

Practicing Zen Without a Licence
by Jack Butler

Excerpt from opening chapter
Preface

How to Use This Book

If you do not already know how to read, please engage the module. Otherwise, you will not be able to comprehend the material. There are no images or sense peripherals provided, other than those stimulated in individual brains by the texts themselves, for the very good and simple reason that the ancients did not have access to such enhancements.

Though we can only guess at what the ancients meant when they spoke of “the willing suspension of disbelief,” it seems clear they had abilities we no longer enjoy. Centuries of experience with the perceptual apparatus has taught us that deprivation in one function is customarily adjusted for by means of superior ability in others. When they “read,” they experienced something.

There were giants in those days.

This collection is divided into sections. The sections have different sorts of things in them. Like the sutras and sayings section, where you can check out all the hottest sutras and sayings. We put them together because the sutras are important and we couldn't figure out where else to put the sayings.

Or the myths, fables, and stories section, comprised of narratives which do not refer to the masters by name and may not be reliably attributed to any known master, but which are nevertheless Easy-related.

Then there's koans, and cosmology, and coprolites. Oops, sorry. We meant Cooper's kites. Or copper lights. Something.

So if you like want to read a koan, go to the koans and anecdotes section. Simple, see? Look, Mu, no hands. Just don't try to burn two sections at the same time without a trained observer nearby in case of emergent C.

This collection stores and transmits information hologrammatically, fractally, chaotically, complexly, and quarkatronically, so you should be prepared for personal transformations in all these ways and means.

Don't be afraid of this book. This book won't bite. This book is user friendly. Begin anywhere with this book, it doesn't matter. Nothing matters. The pun at the beginning of the universe, as Wingo put it.

This book is hot to trot. This book wants to have sex with you. You can't make a mistake with this book.

What we're saying, relax.

This book wonders why you are still reading the introduction when we have made it as clear as possible that you are now free to burn the text itself. —Cassidy, Turble-Tribble, and Buzzwort, Editors

Editorial Background

Beginning late in the 20th and continuing well into the 21st century, zen swept the United States (a political subdivision of Sam which was casually and inaccurately referred to as America, although there were apparently a number of other governments in the two American continents)

The citizens of those times adhered to their doctrines with a devotion matched only by the insanity of the doctrines. They argued heatedly over such misleading dualities as “evolution” and “creation,” or “science” and “religion,” with all the fervor of Republicans declaring the divine right of kings or Martin Luther King's Scientologists protesting the abuses of the papacy.

For zen to have dissolved those meaningless but nevertheless fiercely-defended distinctions was a transition in human awareness fully as important as zen's original leap from its Buddhistic origins in India to China, or the leap that zen made from China to Japan. It is patent that true zen—and this is the last time we shall use such a redundant phrase, for if zen is not true it is not zen—remains always the same. Nevertheless, each of these shifts changed our understanding of zen practice, on the principle of action and reaction: Zen may change a society, but each society must change zen.

According to the No Poet, the “reglars gottaget tit lars.”

The popular account of this transformation is both familiar and fascinating, if sentimentalish, and rehashing it aint our purpose here. We have better things to do with our time than put out yet another lamo version of the Vodex. If that's all the enlightenment you want, you're probably a unit function anyhow.

Instead it is our hope to collect at one address, and for the first time, some of the seminal scriptures of Early American Zen (EAZ, or, henceforward, as in the vernacular, “Easy”). Some of these writings are widely available in reproduction, either as separate wholes or as portions of other texts, as well as in our jokes, lectures, anecdotes, philosophy, and lately even the trivia programs.

But we are now at a distance of some four hundred years from the origin of Easy, and perhaps our memories are growing confused. It seems to the editors of this collection that contemporary zen more and more frequently refers to itself, and less and less frequently contemplates its nature in silence.

Lotta peepa toktitok but doona woktiwok.

Such a situation is understandable when we consider that many early writings exist only fragmentarily, and only in paper text, carefully protected and difficult of access (not that the typical zennist is capable of burning Old American in the first place—or of burning paper text to brain, for that matter).

In fact, when we say that Easy began in the late twentieth century, we are making an educated guess based on later references. Legend is all we have to tell us how the great Suzuki introduced both zen and the violin to America, for example. (The violin was a musical instrument whose cat-like screeches, while perceived as melodious by the rude cultures of the time, were second only to the bagpipes—another vanished instrument—in their annoyance factor.)

This is not surprising, since in the beginning of any movement, the emphasis is on transmission of the understanding and not on preservation of the text. Indeed, master after master has observed that zen is not dependent on what can be written down or spoken aloud. In addition, thanks to the Immaterial Era and the succeeding Blackout—which was not, as folk tradition has it, a punishment imposed when humans forsook zen completely and sought to become like gods, but a result of the net's own suicidal depression at finding itself conscious—we have little information. The Blackout wiped out all electronic records, and few realtexts survive from the founding days. True, the earliest examples we have of realbux and manuscripts are from the late twentieth century and pre-date the IE (though there are few enough even of them), but none relate to Easy.

(One of the more frustrating of phenomena for a true scholar is the vulgar insistence on treating the Vodex as original material, holy text, when we know it is merely a well-after-the-fact compendium of popular tales.)

In this sense we are worse off than the Early Americans, for they had considerable if fragmentary literature from zen's origins to help them with their inquiries. Just as the Early Americans thought themselves a highly "scientific" culture although very few of their citizens had the least understanding of elementary physics, so today we assume that we all understand Easy, but few of us have any grasp of its original principles or growth.

In the IE—when glamorous electronic avatars and dazzling digital wardrobes were all the fashion, while fat progenitors stayed home alone slovenly and unbathed; when you sported on flawless virtual beaches or down precipitous virtual ski-slopes plush with eternally pristine powder; when the net appeared on the verge of subsuming humanity (this was, obviously enough, before the net became sentient, tried to turn itself off, and, failing that, took up Easy)—humans had the illusion they could consolidate all knowledge.

The result, as the ancients should have foreseen but did not, was ICE, the Information Capitalist Economy. Until the ICE thawed, artifacts were seen as "dirty" (see *Dirt World*, virtual reality, *Freddy Dallas*, et aliae). Artifacts were not technically forbidden, but were considered appurtenances of a lower caste, the "dirt-worlders."

How, we ask ourselves (with the wisdom of hindsight), could an entire species turn its back on a method which had served it so magnificently for so many thousands of years? How could there be jamokes have been so beguiled by the wildly unreliable principle that newer is better? How could they have failed to understand that when everything is new, only the old is valuable?

Why didn't at least one of those turkoids realize how priceless print would become? Or grok that the least scrap of handwritten manuscript contained more data than any of our files precisely because it was handwritten?

In their misplaced enthusiasm, our predecessors failed to distinguish between primary and secondary information. They missed the importance of gesture. We must both pity and envy the elders, who lived without external memory, in a state of primitive awareness we can hardly imagine, but who nevertheless embodied zen more fully than is possible in this decadent age.

Writing was physical then. The waver of a trained hand propelling a stylus across a blank "page"—back when "page" meant "paper"—could record the tremor of the spirit itself, in ways which we are only now beginning to understand, but which must have been manifest to those early masters.

It's a sobering thought that the founders we revere were thought of as bubbleheads by their contemporaries. This is what is meant by "the Buddha in the other body." This is what we mean when we say that zen has no preconceptions, not even the preconception of having no preconceptions.

In addition to all these other confusions, the natural velocity of human life was being adjusted to better suit the clock-time of the net—a completely wrongheaded approach, and not at all what they thought they were up to. As nearly as we can tell, they were persuaded they were enjoying "convenience" and "saving" time (though it is not clear where the savings were to be deposited). The fact that time arises from being and not being from time would seem manifest, and yet until Freddy Dallas developed the model of looped and nested time, the ancients were completely unaware of this most basic of principles.

It is difficult for us now to imagine the fractured and tortured perceptions of those legendary masters and bodhisattvas. How such isolated and fragile spirits could survive in the hurricane of dawning species awareness is not obvious. We can only admire them for their courage in persevering, while shivering at the nightmarish cold and darkness in which they walked.

And remember—to those hombres, walking meant walking. For these reasons and many others, the contemporary who wishes to study Easy faces a number of insufficiently superable difficulties. That scholar must locate sources, verify authenticity (which is an even longer search), compile according to availability, and organize by idiosyncratic and not necessarily germane categories. Although this research, or "dirt digging," is certainly a valuable experience for the learner, it is the feeling of the editors that there is a commensurate value in concentrating on the content itself.

It is our purpose here, therefore, to bring together, for the first time at one address, representations of all the available primary texts from which Easy has arisen. We do not doubt there were once other texts of equal or perhaps greater value, perhaps many others. Nor do we apologize for or seek to explain away apparent contradictions between the old masters. It is only when we can accept contradiction as fundamental and rise beyond it, after all, that we may have zen—witness the old masters once more, who disagreed on this very topic.

We believe that such a collection offers the individual mind unique advantages in constructing an effective and sensible practice. It is well established, psientifically speaking, that minds construct their models from the data at hand, not from the set of theoretically knowable data. Given that fact, shouldn't the data at hand be the sort of optimal primary data that only Optimax™ can offer?

An example of minds constructing models from insufficient data is the popular interpretation of a saying attributed to the legendary Wingo: There is the way of motion, and the way of stillness. To this day our lesser teachers persist in describing Easy as The Way of Motion, ignoring the difficult balance of the original statement and forgetting or dismissing its postulate: And these two ways are the same way.

Perhaps if we read Wingo in his own write, fewer would commit such an egregious error. Now, in our edition, primary data, which is by definition optimal data (and who better to deliver optimal data than Optimax™, the company with 73 months of experience?), is made available at one address for all.

To that end, our edition incorporates reader modules. (Reading, as most of you are aware, was a primitive method for burning information directly into a biological mind.) It is true some scholars insist reader modules are mere crutches, that only the slow and laborious task of “learning to read” in the ancient way can convey the true depth of these communications.

This may be so, but we have chosen not to engage the issue. It is our contention that true seekers of zen will either divine the essence by means of modules, or will find themselves compelled to learn “actual reading” in order to further their studies. We believe that any involvement with zen, to any degree of resolution, is beneficial—the path must begin somewhere.

These pieces cycle through many subjects—perception and reality; the question of identity; desire and karma; reason, logic, and morality; appropriate behavior; social structures (optimal and disastrous); the nature of emotion; thought; enlightenment; and so on—but we have collected them according to forms of writing, finding it simpler not to attempt organization of such a randomly-rescued, disconnected, and heterogeneous mass of source-work.

The editors are under no illusion that the current work makes further collections of this sort unnecessary. In our opinion, the work of collection and exegesis is just beginning. We offer our own little opus in just that spirit, with the hope that those who come after us will surpass us.

There is, of course, the matter of the artifacts themselves. We have quite a few of them, as it happens, one way and another. Obviously items so rare and precious as a study panel for the

original Klassical Komik The Enlightenment of Elijah Lee Roswell, say, or a print collection of the No Poet's poems, say, cannot be adequately rendered by any module. In fact, an adequate rendering would be far more expensive than simply purchasing the item. So like, you know, if anything interests you, well, you can always ask.

Like the original graphic of Kree . . . Shnaboodle . . . Ord, say.

1 - There was a guy named Cavafy who observed that time began in people and not the other way round, but he was a poet.