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Puqun Li: Zen koans: unsolvable enigmas designed to break your brain | TED Talk

https://www.ted.com/talks/puqun_li_zen_koans_unsolvable_enigmas_designed_to_break_your_brain

Advanced Words Only

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Session 1: Word List

unexplained

adj. not able to be explained or understood, lacking explanation or justification for something unknown or mysterious

synonym : mysterious, inexplicable, enigmatic

(1) **unexplained** phenomenon, (2) **unexplained** disappearance

There was an **unexplained** noise coming from the attic that frightened us all.

zen

n. a school of Mahayana Buddhism that originated in China and was later developed in Japan, emphasizing the practice of meditation as the way to achieve enlightenment or awakening; (adjective) characterized by a sense of peace and tranquility, often through the practice of meditation or the use of natural elements

synonym : meditative, peaceful, tranquil

(1) **zen** garden, (2) **zen** meditation

Daily yoga helped her achieve a **zen** state of mind and calmness.

monk

n. a member of a religious community of men living under vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience

synonym : friar, cleric, brother

(1) **monk** lifestyle, (2) cloistered **monk**

The ascetic **monk** spent his days in prayer and contemplation in the monastery.

enlightenment

n. education that results in understanding and the spread of knowledge

synonym: civilization, awareness, sophistication

(1) spiritual **enlightenment**, (2) **enlightenment** activity

He finally brought his **enlightenment** to perfection.

bewilder

v. to confuse or puzzle someone; to cause someone to become lost or disoriented in thought or perception

synonym: perplex, confound, puzzle

(1) **bewilder** the reader, (2) **bewilder** scientists

The complex instructions on the assignment sheet **bewilder** most students.

gong

n. a metal disk that produces a deep, resonant sound when struck with a mallet or other object, often used in percussion music or as a signal in various contexts

synonym: bell, chime, clang

(1) **gong** sound, (2) temple **gong**

As the martial arts master began the demonstration, the sound of the **gong** filled the dojo.

incomprehensible

adj. impossible to understand or explain; not able to be grasped or comprehended

synonym: unintelligible, unfathomable, inexplicable

(1) **incomprehensible** jargon, (2) **incomprehensible** math problem

The mathematical formula was **incomprehensible** to most of the students.

surreal

adj. strange and unreal; having an oddly dreamlike quality

synonym: dreamlike, fantastical, unreal

(1) **surreal** number, (2) **surreal** art

The dreamlike quality of the painting gave it a **surreal** feel.

contradict

v. to deny the truth of a statement by stating the opposite;
to be in conflict with

synonym: conflict, oppose, belie

(1) **contradict** each other, (2) **contradict** the principle

The book contains numerous statements that **contradict** previous reports.

proverb

n. a short saying that expresses a truth or gives advice based on practical experience

synonym: adage, saying, maxim

(1) a hackneyed **proverb**, (2) ancient **proverb**

The famous **proverb** "actions speak louder than words" reminds us to focus on deeds instead of words.

monastic

adj. relating to monk or monasticism; ascetic or austere in lifestyle or habits

synonym: contemplative, solitary, austere

(1) **monastic** community, (2) **monastic** orders

The **monastic** lifestyle of the monks involved living in solitude and silence.

illogical

adj. not making sense or not based on sound reasoning

synonym: irrational, senseless, nonsensical

(1) **illogical** argument, (2) **illogical** reasoning

His argument made no sense and was completely **illogical**.

anecdote

n. a short and amusing or interesting story about a real incident or person

synonym: story, account, tale

(1) personal **anecdote**, (2) funny **anecdote**

She entertained the guests with **anecdotes** about her travels and experiences.

ambiguity

n. the quality of being open to more than one interpretation; the uncertainty of meaning

synonym : uncertainty, vagueness, obscurity

(1) free from **ambiguity**, (2) avoid **ambiguity** in writing

The **ambiguity** in the instructions made it difficult for her to complete the task.

paradox

n. a statement, situation, or person that has two opposite facts or features and therefore seems impossible, is difficult to understand, or is strange;

synonym : incongruity, dichotomy, contradiction

(1) French **paradox**, (2) the **paradox** of the heap

There are many theories to explain this **paradox**.

puzzling

adj. confusing or difficult to understand; mysterious

synonym : baffling, confusing, enigmatic

(1) **puzzling** behavior, (2) **puzzling** questions

The detective found the clues **puzzling** and couldn't solve the case immediately.

confuse

v. to mistake one thing for another; to make somebody hard to understand

synonym : confound, obscure, disorient

(1) **confuse** the listener, (2) **confuse** fantasy with reality

Her remarks **confused** the debate.

intern

v. to put someone in prison, especially for political or military reasons; (noun) a student or trainee who works, sometimes for free, to get work experience or to fulfill qualification criteria

synonym : apprentice, trainee, student

(1) **intern** civilians, (2) medical **intern**

The navy **interned** ships of defeated nations.

misguided

adj. having or showing a wrong or mistaken understanding of a situation or course of action

synonym : mistaken, wrong, erring

(1) **misguided** policies, (2) a **misguided** sense of duty
His **misguided** attempt to fix the problem only made it worse.

decipher

v. to read or understand something that is written in code or in a difficult or obscure way

synonym: interpret, decode, translate

(1) **decipher** code, (2) **decipher** message

He spent hours trying to **decipher** the ancient text.

politely

adv. in a courteous or respectful manner, showing good manners or consideration for others

synonym: courteously, respectfully, graciously

(1) **politely** ask, (2) nodded **politely**

She **politely** declined the invitation to the party, saying she had other plans.

restrain

v. to prevent or hold back from doing something, often by physical or moral force; to limit or restrict one's actions or behavior; to control or moderate strong emotions or impulses

synonym: restrict, limit, control

(1) **restrain** from violence, (2) **restrain** a child

The police had to **restrain** the suspect after he became violent during the arrest.

cling

v. to hold onto something tightly; to be closely attached to someone or something

synonym: stick, adhere, attach

(1) **cling** onto power, (2) **cling** tightly to the skin

He **clings** to the hope that he will find a job soon.

ridicule

n. speech or behavior that makes fun of or mocks someone or something; teasing, sarcasm, or scornful remarks that are intended to belittle or humiliate; (verb) to mock, criticize, or make fun of someone or something in a scornful or derisive way

synonym: derision, mockery, satire

(1) public **ridicule**, (2) **ridicule** at his expense
The **ridicule** from his classmates made him feel embarrassed and ashamed.

ripple

n. a small wave on the surface of a liquid, typically caused by an object falling into it or a slight wind

synonym: wave, undulation, fluctuation

(1) a **ripple** of laughter, (2) **ripple** in the water

Many businesses felt the **ripple** effect of the economy's decline.

observable

adj. that can be noticed or seen

synonym: visible, perceptible, detectable

(1) **observable** change, (2) experimentally **observable**

Any theorem relies on both **observable** fact and assumption.

infer

v. to form an opinion or conclude that something is true based on existing facts

synonym: guess, deduce, assume

(1) **infer** quality from price, (2) **infer** the possibility

Animal desire and preference are always **inferred** from their behavior.

defy

v. to challenge or dare someone to do something; to resist or disobey a rule, decision, etc.

synonym: challenge, resist, disobey

(1) **defy** gravity, (2) **defy** authority

She tried to **defy** her parents by moving to the city against their wishes.

abolish

v. to do away with completely; to put an end to

synonym: cancel, repeal, annul

(1) **abolish** slavery, (2) **abolish** censorship

The government voted to **abolish** the outdated law.

paradoxical

adj. seemingly contradictory or absurd because of having two opposite features or facts, though it is probably true

synonym: contradictory, conflicting, perplexing

(1) a **paradoxical** anecdote, (2) apparently **paradoxical** it is **paradoxical** that the French, who prefer animal foods, live longer than people in other countries.

Session 2: Spelling

1. cl__g onto power v. to hold onto something tightly; to be closely attached to someone or something
2. personal an____te n. a short and amusing or interesting story about a real incident or person
3. d__y gravity v. to challenge or dare someone to do something; to resist or disobey a rule, decision, etc.
4. pu____ng behavior adj. confusing or difficult to understand; mysterious
5. nodded po____ly adv. in a courteous or respectful manner, showing good manners or consideration for others
6. in__r the possibility v. to form an opinion or conclude that something is true based on existing facts
7. mo____ic community adj. relating to monk or monasticism; ascetic or austere in lifestyle or habits
8. con____ct the principle v. to deny the truth of a statement by stating the opposite; to be in conflict with
9. funny an____te n. a short and amusing or interesting story about a real incident or person
10. d__y authority v. to challenge or dare someone to do something; to resist or disobey a rule, decision, etc.

ANSWERS: 1. cling, 2. anecdote, 3. defy, 4. puzzling, 5. politely, 6. infer, 7. monastic, 8. contradict, 9. anecdote, 10. defy

11. the pa____x of the heap *n.* a statement, situation, or person that has two opposite facts or features and therefore seems impossible, is difficult to understand, or is strange;
12. ancient pr____b *n.* a short saying that expresses a truth or gives advice based on practical experience
13. public ri____le *n.* speech or behavior that makes fun of or mocks someone or something; teasing, sarcasm, or scornful remarks that are intended to belittle or humiliate; (verb) to mock, criticize, or make fun of someone or something in a scornful or derisive way
14. il____al reasoning *adj.* not making sense or not based on sound reasoning
15. mo____ic orders *adj.* relating to monk or monasticism; ascetic or austere in lifestyle or habits
16. co____e fantasy with reality *v.* to mistake one thing for another; to make somebody hard to understand
17. z_n meditation *n.* a school of Mahayana Buddhism that originated in China and was later developed in Japan, emphasizing the practice of meditation as the way to achieve enlightenment or awakening; (adjective) characterized by a sense of peace and tranquility, often through the practice of meditation or the use of natural elements
18. con____ct each other *v.* to deny the truth of a statement by stating the opposite; to be in conflict with

ANSWERS: 11. paradox, 12. proverb, 13. ridicule, 14. illogical, 15. monastic, 16. confuse, 17. zen, 18. contradict

19. be____er the reader *v.* to confuse or puzzle someone; to cause someone to become lost or disoriented in thought or perception
20. il_____al argument *adj.* not making sense or not based on sound reasoning
21. a mi_____ed sense of duty *adj.* having or showing a wrong or mistaken understanding of a situation or course of action
22. French pa____x *n.* a statement, situation, or person that has two opposite facts or features and therefore seems impossible, is difficult to understand, or is strange;
23. medical in___n *v.* to put someone in prison, especially for political or military reasons; (noun) a student or trainee who works, sometimes for free, to get work experience or to fulfill qualification criteria
24. pu____ng questions *adj.* confusing or difficult to understand; mysterious
25. ri____le at his expense *n.* speech or behavior that makes fun of or mocks someone or something; teasing, sarcasm, or scornful remarks that are intended to belittle or humiliate; (verb) to mock, criticize, or make fun of someone or something in a scornful or derisive way
26. enl_____ent activity *n.* education that results in understanding and the spread of knowledge
27. spiritual enl_____ent *n.* education that results in understanding and the spread of knowledge

ANSWERS: 19. bewilder, 20. illogical, 21. misguided, 22. paradox, 23. intern, 24. puzzling, 25. ridicule, 26. enlightenment, 27. enlightenment

28. a par_____al anecdote *adj.* seemingly contradictory or absurd because of having two opposite features or facts, though it is probably true
29. ab_____h slavery *v.* to do away with completely; to put an end to
30. obs_____le change *adj.* that can be noticed or seen
31. cl__g tightly to the skin *v.* to hold onto something tightly; to be closely attached to someone or something
32. avoid am_____ty in writing *n.* the quality of being open to more than one interpretation; the uncertainty of meaning
33. cloistered m__k *n.* a member of a religious community of men living under vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience
34. inc_____ble math problem *adj.* impossible to understand or explain; not able to be grasped or comprehended
35. de_____er code *v.* to read or understand something that is written in code or in a difficult or obscure way
36. m__k lifestyle *n.* a member of a religious community of men living under vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience
37. a hackneyed pr_____b *n.* a short saying that expresses a truth or gives advice based on practical experience
38. ab_____h censorship *v.* to do away with completely; to put an end to

ANSWERS: 28. paradoxical, 29. abolish, 30. observable, 31. cling, 32. ambiguity, 33. monk, 34. incomprehensible, 35. decipher, 36. monk, 37. proverb, 38. abolish

39. re_____in from violence *v.* to prevent or hold back from doing something, often by physical or moral force; to limit or restrict one's actions or behavior; to control or moderate strong emotions or impulses
40. co_____e the listener *v.* to mistake one thing for another; to make somebody hard to understand
41. experimentally obs_____le *adj.* that can be noticed or seen
42. z_n garden *n.* a school of Mahayana Buddhism that originated in China and was later developed in Japan, emphasizing the practice of meditation as the way to achieve enlightenment or awakening; (adjective) characterized by a sense of peace and tranquility, often through the practice of meditation or the use of natural elements
43. de_____er message *v.* to read or understand something that is written in code or in a difficult or obscure way
44. apparently par_____al *adj.* seemingly contradictory or absurd because of having two opposite features or facts, though it is probably true
45. a ri___e of laughter *n.* a small wave on the surface of a liquid, typically caused by an object falling into it or a slight wind
46. in__r quality from price *v.* to form an opinion or conclude that something is true based on existing facts

ANSWERS: 39. restrain, 40. confuse, 41. observable, 42. zen, 43. decipher, 44. paradoxical, 45. ripple, 46. infer

47. su____l number *adj.* strange and unreal; having an oddly dreamlike quality
48. mi_____ed policies *adj.* having or showing a wrong or mistaken understanding of a situation or course of action
49. une_____ed disappearance *adj.* not able to be explained or understood, lacking explanation or justification for something unknown or mysterious
50. inc_____ble jargon *adj.* impossible to understand or explain; not able to be grasped or comprehended
51. ri___e in the water *n.* a small wave on the surface of a liquid, typically caused by an object falling into it or a slight wind
52. su____l art *adj.* strange and unreal; having an oddly dreamlike quality
53. g__g sound *n.* a metal disk that produces a deep, resonant sound when struck with a mallet or other object, often used in percussion music or as a signal in various contexts
54. free from am_____ty *n.* the quality of being open to more than one interpretation; the uncertainty of meaning
55. po____ly ask *adv.* in a courteous or respectful manner, showing good manners or consideration for others
56. be_____er scientists *v.* to confuse or puzzle someone; to cause someone to become lost or disoriented in thought or perception

ANSWERS: 47. surreal, 48. misguided, 49. unexplained, 50. incomprehensible, 51. ripple, 52. surreal, 53. gong, 54. ambiguity, 55. politely, 56. bewilder

57. re____in a child *v.* to prevent or hold back from doing something, often by physical or moral force; to limit or restrict one's actions or behavior; to control or moderate strong emotions or impulses
58. temple g__g *n.* a metal disk that produces a deep, resonant sound when struck with a mallet or other object, often used in percussion music or as a signal in various contexts
59. in___n civilians *v.* to put someone in prison, especially for political or military reasons; (noun) a student or trainee who works, sometimes for free, to get work experience or to fulfill qualification criteria
60. une_____ed phenomenon *adj.* not able to be explained or understood, lacking explanation or justification for something unknown or mysterious

ANSWERS: 57. restrain, 58. gong, 59. intern, 60. unexplained

Session 3: Fill in the Blanks

1. The navy _____ ships of defeated nations.
v. to put someone in prison, especially for political or military reasons; (noun) a student or trainee who works, sometimes for free, to get work experience or to fulfill qualification criteria
2. She _____ declined the invitation to the party, saying she had other plans.
adv. in a courteous or respectful manner, showing good manners or consideration for others
3. Any theorem relies on both _____ fact and assumption.
adj. that can be noticed or seen
4. Animal desire and preference are always _____ from their behavior.
v. to form an opinion or conclude that something is true based on existing facts
5. The mathematical formula was _____ to most of the students.
adj. impossible to understand or explain; not able to be grasped or comprehended
6. She entertained the guests with _____ about her travels and experiences.
n. a short and amusing or interesting story about a real incident or person
7. Her remarks _____ the debate.
v. to mistake one thing for another; to make somebody hard to understand
8. The police had to _____ the suspect after he became violent during the arrest.
v. to prevent or hold back from doing something, often by physical or moral force; to limit or restrict one's actions or behavior; to control or moderate strong emotions or impulses

ANSWERS: 1. interned, 2. politely, 3. observable, 4. inferred, 5. incomprehensible, 6. anecdotes, 7. confused, 8. restrain

9. The complex instructions on the assignment sheet _____ most students.
v. to confuse or puzzle someone; to cause someone to become lost or disoriented in thought or perception
10. The detective found the clues _____ and couldn't solve the case immediately.
adj. confusing or difficult to understand; mysterious
11. He spent hours trying to _____ the ancient text.
v. to read or understand something that is written in code or in a difficult or obscure way
12. His argument made no sense and was completely _____.
adj. not making sense or not based on sound reasoning
13. The dreamlike quality of the painting gave it a _____ feel.
adj. strange and unreal; having an oddly dreamlike quality
14. As the martial arts master began the demonstration, the sound of the _____ filled the dojo.
n. a metal disk that produces a deep, resonant sound when struck with a mallet or other object, often used in percussion music or as a signal in various contexts
15. He finally brought his _____ to perfection.
n. education that results in understanding and the spread of knowledge
16. The famous _____ "actions speak louder than words" reminds us to focus on deeds instead of words.
n. a short saying that expresses a truth or gives advice based on practical experience

ANSWERS: 9. bewilder, 10. puzzling, 11. decipher, 12. illogical, 13. surreal, 14. gong, 15. enlightenment, 16. proverb

17. There was an _____ noise coming from the attic that frightened us all.
adj. not able to be explained or understood, lacking explanation or justification for something unknown or mysterious
18. The government voted to _____ the outdated law.
v. to do away with completely; to put an end to
19. The ascetic _____ spent his days in prayer and contemplation in the monastery.
n. a member of a religious community of men living under vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience
20. The _____ in the instructions made it difficult for her to complete the task.
n. the quality of being open to more than one interpretation; the uncertainty of meaning
21. Daily yoga helped her achieve a _____ state of mind and calmness.
n. a school of Mahayana Buddhism that originated in China and was later developed in Japan, emphasizing the practice of meditation as the way to achieve enlightenment or awakening; (adjective) characterized by a sense of peace and tranquility, often through the practice of meditation or the use of natural elements
22. Many businesses felt the _____ effect of the economy's decline.
n. a small wave on the surface of a liquid, typically caused by an object falling into it or a slight wind
23. The book contains numerous statements that _____ previous reports.
v. to deny the truth of a statement by stating the opposite; to be in conflict with
24. She tried to _____ her parents by moving to the city against their wishes.
v. to challenge or dare someone to do something; to resist or disobey a rule, decision, etc.

ANSWERS: 17. unexplained, 18. abolish, 19. monk, 20. ambiguity, 21. zen, 22. ripple, 23. contradict, 24. defy

25. He _____ to the hope that he will find a job soon.

v. to hold onto something tightly; to be closely attached to someone or something

26. His _____ attempt to fix the problem only made it worse.

adj. having or showing a wrong or mistaken understanding of a situation or course of action

27. The _____ from his classmates made him feel embarrassed and ashamed.

n. speech or behavior that makes fun of or mocks someone or something; teasing, sarcasm, or scornful remarks that are intended to belittle or humiliate; (verb) to mock, criticize, or make fun of someone or something in a scornful or derisive way

28. it is _____ that the French, who prefer animal foods, live longer than people in other countries.

adj. seemingly contradictory or absurd because of having two opposite features or facts, though it is probably true

29. There are many theories to explain this _____.

n. a statement, situation, or person that has two opposite facts or features and therefore seems impossible, is difficult to understand, or is strange;

30. The _____ lifestyle of the monks involved living in solitude and silence.

adj. relating to monk or monasticism; ascetic or austere in lifestyle or habits

ANSWERS: 25. clings, 26. misguided, 27. ridicule, 28. paradoxical, 29. paradox, 30. monastic