Zen Notes

“Basketball is a complex dance that requires shifting from one objective to another at lightening speeds...The secret is not thinking. That doesn’t mean being stupid, it means quieting the endless jabbering of thoughts so that your body can do instinctively what it’s been trained to do without the mind getting in the way.” (Phil Jackson, NBA coach of the Chicago Bulls and the LA Lakers with 9 NBA championships, In Understanding Buddhism, Gary Gach, Alpha Books, 2002, p. 306)

“Zen teaches us to relinquish control.” (p. 4)

“Zen is the Japanese word for ‘meditation.’” (p. 5)

“Zazen is sitting. Zen sitting.” (p. 7)

“One of Zen’s most dramatic benefits is the way it teaches you to pay attention.” (p. 8)

“Moderation in all things: That means making a conscious effort not to overconsume, overindulge, live inconsiderately, or hurt others.” (p. 11)

“Make now count for everything.” (p. 13)

“Ambition can be Zen-like or un-Zen-like. Ambition to live mindfully and succeed ultimately in the present moment is Zen-like. Ambition to get ahead of others, gain more material possessions, and achieve status at the expense of compassion is counterproductive to Zen living.” (p. 13)

“One of the effects of the Buddha’s enlightenment was a deep compassion for all living things and the wish for all to recognize their own Buddha nature.” (p. 18)

“The Four Noble Truths are the heart of the dharma.” (p. 19)

“Dukkha is the word for suffering or, more generally, that deep feeling of discomfort, dissatisfaction, restlessness, unfulfilled desire, and want that so often characterizes human existence.” (p. 19)

“Suffering is caused by desire. Desire is wanting something you don’t have, wishing something were some way it isn’t, or being otherwise generally dissatisfied with the way things are, in the belief that the things would be better, you would be happier, life would be sweeter if only this were the case, if only that would happen, if only something were different than the way it is now.” (p. 20)
“The third Noble Truth says we can eliminate suffering. How? By eliminating desire. If you remove the cause, the effect will stop. That doesn’t mean you give up living, working, having relationships, feeling compassion and joy, appreciating life. *It just means you give up that futile grasping, painful longing, that feeling that you have to have something you don’t have.*” (p. 20)

“The way to eliminating desire is by adhering to the Eightfold Path. *These eight steps to living the Middle Way,* as the Buddha suggested, help to put you on the path to living that will ease your desires and thereby ease your suffering, bringing more joy into your life. In Buddhism, enlightenment is the culmination of practice.” (p. 20)

“Zen also values the simple life: Do you daily work without making a big deal of it, dreading it, or disliking it. *Let your daily work bring you joy. Don’t over consume, but use only what you need. Over consumption fuels desires, which (as we’ve mentioned) cause suffering.* Live close to the earth and marvel in its beauty. The simplicity movement and the environmental movement in this country are nicely compatible with these values.” (p. 31)

“While in Asia Zen is primarily the business of monks and nuns, in America Zen is for the average guy or gal on the street.” (p. 31)

“Hey don’t take yourself so seriously–after all, what is ‘self’?” (p. 32)

“*Finding the beauty in the ordinary, and the ordinary in beauty, is Zen living in action.*” (p. 33)

“A familiar but very Zen-like concept is to *walk a mile in another person’s shoes.*” (p. 34)

“While psychotherapy has a long tradition of encouraging the development of a strong sense of self, Buddhism has an even longer tradition of teaching the value of collapsing that self...” (p. 38)

“Buddhism is all about apprehending truth rather than being seduced by illusion.” (p. 43)

“It simply means that you do what you do, really do it, without dreading it, resenting it, or even getting a particular wild thrill from it. Do your duty. Do your job. Do your housework. Eat your meals. Play with your kids. Walk your dog. Make your bed. Love your partner. *Do all those things with mindful awareness, and you will be living Zen.*” (p. 44)
“Of course, many of our reactions, thoughts, feelings, and emotions are simply a matter of habit. *Part of Zen is breaking those old habits that aren’t doing us any good.*” (p. 47) – Wife, Grocery Store, Repentance

“Being human means *experiencing unpleasantness.*” (p. 48)

“How you handle those ‘bad’ things (bad being a relative term) is what causes your suffering, not the bad thing itself.” (p. 48)

“When life gets to be too much and you find yourself losing your sense of self, *just take a moment and find your center.*” (p. 50)

“We can help to wake ourselves up by setting our alarm clocks to break out of old categorized distinctions we take for granted, by performing behaviors differently, by seeing things from a different point of view.” (p. 53)

“We have faith that you are already whole and complete, all on your own, and that meditation and mindfulness can help you to apprehend this truth for yourself.” (p. 57)

“The idea of giving up control can be frightening, but it becomes much easier if you realize that you aren’t giving up anything at all. *You are only giving up the illusion that you had something.*” (p. 63)

“Giving up the illusion of control also doesn’t mean giving up rules, plans, or all necessary things you need to do to live your life among others. *It means just giving up control of your attachments to the rules, plans, and other details of life.*” (p. 64)

*Why waste energy* being irritated by things you can’t control?” (p. 65)

“It doesn’t matter what anyone else thinks or does because you can’t control what anyone else thinks or does.” (p. 65)

“All you can control is your own reaction to the circumstances in your life. *And that’s plenty.*” (p. 65)

“It is all too easy to get caught up in what other people think of you. Ironically, the more worried you are about other people’s opinions, *the more negative those opinions tend to be.* Those who don’t give a thought to what others think tend to be the most revered.” (p. 66)

*The tragedy of other is not a reason to celebrate.*” (p. 72)
“To truly embrace a Zen attitude is to recognize that we never owned any of it to begin with. *We don’t own anything.*” (p. 78)

“Watch out for self-perpetuated habitual suffering. Do you dwell on feelings that make you sad? Do you let yourself become overly sensitive or reactive? *Do you nurse your grudges and fuel your own anger?* Noticing these patterns and refocusing on the here and now (mopping the floor, balancing the checkbook, reading) can help to dispel chronic suffering, which can be largely a matter of habit.” (p. 78)

“Some feel enlightenment should happen all at once, others believe it happens a little at a time.” (p. 84)

“In Sanskrit, the word *nirvana* means “blowing out,” as if blowing out a flame. The symbolism refers to total satisfaction in the present moment, where all attachments to past, future, and anything else but the now dissolve. In *The Beginner’s Guide to Zen Buddhism*, Jean Smith describes Nirvana as “…the state of being where there is no grasping, no desire for things to be different from the way they are...In these moments, we are experiencing our life as nirvana.” (p. 84)

“If you imagine enlightenment will make you spiritually, intellectually, or morally superior, you don’t have the right idea either.” (p. 85)

“Inter being is the whole BIG PICTURE. It relates this page of paper back through the pulp to the logger who fed his family by felling the tree, back through the parents who raised him, on through the wheat fields which nourished them all, to the rains clouds and soil and sunshine that made possible all these and everything else.” (p. 93)

“We are part of a great big, ultimately complex system. We are like individual cells in a giant body.” (p. 93)

“The self and the others are all part of the same thing, so in serving one, you serve them all.” (p. 94) King Benjamin

“In *The Art of Happiness*, His Holiness the Dalai Lama explains the difference between compassion and attachment:

‘One kind of compassion is tinged with attachment—the feeling of controlling someone, or loving someone so that person will love you back....a relationship based on that alone is unstable...But there is a second type of compassion that is free from such attachment...Genuine compassion is based on the rationale
that all human beings have an innate desire to be happy and overcome suffering, just like myself. And, just like myself, they have the natural right to fulfill this fundamental aspiration.....It is based on the other’s fundamental rights rather than your own mental projection. Upon this basis, then, you will generate love and compassion. That’s genuine compassion.” (p. 94)

“Because Zen exists in the now, recognizing the importance and the immediacy of the present moment has an interesting effect: You learn to make the present moment better. If this is it, if this is your life, if the present moment is everything, then why waste it watching second-rate sitcom re-runs on TV until 3:00 A.M.? Maybe you will want to do that sometimes, but an enlightened awareness will also make you want to make the most out of each moment.” (p. 95)

“The goal of Zen is to live your goal right now rather than look ahead to it.” (p. 95)

“Nirvana, is the freedom from attachments to thoughts, feelings, and desires, and a complete and total absorption in the present moment.” (p. 95)

“Other Zen perks include mental clutter control, an ability to handle stress-inducing situations with humor and lightness, a purging of preconceptions and expectations, and a mind that remains calm and clear in any situation.” (p. 95)

“Enlightened people recognize that everyone and everything in the universe is connected and interrelated in an intricate system.” (p. 95)

“Enlightened people are frequently compelled to spend their lives helping others and improving their environments, in order to make the most of each present moment.” (p. 95)

“Devote yourself with compassion to the world and the people and things in it– without attaching to them, without needing them, without desiring them, but simply by loving them.” (p. 102)

“Now is everything.” (p. 102) Now thyself!

“Life isn’t a race. Life isn’t a competition.” (p. 103)

“Try to notice every single thing you can with each of your five senses.” (p. 105)

“I learned that the core tool of Buddhism is meditation, with its focus on the breath.” (p. 110)
“Zazen simply helps to clear out your muddled mind so you can think more clearly and act with more perspective, compassion, and conviction (and with less attachment, grasping, and desire).” (p. 116)

“You have to take in the understanding that logic doesn’t always work in life and that the greatest truths are perceived on a level beyond logic.” (p. 136) Mantle...

“The essence of Buddha’s teaching is non-attachment. All human troubles and sufferings, without exception, are due to attachment. Even attachment to the idea of non-attachment is attachment!” (p. 143)

“We make ourselves victims of concepts.” (p. 143)

“Meditation does more than change your response to stress. It changes your response to yourself. Or we could say it eliminates your response to yourself because you begin to see things the way they really are. You start to appreciate the beauty and the wonder of the mundane.” (p. 148)

“Keeping things in balance makes mindfulness easier, and mindfulness makes it easier to keep things in balance.” (p. 152)

“Our culture encourages dissatisfaction.” (p. 165)

“We are continually encouraged to strive for these very external symbols of accomplishment.” (p. 165)

“One way to help de-emphasize your dependence on external notions of perfection is to break habits that tune in to those cues.” (p. 165)

“Without the now, we can’t get to the then.” (p. 166)

“You can’t avoid bringing baggage into a relationship, but you can avoid forcing your partner to serve as your personal porter.” (p. 177)

“It may be the only thing you need to know to communicate effectively with the love of your life. Be present in the moment with the one you love, without assuming or expecting anything.” (p. 179)

“Be here now, and start living in your relationship, not hovering over it like an albatross.” (p. 179)

“In Buddhism, the notion of right action involves acting to promote harmony and unity rather than discord and disagreement.” (p. 179)
“Consumerism has adjusted our attitudes so that what was once a desire for enough has become an unquenchable thirst for more. What is quality? Who cares? Use it, toss it, buy a new one.” (p. 200)

“To learn to focus so completely that you and your work are the same thing erases innumerable barriers and difficulties. If you and your work are one, if you become the work and the work becomes you, there is no conflict, no difficulty.” (p. 226)

“Grades...”

“Find the flow inherent in the work and follow it, rather than imposing your own order upon it.” (p. 227)

“We attach. Then we suffer.” (p. 241)

“Just don’t assume at all.” (p. 241)

“Having a boss is a particular challenge to those of us with ready-made authority issues.” (p. 242)

“Does it injure your ego to have someone in charge of you? Do you wish you were the boss? Are you afraid your boss won’t like you? Are you afraid you’ll be unfairly treated because you were in the past? Engage in a little self-examination.” (p. 242)

“So you don’t agree with everything your boss says or does. So what? It doesn’t have anything to do with you. It doesn’t have anything to do with anything. It just is. You work in a place that has these certain rules. Follow them and get on with it. Having a boss sometimes requires adjusting to someone else’s rhythms, doing something in a way you might not normally do it, and not resisting every little wave that rocks your boat a little. Get over it!” (p. 243)

“That’s the way things are set up right now. It isn’t a reflection on you, so don’t let it be. Just do your work.” (p. 243)

“Interactions are complicated, but when it comes right down to it, we all act and react out of our own heads. To recognize this is to be set free from the bondage of other people’s attitudes and reactions.” (p. 254)

“A job crisis isn’t an identity crisis for people who have things in perspective.” (p. 261)

“Living 10 years from now, mindlessly rushing through the now so you can get
to the then, that is a waste of a life.” (p. 265)

“Living simply helps counteract materialistic impulses.” (p. 280)

“In things there is no reality or ultimate value.” (p. 287)

“Household chores are an excellent opportunity to practice mindfulness. Keeping a clean house is also a good way to practice self-discipline, and living in a clean house is not only more sanitary, but much more pleasant. *It just feels better.*” (p. 288)

“The British Zen scholar R. H. Blyth once wrote, “Zen is the unsymbolization of the world and all the things in it. No object, no thing in your house makes your house Zen-like. Your experience of living in your home and doing your work there is Zen.” (p. 288)

“*Zen is the perception of the eternal you and your part in the universe.*” (p. 289)

(Source: Zen Living, Gary McClain and Eve Adamson, Alpha Books, 2002)