Becca Hiller
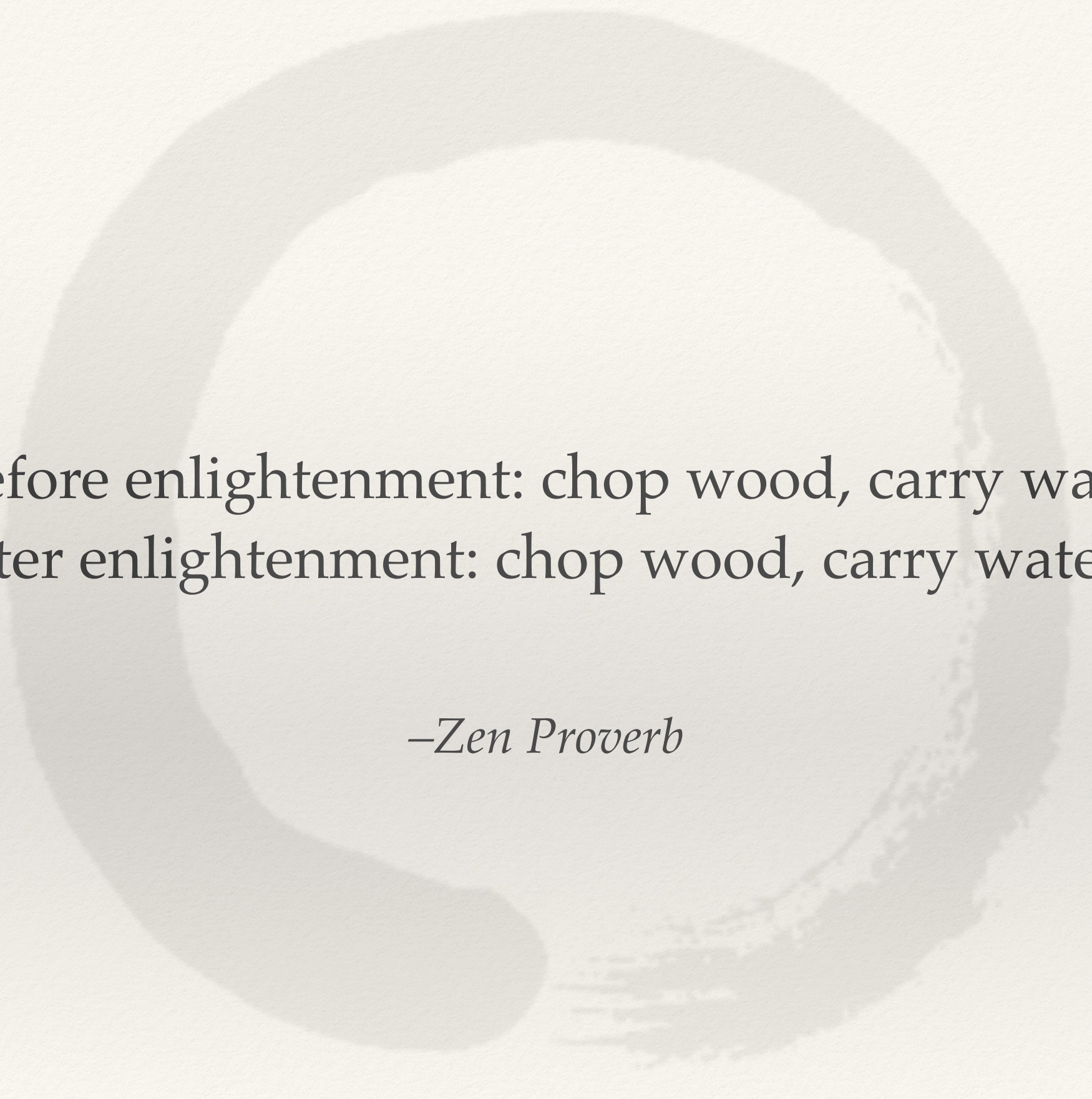
The Zen of Agility
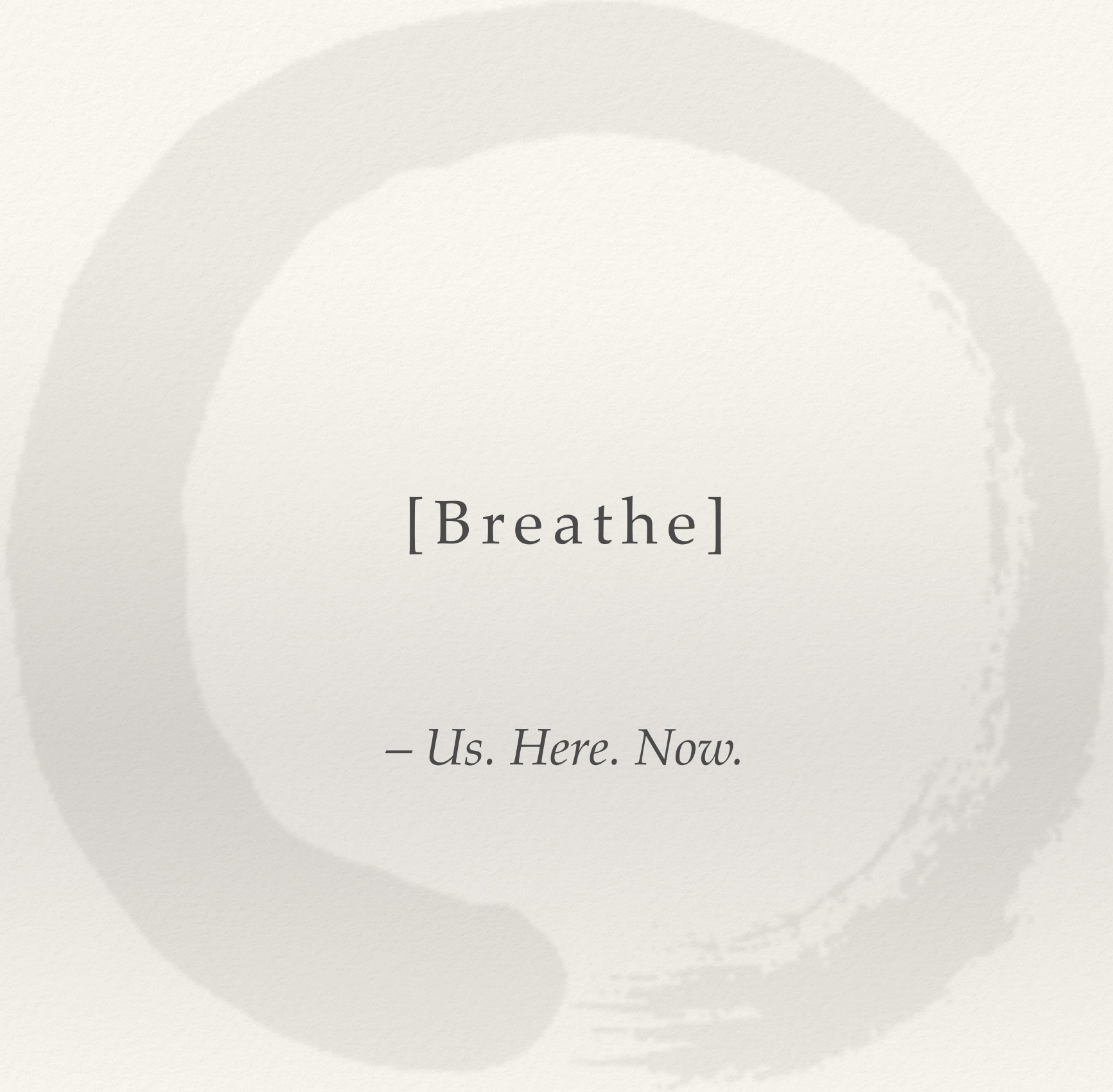
Learning, Unlearning, and
Why Simple Agile Isn't Easy

"Before enlightenment: chop wood, carry water.
After enlightenment: chop wood, carry water."

–Zen Proverb

[Breathe]

– Us. Here. Now.

A Confession (Story Time)

❖ I *really* dislike slide presentations.

   ❖ Creating them.

   ❖ Reading them.

   ❖ Making them function the way I want.

   ❖ Reviewing them only to miss an inevitable typo.
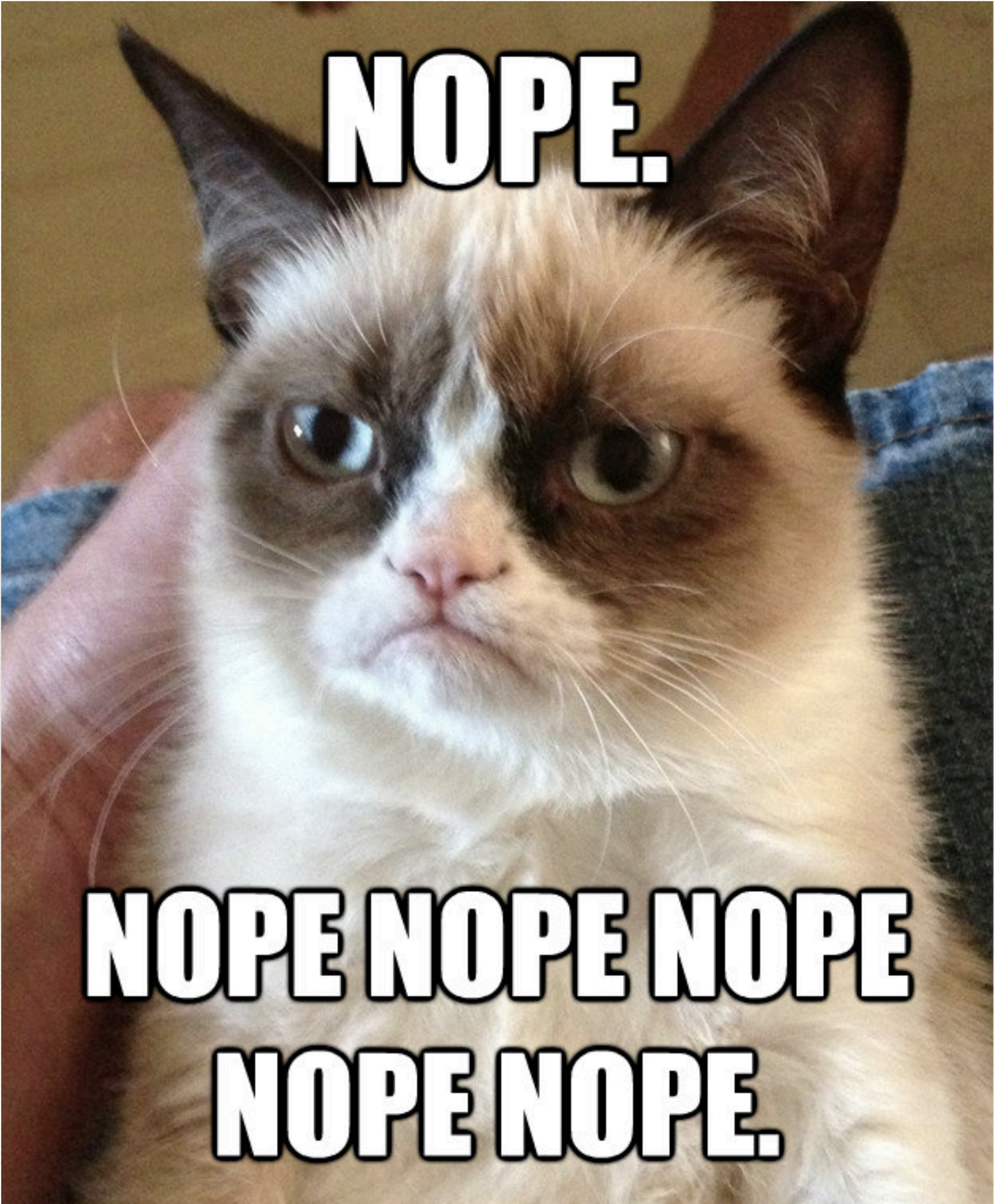
A Confession (Story Time)

- I'm lost; other things I'm used to are easier…

- Why is something so simple also so hard?

- What if I'm boring or sound stupid? WHAT IF I FAIL?

- How does this option lower ANY of these risks?

- Where do I even start?

Stop Me If You've Heard This One

What if my experience

(stick with me on this…)

feel a whole lot like…

Stop Me If You've Heard This One

this "Agile Transformation" thing

Agile Is a Human Experience

The underlying fear:

is all this suffering worth it?

Agile Is a Human Experience

Is *transformation,* Agile or otherwise, just another quest for *enlightenment*?

Agile Inspiration

I'm not saying it all started in Japan.

I'm just saying look there first.

Especially if a quiz is involved.

(Toyota…Aikido…just saying.)

Agile Inspiration

Agilists pull from mindfulness practices, meditative focus, and martial arts philosophies.

(Perhaps with some good reasons.)

Zen

- Zen Buddhism is in the School of Mahāyāna (one of two major branches of Buddhism)

- Rooted in Japan and Japanese culture; based on Buddhist practices originating in China and India

- Introduced in the United States in the late 19th Century

Zen Specifics

- Enlightenment within (empowered not bestowed)

- Experiential rather than theoretical

- Being in doing

- Freedom and spontaneity in discipline

- Understand complexity via simplicity and stillness

Zen

- Buddhist Principles and Practices are Rooted in the Four Noble Truths:*

    - The Truth of Suffering

    - The Truth of the Cause/Origin of Suffering

    - The Truth of the Cessation/Removal of Suffering

    - The Truth of the Path to End Suffering (Eightfold Path)

        - Right: View, Intention, Speech, Action, Livelihood, Effort, Mindfulness, Concentration

        - Typically represented as a wheel (dharmachakra)

Take all of the wording specifics with grain of salt, because it comes from translations, often through multiple languages

Our Shared Stories

What suffering have you experienced on the journey to Agile Transformation?

Our Shared Stories

❖ How can we…

  ❖ Foster learning and unlearning?

  ❖ Reduce suffering and ease attachments?

  ❖ Find focus?

  ❖ Re-humanize the experience?

Discuss and Explore: Learning

❖ What does LEARNING look like?

❖ What does LEARNING feel like?

❖ How do we help others LEARN?

Discuss and Explore: Unlearning

- What does UNLEARNING look like?

- What does UNLEARNING feel like?

- How do we help others UNLEARN?

"In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, in the expert's mind there are few."

–Shunryū Suzuki

Zen Concept

❖ *Shoshin* - the beginner's mind, or the state of approaching all things, regardless of expertise or experience, from a state of fresh perspective as though learning for the first time

The Beginner's Mind

❖ Full of curiosity and excitement.

❖ Open to experimentation; eager to question in earnest.

❖ Provides fresh perspective and welcomes change.

❖ Removes attachment to having the answers.

"If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough."

–Albert Einstein

Zen Concept

❖ w*abi-sabi* - simple, serene aesthetic inspired by Zen (combination of terms *wabi* and *sabi*)*

  ❖ Seven aesthetic principles:**

    ❖ *fukinsei* (asymmetry); *kanso* (simplicity); *koko* (basic); *shizen* (without pretense); *yugen* (subtly profound grace); *datsuzoku* (unbounded by convention); *seijaku* (tranquility)

*One resource for more info: https://nomurakakejiku.com/lesson_lineup/wabi-and-sabi

**Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_aesthetics (wording simplified)

Simplicity

- ❖ "Simplicity - the art of maximizing the amount of work not done - is essential."

- ❖ Reduces complications; reveals essentials and patterns.

- ❖ Foundational, incremental, and/or repeatable.

- ❖ Rhythm for habit making and habit breaking.

"When walking, walk. When eating, eat."

–Zen Proverb

Zen Concept

- *zazen* - the specific practice of seated meditation

- *kinhin* - specific practice of walking meditation

- *samu* - mindful or meditative working / laboring

Mindfulness and Stillness

❖ Full presence through full focus.

❖ Sustainability requires equanimity and flexibility.

❖ Supports transparency, inspection, and adaptation.

❖ Allows for introspection and integration of knowledge.

Ensō: Full Circle

- ❖ Stages of Mastery: Shu Ha Ri

- ❖ Cognitive Load, Decision Fatigue, and Other Obstacles

- ❖ Habit Building + Breaking (Learning + Unlearning)

- ❖ Singular Focus
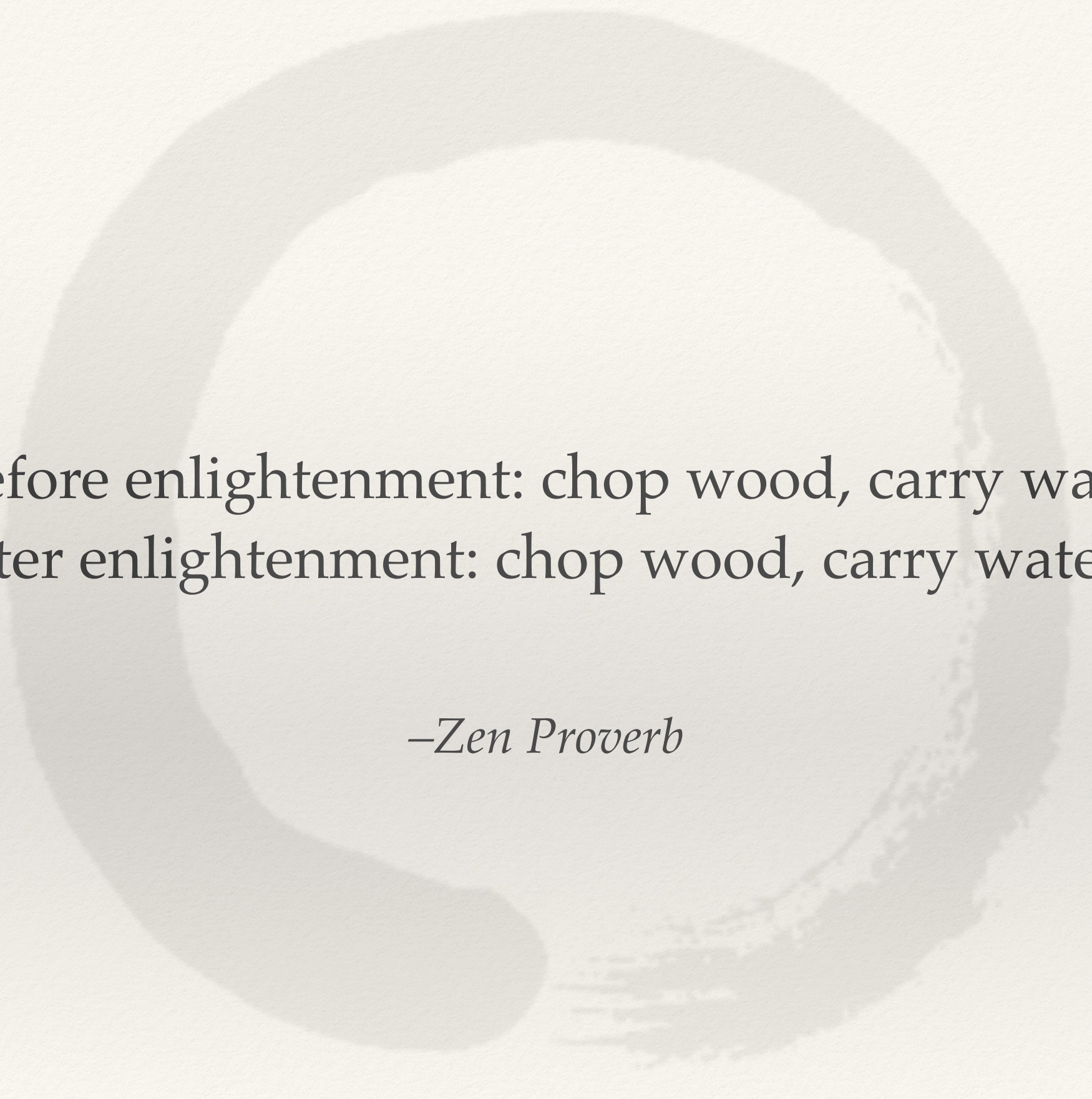
- ❖ Incremental Improvement

Revisit Our Shared Stories

❖ Given our shared truths of Agile Transformation,

❖ What noble path can we walk to…

   ❖ Foster learning and unlearning?

   ❖ Reduce suffering and ease attachments?

   ❖ Find focus?

   ❖ Re-humanize the experience?

"Before enlightenment: chop wood, carry water.
After enlightenment: chop wood, carry water."

–Zen Proverb

Where Can You Find More Info?

❖ Books

  ❖ *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* by Shunryū Suzuki Roshi

  ❖ *Coaching Agile Teams* by Lyssa Adkins

❖ Enlightening Individuals:

  ❖ Zen/Buddhism: Shunryū Suzuki Roshi, Thich Nhat Han, angel Kyodo williams, Les Kaye, Leo Babauta

  ❖ Learning/Experiences TED Talk Speakers: Jane McGonigal, Brené Brown, Simon Sinek, Adam Grant, Tim Ferriss

❖ Centers, Websites, & Media

  ❖ Center/Site: San Francisco Zen Center (sfzc.org); look for a Zen Center in your area as well!

  ❖ Site: Zen Habits (zenhabits.net)

  ❖ Podcasts: Complete Developer Podcast, Let's Know Things, Revisionist History, The Minimalists, Chasing Excellence

Obligatory "Me" Slide

- Where can you find me?

  - Connect with me on LinkedIn.com

  - Email: poetrygrind@gmail.com

  - (Newly) on Twitter and IG: @IntentAgility

- The small talk:

  - I'm an Agile Coach, Registered Yoga Teacher, and life long learner

  - Editing/contributing to a productivity book: *Triumph over Time* by Josh Bruce

  - Food is my favorite part of travel (and favorite thing to share with visitors)

  - Ask me about psychology, literature, swords, and circus arts

A Word From Our Sponsors

- ❖ Taking a moment to express gratitude to…

  - ❖ Our conference sponsors for making this learning (and unlearning) opportunity possible.

  - ❖ Agile Midwest for bringing us together.

  - ❖ All of you for being present.

Thank you.