Two major schools of Zen exist in Japan: the Rinzai and the Soto.

Both have the same goal, of seeing the world unmediated, but their approaches are different.

In the Soto school, the emphasis is on quiet contemplation in a seated position without a particular focus for thought.

The method in the Rinzai school, however, is to put the intellect to work on problems that have no logical resolution. Such problems are known as koans, from the Chinese kung-an meaning “public announcement.”

According to tradition there are seventeen hundred such conundrums in the Zen repertoire. And their common aim is to induce a kind of intellectual catastrophe, a sudden jump which lifts the individual out of the domain of words and reason into a direct, non-mediated experience known as satori.

Zen differs from other meditative forms, including other schools of Buddhism, in that it does not start from where we are and gradually lead us to a clear view of the true way of the world. It is not a progressive system in this respect.

The sole purpose of studying Zen is to have Zen experiences — sudden moments, like flashes of lightning, when the intellect is short-circuited and there is no longer a barrier between the experiencer and reality.

If you have the staff, I will give it to you.

If you have no staff, I will take it away from you.

A man traveling across a field encountered a tiger.

He fled, the tiger after him. Coming to a precipice, he caught hold of the root of a wild vine and swung himself down over the edge. The tiger sniffed at him from above. Trembling, the man looked down to where, far below, another tiger was waiting to eat him. Only the vine sustained him.

Two mice, one white and one black, little by little started to gnaw away at the vine. The man saw a luscious strawberry near him. Grasping the vine with one hand, he plucked the strawberry with the other.

How sweet it tasted!

Once there was a Chinese farmer who worked with his son and their horse. When the horse ran off one day, neighbors came to say, *“How unfortunate for you!”*

The farmer replied, *“Maybe yes, maybe no.”*

When the horse returned, followed by a herd of wild horses, the neighbors gathered around and exclaimed, “*What good luck for you!”*

The farmer stayed calm and replied, *“Maybe yes, maybe no.”*

While trying to tame one of wild horses, the farmer’s son fell, and broke his leg. He had to rest up and couldn’t help with the farm chores. *“How sad for you,”* the neighbors cried.

*“Maybe yes, maybe no,”* said the farmer.

Shortly thereafter, a neighboring army threatened the farmer’s village. All the young men in the village were drafted to fight the invaders. Many died. But the farmer’s son had been left out of the fighting because of his broken leg. People said to the farmer, *“What a good thing your son couldn’t fight!”*

All things return to one. To what does one return?

When I was living in Qingzhou I sewed a robe. It weighed seven pounds.

As the roof was leaking, a Master told two monks to bring something to catch the water. One brought a tub, the other a basket.

The first was severely reprimanded, the second highly praised.

Two children would cross paths each day.

*"Where are you going?"* asked the one.  
*"I am going wherever my feet go,"* the other responded.

This reply puzzled the first child. After much thought he planned to ask the same question. Anticipating the same answer then ask him: *‘Suppose you have no feet, then where are you going?`*

The children met again the following morning.

*"Where are you going?"* asked the first child.  
*"I am going wherever the wind blows,"* answered the other.

This again nonplussed the youngster. After this defeat he thought to ask him where he is going if there is no wind.

The next day the children met a third time.

*"Where are you going?"* asked the first child.  
*"I am going to the market to buy vegetables,"* the other replied.

Tanzan and Ekido were once traveling together down a muddy road. A heavy rain was falling. As they came around a bend, they met a young girl in a silk kimono and sash, unable to cross at an intersection. "Come on, girl," said Tanzan at once. Lifting her in his arms, he carried her over the mud. Ekido did not speak until that night when they reached a lodging temple. Then he could no longer restrain himself. "We monks are not permitted to touch a woman," he told Tanzan, "especially not young and lovely ones. It is dangerous. Why did you do that?" "I left the girl there," said Tanzan. "Are you still carrying her?”

During the civil wars in feudal Japan, an invading army would quickly sweep into a town and take control. In one particular village, everyone fled just before the army arrived - everyone except the Zen master. Curious about this old fellow, the general went to the temple to see for himself what kind of man this master was. When he wasn't treated with the deference and submissiveness to which he was accustomed, the general burst into anger. "You fool," he shouted as he reached for his sword, "don't you realize you are standing before a man who could run you through without blinking an eye!" But despite the threat, the master seemed unmoved and replied calmly, "And do you realize that you are standing before a man who can be run through without blinking an eye?"

