

Definition of Zen – Kent State University

1976²

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The talk tonight is about the definition of Zen. The reason for this is that over the years the definitions in the mind of the public have changed. First of all, it takes awhile to understand them, and I find that they're continually fluctuating by virtue of use. The way the word Zen is used now causes a different understanding of it by the majority of the people. Of course, it's questionable whether the word Zen will ever be understood or even defined for the majority of the people, or even the majority of the people who are interested in it.

I have found a considerable variance between many of the Zen movements and the stuff I studied from a personal teacher.³ This man took issue with things that are repeated in many books on Zen today. Some of the things emphasized now – and probably emphasized for several hundred years – were authenticity by virtue of a rubber stamp, and claims about their lineage. The man in question refused to talk about his lineage. He said, "I'd give it to you if you want, but I think it's nonsense." But this seems to be one of the keys in Zen literature, and in the basic understanding by the public about Zen.

This happened to me quite a few years ago⁴ and at that time hardly anything was written about Zen. In fact, I heard about the man in question, his name was Pulyan, by word of mouth.⁵ I had gone out to California and ran into some fellow who had been digging into Zen for a few years, and he knew both Sokei-an⁶ and Pulyan. D.T. Suzuki⁷ was writing

¹ Url: <http://direct-mind.org/index.php5?title=1976-Definition-of-Zen-Kent-State>

For access, send email to editors@direct-mind.org

² Date based on PZ newsletter, courtesy of Al Fitzpatrick.

³ Alfred Pulyan. See <http://www.selfdiscoveryportal.com/Pulyan.htm>

⁴ Rose's correspondence with Pulyan was 1960-1961: <http://selfdefinition.org/pulyan/>

⁵ See <http://www.selfdiscoveryportal.com/Conquest.htm>

⁶ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sokei-an>

books – he was the only authority on Zen at the time for which you could buy books or get them at the library. Later on, Alan Watts came out.^{8,9} The first time I ran across Watts was in an article he wrote in an underground newspaper about beatnik Zen.¹⁰ And I had a feeling that he knew something. He was either not revealing it, or he was trying to write for a mediocre public; he wasn't going to come out with the whole truth about Zen, if he knew it.

Since then, movements have sprung up around the country. And the philosophic public is inclined to believe that these movements are all valid, and that possibly the ones that are the most valid are those who wear the clothes, the uniform, or who claim some sort of oriental patronage, as if they came through some school.

Bodhidharma's four principles

Now I'm going to abbreviate that and to come in from a different angle, because we can't review all the books. I don't know how many of you are acquainted with Zen, but the outstanding authorities, I think, down through the ages, were people like Huang Po¹¹ and Bodhidharma.^{12,13} Now Bodhidharma defined Zen, and you'll find this in Suzuki's Zen writings. According to Bodhidharma there were four things Zen had to have or it wasn't Zen: First, that it was a separate transmission outside of the scriptures; second, an absolute avoidance or disregard for words and letters; third, direct looking into the soul of man; and the fourth of course was arriving at Buddhahood – they contemplated that it could be done.

The first one implies transmission, and transmission implies more than one person. Now any person can reach enlightenment, possibly. And when I repeat this, people don't understand, and they think I'm violating some premise when I become so critical of certain Zen movements. But anybody by themselves can reach enlightenment, if they're persistent enough and if they dig enough – to find out some of the things they have to do, things they have to avoid, and to put total energy into a given project.

But the Zen system endorses cooperation with someone else. So does the Christian system. And I draw a parallel with the sayings of Buddha and the sayings of Christ: "The way, the truth and the life" are synonymous with "The buddha, the dharma and the sangha" – which means the truth, the discipline and the brotherhood. The way is the discipline, the truth is the buddha-nature, and the life is the brotherhood or the

⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/D._T._Suzuki

⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan_Watts .

⁹ E.g., *The Way of Zen*, 1957. PDF: <http://selfdefinition.org/zen/>

¹⁰ Possibly *Beat Zen, Square Zen, and Zen*, 1959. PDF: <http://selfdefinition.org/zen/>

¹¹ 9th century http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Huangbo_Xiyun

Also see: <http://www.selfdiscoveryportal.com/cmHuangPo.htm>

¹² 6th century. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bodhidharma>

¹³ Bodhidharma – PDF here: <http://selfdefinition.org/zen/>

apostolate. Now don't let me insinuate that Buddhism is Zen or that Zen is Buddhism. Possibly both emanated from the same source; one was a total discipline whereas the other was a layman's discipline. And as time passed they became separated and there was no relationship at all hardly between them.

So when we use the first term, "a separate transmission outside the scriptures", it doesn't just apply to Buddhistic scriptures; it applies to any scriptures, any dogma. So as soon as you start seeing a prolific number of books put out on the subject of Zen or any system – especially if that tends to become a dogmatic system – you have to be a little suspicious of it: Are we getting into words and letters once more? Are we starting to build a vocabulary? Do we now find the foreign words and phrases as enchanting as Latin was a few decades ago?

Transmission implies that it's possible that a person who has, can extend. Even if he can't completely transmit the experience, he may be able to help. If he's not a teacher he may be a member of a group; and being in a group, whether it's Alcoholics Anonymous or a Zen group, results in an objective mutual help for all participants. But the ability to transmit is a necessary part of Zen. It really isn't Zen unless there's somebody there who can transmit.

The second thing of course is getting away from words and letters. You throw your books away; we don't need books. And the third is going directly into the mind of man, or the heart of man, or the soul of man. Of course you don't know you have a soul until you go within and find out what's there, but we presume that whatever is in there – just go in and you can find out.

Now there's a reason for this particular statement of principles. Zen is an elusive thing, and down through the ages there were many advocates or devotees or whatever you want to call it in different countries, but then it disappeared. It disappeared in India and appeared with Bodhidharma in China. It thrived for awhile in China and disappeared from there, and it's now in Japan, predominately. But regardless, the same theory or soul of Zen, the same theme, has been maintained through the ages, because of these precepts that were laid down. And these precepts weren't laid down to inhibit behavior, or to try to get you to walk the party line; they were there to keep it absolutely pure of dogma, and from becoming an institution. If it became an institution, it automatically stopped you from thinking; you would rationalize acting a certain religious role, rather than actually *being* religious – spiritual or wise or philosophical, or whatever you want to call it.

Zen state of mind

So it comes back to the fact that Zen is not any part of any religion. Zen is basically a state of mind. I read one of the Zen writers, incidentally, who defined it as that, and this

is very accurate.¹⁴ Zen is a mental technique, a mental discipline, and again, it is not part of Buddhism. Now a lot of people are Zen-ish and don't know it, perhaps like George Bernard Shaw – a person who has an unusual amount of common sense and wit, and was able to bring his point across, not by argument but by digging and pointing out and jabbing a little bit here and there, until a person becomes aware of another state of mind or another frame of mind.

I maintain that Zen is basically nothing more than common sense. Now most of us don't like something that is just plain common sense. We would like to have something mysterious and complicated, which could be bought for a thousand dollars, a hundred dollars or ten dollars – wrapped up and shipped in a package. But it must be mysterious and something tremendous and intricate.

And basically *it is* – something tremendous and intricate; and at the same time it's very simple, just common sense. We hear so many talks, and there are so many books written, like Benoit¹⁵ – complex books on the intricacies of why you should be allowed to think along Zen lines – these tremendous apologies of Zen by psychiatrists on “why it might be practical and tolerant” to think along Zen lines. This is just another book of words.

But actually, we are students of the truth, number one. The purpose of a student of Zen is to find the answer. Of course, he doesn't want the answer to how many calories are in this piece of bread, particularly. He wants the answer to all of life, the answer to three major questions: Who am I? Where did I come from? Where am I going? And these aren't answered too accurately by the dogmatic religions. They swing off into storybook adventures and tales. And incidentally, Zen also has its crop of little anecdotes, which I don't think have too much meaning. And I wonder of course why. I think the word Zen became magical for a period of time, and anything that was written on it would attract attention.

Common sense

Basically the whole thing is everyday common sense and practicality. And if it doesn't start with that then you can't pursue it, in my estimation. I notice that a tremendous lot of people want to pursue a profound religion, a profound philosophy, while hanging on to a life of non-common sense. They want to keep up whatever role in life they're playing, as though they didn't dare let loose, and at the same time they say, “Hey, tell me what I have to do to get this.”

If this is the total value of life, then I want it. And possibly in order to get it – it's not going to be something you could package in the form of wisdom you can memorize or learn. It's basically something that changes you; and in the changing you *become*. So the

¹⁴ Possibly Jack Kerouac. Can't seem to find the phrase in Watts or Suzuki.

¹⁵ Hubert Benoit, *The Supreme Doctrine*. PDF: <http://selfdefinition.org/zen/>

whole problem is that if you're not ready to drop the stuff that isn't common sense, you'll not proceed. And you'll write into every line you hear, or every proposition made to you – to shape your head, to get you to try to confront yourself, to analyze your own thoughts – you'll only accept what you would prefer and like. If you think it's okay, if it flatters your previous concepts, you'll accept it; and if it doesn't you'll reject it.

This happens at every lecture. There's always something I say that somebody will challenge. They'll say, "Ho. If you're not in favor of this particular form of the modern liberal movement, you're not enlightened." Someone who hasn't stuck their nose in any form of philosophy or spiritual endeavor will tell me who's enlightened, by virtue of whether I'm politically popular. They're going to hang onto what they wish, demanding that God be defined in term of liberalism.

Zen uses plain common sense to reach absolute knowledge. We're not talking now about just knowing who you are in a psychological sense – but we might begin with an intense application of psychology and self-analysis, to find out who you are, and find out where you come from and where you're going.

How people are swayed

Now, how do we determine whether we have common sense? Everybody thinks they have common sense. Everybody thinks in fact that common sense is what the most people think and do – and this isn't necessarily true. Most reactions of people are like goats – they are led. The majority of people are led – this was said by an eminent theologian, Cotton Mather,¹⁶ and by an eminent communist, Karl Marx. Both of them made the remark that the masses are incapable of governing themselves. But people think that by democratic vote, that's all it takes. So we're voting on stuff celestial and psychological. And we're coming up with voting on what sanity is and voting on what God is – and when you vote him down, he'll disappear, obligingly, and not cause us any more trouble.

Common sense is not being fooled by clever advertising. I'm not buying a car because it's pretty, or a product where the advertising hints that you should buy it because it's popular. The big theme is, "Everybody is buying this today." And people rush out and buy it, and pretty soon everybody's buying it – but only after they saw the advertisement that said everybody was buying it.

Now we say, "Sure, we know all that – and we reject it." But when you go to the store and come home with a bundle do you ever say, "How did I come to buy this? Did I see a commercial? Why did I pick this one instead of the one that wasn't advertised?" It's become almost a religion: Things are advertised grade A, and if you pay a lot for it, it's got to be special. Don't buy anything cheap, because it's second-class material. How do you know? But we have become brainwashed into following these yardsticks of

¹⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cotton_Mather

popularity. And of course there's the appeal that the product will make you popular with the opposite sex. Almost all of us will buy the toothpaste with the ad that shows us the smile before and after: the girl running, the girl coming back, bad breath, Clorets, physical culture. And people go to school because they see a glamorous advertisement.

I had a fellow tell me one time – he was a native of Scotland and I ran into him in Denver, Colorado. I was working there when they first started working on streptomycin,¹⁷ and he was there trying to save the last part of his lung. He had been shot down over Afghanistan, fighting in the Afghan war for the British. I said, "How did you ever wind up in the British army?" He said, "Those blasted bagpipes." They came into a Scottish town playing bagpipes and he fell in line. "The next thing you know," he said, "for a shilling a day they got me." But what got him was his inability to see through this fake glamour that was built up. There was no glamour on the battlefield. He said that when he got shot down they told him, "Well, you've lost a lung." The thing he guided the airplane with went through one lung, and he got tuberculosis in the other. The British had no way of treating him so they just dropped him.

But a lot of things are done like that. How many people today are working in uniforms? Maybe they even have to supply or pay for the uniforms themselves, and work for less money. Guards at plants – they think they look glamorous or handsome. And nurses too. I'm not throwing rocks at nurses, my wife is a nurse – not that I might want to throw a rock or two there – but I saw that she was working for nothing. Because she was continually flattered into believing she was Florence Nightingale of the modern times – she was out working miracles and healing the sick and all this sort of thing. And she was doing the dirty work as a scrub nurse for a doctor who made a thousand or two thousand dollars a day off her labor, while she made twenty-five. But nevertheless she was staked into this by virtue of the fact that she didn't have the common sense to see she was just being used. She could have made more as a cashier in a Kroger store.

We go in for things like name-dropping. Name-dropping divorces us of our common sense sometimes. If we hear that Joe Garagiola the ball player endorses something, we don't think for a minute that he's a rascal – everybody likes Joe Garagiola. Or some movie star, let's say. Loren Greene is advertising dog food now. I never saw a dog on Bonanza, or I might think he had some experience with them. They get a race car owner to advertise STP and this produces a profitable return for the advertiser. They pick these people not for nothing, but because this has a psychological effect.

Also we have this business of deference for authority. When you get down to your daily life, I don't care where you go, someone is taking advantage of your refusal to apply common sense; it costs you at every turn. I remember they used to have a commercial, "Ten New York doctors say ..." Remember that one? It was Carter's Little Liver Pills. And then the Pure Food and Drug people come out and said, "These aren't liver pills." They were little more than a placebo, a mild physic. They had to take them off the market as liver pills. But for years that's what sold Carter's Little Liver Pills.

¹⁷ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Rose_\(mystic\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Rose_(mystic)) See Biography section.

So now we have, “Modern psychiatrists say ...” Well, we know what modern psychiatrists are saying because we finally got a few of them who will argue with each other. The old school of psychology was originally one of experimentation with an open mind. Then of course it became Freudian, and then behavioristic: trying to determine by graphs and that sort of thing the substance of a person’s mentality or thought. That was Skinner.¹⁸ This of course was thrust aside by new schools of thought such as Fritz Perls¹⁹ and Thomas Harris²⁰ and these people. And some of them were idealized and considered great authorities, great pioneers. But the amazing thing about this country is that somebody is always writing biographies of people as soon as they die, or even before they die, and we find that some of these eminent authorities were extreme alcoholics or extreme psychotics. Even Fritz Perls’ own people claimed he was psychotic, aberrated.

Pretense

Another thing we’re snowed by is pretensive terminology. Now there’s a reason for this drift I’m taking because this all applies. We apply these same thing to philosophy, and movements, groups, cults or what have you. We apply the same common sense as you would for sorting out the cheapest toothpaste or the cheapest aspirin – when they say you have to have a quarter-grain of aspirin and it doesn’t matter what you pay for it – rather than buying something with a fancy title or that comes in a fancy tin box. If we don’t have the common sense to take care of the food we feed our children – we’d rather listen to an advertisement – how can we possibly get the common sense to sort out the religions or the cults – that are supposedly reaching out beyond the established, old, dogmatic religions for a brave venture into total knowledge? We’ve got to have some real common sense. We’ve got to start from the bottom.

So we take this thing of pretensive terminology. The drug prescriptions used to be written in Latin, supposedly so they couldn’t be duplicated – hardly anyone knew how to read them. I think the most important reason they were written in Latin was so they could give a prescription to a druggist that was a placebo – and the victim didn’t know the difference and thought he’d been given something that could cure him. It covered up a tremendous lot of inadequacy. If he gave the wrong medicine and it killed the patient – they couldn’t read his writing, possibly. The druggist made a mistake or the doctor made a mistake, but they could translate it to suit themselves. The same applies to the legal profession. Why do they have everything in Latin? I think for the same reason; you had to have a language. Now we have too much language today – our technical language, in chemistry and electronics and that sort of thing. We’re getting all this vocabulary, and half of them are about you having things to cover up, for the purpose of certain trades.

¹⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B_F_Skinner

¹⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fritz_Perls Demonstrations can be seen on Youtube.

²⁰ *I’m OK, You’re OK.* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Anthony_Harris

It goes clear down to eating in the restaurants. We always have French dishes – this spring I was over in Egypt and I noticed they had everything written in French. They called the fish a loup de mer²¹ francais or loup de mer anglais, but it was always the same fish – they only had one type of fish. They had beef and that was written in French too, but it wasn't beef – it was water buffalo, and it was like neoprene. But it was a fancy word. They put towels on the table and napkins and fancy silverware and that sort of thing. But you were led to believe you were living it up by eating something that you didn't understand.

Now we go back further into everyday life, and we find that everybody is interested in fooling everybody else. This is where the basic thing of truth begins. If you want to find out the ultimate truth – how can you avoid the daily truth while still being basically truthful? We need to live in a truthful manner in order to be consistent with ourselves and with our friends – because these are the mirrors of ourselves, even if we're going the trip alone. If we're hated by our family and our friends because of our own misconceptions, how will we be able to see ourselves clearly without this yardstick?

We hear the jingles and commercials on the radio or television and we listen to them until they become hypnotic – and you go out and buy a Pepsi-Cola or whatever they're advertising. You also have the lucky coupon deal. The people who sold aluminum siding for houses used to go around and say, "It will cost you \$5,000, but for every customer you get for us we'll knock \$50 off the cost." So they get a customer for the fellow and he knocks \$50 off their bill – and he charges the next one \$5000 plus another \$50. And this type of pyramid thinking is very common – getting something from sending in your neighbors, mailing in so many box tops, some little contest or name-guessing, and you get a Cadillac or lord knows what, a free subscription to a magazine.

Also we have the psychology of repetition; this has been something known for a long time. It was one of the first psychological gimmicks, whether in salesmanship or in learning. Keep repeating and repeating until all of a sudden the victim agrees. Another is the admonition that some product will take care of everything. Snake oil seventy or eighty years ago would heal everything.

Spiritual sales gimmicks

I want to give a parallel now with how some of these things affect a spiritual or philosophic path. Some people prefer to use the word spiritual and some call it psychological or philosophical. But I'd like to show you the parallels between this everyday advertisement and the philosophical or spiritual advertisement.

For example corresponding to the jingles, which are repetitive and hypnotic, now you have chanting. Likewise, the psychology of repetition is exercised in mantras – repeating the mantra you can become convinced. The coupon deal is when you get through a

²¹ Sea bass.

course and become a teacher, and then you can take a rake-off. And how many little brochures that we might pick up claim that this or that practice cures everything? They take care of your peace of mind and ensure that you become wealthy, and that everything you do is alright. And in fact some mantras are guaranteed to bring you anything you want – just keep chanting them.²²

Now of course in sales we have a thing called subliminal advertising – suggestions that are hypnotic; they appeal to something that actually carries you away, without realizing you're being carried away. Then we have the thing that's called addiction, where you're given a free sample, a free pack of cigarettes, and the next thing you know you're hooked. Corresponding to these, for subliminal advertising in esoteric matters we have what I call "zapping".^{23, 24} This is subliminal; you don't know it's happening. Sometimes the results take you quite a ways; it's like the cumulative effect of pot – you accumulate a lot of this hypnotic indoctrination, and before you realize it you've been zapped.

Healing is another one. And healing is very true – a lot of people get healed; the apostles healed. But it's a subliminal sort of thing. Very few people know the mechanics of healing. But they like to leave the impression that they're the right arm of God. My conviction about healing is that it's human energy projected – you've got to have it before you can spend it.²⁵ And if you don't have enough of it, it's nice to go into a crowd and tap some of the crowd's energy.

Another technique is suggestion: fear suggestions and suggestions that placate. This corresponds to the hypnotic advertisements. We'd like to hypnotize people with the fear of going to hell – at least that's what happened in the past. Or saying, "Now that you're a troubled soul because I've scared the wits out of you, let me placate you with the blessing." And they get five dollars for a trip to the tent. As for addiction: how many of these movements stand out as unique, all-curing philosophies and tell you this explicitly? They'll take care of everything. All you have to do is trust yourself to the guru – give your guru your karma. You may be slightly insolvent but all your cares will be taken away.

Psychology and psychiatry

Now let's go to this business of understanding the mind. The third directive of Bodhidharma is that we go directly to the soul of man – this is what happens in Zen, and we'll get to that a little later. The second one was to avoid words and letters, meaning you don't read textbooks. Now I'm continually reading books of psychology – against my own advice – because invariably there's some new word thrown out, a new system, a

²² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nichiren_Shoshu

²³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shaktipat>

²⁴ From Pittsburgh meeting March 4, 1976: "I think Meher Baba was a phony. He was a zapper. ... It's done for money."

²⁵ See Rose, *Energy Transmutation, Betweenness and Transmission*. Also chapter 5 of *The Albigen Papers*.

new technique, and I'm tempted to see what might come out of that. But all I find is that each book is a new vocabulary – because there's a certain jealousy among men of letters, especially psychologists. I find that while they in turn curse the previous vocabulary, they create a new one. We were talking about psychoanalysis at the house today – for me the word means the analysis of the psyche, the analysis of the mind, and psychotherapy to me is the therapy or the treatment of the mind.

But there's another meaning. Freud said, "Whenever you use the word psychoanalysis, you're talking about me." He was supposed to be the father of psychoanalysis, and as of now it means the Freudian type of thinking. Psychotherapy means the Adler type of thinking. And we get down to people like Karen Horney²⁶ and Viktor Frankl²⁷ with his logotherapy.²⁸ Then there are Thomas Harris and Eric Berne²⁹ with their transactional analysis³⁰ – these are magnificent-sounding terms – and book titles like "I'm Ok and you're Ok and we're all perfect bums together." That's tempting when you first see it, but when you analyze it you find out the man is criticizing the parent while by becoming the parent with his book.³¹ He never stops to think that he's the parent, and he has to tell you how to live.

And the same with this business of Skinner and his robots. Common sense tells me that if we are all robots, we don't dare trust a robot to condition us. But Skinner says we all need to be conditioned, so that the society will be perfect. How can a robot or even a million robots decide what is perfect, what is Utopian?

Frankel, with his logotherapy, said that man could not live without meaning. And when I first saw that in his book I thought, "Wonderful, this sounds like Zen; here's somebody who wants to find out who he is." But when I read the book – he didn't want to find out who he was. He found out that people live longer in concentration camps if they created a synthetic objective, so he says go out and create yourself a synthetic objective. And then you'll live longer or you'll find more meaning in life. And he left his wife behind,³² because she was less important possibly than his manuscript; he could hang on to this book and survive the concentration camp. Freud left his sisters behind; his reason was to start up his clinics – because they were in the packaging business, they were not in the business of finding the truth.

So if this is true – some of you may throw rocks at me and say I'm mistaken; maybe so. But regardless, we're creating a Tower of Babel in the science of the mind – which is going to be hard to sift and sort, to find out which one really knows something about the mind. And I think we do have to have some understanding. You can't avoid the use of

²⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karen_Horney

²⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viktor_Frankl

²⁸ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Logotherapy>

²⁹ *Games People Play*. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eric_Berne

³⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transactional_analysis

³¹ Roles defined in TA are parent, child and adult.

³² She died in the concentration camp.

terms, you can't avoid reading books, because the books are stimulating. And I say this, that if you don't have anything else to read, read a book of psychology. It will bring you a better knowledge of yourself, even though in the process you have to prove the author inadequate. It will still cause you to think about your own thoughts, and bring you in a little closer. But I sometimes wonder how far we have come in psychiatry and psychology.

Correspondences

I have a list of words here and their correspondences.

The couch	Confessional.
Psychosis	Sin
Egotism, one-upmanship	Pride

(That's the big crime today; everybody has to stop it. Why?)

Greed, insecurity	Covetousness
Satyriasis, nymphomania	Lust
Anti-social attitudes	Anger
Hypothyroidism	Laziness, sloth
Competitional frustration	Envy

We're running through the seven deadly sins and seeing how they correspond with today's language. And what are they, basically? Are they bad, in either case? If they're bad should you be convinced of your guilt – if you feel you have to be cleared of the psychoses or the sin in order to be functional? I think of course that if you admit you have the psychoses or the sin you can start to overcome it.

But some of these things were built into us. This one-upmanship – God help us when we drop it; that's pride, and pride is necessary to keep the rooster going. He has to make a fool of himself for forty years; he must run that race in order to earn his way. If he discovers that there's foolishness in that fact, he's going to give up. So we need a lot of roosters.

And this applies to spiritual matters too. You have to hope that you're going to heaven even if everybody else goes to hell. There is no democracy in Christianity. The road to heaven they used to say is narrow, the road to hell is wide. You're going to vote yourself in? Are you going where everybody's is going? Now of course no one believes that these days – that the road to heaven is narrow and the road to hell is wide. But it's true that the percentages of the people who get into deeper phases of philosophy are much

smaller than the people who play with little ideas, who go occasionally to some sort of intensive retreat, join some movement, pay for lessons through the mail or something.

So consequently, the field does narrow. And of course, if you're investigating things, this has to narrow down too. You have to start sorting. You can't endorse everything. This is one of the things I run into in my talking: everybody wants to be endorsed. A lot of speakers get up today and they're careful not to tramp on any toes. I'm not running for office. I don't care if you vote for me or not. The only thing is, I do hope that if I learned something, it can be available to those who somehow feel there is common sense in what I have to say. And then maybe go a little further to do something on their own.

Personal search

Now I can give you, again, a little history of my own adventures in this regard. I was raised in a conventional religion. I studied to be a priest; and I was seventeen when this somehow didn't strike me as being common sense. I saw a lifetime objective; they wanted me to sign up for life. And I thought that if I'm going to sign up for life I'd better be sure of what I was doing. I wasn't sure that they were wrong – but I just wasn't sure that I had exhausted all other possibilities, to do the thing a little better. So I got to looking around. And I looked, as I used to say, under every rock. Don't be too proud to look under rocks. Sometimes the words of idiots and lunatics are more important than the pretentious words of theologians. And at one time they worshipped the idiots in Russia, in the days of Rasputin.³³

But I did look around a good bit. I stuck my nose into Spiritualism, and I was able to see what I'd call a genuine materialization. And I was not impressed, because the eighteen-odd people that I talked to didn't seem to know too much more than I did. And then I went back and remembered hearing something in the Bible, where Christ supposedly said,³⁴ "The dead know nothing." And I got reassurance of that. I wouldn't have believed that at the beginning and just ignored the chase. I had to go through the chase and find out that somebody who had run that chase before knew something about it.

But I got interested in other things and I got clear away from Christianity – I thought there was too much of a demand for blind faith, a demand for adherence, the deference for authority. "Shut up," the priests said, "The Pope will excommunicate you." To a point where finally you say the heck with it. If God is subject to the whims of these creatures who seemingly don't know more than I do, I'm checking out and I'll look somewhere else.

So, as a lot of people do today, I got interested in oriental religion, the eastern movements. And the grass is greener on the other side of the fence; that was the main reason. And I too was taken in by exotic-looking people and exotic names and terms.

³³ 1869-1916. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grigori_Rasputin

³⁴ Quote is actually in the Old Testament: Ecclesiastes 9:5.

We have a contempt for the parental language or parental religion: “Let’s try something strange and different and new.” So I went through the same thing, for quite a few years. I tried the equivalent of the macrobiotic diet – they didn’t call it that, it was just called vegetarian. You weren’t supposed to eat meat, and I thought, “That’s good enough; that’s a small price for the truth. I’ll quit eating meat.” You weren’t supposed to take in coffee either. This is the yogic path now. I shut out a lot of stuff – the opposite sex was out also, and I thought, “Well, sex a disadvantage; that’s a small price to pay for the truth, we’ll throw that out too.”

So I went at this for about seven or eight years, from the time I was twenty-one until I was twenty-eight. And I was rewarded with an increasing amount of ignorance – or seeming ignorance; I felt I was getting stupider every year. My hair was falling out, my teeth were falling out, and my ability to reproduce would soon be over, if I cared to go back to that foolishness. Several times I thought of chucking the whole thing, and tried to. Because I felt that I was basically just fooling myself. I had maybe built up a little anger. Right now I’d say that if my parental religion or established church was right, I still considered it to be as full of holes as swiss cheese. But it looked to me like there was no truth, basically. My computer kept saying that no matter where you go you’ll find phonies. The only thing is, you can’t identify an oriental phony as quickly as you can an American phony. So you linger a little longer in the cult and stay in the shadow of the guru.

Experience

So eventually I kicked it all loose and decided I was going to forget about that; I couldn’t complete it. But in none of those times that I decided to kick it was I really able to do so. Then I had an unusual experience that convinced me that there was something to look for.³⁵ And then a lot of these things that I had heard and previously brushed aside came back to me, like “First know thyself.” Nobody pays any attention to that, because you find it in so many books, that this old philosopher said, “First know thyself.” So what?

And you get to books on Zen. I found out, in one of the books by Alan Watts, where he described some of his information he got from Sokei-An, that the ultimate purpose of Zen was the attainment of no-mind. So consequently there was nothing to find – and that seemed to be almost a joke; they giggled about it together. If there’s nothing to find, why look? It never occurred to him that it was utterly absurd that people would stay in monasteries their entire lives, in Asia or anyplace, trying to find something that they knew beforehand was nothing to find. That they would just stay there and giggle about the fact that they don’t do anything.

Some other statements came back to me, like the admonition of Christ, “The way, the truth and the life.” And in Buddhist terminology, “The buddha, the dharma and the

³⁵ See “Three Books of the Absolute”. <http://www.richardrose.org/ThreeBooks.pdf>

sangha” – this sounds exotic. But it’s there in front of us all the time. And after I had this experience – I was thirty when it happened³⁶ – I tried to talk to people about it. But I found out it was much wiser to keep your mouth shut; because if you have to hold onto a job or if you go into business, you can’t afford to talk about any of this material. You can talk about who’s on first base, or about the stock market, but you get into trouble if you talk about religion – especially way-out religion, such as that you might have had a realization. But I did find a fellow, a Zen teacher, shortly afterwards – he had this realization. This was Pulyan, on the east coast.

Paul Wood

Then I found a fellow by the name of Paul Wood^{37, 38} who had had an experience that was possibly much longer than mine; it seemed to be more profound and detailed. I met him in Akron, Ohio. He had come to this realization by meditating on the Lord’s Prayer. And I was utterly amazed, because I thought that system was all washed up and that you have to find, as Chilton-Pearce says,^{39, 40} a new set of symbols to go by. That you have to toss out these old ones, that weren’t delivering results.

What had happened, he was an aviator who had dropped some bombs on Japan. And being a good Christian he wondered why the God who watched the fall of a sparrow didn’t stop those bombs from landing in the right place. And this obsessed him or pursued him until the Air Force got rid of him; they said he was a risk. So they sent him home mumbling to himself. And he got down to Texas where he worked, and he mumbled to himself until his wife threw him out. She decided he wasn’t going to be serviceable anymore so she got rid of him. And he wandered the streets still mumbling to himself. He took first one job and then another, and his family wouldn’t have anything to do with him. He had some children; his kids made fun of him, apparently.

So he got a job, as he told me, at an automobile dealership selling cars, and one day he put his head down on the desk and asked God to kill him. He had tried to commit suicide two or three times but he couldn’t do it, didn’t have the courage. And when he woke up he said he was in the hospital. He was there for about ten days. And he said he was travelling on a starship, like in Star Trek. He was travelling in outer space for about a week or ten days.

³⁶ 1947. In the original Rose says, “31 or 32”, but later corrected this.

³⁷ Also for Paul Wood see *Obstacles*, Cleveland, Ohio, Nov. 12, 1974.

<http://direct-mind.org/index.php5?title=1974-1112-Obstacles-Cleveland>

³⁸ Newspaper article from 1965 on Wood: <http://selfdefinition.org/christian/paul-wood-story.htm>

³⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Chilton_Pearce

⁴⁰ *Crack in the Cosmic Egg*, PDF here: <http://selfdefinition.org/psychology/>

I met him in a garage in Cuyahoga Falls.⁴¹ We sat in this dirty garage with some of the so-called brains from Goodyear and Firestone. We had to go to the garage because my friend who invited me over had some noisy kids in the house, and we couldn't talk, so we went out into the garage. But I sat there and listened to this man's experience and I was utterly amazed. And I said to him. "How? What brought this about?"

He said, "Well, everything hit the fan and I didn't know where to turn, until I got the Bible out. And the Bible says that when you're troubled pray thusly." And what followed was the Lord's Prayer. So he said, "I decided to give it all. If that's what it takes, repeat the Lord's Prayer; eighteen hours a day if necessary. And we'll analyze it, study it, take it apart. And whatever was meant by it, we'll try to find out." And he stayed with it. But he said the more he spent time on it and the more he walked the streets mumbling that stuff, the worse things got. He'd lose one job after another. But what was happening – something was taking him to a breaking point – in other words, to the point where his head stopped. And when his head stopped he knew everything.

Now this is what they really mean in this Zen literature about *no-mind*. They mean the point where the head stops. And they talk occasionally about killing the Buddha, or killing the mind. But you can't kill your mind. These were terms that were either lost or had something wrong with the translation, or misinterpreted. The mind is killed for you. You can't set out to kill your own mind. The only thing you can do is set out to find the truth. But in the process of finding the truth, you have to somehow put a stop to this relative hassle that goes back and forth: "It could be this but it also could be the opposite. Or let's look at it from two sides." No, you have to go right down the middle. Look at it directly. Become one with it. You can't reason it out, back and forth.

So he tried of course to pass this on to a few people, and he couldn't do it. Because he could only tell them to use the Lord's Prayer. But there was something missing when they got to studying the Lord's Prayer: they hadn't been aviators, they hadn't dropped bombs and killed people, they hadn't gone through all the little detailed steps of hell that he went through. And he couldn't project them into that.

Each man's path is slightly different. So that's the reason that no religion or philosophy has a priority on enlightenment. There shouldn't be any implication that you have to join anything. They say to have faith – but I say one of the things you've got to keep doing is doubting, not having faith. That you have to have faith is a paradox you walk right through: You have to have faith in yourself. You have to have the faith that you will either find or you'll go crazy, or drop dead. If you have that kind of faith you might get something.

Now I would like to give myself a break and let you ask some questions.

⁴¹ Rose met Wood through Robert Martin. Martin's description of Wood begins on page 91 in *Peace to the Wanderer*. PDF: <http://www.selfdefinition.org/rose/>

[Tape ends here, before the Q and A session. The audio quality of this tape was horrible. If you happen to have a decent version of this tape in your collection, please advise. Thank you.]