

Zen, Roleplay and Personal Expansion

The Author

Denkyu Sebastian Gundel, a Zen Warrior Artist.

37 years married and father to 4 children from 13 to 5 years. Educated pedagogue and have a broad experience in personal development courses, as well with Zen and shamanism.

Runs a company (Legendernes Arena) that works with roleplay and personal growth, education and socialization.

One course is the Thunderelves - an Indian inspired elf tribe

<http://www.tordenkrigerne.dk>

Been in tabletop roleplay for 19 years and larp 8 years. Have experienced a lot of different scenarios and been project leader on 4-5 where half of them had a developing agenda.

I'm a Japan enthusiast and train Tai Chi Chuan and Zazen, and love being with and working with children and youth. At the moment I'm founding a roleplay theatre.

Intention

My intention is to communicate the profound possibility of self-realization through the medium of roleplay. For two decades of my life, I have been deeply involved in roleplay, Zen and personal development. I have participated in numerous courses and sessions, and written continuously about my personal processes, in addition to spending many, many hours participating in live and tabletop roleplay. This article is based on my experiences and presents whatever wisdom I can distil from them.

Zen

Shuzan held his short staff up and said: "If you call this a short staff, then you contradict its reality. If you don't call it a short staff, you ignore fact. Well, then, what will you call it?"

from Zen flesh, Zen bones.

You might call it Zen, but then Shuzan would probably say you were wrong. The point is that Zen is beyond language and the intellect. So what I write here is like a finger pointing to the moon: the finger is the word; the moon is Zen.

Zen (from Chan in Chinese) means 'meditation'. It is not that one does not sit cross-legged for hours and ask to be hit on the shoulders with a stick, but you are to do good in the world you have to be an active part of society. Be a living Buddha. (Not that you are not that right now – but that's another story.) The only way to be a living Buddha is to awaken and realize the Truth – that all of life and the world is one, it is you. In Japanese called Satori (I have not had this experience. I refer to the words of the master.) Then you have to forget all that, and be an ordinary person again.

This, at least, was a brief and feeble attempt to explain what is involved.

Zen is a way of being – a state of mind without attachment to the self-reflective and self-aware processes of the Mind generated by the Ego (or 'small self', as my Zen master puts it).

Right here, right now. Right here, right now. Right here, right now. Right here, right now. Right here, right now. Right here, right now. Right here, right now. Right here, right now. Right here, right now. Right here, right now.

- Fat Boy Slim

This is the objective of Zen: When you read, read. Right here, right now.

As Rinsai Zenji puts it:

*Within that 6 feet of flesh,
There is a true person.
Make it step forward now.*

Don't hesitate!

Zen is what I recall from my childhood of sitting and drawing and becoming totally absorbed in it. Totally forgetting time and place. Being one with drawing. And there was no thinking, no little voice in the head saying: »That line is not straight. That boat looks wrong and ugly. Blah-blah-blah ...» Know what I'm saying?

So Zen is about being 100% present, alive, self-expressed and self-forgetting. No little voice – no judging of self or others, no stories, gossip, news or fantasies.

Zen is to be unconsciously conscious, going 100 % with the flow of the life energy (also known as Pranja, Chi or Ki) in all its manifested and unmanifested forms!

It is living life full out. Even when quiet, it is being 100% present in being quiet.

Roleplay

- Well, Roll playing is playing a role.
- Like being a father in 'Mummies and daddies'? Batman, a taxi driver? An Orc?

- Yes, exactly – pretending to be a person. The word 'person' comes from the Latin *persona* –which means something like 'to wear a mask'. Right now, you play the role that is given to you by your Ego. You play that you are the person you think you are. Determined by genes, history, soul and so on. When at work, you play

the role of the occupation you have. The doctor, baker, teacher or whatever. You can describe how doctors are. You know their archetype. So if I say I am a doctor, you automatically think I am so ... and so. Right?

So roleplay means playing a person, where 'playing' refers to the theatre/ movie concept of play.

It is acting, dressing, talking, thinking, feeling like the character, and having what it has.

It is identifying with the role and the setting/world/scene.

- But that is unreal. It can't be done. I can't have \$3 zillion!

- True. But in a roleplay, we pretend and play by rules. So we do what we can to create that illusion, through the use of physical objects, texts (role descriptions, plotlines, scripts) and instruction of all the characters. (This is not used very much at the moment – but if you watch children's play, or your own, you will notice it, albeit on a small scale.)

Short and sweet: we pretend something is real and act on it as the role.

- In roleplay, who decides? Who has power and control over the so-called play?

- The Game Master. The arranger, the instructor, the producer, the board of directors, the members, the players. They are all part of the organization of the game – and play different roles off-game as in-game. Everybody has responsibility, influence on the course of the game and preparatory work. But some have greater responsibility than others, and some are responsible

to the laws of the society if anything blows up. There are leaders at all levels and subordinates on all levels.

The better the system of organization and the personal level of responsibility, the better the result. Results are the measure of the organization!

- Results of roleplay? – What on earth are those?

- Experience and adventure. Witnessing and participating in an epic drama, mind-blowing action, tragic events, hazards, intense relationships ...

- It is being with a great group of people, playing like you did when you were a child and having fun (without getting drunk!). It is having a great time – that you will carry in your memory as a great experience.

- Got it!

- Okay. – So ... Are you ready to try it? I'm just ready to go. Coming?

- ALL RIGHT!! ... But does it cost money? Is it worth my time and money?

- You check it out for yourself, brother. YEAH! Hit it!

Here we leave the two roles of the roleplay guru and the newbie to roleplay and take a closer look at a central aspect of roleplay: IMPROVISATION.

Improvise

Source; Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary:

1. to create music, a part in a play, etc while one is playing or speaking, instead of using music or words



The Carp ascends three roaring waterfalls and becomes a dragon
Bū Shodo Harada Roshi

written previously.

2. to make something from whatever is available, without advanced planning

Creating spontaneously in harmony or accordance with what is present. This is improvisation, and without it the roleplay would be rather dead. But where do the impulses and inspiration come from? Most often from our personality. So we just react as

ourselves – automatically, so to speak. Often, we have a lot of persistent thoughts about what we could do or say; there is a lot of conversation going on in our minds. But other times, when we feel safe and/or if we train ourselves, we let go and let the action and words flow spontaneously. Afterwards, we are surprised by what we have done, and we experience a very strong sense of being alive and

present in the illusion of the setting. The cultivation of the fundamental characteristic of the role, so that we own the role as a second self and let go of self-reflection and enter into spontaneity, is the access to great roleplaying. As well as experiences, adventure and the joy and energy of the other players, that one gives oneself to.

Personal Expansion

Do you have your limits? Do you know them? Are you a slave to your limits, or it is more a matter that there are things you don't do because you don't dare, or because you think you can't do, be, say or have that?

Personal expansion means active personal growth – like maturing, or learning a new skill, or dealing with personal relationships in a more giving way.

This is in contrast to personal development. The former is a natural, easy-going, joyful process. The latter is more serious, painful, and demanding. The first is the rich uncle, the second the strict father.

What if your life is just an eccentric, off-game roleplay – with your personality given to you by God, karma or coincidence? You did not create your role in life by an act of will, the way you create your roles for a roleplay. But you can learn to be the

person you want to be, if you train and work on a role that is how you want to be. Then you can create your life to fit the role in life you dream of!

There are ways of personal growth and development for human beings that are common. Like playing roleplay and pretend games (as children do). Other ways involve learning from the experience of failure and success, and from second-hand knowledge, transmitted through communication of some sort.

Here is a special Indian way to use roleplay to personal growth:

Some Lakota Indians and a friend of mine played with the intention of gaining power. (Here, power resembles the 'Force' in Star Wars.) The player sets up a personal quest for power and invents a role in consultation with the Game Master. Then he and the group of players design, create, experience and grow through the medium of imagination, acting and communication. A tale of Power is told.

Just to make the power quest clear, I could mention the power to quit smoking, heal a deep sorrow, get a better concentration, bringing love into one's life, control one's desire or greed, being a successful artist, gaining a deeper relationship to the spirit world or being an everyday warrior, you name it.

Conclusion

‘You are what you play.’

Louis Armstrong

Zen claims that we have an ‘Original Mind’ – a Buddha Mind – which is the source of who we are. This is overshadowed by the Ego and the attachment to the picture we (and others) have of who we are – and the role we play in real life. Through being present and totally engaged in what we do, we can contact or be one with that Original Mind.

This is connected with spontaneity and inspiration. When we create spontaneously, our creation comes from the source. It will, of course, be coloured by who we are, as we are the channel, or medium. What comes out is an expression of who we are and what we need to express to cultivate in ourselves or/and what others need to experience. It is a natural way of learning to cultivate our Mind.

Take a look at the different roles you have played and see if they have expressed some profound aspect of your personality, or perhaps expressed aspects of yourself you did not own or master. Maybe a repressed anger, traumatic experience, delusion or vision, mystic experience or miracle. Look!

The way to use roleplay as a tool for personal growth is to consciously work with the role and with improvisation. Then you can build yourself up to be/play the role and experience living it out in ways that are not your normal everyday role/personality. This gives you first-hand experience of what you also are, and you expand your expression as a human being.

You are a Buddha, and from this you create something inspiring.

From this, you cannot avoid learning something about yourself, even if you do not do this with the intention of personal growth.

Gassho

(I greet you with my hands together in front of my heart – like a lotus bud – and then I bow to you.)

Denkyu Koji

Lay brother with Shodo Harada Roshi (Zen master in the Rinzai sect) at the monastery of Sogenji, Okayama, Japan.

PS: Please remember that this text is like a finger pointing to the moon. It is not the moon. So if you see dirt on the finger, sorry about that! Please don't think that the dirt is the moon, either. Just follow your inspiration, which is the Truth anyway. Or forget my words quickly and forever.