

# Really Quite Simple

By Bruce Bowers

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Beginning when I was very young, in about the eleventh grade, I began to develop a strong interest in philosophy and religion. I was an only child and, discouraged by my upbringing in the Lutheran Church, I felt a strong need to find "a path". It was around this time that I found a few early books on Zen Buddhism. When Phillip Kapleau's book, *The Three Pillars of Zen*, was published, I felt an immediate connection to what seemed a cryptic, but comforting religion. Many times while reading it and reflecting upon it, I said to myself, "Yes, that's true."

For almost thirty years, I have lived with that same feeling. Usually the periods of clarity were very transitory, but convincing. Years of on again, off again Zazen meditation deepened those sensations. Although, no matter how much I read and meditated, I could not sustain those feeling of comfort and connectedness that I felt during these fleeting moments.

As my life continued, I got married (and have remained so for almost 28 years), had a daughter who is now ready to graduate from college, and sadly, lost both of my parents, all of my aunts and uncles, some of my cousins, and a few of my friends. By the time all of this happened, and the rigors of middle age set in, I began to feel very alone, very isolated. Although I have always had lots of friends, those friendships and my beautiful family were not enough to pull me from my solitary island. A sense of existential aloneness seemed an integral part of my being. More than ever, I sought a sense of "connection" with the world. Always, my meditation and, to a much lesser extent, my readings on Zen, brought me temporarily "home" to a more integrated place.

In retrospect, I see that this long period of sporadic Zazen, served as a ripening period. It laid the groundwork for the realizations that I have experienced over the past several years. It was an indispensable prerequisite to having my eyes opened to some modest extent.

As I approached my late forties, my dedication to a daily sitting practice really flowered. As a result, I visited many Zen centers throughout the Mid-Atlantic region, and beyond. My search for a teacher became of vital importance. Then, about three years ago, I met Jiro at a weekend retreat in Baltimore, Maryland.

After a few Dokusan meetings, I was assigned my first Koan. I lived with it, worked with it, and slept with it for many months. Upon its resolution, I experienced an irreversible transformation in the way I view the world, the universe, and my place in it.

The assignment of various Koans has vitalized my Zazen and my life to a tremendous degree. This approach to "the truth" suits me perfectly.

I still have feelings of isolation at times, but on a deeper level, I feel a sense of integration with life, with the people I meet, with all people, and with the universe in its entirety. Zen practice is really quite simple. It means meeting each day with full awareness and dealing with the difficulties of life head on. Nothing changes. I know the universe is the universe, although maybe in a different way than I previously thought. The only thing transformed by my practice has been me. It has made me realize that I am a citizen of the world. Underlying all of the difficulties and challenges of life is this knowledge that the universe is a truly wonderful place.

Since Zen is very tolerant of other religious persuasions, I would heartily recommend giving it a try. If nothing else, Zazen is a healthy practice both physically and psychologically. It could be an experiment that yields beautiful results.

Since Jiro, and "Early Light Zendo", present an American approach suited to "this time and this place", it could be a wonderful place to start your journey. I send you a deep gassho and wish you the highest zeal and aspiration in your practice.

(Note: the author, Bruce Bowers, is a potter. The teacups at Early Light Zendo came out of his wood-fired kiln. He lives in Maryland.)