

Shinzen Young tells Stories of Yes & No

00:00:00 So, there was a famous master in the Tang Dynasty that in Chinese is called Zhao Zhou.

00:00:22 His name is Zhao Zhou.

00:00:24 East Asia is a little confusing, you know, because there's four ways to pronounce every

00:00:31 kanji, every Chinese character.

00:00:35 There's the Chinese way, and actually it varies depending on the part of China.

00:00:40 Then there's a Sino-Japanese, a Sino-Korean, and a Sino-Vietnamese.

00:00:44 So if you want to look up Zen masters, sometimes you find the name under the Japanese pronunciation,

00:00:52 sometime under the Chinese.

00:00:53 So Zhao Zhou in Japanese is pronounced Zhou Shu.

00:00:59 A lot of people think, oh, that's the same as Sasaki, Zhou Shu, my teacher, but it's

00:01:06 written with completely different characters.

00:01:10 Just happened to sound the same in Japanese.

00:01:15 So Zhao Zhou, or Zhou Shu in Japanese pronunciation, was actually one of the major Zen masters

00:01:25 of the late Tang Dynasty.

00:01:30 He was a disciple of Master Nantran.

00:01:38 That's Nansen in Japanese pronunciation.

00:01:44 And Nantran was a disciple of one of the founders of Zen, Maazu, called Baso in Japanese.

00:01:57 Nantran is famous for a rather horrific piece of behavior if you were to take things literally.

00:02:10 But you know, these Zen stories, you cannot take literally, right?

00:02:16 Remember they point, but they also hook.

00:02:18 The whole idea is to see what they point to, but not allow your fixations to get hooked

00:02:29 by things.

00:02:31 So because when you hear this story, it's like, what?

00:02:36 So I don't know if this story actually happened, okay?

00:02:40 It's a little hard to imagine that it actually did happen, but it does point to something.

00:02:51 So this story involves Nantran, Nansen in Japanese pronunciation, and Zhao Zhou.

00:02:57 Zhao Zhou was Nantran's disciple.

00:03:02 So Zhao Zhou was out, and a dispute developed among Nantran's students.

00:03:17 The way that the temples were organized in those days is that there was an Eastern Hall

00:03:22 and a Western Hall.

00:03:24 So the monks in the Eastern Hall and in the Western Hall got into an argument about who

00:03:31 owned a cat.

00:03:34 This is pretty typical of the tempest and the teapot kind of stuff that we humans are

00:03:41 subject to.

00:03:42 You may have noticed things like this happening sometimes.

00:03:46 Little things become big things.

00:03:53 You may have noticed it during this retreat.

00:03:57 We call it yogi mind, right?

00:03:59 We're all yogis in the Buddhist sense of the word yogi.

00:04:03 It doesn't mean someone that can bend into a pretzel.

00:04:06 It means meditators are called yogis, we're yogis.

00:04:11 So the sort of weird things that start to happen where you get little idiosyncrasies

00:04:19 of your fellow meditators become sins crying out to heaven for vengeance.

00:04:27 You notice someone and you haven't talked to them or anything, but you have this entire

00:04:36 scenario of how you found your spiritual soulmate.

00:04:42 This whole thing unfolds and then when you finally break silence and talk to them for

00:04:53 about three minutes it's like, what was I thinking?

00:04:57 I don't even want to talk to this person anymore.

00:05:01 So these kinds of sort of inflations of little things, we learn to work with them.

00:05:11 I highly recommend the poem by Robert Browning called Soliloquy of a Spanish Cloister.

00:05:20 If you want to see yogi mind to its max, it's just a brilliant piece of work.

00:05:26 How these monks, this one monk in specific, is just lost in these petty rages.

00:05:38 So east or west, it's the same.

00:05:42 This kind of stuff happens.

00:05:45 So the east and the west monks were having this dispute over who owns the cat.

00:05:59 So Master Nantran heard the commotion, came out and grabbed the cat, held it up with a

00:06:13 knife in another hand.

00:06:16 Okay now don't get hooked on this.

00:06:19 See what I mean?

00:06:22 Okay.

00:06:23 I'll take it too literally.

00:06:26 There's something being pointed to that's really important.

00:06:32 And he said, if any of you can say a word, it will save the cat.

00:06:45 Otherwise I'm going to cut it in two.

00:06:51 And they were all fixated in confusion and doubt.

00:06:57 So he cut the cat in two, supposedly.

00:07:06 Now I'll give you a heads up.

00:07:07 This is leading to a co-op.

00:07:10 You're going to be asked a question.

00:07:16 Shall I give you a hint even before I ask the question?

00:07:21 How about that?

00:07:23 I will give you a hint.

00:07:26 I will tell you, at least in my interpretation, what the answer to the koan is.

00:07:37 But maybe not as well.

00:07:39 Yes.

00:07:40 The answer to the koan is on my t-shirt.

00:07:47 So this is like Jeopardy, okay?

00:07:48 So what's the question?

00:07:49 The answer is on my t-shirt.

00:08:00 If you remember what I said about what this means.

00:08:04 Okay.

00:08:05 So then what's the question?

00:08:08 So when Zhao Zhou returned, Nanquan told him the story of what had happened during the

00:08:20 day.

00:08:22 At which point, Zhao Zhou took off his sandals, put them on top of his head, and walked out.

00:08:41 To which Nanquan said, Zhao Zhou could have saved the cat.

00:08:55 So the koan is, why?

00:09:02 Why was Zhao Zhou the person that could have saved the cat?

00:09:09 What do you think?

00:09:11 Are you fixated in confusion?

00:09:15 There's nothing wrong with being confused.

00:09:16 In fact, being confused is really good.

00:09:21 Being coagulating when you're confused, not good.

00:09:28 The goal is not to avoid confusion, doubt, disorientation.

00:09:35 The goal is not to avoid don't know.

00:09:39 The goal is to avoid the habitual coagulation around don't know.

00:09:48 Uncoagulated don't know is called spontaneity when it comes out of your body, and wisdom

00:10:00 when it turns in your mind.

00:10:04 I repeat, uncoagulated don't know is dynamic spontaneity when it comes out of your body,

00:10:12 and wisdom when it turns in your mind.

00:10:17 So remember the story?

00:10:24 Nanquan asked the monks to turn a word, to say something, to manifest, and they were

00:10:32 coagulated in don't know.

00:10:35 So they couldn't say anything.

00:10:37 So they lost the cat.

00:10:46 Zhao Zhou had an immediate response, no fixation whatsoever.

00:10:53 But what did it mean?

00:10:56 It doesn't mean to put your sandals on your head, the part that's underneath is now on

00:11:10 top.

00:11:11 Then where are you?

00:11:19 And the person that lives there, there, it would be the kind of person who could save

00:11:34 the cat.

00:11:38 Zen master Wumad, commenting on Zhao Zhou's activity, said something to the effect of

00:11:56 he grabbed the knife away from Nanquan, and now Nanquan is begging for his life.

00:12:09 Praised him that highly.

00:12:14 So you don't understand, right?

00:12:18 Or maybe some of you do.

00:12:20 So not understanding is fine.

00:12:23 It's good, as long as you're working through the habitual tendencies to coagulate as soon

00:12:34 as don't know arises.

00:12:39 It was a brilliant way to symbolize, without having to use words, what it means to live

00:12:52 below the arising of the world, to live below what is born, to live in zero.

00:13:09 The ultimate humility.

00:13:12 Such a person could save the cat.

00:13:22 So Zhao Zhou is famous for his own koan, maybe one of the most famous koans in the whole

00:13:35 history of Zen, and one that Sasaki Roshi talks about a lot.

00:13:41 Thank God, otherwise I wouldn't know how to discuss it for you.

00:13:48 I've got the cliff notes from an actual master.

00:13:57 It relates to exactly the same thing.

00:14:02 It's about exactly the same thing, but from a little different perspective.

00:14:16 So Zhao Zhou lived in the Tang Dynasty, and the Tang Dynasty was roughly, very roughly

00:14:29 600 to 900 AD.

00:14:32 It's the golden age of Chinese culture.

00:14:37 Interesting sort of corresponds to really the darkest period of European history.

00:14:44 But that was the golden age of Chinese culture.

00:14:48 Buddhism came into China before that considerably.

00:14:52 Buddhism came into China in the Han Dynasty.

00:14:56 Han Dynasty is about 200 BC to 280, so it roughly straddles the beginning of the Christian

00:15:02 era.

00:15:03 Or, you can think of the Han Dynasty as corresponding roughly to the Roman Republic and the Roman

00:15:10 Empire.

00:15:11 So the Roman period, that 400 years, approximately 200 on either side of the time of Jesus.

00:15:20 That was Han in China, and Rome was ruling in the Western world.

00:15:26 It was then that Buddhism came into China as a kooky foreign cult from India.

00:15:35 So Tang Dynasty is much later, 600, 700 years later.

00:15:41 It took that many centuries for this kooky foreign cult from India to be fully metabolized

00:15:55 into a form that was comfortable for the Chinese, meaning an expression of enlightenment that

00:16:04 fit the Chinese culture.

00:16:10 And that's Chan, or Zen.

00:16:15 So these masters from the Tang Dynasty, Ma Zi, Nan Quan, Zhao Zhou, that was from that

00:16:26 period.

00:16:30 It took all those hundreds of years, sort of interesting because I think it's only going

00:16:39 to take not even 100 years for something similar to happen in the West.

00:16:45 But then things move much faster now.

00:16:49 So Northern Chinese to this day call themselves

00:17:01 Hanran, which you even see it on the internet, Han Chinese.

00:17:09 That means as opposed to other ethnic groups that are in China.

00:17:14 But people from South China, Tongyan, right?

00:17:21 Like from Hong Kong, Canton, they call themselves Tang people.

00:17:32 I guess because why?

00:17:34 Maybe it was that, I don't know, but in South China they usually, am I correct, usually

00:17:41 use Tang instead of Han?

00:17:44 I think it's just a later, right?

00:17:47 Yeah, it's just a time period.

00:17:51 For whatever reason.

00:17:52 So the way Chinese was pronounced in the Tang Dynasty is preserved in South China.

00:18:05 Whereas the Mandarin which is spoken in North China has gone through a lot of modifications

00:18:12 because North China is where all the, well there's just a lot of reasons that the language

00:18:18 changed up there.

00:18:20 So this is a famous story.

00:18:22 I'm going to say it in Mandarin.

00:18:25 It's a story about Zhao Zhou.

00:18:28 But then I asked Philip to say it in Cantonese so you can be able to hear it the way Zhao

00:18:36 Zhou would have said it and heard it.

00:18:38 It's a very different feeling tone to the language.

00:18:42 So here's the, and then I will translate also into English.

00:18:49 So Zhao Zhou He Shang Yin Seng Wan Gou Zi Huan You Fo Xin Yan Wu Zhou Yun Wu.

00:19:11 So that's the story in modern Mandarin pronunciation.

00:19:16 So Zhao Zhou He Shang, so Master Zhao Zhou Yin Seng Wan happened to be asked by a monk.

00:19:28 A monk asked Master Zhao Zhou.

00:19:31 Gou Zi Huan You Fo Xin Yan Wu.

00:19:39 Gou Zi means a dog, a puppy.

00:19:43 Apparently as they were talking this little puppy was walking around or something.

00:19:51 So the monk pointed to the puppy and said, Gou Zi Huan You Fo Xin Yan Wu.

00:19:59 Does the dog have Fo Xin, the Buddha nature, Yan Wu or not?

00:20:13 So You means have, Wu means not have.

00:20:21 Now Ye makes it an exclusive or.

00:20:27 Yes or no.

00:20:30 Does the dog have the Buddha nature?

00:20:34 So that's the part you have to appreciate about this koan is that the monk is setting

00:20:49 a track for Master Zhao Zhou.

00:20:56 Yes or no, exclusive or.

00:21:02 So literally in Chinese it's dog, have, Buddha nature or no, not have.

00:21:17 But there's a little different language feeling to it if you hear it in the way it probably

00:21:28 would have sounded to Zhao Zhou.

00:21:30 So why don't you manifest that.

00:21:32 This is the Cantonese pronunciation.

00:21:35 Zhao Zhou He Shang Yin Zheng Wen Gou Zi Huan You Fo Xin Yan Wu Zhou Yun Mu.

00:21:45 So You Mu.

00:21:51 Sounds a little bit more like the English yes, no.

00:21:57 That's why I like it in the Cantonese pronunciation.

00:22:03 Yes or no.

00:22:06 Does the dog have the Buddha nature?

00:22:11 Yao, Mu.

00:22:17 What do you think?

00:22:18 What's the right answer?

00:22:21 Shall I give you a hint?

00:22:25 The right answer depends.

00:22:30 Depends on the context.

00:22:33 There's several right answers, but those right answers are also wrong answers in a different

00:22:40 context.

00:22:43 So let's start with the context of traditional Buddhism.

00:22:51 From the viewpoint of early Theravada Buddhism, does the dog have a Buddha nature?

00:23:01 No.

00:23:02 Only a human being can become a Buddha.

00:23:11 Animals are too stupid and gods are too blissed out.

00:23:17 The condition that's in between animals and gods is the human condition.

00:23:23 Smart enough to figure things out, but uncomfortable enough to be motivated to do something about

00:23:31 it.

00:23:33 So early Buddhist idea is human life is very special because only the human life has the

00:23:40 right mixture of intelligence, pleasure, and pain to clue a person in to the need for enlightenment.

00:23:55 So from that point of view, scholastically, the answer is no.

00:23:59 Dog doesn't have a Buddha nature.

00:24:05 So that's Hinayana, that small vehicle point of view.

00:24:10 However from the Mahayana point of view, it is a philosophical item of belief that everything

00:24:24 has the Buddha nature.

00:24:30 So the Buddha nature.

00:24:43 The actual characters in Chinese would be written this way.

00:24:54 I don't know how much you can see it.

00:24:55 This is Fo, it's pronounced Fo in Mandarin, but it would have been pronounced something

00:25:03 like Boot a long time ago.

00:25:06 So that's from Buddha.

00:25:09 So this means Buddha.

00:25:12 But the interesting character is this one.

00:25:14 This means, this side of the character means to be born and this is heart or mind.

00:25:22 So your nature is the consciousness or mind or heart that you're originally born with.

00:25:39 So this word, it's pronounced Sho in Japanese, Shi in Mandarin Chinese.

00:25:50 This is a very important word in East Asian Buddhism.

00:25:55 Enlightenment, initial enlightenment, what roughly corresponds to stream entry in Southeast

00:26:04 Asian Buddhism, is often referred to in Japanese as Kensho.

00:26:10 Ken means to see and sho means nature.

00:26:14 When you see your nature.

00:26:17 But what's interesting is that there's another character, Gen, which is very related to Ken.

00:26:27 They're actually the same word in archaic Chinese.

00:26:31 And Gen means to manifest.

00:26:36 So Ken is the I see it.

00:26:42 Gen is the it manifests, but they're actually the same word.

00:26:51 So the Zen teacher that I studied with, several of them actually, said that Kensho, or to
00:27:03 see your nature, is really Gensho.
00:27:06 It's to manifest your nature.
00:27:09 So what is your nature?
00:27:11 Well, your nature is the, there's only one nature.
00:27:15 It's the Buddha nature.
00:27:17 So how would a teacher interpret the Buddha nature?
00:27:22 Well, you know how one teacher interprets it, the activity of expansion, contraction.
00:27:30 And that's the interpretation we're going to use here.
00:27:34 That's the one I'm familiar with.
00:27:36 So from the viewpoint of Mahayana, does the dog have the Buddha nature?
00:27:45 The answer is yes.
00:27:48 Scholastically speaking, the answer is yes.
00:27:54 So these are the answers that are correct from an intellectual point of view.
00:28:09 But you can be sure that the monk who was trying to set a trap for Zhaozhou was not
00:28:21 asking what's the Theravada party line on dog and Buddha nature, or what's the Mahayana
00:28:30 party line on dog or Buddha nature.
00:28:35 The monk was no doubt testing the master's ability not to explain, as I just did, the
00:28:53 answer, but to manifest the answer.
00:29:00 So if you were master Zhaozhou and someone set a trap for you that you recognized by
00:29:13 asking you an exclusive or question, okay?
00:29:20 Yao, mo, yes or no?
00:29:29 Dog have Buddha nature.
00:29:33 What are you going to say?
00:29:38 Good.
00:29:43 That would definitely be an acceptable answer.
00:29:53 But maybe a little bit more?
00:29:57 Go ahead.
00:29:58 Manifest.
00:29:59 That would be an acceptable answer.
00:30:14 Now let's go back to intellectual.
00:30:19 The problem with the question was the exclusive or.
00:30:26 So the answer would be to not get caught in the dichotomy of the exclusive or.
00:30:43 So the answer that we just gave, going back now to intellectual for a minute, was that
00:30:55 what was that answer in terms of yes and yes, no?
00:31:02 It's not yes.
00:31:04 It's not no.
00:31:06 Is it both or is it neither?
00:31:15 Can that happen with just yes or just no?
00:31:20 It takes yes and no, right, to mold anything, to manifest any appearance.
00:31:28 Takes an interplay of yes and no.
00:31:32 So that was the answer both, okay?

00:31:39 You're expanding and contracting, doing the doing called dog.

00:31:46 Yes, mixing yes and no to manifest the activity called dog.

00:31:54 So that's a good answer.

00:32:00 But that's not the one that Joshu gave.

00:32:06 Yau?

00:32:07 Mo.

00:32:08 Okay.

00:32:09 Joshu said mo, no, no.

00:32:27 So Joshu's no.

00:32:39 Is it really no?

00:32:44 Or is it the closest...

00:32:48 If you live in a culture that does not have zero as a number, then the closest thing that

00:32:59 you can have to that which is neither positive nor negative, the only thing that you can

00:33:06 do that's beyond yes and no, if you have to choose either yes or no to express that which

00:33:15 is neither yes nor no, neither movement from nor towards, neither plus nor minus, neither

00:33:23 expansion nor contraction.

00:33:26 Well if you had to do one or the other, zero is more like no than it is like yes.

00:33:37 Especially if you say it in a certain way, okay?

00:33:46 So the answer to this koan is in how you say the word no.

00:33:56 If you say the word no in a way that cancels yes and no, which you can actually hear in

00:34:07 the archaic Chinese.

00:34:09 In Japanese it's mu.

00:34:13 Okay.

00:34:15 And in Cantonese, mo.

00:34:21 So then it's zero.

00:34:25 The answer is zero.

00:34:31 The answer is that which precedes the manifestation of the dog and that which follows the manifestation

00:34:44 of the dog.

00:34:47 Except for the point, the still point, there would be no dance and there is only the dance.

00:34:58 T.S.

00:34:59 Eliot.

00:35:00 So the both, the polarization of yes and no to make a dog or a flower or a life or a planet,

00:35:19 that is preceded by and followed by what is beyond yes and no.

00:35:31 So they're inseparable.

00:35:37 You could, it would have been a correct answer to separate yes and no and manifest dog in

00:35:46 between.

00:35:48 But it's equally a correct answer to bring yes and no together because that's what's

00:35:56 before the both and that's what's after the both.

00:36:05 So it's a cycle.

00:36:08 Either the big no, the zero, the aji hongpushode, the alpha privative of the unborn, the place

00:36:24 where Zhao Zhou acted from, symbolized by having, being below his sandals, below the

00:36:39 earth, below what is born.

00:36:44 That place is half of what you need to know to be enlightened and the other half is when
00:36:56 it's yes and no, dancing together.
00:37:00 No yes, no no, which is sort of the no with the big capital no.
00:37:12 The way I personally like to point people to this, just my own style, because I like
00:37:32 a system, is well the place where things come from, the zero, the source, is the place that
00:37:43 they go to.
00:37:46 So you can train yourself gradually, systematically to start to notice when things disappear.
00:37:55 And the sensitivity develops over time until you finally see what happens, why things disappear.
00:38:04 The reason things disappear is that the forces, the polar forces that mold them cancel and
00:38:14 then they repolarize and then they cancel.
00:38:18 It's a cycle.
00:38:22 There's another way, well there's many other ways to come to this same knowledge.
00:38:32 One of the most powerful ways is called self-inquiry.
00:38:37 It's the flip side of just not God, just the reversal.
00:38:44 In that practice you're constantly trying to look over your shoulder and see where the
00:38:50 moment arose from, the unborn whence things are born.
00:38:56 So you're turning 180 degrees, turning consciousness back on itself, asking who am I, what is this?
00:39:04 Not as an intellectual question, but as an observing.
00:39:12 So in that case A has arisen and you ask where did A come from?
00:39:23 In this other practice, which I like because I can make it systematic and I can gradually
00:39:29 train people to do it, there's no gradual training for self-inquiry, you just do it.
00:39:36 There's no algorithm, you just do it.
00:39:41 The instruction is always the same.
00:39:42 You go to the teacher and it's just like, well where did that come from?
00:39:48 So that can be very powerful, but since I like algorithms and systems and let's see
00:39:54 what's coming up with people and whatever, I like something that I can teach step by
00:39:59 step.
00:40:01 So I sort of approach it from the other side, let's see where things go to.
00:40:06 But it's the same process, the same process.
00:40:19 So in the just not gone approach, A has arisen and now let's stay with A until we notice
00:40:27 the instant that A vanishes.
00:40:33 The instant that A vanishes is also the instant that B arises, the very instant.
00:40:43 What is B?
00:40:44 B is whatever came after A. So if you want to be truly at the absolute now whence something
00:40:56 arises, just watch something pass and then you'll be, either nothing will happen, which
00:41:07 case you're in chow-chow, or something will happen and you'll notice it coming from nothing.
00:41:24 Yes and no, my two favorite words.
00:41:30 Really?
00:41:31 When I ask someone a question, if they just say yes or just say no, without any modifications,
00:41:44 that's nice.
00:41:45 But usually there's modifications.
00:41:54 So as a parting gift, I'm going to slip you the secret.

00:42:06 How's that sound?

00:42:09 I'm going to slip you the secret with regards to yes and no.

00:42:18 The goal is to have a clear and deep experience of no.