

## 150 Zen Saying from The Grapes of Wrath

メタデータ	言語: eng 出版者: 公開日: 2015-06-04 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: Shigematsu, Soiku メールアドレス: 所属:
URL	<a href="https://doi.org/10.14945/00008660">https://doi.org/10.14945/00008660</a>

150 Zen Sayings from *The Grapes of Wrath*

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I have picked out 150 Zen expressions from John Steinbeck's masterpiece, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and capped each of them with a Zen saying chosen from my book, *A Zen Forest: Sayings of the Masters* (New York & Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1981), an English translation of the capping-phrase book called the *Zenrin Kushū*, which was compiled in the late fifteenth century by a Japanese Zen master, Tōyō Eichō. To explain and to clarify, however, the Zen viewpoint in each quotation from the Steinbeck's work, I have often tried to pick one with the same or a similar connotation.

The number put at the end of each quotation indicates that of the page in the Viking edition of *The Grapes of Wrath* (The Viking Critical Library, 1972) I have used for this work, and I have arranged the quotations in page order. To some of them I have added one or more quotations of the same kind from elsewhere in *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Those capping phrases which have an italicized number at the end are from *A Zen Forest* and refer to the phrase numbers there, while those without numbers are from my forthcoming translation of secular Zen sayings.

To make each extract an independent saying, I have not always followed the strictly academic system of quotation; but, needless to say, I have left the wording as it is, even the slangy and ungrammatical expressions being untouched.

For further detailed information regarding the *Zenrin Kushū*, Zen sayings, and capping phrases, see my introduction to *A Zen Forest*, where I have explained these in detail.

This piece of work follows my earlier "100 Zen Sayings from *The Old Man and the Sea*" as part of my research into "Zen in American Literature" and has been carried out with the assistance of a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research from the Ministry of Education, to which I would like to express my deepest gratitude.

1. As the sky became pale, so the earth became pale. (p. 3)

In the willow, become green!

In the flower, become red! (no. 906)

2. No misfortune was too great to bear if their men were whole.(7)

Scatter away ten thousand/Troubles with a smile:

Plum flowers.

3. A land turtle crawled, turning aside for nothing, dragging his high-domed shell over the grass. (20)

It's also mine—/And then, it's not heavy:

The snow on my hat.

4. His fierce, humorous eyes, under brows like fingernails, stared straight ahead. (20)

Don't hesitate,/Go straight on!/A snow-covered path.

5. Lying on its back, the turtle was tight in its shell for a long time. (22)

Pecking the eggshell/at once from inside and out.

(732)

6. Joad plodded along, dragging his cloud of dust behind him. (24)

The sacred tortoise/clumps over the land:

How can it erase/a trail in the dirt? (1218)

7. He moved up the road, shooting the dust ahead of him, making a cloud that hung low to the ground behind him. (23)

8. Nobody can't keep a turtle though. They work at it and work at it, and at last one day they get out and away they go—off somewheres. (28)

Dead water:/no dragon in it. (471)

9. I wouldn't take the good ol' gospel that was just layin' there to my hand. (28-9)

To crave the moon/in the heavens  
And lose the pearl/in his hand. (886)

10. I got to be pickin' at it an' workin' at it until I got it all tore down. (29)

Pity! Aman/endlessly juggling  
the waves of the Buddha Sea  
Finally/falls in/and dies. (139)

11. It only dropped its head an inch and trotted fast toward some definite destination. (29)

Beyond/the white clouds—/a blue mountain:  
A traveler/goes/beyond that mountain. (949)

12. They're (=turtles) always goin' someplace. They always seem to want to get there. (60)

13. There ain't no sin and there ain't no virtue. There's just stuff people do. It's all part of the same thing. (32)

Worldly passions inseparable/from satori. (1096)

14. Some of the things folks do is nice, and some ain't nice. (32)

One man's speech / is a rapid stream;

The other's, / simple and artless. (71)

15. I only love people.... I want to make 'em happy, so I been preachin' somepin I thought would make 'em happy. (32)

Watch all sentient beings / with merciful eyes. (482)

16. Maybe that's the Holy Spirit—the human spirit—the whole shebang. Maybe all men got one big soul ever'body's a part of. (33)

Mountains and rivers / and the great earth:

Everything reveals / the Body of Buddha. (413)

17. The twenty families became one family, the children were the children of all. (264)

18. He foun' he jus' got a little piece of a great big soul. (570)

19. A fella ain't got a soul of his own, but on'y a piece of a big one. (572)

20. Now I sat there thinkin' it, an' all of a suddent—I knew it. I knew it so deep down that it was true. (33)

The ten thousand / barriers / open all at once. (975)

21. The naked honesty in the preacher's eyes. (33)

Straightforwardness: / the monastery. (796)

22. Gonna lay in the grass, open an' honest with anybody that'll have me. (128)

23. We were born on it, and we got killed on it, died on it. (45)

A wide sea lets/fish hop and leap;

A wide sky allows/birds to flutter and fly. (745)

24. Men made it (=the monster), but they can't control it. (45)

No carpenter/Will build a/Wagon-on-fire;

We make it for ourselves,/And ride on it.

25. The monster isn't men, but it can make men do what it wants. (46)

26. If he owns property only so he can walk on it and handle it and be sad when it isn't doing well, and feel fine when the rain falls on it, that property is him. (50)

Self and other/are not two:

Illusory/you and I. (490)

27. Place where folks live is them folks. (71)

28. There was the hills, an' there was me, an' we wasn't separate no more. We was one thing. (110)

29. The anger of a moment, the thousand pictures, that's us. This land, this red land, is us; and the flood years and the dust years and the drought years are us. (119)

30. Can you live without the willow tree? Well, no, you can't. The willow tree is you. (120-1)

31. The pain on that mattress there—that dreadful pain—that's you. (121)

32. Grampa an' the old place, they was jus' the same thing. (199)
33. An'—when they stood—an' me a-singin', why, me an' them  
was together more'n you could ever know. (298)
34. The evening light was on the fields, and the cotton plants threw  
long shadows on the ground, and the molting willow tree threw  
a long shadow. (57)

The sun arrives/at the western peak:/shadows longer.

(899)

35. The sun dropped low toward the horizon and the dusty air  
was red and golden. (59-60)
36. If you want to tell about somepin off northwest, you point your  
nose straight southeast. (63)

Asking for the east,/to be told, "There's the west!"

(1147)

37. Fella gets use' to a way a thinkin', it's hard to leave. (69)

A phrase/completely to the point:

The eternal/donkey hitching post. (32)

38. Fella gets use' to a place, it's hard to go. (69)
39. They ain't whole, out lonely on the road in a piled-up car. (71)

Devil may care! Wearing/My hat slantways...

In travel a companion,/In life compassion.

40. Sometimes a sad man can talk the sadness right out through his



mouth. (72)

The gold bracelet/on her arm/one inch looser:

Nevertheless she says to/everyone/"I'm not in love!

Not in love!"

(1161)

41. Sometimes a killin' man can talk the murder right out of his mouth an' not do no murder. (72)

42. You don't look for no sense when lightnin' kills a cow, or it comes up a flood. That's jus' the way things is. (74)

Spring comes:/grass grows. (550)

43. Suddenly he cried, "I got her! If ever a man got a dose of the sperit, I got her! Got her all of a flash!" He jumped to his feet and paced back and forth, his head swinging. (75-6)

March, the flower time:/Even little birds will dance

Calling "Hey, butterflies! /Hey, flowers!"

44. I think I got her (=the sperit) now. I don' know if I can say her. I guess I won't try to say her. (76)

Words/fail.

Mind/fails. (307)

45. I could shut my eyes an' walk right there. On'y way I can go wrong is think about her. Jus' forget about her, an' I'll go right there. (90)

A waterfowl,/Coming and going/Doesn't leave traces,

But, never/Forgets its way.

46. Kids now can tear down a car 'thout even thinkin' about it.  
(252)

47. I didn' know what I was a-doin', no more'n when you take  
a breath. (535)

48. She seemed to know, to accept, to welcome her position, the  
citadel of the family, the strong place that could not be taken.  
(100)

Stars in the sky/all pay respects/north—  
All streams in China/go/east— (832)

49. Her joy was nearly like sorrow. (101)

Pleasure in sorrow,/sorrow in pleasure. (270)

50. Sadness and pleasure so close together, really the same  
thing. (447)

51. Nighttime I'd lay on my back an' look up at the stars; morning  
I'd set an' watch the sun come up. (110)

In the morning/to encamp at East Gate,  
In the evening/to reach North Bridge. (785)

52. Midday I'd look out from a hill at the rollin' dry country;  
evenin' I'd foller the sun down. (110)

53. We was holy when we was one thing, an' mankin' was holy  
when it was one thing. (110)

Throughout the universe/One Holy Body/revealed. (977)

54. When they're all workin' together, not one fella for another fella, but one fella kind of harnessed to the whole shebang—that's right, that's holy. (110)

55. His little piece of a soul wasn't no good 'less it was with the rest, an' was whole. (570)

56. How will we know it's us without our past? No. Leave it. Burn it. (120)

Everything washed away! / Winds are cool  
On my way back.

57. You got to think about that day, an' then the nex' day. (123)

At each step, / the pure wind rises. (1063)

58. "Watch the look in his eye," said Ma. "He looks baptized. Got that look they call lookin' through." (127)

His eyebrows, / like snowed-over banks;  
His eyes, / like autumn rivers. (198)

59. The houses is all empty, an' the lan' is empty, an' this whole country is empty. (127)

Outside void, / inside void, / inside-outside void;  
Void, void, / void, void, / finally all void. (164)

60. The world was pregnant to her. (130)

Human faces, peach blossoms / reflect each other  
bright pink. (920)

61. Plants were individuals, not the mass of crop; and the ragged willow tree was itself, standing free of all other willow trees. (135)

The One Mind/Of heaven and earth/Is dyed into  
A thousand different/Grass colors.

62. The film of evening light made the red earth lucent, so that its dimensions were deepened, so that a stone, a post, a building had greater depth and more solidity than in the daytime light. (135)

63. These objects were curiously more individual—a post was more essentially a post, set off from the earth it stood in and the field of corn it stood out against. (135)

64. The preacher sitting back against the wall, looking at the flashing evening star in the light sky. (140)

Clear far into the heavens:/crowds of stars come near.  
(828)

65. He threw back his head and looked at the sharp stars. (82)

66. It's women's work. (146)

North village,/south hamlet,/one rainfall's rest:  
A new bride serves lunch/to mother-in-law, and  
father-in-law feeds the baby. (892)

67. I'll jus' stay right here where I b'long. (152)

When a lantern's out,/Where, I wonder, does

Its light go?/Darkness is my old friend,  
My own original house.

68. They saw the shed take shape against the light, and they saw the lanterns pale until they no longer cast their circles of yellow light. (154)

The day dawns:/fire gets useless. (827)

69. Their eyes focused panoramically, seeing no detail, but the whole dawn, the whole land, the whole texture of the country at once. (154)

A lone, round/mind-moon:  
Its rays/swallow up everything. (587)

70. She straightened her head and peered straight ahead along the dirt road. (156)

One straight path/through thorny bush. (282)

71. When a horse...goes into the barn there is a life and a vitality left, there is a breathing and a warmth. (157)

Catch/the vigorous horse/of your mind! (730)

72. The ears and the eyes are alive. (157)

73. So easy that the wonder goes out of work, so efficient that the wonder goes out of land... and with the wonder the deep understanding and the relation. (157)

Magical power,/marvelous action!  
Carrying water,/shouldering wood. (595)

74. That man who is more than his elements knows the land that is more than its analysis. (158)

Three thousand miles away—/another one  
who knows. (431)

75. The doors of the empty houses swung open, and drifted back and forth in the wind. (158)

On the crossroads,/a pair of broken/straw sandals.  
(529)

76. On windy nights the doors banged, and the ragged curtains fluttered in the broken windows. (159)

77. The mice moved in and stored weed seeds in corners, in boxes, in the backs of drawers in the kitchens. And weasels came in to hunt the mice, and the brown owls flew shrieking in and out again. (159)

Horse dung originates in/The pampas grass—on  
The hills and fields—which/Once gave shelter to  
The chirping grasshoppers.

78. A vacant house falls quickly apart. (159)

Water originally/contains no sound:  
Touching a stone/makes it murmur. (614)

79. Al was one with his engine, every nerve listening for weaknesses, for the thumps or squeals, hums and chattering....He had become the soul of the car. (167)

On the saddle,/no man;

- Underneath it, / no horse. (8)
80. Her whole thought and action were directed inward on the baby. (130)
81. This here little piece of iron an' babbitt. See it? Ya see it?  
Well, that's the only goddamn thing in the world I got on my mind. (236)
82. I got this goddamn car on my soul. (309)
83. He's out lookin' for a girl. He don't care 'bout nothin' else.  
(525)
84. Think about it all day an' do it all night. (525)
85. I'm workin' hard an' sleepin' good. No dreams nor nothin'.  
(560)
86. Up ahead they's a thousan' lives we might live, but when it comes, it'll on'y be one. (168)
- Easy is / the way to satori:  
Just / avoid choosing! (476)
87. She was all secrets now she was pregnant, secrets and little silences that seemed to have meanings. (175)
- Taking up / a lute, / the lady  
Half hides / her face: / most elegant. (1168)
88. The world had drawn close around them, and they were in the center of it. (175-6)
- Above the heavens, / below the heavens:  
Only I / am holy. (831)

89. Rose of Sharon was in the center of it with Connie making a small orbit about her. (176)

The North Star,/not moving,  
Makes the others/circle it. (991)

90. They (=Grampa's eyes) were clear and deep and penetrating, and there was a knowing serene look in them. (188)

One monk is enough/who's gone through  
the last barrier:  
Stretching out his legs,/lies full on the mat  
in the zendo. (1204)

91. We're proud to help....People needs—to help. (192)

Fish live in the streams,/Birds nest on the trees;  
Human beings dwell in/Mercy and love.

92. Grampa here, he got the easy straight. (197)

One/eternal Way:  
Each man of satori/takes it. (314)

93. He got a job to do, but it's all laid out for 'im an' there's on'y one way to do it. (197)

94. Funny thing is—losin' Grampa ain't made me feel no different than I done before. I ain't no sadder than I was. (199)

I never die,/Won't go anywhere:/I'm staying here.  
Don't ask me anything,/Cause I speak no word. (146)

95. He spoke loudly, for a load of worry was lifted from him. (202)



- Having just thrown/everything/into West Lake—  
 This clear wind cooling/my unburdened shoulders:  
 with whom shall I share? (909)
96. Muscles aching to work, minds aching to create beyond the  
 single need. (204)
- Rendezvous makes/A thousand miles one mile:  
 Over the wide rice field,/Only one jump—
97. Got a million acres an' scairt of dyin'. (281)
- To have no posterity/for fear of mourning. (243)
98. I never seen nobody that's busy as a prairie dog collectin' stuff  
 that wasn't disappointed. (282)
- All vanity:/heaping a well/with snow.  
 Hundred years' illusion:/binding a rope/with wind. (238)
99. When we get there, we'll get there. When we get a job we'll  
 work. (283)
- You want to go?/—go!  
 Want to sit?/—just sit! (1172)
100. When somepin happens that I got to do somepin—I'll do it.  
 (168)
101. A man got to do what he got to do. (306)
102. He's jus' doin' what he's got to do. (525)
103. When it's time to go—we'll go. We'll do what we got to do.  
 (605)

104. Dyin' is a piece of all dyin', and bearin' is a piece of all bearin',  
an' bearin' an' dyin' is two pieces of the same thing. (286)

Birth and death in/This passing world—  
See through them! / They're just like  
Ice and water.

105. It's the same thing, singin' an' prayin', jus' the same thing.  
(298)

106. Take your breath in when you need it, an' let it go when you  
need to. (286)

Cold comes—/double your robes!  
Heat comes—/fan it away! (194)

107. Suddenly they saw the great valley below them... "Jesus Christ!  
Look!"... The vineyards, the orchards, the great flat valley, green  
and beautiful, the trees set in rows, and the farm houses.  
(309-10)

Mountains and rivers/and the great earth:  
Everything reveals/the Body of Buddha. (413)

108. They stood, silent and awestruck, embarrassed before the great  
valley. (310)

The sharp sword/in the box glittering/cold—  
Outsiders and devils/all bow before it  
—with reverence. (631)

109. The distance was thinned with haze, and the land grew softer  
and softer in the distance. (310)

How to describe it? / Evening clouds flying / in tatters...

Distant mountains/limitless blue,/range over range...

(191)

110. The sun was behind them, and the valley golden and green  
before them. (313)

The tree splits/the spring wind/in two—

Southern branches stretch/to warmth;

northern, to cold. (46)

111. They're beating their wings like a bird in a attic. Gonna bust  
their wings on a dusty winda tryin' ta get out. (340)

To sneer at myself/being without/life-long Zen:

Mostly blown/at the mercy of/karma winds. (488)

112. S'pose you was cookin' a stew an' a bunch a little fellas stood  
aroun' moonin', what'd you do? (353)

Swords leave/the jeweled box/for the hungry;

Medicine escapes/the golden bottle/for the sick. (296)

113. A pick is a nice tool (*umph*), if you don' fight it (*umph*). You  
an' the pick (*umph*) workin' together (*umph*). (407)

The bell rings?/Or the stick rings?

Between the bell and the stick/*It* rings.

114. Huntin' skunks under water. (435)

To bounce a ball/on the rapids. (222)

115. Bang! You pick him up—bloody an' twisted, an' you spoiled  
somepin better'n you. (445)

- The mirror, shattered, / reflects never again;  
 The fallen blossom never / returns to its twig. (934)
116. The stars came down wonderfully close and the sky was soft.  
 Death was a friend, and sleep was death's brother. (447)
- Watch by yourself / the way / of life and death.  
 An active soul / is exactly in / the dead man! (651)
117. The stars are close and dear and I have joined the brotherhood  
 of the worlds. (447)
- Heaven, earth, and I: / the same root.  
 Everything and I: / one thing. (835)
118. Stop the fall from comin'.... Stop the sap from movin' in the  
 trees. (450)
- Wrap a clear wind / with a torn / robe. (940)
119. Valleys in which the fruit blossoms are fragrant pink and  
 white waters in a shallow sea. (473)
- Grass color / green green— / willow color gold.  
 Peach blossoms / bloom bloom—  
 plum flowers fragrant. (722)
120. Ever'thing you do is more'n you. (482)
- To display at last / maturity of spirit. (127)
121. If I don't get one (=a bath) ever' day I stink. (487)
- Hard to realize it's / the stink of his own shit! (486)
122. The sun moved up toward noon and the shadow of the truck

grew lean and moved in under the wheels. (501)

Castle shadows cease/under a high moon;

Willow streamers are thinner/in heavy frost. (291)

123. Folks is their own cops. (523)

Be master of yourself/—everywhere:

All you do/proves true. (636)

124. If we can gove'n ourselves, maybe we'll do...things. (406)

125. They wasn't no cops wagglin' their guns, but they was  
better order than them cops ever give. (571)

126. Fingers go right to it. Fingers know. (555)

What a miracle! I've/Forgotten how to fold my robe,

But my hands still remember it.

127. Got to grow into her (=a car) when you're a little kid.

It ain't jus' knowin'. It's more'n that. (252)

128. Inquisitive fingers snick in and out and find the bolls.

Hardly have to look. (555)

129. Wise fingers seeking in the bolls. Hips hunching along,  
dragging the bag. (556)

130. Back with the empty sack. (556)

Emptyhanded come,/emptyhanded go! (274)

131. Cotton rolls in little balls along the road when the wind blows.  
(556)

A wind/ from the west:

Falling leaves,/ two or three... (662)

132. A wind stirred the willows delicately,... and a shower of golden leaves coasted down to the ground. (567)

133. The wind blew past and left the thicket quiet. (567)

134. Well, that's a nice day anyways. (557)

Day after day/ a very good day:

Winds come/ and trees bow. (900)

135. From each car a hard-beaten path went down to the stream.  
(559)

Peach and plum blossoms/ speak no word:

Lines of admirers/ tread a path under them. (872)

136. Stuff settin' out there, you jus' feel like buyin' it whether you need it or not. (560)

A fully packed treasury/ tempts a robber;

A voluptuous female/ rouses desire. (1099)

137. Suddenly a gust boiled in and racked the trees, and a cricking downpour of leaves fell. (567)

A crazy/ gust/ last night:

How many/ peach blossoms/ fallen? (1158)

138. Over the sky a plump black cloud moved, erasing the stars.  
(567)

The whole earth:/all dark and dark. (751)

139. The cloud moved on and unveiled the stars again. (567)

Clouds gone,/the mountain shows. (99)

140. One time he went out in the wilderness to find his own soul,  
an' he foun' he didn' have no soul that was his'n. (570)

From the origins/nothing exists. (1094)

141. Hush—listen. (571)

Knock on the sky/and listen to the sound! (613)

142. I'll be all aroun' in the dark. I'll be ever'where—wherever you  
look. (572)

Here, there,/everywhere it stands. (312)

143. Wherever they's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be  
there. Wherever they's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there.  
(572)

144. I'll be in the way kids laugh when they're hungry an' they  
know supper's ready. (572)

145. An' when our folks eat the stuff they raise an' live in the  
houses they build—why, I'll be there. (572)

146. Jus' try to live the day, jus' the day. (578)

One encounter:/once for all. (27)

147. Jus' take ever' day. (124)

148. The afternoon was silver with rain, the roads glittered with water. (588)

Dawn coming—/a thousand houses seen/all in rain.

(794)

149. Tiny points of grass came through the earth, and in a few days the hills were pale green with the beginning year. (592)

The fire has burned/the surface of the field:

New shoots come out/with the spring breeze. (1148)

150. She looked up and across the barn, and her lips came together and smiled mysteriously. (619)

Glimpsing a flower/behind the curtain,/I ask who—

A smile/on her colored lips/—no word. (1067)