my own answer to some of the questions. It was also likely due to the fact that I had never discussed these matters with anyone in a dialogue, let alone with a Master of the craft.

² Watts, Alan., *Zen Bones*, 1967, online at <https://www.organism.earth/library/document/zen-bones>

I sat on a metal park bench facing West, watching nothing in particular, just the unbounded Space of awareness. I was breathing steadily, and could feel the late-Spring heat against my cheeks contrasting the sensations of the Spring breezes emerging and fading, or steadying. Some unknown time into this sitting a weighty gust of wind swept through from the northwest, carrying with it the question,

“What is the meaning of Zen?”

The gust of wind found itself in a Lull, as the birdsong in me chirped and chimed with a chortle,

“A flower petal floating on the view.”

I remember being absolutely astonished and downright delighted as I saw a single pink rose petal soar right through my perspective view during the exact duration of the Lull between wind gusts. It travelled from the upper right to the lower left before catching its next ride swiftly upwards and further south. Part of the astonishment came from knowing that there were no rose bushes in the vicinity, yet there was the passive petal as active as a windless wind; traveling some distance simply to mutually entail an interwoven realization of living circumstances. Adjacent to that, it seemed that the petal, like myself, had come to find that while being alone can be quite romantic, even if the only memory of it resides at the Lull between gusts, it needs—however brief—a little company. Because to be alone is like being a stone Buddha, it's alone, not alive. We are not alive on the flower of inter-connected life today and then sailing alone to our dusty composite the next. That's just one of the many poorly fitted frames we have forced onto a frameless world. We are, rather, on a fantastic voyage to parts unknown. It was here when I saw what was meant,

“. . .when this artist, Hasegawa, was asked, “How does one see into Zen?” he said: “It may take you three seconds, it may take you thirty years. I mean that.” And so, you see, there is always the possibility that it may take only three seconds. Zen literature abounds with stories, you see, in which there's a dialogue—or what is called in Japanese *mondō*, which means ‘question-answer’—between a Zen teacher and his student, and these dialogues are fascinatingly incomprehensible. But it always seems to be that [at] the end of this swift interchange, the student gets the point. Sometimes he doesn't.”³

³ Watts, Alan., *The World As Just So, Part 1.*, online at <https://www.organism.earth/library/document/out-of-your-mind-7>