


ZEN for CATS

Teachings of the
Zen Cat Masters

as intuited by
Alfred Birnbaum
and
Riku Kanmei

illustrations by J.C. Brown



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Zen for Cats

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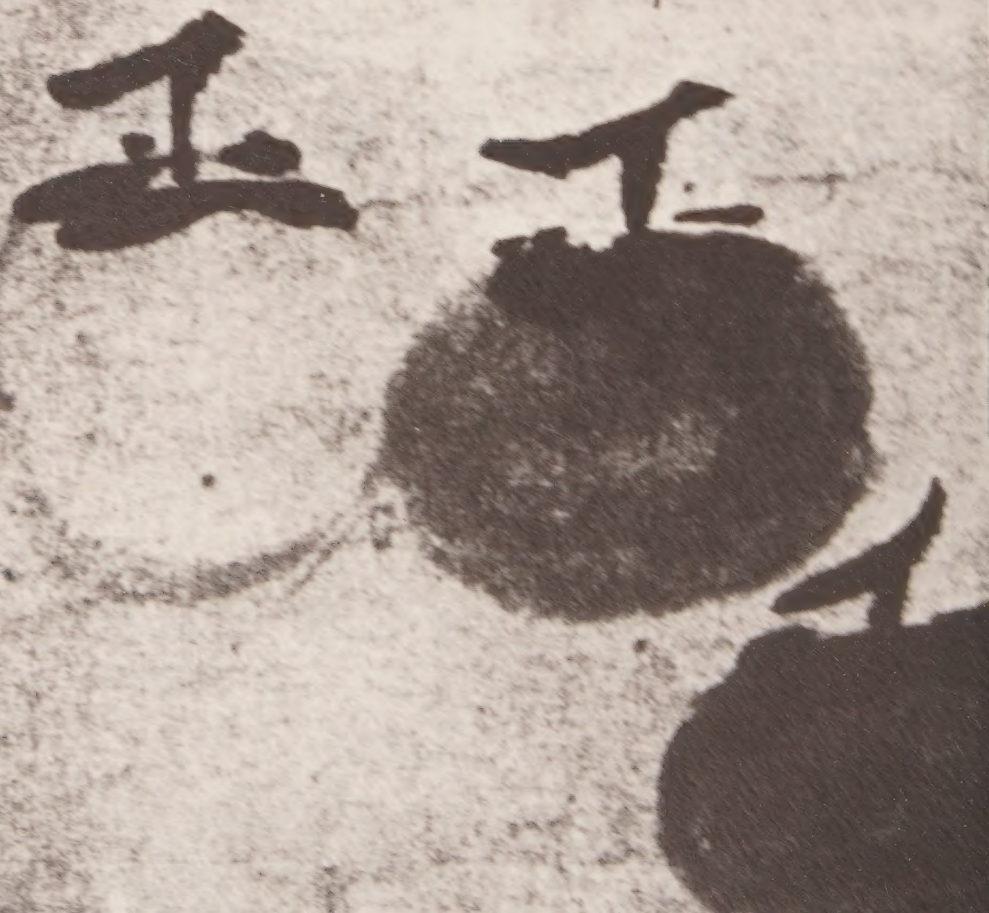


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Zen For Cats

The Tail of



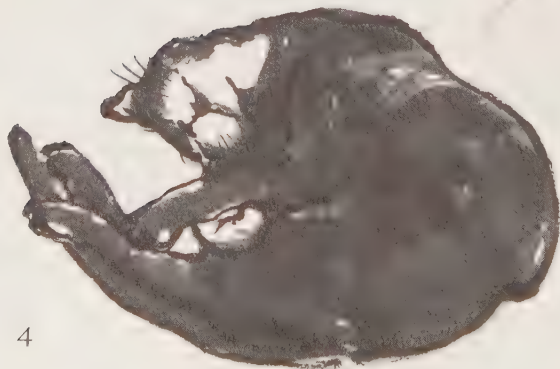


the Teachings

Words are but paw-prints

The Scriptures are mere tracks, leading us across the carpet toward the sunniest spot on the floor—they are not the cat lying in the sunlight.

Cats in their wisdom know that Knowledge only scratches at Truth, and Enlightenment is meaningless without a compassionate lap to enjoy it on. So if they seem to freely bestow their not-quite-so-humble teachings on us humans, the truth is, cats want something from us along the Way.





Host or Guest?



Whether sleeping, stretching, or gazing out the window, cats never cease to look within, realizing that enlightenment is closer than the tip of one's nose. As the oft-quoted koan goes:

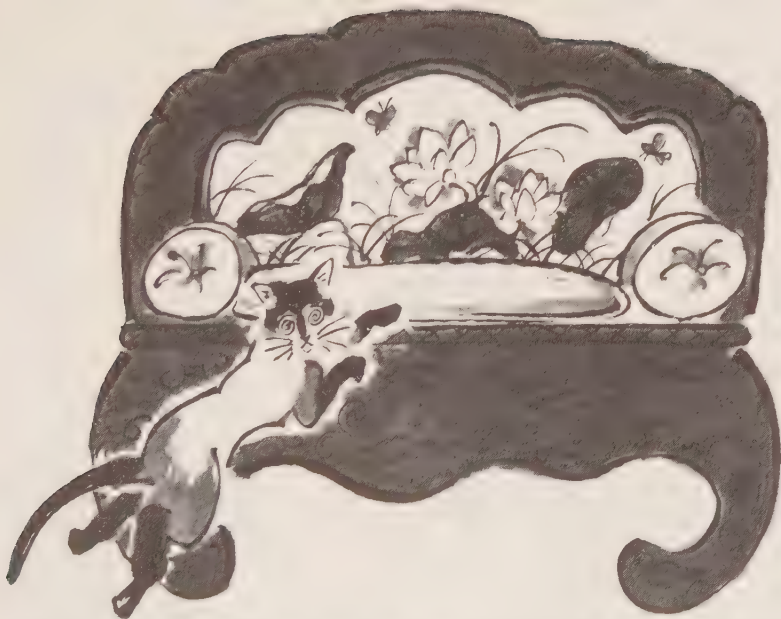
Pink nose, black nose—not-two

Cat Zen began in ancient India, two-and-a-half millennia ago. A furry pilgrim named Mahakatsya journeyed from afar to hear the Buddha preach, but found him fast asleep. Puzzled, the seeker gave the World-Honored One a respectful bat on the nose. The Awakened One opened his Dharma Eyes and smiled at Mahakatsya, and in a blinding flash the cat attained Enlightenment. Whereupon the Selfless Snooze became a core practice of *Fur-Footed Buddhism*.



Ten centuries later, Bodhipurrrma, the scruffy First Patriarch of Cat Zen, carried the fleas of Non-Attachment over the Himalayas from India. This tough old tomcat then sat facing a mousehole in meditation for nine years—so long, in fact, that he was mistaken for a throwrug. Ever since, the Zen cat has followed the strict practice of contemplative sitting and ritual purrrification by licking.





Still later, the High-Strung Blue-Point Master Fe-Lien established a warm place in the Imperial Court of the Sung dynasty. In China, Cat Zen became known for its ineffable expressions of “thusness”—basking, rolling, yawning, napping, nibbling, and romping. As Master Fe-Lien instructed:

The tabby knows where to grow stripes

Eventually, lured by the aroma of raw fish, Cat Zen crossed the sea and arrived in Japan. Here the sect achieved its greatest refinement, under the erratic guidance of the Bob-Tailed Master D.T. Sushi Roshi. His disciples went on to create the catnip ceremony, the One-Slash School of Sofa Shredding, and other arts close to the heart of Japanese culture. Soon, behind every successful haiku poet was a cat:

*An old futon
Tora jumps on
The sound of the hours*



↑
BASHO

↑
TORA

Cat Zen offers vital truths for all sentient beings. But be forewarned: The Teachings are universal but unfathomable, both rigorous and subtle. When in doubt, consult your own little spiritual master. Pose the age-old question to any pointed ear:

Does a Buddha have Cat-Nature?

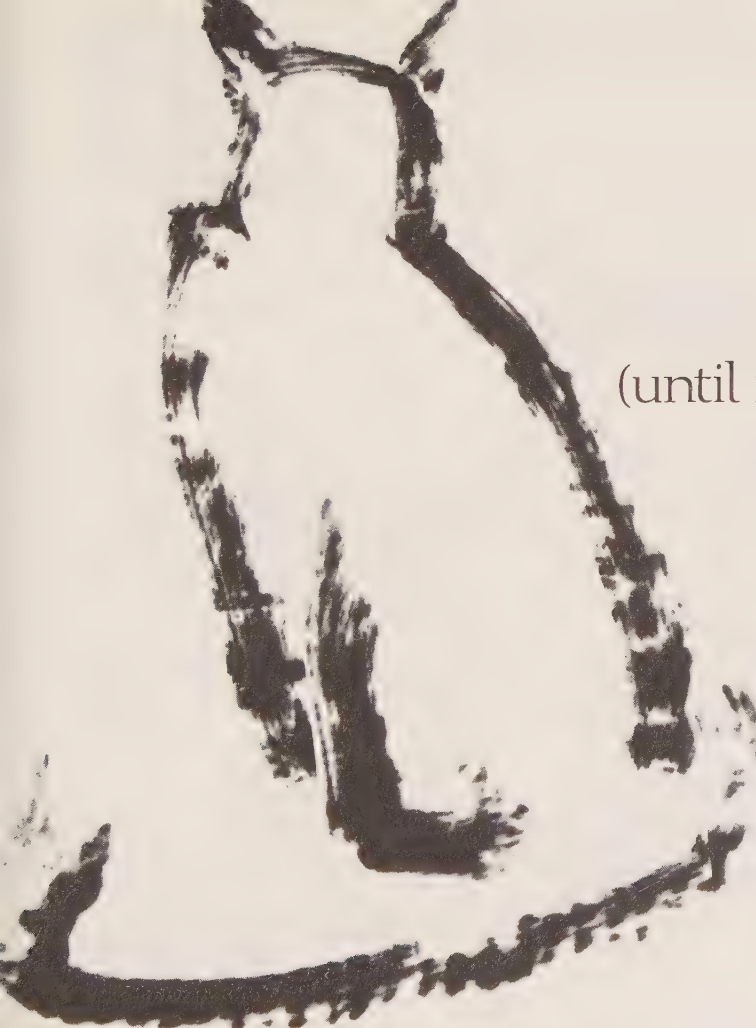
The answer: an unequivocal

MEOW

www!!

Meditation

Contemplating the here and now



(until mealttime)

On Ceaseless Change

"All sitcoms are impermanent"



On Transmigration

Same ingredients, different vessels

On the One and the Many

What's a Zen cat to do?



On Transcendence

The Master sees what we can't

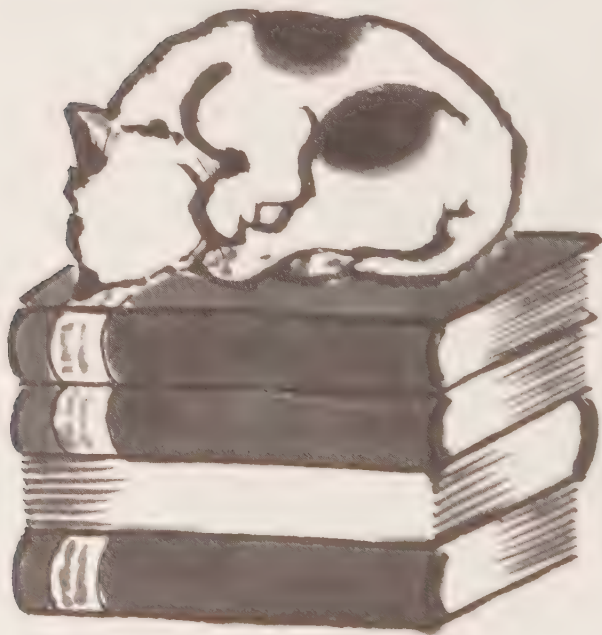


On Human Concerns

And ignores what we can



On the Scriptures



Hard is the seat of wisdom

On Emptiness



Easy is the vow of poverty

On Chaos



The immutable Law of Paws and Effect

On Cycles



Born to be wild

On the Sutras



Namrrr Sakyrrrrmmunnrrrr Buddhrrr

On Desire

Fur burns



On the Rational Mind



More waves than one to scan a cat

On Cholesterol



What color is your prosciutto?

On Appearances



I sniff what you think

On Death

"Where is thy wing?"



On Nature




Becoming one with small living creatures

On second thought, staying indoors
It rains outside all windows

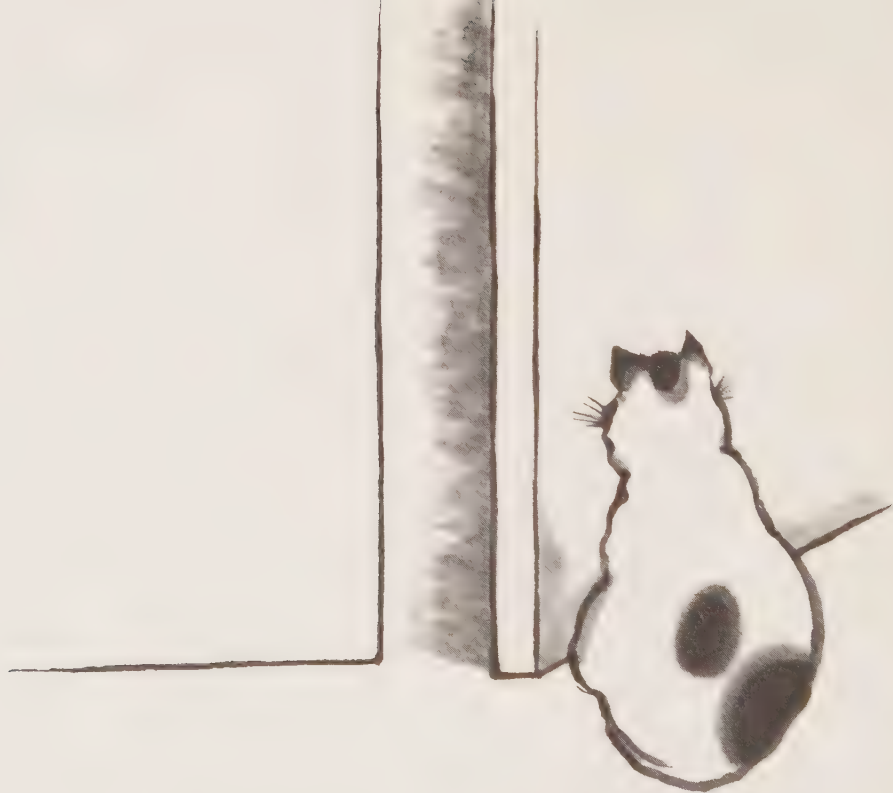


Kat Koans



The background of the page is a soft-focus, sepia-toned photograph of a landscape. In the upper half, there are rolling hills or mountains partially obscured by a thick mist or fog. In the lower right foreground, a large, dark, leafy tree stands prominently. The overall atmosphere is quiet and contemplative.

What is the sound
of one can opening?



Door open—Stay in!
Door closed—Go out!

Roll in dirt, get clean



Find where paths cross—



Sit smack center



Don't bother the Buddha—

I'm eating

Don't bother the Buddha—

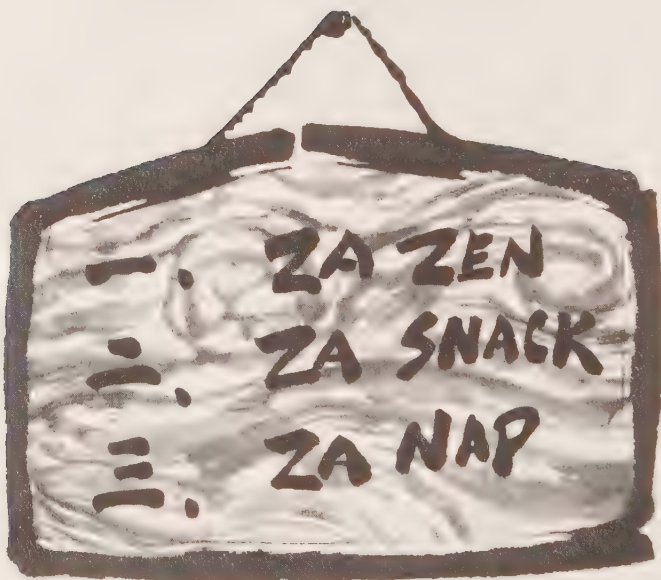
I'm sleeping

Don't bother the Buddha—

I don't want to be bothered







Zen today, Zen tomorrow



Eat and sleep—
Nothing sacred about the Order

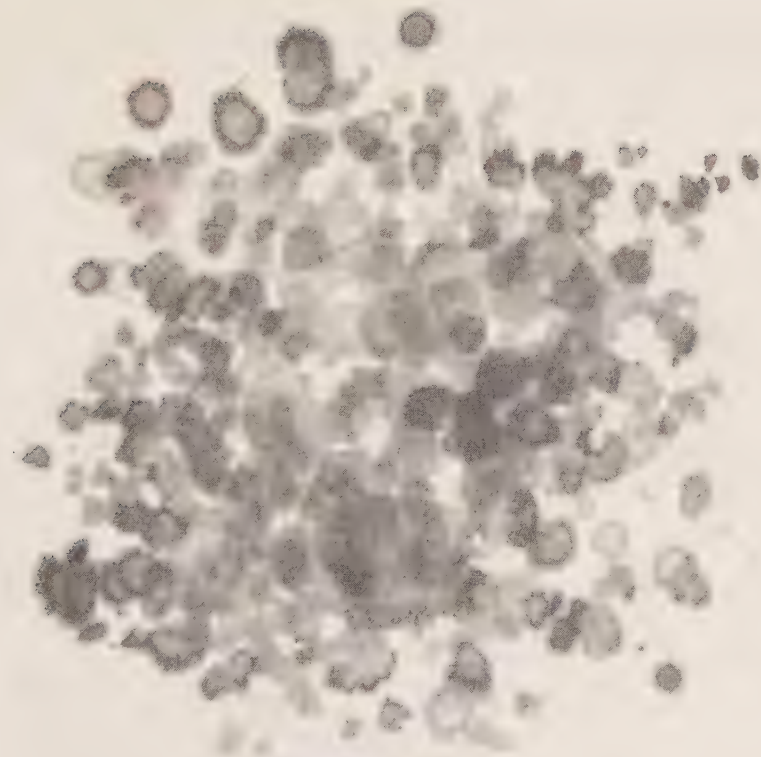


One coat of fur sheds everywhere



Steak and hamburger are the same—
Only the names are different





Gulp it down—No good!
Throw it up—No good!

Enter the den of the tiger—



Stroke its whiskers

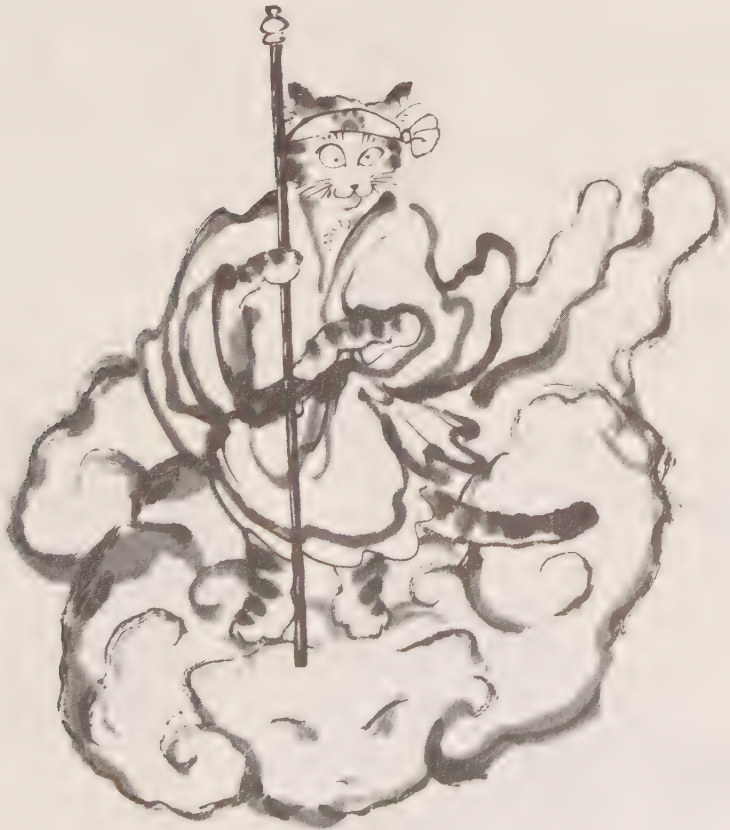
Clawing the keeper's treasures





The bird does not ask to be stalked

Fluff is void, void is fluff



It's a Zen Life



If I have but nine lives to live,
let me live them as a cat



Knocking at the Gate



Acknowledging
the Master

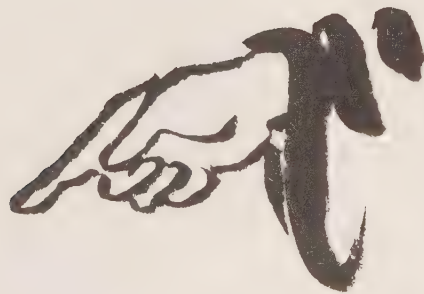


Washing the Feet

Taking the Vows



Accepting the Teachings





Wandering and Begging



Taking Refuge in the Brotherhood



Renouncing the Lay Life



Attainment



Zen Fish, Zen Bones

A cautionary tale of
the perils of the worldly life



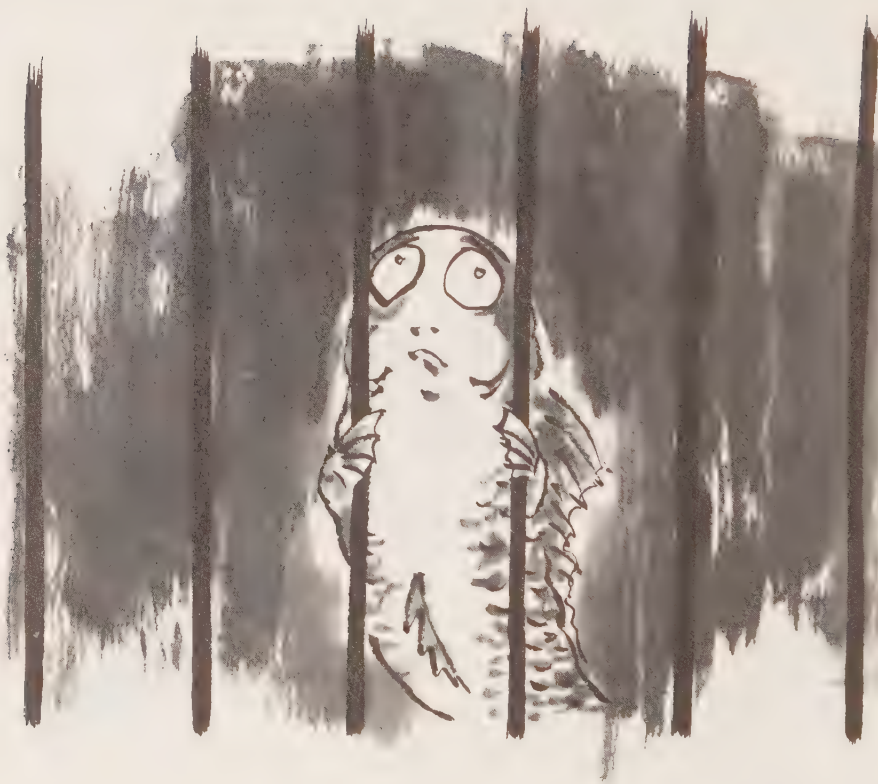
Raw Fish



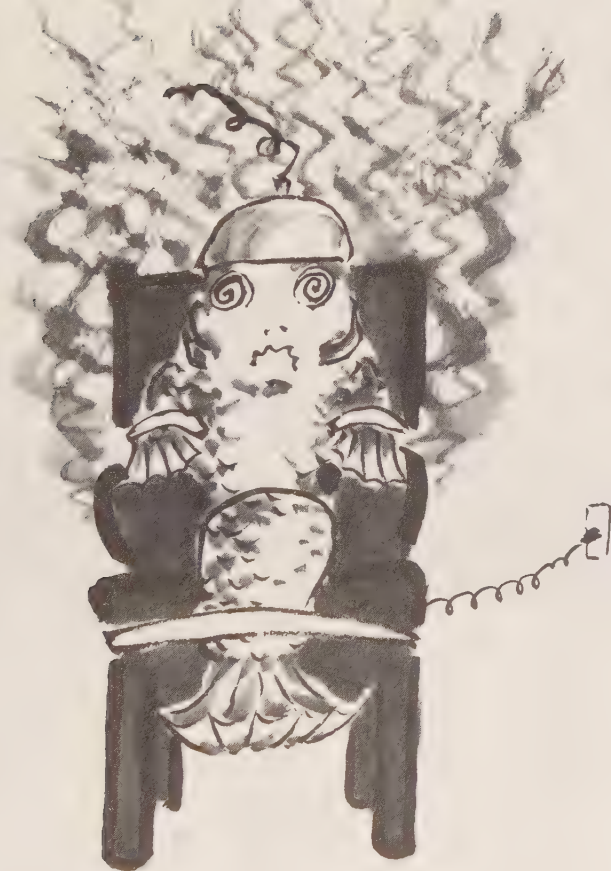
Smoked Fish



Grilled Fish



Canned Fish



Fried Fish

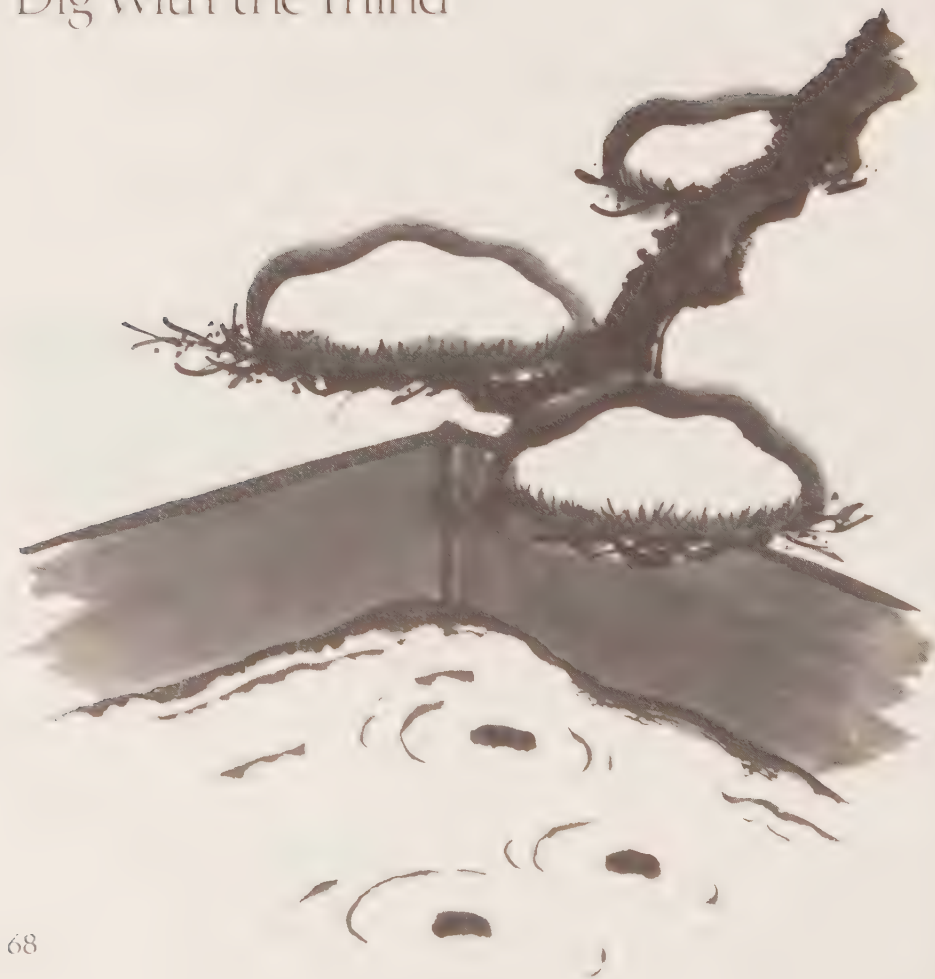


Raking Sand

Seasonal patterns in the box garden



Dig with the mind



Not with the feet



Concentrate



Leave not a trace



The Ten Sacred String-Chasing

On the impermanence of common



Pictures

household objects



1

Looking for the String

*In the living room of this world,
Lost amidst the interpenetrating paths,
I see only bobby pins and dustballs.
Unamused, I can find no String.*



Sensing the Movement

*Distant as the back hall, do I hear footsteps?
A drawer opens on untold mysteries!
I stand at the threshold with whiskers awakened.
Traces are everywhere, at the end of my nose.*



3

Turning the Corner

*Where, oh where does this path lead?
I seek my way through God-knows-what all.
Curiosity aroused, no door can contain me,
Nowhere the String can hide!*



Over

*Rising to the occasion, I jump the leak bureau.
Perilous are the Lemon Pledged heights —
The lamp cord is but a shadow of the String
And the light that falls is not the Light.*



Under

*Swept beneath the rug of existence,
The myriad things shine like stray cufflinks.
Lured through the loop of delusion's purse strap,
I lose the String along with kitsch.*



Sideways

*Tangled in the fabric of non-being,
I merge with the lint of the ages.
The knot is tied, but not the String—
This silken slip isn't out of the bag.*



Down

*Light, more light, I scoot beyond the folds,
These veils of illusion that drape and blind.
I draw the curtain on this chintzy play
And sever all ties, no String attached.*



String Gone, Cat Gone

*String and self both transcended,
A great stillness pervades all quarters,
Like calm after a passing storm—
It's so quiet you can hear a priceless antique drop.*



Cat Bored

No truth to gain, nowhere to go,
I sharpen my claws on blissful repose.
If a hundred birds strew my path with Friskies,
In one yawn I would swallow them all.



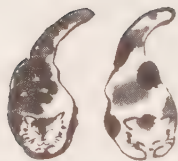
Entering the Kitchen

*No pussyfooting here, my paws to refresh,
I rub against the Master's legs.*

*Blessings on the Buddhas of the Six Supermarkets—
Spirituality really works up an appetite!*



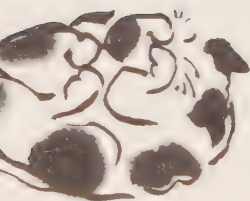
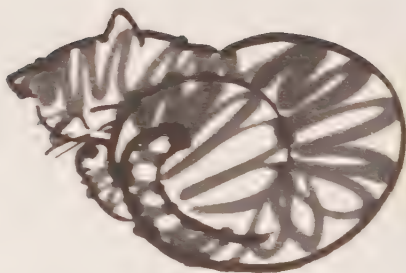
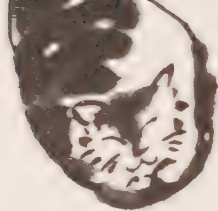
Satori

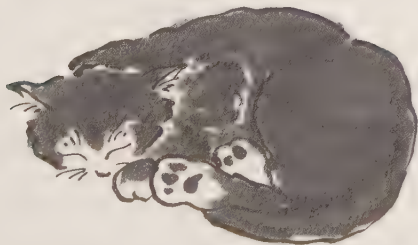
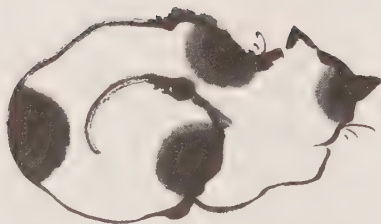


Enlightenment

beyond words











"Zen for cats? How much more empty can their little heads get?"

—P.J. O'Rourke

"So this is where cats have been coming from!"

—Jack Ziegler

"When the animals arrived to celebrate the Buddha's birthday, the cat was conspicuously absent. With the appearance of this book, the Zen Cat has zanily arrived at last."

—Maxine Hong Kingston

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Zen for Cats will delight all those who have survived the strict master-disciple relationship that cats use to lead us humans to the Truth. Over seventy ink-wash paintings capture the essence of cats in contemplation; illuminate the "three pillars" of Za-Zen, Za-snack, and Za-nap; and reveal the best-kept secrets of the esoteric art of litter-box sand raking. Whether you are the Guest or Host to a feline follower of the Way, you will find *Zen for Cats* transcendent.

Alfred Birnbaum is a leading translator and editor of contemporary Japanese fiction. Riku Kanmei is the ninety-ninth master in the lineage of the Neko Sect of Zen. J.C. Brown is a calligrapher and illustrator residing in Tokyo.

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