

*From Agnostic: A Spirited Manifesto (2016) by Lesley Hazleton:*

A classic Zen exercise is the *ensō*, the circle hand-drawn in a single fluid brushstroke. It is close to perfect, but never there. If perfection is what you want, you can produce it anytime by using a compass or a computer, but the *ensō* defies such mechanistic precision; indeed it is often incomplete, left slightly open as though in invitation to everything beyond it. And each one is different, never the same circle twice. You can see the hairs of the brush in the drag of the ink on paper; trace the fluidity of the moment when the stillness of meditation was released in one rapid stroke; sense the calm grace of the artist. The beauty of the Zen circle lies precisely (or more precisely, *imprecisely*) in its imperfection. That is what speaks to us, and draws us in. A perfect circle is uninteresting, a closed system containing nothing, while an imperfect one vibrates with warmth. It invites us into the moment of its creation, into that single deep exhalation as the hand arced through the air, the brush over the paper. It is open, human, fallible—an expression, that is, of soul.