

# road trip

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When I was young, I remember that my father was always reading maps. We never really went anywhere, but he would spend hours looking at maps of our state, the surrounding states, and even the entire United States. He knew all the major roads, where they went, what towns they went through, the fastest route from here to almost anywhere. He knew just about every major and minor river and where it started and where it ended. One time on a trip home, I noticed that I had crossed the East Branch of the Skunk River. The name just struck me as being funny, so I mentioned it to my dad. He knew exactly where it was and even told me where the West Branch of the Skunk River was. Yet, with all the reading he did and knowledge he had about roads, cities, and states, we hardly ever went anywhere.


I used to look back at that and laugh and wonder what that was all about, and then one day I caught myself doing the same thing. When I stopped and thought about it, I realized that I also spent a lot of time looking at maps. I don't know, maybe it's just a guy thing, or maybe it's some strange genetic trait passed on from my forefathers. But I remember a couple of summers ago, my wife and I talked about going to the Outer Banks of North Carolina. Before long, I had the maps out and was planning a road trip. Within a day or two, I had mapped out several different routes from here to the Outer Banks. Not just one route, mind you, but I had probably four different routes through as many states as you could imagine. I even had several different routes for the trip back home. But something came up and the trip never happened. The following summer, we thought about going down and checking on some land we own in Tennessee. Of course, that was then expanded to go farther, as long as we were in the area, we might just as well go to Asheville, North Carolina—it's right down the road a piece, and as long as we were that far south, we could just as well continue on to Savannah, Georgia and check it out. I always wanted to see Savannah. Out came the maps, and several routes were once again plotted. Both to and from, several selections, just take your pick of states to go through. Of course, something else came up, and that trip was postponed also. But I continued to look at maps and atlases, and at the very mention of a trip, I

would start plotting routes again and again. Never taking the trips, but always prepared.

You can probably see where this is headed, right? Nowhere. As long as you plan, plan, plan, you never go anywhere. Someday you have to stop planning and just go. You can be like my father and know every major road in the United States, but until you actually get in your car and drive on those roads, you will always be right there in your driveway where you started.

Many times we plan to do things, whether it be to go to practice or go shopping. But the results are the same if we only plan to do these things and never get around to actually doing them; then we never get to practice or we never go shopping. We can apply this same principle to a lot of other things in our home life and our work life. As the end of the year approaches, I am reminded that I had planned to take several classes to fulfill my development plan objectives at work for the year. But, so far, I have only planned to take the courses, I haven't actually taken the courses yet, and the year-end is quickly approaching. So planning to take the courses is as far as I have gotten, and that isn't going to meet the objective, which was to actually take the courses.





As I talk to other people about Zen practice, I run into many people who say they have read a lot about Zen. They haven't practiced Zen at all, they don't apply Zen to their daily lives, but they have read a lot, and know probably far more than I do about historical facts and figures relating to Zen. But reading about Zen and not practicing is like reading maps and not going anywhere. Over the years, I have heard many teachers say "put the books down and practice." Sometimes we need to remind ourselves that reading about Zen is fine, but someday you have to put down the books and start sitting on the cushion. We have to take all of those great ideas that we read about in all of those books and start applying all of those things in our daily life. That way, when we see someone who is hungry, we know that we need to feed them. If we see someone who is suffering, we can help them find the origin of their suffering, and correct the situation.

Planning is a necessary part of life. We need to plan for the future, but we must remember that when we plan for the future, we have to do the planning in the present

moment. After we make those plans, we have to act on them, follow the plan that we laid out. Many people don't plan and have no way to handle bad situations that arise. But having a plan that is never followed is of no use to us, either.

There is nothing wrong with looking at maps and planning trips. There is nothing wrong with reading all the Zen books you can find. There is nothing wrong with planning. Just remember that all of that planning is empty unless you start the car or sit on the cushion. You must put the plan into action to reap any benefits of the plan.

So, the next time you pick up a map and look at all of the different ways to go from point A to point B, remember to start the car and actually experience the trip. The next time you enjoy reading about Zen in a new book, put the book down, and sit on the cushion for a while. Experience the trip, experience Zen. You'll be happy you did. 🌀

