

# Zen in the Art of Close Encounters

## *Crazy Wisdom and UFOs*

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Edited by Paul David Pursglove

Back cover

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## *Crazy Wisdom and UFOs*

“Hey man, are UFOS *real!*?” is the wary question from anyone who’s only recently discovered this mind-pretzeling, science-monkey-wrenching phenomenon. In today’s vernacular the reply might be, “Yep, sure are; *if* you can expand your meaning of “real” to include what’s beyond what you can imagine you can imagine — and then double *that*.

An evocative, much older, but just as radical reply might be this from “The Practice of True Reality” by 12th Century Zen Master Hongzhi:

*If you accord everywhere with thorough clarity and cut off sharp corners without dependence on doctrines, like the white ox or wildcat, helping to arouse wonder, you can be called a complete person. So we hear that this is how one on the way of non-mind acts, but before realizing non-mind we still have great hardship.*

In that spirit, then, here is a large anthology including the best kinds of high and low strangenesses you may have heard of (and some you haven’t imagined). These are the kind that present us with paradoxes on top of paradoxes. Our neurological relays pop — which may be exactly the point!

Everything from reports by people who’ve *initiated* successful contact, to serious psychiatric essays, to cartoons, to a disconcerting short story, to the connection with psychedelics, to a kid telling of being levitated out of his bedroom at night for a romp on the local swing set with several little gray UFOFKS — one of whom fell off a swing flat on his back.

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# Frontispiece

"We need to matriculate from an answer-based philosophical mode to an event-oriented one. A limited precursory model of this can be demonstrated by the roundabout, intuitive techniques of the East and in Zen. The 'correct' answer to a Zen monk's koan is not a syllogistic resolution, but an event: the seeker who succeeds, who 'gets it', *pops a neurological relay into an expanded non-linear awareness* that subsumes rationality — like Einsteinian relativity does Newtonian mechanics." (my italics -ed)

-Neil Freer, author of *Breaking the Godspell*

Is this why the contact phenomenon is so surreal? Are we being evolutionarily jumped (pun intended)? By a bunch of ultra-tech Socratic/Zen teachers/therapists/absurdist liturgical pranksters from. . . somewhere/when. . . who use Whitley Strieber's house, among others, as a bell to ring the Angelus (three sets of three dings)? And (*important!*) can we collaborate in getting our neurological relays popped? (-ed)

^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^

"The sightings and encounters go on and on, inconclusively; there is no evidence of rational plan, goal, outcome, closure. There is just the endless game, playing like children play, who quit when they get tired. The mistake: we're trying to be serious about what's just a goof. It would be as if your dog got neurotic over trying to figure out why you keep tossing a stick away from him every time he retrieves it."

-Michael Grosso

# Table of Contents

Frontispiece . . . . .	3
Acknowledgements . . . . .	4
Table of Contents . . . . .	7
Editor's Introduction . . . . .	12

## INITIATIONS

Close Encounter of the Jazz Kind MICHAEL GROSSO . . . . .	22
An Anomalous Sighting STANLEY KRIPPNER . . . . .	32

## SCIENCE, SENSE AND ZEN

Quote from a British Astronomer . . . . .	42
Zen. . .and the Art of Debunkery DANIEL DRASIN . . . . .	43
How the Stranger Vainly Endeavoured to Reveal to Me in Words the Mysteries of Spaceland A. SQUARE (EDWIN A. ABBOTT) . . . . .	59
Fringe Science NICK HERBERT . . . . .	67

## CROP GLYPHS AND HIGHER STRANGENESSES

Close Encounters of the 5th Kind: Contact in Southern England July, 1992 STEVEN GREER . . . . .	72
An Unhill and Stretched Time in a Crop Circle RON RUSSELL . . . . .	94
Cartoon by BILL BARKER . . . . .	102

## VISITS

from the chapter "Extreme Strangeness"	
WHITLEY STRIEBER . . . . .	104
from "Other Realities: The 'Alien Abduction' Phenomenon"	
JOHN MACK . . . . .	108
from "The Magic Playground"	
ANONYMOUS LETTER . . . . .	109

## MESSING UP WHAT'S "REAL"

from "Psychological and Psychodynamic Components of EAT"	
RIMA LAIBOW . . . . .	112
In the Middle of Whose Ship Are You Standing?	
NEIL FREER . . . . .	116
from "Interview with Robert Anton Wilson"	
GREGORY D. BISHOP . . . . .	127

## PSYCHOSOCIAL ZEN-ALERTS

One Good Reason They Haven't Landed on the White House Lawn	
JOHN R. SALTER, JR. . . . .	134
The Danger of 'Gods from Outer Space'	
JOHN WHITE . . . . .	136
Are Enormous Changes on the Way?	
WHITLEY STRIEBER . . . . .	141
UFOs on Trial: Evidence 'Beyond Reasonable Doubt'	
BARRY TAFF . . . . .	146
from "UFOs and the Global Situation"	
MICHAEL LINDEMANN . . . . .	155
from "Hands Off"	
PHILIP SLATER . . . . .	158

## IS IT GOING ANYWHERE?

The Significance of UFO Experiences	
R. LEO SPRINKLE . . . . .	164
The Rock Is Still Rolling	
KEITH THOMPSON . . . . .	166
On Psychedelic Mushrooms and the End of History	
TERENCE MCKENNA . . . . .	178

## SCHOLARLY PATHS

Between One Eye Blink and the Next:	
Fairies, UFOs and Problems of Knowledge	
PETER M. ROJCEWICZ . . . . .	184
Cartoon by OLIAN . . . . .	203
Mythopoeia on a Few Short Anomalies	
DENNIS STILLINGS . . . . .	204
Reality Creation and the Unified Field	
in Otherworldly Experience	
JON KLIMO . . . . .	214

## TWO POEMS AND A UFO-DHARMA TALE

the last alien	
HOWARD M. SCHACHTER . . . . .	236
Separation	
PAULA UNDERWOOD SPENCER . . . . .	240
Joy Ride	
DR. CHARLES LE CANARD . . . . .	242

## CALISTHENICS IN NON-DOING WITH UFOs

Controlled Folly	
STAN TENEN . . . . .	260
from "Agriglyphs and Agraffiti"	
BRIAN O'LEARY . . . . .	265

Close Encounter Zen Lab  
 SHARI ADAMIAK . . . . . 267  
 Your Koan for Today: What do the Crop Glyphs Mean?  
 PAUL DAVID PURSGLOVE . . . . . 276

**THE TRUTH**

Commentary: Crop Circles in a Trackless Field  
 MARILYN FERGUSON . . . . . 288

**US NOT GETTING IT**

The Parable of the Five Caterpillars and the Butterfly  
 TIMOTHY LEARY . . . . . 294  
 from "How to Use this Manual" (*E.T. 101: The Cosmic Instruction Manual*)  
 MISSION CONTROL AND DIANA LUPPI . . . 295  
 from a Letter to *Saucer Smear*  
 ROBERT ANTON WILSON . . . . . 296  
 Guy in Times Square on New Year's Eve  
 DANIEL DRASIN . . . . . 298  
 Why the Flying Saucers Are Not Landing  
 GALLAGHER [the comedian] . . . . . 299

**MAKING SERIOUS FUN**

from an Ersatz Dodo Comedy Team Performance  
 NELSON AND ERIC SPRINKLE AND OTHERS 302  
 Hey, UFOLKS, Allee, Allee, All in Free-ee!  
 JEAN MUNDY . . . . . 309  
 from "Trauma and Transformation"  
 CAROLYN BARNES . . . . . 320  
 "What, If Anything, Is the Role of Play  
 In CSETI Activities? Explain."  
 PAUL DAVID PURSGLOVE . . . . . 321

Mind in the UFO Blender	
MICHAEL GROSSO . . . . .	323

## ENDPAPERS

Afterword	
MILLEN TRENCH . . . . .	330
Notes about The New Being Project and the editor . . . .	331
Selected Bibliography . . . . .	332

# Introduction

Mort was interested in lots of things. Why people's teeth fitted together so neatly, for example. He'd given that one a lot of thought. Then there was the puzzle of why the sun came out during the day, instead of at night when the light would come in useful. He knew the standard explanation, which somehow didn't seem satisfying.

In short, Mort was one of those people who are more dangerous than a bag full of rattlesnakes. He was determined to discover the underlying logic behind the universe.

Which was going to be hard, because there wasn't one. The Creator had a lot of remarkably good ideas when he put the world together, but making it understandable hadn't been one of them.

-Terry Pratchett in *Mort*<sup>1</sup>

Listen, Subhuti. Within these innumerable Buddha-lands there are every form of sentient beings with all their various mentalities and conceptions, all of which are fully known to the Tathagata, but not one of them is held in the Tathagata's mind as an arbitrary conception of phenomena. They are merely thought of. Not one of this vast accumulation of conceptions from beginningless time, through the present and into the never ending future, not one of them is graspable.

-from *The Diamond Sutra*<sup>2</sup>

*alt.buddha.short.fat.guy*

-title of newsgroup on USENET  
(a computer-linked  
information/discussion service)

Mainstream science and Zen squint at one another from a distance now and then in the same way an adult lion and a mature elephant might eye each other. Big moving objects on each others' horizons, but neither prey nor predator. And both sidle on by the UFO business, but for very different reasons.

When science gets wind of UFOs, it looks deliberately and studiously in another direction. Something piquant in the scent it picks up warns that, as Carl Raschke has put it, "It may

indeed be the 'mission' of UFOs not to provide our civilization with a jewelled capstone to the grand edifice of secular science, but to undo the very architecture itself."<sup>3</sup>

Zen doesn't break stride, takes a clear-eyed look at the evanescent craft, small beings, tall beings, mysteries, and with a toss of the hand, throws this line at the air, "Ah. The perfect pre-millennial predicament. Good teachers. Yes."

Teachers of what? Well, as you'll see from both this introduction and the content of the book, no direct, cerebrally analytic answer to that question is possible or advisable. When someone schooled in the Newtonian/Cartesian, materialist worldview innocently asks an adept what Zen is, s/he is often offended by just the sort of brusque reply I've invented above, and worse!: "the head of a dead cat;" "a shit-wiping stick;" "selling water by the river." These are a few of the classics. And they all are genuine answers to the question. (See Neil Freer's comment in the Frontispiece for more about this.) With such detonations, Zen knocks the questioner into a double-bind from go: "Why haven't you stopped beating yourself to pieces for rational answers to the question, 'What the hell is *really* going on?'"

"Zen functions in non-duality. The process of thought, of reasoning, takes place in the field of duality. It follows that no thinking will achieve Zen." (Christmas Humphreys)<sup>4</sup> So, a Zen teacher (or UFO-naut) is engaged in an analogous enterprise *vis à vis* linear human consciousness as was Ann Sullivan as she worked to help her deaf and blind student, Helen Keller, "get" the connection between the sign language she had memorized and actual objects and events. In the triumphant scene in the film *Miracle Worker*, Ann holds Helen's hands under water flowing from a pump, "signing over and over, 'water, water, water.' In one sudden flash of insight, Helen becomes a full human being." (Clifford Shaw)<sup>5</sup>

## A Bag Full of Rattlesnakes

So what? Even if we all "get it" about the "omnjectivity" (Michael Talbot's coinage) of ufo stuff, what difference will it make? How is that in any way a parallel to Helen Keller's illumination?

Better ask first, what's so dangerous about Mort? (see the first quote above this introduction) Logic is fine in many carefully limited situations. But, need I spell out the vast array of "Sorcerer's Apprentice" scenarios that can and already have come to pass in human history, masterminded by people who thought they had the universe and all of Mystery by its rational tail on a downhill pull? It's the obdurate faith in human logic and rationality *alone* that is nightmarishly perilous for us. We get the terrible splits: man vs. nature, mind vs. body, spirit vs. matter and the rest. About which Wm. Blake issued, as early as 1802, the impassioned warning, "May God us keep/From Single vision & Newton's sleep."

And we get Hitler, the British Empire (among others), scheduled bottle feeding, "an eye for an eye" (which grisly bit of reasoning we can thank for the crime-spawning heartbreak we now call a penal system), carpet bombing, and warehousing kids in compulsory education buildings and "mentally ill" people on back wards.

A bag full of rattlesnakes!

And hubris a-plenty! How could we, one species on a small planet, be so vain as to imagine the universe [or particularly the UFO] is under some obligation to present itself in terms comprehensible to human reason? (David Barclay)<sup>6</sup> Because we're so clever and facile at "penetrating so many secrets, we cease to believe in the unknowable. But there it sits nevertheless, calmly licking its chops." (H. L. Mencken)<sup>7</sup>

## Getting to Be of Another Mind

Given Mencken's chops-licker (How hungry is s/he?!) and some of the other dilemmas I've mentioned, seems to me we better listen up to all the sources we can find that dispense liberal doses of crazy wisdom. Right about here the parallel to Helen Keller's Big Insight starts coming into focus. *Put it this way: What happens if we **don't** wake up from "Newton's sleep"?*<sup>8</sup>

Plato saw that ". . . every man and woman should. . . play the noblest of games and be of another mind from what they are at present. . . life must be lived as play. . . and then a man will be able to propitiate the gods. . ." <sup>9</sup> What an idea! ". . . the noblest of games. . ." The alarm goes off and we're jolted out of Newton's sleep to. . . crop glyphs?<sup>10</sup>. . . Shapes laid down in wheat and barley and canola fields and on river ice that nobody can figure out. Our technology can't make them and it isn't weather, so how are they made? What do any of the often very complex, huge figures "*mean*". . .? What do the "abductions" "*mean*"? And all the multiply witnessed sightings of anomalous craft and radar traces and scorches on the earth and. . .??

Forget it. No answers. Just look at the conundrum these questions pose collectively. It's impossible to say something positive *or* negative — or even neutral. The problem reminds me of Tokusan's famous koan\*: "When you say 'yes', you get thirty blows of my staff; when you say 'no', you get thirty blows of my staff just the same."

---

\* A koan (pronounced kō-**ahn**) is a question or statement for a Zen student to meditate on and attempt to "solve". Koans are intentionally unanswerable in the terms in which they are presented, though they often appear to make perfect sense. For more on this and how the student can be helped by a koan toward Zen's mind-unbinding goal, see Neil Freer's remarks in the Frontispiece of this book.

Nowhere to go. Try another tack. *Mess* with it. *Fool* with it. *Play*. Hold all your ufo stuff up in the air in a whopper soap bubble. Then hold the Four Great Statements of Zen up in the air in another bubble beside the first:

A direct transmission outside the scriptures;  
No dependence on words and letters;  
Direct pointing to reality;  
Seeing into one's own nature and attaining Buddhahood.

Kick back and let the two bubbles monkey around with each other in your feeling/thinking. You can get a taste, maybe more, of being of Another Mind.

## Science and "Beginner's Mind"

With that micro-Satori under your belt, can I ask you to reconsider science for a moment? Above, I left *secular* science in danger of being deconstructed by ufo stuff. How can science be anything but secular? Daniel Drasin: "Like all systems of truth seeking, science, properly conducted, has a profoundly expansive, spiritual impulse at its core. This 'Zen' in the heart of science is revealed when the practitioner sets aside arbitrary beliefs and cultural preconceptions, and approaches the nature of things with 'beginner's mind.' When this is done, reality can speak freshly and freely, and can be heard more clearly. Appropriate testing and objective validation can — indeed, *must* — come later."<sup>11</sup>

Under such an aegis, the *process* of scientific inquiry evokes the sensibility of its predecessor, alchemy, wherein the explorations were as much about understanding and transmuting reality "out there" as they were about transforming the consciousness of the explorer. Ufo stuff may elude our understanding until we can risk "seeing into [our] own nature" more deeply as we snoop and try to jimmy the locks.

## Speaking of Evidence. . .

Any mention of "science" triggers the question, "And what do you accept as evidence. . .?" Or, put another way, the question borders on being a koan: "Hey man, are UFOs *real*?" The only sensible reply here is another question: "What *kind* of real do you mean?" And then, if the first questioner is gifted with any philosophic imagination at all, we're off and running through multi- and poly-dimensional universes, beings and intelligences for an hour.

As for me, I'm not at all troubled by considering the UFO as *both* physical, when it is, *and* non-physical/ideational/-non-local/para-rational/sub-whatever/post-anythingelse at the same time. So, we're creating the UFO creating our view of it and its occupants simultaneously. It's a both/and — and maybe more! — not an either/or. Since our cognitive machinery is capable of setting all kind of limits, we *can* set the whole business up as an either/or and demand of what we see or experience that it stay *only* "out there". Just look through the voluminous UFO evidence and controversy to see what happens when we attempt that: Rather like trying to nail Jello to the wall.

But, one of the premises of this book is that our getting hooked on such a "nailing job" may be basic to the UFO-nauts mission.<sup>12</sup> If we work hard, the mind-pretzeling effect may spiral up (hopefully) to the point of stress failure. And lest someone think I'm sadistic here, when ratiomania gnarls the mind to the stress failure point, one comes to one's senses. Feels much better. Old Zen paradox. Ah, **so!**

\*\*\*\*\*

## A Few Concluding Thoughts and Then *The Truth*

For Zen aficionados: The title notwithstanding, this book isn't about *Zen practice*. Unless, of course, it turns out ultimately that the very act of earnestly asking about UFOs steps one directly into the biggest and most elegantly designed Zendo

ever. In my own case, I'm gratified to report that during the two-year task of preparing this book, I have learned by osmosis what my current koan is: Why did I decide to do a book on Zen and UFOs?

The fabled "government cover-up" is only tangentially relevant to the book's approach and is addressed directly only by Barry Taff's article. And wait'll you see where he winds up with the issue!

The same goes for the "good alien/bad alien" dispute. Whitley Strieber in a recent online conference on Compuserve made a remark about this that made my jaw snap shut. Someone asked him if he thought the "visitors" were benevolent. He replied that the question had no meaning for him and shot back, "Are we benevolent?"

Now, for those of you who pick up a book and must locate the "T" ruth right away: It's somewhere about 2/3 of the way through the table of contents. Look around; you'll find it.

-Paul David Pursglove, 10/94  
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## **NOTES**

1. Terry Pratchett, *Mort* (London: Corgi, 1990), pp. 11-12.
2. "The Diamond Sutra", in Dwight Goddard, ed., *A Buddhist Bible*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), p.100.
3. Carl Raschke, "UFOs: Ultraterrestrial Agents of Cultural Deconstruction" in *Cyberbiological Studies of the Imaginal Component in the UFO Contact Experience*, ed. Dennis Stillings (St. Paul, MN: The Archaeus Project, 1989), p. 28.
4. Quoted in Jon Winokur, ed., *Zen to Go* (New York: NAL Books, 1989) p. 27.
5. Personal communication.

6. Jason Keehn paraphrasing David Barclay in a review of *UFOs: The Final Answer?*, D. and T. M. Barclay, eds. (U.K., n.p.: 1993). Review appeared in *Brain/Mind*, February, 1994, p. 4.

7. *Zen to Go*, *op.cit.*, p. 119.

8. A day or so after I wrote this, I realized it's a koan. . .or at least a near-koan. And not just because we can't predict the consequences of an event *not* occurring. Those of you who revel in the harlequinade of such utterances may giggle and reverberate uncontrollably.

9. See Jean Mundy's "Hey UFOLKS, Allee, Allee, All in Free-ee!" in this book. She prefaces the essay with more of this surprising quote from Plato.

10. See Steven Greer's narrative, "Close Encounters of the 5th Kind: Contact in Southern England July, 1992" in this book for a detailed account and photos of the glyphs.

11. from his essay in this book, "Zen. . .and the Art of Debunk-ery"

12. See Michael Grosso's essay "Mind in the UFO Blender" (last article in the book) for further brain-shredders on this point.