



The Newsletter of the Original Mind Zen Sangha of the Five Mountain Zen Order

Princeton, New Jersey

originalmindzen.com

Top-Five Zen

We all have our idiosyncratic experiences and favorites that have helped us understand Zen and living in the world. Members of the Original Mind Zen Sangha share their top-five lists throughout this issue. May something from these lists provide you with insight. Send in your list as a letter to the editor.

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Features

Dharma Latte

By Gary Cocciolillo

The aroma of freshly brewed coffee is wafting throughout the house. I pick up my mug and slowly sip its taste, its boldness, followed by a mild bitterness that is transformed into a floral aftertaste. I let out a sigh of relief as my nervous system tingles with the effects of caffeine.

Some coffee aficionados claim that democracy is the result of free minds under the influence of coffee's mental stimulating effects. A fruit from Yemen gave us new governments, politics, and economics that rule our modern world to this very day. Furthermore, without my morning cup of coffee inspiring me to write, you would have nothing read, or would be reading something else.

Why all this talk about coffee? I have been reading book about coffee, the history of its discovery, how it spread, how it is grown, dried, roasted, transported, etc... This cup of coffee I am drinking did not magically appear. Or maybe it magically appeared from an infinite tangle of causes and effects, so many that it boggles my mind at how many factors came into play for me to be drinking this coffee now as I am writing this.

Can I describe to you in words how this cup of coffee tastes, all the nuances, the boldness the bitterness, the sweet after taste? These are only words and every person's palate is unique. Every batch of coffee is unique, even if it is from the same estate.

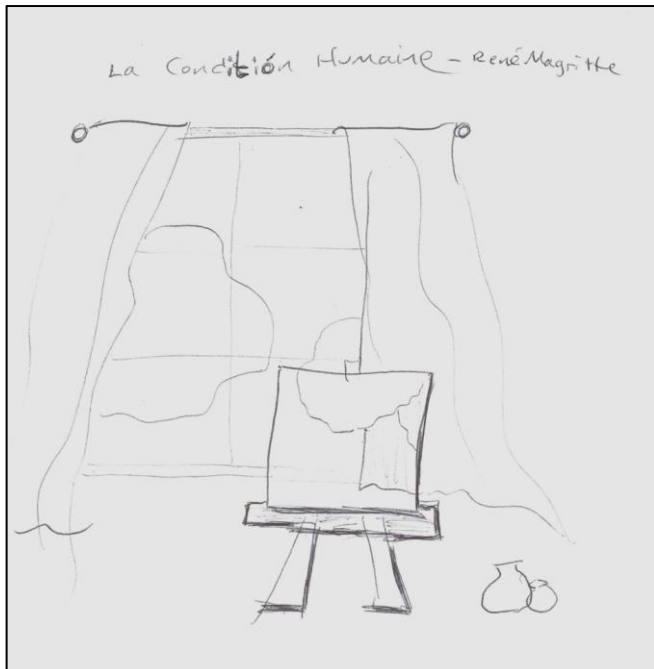
Coffee that is dried on clay will taste different from coffee dried on dirt. The plant life surrounding the coffee affects its taste, because it absorbs flavors from

surrounding plants. Each cup of coffee has subtle flavors that cannot be described with words; they can be experienced only by drinking it.

Five Zen Art Forms

By D

Coming from a Zen mind/beginner's mind, I don't know what is Zen and what is not-Zen, but I can share some images that resonate with me which might pertain to Zen. They are like what I understand to be the process of Tao and the goal of Zen, just immediate experience/taking in without any perceptions getting stuck on the sticky, thorny, outer branches of whatever my narrative head needs to box into categories, proof of hypothesis #3,952, etc. The wonderful lady who taught me this, my other mother, said that great art asks, "What is real?" You can tell me if any of this fits in the lines of Zen.



Magritte's La Condición Humana - in the picture, in a room, there is a sky painting overlapping the open window, and the outlines of the canvas where they overlap are barely visible. Until about a minute ago, I thought it was an obvious illustration of what it's like to have a clear mind, but now I'm wondering if it shows how to construct a semblance of reality? I like how it differentiates internal (room, mind) from external (sky, "reality????") without negating either. There are several

versions on this theme, all titled the same: one is a bare room, summer morning sky, another with heavy curtains, fall afternoon sky, etc. The easels might change too.

The Velveteen Rabbit, because in the story, the little rabbit asks the old leather horse what is real, and it is not the shiny, fancy metal toys with sharp edges that break easily (all the ego and constructed delusions that cause suffering), but the soft little rabbit that is fine wherever he lands and is loved by the boy until his fur wears off and his eyes are dull (I think one eye even falls out, like Robert Thurman) and finally has to go because he will make the little boy sick (letting go, pure compassion). Only then does he get real legs to move on his own and jump pure happy rabbit jumps in true rabbit-ness (interacting fully with the world as it is).

Little Big Man. I saw this movie right when I found out my folks were getting divorced and my mom and I were moving back to NY. In it, Dustin Hoffman keeps getting shuttled back and forth between a very rough shod white civilization and a maybe too idealized Native American troupe. It's a trumped up kid's cowboy and Indian story, but the idea of having a stable identity in midst of very different expectations seems like such a fun way of doing Zen, so while all the other characters impute all sorts of personalities on him (sinner, savior, businessman, warrior, gunslinger, drunk, something else for the Reverend's wife, etc.), Dustin is just busy playing with the soda fountain making it go on and off and eating the sugar. Also, the grandfather character has the greatest calm detachment to ideas, whether it's the snake women (they copulate with horses, which is strange to me...all said deadpan and kind of sweetly), or life itself (when he decides it's a good day to die and walks through the cavalry massacre without getting shot by a bullet, only to find out, after Dustin Hoffman has been crying, that it's raining and he's not going to die after all so they might as well get up and go back to the tent.)

The Incredible Hulk from the 70s. Bruce Banner, renegade scientist, drifts from town to town, identity to identity, searching for cures for his trumped-up buried rage which turns him into the Marvel character (is there a better metaphor for spiritual seeking to dealing with one's messy inner life?). He can't cling to a house, a career, a reputation, a family, even his own name, but

ends up being the good guy helping out the hosts who take him in and directing his Hulky schmutz at whatever "bad guys" are troubling the hosts of that episode.

Bamboo forest walk, Rutgers campus. Perspectives change with every step.

Lost Connection

By Jonson Miller

Technology shapes our lives through its presence. It shapes our identities and relationships with others. Communication technologies increasingly atomize us and, while allowing communication and connection of one sort, break connections of another.

Years ago, I moved in with a girlfriend. We had a real phone, what some folks now call a land-line. I did not have a cell phone, but she did. Nonetheless, we still got lots of calls to the house from friends and family. So I often spoke with her parents when they called. Friends who called would speak with whichever one of us answered. People called us.

A few emergency situations came up – a murderer stalking a friend and my father going to Iraq – so I was going to have to be readily accessible by phone. Since I was often not home, that meant getting a cell phone. My girlfriend and I then decided to drop our regular phone service because it had become an extra expense. That changed things.

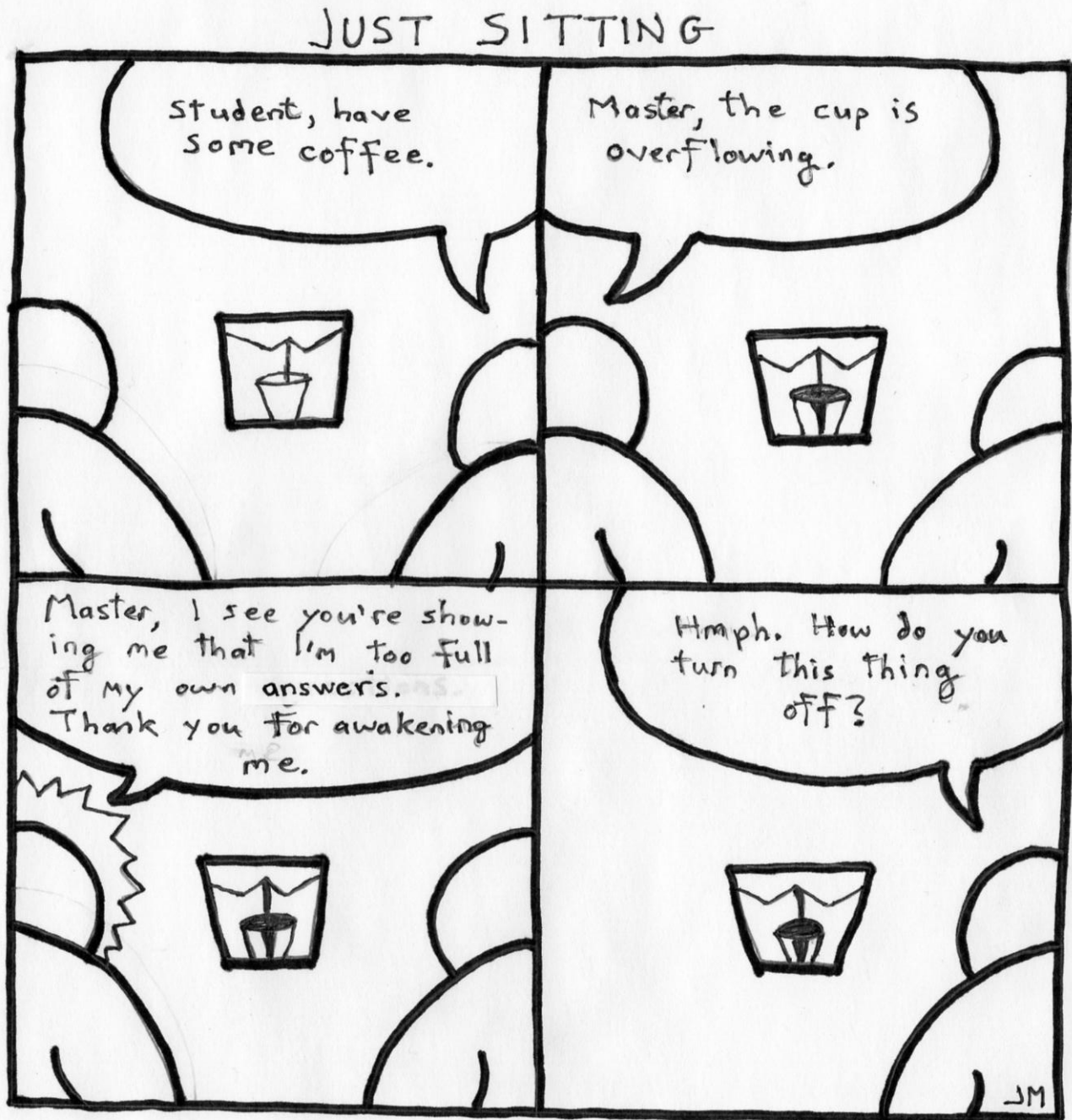
I no longer spoke with her parents, nor she with mine. We quickly found out which of our friends was friends with whom by which one of us they now decided to call. There was no longer an us, only her and me.

Friends of mine – a couple – have found similar difficulty with cell phones. Their son often plays over at a friend's house where there is no real phone. My friends often have difficulty when they try to call his friend's parents to send him home. They might, for example, call one cell phone and reach the boy's father at work, which is of no use. The cell phone is identified with an individual, whereas a traditional phone is identified with a place. When my friends want their son to come home, it is a place they need to reach, not an individual.

Phones are supposed to connect people. In a way, mine and my girlfriend's cell phones did. I was able to catch a call from my father in Iraq whenever he had a chance to call. That was nice, especially since my brother was dying from cancer, which was extremely hard on my father who was unable to be with him. But cell phones also isolate people. The regular phone presumes a home and family. The cell phone presumes the atomized individual. Which do you want? Of course, you can choose to pay for both, but you have only limited control over which of those phones people choose to contact you with.

It was the telephone that first prompted the Amish to think critically about the adoption of new technologies. They feared that if they had phones and could call one another, then they wouldn't bother going to visit in person. This would weaken their relationships. Also, if they could call anyone anywhere in the country, then their relationships with their neighbors and their fellow church members would matter less and become even weaker. For the Amish, there is nothing more important (except salvation I suppose) than the family and the local church. They were right, I believe, to be concerned about the effects of communications technology. And they're smart about it. They're by no means opposed to technology; they're just mindful of what's most important to them and how new technologies will promote or degrade what they value.

I moved in with another girlfriend, whom I later married. I let my cell phone contract expire. She never had one at all. We have only a single home phone. So I speak with her family, clients, and friends. As does she with mine. They call us. They call *our* home. Except that there's also this technology called caller ID...



Five Zen Film
By Andrew Condouris

1. The Matrix
2. The Big Lebowski
3. Barfly
4. The Song of Sparrows
5. Three Colors: Blue

Five Zen Practices Beyond Zazen
By Gary Cocciolillo

1. Breathing
2. Eating
3. Sleeping
4. Laughing
5. More laughing

Awake in the Land of Darkness,

By Andrew Condouris

It was good up there in that tree. The birds hovered and landed on the top branches. I went there most days before school. And from up in that tree I watched what happened every day on the road. And what happened every day was these two gentlemen passed each other on the road. They didn't look that different, these two. They were two different men but they didn't really seem that different. If they switched places for a day, it might not cause that much of a mess.

They never said anything to each other. Not even a nod of recognition from either one. But on this day, one of them stops. He stops and stands still. A statue. It is like he has always been there. The other man came along. He was a teacher at my school. I didn't know his name, but I had seen him in a classroom at school. This other man, this teacher, came along up to the frozen man and said things to him. He wanted to know why the stopping. I did, too.

I should go down, I thought. But I might be dreaming right now. And if I leave the tree, then the dream might end. I could hear the voice of the teacher pretty well. He didn't stop asking the frozen man questions. The asking *was* him, you might say. He was not a good person, this teacher. Something in the way he spoke, like he was not alive and breathing. As though he'd said the words before a thousand times. As though he had rehearsed all of this before. Like an actor. A bad actor. A clown.

Are you okay? May I help you? I could call someone. Is there someone I could call? Do you need help? Are you having a stroke? I could call someone in town, if you like.

Are you playing games? Is there someone in town? I could come back with them.

We need to get you to the shoulder; this road is never used but you never know. Will you just come with me just to the side of the road? Over here. Over—can you come over here? I can't lift you or move you because it might cause further injury.

Perhaps I don't understand. It has happened before, me not understanding. I just want to help. That's all. Is there something bothering you? Is it—is it over there? I don't see anything over there. I don't know what you see.

I'm concerned. Anyone would be. I'll call the police when I get into town. Would that help if I called the police?

Oh, this is no good. Well, look, if I go into town then I would be leaving you by yourself and I don't think that's a good idea. I mean, if you're sick then someone should be with you. Perhaps you could blink twice if you understand. Go ahead.

No?

Okay.

Then let's think this through. I don't want to touch you. That might not be medically wise. If I could just think for a second. Clearly this isn't good. Okay, well, let me sit and think a moment. Sometimes it's good to sit and think a moment. You're alive, so there's *that*. I mean, you must be alive since you're standing right there in front of me and you're breathing; I can hear it. This is good. I'd check for a pulse but that's silly if I already know you're breathing. I do see a pulse on your neck there. I shouldn't touch you, though. No. I don't like to touch people. Or to be touched. It's just something peculiar to my personality. I'm sure I'm not the only one. There must be plenty of others who find the touch of another simply repulsive. It's like the feeling you get when it's just starting to rain and you're caught without an umbrella. You feel the drops sneaking down your neck, falling there on the tip of your nose while you have your hands full of groceries or something. You can't wipe away the drop and that *drives you completely batshit*.

Let's change tack here. You were walking and then you came to a stop when I came over the hill there. You simply stopped. If you saw something in the distance, then it is gone now because I see nothing. Unless you see something, huh, that I don't see—but I see nothing so whatever you saw must now be gone. Whatever you saw you no longer see—but then you might see something that I don't see. What do you see? You can tell me; I'm good with secrets. I won't tell a soul. I promise.

What do you see? Is it a woman you once loved? A man? Is it a hot-air balloon? Or a monster of some sort? They say there's monsters out here, but I don't believe in such things. Mostly because—well, if I must tell you—I *am* a monster. Huh, bet you didn't know that. Huh. I walk around as a man during the

day, but when night comes I change. I change into something you'd rather not see. Or maybe you would. It takes all kinds, doesn't it?

I understand, you know? I'm not stupid. You have your reasons for stopping, I'm sure. We all do, don't we? I've even thought of it myself but it's no reason to give up. You have to dig deep and find your next step. It happens to the very best of us. It's just a game, that's all. Everyone gets a chance to play. All you need to do is stick to it and take the next step. Anything's possible, you see? But you still have to take a step. Go ahead. I'll take it with you if you like.

Let's go.

Here we go now.

Now.

It's not as hard as you think. You're overcomplicating it. At least bend your knees or wrinkle your nose.

Okay. Fine. I will be here. I'm not going anywhere. I'll stay here and stand with you. How about that? I'll play right along with you. It's all the same to me. We'll work through this together. You won't go through this alone.

There are plenty of things I don't know and I wouldn't presume to know. Yes, there's a mystery to it all. We'll just let it happen. They tell us not to be honest, not to let your heart show. It is good advice until it isn't. I don't know what to tell you. You have to try. You *have* to. It's a matter of principle. This deer-in-headlights routine is inhuman and unmanly. Now, just take one step with me. Just one and then we'll call it a day. Anything can happen. Anything at all.

Let's go.

C'mon.

No? No.

Why 'no?' What's got you so scared you can't take another step? I can't just leave you here, sir. It would be wrong. Maybe you don't think much of me but I do know right from wrong and this is undeniably wrong to just stand there and let life pass you by. Insane, stupid, childish. All of the above.

Please stop this. It is cruel to me. No one should have to suffer like this.

It's just that we've crossed paths so many times. Never uttered a word to each other in passing. We've each had a hand in it, this loneliness. It seems the more we try to connect in this world, the further apart we get. But you know all this already, of course. I

mean, since you look like a man of, I don't know, great knowing.

And when we've passed, I've often thought what a great thing it would be if we could switch places even for just one day. You could go into my job and I could go into yours. We could investigate our lives and then report back to each other. I'm sure you've thought these same thoughts. I've never seen anyone else along the road and somehow that means we've shared the same thoughts. I don't know how I know that but it seems true enough. A matter of the landscape and the weather, perhaps. This murky grey, this fog that never relents. It is bound to create the same sense of doom and gloom. Not that that's all I feel on this walk. Sometimes—and perhaps you've felt the same—a feeling of joy cuts through me like a razor blade. I don't know what inspires it. Once, I heard a bird cry and it shook me up. I suppose it was a lack of thoughts.

I should mention I've often thought of a good way to introduce myself to you. I'm not the best at small talk or social conventions, et cetera. I know a simple 'Hello' or 'Good Morning' would've been enough but I kept having this suspicion that even if I did say 'Hello' then that would somehow make you, I don't know, disappear and then I wouldn't have that calm assurance knowing I would cross paths with you ever again. Funny how silly little things can become so monumental.

But here we are and I've said much more than just 'Hello' and you're still here. Aren't you? Because I don't really know where you are. I mean, you're here but you're not *here*. We'll leave that alone. No need to get into all of that.

Silly.

This is just a moment's rest for you, isn't it? Easy to get lost in the motions, so you take a moment or two--perhaps you breathe and breathe and only keep breathing and nothing else comes up. That's fine. Why not? Far be it from me to interrupt you in your moment of clarity—oh, but I'm interrupting you now. That is foolishness on my part. I'll leave you alone, then. I can do that. Goodbye.

Well. Wait. What if you are sick? What if you are trying to communicate but you simply can't? Stuck, frozen. If the tables were turned, I believe I would want you to stay. I would want you to bend my knees and flex my arms. Shake me out of it. Shake shake shake. C'mon now; we're all aware of it. Doesn't

take much to wake up. WAKE UP! Just blink twice, bend your knees, or crack a smile! Anything will do. Not even a smile? Just show me your teeth. What would that take? Everything?

I could see why someone might think I'm the crazy one in this scenario. I can see it. Certainly. I can see what happens next. I can knock you over just to see if you have any reflexes. There must be something that wakes you up.

Wake up, please.

Please?

You know, it's funny. You know, I've made guesses over the years. You were a librarian, a lawyer, a salesman of some sort. But then someone, I think it was the mailman, told me that you were the banker. I've imagined you in town, commiserating with your cronies over the state of things. How the market's bottomed out and that you were all innocent of it. Hmm.

Perhaps you've wondered about my profession. Easy, I am a teacher. I hate my job. There. Now you know more about me than I know about you. I've been a teacher for 15 years. It's gotten so the faces of the students all blend together. They'll be wondering where I am today. That is, they'll be happy that I've not come in and they'll treat my replacement horribly, no doubt. Always the nagging feeling I wouldn't be missed. Life would go on or there'd be a mystery for a while but sooner or later I'd be flat forgotten. But I'm sure you'll be missed. Everyone will wonder what's happened to you. That will be something.

This is ridiculous! I've had enough. If you don't move soon, I'll slap you in the face. I'm not afraid. My whole life, I've always wanted to hit someone. My brothers and I would fight when we were children, but then we'd stop and find some common ground. I'll--I'll slap you lightly. I'll make sure not to hit you too hard. I'll pull a punch, as they say. Or a slap anyway. No, no. I'll give it everything I've got. You'll feel my wrath. Apologies in advance. I'll try not to break your nose or your jaw, but there are no guarantees in life. I'll do the best I can.

I will.

I promise.

Just allow me the grace uh err extend me the grace of your mercy.

My idiocy has a point. Somehow there's logic working here. I can't explain it. Call it an intuitive grasp of the moment. Huh, there are mysterious

forces at work here. I feel it in my bones but I can't name it. That is, unless I smack you in the maw. Then I'll know what I don't know, which is why I must do it. But let me work up the courage first. Have to clear out the mind, make it pure as the driven. Only at its purest can I then proceed. The act requires my full attention, my entire body, and my entire mind. There's no room for hesitation or procrastination. Yessir, I will slap you full in the face!

If only I had some implement--a stick or a stone--just for a little distance from the act itself. It needn't be anything tremendous. Nothing special. Just something that disconnects me from you. Is that the thought of a coward? Fine, I'm a coward. I've been called worse. I've been called impotent, sterile, dead, and the like. It's no problem, really. Because one doesn't have to do a thing, right? One can just--yes--stand there staring at the horizon. It is something that is done. Huh, you become a wailing wall. I've caught myself doing it once or twice in my own life--a glaze over the eyes. Lost in the last thought and waiting for the next. But nothing comes. Someone could be screaming at me, but I am lost in the fog and waiting for something to show its face. A real space baby. This happens to me more often than I'd like to admit. If I could just be in that space all the time, perhaps I would be free. Is that how you ended up in this position? Answer me! Say something! Anything! We are not limited by our pain, sir. It isn't everything. You've lost your way? Join the club. Membership one gazillion. Your mind is okay, sir. Nothing needs to be altered or scrutinized. Simply speak. Use your words. We are all here for you, at least in spirit.

A blink. A mumble. A grumble.

Anything will do.

Even statues speak occasionally.

I'm no doctor, but surely there's something to be said for tickling. Surely you must feel something tickle tickle right there on your chin. Will anything suffice? Shall I commit a homosexual act upon you? What would bring you around? Something must. A word or a phrase. C'mon now. Shake your head or nod. Tilt it. Flinch! I'm gonna punch you in the fucking face, sir.

Here it comes!

Here!

I quit. The end. No more of this dickering around. The charade is over. We are finished!

Who do you think you are? What kind of pompous asshole stands there in the middle of the

road without any concern for the consequences? Because there *are* consequences. Here is a consequence right in front of you. Yes. Me!

You are heartless and cruel, sir. Who could love someone as horrible as you? You feed off of suffering; I won't give you the opportunity. I'll leave you here. Supposed to rain this afternoon and where's your umbrella? Huh? Torrents of rain. Buckets. Cats and fucking dogs, sir.

What have I done to deserve this treatment? Only lived one day to the next, frittering them away as only God could. Yes I think I'll make it through this life unblemished, but there are reminders everywhere that say the opposite is true. You being a case in point.

You think I haven't thought of it myself? Just stopping everything? Certainly.

This is exhausting work. I can't do it anymore. Please forgive me. I've got to go now. Please forgive me. Forgive me.

Goodbye.

I will return, of course. I must, for this is the only way home for me. No, I won't be fooled by you again. I don't know who you think you are, but it's occurred to me that this--whatever this is--is argument enough against you.

I don't trust you; I'm onto you.

Still...

What's good about you is the mystery is better, this illusion of a life. What's good about you is you can't give me advice that's supposed to make me happy. Finally, someone to listen and not to offer a word of advice. Open doors are better than closed doors. What's good about you, huh, is I never have to accommodate you. I don't have to hear that Answer for Answer's sake. That manly subterfuge. Who needs it? What's good about you is there's no philosophy to shore up the emptiness.

What's good about you is you'll never abandon me.

What's good about you is the trust is implicit; I don't have to tell you the truth; I don't have to lie to you. What's good about you is you can't escape. Is that horrible? I don't know. Am I a bad human? What's good about you is you don't need to be entertained. What's good about you is you'll disappear when I forget about you. Like a leaf down a drain. I won't wonder about you all day today out here alone in the rain. I'm supposed to feel guilty but I don't think I will. I might feel strange but no guilt.

(I've always felt strange. It's exhausting. If I could stop feeling anything then that would be nice. If I could stop my mind from running to beat the devil). This strangeness is with me all day. Even in front of the children I teach.

I teach calculus, by the by. I don't think the children are alive. Huh, I mean that sometimes they just seem so lifeless, like garbage on the skin of a pond. I don't mean that in a negative sense. I think they know I know they are already dead. I can't believe I'm telling you this, but there it is. It's very difficult to be a teacher. Eventually you just go numb and you don't even know what you're saying anymore and this anger starts to fester in your heart.

I teach at the same school I attended as a kid. Nothing's different. Everything's different. There's one child. A boy. He looks like he will grow a beard before he is much older. He's just going to be a bearded man. That's his life. He'll never understand a woman and he'll have many children and the daughters will feel like an alien in front of him. Another boy looks like a rapist. It's easy to detect after a few seconds in conversation with him. Something in his eyes, a glassy distance bringing death. There's one like that in every class. I don't know what to do about it. You can't tell police you think someone's a potential rapist based on your gut feeling. Too bad, huh. I can also see which ones are going to cause unbearable sadness and grief in those around them. Some people don't contribute anything to the world but just take and take and take until you have nothing left and then they find someone else they can bleed dry. I'm sorry, how inappropriate of me. I'll speak instead of something nice.

There's a childhood dream where I live in a house so big it has no dimensions. That's silly, of course it has dimensions. What would it be otherwise? Everything has dimensions and then one day nothing has dimensions. It's possible; it's happened once before, huh. That is, the universe wasn't there and then it was. There's a certain deceitfulness in the act, isn't there? A peekaboo of sinister intent. Evil, for lack of a better word. And that's what's taught in the schools: how to play the game and act with vested interest in the things of man and to trample the flowers and make off with the gold of fallen kingdoms and the ability to fly when there's no sky to be got at. That's what we teach.

It's no secret, is it?

What about it? What else can I say to them? What wisdom could I impart to these children? They must know about us, who we are deep down inside—reptilian, slithering--where nothing else lives but that vague ugliness. They must see that and imitate. Huh, they must give up and/or fail at their dreams if we're ever going to make something out of their mushy minds.

You want me to say that some part of me wishes that they might keep their dreams. Oh no, I am to crush it and I don't deny it. They know the deal. A year of brutality with me and they'll know something that can never be taken away: the truthiness of numbers. The truth. It's the best I can do, my good sir.

Do you object? Do you believe in something more?

Well, what wisdom could you impart that's right and good and true? None! Your type only takes and takes and gives nothing back. Your type destroys the world from the inside out, leaves nothing behind. *Your type enslaves with the false promise of autonomy, hub, you poison the earth with your greed you make monsters of men and women who have no means to live you train them to respect power and luck and you cram them full of lies* HARD WORK WILL PAY OFF IT'S LONELY AT THE TOP SHOOT FOR THE STARS BLAH BLAH BLAH *the truth is it's just misery and pain.*

But if you acknowledge the misery and pain then you can endure. But you don't want that to be known, no. No, you have a secret: most of us--*all of us*--will fail and that's your bread and butter. You need them to think that you have a way out of it, a way to keep them from the chaos, from the whirlwind of time's wings. And you let them think their houses are theirs and they are kings and queens of this castle but there's only clouds holding the whole thing up. And the truth is that they work for you, they toil for you and sweat, just to keep the monsters at bay.

I'm surprised they haven't publicly stoned you to death!

And now they live in small cramped spaces, locked out of their dreams once more. And your kind has the audacity to tell them they have only themselves to blame for all they have lost? But who were you, guaranteeing home and hearth while all the time the sound of thunder came closer? Why did you choose to destroy? Why did you not pay attention or were you too busy listening to the sound of your largesse, your lies, and your thieving in night--when all our

fears exploded in candy-colored light? Yes, that's all you could hear.

There is an evil in this world and you are I.T. it. And now I have you and my wish is that you are fully conscious right now so that we can continue this conversation to end all conversations.

Care for a cigar? No? Then I hope you don't mind if I do.

Hmm, I wonder what it feels like to be so helpless.

I wonder too what it feels like to feel the business end of a cigar burning a nice hole through your cheek...

I'll show mercy for now; we've so much to discuss...

Early in my career as a teacher I was let down by the lack of enthusiasm for mathematics. I couldn't believe this apathy, which is what it was. There I was, teaching them change. Nothing more and nothing less. What they saw instead was the abyss of fear, the black hole of disarray. There's nothing to be done for it. That fear is real, more real than God. Or you might say that that fear itself *is* God.

Take you, for example. Aren't you a fair representation of Zeno's Paradox? Motion is simply impossible.

Don't worry, I'm not going to bore you with a lecture. I'd rather illuminate the source of your evil, which requires no fixed point. Your trajectory is one to be worked over lo these tens of thousands of years since the first of us crawled out of the water.

What inspires your heights and depths?

I've seen it in myself, but it is only a thought. For you, it is a dream realized. I'm almost jealous.

If I'd been raised without a conscience, then I suppose anything could've become of me. I could've built a bomb and done it right, killed millions of people in the flash of a second. I don't doubt it, but it is only a design, a convergence in dreamt-up space.

Nothing more, nothing less.

Some of these children *have such aspirations...*

Who could now deny them their bright-orange-and-black-smoke dreams when your kind has created a world with no humanity in it? Alas, there must be dreams and there must be violence. It's the only way now.

And so I commit this simple act of violence upon you: I leave you standing, prey to the elements. It's all I have to offer you, the luxury of doing nothing. Quite rare in this our broken era. If you could see it from my point of view, you'd really realize the value

of doing nothing. What is this desire to keep busy and block out what is real and present? Who started it?

When will we wake up and do nothing?

Goodbye, sir...

He walked away from the frozen man. I remember how his footsteps fell, like he was short a bowling ball. Something had left him. Or else he'd left it behind. Some weight. What was it?

He disappeared over a hill and that was it for him. Then it was just me and the statue. Me and the frozen man. Me and the dead man who would not lay down.

I jumped out of that tree. I approached this fella with a forlorn swagger I guess I must've cultivated from the movies. I was kicking the dirt and keeping my eyes to the ground. Some kind of rebel without a clue, a ruffian looking for an angle. These characters played in my head and before I knew it I was right there smack dab in front of Mr. Ice. He didn't even look down at me. Just did his standing. I reached out and I touched his hand. Right then, something went off in me like a firecracker. I was hearing his voice right there in my head...

My watch had broken and there was someone who could repair it in town. I was on my way there – sudden flash of light and everything split in two and I farted uncontrollably for what seemed a lifetime. Thank goodness you weren't here for that!

Yes. Suddenly it happened. Stopped. Stopped. I stopped.

Suddenly, surely. Stillness is a movement.

It was this stickiness. This stickiness was sticky. A voice came from the sky. Asked a question. This question kept questioning over and over again.

What would you do and, if you could do it, would you do it?

I didn't know what I would do, but still I did it. Whatever it was.

I stopped. Certainly, I stopped, but I would've kept going if I could've. I counted one two three and I thought something would happen, some movement. Well, nothing happened. I asked the sky: What are you talking about? What are you?

And the sky was still sky. Still very much sky. And it didn't stop. Still, I see the sky and the land and the line of trees and this was good but it wasn't good.

It was bad.

Strange shadow in front of me. Is it mine? The road weaves and bends, but there's something I've forgotten, something right in front of me. Two steps in front of me, or maybe three. Three steps ahead, three steps up the road or down. But I haven't stepped. Forgive me. Why? Because you, a child, are already forgiven. So you must return a favor. Why? To make this life smooth.

No, the road doesn't go smooth. But it *does*, doesn't it?

I was trying to make time, but how do you do that if you've no way to tell time? My watch. I never liked it because it never moved. Just kept on being stuck there at one-thirteen. Forgot to wind it up. Was a gift from father for my birthday. The first gift that truly I did love. But I had to remember to wind it. So when it occurred to me to wind it, when I remembered to do it, it was already too late. Because of my neglect, something had died inside the poor thing. So, I've always been prone to slowness, you might say.

I heard the church bells from both towns. First came Aphelion's and then Perihelion's. The bells are equidistant at this point, I'll have you know. So, there are two different times. So, you could say I know the time(s) but not time itself. The sun has no problem with this. The sun lives in the infinite, doesn't it? Who can tell? I am no astronomer. But the still sky is still silently shouting. And the tree line is still sweeping at the skies.

What would you do if you could do it? Then you should do it, shouldn't you?

One step, two step. But no. Paralysis instead.

Sister won't abide my lateness. Which was why the watch made sense as a gift. For one step two step to come quicker. I was always frozen, in a sense. Someone would ask me my name and I would think Oh No I lost my name, it was there only moments ago, like a single rip in the sky.

125 decibels; the church bells filled the head.

Why did I have to walk? Why did I? Why?

And then the man approached me and the man was talking and I didn't hear him over the bells, the sun, the sky, the steps one and two and three.

When we were young, sister said there were paints she used and I couldn't share with her because I didn't know how. Why didn't she just teach me how? My brush was in her hand and she never gave it back and then she said some twins absorbed their sibling in

the womb and what a lucky break for the both of us considering our appetites and all.

And why does she play such games? Why, at 64 and three minutes, does she need to know my every move? *Nymph, in thy orisons be all my sins remembered.* Return me your smile, Nymph, which is not a smile but sky and sun shouting at the top of your roving lungs.

Today is the day of my visit to her house, where she collects my thoughts for me in a bucket. Shrinks my wickedness (or is it hers?) and then we go to the attic to see if there are any squirrels or raccoons that she swears she hears in the night scratching. Once, when we were children, we heard something clicking. There was an owl in the attic, dying there on the floor, throat slashed, talons grasping on the dusty floor. Looking at it, I thought it was me. But it wasn't me. I was stuck wondering for a while about the world in its fleshy particulars. Ugh.

The man, the one who was trying to help me get unstuck, was shouting at the top of his lungs, rattling off at me like a Wagner opera. The words would not come to my lips. Would you kindly stop shouting, please? I...I...I...I don't understand a word you are saying!

A bird behind him plummeted to the ground and died. He didn't even hear it he was shouting so loud.

One step, two step.

The man was shouting.

I am of the mind that yes one step and another and then everything disappears. And I can stand still. Yes, here goes nothing.

One step, two...

His face was so animate. About the face, the cracks were widening. Oh, distracted man with rambling legs. Whereas I was/am full of worries, but granted this reprieve from movement. I didn't understand a word he was saying. There were, like, marbles in the throat, a quiet gargling. You were up a tree, kid. I can feel it in your hand... How did he survive childhood with a voice like that? And, about the face, something like a house with every door and window open.

When I was your age I didn't know what I was doing. I'd walk along the road and the foxes knew my scent. They would go about their business, but after a while they were following me. Following me and the road down through the woodland. Sometimes the snow and the sun mixed up. What was I doing slushing through the woods? They

followed me in a game, foxes chasing a rabbit through the woods to the river and the river moves and I/we along with it, never stop breathing, blood boiling, crossing the river of ice, the moon up high--if I could be up there, too, around the baby's breath of the moon. How and when will they stop? Now the rabbit leaps and bounds faster than its mind, rushes, and what follows is not good, is bad. When will they stop? They know my scent and follow the whisper of my footsteps from this valley to the grove to the... I lead them through the shadows *yessir yessir yessir that is correct sir* over the river and through the woods to grandmother's house we go. Very serious business; they hunt me down for my flesh and I almost want them to catch me...

In his speaking, the man, he did not speak a single word but chattered on in the air around him. A mirror image of myself—all funhouse, then not. He satisfied his whims and fancies but I could not.

How long and why have I been here, kid? And where am I? A flower grows in my head, time-lapse photography, keeps rewinding and rewinding itself. Asks me what I am and all I am is the gravel beneath my feet and the seed returns to darkness all around it and the rain sinks into the darkness and darkness pushes me into the sun and then I return again to darkness for how long and why? And me forgot me umbrella. See it there in the hallway, in a clutter of shoes. What does a man need so many shoes for? Is he alive in every pair? I wear a costume every day. Wear it well, me. Even a nudist wears a costume, when you think upon it.

The sky opens – Zeus hello Zeus what are you doing when you are not busy raping cattle and other animals in your menagerie too besides? What? Jesus Christ, the seed rises and then subsides and then another seed and I am left in a wet panic, God help me, old testament new testament, test of faith, again the seed the dark the fissure in the dark the whatwhat the heavy forgetful missing star of the throat of the evening.

Kid, will I return to myself?

Yes, I have. Have done so. Of course. Tongue still moving still, salty slug.

Bells howling in the morning light. Crazed, starved. Hear them louder after the ringing's ceased. You must learn to stay in the places that hurt...

I want to move now, kid. I am ready – if you just turned me in a different direction, then that would be enough. I don't need to be awakened, but it would be

nice to be sitting on the hillside. Maybe under that tree over there? How, though? You don't look strong enough to carry me on your back, though. Just my luck, though.

Can't move – I can't move. That's what's happening now. If I could just get to the side of the road. It feels like I'm all turned around. I feel weak. I'm just fading away the way a mist does. Fading in bunches. I'm just a fool, frozen in the road. There must be something left – I can't be finished – I am so afraid – if you'd just hold my hand – reach out and touch my face – anything – if we could manage a hug of some kind. Seriousness is all I want. Truth. And if I could just wiggle my toes in the process, that would be just smashing. Or wrinkle my nose, flare my nostrils. I need the force of reality to wake me up, something like dishes in the sink, garbage piled to the rim, stack of junk mail by the front door, bat fluttering around in the living room now the bedroom now the piano room now the bathroom (what music does it hear that I don't hear?) the steam rising from the bathtub, I sink into it, scalding hot, but I don't care, balls cooking nicely, the angel floats on high while the bat hides somewhere and counts its blessings.

The time-lapse flower still comes and goes— bright orange 1980s explosion VHS quality (or BETA?). How long have I been stuck here? Tell the truth, boy, please. Gone gone completely gone to the other shore – Jesus Ballooning Christ – god make it stop god – can't move an inch – sun stabs at my eyes -- first chance they get they'll cart me off, boy – can't lie my way out of this one -- what the fuck is this and how long will it last? -- what's that smell? -- this is exhausting – tell me what's happening to me, please -- please do not abandon me in your simple wisdom -- it does no one any good – soon enough the blood will move again and I again with it -- goddamn it all to hell – a flower in the vase, me -- a still life, me – I remember Grandfather's terrible paintings which were magnificent in that they magnified the ordinary which in turn needed no magnification – what does perfection do for you but deny you real love? To see things as they are is rarer than true silence. Everything is everything, as Shakespeare once said (no he never said that but perhaps he did at some point or another in his own wizardly way). But to present things as they are – the piety of animals, the

lust of storms – who am I without them and – further – them without me?

I can feel it coming, boy; the great throat of the evening, some horrible thing awake in the dark reaching for me. Its name? Alas and alack, I can't remember but it is still there on tip of brain tongue blugg it has trapped me and maybe you too besides. You are the cruel sea and I am the harrowing storm. Together we explore the lost art of conversation. We speak kindly to each other. As kindly as we speak to shadows. Then the mythology breaks down and everything becomes real again. But, no, we need our monsters; something bending and creaking in the dark – there's a dumb child that lives inside us – always running back and forth, back and forth making stupid noises without fail. I want this child to learn the art of subtlety. Seriously, what the fuck is he doing, making so much noise?

All the luck in the world won't get me out of here, will it, boy?

No, I'll be able to move again.

Not sure I understand the mechanics of my brain.

I need help. Perhaps you'll help me, boy. I am the Tin Man in Wizard of Oz. Oil can. Oil can. Film. 24 frames per second. A row of images is just one image. Or one image repeated over and over again is a different image?

Something seriously bad has happened, boy. A doctor would help. Why don't you go off to get help? I'll be fine here for a while; just a little wet from the rain, maybe.

It must be a stroke, that's all.

If I could just get struck by lightning then maybe my brain would reset – electroshock therapy.

Feel at the end of my rope here, boy.

This is going nowhere fast.

This is it. A flash and a blip.

I didn't know it would be like this.

I am okay and I am ready. The road is below me and the sky above. I am man reaching for the sun, becoming the sun. Returning to. Look at me twirling inside my brain.

What is real? Sparks swarm all around me, hold me even, enshrouding me in smells strange and familiar. Smells of war across the kitchen table, of love in the doorway, smells of the definition without the word. Sounds of jazz; one solitary saxophone falling amongst the rushes of drums and piano. The bubble of static. Call and response, the inglorious

chop of the brushes, the jaunty play of the piano flubbing down the path, the orchard path I once as a child found to be home and no more, no less...

This is bad.

Go get help, boy.

Run.

But I didn't run. I walked back home and left him there frozen. I don't know why I didn't help him. It seemed the right thing to do. I can't explain it. It was like, somehow, I was convinced that there was nothing wrong with him. He was now in the exact place he deserved.

The sun was setting, so I walked back home. I don't know how it happened, but the day had passed while I was observing these two men. At dinner that

night, I did not say a word about the two men I had seen that day. The next day, I went to the same spot up my tree but the frozen man was gone and the other man, the teacher, did not appear. I went to the same spot every day for two weeks and then I gave up on ever seeing them again.

It was years later I became a calculus teacher and, when the well of my youth had dried, I turned toward finance and made a name for myself. This is how such things go, regardless of our preferences. Yes, we become the thing we fear. But that's not the worst of it. Whatever I was when I was up that tree is now gone. Whoever that boy was, full of wonder and fear, he is now long gone and now a monster takes his place. Such is the journey.

Why should mine be any different than yours?

Five Non-Zen Writers

By Jonson Miller

None of these five writers are practitioners of Zen, but I include them here because of what they've taught me about being in the world and the moment, which is one of the great lessons of Zen.

Wendell Berry: A great Christian agrarian poet, essayist, and novelist. He has much to teach us about the dignity of land and non-action in living and farming.

Friedrich Juenger: A mid-twentieth-century German philosopher who wrote *The Failure of Technology*, the best critique of rationalism and industrialism I've read.

Michael Pollan: Wrote *In Defense of Food*, which is a great critique of hyper rationalism, particularly in regard to eating. His nutritional plan is simply: "Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants."

Philip Shepherd: Zen certainly influences Shepherd, but he emphasizes living in and through the body, whereas zazen can, if we're not careful, lead us away from the body. I reviewed his *New Self, New World* in issue 1.

Chuang Tzu: The great Taoist philosopher, who surely had some influence on the development of Zen in China.

Announcements and Events

Original Mind Zen Sangha

Sundays, 6:45 to 9 pm

Princeton, New Jersey

The Original Mind Zen Sangha meets every Sunday from 7 to 9 pm at the Fellowship in Prayer building at 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, New Jersey.

Please join us for sitting and walking meditation and a dharma talk. We provide cushions and mats. Please dress comfortably.

Newcomers should come fifteen minutes early for basic instruction and an introduction to the sangha.

For new visitors: The **first Sunday of each month**, we replace one meditation session with a **Q&A session**. This is an opportunity to find out what were about and to get started in your practice.

For more information, see originalmindzen.com.

Original Mind Food Donations Ongoing

Please remember that we are donating food to the Penndel, Pennsylvania food pantry of the Bucks County Housing Group. Bring donations to the sangha any Sunday night. Keep in mind that this is food that will be distributed to individual families, rather than being used in a dining hall. So it isn't

necessary or even desirable to find the biggest jar of food you can to feed as many people as possible. In fact, it is better to buy several smaller containers so that some food may be given to several families.

For a list of specific items the pantry needs, please scroll down to the bottom of the page at www.bchg.org/food-pantries.

Contributors



Gary Cocciolillo is a monk of the Five Mountain Zen Order and a member of the Original Mind Zen Sangha. He is currently writing *Enlightenment Guaranteed: The Only Book on Zen You'll Ever Need*. You can follow his blog *Zenpalooza* at

zenpalooza.com.

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Andrew Hyeonjeong Condouris is the abbot of the Original Mind Zen Sangha and a monk of the Five Mountain Zen Order. He is a video artist and writer with a penchant for good coffee and cake. When he isn't meditating, he can be found

reading fiction or writing it. As a video artist, he explores "essence of mind" in the realm of the abstract.



Jonson Miller is a member of the Original Mind Zen Sangha and is the editor of this newsletter. He writes about technology, international affairs, genealogy, and other topics at jonsonmiller.wordpress.com.

Letters to the Editor

To submit letters:

1. (Preferred). Email your letter to the editor at [jwmiller \[at\] mail.com](mailto:jwmiller@mail.com). Title your subject line "Original Mind: Letter to the Editor." Include your letter in the body of your message, rather than as an attachment.
2. You may mail your letter to the editor. If so, be sure to include a phone number so that the editor may contact you to confirm that we have your permission to publish it. Mail your letter to:

Jonson Miller
Original Mind Newsletter
559 Florence Avenue
Langhorne, PA 19047

We limit letters to 250 words. If you have more to say than that, then consider writing an article for us.

About *Original Mind*

Original Mind is the newsletter of the Original Mind Zen Sangha based in Princeton, New Jersey. We are members of the Five Mountain Zen Order.

This newsletter serves several audiences and several purposes:

1. Spread the dharma and save all sentient beings.
2. Alert members of the sangha and our local community about upcoming events at our sangha or in the region.
3. Show new or prospective visitors what we're about so they can better decide if they'd like to join us.
4. Connect sangha members to the broader order by providing news about order events, publications, institutions, leaders, and fellow sanghas.

5. Connect sangha members with the broader Buddhist community in our region through announcements of and articles about relevant events and groups.
6. Support one another in our practice.

You can learn more about our sangha and our order at the following websites:

www.originalmindzen.com

www.fmzo.org

Contact the editor at [jwmiller \[at\] mail.com](mailto:jwmiller@mail.com).

Submission Information

Original Mind welcomes original articles and interviews on any topic related to Zen, broadly conceived. We also want book and film reviews, announcements about events of the Five Mountain Order, and announcements of or articles about local retreats and lectures.

If you would like us to consider your writing for publication, email your submission to [jwmiller \[at\] mail.com](mailto:jwmiller@mail.com).

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We may edit your work for clarity, consistent formatting, or length.

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