

Notes on a WoK vacation and Nansen's cat:

It was quite a long break (3 weeks) without the support and camaraderie of SL friends, and I did miss it! I had a little bit of fun wandering around the Internet and Second Life; meeting magical Storm in Dragon Thunder Temple, and chatting (briefly) with sparkling Pema at Play as Being. But sometimes I did find myself waiting!

Have been meaning to post a link to <http://www.ustream.tv/recorded/6164265> -- an internet teaching from Tenzin Wangyal on "Turning Pain into the Path". It felt very close to heart after our explorations of Lojong, and I find myself remembering a few sentences from his discussion several weeks later ... a comment about compassion being very easy if we listen to the pain rather than the ego, the importance of caring (oddly, my teacher used the same word just a few days previously -- or did I suddenly decide to hear it?).

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Nansen's cat. I will admit to having heard a lecture on just this koan about a year ago at Zen Mountain Monastery, and remembering not very much about it (ack) though I might be drawing upon it now subconsciously (double ack). Have decided to take the POV that there is no "right" answer, but many rather possible answers, and that the issue is to find an angle that resonates at a given time. So today I suppose my sympathies lie with the arguing monks -- feel quite keenly the situation where I have worked myself up over some disagreement so that it is actually not possible to say anything that could possibly matter, only bits of repetitious rattling in my head that hardly have any meaning left. Although I find it quite humiliating to have such a flaw in my thinking pointed out to me, it is also impressive to find someone who can "cut through" the rattling. (I'm going to put aside the fate of the poor cat for the moment and assume it's some kind of metaphor for cutting through the object of arguing -- letting go. I hope that's not a cop out. Hmm, but the monks must feel very responsible for the cat and their bad actions, and that sense of responsibility is completely appropriate.)

So sandals on head -- this part I do remember from another conversation -- topsy turvy. Today for me it means, the monks exemplified the truth of the situation by not speaking, the teacher did not appreciate the fullness of this and all circumstances, and a disrespectful act (such as leaving with out saying a word) could still be in accord with the way. I'm thinking this is why Nansen was willing to accept Joshu's answer -- because in that acceptance, the karma was stopped.

The interesting thing about working with this koan was not in finding an answer, but in finding the places where I felt uneasy -- where I really wanted to save the cat but because of fears of stupidity or "lack of enlightenment" or bad behavior or lack of acceptance, I might be thwarted. So, the acceptance of the situation is the "salvation."

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Seems like there are at least 3 (maybe more?) koans in this story:

- How would I answer Nansen's original challenge / koan?
- Why did Nansen kill the cat?
- Why did Joshu put shoes on his head?

And I'm still thinking about an approach that [Eliza suggested](#) -- the notion of treating a koan as a dream.