

**Z**en literature seems at times to divide into two groups of works: those that are *about* zen; and those that *are* zen itself, talking. The first group is often precise, authoritative, and highly pedigreed but lacks a certain warmth and settledness. The second is often inaccurate, poorly composed, vague at times but has a special sound which you can recognize as the real thing. It is the sound of someone singing a song he himself has composed and which no one else can ever quite imitate. That is what we have here.

Zen is nothing other than what happens to individual people, and zen accounts which stay close to personal circumstances are truer than those which generalize. When Marian keeps her accounting close to what she sees and remembers, she avoids the academic objectification of zen which becomes controversial and misleading.

My own academic, English teacher's narrow mind always bridles at rambling zen disquisitions of this sort, but if you want to read real zen you have to put up with it. The best of zen masters ramble on and on without any apparent central point. This is caused by the slippery nature of what they are trying to convey. You can't read a zen discourse the way you read a detective story, trying to figure out the plot. There isn't any. You have to read this book like a giant catalog, line by line, looking for items to buy and keeping the rest on hand in case you might want to buy them later. When you finish this book, you can

start right in again on the first chapter and discover much more than you saw the first time.

That, after all, is how one learns about life itself.

—ROBERT M. PIRSIG