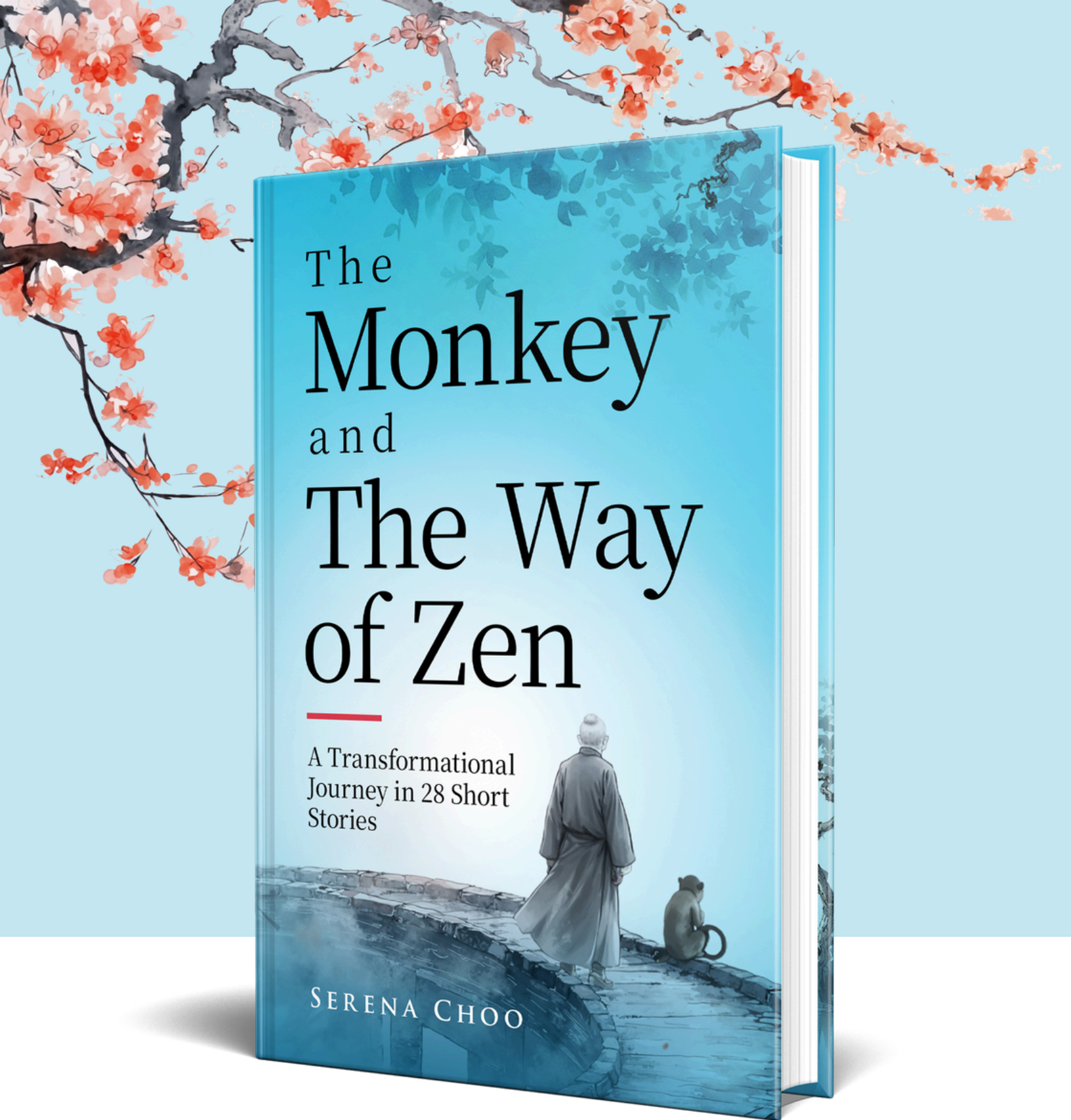




- BOOK EXTRACT -



Praise for The Monkey and The Way of Zen

"If you feel like contentment is always out of reach, this is the book you need. I found myself experiencing 'aha' moments from a single sentence. You'll highlight and reread this often."

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An Invitation

Come, sit for a while.

There is no rush. No urgency.

You do not need to chase. You do not need to fix anything. You do not need to become more than you already are.

For so long, the mind has been searching—racing forward, tangled in worries, grasping at certainty. It looks for peace as if it were something distant, just beyond reach.

But what if peace and happiness were never something to be found?

What if they are already here—hidden beneath the noise of thinking, waiting to be seen?

If you find yourself trapped in overthinking, stress, or striving, these stories offer a different way forward. Each one is a gentle interruption—a pause in the mind's endless loops, an opening for something deeper to emerge.

Zen wisdom is not about gaining knowledge. It is about dissolving what is unnecessary. For centuries, Zen masters have shared short, paradoxical tales, known as koans—not to explain the truth, but to point toward it.

While traditional Zen koans often use paradox to break through conditioned thinking, these Zen-inspired stories are written with a gentler approach—offering reflections that invite awareness in narrative form.

Let these stories settle in your mind. Read them once, then again later. Notice how different passages speak to you at different times. The story

that means little today may unlock something profound when you least expect it—a day, a month, even years from now.

Read. Let go. See what arises.

At the end of each story, you will find a short Pause & Reflect prompt. These are not instructions, but gentle invitations—to turn inward, to notice, to simply be aware.

So take a breath.

And allow yourself to see what has always been.

Prologue

The monkey was always moving. His feet never stayed on a single branch for long, his thoughts never rested in one place. He swung from tree to tree, always chasing something—though he could never say exactly what.

A sense of unease followed him, like a shadow he could not escape.

His mind was restless, spinning with questions, worries, doubts. He was quick to anger when things didn't go his way, impatient when answers didn't come fast enough, frustrated when the world refused to bend to his will. The harder he tried to control things, the more complicated everything seemed to become.

And yet, despite all his effort, despite all his running, he felt no closer to peace.

At night, as he lay on a high branch staring at the stars, the weight of his own thoughts pressed down on him. He longed for something more—a life that was not an endless chase, a mind that did not feel like a tangled jungle of overthinking.

But how?

Where would he find what he was looking for?

Not that he even knew what that was.

One evening, as the jungle settled into its familiar rhythm of rustling leaves and distant hoots, the monkey sat among his troop, watching the others groom and chatter. The branches swayed under their playful movements, but his own limbs felt restless.

A younger monkey swung past him, hooting loudly before dropping onto a nearby branch. “Why do you always look like you swallowed a sour berry?”

The others chuckled.

“Do you ever wonder if there’s more than this?” he asked, his voice quieter than usual.

One of the older monkeys, his fur speckled with silver, drawled sarcastically. “More than what? More than climbing, eating, and napping?”

A lanky monkey, still hanging upside down from a nearby vine, snorted. “Careful, or you’ll end up like the bat! Always hanging upside down, thinking strange thoughts.”

The troop burst into laughter.

The monkey’s tail flicked irritably. “I just mean... don’t you ever feel like something is missing?” He hesitated, then tried again. “Like you’re running, but you don’t know where?”

Another monkey stretched lazily across a thick branch, yawning. “You think too much. If you stopped climbing trees to chase thoughts, maybe you’d be happier.”

A smaller monkey, still half-grooming his friend’s fur, smirked. “Or maybe he just needs a mate. That’s what’s missing.”

More laughter.

The monkey clenched his jaw, heat rising in his chest. It wasn’t just the teasing—it was that they didn’t care. Every day felt the same. Every conversation predictable. And yet, when he tried to speak of it, he was met with jokes and dismissive grins.

No one ever wondered about the things that kept him awake at night. No one ever seemed to feel what he felt—the aching, restless feeling that there had to be something more.

That night, as the others curled up together, he climbed higher into the canopy, perching alone beneath the vast stretch of sky. The stars shimmered like scattered seeds across an endless field. Somewhere beyond this jungle, beyond the life he had always known, something waited for him.



One day, he heard a rumor.

Somewhere beyond the dense jungle, past the river that ran like silver in the moonlight, there was a master. A teacher who spoke of things beyond what the monkey had ever known.

Some said the master had the answers to everything. Others said he simply pointed the way.

The monkey scoffed when he first heard the tale. A single master, holding the key to everything he had spent his whole life searching for? Foolishness.

And yet... the idea would not leave him.

What if this master had what he was looking for?

But what if he left everything behind, made the long journey, only to find nothing? What if he returned home empty-handed, laughed at, a fool?

Doubt twisted in his chest.

But he had to know.

And so, one morning, before the sun had fully risen, the monkey left the only life he had ever known. He followed the whisper of a rumor, chasing a master who might not even exist, searching for something he could not yet name.

And from that moment on, he was no longer just a monkey.

He became the wandering monkey.

Chapter 1

The Lens of Perception



The wandering monkey had spent many days traveling through the dense jungle, following rumors of a wise master who lived in the mountains. The sun burned hot above him, beads of sweat dampening his fur. Tangled vines tugged at his limbs, as if the very forest wanted to hold him back from his quest. Yet, he pressed on, for he carried a question heavier than his aching limbs: *Why is life so difficult?*

When he finally arrived at the old temple, his expectations shattered. No grand halls, no golden statues—just an elderly master sitting beside a simple pond, his gaze fixed on the rippling water. The stillness of the place felt unsettling, as if the air itself held its breath.

His nose wrinkled. *Was this the master that many spoke of?*

He had imagined someone... more. Someone who looked wise. Someone who carried an air of importance. Instead, this was just an old man in plain robes, silent and still as a rock.

The monkey shifted from foot to foot, waiting. Had the master even noticed him?

After what felt like an eternity, he cleared his throat. "Master, I have traveled far seeking wisdom. My mind is full of thoughts, doubts, and worries. The world is unfair. People misunderstand me. No matter what I do, things seem to work against me. I want to see things clearly, to understand what is true."

Under his breath, he muttered, "You don't even look like the master I heard of."

The old man finally lifted his gaze, studying the monkey's weary face for a long moment before reaching into his robes. Without a word, he pulled out a small, polished bronze mirror and held it up.

"What do you see?"

The monkey frowned, ears twitching. His fur was matted from the journey, his eyes heavy with exhaustion, his face tense. "I see myself."

"And now?" asked the master, tilting the mirror slightly.

The monkey squinted. Now, in the reflection, he could see the temple behind him.

"I see the temple too."

Then the master dipped the mirror into the pond. The water shimmered as the monkey's reflection twisted into strange, warped shapes.

His stomach clenched. He leaned forward, staring hard. His face looked monstrous. His eyes bulged, his mouth twisted sideways, his fur blurred into strange patterns.

He recoiled, suddenly uneasy. "This—this isn't right!" he snapped, shaking his head. "I don't look like that!"

The master said nothing, simply letting the ripples settle. The monkey glanced at him sharply, his tail lashing in agitation. *Was this a joke? A trick?*

But as the water stilled, his real face returned.

The master finally spoke, his voice calm. “Your reflection changes depending on what you look through. A mirror, a pond, a still or disturbed mind—each presents a different image. Tell me, which reflection is the real one?”

The monkey knitted his brows together. “I suppose... none of them?”

The master nodded. “What you see is always shaped by what you look through. The world is not as it is—it is as you are. When your mind is still, you see clearly. When it is disturbed, you see distortions. If you believe the distortions, you suffer.”

The monkey let out a sharp breath, his shoulders sagging. He kicked a small stone into the pond, watching the ripples spread. “So... if I see unfairness, suffering, and obstacles, does that mean they aren’t real?”

The master stood and gestured toward the mountains in the distance. “Tell me, do you see that mountain?”

The monkey nodded.

“How does the mountain look from here?”

“Small,” the monkey admitted.

“And if you stood in the valley, looking up?”

“It would seem massive,” the monkey said.

The master nodded. “And if clouds covered its peak?”

“Then I wouldn’t see it at all.”

The master’s eyes twinkled. “And yet, the mountain remains.”

The monkey opened his mouth, then closed it again, without speaking.

“Perception shapes experience,” the master said. “But reality does not change because you see it differently. What changes is your experience of it.”

The monkey rubbed his arms. “Then... how do I know what is true?”

The master lifted the mirror again, this time tilting it toward the sky. The glass reflected the open expanse of blue above. “When you stop looking for yourself in every reflection, the world appears as it is. Truth is not found in the distortions of perception but in the stillness that remains when the mind is clear.”

The monkey sat for a long time, watching the pond return to stillness. The wind whispered through the trees, carrying with it the gentle rustling of leaves and the scent of damp earth and jasmine. He did not argue, did not try to grasp the lesson all at once.

For the first time in his life, he did not try to answer—he simply observed.

And in that silence, something within him shifted.

Pause & Reflect

How has your perception shaped your reality in the past? Can you think of a time when changing your perspective transformed how you felt about a situation?

Chapter 2

The Veil of Separation



The wandering monkey woke the next morning, still tired from his travels. He stretched, his limbs stiff from the uneven ground, and rubbed his face with both hands. His mind immediately went into overdrive, replaying his meeting with the master the day before. It had all made sense then, but now, in the cold light of morning, he wasn't so sure.

His tail twitched as uncertainty crept in. *What if that wasn't even the real master?*

He kicked at a loose pebble, his frustration rising, when a voice behind him interrupted his spiraling thoughts.

"You're new here, aren't you?"

The monkey whipped around. A young temple student stood nearby, his simple robes lightly dusted with dirt from morning chores. His face was calm as he watched the monkey with a curious but unreadable expression.

"I suppose I am," the monkey said shortly, his tail flicking.

The student studied him for a moment, then sat on a nearby rock. "You don't look like the others who come seeking the master."

The monkey let out a sharp scoff. "That's because I don't even know what I'm looking for."

The student smiled faintly. "I understand." His voice drifted off as he gazed toward the distant treetops.

The monkey glanced at him suspiciously. "And?"

The student hesitated. "Before I came here, I lived in a village by the river. My family was there, my friends—everything I had ever known. But somehow, I always felt like an outsider. Like I didn't quite belong, even among the people who raised me."

The monkey frowned. "What... you too?"

The student grinned slightly. "Yeah. I thought maybe coming here would change that. That I'd finally feel at home."

The monkey's eyes narrowed. "And do you?"

The student hesitated again. "Some days... Other days, I still feel like I'm looking for something I can't name."

The monkey's tail lashed sharply against the ground. "So what are you saying? That no matter where we go, we'll never belong anywhere?"

The student met his gaze with a quiet expression. "I don't know. But I do know that leaving one place doesn't always mean you've escaped what was inside you all along."

The monkey exhaled sharply, rubbing his temples. "Well, that's... not helpful."

The student simply smiled, as if he'd expected that answer.

After a long pause, the monkey pushed himself to his feet, brushing the dust from his fur. "I have to keep looking."

The student didn't try to stop him. He simply nodded.

With that, the monkey set off again, his frustration deepening.

He climbed the mountain for days, each step pulling him further from the jungle he had always known. His arms ached from scaling rocky ledges, his fingers scraped raw against jagged stone. The cold mountain air bit at his skin, so different from the thick, humid jungle.

Below him, the dense canopy had disappeared, replaced by an endless stretch of jagged peaks and eerie silence. His thoughts were his only company, looping in endless circles—dwelling on old grievances, moments of loneliness, the gnawing sense that something was missing.

And then, at last, he reached the summit.

There, at the edge of a vast ravine, sat the old master, legs crossed, eyes half-closed, as if listening to something only he could hear.

The monkey froze mid-step. His mouth went dry. *What? How did he get here?*

He hesitated, his pulse quickening. Then, cautiously, he sat beside the master, eyeing him sideways.

"Master," he said, his voice quieter than usual in the stillness. "Is it you?"

Silence.

The monkey shifted, his tail curling tightly around his feet. "Master, I..." He faltered, unsure if he should continue.

More silence.

The monkey's patience snapped. His fingers clenched in the dirt. "Master, I feel like I don't belong anywhere!" The words burst out before he could stop them. "In the jungle, I'm different from the other monkeys. When I travel, I am a stranger. Even now, sitting beside you, I feel... apart."

The master slowly opened his eyes and gazed out at the ravine before them. "What do you see?"

The monkey followed his gaze. A great chasm stretched between two cliffs, deep and endless. The sun cast long shadows into its depths, making it seem even more unreachable.

He hesitated. "I see..." His brow furrowed. "A vast space. A valley between two mountains."

The master gave a small nod. "Yes. And what else?"

The monkey looked again. The jagged cliffs framed the empty air between them. He studied the steep drops, the rugged edges of stone. "It's... uncrossable."

The master remained silent, waiting.

The monkey shifted uncomfortably. "One side is over there, the other side is here." He exhaled. "Separate."

The master tilted his head slightly. "And if you were a bird, flying above?"

The monkey blinked. He pictured himself soaring through the crisp air, his feet never touching the ground. The image flickered in his mind. "Then..." He frowned, something clicking into place. "Then there would be no divide. Just one mountain."

The master smiled. "Perspective shapes perception. The separation you see exists only from where you stand."

The monkey frowned, staring at the ravine. "But it's real. I can't cross it."

The master reached into his robe and pulled out a small wooden cup. He dipped it into a nearby stream and held it up, the water glistening in the light. "Is the water in this cup separate from the stream?"

The monkey tilted his head. "Well... yes. It's in the cup now."

The master poured the water back into the stream. Ripples spread outward, dissolving any trace of separation. "And now?"

The monkey watched with raised eyebrows. The water that had been in the cup was now indistinguishable from the rest.

“We create separation in our minds,” the master continued. “We label things: me, you; here, there; past, future. But is a wave separate from the ocean? Or a leaf from the tree?”

The monkey scratched his chin. “But I *feel* separate. When others do not understand me. When I am alone.”

The master picked up a pebble and rolled it between his fingers before tossing it into the ravine. They listened as it clattered down the rocky walls, the sound gradually fading into silence. “Does the stone leave the mountain?”

The monkey thought for a moment. His fingers absently traced patterns in the dirt. “No... It is still part of it, just in a different place.”

The master placed a hand over his heart. “So too are we. The mind builds walls that do not exist. Whether you stand on one side of the mountain or the other, you are always part of something greater.”

The monkey exhaled. He looked again at the ravine, turning the thought over in his mind. *It's not an impassable divide, but part of the whole landscape.*

He understood the words—but was it truly that simple? Could a thought alone dissolve something that had always felt so real?

The breeze stirred the dust at his feet. He inhaled deeply, feeling the mountain air fill his chest.

Strangely, he felt... a little less alone.

Pause & Reflect

Where in your life do you feel separate or disconnected from others? How might you experience change if you saw yourself as part of a greater whole?



Next Steps

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