

150 Zen Sayings from Whitman's "Song of Myself"

Soiku SHIGEMATSU

This piece of collection follows my earlier "100 Zen Sayings from *The Old Man and the Sea*," "150 Zen Sayings from *The Grapes of Wrath*," "Zen Sayings from Ralph Waldo Emerson (I)."

I have picked out 150 Zen expressions from Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself." The number put at the end of each quotation indicates that of the line number in the Everyman's Library edition (1947).

Each extract in this collection is, so to speak, an original Zen saying written in English. Whitman, who was quite ignorant of Zen, did not mean it at all, but it is obvious that there are various Zen viewpoints—what I call Universalism, Individualism, Vitalism, or some other aspects of Zen—vividly expressed in his own "native" language without any mixture of exoticism nor imitation at all. Undoubtedly, no Zen exists without the self-awareness of seeing the Dharma (Truth) through mind-and-body. So far as words are concerned, however, it is also true that the Zen eye can see in each extract one or more than one aspects of Zen spoken in words. I wish to have put a capping phrase (saying) to each entry even in this collection just as I have done in my earlier ones (except the one from Emerson) to make the Zen viewpoint in each quotation much clearer. For detailed information regarding Zen viewpoints, sayings, and capping phrases, see my introduction to *A Zen Forest: Sayings of the Masters* (New York & Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1981), where I have explained these more in detail.

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1. My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this
air. (6)
2. Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their
parents the same. (7)
3. The atmosphere is not a perfume, it has no taste of the distillation,
it it odorless,
It is for my mouth forever, I am in love with it. (17-18)
4. I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and
naked,
I am mad for it to be in contact with me. (19-20)
5. My respiration and inspiration, the beating of my heart, the
passing of blood and air through my lungs. (24)
6. The play of shine and shade on the trees as the supple boughs
wag. (27)
7. There was never any more inception than there is now,
Nor any more youth or age than there is now,
And will never be any more perfection than there is now,
Nor any more heaven or hell than there is now. (40-43)
8. Out of the dimness opposite equals advance, always substance and
increase, always sex. (46)
9. Always a knit of identity, always distinction, always a breed of
life. (47)
10. Clear and sweet is my soul, and clear and sweet is all that is
not my soul. (52)

11. Lack one lacks both, and the unseen is proved by the seen,
Till that becomes unseen and receives proof in its turn. (53—54)
12. Not an inch nor a particle of an inch is vile, and none shall be
less familiar than the rest. (59)
13. Looks down, is erect, or bends an arm on an impalpable certain
rest. (77)
14. Both in and out of the game and watching and wondering at it.
(79)
15. I believe in you my soul, the other I am must not abase itself
to you,
And you must not be abased to the other. (82)
16. Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge
that pass all the argument of the earth,
And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,
And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,
And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the
women my sisters and lovers. (91—94)
17. And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the fields,
And brown ants in the little wells beneath them,
And mossy scabs of the worm fence, heap'd stones, elder,
mullein and poke-weed. (96—98)
18. Or I guess the grass is itself a child, the produced babe of the
vegetation. (105)
19. Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic,
And it means, Sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow zones,
Growing among black folks as among white,

Kanuck, Tuckahoe, Congressman, Cuff, I give them the same,
I receive them the same. (106—09)

20. Every kind for itself and its own, for me mine male and female,
For me those that have been boys and that love women,
For me the man that is proud and feels how it stings to be
slighted,
For me the sweet-heart and the old maid, for me mothers and
the mothers of mothers,
For me lips that have smiled, eyes that have shed tears,
For me children and the begetters of children. (139—44)

21. The big doors of the country barn stand open and ready,
The dried grass of the harvest-time loads the slow-drawn wagon.
(167—68)

22. I jump from the cross-beams and seize the clover and timothy,
And roll head over heels and tangle my hair full of wisps.
(173—74)

23. Wandering amazed at my own lightness and glee,
In the late afternoon choosing a safe spot to pass the night.
(176—77)

24. They do not hasten, each man hits in his place. (224)

25. In me the caresser of life wherever moving, backward as well
as forward sluing,
To niches aside and junior bending, not a person or object missing,
Absorbing all to myself and for this song. (232—34)

26. And the jay in the woods never studied the gamut, yet trills
pretty well to me,
And the look of the bay mare shames silliness out of me.

27. The sharp-hoof'd moose of the north, the cat on the house-sill,
the chickadee, the prairie-dog,
The litter of the grunting sow as they tug at her teats,
The brood of the turkey-hen and she with her half-spread wings,
I see in them and myself the same old law. (249—52)
28. The press of my foot to the earth springs a hundred affections.
(253)
29. What is commonest, cheapest, nearest, easiest, is Me. (259)
30. The canal boy trots on the tow-path, the book-keeper counts at
his desk, the shoemaker waxes his thread. (297)
31. Seasons pursuing each other the plougher ploughs, the mower
mows, and the winter-grain falls in the ground. (316)
32. The city sleeps and the country sleeps,
The living sleep for their time, the dead sleep for their time.
(324—25)
33. And these tend inward to me, and I tend outward to them,
And such as it is to be of these more or less I am,
And of these one and all I weave the song of myself. (327—29)
34. Maternal as well as paternal, a child as well as a man,
Stuff'd with the stuff that is coarse and stuff'd with the stuff
that is fine. (332—33)
35. One of the Nation of many nations, the smallest the same and
the largest the same,
A Southerner soon as a Northerner, a planter nonchalant and

hospitable down by the Oconee I live. (334—35)

36. The moth and the fish-eggs are in their place,
The bright suns I see and the dark suns I cannot see are in
their place,
The palpable is in its place and the impalpable is in its place.
(352—54)

37. If they are not yours as much as mine they are nothing, or next
to nothing,
If they are not the riddle and the untying of the riddle they are
nothing,
If they are not just as close as they are distant they are nothing.
(356—58)

38. This is the grass that grows wherever the land is and the water
is. (359)

39. This the common air that bathes the globe. (360)

40. Have you heard that it was good to gain the day?
I also say it is good to fall, battles are lost in the same spirit in
which they are won. (363—64)

41. This is the meal equally set, this the meat for natural hunger,
It is for the wicked just the same as the righteous, I make
appointments with all. (372—73)

42. I will not have a single person slighted or left away,
The kept-woman, sponger, thief, are hereby invited,
The heavy-lipp'd slave is invited, the venerealee is invited;
There shall be no difference between them and the rest.
(374—77)

43. This the far-off depth and height reflecting my own face,
This the thoughtful merge of myself, and the outlet again.
(380—81)
44. What is a man anyhow? what am I? what are you? (391)
45. I wear my hat as I please indoors or out. (397)
46. In all people I see myself, none more and not one a barley-corn
less. (401)
47. To me the converging objects of the universe perpetually flow,
All are written to me, and I must get what the writing means.
(404—05)
48. I exist as I am, that is enough,
If no other in the world be aware I sit content,
And if each and all be aware I sit content. (413—15)
49. I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul,
The pleasures of heaven are with me and the pains of hell are
with me. (422—23)
50. Earth of shine and dark mottling the tide of the river!
Earth of the limpid gray of clouds brighter and clearer for my
sake!
Far-swooping elbow'd earth—rich apple-blossom'd earth!
(442—44)
51. I am integral with you, I too am of one phase and of all phases.
(458)
52. This minute that comes to me over the past decillions,
There is no better than it and now. (473—74)

53. It alone is without flaw, it alone rounds and completes all,
That mystic baffling wonder alone completes all. (481—82)
54. Your facts are useful, and yet they are not my dwelling,
I but enter by them to an area of my dwelling. (491—92)
55. No sentimentalist, no stander above men and women or apart
from them. (499)
56. Whoever degrades another degrades me,
And whatever is done or said returns at last to me. (503—04)
57. Through me many long dumb voices,
Voices of the interminable generation of prisoners and slaves,
Voices of the diseas'd and despairing and of thieves and dwarfs.
(508—10)
58. Seeing, hearing, feeling, are miracles, and each part and tag of
me is a miracle. (523)
59. Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch
or am touch'd from. (524)
60. Each moment and whatever happens thrills me with joy. (545)
61. I cannot tell how my ankles bend, nor whence the cause of my
taintest wish,
Nor the cause of the friendship I emit, nor the cause of the
friendship I take again. (546—47)
62. A morning-glory at my window satisfies me more than the
metaphysics of books. (549)
63. To behold the day-break !

- The little light fades the immense and diaphanous shadows,
The air tastes good to my palate. (550—52)
64. Writing and talk do not prove me,
I carry the plenum of proof and every thing else in my face,
With the hush of my lips I wholly confound the skeptic. (579—81)
65. A tenor large and fresh as the creation fills me,
The orbic flex of his mouth is pouring and filling me full. (601—02)
66. It sails me, I dab with bare feet, they are lick'd by the indolent
waves. (606)
67. I am cut by bitter and angry hail, I lose my breath,
Steep'd amid honey'd morphine, my windpipe throttled in fakes
of death,
At length let up again to feel the puzzle of puzzles,
And that we call Being. (607—10)
68. Mine is no callous shall,
I have instant conductors all over me whether I pass or stop,
They seize every object and lead it harmlessly through me. (614—16)
69. Is this then a touch? quivering me to a new identity,
Flames and ether making a rush for my veins,
Treachorous tip of me reaching and crowding to help them,
My flesh and blood playing out lightning to strike what is hardly
different from myself. (619—22)
70. Logic and sermons never convince,
The damp of the night drives deeper into my soul. (653—54)

71. I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars,
And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and the egg of the wren. (663—64)
72. And the tree-toad is a chef-d'œuvre for the highest,
And the running blackberry would adorn the parlors of heaven. (665—66)
73. And the narrowest hinge in my hand puts to scorn all machinery,
And the cow crunching with depress'd head surpasses any statue,
And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels. (667—69)
74. I find I incorporate gneiss, coal, long-threaded moss, fruits,
grains, esculent roots,
And am stucco'd with quadrupeds and birds all over. (670—71)
75. In vain the razor-bill'd auk sails far north to Labrador,
I follow quickly, I ascend to the nest in the fissure of the cliff. (682—83)
76. They do not sweat and whine about their condition,
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins. (686—87)
77. They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God,
Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with the mania of
owning things. (688—89)
78. I but use you a minute, then I resign you, stallion.
Why do I need your paces when I myself out-gallop them?
Even as I stand or sit passing faster than you. (707—09)

79. My ties and ballasts leave me, my elbows rest in sea-gaps,
I skirt sierras, my palms cover continents. (714—15)
80. Where the pear-shaped balloon is floating aloft, (floating in it
myself and looking composedly down.) (740)
81. Where sun-down shadows lengthen over the limitless and lonesome
praisie. (760)
82. Looking in at the shop-windows of Broadway the whole forenoon,
flating the flesh of my nose on the thick plate glass,
Wandering the same afternoon with my face turn'd up to the
clouds, or down a lane or along the beach. (779—80)
83. Hot toward one I hate, ready in my madness to knife him,
Solitary at midnight in my back yard, my thoughts gone from
me a long while. (788—89)
84. Speeding through space, speeding through heaven and the stars,
Speeding amid the seven satellites and the broad ring, and the
diameter of eighty thousand miles. (791—92)
85. Speeding with tail'd meteors, throwing fire-balls like the rest,
Carrying the crescent child that carries its own full mother in
its belly. (793—94)
86. I visit the orchards of spheres and look at the product,
And look at quintillions ripen'd and look at quintillions green.
(798—99)
87. I fly those flights of a fluid and swallowing soul,
My course runs below the soundings of plummets. (800—01)
88. I help myself to material and immaterial,

No guard can shut me off, no law prevent me. (802—03)

89. Through the clear atmosphere I stretch around on the wonderful
beauty,
The enormous masses of ice pass me and I pass them, the
scenery is plain in all directions. (810—11)

90. Agonies are one of my changes of garments,
I do not ask the wounded person how he feels, I myself become
the wounded person,
My hurts turn livid upon me as I lean on a cane and observe.
(844—46)

91. Distant and dead resuscitate,
They show as the dial or move as the hands of me, I am the
clock myself. (856—57)

92. The blossoms we wear in our hats the growth of thousands of
years. (973)

93. Behavior lawless as snow-flakes, words simple as grass, uncomb'd
head, laughter, and naivetè,
Slow-stepping feet, common features, common modes and emanations.
(983—84)

94. Behold, I do not give lectures or a little charity,
When I give I give myself. (994—95)

95. I ... have stores plenty and to spare,
And any thing I have I bestow. (999—1000)

96. O despairer, here is my neck,
By God, you shall not go down ! hang your whole weight upon
me. (1012—13)

97. I am he bringing help for the sick as they pant on their backs,
And for strong upright men I bring yet more needed help.
(1021—22)
98. The bull and the bug never worshipp'd half enough,
Dung and dirt more admirable than was dream'd. (1048—49)
99. The supernatural of no account, myself waiting my time to be
one of the supremes. (1050)
100. Ever the old inexplicable query, ever that thorn'd thumb, that
breath of itches and thirsts,
Ever the vexer's *hoot! hoot!* till we find where the sly one hides
and bring him forth. (1067—68)
101. Not words of routine this song of mine,
But abruptly to question, to leap beyond yet nearer bring.
(1086—87)
102. I shall come again upon the earth after five thousand years.
(1099)
103. One of that centripetal and centrifugal gang I turn. (1111)
104. The past is the push of you, me, all, precisely the same,
And what is yet untried and afterward is for you, me, all
precisely the same. (1119—20)
105. Nor the old man who has lived without purpose, and feels it
with bitterness worse than gall. (1127)
106. What is known I strip away,
I launch all men and women forward with me into the Unknown.
(1135—36)

107. I do not call one greater and one smaller,
That which fills its period and place is equal to any. (1141—42)
108. I am an acme of things accomplish'd, and I an encloser of things
to be. (1148)
109. On every step bunches of ages, and larger bunches between the
steps,
All below duly travel'd, and still I mount and mount. (1150—51)
110. Rise after rise bow the phantoms behind me,
Afar down I see the huge first Nothing, I know I was even
there. (1152—53)
111. Immense have been the preparations for me.
Faithful and friendly the arms that have help'd me. (1157—58)
112. Before I was born out of my mother generations guided me,
My embryo has never been torpid, nothing could overlay it.
(1162—63)
113. For it the nebula cohered to an orb,
The long slow strata piled to rest it on,
Vast vegetables gave it sustenance,
Monstrous sauroids transported it in their mouths and deposited
it with care. (1164—67)
114. All forces have been steadily employ'd to complete and delight
me,
Now on this spot I stand with my robust soul. (1168—69)
115. Wider and wider they spread, expanding, always expanding,
Outward and outward and forever outward. (1185—86)

116. My sun has his sun and round him obediently wheels,
He joins with his partners a group of superior circuit,
And greater sets follow, making specks of the greatest inside
them. (1187—89)
117. A few quadrillions of eras, a few octillions of cubic leagues, do
not hazard the span or make it impatient,
They are but parts, any thing is but a part. (1194—95)
118. See ever so far, there is limitless space outside of that,
Count ever so much, there is limitless time around that.
(1196—97)
119. My rendezvous is appointed, it is certain,
The Lord will be there and wait till I come on perfect terms,
The great Camerado, the lover true for whom I pine will be
there. (1198—1200)
120. Not I, not any one else can travel that road for you,
You must travel it for yourself. (1210—11)
121. It is not far, it is within reach,
Perhaps you have been on it since you were born and did not know,
Perhaps it is everywhere on water and on land. (1212—14)
122. Shoulder your duds dear son, and I will mine, and let us hasten
forth. (1215)
123. If you tire, give me both burdens, and rest the chuff of your
hand on my hip,
And in due time you shall repay the same service to me.
(1217—18)
124. After we start we never lie by again. (1219)

125. You are also asking me questions and I hear you,
I answer that I cannot answer, you must find out for yourself.
(1223--24)
126. Sit a while dear son,
Here are biscuits to eat and here is milk to drink. (1225--26)
127. Long enough have you dream'd contemptible dreams,
Now I wash the gum from your eyes,
You must habit yourself to the dazzle of the light and of every
moment of your life. (1228--30)
128. I teach straying from me, yet who can stray from me?
I follow you whoever you are from the present hour. (1244--45)
129. My words itch at your ears till you understand them. (1246)
130. If you would understand me go to the heights or water-shore,
The nearest gnat is an explanation, and a drop or motion of waves
a key,
The maul, the oar, the hand-saw, second my words. (1252--54)
131. The woodman that takes his axe and jug with him shall take
me with him all day,
The farm-boy ploughing in the field feels good at the sound of
my voice. (1258--59)
132. The girl and the wife rest the needle a moment and forget
where they are. (1267)
133. I have said that the soul is not more than the body,
And I have said that the body is not more than the soul,
And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is.
(1269--71)

134. To glance with an eye or show a bean in its pod confounds the
learning of all times. (1274)
135. There is no trade or employment but the young man following
it may become a hero,
There is no object so soft but it makes a hub for the wheel'd
universe. (1275—76)
136. I say to any man or woman, Let your soul stand cool and
composed before a million universes. (1277)
137. No array of terms can say how much I am at peace about God
and about death. (1280)
138. Why should I wish to see God better than this day?
I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four, and each
moment then. (1283—84)
139. In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own face
in the glass,
I find letters from God dropt in the street, and every one is
sign'd by God's name. (1285—86)
140. And as to you Corpse I think you are good manure, but that
does not offend me,
I smell the white roses sweet-scented and growing,
I reach to the leafy lips, I reach to the polish'd breasts of
melons. (1294—96)
141. And as to you Life I reckon you are the leavings of many deaths,
(No doubt I have died myself ten thousand times before.)
(1297—99)
142. I perceive that the ghastly glimmer is noonday sunbeams

- reflected,
And debouch to the steady and central from the offspring great
or small. (1307—08)
143. There is that in me —I do not know what it is— but I know it
is in me. (1309)
144. I do not know it —it is without name— it is a word unsaid,
It is not in any dictionary, utterance, symbol. (1312—13)
145. The past and present wilt—I have fill'd them, emptied them,
And proceed to fill my next fold of the future. (1319—20)
146. Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.) (1324—26)
147. I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable,
I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.
(1332—33)
148. I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.
(1339—40)
149. You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
And filter and fibre your blood. (1341—43)
150. Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
Missing me one place search another,
I stop somewhere waiting for you. (1344—46)