

## Zen Metaphysics and the Big Encounter

Where the only constant is change,  
what is real?

Shunyata?  
Tathata?

How can a fish in water be thirsty?  
What does it thirst for?

Tathata?  
Shunyata?

When I entered the great purple cavern long ago,  
and heard the music therein booming,  
I stood – or floated – in the presence of God,  
before His might and glory.

God was there,  
and yet could not be seen;  
He was omnipresent,  
and yet not located,  
transcendent as well as immanent.

Tathata.  
Shunyata.  
Not there,  
but surely there!

I was exposed,  
laid bare, puny and unclean,  
before the hugeness and perfect purity  
which filled the booming cavern,  
before the emptiness  
which was overwhelmingly present there.

Shunyata. Tathata.

Process and reality; being and nothingness;  
soul without body, admitted to the Presence,  
confronted by the Absolute,  
observed, regarded,  
not necessarily judged and evaluated,  
but exposed, revealed,  
and yet not quite rejected,  
allowed to remain, not cast out.

Shunyata.  
Tathata.  
Both.

How?

## **James Joyce's Mirror**

I see  
that you've seen me  
seeing you  
seeing me

And I also see  
that there's no seeing  
save seeing oneself  
trying to see oneself  
and failing  
and seeing the failing  
and then seeing  
that there's no seeing oneself  
save through the eyes of another

So:

I'm looking to you  
in the hope of seeing myself  
in the looking glass of your eyes

## Nureyev and Fonteyn, Stan and Ollie

Nureyev and Fonteyn,  
like Laurel and Hardy,  
spun a web  
whiffing down  
into  
a charming secret space  
beneath  
the stage  
upon which the dance had been  
performed

Losing track of time,  
they drifted  
without specific aim  
into the  
evening shadows,  
touching the warm wind  
as it enticed them  
to follow  
their hearts  
into the ever-deepening darkness  
of the oncoming night

And so  
they fled  
with blithe abandon  
from the ordinary world  
of work and worry  
and found their way,  
along with Stan and Ollie,  
to the place  
where  
day in and day out  
is  
no more

And there,  
they will dance,  
with joy,

forever

## Learning to Type

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

The lazy dog looked up.  
He saw the bushy tail moving away from him.  
He was dimly aware that he had been jumped over  
and wondered what to do,  
if anything.

The fox paused to peer back at the dog.  
The dog was stirring, but still lazy.

The fox gritted his teeth in an attempted smile.  
He was, despite himself, taunting the dog.

The dog, however, was unconscious of this subtlety  
and continued to gaze,  
blurry-eyed,  
in the general direction of what he took to be  
a bushy, moving rug.

He was still half asleep.

How could a rug jump over him?,  
he wondered.

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I'll just have to keep on, he said.  
I want to see it through  
to the end.  
Don't ask me why. I don't  
know  
why.

The night came on  
like a menace;  
no stars,  
no  
moon.

Have you a flashlight?,  
he asked.  
None could be found.  
They tried matches,  
looked for a candle,  
found some straw,  
lit that,  
and used it until  
it burned away.

The ashes smoked on the floor of the barn.  
The smell was pleasant  
and sad.  
The wind whistled outside;  
otherwise,  
all was  
silent,  
except for their breathing.

They gave up  
trying to find  
or manufacture  
a light.  
Instead, they spread their blankets  
on the floor,  
lay down,  
and tried to sleep.

The one was asleep before the other.  
The night continued.  
The other drifted  
into a dream,  
following his sleeping  
companion.

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They both slept  
and  
dreamed.

Or at least the one dreamed.

He dreamed  
of standing on the cliffs  
overlooking the valley where he lived  
when he was a boy.  
He dreamed of his  
mother,  
or was it his  
grandmother?  
They were standing together  
on the cliffs,  
looking southward,  
searching the horizon  
for some sign  
of a homecoming.

The sun was rising —  
in his dream  
and outside the barn.  
He awoke  
and found that his  
companion was already sitting up,  
studying the pocket map  
they had brought  
with them.

Sound began  
to emerge  
outside.

They decided  
that they might as well  
move on.

## 1940s Redux

Sinatra,  
swinging in the system;

I and orichetti with pork bracciole  
at the table,

reading Mickey Spillane,  
“My Gun Is Quick,”

finding Sherida there  
in the ladies of the '40s —  
tall, blonde, long dresses,  
ready for romance —

Then the music changes — some guy with an  
Italian accent  
singing “Love Story” — a real  
come-down from Sinatra —  
my mind snapped back  
from the '40s to NOW —  
Is it Andrea What's-His-Name?  
The blind guy?

Then I return to Spillane in  
the late '40s —  
Mike hammer, the dolls,  
the greaseballs —  
right after World War II.

Sherida not born until 1960,  
but grows up to be  
a lady of the '40s —  
the hair, the fancy dresses,  
the glamour — What a girl!

Mickey, you missed this one!  
Put her into a new novel  
before the '40s are finally  
over.

**A CONTRADICTION**  
(for R.D. Laing)

I want to be free,  
and I want you to be free.

I want to do what I want to do,  
and I want you to do what you want to do.  
I hope that you will want to do what I want you to do,  
but if you don't want to do what I want you to do,  
then I still want you to do what you want to do.

If you do what you want to do,  
then you might do something that I don't want you to do,  
which means  
that you will be tramping upon my freedom  
to want you to do what I want you to do.

And yet,  
if you do what you want to do,  
then you will be doing what I want you to do,  
which means  
that I will be thwarting your freedom  
to want to do something that I don't want you to do;  
and since I want you to be free,  
I want you to do that you want to do,  
even if you do something that I don't want you to do.

But  
if you don't want to do what I want you to do,  
then  
I'll make your life miserable.

## MORE TRAPS

I

I want you to be what I want you to be,  
and you want me to be what you want me to be;  
I don't want you to be what you are,  
and you don't want me to be what I am.

Furthermore:

I want to be other than I am;  
I want to be what you want me to be.

Also, I suspect that you want to be other than you are  
and that perhaps you want to be what I want you to be.

Thus:

neither of us is satisfied with the other,  
and both of us want the other to be what we want him to be;  
and neither of us is satisfied with himself,  
and both of us want to be what the other wants us to be.

Our inability to get the other to be what we want him to be,  
and our failure to be what the other wants us to be  
are both frustrating and infuriating.

I don't want you to be what you are,  
and you don't want me to be what I am,  
because what you are and what I am  
frustrates and infuriates both of us.

I don't want to be what I am,  
and you don't want to be what you are,  
because what I am and what you are  
frustrates and infuriates both of us.

But I can't be what you want me to be,  
and I can't be what I want me to be,  
and you can't be what I want you to be,  
and you can't be what you want you to be.

Frustration and fury seem unavoidable.

[continued →]

## II

I am not satisfied with you,  
and you are not satisfied with me.

One of the reasons why I am not satisfied with you  
is that you are not satisfied with me;  
and one of the reasons why you are not satisfied with me  
is that I am not satisfied with you.

I am not satisfied with you  
because you can't be what I want you to be;  
and you are not satisfied with me  
because I can't be what you want me to be.

One of the things that I want you to be is satisfied with me,  
and one of the things that you want me to be is satisfied with you;  
but you can't be satisfied with me  
because I can't be what you want me to be,  
and I can't be satisfied with you  
because you can't be what I want you to be.

This is both frustrating and infuriating.

I am not satisfied with myself  
because I can't be what I want to be;  
and you are not satisfied with yourself  
because you can't be what you want to be.

One of the things that I want to be is satisfied with you,  
and one of the things that you want to be is satisfied with me;  
but I can't be satisfied with you  
because you can't be what I want you to be;  
and you can't be satisfied with me  
because I can't be what you want me to be.

One of the things that I am not satisfied with in myself  
is wanting you to be other than you are;  
and one of the things that you are not satisfied with in yourself  
is wanting me to be other than I am.

By wanting to stop wanting you to be what I want you to be,  
I become dissatisfied with myself,  
because I can't seem to stop wanting you to be what I want you to be;  
and by wanting to stop wanting me to be what you want me to be,  
you become dissatisfied with yourself,  
because you can't seem to stop wanting me to what you want me to be.

[continued →]

Furthermore:

I am not able to stop wanting to stop wanting you to be what I want you to be,  
and you are not able to stop wanting to stop wanting me to be what you want me to be.

Thus:

I am inevitably dissatisfied with myself,  
and you are inexorably dissatisfied with yourself,  
because neither of us can stop wanting what each of us wants  
and because both of us want what we can't get.

It would appear, therefore, that our dissatisfaction with each other  
can be traced to the fact that neither of us is satisfied with himself!

Can frustration and fury be avoided?

## Looking back on oneself, taking pity

That poor little boy,  
that poor little boy,

Georgie,

wandering through his early years,  
his childhood, his early teens,

lost,  
homeless,  
unguided,  
unprotected,

tying his shoes,

trying to save his dog, Snooky,

and failing.

Where is that little boy now?  
Where has he gone?

He seems to be still here,  
wandering,  
looking,

hoping to go back to the Animal Hospital  
with a dollar  
to redeem his dog.