

# The Interview

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The Zen interview is a vital part of the training in our school. While the form and content of the interview depend entirely on the student and the particular teacher's style, the purpose is to help the student experience his or her own strengths and limitations. It is not very useful, nor even possible, to judge one's practice, but it is possible for us to experience the quality of our practice through the Zen interview.

There is an "incorrect" and a "correct" way to approach the interview. If we are attached to being "correct," to answering any kong-an correctly, to demonstrating always how clear and strong we are, the interview becomes quite an ordeal. It is this desire to answer correctly, to not show our weaknesses, our dirty corners, that causes fear to appear. It is not easy to be able to make mistakes, to be stupid, and yet not check that and keep on trying. Some Zen students try to avoid this situation by simply avoiding the interview.

There is another extreme, which is also not very helpful for our practice. It manifests itself through an unhealthy fascination with kong-ans, and with interviews. This is especially unhealthy in the case of students whose entire practice revolves around trying to answer kong-ans. These students forget that without the fire of "don't know," without a steady effort, such kong-an answers and such interviews cannot connect to their lives and are quite useless.

Finally, the Zen interview is very important, but only as part of our practice. If used correctly, without avoidance or fascination, it is a very powerful tool and helps both the student and the teacher. It can provide a vital link between our meditation and our life. It is like a lab where we can safely test our practice under fire. The kong-an situations presented in the interview are usually extremely simple, and even if we make a mistake, no serious consequence occurs. Our lives are usually not so forgiving, and many of our everyday situations are very complex and full of subtleties. But the Gordian knot they represent can be cut through. The Zen interview and kong-an teach us how to do that.