

A Zen Story: Mathematics And Zero

By Kevin A. Sensenig

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Zen master: I have proof here that $1 + 2 = 0$.

Student: What?? You cannot. Everybody knows that $1 + 2 = 3$. That's mathematics.

Zen master: But you've forgotten. I have a case here, and it's mathematical, that $1 + 2 = 0$.

Student: You can't!

Zen master: Ah! Here I have 1 eaten apple plus 2 eaten apples equals 0 apples.

Student: Ack. <Laughs> So that's combinatorics, eh!

Zen master: Maybe. But isn't it real life?

Student: <Smiles>

I've modified it, but this story is recounted by Seung Sahn in "Dropping Ashes On The Buddha".