



“Mu”

calligraphy by
Hakuin Zenji

Table of Contents

Case 1. Much Ado about Mu.....	4
Case 2. Baizhang's Fox.....	24
Case 3. One Finger Zen.....	33
Case 4. The Barbarian Has No Beard.....	39
Case 5. Up a Tree.....	44
Case 6. Buddha Holds up a Flower.....	47
Case 7. Zhaozhou's Bowl-Washing.....	56
Case 8. The Cart.....	69
Case 9. Ch'ing-jang's Nonattained Buddha.....	74
Case 10. Qingshui, Poor and Alone.....	82
Case 11. Zhaozhou Examines the Hermits.....	88
Case 12. Zuigen calls "Master".....	96
Case 13. Deshan: Bowls In Hand.....	101
Case 14. Nanquan Kills the Cat.....	112
Case 15. Dongshan's "Three-Score Blows".....	129
Case 16. The Sound of the Bell and the Seven-Panel Robe.....	139
Case 17. The National Master's Three Calls.....	144
Case 18. Dongshan's Three Pounds of Hemp.....	151
Case 19. Ordinary Mind is the Way.....	155
Case 20. A Man of Great Strength.....	163
Case 21. Yunmen's Dry Piece of Shit.....	168

Case 22. Kashyapa's Flagpole	174
Case 23. Think Neither Good Nor Evil.....	185
Case 24. Detachment From Words.....	196
Case 25. Sermon from the Third Seat.....	199
Case 26. Two Monks Roll up the Blinds.....	208
Case 27. It Is Not Mind or Buddha.....	213
Case 28. Long Have I Heard.....	222
Case 29. Not the Wind, Not the Banner.....	232
Cases 30 and 33. Mind and Buddha.....	240
Case 31. Zhaozhou Checks a Woman.....	253
Case 32. An Outsider Questions Buddha.....	260
Case 34. Knowledge Is Not the Way.....	270
Case 35. Wu-tsu: Which is the True Ch'ien?.....	276
Case 36. Meeting Adepts on the Road.....	286
Case 37. Zhaozhou and the Cypress Tree.....	289
Case 38. The Ox Passing Through the Window Screen.....	296
Case 39. Trapped in Words.....	302
Case 40. Kicking Over a Water Pitcher.....	305
Case 41. Pacifying the Mind.....	316
Case 42. A Woman Comes Out of Absorption.....	325
Case 43. Shou-shan's Short Bamboo Staff.....	331
Case 44. The Staff.....	336

Case 45. Who Is That?	342
Case 46. Stepping off The One Hundred-Foot Pole.....	345
Case 47. Tou-shuai's Three Barriers	348
Case 48. One Road.....	355
Works Consulted.....	359

Case 1. Much Ado about Mu (1)

The Case

A monk asked Zhaozhou,
"Has the dog Buddha nature or not?"

Zhaozhou said, "Mu."

Wu-Men's Comment

For the practice of Zen it is imperative that you pass through the barrier set up by the Ancestral Teachers. For subtle realization it is of the utmost importance that you cut off the mind road. If you do not pass the barrier of the ancestors, if you do not cut off the mind road, then you are a ghost clinging to bushes and grasses.

What is the barrier of the Ancestral Teachers? It is just this one word "Mu"—the one barrier of our faith. We call it the Gateless Barrier of the Zen tradition. When you pass through this barrier, you will not only interview Zhaozhou intimately. You will walk hand in hand with all the ancestral Teachers in the successive generations of our lineage—the hair of your eyebrows entangled with theirs, seeing with the same eyes, hearing with the same

¹ Unless indicated, texts of koans are rewritten by me. The text of this koan was translated by Aitken Roshi. All "Reflections" etc. written by me.

ears. Won't that be fulfilling? Is there anyone who would not want to pass this barrier?

So, then, make your whole body a mass of doubt, and with your three hundred and sixty bones and joints and your eighty-four thousand hair follicles concentrate on this one word "Mu." Day and night, keep digging into it. Don't consider it to be nothingness. Don't think in terms of "has" and "has not." It is like swallowing a red-hot iron ball. You try to vomit it out, but you can't.

Gradually you purify yourself, eliminating mistaken knowledge and attitudes you have held from the past. Inside and outside become one. You're like a mute person who has had a dream—you know it for yourself alone.

Suddenly Mu breaks open. The heavens are astonished, the earth is shaken. It is as though you have snatched the great sword of General Kuan. When you meet the Buddha, you kill the Buddha. When you meet Bodhidharma, you kill Bodhidharma. At the very cliff edge of birth-and-death, you find the Great Freedom. In the Six Worlds and the Four Modes of Birth, you enjoy a samadhi of frolic and play.

How, then, should you work with it? Exhaust all your life energy on this one word "Mu." If you do not falter, then it's done! A single spark lights your Dharma candle.

Wu-men's Verse

Dog, Buddha nature—
The full presentation of the whole;
With a bit of “has” or “has not”
Body is lost, life is lost.

Reflections

Zhaozhou lived to be 120 years (778-897).

He had his first experience of kensho when he was seventeen. He said about it, "Suddenly I was ruined and homeless."

He studied with Nanquan for about sixty years. Nanquan died and then Zhaozhou went on pilgrimage through China. Before departing he made a famous statement, that if he were to meet a child of three years old who could teach him he would become the child's pupil and if he were to meet someone over a hundred years old whom he could teach, then he would teach that person. He finally ended his wanderings after twenty years and began teaching at eighty for another forty years.

His mode of teaching was to speak softly. They say his lips gave off Light.

I guess if one were to list the two most famous koans they would be, “Mu” and Hakuin Zenji’s “Sound of One Hand.” Probably more has been written about Mu than any other koan. So who am I to add my two cents? Writing about Mu is like trying to describe to someone who has never had a Coca Cola how the soda tastes. The only way to know Coke is to drink it. Indeed, when I read the exotic descriptions of wine tastings, I wonder? Likewise the only way to know what Mu is all about is to practice Mu. To do Mu. To be Mu.

All words, all descriptions, explications, analyses, miss the mark. And yet, it is incumbent upon those of us who are teachers to try to express the Dharma in words. Even though Dharma itself cannot be verbally expressed. Knowing that words miss the mark, the only hope I have in writing about Mu is that you will plunge yourself into the depths of Mu.

This incident of this koan took place during the T'ang Dynasty or roughly 1500 years ago. It took a few hundred years for the koan to take off and become more than the verbal exchange cited in the koan. The word "Mu" transcends the koan. It transforms the koan. It becomes greater or, at least, other, than the koan. It takes on cosmic, super-natural, dharanic, mantric, significance. It goes way beyond what the original compilers of the koan had in mind. What either the questioning monk or Zhaozhou had in mind.

Much has been made of this koan. It defies translation, explication, and understanding. In the canon of koan literature, it is pre-eminent. In the most famous collection of koans, the *Wumenkuan*, the editor, or compiler, Wu-men says he spent eight years working on Mu, before he was able to get it. Aitken Roshi, who says he has spent a lifetime working with Mu, is now in his 90s, and probably still working with Mu.

Mu has transcended its own text. Transcended Zhaozhou, the nameless monk who asked the famous question, the koan collections which contain the koan, and the thousands of Zen masters who have worked with Mu and have given this koan to the many more thousands of students to work with. Mu has taken on a life of its own in much the same way literary creations have taken on lives of their own and reached realms of existence the original creators never dreamed of. Such characters as Don Quixote, Sherlock

top of our lungs. Each trying to out-Mu the other. I don't think I ever succeeded. Bernie's Mu-growl was indeed very loud!

Sometimes, in the zendo, during a deep samadhi-zazen, Bernie would very quietly whisper Moooooooooooo—holding Mu for the length of a very long breath. Then with the next breath, he would up the volume, just a little bit, and Moooooooooooo. Then again, louder. Then louder, and louder. Others in the zendo, one by one would join him in Mu, until the entire zendo would be shouting—screaming at the top of their collective lungs

Mooo!
Mooo!
Mooo!

What does this thunderous Mu have to do with soft-spoken Zhaozhou? It is said Zhaozhou never raised his voice. Would Zhaozhou be astounded at what Mu has become? Is the Mu which stormed through the centuries related to the Mu of Zhaozhou?

When I sit with Mu I wonder about the whispered response of Zhaozhou from his lightgiving lips. I wonder if Zhaozhou's Mu, tapped into the infinite light of the universe—the light that in Buddhism is known as Amitabha. The light that embraces, supports, enlivens, and gives comfort to all beings in the universe. Zhaozhou may not have dreamt of the thunderous power of his response. He stepped into the wonderful beautiful, powerful dream and sometimes nightmare, of Mu.

One can work with this koan in two ways. First, as a koan, second as a mantra.

As a koan.

Look carefully at the actual text.

Is there a paradox in the koan?

Is it the question?

Is it Zhaozhou's response?

Why yes in one version and no in another?

What is the relative in the koan?

What is the absolute in the koan?

Query every aspect of the koan.

Why a dog?

Why not a cat?

Or a fish?

Or an artichoke?

Or a plum blossom?

What does the monk's question really mean?

Why does he ask that question?

Is he testing Zhaozhou?

If so, does Zhaozhou realize he is being tested?

If so, does Zhaozhou respond to the test?

If so, does Zhaozhou "pass" the test?

As a mantra.

Chant the word "Mu."

Mu your inbreath.

Mu your outbreath.

Mu your slow walking kinhin.

Mu your fast walking kinhin.

Mu your chopsticks when you eat.

Mu your pee in the toilet.

Don't mow the lawn Mu it.

Don't chop wood Mu it.

Mu your head down to rest.

Let your eyes Mu the eyes of another.

Mu the pain, or anxiety, or trouble, or joy,
or happiness, of another.

Mu every aspect of your being.

Mu in the deepest recess of your being.

Of your heart.

Of your stomach.

Of your intestines.

When you see, see Mu.

When you hear, hear Mu.

When you taste, taste Mu.

When you touch, touch Mu.

When you feel, feel Mu.

Mu Mu Mu

The translation I broke my teeth on is Yamada Roshi's. His translation is the only one which has the phrase, "in all earnestness."

A monk asked Joshu in all earnestness,
"Does a dog have Buddha nature or not?"

Joshu said, "Mu!"

This phrase tells me that the monk was seriously searching, and working to understand the issue of Buddha Nature.

The monk knows, as you all know, that one of the basic teachings of Buddhism is that all sentient beings contain, or "have" Buddha Nature. This teaching is first presented in the *Nirvana Sutra*, Later, Dogen Zenji turned the original statement of the *Nirvana Sutra*, and said not that all sentient beings have or contain Buddha Nature, but that all beings **are** Buddha Nature. But this is another dharma talk. Let's stick to Mu now. All sentient beings have or are buddha nature.

The monk knows this. You all know this. So why the question? Was the monk asking about how far Buddha Nature goes? How far can one apply the teaching of Buddha Nature? Does it include all of the realms? Not just the animal realm, which the dog represents, but all of them: the Hell Dwellers, the Hungry Spirits, the Fighting Demons, the Animals, the Humans, and lastly, the Heavenly Beings.

Does the teaching include the Hell Dwellers—those who are the murderers, the rapists, the thieves, the sex-offenders, the psychopaths—those who seem to have no redeeming qualities? Can this teaching apply to these

people? To the scum of the earth? To the Hitlers, the Stalins, the Borgias, the Sades, the Amins, the Milosovichs, the torturers, the executioners, those who ruthlessly commit genocide, or have committed genocide—who wiped out entire civilizations!—the American Indians, the Incas, the Aztecs, the Armenians, the Jews? Can the teaching of Buddha Nature apply to these Hell Dwellers?

And what about the Hungry Ghosts—those whose insatiable greed sucks out the lifeblood of all whom they touch? The Angry Fighting Demons—those who inflict fierce violence upon others? Who smash, and gouge, and rip bodies with knives, grappling hooks, uzis, bombs? Can the teaching of Buddha Nature also apply to them?

What **about** the animal realm? Let's not be precious and idealistic about this realm. You all know how cute our dog Sancho is. Yet, on one of our walks, he chased, trapped, and captured a new-born fawn. He tumbled it about with his jaws, and ripped it with his claws and teeth before I could get to them. On TV the focus is to satisfy the blood lust of viewers—even in animal programs— extreme violence among animals. The endless shark programs, The alligator programs. The ubiquitous tiger, leopard, cheetah, wild dogs, wild grizzly bear, wolf programs. All overflowing with the violent preying viciousness of the realm of animals. Are they also included in the teaching of Buddha Nature?

Need I go on?

Can you appreciate the anguish of the monk? Can you appreciate the phrase "in all earnestness?"

And all creation is included,

Mu is the saving dharani of all creation,

Mu is the thousand eyes and thousand arms of Avalokiteshvara,
of Tara, of Kuan Yin,

of the Blessed Virgin Mary,

Mu is the salvific love of Jesus Christ, who died for all sentient
beings, sinners as well as saints.

Can you imagine anyone—anyone—being excluded from the love
of Christ?

Mu is the saving, healing, loving compassion,
of Shakyamuni Buddha.

It's because of Mu that Margaret and I went to the prisons.

To tell the people there that no matter what they have done—
Murder, kidnapping, arson, rape—whatever, they are also
included in this Mu,

Mu is Atta Dipa.

Mu is within.

Mu is your inbreath and your outbreath.

Mu is the circulation of your blood.

Mu is the beating of your heart.

So, can you actually ever pass this koan? Remember Wumen and Aitken Roshi.

Notice Wumen's words in his commentary. He calls Mu the gateless gate. If a gate is gateless does that mean there is no gate? Or does that mean the gate is invisible? Or does that mean Atta Dipa? Does that mean the gate is gateless because it is not there, it is here—within. It is our thoughts, our opinions, our beliefs, our prejudices, our preconceptions, this dharma talk, our books, our CD's, our Music, our literature, our philosophy, our lovers, our mothers, our fathers, our children, our families, our friends, our religions, our non-religions—you name it—it is all within and it is the toughest gate of all to get through. Wumen tells us, assures us, that Mu is able to penetrate the gate.

So can you penetrate the gate?

Have you gone through?

Have I gone through?

Are these words of mine mere words?

Have they not added more nails, and lumber to the gate?

You had better forget these words.

evil is contained in good.

Good interpenetrates evil,
evil interpenetrates good.

Light is contained in darkness,
darkness is contained in light.

Light interpenetrates darkness,
darkness interpenetrates light.

Mu interpenetrates U,
U interpenetrates Mu.

Yes interpenetrates No,
No interpenetrates Yes.

In the realm of the absolute, Yes and No
are the same, yet different.

In the realm of the absolute,
all experience is Yes and
all experience is No.

In the realm of the absolute,
everything is contained.
In the realm of the absolute,
there is nothing to be contained,
and there is no container.

There is no dog,

No monk,

No Zhaozhou,

No Buddha Nature!

No Mu.

Mu.

Mu takes us to the place and language of
St. John of the Cross.

The last verse of his "Noche Oscura " Dark Night. (Starr)

*Quedéme y olvidéme,
El rostro recliné sobre el amado.
Cesó todo y dejéme,
Dejando mi cuidado
Entre las azucenas olvidado.*

I lost myself. Forgot myself.
I lay my face against the Beloved's face.
Everything fell away and I left myself behind.
Abandoning my cares
Among the lilies, forgotten.

Mu is the Noche Oscura. It is where you drop and abandon everything and leave yourself behind and forgotten. It is the Way that is not the Way. It is the Way Shitou Xiqian speaks of in his thunderous poem, "The Identity of Relative and Absolute." (*Zen Services*)

When you walk the Way you draw no nearer progress no farther.

Who fails to see this is mountains and rivers away.

Noche Oscura is utter despair—utter frustration. There is nowhere to turn. We are nothing. Whatever we do is pointless. Yet it is not nihilism. It is the profound truth and fact of Dukkha—of impermanence. Nothing is as it seems to be. The word "seems" takes on mythic proportions. It would be more correct to say, "I seem to see a sunset" rather than, "I see a sunset." "I seem to experience Mu" rather than, "I experience Mu." I know nothing, because everything is, as it seems. Everything changes, and likewise, when I look and look and search and search for my self, my true self, that which I call Mui, I find Mu. I find nothing. And yet within that nothing is a great big Yes which is Mui, which is Mu, which is me. With Don Quixote may I say,

I am I, Mui, nowhere to be found.

Case 2. Baizhang's Fox

The Case

Whenever Baizhang gave a dharma talk he noticed an old man who was not one of his students would sit in the back of the dharma hall and listen to his talk. When the talk was over he would leave with the others. Once day the old man remained behind. Baizhang asked him, "Who are you?"

The old man said, "I'm not a human being. A long time ago in the days of Kashyapa Buddha, I was the priest of this mountain. And one day one of my students asked me if enlightened beings are subject to the laws of cause and effect. I told him they were not. And so I have been reborn as a fox for 500 lifetimes. So now I ask you to give me a turning word so that I may be freed from this body of a fox. Tell me, are enlightened beings subject to the laws of cause and effect?"

Baizhang answered, "No."

And the old man was deeply enlightened. He bowed and said, "Now I am free of the fox's body. Please perform a burial service for me. You will find my foxbody on the other side of the mountain."

The master then went into the hallway and told the Doan to strike the *densho* for there will be a funeral service for a dead monk

after the meal. The monks wondered who had died for all were well and there was nobody in the infirmary.

After the meal Baizhang led all the monks outside and they went to the other side of the mountain. There they found the body of a dead fox. He cremated it in the customary way.

Later that evening when the master sat on his high seat he told the monks what had happened. Huangbo stepped up to Baizhang and asked, "The old man was reborn as a fox for 500 lives. What would have happened to him if his answer was correct?"

Baizhang said, "Come up closer to me and I'll tell you." Huangbo came up close and slapped Baizhang in the face.

Baizhang clapped his hands and said, "I thought I was the red-bearded barbarian but you have an even redder beard than I have!"

Mumon's Comments

"Not falling into causation." Why was he turned into a fox? "Not ignoring causation." Why was he released from the fox body? If you have an eye to see through this, then you will know that the former head of the monastery did enjoy his five hundred happy blessed lives as a fox.

Not falling, not ignoring:
Odd and even are on one die.

Not ignoring, not falling:
Hundreds and thousands of regrets.

Reflections

Before giving my own comments please refer to the monumental study of this koan made by Steven Heine in his *Shifting Shape Shaping Text*. A book well worth studying.

Baizhang dates: 720-814. He was a leading student of Mazu and received dharma transmission from him. So he came from one of the leading figures of Tang Masters whose zen was most unconventional. The shouts, the slaps, the pushing, the smacks of the stick, the wild spontaneity all stem from Mazu. Also the beautiful rendering of zen into the ordinary.

What is the Way?

The Way is ordinary, said Mazu.

And yet Baizhang went on to create a set of rules and formulations creating the first Chinese Zen Monastery which were consistent with the Confucian ethic of China. So we have a Baizhang who contained within himself the wildness of Mazu and the conservatism of Kongqiu (Confucius).

A little historical background may help. Xenophobia was strong. We're talking about a time in China when anything not Chinese was seen to be barbaric. And this newfangled foreign religion from India was atheistic, broke all the rules of structure, authority, paid no respect to ancestors, or the state. And worse of all turned all of it's followers and practitioners into

parasites and beggars who were a scourge on society. All of which was un-Chinese and had to be stamped out.

Baizhang was Chinese. And he grew up Chinese. So converting to Buddhism was no easy thing. He knew the Indian way of practicing Buddhism was an abomination to his countrymen. He may even have had some of these xenophobic feelings himself. So to make Buddhism acceptable he devised a way of dealing with one of the major objections: begging. According to the Old Indian Hinayana way, begging was intrinsic to the practice of Buddhism. The laity's job was to give to the beggar-monks. In return, the beggars would give the laity religious instruction or a dharma talk or read the sutras since the literacy rate was low. Even old Shakyamuni did that. Everybody who was a monk or nun begged. In fact, according to the Vinaya, that ponderous list of rules, it was forbidden to engage in agriculture. Farming was forbidden. You see, farming involved the killing of worms and other beings. So farming was out. And since society was basically agrarian what was a poor monk or nun to do but beg?

In China things were different. China was a modern society. It was shipshape, efficient, and pragmatic. Ancestors were revered and worshipped. The state was supreme. The family was sacred and symbolic of the state. And you earned your keep.

Baizhang changed Buddhism. He created the first Chinese monastery where monks had to support themselves. He established a famous rule,

A day of no work is a day of not eating?

What could be more Chinese? Much more they engaged in agriculture. They worked the fields. They showed their fellow countrymen that Yes they were

Buddhist monks, but they were **Chinese** Buddhist monks. The barbarism of India was expunged. They did away with begging and replaced it with work and fundraising! Alas, things were also not so rosy, for in those days slavery was rife. And most of our dear old Buddhist monasteries, probably Bazhang's as well, owned hundreds of slaves in order to get the work done. And probably the meanest and dirtiest jobs were allocated to the slaves. But that was also Chinese! So it was OK!

So, turning to the turning word/s of this koan. It—they/is—are found in Baizhang's response to the foxmanspirit. There are various translations.

Kirchner: They are **not confused** about cause and effect

Hoffman: They are **not deluded** by causality

Sekida Roshi: He does **not ignore** causation

Cleary: They are **not blind** to causality

Cleary: (*Book of Serenity*) He is **not blind** to cause and effect

Aitken Roshi: Such a person does **not evade** the law of cause and effect

Yamada Roshi: The law of cause and effect **cannot be obscured**.

Shibayama Roshi: He does **not ignore** causation.

And even papa Dogen Zenji in "Daishugo," says, Do **not be unclear** about cause and effect OR, Do **not be ignorant** of cause and effect.

And in "Jinshin Inga" he says, No one can **set aside** [the law of] causality.

The striking characteristic of these turning translated words is that they all waffle. Why not Yes or No like in my rewrite? I believe Baizhang waffles in his answer because of the analogy of

causation equals the relative
and
no-causation equals the absolute.

For as we know from the Heart Sutra,

form equals emptiness
and
emptiness equals form

or
the relative equals the absolute
and
the absolute equals the relative

or
causation equals no-causation
and
no-causation equals causation.

And Baizhang uses the waffle response to say this. He straddles causation and noncausation.

Baizhang contained within his own person both the wildfoxspirit of Mazu as well as the staid conservatism of Kongqiu ethic reflected in the monastery rule.

This leads to the suspicion that there were not two Baizhangs. There was not an old foxspirit. He resided within Baizhang. We're talking about a person with two conflicting or competing parts of his personality. The koan tells us there's a resolution to the conflict. The wildfox is buried. But is it? The final encounter between Baizhang and Huangbo seems to say that the old fox is alive and well! And so there really is no resolution to the koan. Or is there?

I'd like to offer a feeble attempt at a quantum resolution.

Particles behave like electrical charges and/or waves

Particles adopt two or more identities,
yet are the same.

So both the relative and the absolute both causality and no-causality are true and valid at the same time in the same way that particles may adopt two or more identities at the same time and yet be the same particle.

In this light Wumen's commentary and poem make sense.

"Not falling into causation." Why was he turned into a fox? "Not ignoring causation." Why was he released from the fox body? If you have an eye to see through this, then you will know that the former head of the monastery did enjoy his five hundred happy blessed lives as a fox.

Not falling, not ignoring:

Odd and even are on one die.

Not ignoring, not falling:

Hundreds and thousands of regrets.



Whenever Baizhang gave a dharma talk he noticed an old man who was not one of his students would sit in the back of the dharma hall and listen to his talk. When the talk was over he would leave with the others. Once day the old man remained behind. Baizhang asked him, "Who are you?"

The old man said, "I'm not a human being. A long time ago in the days of Kashyapa Buddha, I was the priest of this mountain. And one day one of my students asked me if enlightened beings are subject to the laws of cause and effect. I told him they were not. And so I have been reborn as a fox for 500 lifetimes. So now I ask you to give me a turning word so that I may be freed from this body of a fox. Tell me, are enlightened beings subject to the laws of cause and effect?"

Baizhang answered, "Enh, Yes and No."

And the old man was deeply enlightened. He bowed and said, "Now I am free of the fox's body. Please perform a burial service for me. You will find my foxbody on the other side of the mountain."

The master then went into the hallway and told the Doan to strike the densho for there will be a funeral service for a dead monk after the meal. The monks wondered who had died for all were well and there was nobody in the infirmary.

After the meal Baizhang led all the monks outside and they went to the other side of the mountain. There they found the body of a dead fox. He cremated it in the customary way.

Later that evening when the master sat on his high seat he told the monks what had happened. Huangbo stepped up to Baizhang and asked, "The old man was reborn as a fox of 500 lives. What would have happened to him if his answer was correct?"

Baizhang said, "Come up closer to me and I'll tell you." Huangbo came up close and slapped Baizhang in the face.

Baizhang clapped his hands and said, "I thought I was the red-bearded barbarian but you have an even redder beard than I have!"

Case 3. One Finger Zen

No matter whatever Gutei was questioned he would simply raise a finger in response. And one day a newcomer to the monastery asked Gutei's attendant what the Master's teaching was? The boy raised his finger.

Gutei heard about this, so he called his attendant and asked him about his teaching and the boy raised up his finger. Gutei then cut off the boy's finger.

The boy screamed in pain, and ran away. Gutei called him, the boy turned around, Gutei raised a finger and the boy was enlightened.

Upon his deathbed, Gutei said to the monks around him, I received my teacher's one finger Zen and have used it all my life. It has never failed me. With these words, he died.

Reflections

Gutei was given his name because his major practice was to chant a dharani related to Guanyin, who represents infinite compassion. One of the words in the dharani is, Gutei.

Gutei was contemporary to Huangbo and Linchi of the 9th century. All commentaries of the koan tell the story of the encounter between Gutei and the nun, Jissai.

She enters his hut. He is sitting zazen, chanting his dharani. She circumambulates him three times and says she will take off her hat if he will say a true word of Zen. He's flabbergasted. Unable to say anything.

She repeats the circumambulation three times and repeats her questions three times. Gutei is still unable to respond.

Jissai turns to leave. He asks her to stay, It's getting dark, spend the night. She turns, faces him, If you can say a true word I will stay. He's tongue-tied. She leaves.

He is mortified and decides on the spot that he will stop his practice and visit Zen masters throughout China to find out what's what. He packs, intending to leave first thing in the morning. During the night Gutei dreams that a great master will come to him in his hut. So he remains and continues sitting intensely for ten days.

Tenryu comes. Gutei tells him about Jissai and asks Tenryu, What should I have said to Jissai?

Tenryu raises a finger. In other versions of the koan Tenryu raises his finger when Gutei says something like, What is the essence of the Buddha's teaching?

Gutei's practice was to sit alone in the splendid isolation of a hut in the forest chanting his dharani. His practice was probably something close to what we do when we chant, Om Tare, tuttare ture svaha. Then reality, in the form of the nun Jissai, intrudes upon his practice. (The name, Jissai, means reality.) He is unable to engage with her, unable to respond to her demand for a true

word of Zen and realizes that his wonderful smug self-satisfying zen practice was just that. Meaningless. How many of us are engaged in practices that are wonderful and do great things for us? How many of us think we've got it? We're happy with ourselves. We've got Zen down. We just whip through all sorts of koans. That's where Gutei was. So realizing his practice was nowhere, he decided to stop and find a teacher! And then the teacher appeared. And Gutei's life changed.

Yamada Roshi's has a commentary on the koan.

There's an ancient Zen text called *Believing in Mind (Shinjiin-Mei)*, in which the line appears, One is everything. Everything is one. In the absolute world, the world of enlightenment, the logic of, One is everything; everything is one, reigns. When Tenryu sticks up a finger, that one finger is the whole universe. When we stick up one finger, there is nothing but one finger in the whole universe. When you stand up, there is nothing but standing up in the whole universe. When Gutei saw Tenryu holding up one finger he realized clearly that the one finger and the whole universe are one. There isn't anything else that remains. There is nothing outside it. That is enlightenment



No matter whatever Gutei was questioned he would simply raise a finger in response. And one day a newcomer to the monastery asked Gutei's attendant what the Master's teaching was? The boy raised his finger.

Gutei heard about this, so he called his attendant and asked him about his teaching and the boy raised up his finger. Gutei then cut off the boy's finger.

The boy screamed in pain, and ran away. Gutei called him, the boy turned around, Gutei raised a finger and the boy was enlightened.

Upon his deathbed, Gutei said to the monks around him, I received my teacher's one finger Zen, and have used it all my life. It has never failed me. With these words, he died.



More Reflections in the form of questions

What about the story of Jissai, or Reality, and Gutei?

Did it really happen?

Is there really a Jissai?

Did the story take place in Gutei's mind?

Similar to when Mara tempted Shakyamuni on the bodhi seat.

Why does Jissai circumambulate Gutei three times?

What does she mean when she says she would take off her hat?

What is a true word of zen?

Put yourself in Gutei's place, what would you respond to Jissai's challenge to say a true word of zen?

As Jissai turns to leave, Gutei asks her to stay, spend the night. Does this make sense?

Is it appropriate for a man and woman to be alone together in an isolated hut all night?

Wouldn't this compromise both of them?

And yet Jissai says if Gutei would say a true word of zen she'll stay. Does this make sense?

What's going on here?

Why doesn't Gutei rise and say, Take my place. Spend the night inside where it's warm. I'll take some blankets and go outside and sleep under a tree.

What about Tenryu's upraised one finger? One of the usual responses to the sound of one hand koan is to raise the hand. Is this like Tenryu's one finger? (Note: If anyone raises their hand in the daisan room for the onehand koan they'll be thrown out.)

Finally, what about the saying, All things return to the one. Where does the one go?

Does this saying have anything to do with the koan? Is this what the Yamada Roshi quote is all about?

Case 4. The Barbarian Has No Beard

Huo'an asked, "Why has the barbarian no beard?"

Reflections

So why the question?

Why ask about something that's there not being there?

It's like asking, "Why does have Deborah no hair?"

Or the dialogue between Hamlet and Polonius.

Hamlet: "Do you see yonder cloud that's almost in shape of a camel?"

Polonius: "By the mass, and 'tis like a camel, indeed."

Hamlet: "Methinks it is like a weasel."

Polonius: "It is backed like a weasel."

Hamlet: "Or like a whale?"

Polonius: "Very like a whale."

Or the butterfly dream of Chuangtzu.

Once Chuangtzu dreamt he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting and fluttering around, happy with himself and doing as he pleased. He didn't know he was Chuangtzu. Suddenly he woke up and there he was, solid and unmistakably Chuangtzu. But he didn't know if he was Chuangtzu who had dreamt he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming he was Chuangtzu. Between Chuangtzu and a butterfly there must be some distinction!

So, why does the Western Barbarian have no beard?

Is this koan similar to the one about the cat in the painting of the Last Supper? Remember how that koan goes, "Why is there no cat in the painting of the Last Supper?"

The difference is monumental. In our koan we're talking about something that's there not being there. In the Last Supper koan we're talking about something that's not there not being there.

It's interesting that many of the commentators of this koan focus on the first word, Why.

I think the key to the koan is found in hints given by Hamlet and Chuangtzu. The hint is what is reality?

Take this stick in my hand.

Is it real?

Is it form?

Is it empty?

When you say it's form everyone in this room can easily and conclusively prove it's empty. (Turn to someone and ask him/her to do so.)

And following Samuel Johnson's lead when he kicked a rock to prove it exists, if I were to whack one of you with the stick you would say it sure ain't empty.

Is Bodhidharma's beard real?

Are rabbit horns real?

Is Deborah's baldness real?

Is Deborah's hair real?

What about Hamlet's clouds and whales and weasels?

Are the clouds real?

Or the whales?

The weasels?

And Chuangtzu's butterfly?

Is it real?

Or is Chuangtzu the reality?

Perhaps both?

Perhaps neither?

Reality is boundless, I vow to perceive it.

How can reality be boundless if it doesn't exist?

Not to mention how can I perceive it!

How can there be no beard on Bodhidharma's face when there is one?

How can Deborah be bald when she has hair?

Does reality exist?

Does Form exist?

Does Emptiness exist?

Does Form equal Emptiness?

Does Emptiness equal Form?

Does E equal m^2 square?

Does nonform equal nonemptiness?

Does nonemptiness equal nonform?

Does nonform equal emptiness?

Does nonemptiness equal form?

I have to stop my eyes are twirling.

Case 5. Up a Tree

It is as if you are up in a tree, hanging from a branch with your teeth, and your hands and feet can't touch the ground or any other branch. Someone comes to the tree and asks you, "What is the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming from the West?" If you don't answer, she remains condemned to ignorance. If you answer, you fall from the tree and lose your life. What will you do?

Reflections

In considering this koan look at all parts of the koan and ask yourselves such questions as:

Who are you?

Who is the woman who asks the question?

What is the tree?

What are the branches?

What is the trunk of the tree?

Why are you hanging on with your teeth?

Why can't you reach the trunk of another branch of the tree with your arms or legs?

What is the meaning of the question?

Why that question?

In considering this koan, go at it slowly. Circumambulate the koan. Repeat it over and over again as a mantra. Bypass your discerning, discriminating mind and let the koan abide and rest in your Unborn Mind. Let the koan seep into the pores of your body. Become the koan. Feel yourself hanging on for dear life. What do you feel when she comes below and asks you that question? What are your reactions? Your responses? What happens to you?

Then at another point in your contemplation, become the woman who asks the question. What is it you see up there? What is it about the situation that prompts you to ask that question at that particular time?

Look at the situation. The meaning of the words. What do the words mean? To hang on a branch with your teeth? To fall and lose your life? And even if you do not answer the question how long can you hang on?

What is the teaching of this koan? Notice the koan begins with the words, "**It is as if** you are up in a tree..." So the entire situation, the entire koan is a metaphor. If this is so then is there a questioning woman? What is the metaphor of the woman? Are you hanging from a tree? Are you a metaphor? What is the metaphor of the question? What is the metaphor of the hanging? The tree? The beyond-the-reach branches? The potential of losing your life? Are there metaphors within metaphors in this koan? And finally, what is **It**?



It is as if you are up in a tree, hanging from a branch with your teeth, and your hands and feet can't touch the ground or any other branch. Someone comes to the tree and asks you, "What is the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming from the West?" If you don't answer, she remains condemned to ignorance. If you answer, you fall from the tree and lose your life. What will you do?

Case 6. Buddha Holds up a Flower

The Case

When the World-Honored One gave a sermon at Mount Gurakuta, he held up a flower.

Everyone was silent. Kashyapa smiled.

The World-Honored One said, "I have the heart of the true Dharma, the mind of nirvana, the form of no-form, the gate of the Dharma. It does not depend on letters. It is transmitted outside all teachings. Now I give it to Mahakashyapa."

From, *The Transmission of the Lamp*. Early Masters. p. 5.

A short while later, at the Deer Park, the Buddha turned the dharma-wheel for the five men (his first disciples), expounding the Four (Noble) Truths and how they would lead to nirvana.

When he had taught for forty-nine years, he said to his disciple Mahakashyapa, "I transmit to you the light of the pure dharma eye which is birthless, deathless, wondrous, spiritual, the real form of non-form, delicate, the true teaching. You must cherish it." Then he also instructed Ananda to assist in the continuance (of the dharma).

The Buddha then delivered a stanza, which runs:

The original dharma of all dharmas is no-dharma;
The dharma of no-dharma is also a dharma.
Now, when no-dharma is transmitted,
How can this dharma be the dharma?

Then the World-Honored One spoke again to Mahakashyapa, "I am handing to you the cloak, golden and brocaded, transmitted among substitutes. You must not allow it to decay until Maitreya Buddha comes to this world."

Having heard this, Mahakashyapa bowed low until his head touched the feet [of the Buddha], saying, "Well said! Well said! O Enlightened One, I will follow your instruction."

From, *The Record of Transmitting the Light*. Translated by Francis H. Cook.
p. 30.

Case

The first patriarch was Mahakashyapa. Once, the World-Honored One held up a flower and blinked. Kashyapa smiled. The World-Honored One said, "I have the Treasure of the Eye of the True Dharma and Wondrous Mind of Nirvana, and I transmit it to Mahakashyapa."

From, *Entangling Vines*. Case 143 Translated by Thomas Kirchner

Once at Vulture Peak, Shakyamuni stood before the assembly and simply held up a flower. No one responded except Mahakashyapa, who broke into a smile.

At this the Buddha said, "I possess the treasure of the true dharma eye, the ineffable mind of nirvana, the true form of the formless, the subtle dharma gate. It does not depend on words or letters and is a special transmission outside the teachings. This I entrust to Mahakashyapa."

Reflections

This is a difficult koan. Difficult because the event cited in the koan is spurious. There is no known Sanskrit text that contains this story. And according to Aitken Roshi the first record of this story is in a Chinese Sutra dated AD 1036, or 1400 years after Shakyamuni's death. That is, during the Sung Dynasty, the period when all the koans were written, collected and made into the great volumes of koans we have today. Even the "language" of the koan gives away its Chinese origin for it is very similar to language attributed to Bodhidharma:

A spiritual transmission outside tradition—
not established on words and letters.

Which makes one wonder if there is a similar source.

Another problem with this koan is that it establishes Kashyapa as the dharma heir and leader or first Pope of Buddhism. And the Lineage of Zen Buddhism begins.

The problem is that the lineages were all created during pre-Tang days of China by conflicting schools of Buddhism each of which claimed that their own take Buddhism was the one true Buddhism and the others were phony. And in order to prove it they developed lineages that linked them and their Buddhism back to Kashyapa and thereby to Shakyamuni himself.

We know Kashyapa did assume leadership of the early Buddhist sangha. He called together the first Buddhist councils in which the Sutras were first recited, thereby creating the Buddhist canon. His leadership, however, flies straight in the face of one of the sutras recited at that very council. In this sutra Shakyamuni specifically says that there should be no human leader of the Sangha but that the Dharma should be the leader. And yet, Kashyapa was the first leader.

We can see how the Chinese, from this quasi-historical fact, needed some sort of transition between Shakyamuni and Kashyapa and so the flower story of this koan was born.

There are other internal problems. If this koan is about transmission, then the question is what is transmitted? And the koan shamefacedly states that nothing at all is transmitted. Listen to Shakyamuni's transmission poem:

The original dharma of all dharmas is no-dharma;
The dharma of no-dharma is also a dharma.
Now, when no-dharma is transmitted,

How can this dharma be the dharma?

So what is this all about?

1. The event in the koan didn't happen.
2. Kashyapa didn't receive transmission.
3. And even if he did there was no content to the transmission.

Does this strike a bell? Remember when we talked about the content of Shakyamuni's enlightenment we arrived at the conclusion that there was no content. Or if there was nobody knew anything about it, because Shakyamuni never spoke about what happened to him during his enlightenment experience. There is no place where he says, "So and so happened and I was enlightened."

Is the same true of transmission?

I remember my own transmission ceremony. And I can't remember anything I actually **received** from Bernie that qualified as something he handed on to me to pass on to my dharma heirs. And you can ask Margaret. I didn't give her anything. Because I had nothing to give. I didn't even sing the Fats Waller song:

I can't give you anything but love, baby!

Nothing happens.

We're in the land of Godot.

We wait and we wait and we wait.

We look down the road.

We squint our eyes.

We pick up a telescope and look as far as we can.

But there is nothing there.

And nobody comes.

And nobody is coming.

And yet we wait.

So what is transmission? Listen to what Aitken Roshi says:

What is transmission, after all? Certainly it is not a heavenly decree. Even excellent teachers have made mistakes and named disgraceful successors. If transmission is set forth as some kind of occult sanctification, then Buddhas, shravakas, and the rest of us are betrayed. It is all a hoax, as Wu-men says. The World-Honored One would be no better than a swindler at the town gate hawking tin jewelry dipped in gold paint.

And yet having said all this I will make a fool of myself by declaring that during empowerment ceremonies—like Jukai, Tokudo, Denkei, Denbo—something happens. And that which happens is contentless. And is clearly palpable. My response to **it** is to put my hands together in gassho and to keep my mouth shut. It is as contentless as enlightenment.

Some of the symbols are

a twirling flower

the morning star

an upraised finger

the cypress tree in the courtyard

three pounds of hemp

apple blossoms floating in the air

a sunset

a wave on the sea

a pair of phoebes nesting over the front door

a smile

So what about the veracity of this koan?

Who cares?

I feel the truth of this koan in my bones.

I know something happens between teacher and student when transmission happens but I don't know what.

Something happens between lovers when they connect not just physically but in ways that are not definable. Something happens when we stumble across a blazing sunset. When all of a sudden we turn around and there is the full moon reflecting all of its glory on every creature, every blade of grass, every drop of dew on every leaf on every tree on earth.

Something happens when we see that something in another person's eyes.

Something happens and it is contentless.

It is empty

It is palpable

It is full

It is complete

It is everything

The important thing in waiting for Godot
is not that he doesn't come, but that we wait

The important thing in waiting for Jesus
is not that he comes but that we wait



Once at Vulture Peak, Shakyamuni stood before the assembly
and simply held up a flower.

Mahakashyapa broke into a smile.

Case 7. Zhaozhou's Bowl-Washing

When food comes, stuff the mouth.

When sleep comes, close the eyes.

When washing your face rub your nose.

When taking off straw sandals touch your feet.

At such times if you miss it, take a light and search

Hard in the deep of night.

Did you find it?

Main Case

A monk approached Zhaozhou and said, "I am a new student. I've just entered the monastery. Please, teach me."

Zhaozhou said, "Have you had breakfast?"

The monk said, "Yes."

Zhaozhou said, "Wash your bowls."

Reflections

Zhaozhou is one of the Zen Ancestors to whom I feel particularly close. I feel close to him because he began Zen practice in his later years, as I did. Also, he wrote a poem that resonates in my bones.

The cock crows in the early morning;
Sadly I see as I rise how worn out I am;
I haven't a belt or a shirt.
Just the semblance of a robe.
My loincloth has no seat, my pants no opening—
On my head are three or five pecks of gray ashes.
Originally I intended to practice to help save others;
Who would have suspected that instead
I would become a fool!

Zhaozhou: the great Zen master. His formal name was Congshen. Zhaozhou is the name of a small town not far from Peking where he spent his old age and from which he is named. In Japanese his name is Joshu Jushin. His dates were 778-897. He lived to be 120 years old.

He studied with Nanquan. Nanquan is the famous Zen master presented in the koan about the cat—where the two groups of monks were fighting over the cat. After Nanquan's death, Zhaozhou went on pilgrimage throughout China. Before departing he made a famous statement. He said that if he were to meet a child of three years old who could teach him, he would become the child's pupil, and if he were to meet someone over a hundred years old whom he could teach, then he would teach that person.

It was not until Zhaozhou was around eighty that he settled at the Kuan-yin monastery in the eastern suburb of Zhaozhou. It is said that he was extremely ascetic in his habits. During the forty years of his abbotship, he did not install a single piece of new furniture, nor did he write a single fundraising letter to any patron to ask for money.

Zhaozhou is a man who is very modest, very kind, very simple, self-abnegating, and an ascetic. He knows his own self, and is not timorous to present it at the appropriate time, yet he does not push himself forward in order to gain fame, or glory, or recognition. He uses simple language. Language not fettered with Buddhist clichés. Language that does not begin or end with words. Silence is also the language of Zhaozhou, as well as simple actions. He is not interested in "figura," or the presentation he makes. He is not interested in fine robes, brocade rakusus, silk kesas, fancy furniture. When the leg of a chair breaks, a piece of firewood will do for its replacement. He is totally devoid of pride in his accomplishments, or achievements in Zen. A wonderful story illustrates this.

Someone asked Zhaozhou, "Being on the verge, that point of absolute immediacy—what is it like?"

Zhaozhou said, "Pissing is a small thing to do, but I have to do it myself." (Hoffman)

He is open to the learning he can receive from others, no matter who, male or female, young or old, Buddhist or non-Buddhist. Whoever and whatever can teach him, he will receive their learning. And likewise, he is open to teach anyone who is willing and interested in learning from him. He is not interested in theological speculation; nor is he interested in sham and

exposes it as such, directly and immediately. However, he does it with kindness. No thirty blows from Zhaozhou. No shouting of obscenities. This is Zhaozhou. I hope you get to know, respect, and love him as I do. Your association with this great Zen master will enrich you.²

"I have just entered the monastery. Do you have anything? Please, master, what can you teach me? Here I am. Teach me!"

"Did you have anything to eat yet?"

"Yes. I've eaten. And I'm finished."

"Then go wash your bowls."

Let's look at this student-monk and enter into him. Let's see what's going on inside of him. He comes to Zhaozhou's monastery. Here's my take on his state of mind:

I'm going to find old Master Zhaozhou and show him how accomplished I am. I've been through koan study. Passed all my koans with flying colors. I've had kensho dozens of times. I know the sutras backwards and forwards. I've been asked to give Dharma talks. And look how responsible I am!

At this point I would like you to spend the next few minutes thinking about your own wonderful strengths, achievements, and accomplishments.

² Most of the data for this short biography comes from *The Golden Age of Zen* by John C. H. Wu, the *Dentoroko—Transmission of the Lamp*, and from the many koans in which Zhaozhou appears.

Some examples could be,

I run the Zendo.

I'm the best chanter ever.

I have a mala, or rosary, with me wherever I go.

I've memorized the "Heart Sutra" both in English and Japanese.

I never miss Mass.

I never miss a single time to do the Daily Office.

Nobody does the jikido—meditation monitor— as well as I do.

I ask the tough questions everybody else is afraid to ask, and I keep Margaret and Stef on their toes all the time.

I give beginning meditation instruction to newcomers, and boy am I good at it.

I can chant the lineage—the list of Zen Ancestors, beginning with Shakyamuni—eighty-eight generations, down to myself without making a mistake.

I've got a PhD in Religion, Philosophy, Mathematics, Literature, Psychology, Music, Biology, or _____(fill in the blank).

We're dealing with the Archetype of the self-satisfied smug. The Archetype of "The Heavenly Being." The old Buddhas described six major realms of being. They are known as the "Realms of Existence." These realms are psychological states through which we transmigrate constantly. They are archetypes.

The first is the **Hell-Dwellers**. It's a state where the energy is so intense that we don't know if we control the energy or it controls us. So intense that paranoia develops. And when we strike out we strike out against ourselves. It's a state of intense hatred. Shakyamuni talked of hatred or anger; the second of the three poisons—greed, anger, and ignorance—as picking up a flaming hot coal with our bare hand and throwing it at someone. We always end up burning ourselves. We want to destroy what we hate and we destroy ourselves. We want to escape from the intense anger we feel. But there's nowhere to turn. Our very selves haunt us. This is hell. It's a state where nothing goes right. We wake up in the morning and see everything as awful, dismal.

Then we have the **Hungry Ghosts**. These are beings that are condemned by their evil deeds to suffer constant unappeasable hunger and thirst. A state of intense greed. A state where we already have everything we want. Don't have to have anything else. But we're still hungry. We still want more. A state of insatiable, unquenchable need. Whatever is done to alleviate it is never enough. It's the state where we suck the life juices of whoever tries to feed us. Whether with compassion, advice, love, money, sex, or whatever—it's never enough. And the one who tries to give to a Hungry Ghost always ends up feeling violated. Raped. Sucked dry.

The third state is the state of **Animals or Beasts**. It is a joyless existence. Blind stupidity and ignorance. Ruled entirely by desire and lust. Even parents and children harm one another. The instincts and passions rule without regard to any other consideration such as love, morality, feelings, and priorities of others. It's sex without love. Eating without appreciation. There's no joy. And worse, no humor.

Then we have the **Fighting Spirits**. These are beings that live in perpetual strife. It's a realm of envy and jealousy. Survival of the fittest. Winner takes all and loser be damned. Always with a chip on the shoulder. Always taking offense at whatever is said. Suspicious. Angry. Provocative. We're the one in the fast lane. And you'd better not slow me down or be in my way 'cause I've got to be first.

Then we have the **Humans**. The human stage is the springboard to all the other realms. We are constantly slipping into and out of each realm. A harsh word, and we stand in danger of becoming a Fighting Demon. Dissatisfaction with the meal placed before us. And we can become a Hungry Ghost. Continuing and intensifying our dissatisfaction may lead us to the realm of the Hell Dwellers.

What is particularly wonderful about the human realm is that it contains the possibility of religious aspiration for enlightenment. It is the state where we can become the Buddha. Where we can receive and become the Sacraments. Where we can become Christ.

Finally, we come to the **Heavenly Beings**. In this realm we see the archetype of our self-satisfied smug-monk. This realm includes virtuous people. Sages. Bodhisattvas. And all the new converts. From smokers to

non-smokers; from alcoholics to non-alcoholics; from whatever to Catholic; from meat-eaters to vegetarians; from whatever to Zen. The tip-off is that these new converts suddenly become intolerant of those still afflicted with what they left behind. And they have a zeal for their new-found state of perfection that is unbearable to the rest of us.

People in this realm live in constant happiness and know no suffering. Everything goes well. They also have no awakening and are without religious aspiration, because they already have reached nirvana. They are enlightened. And they've done it on their own. They are the self-developed person. In this realm we spend countless hours developing our bodies to become beautiful and shapely. Dieting so that we can slip into a number eight dress rather than a twelve. So that we can wear size twenty-eight trousers, rather than forty-two. We take delight in our health. Great pride in our accomplishments. We're satisfied with our achievements. We're intoxicated by our ego. The mirror mirror on the wall always declares us to be the fairest of them all. We thank the Gods for what we are. That we are not like them. We are content. Ours is the perfect marriage. Our income is great. We have a beautiful, spacious house in a select suburb, with an outdoor butane barbecue. Barbie-Doll perfect children, none of whom are into drugs. What could be sweeter? How lucky I am. This is the archetype of the self-satisfied smug. Sadly, the smug, in one way or another is each of us. That's the way archetypes work. We all have them. Each one of us is the student-monk.

So, Oldman Zhaozhou, here I am, a brilliant student. What more can you teach me?

Zhaozhou knows he is dealing with an archetype. Knows the archetype is deep—deep in the mind, deep in the consciousness, and deep in the personality of the monk standing before him. He knows the trouble with archetypes is that they are not devils that can be exorcised and got rid of. They are always there.

It's like too much salt in the soup. You can never really get rid of the taste of over-salted soup. You've got a major problem. There are all sorts of things you can try. Like adding more water, or milk. Or flour. Or pepper. All attempts to lessen the sharpness of the salty taste. Sometimes you can succeed, but rarely satisfactorily. Each of us has salt in the soup of our being. Some have more than others.

Zhaozhou is faced with a student with too much salt. Can he make the appropriate corrections to take away the over salted taste? He knows it's a difficult, if not impossible job.

He also knows the one thing he must not do is **add** more salt. This student-monk is already overeducated. He knows all about Zen. About the history of comparative religions. All about the sutras, the ancestors. All the holy books. He knows too much. He needs to unknow.

So Zhaozhou tests the student-monk to see just how salty-smug he is.
Did you finish your gruel?

The monk hears,

Have you finished all your training as a Zen monk?

Or he hears,

Have you completed koan study?

Or he hears,

Have you experienced kensho—an intense realization?”

Or he hears,

Have you mastered the sutras?

The monk answers, “Yes I have,” thinking, perhaps now Zhaozhou will acknowledge my achievements. Maybe Zhaozhou will initiate me into the esoteric teachings of Zen? Why maybe I can even become his successor?

Zhaozhou says, “Then wash your bowls.”

With that response Zhaozhou cuts through the presumptive salty smugness of the monk.

This mondo, or dialogue, between student and master reminds me of my childhood. Whenever I would presume to enter into “grown-up conversation”; or venture an opinion on subjects which were beyond me; or whenever I put on “airs” with my education and book knowledge, which was greater than my father’s; my father would make a sharp and ironic response. He would say, “*Va lavati mani.*” “Go wash your hands.” Or more expressively, “*Va stu yu tu culu.*” “Go wipe your ass.”

Papa’s meaning was always clear. A sharp put-down of a snotnosed kid. First, experience life for yourself and then you can talk about it. First, learn the alphabet of ordinary common-sense living and then you can spout your book-knowledge. But right now you stink of presumption and your ass needs wiping.

Zhaozhou is equally sharp. His response turns us inside. Right here. Now. It's not the learning of sutras, the passing of koans, the countless repetitions of prayers, the nembutsu—recitation of Buddha's name—or the Jesus prayer—the rosaries, the masses, the sacraments. It's the ground beneath our feet. It's the food we eat as we eat it. It's the eating. It's the hands we wash. It's the washing. It's doing what we are doing when we are doing it. When food comes, we eat!

I had an experience of this once in the bakery of the Zen Community. At that time, the monks and staff were the workers of the bakery. Every now and then, after a too-big order, the entire community had to get down to the bakery and work in order to fulfill that order. Sometimes we would work past midnight. On one these occasions, Roshi Bernie and I were assigned to a huge sink and had to wash a mountain of baking trays. I watched Bernie wash. He was slow and totally unconcerned with the mountain of trays. He simply picked one off the top and carefully, completely, washed—washing with no other thought than to wash. He was sweating profusely. His clothes were stained with his sweat. He didn't seem to notice. I was thinking of how many damn trays there were and of how long it would take to do them all. At the rate he was going we would be there all night. He washed the trays, fed them to me, and I dried them. I had to patiently wait for him to finish another tray before I could wipe. He just continued, unconcerned with the time, with the number of trays he had before him, with the sweat rolling down his face, seeping into his clothes. He was so slow! Something had to be done. So I subtly suggested that we switch places. This way, I thought to myself, I could smash through and get the job done. Then we could go back to the monastery and get into bed. He cheerfully accepted my offer and switched to drying. Then during my speed-demon tray washing I happened

to glance at Roshi. And there he was. Unconcernedly drying. Drying tray after tray, carefully as if each one was a precious jewel.

Completely absorbed in drying.

He was the act of drying.

He was drying.

Drying dried.

The trick is to be completely there.

The trick is to do one thing.

The trick is to be one thing.

The trick is to be present wherever you are.

The trick is to be.

To be present.



A monk approached Zhaozhou and said, "I am a new student. I've just entered the monastery. Please, teach me."

Zhaozhou said, "Have you had breakfast?"

The monk said, "Yes."

Zhaozhou said, "Wash your bowls."

Case 8. The Cart

There is a cart whose wheels have a hundred spokes. Remove the spokes and remove the axle then what will it be?

Reflections

By now I guess most of you are used to the fact that when I give a dharma talk on a koan I consult all the known translations of that koan. In the case of this koan I rounded up the usual suspects: Cleary, Aitken Roshi, Yamada Roshi, Sekida Roshi, Shibayama Roshi, and the *Dentoroku*, which in many ways is the Ur-text of all the koan collections.³

I have added two other books to my list of references. First there is what many zen teachers consider the infamous collection of koans of Yoel Hoffman in his book, *The Sound of One Hand 281 Koans With Answers*. This book is a translation of a book which was first published in Japan in 196 entitled *Gendai Sojizen Hyoron, or A Critique of Present-day Pseudo-Zen*. The author of the book was an unhappy monk who preferred to remain anonymous and used the pseudonym Hauhoo. Which more or less means "the Arch-Destroyer of the Existent Order. The book contains the complete body of the 281 koans which supposedly constituted the Hakuin Zenji Koan system.

The second book is most recent and is difficult to get. I managed to get a copy from the author. It is called the *Kattoshu*. The translator is a Rinzai monk named Thomas Yuho Kirchner who lives in Japan in a Rinzai monastery. This collection contains 282 koans and is the system of koan

³ A full list of works consulted is found in the appendix.

study used in Rinzai temples. It also is probably another representation of the Hakuin Zenji system of koan study.

Shibayama Roshi provides the commentary to the Wumenkuan koans in his book and Sumiko Kudo a female student of his provides the translation.

I find sometimes that one or the other translators more meaningful for me with a particular koan. In this case I prefer the Kudo-Shibayama Roshi text.

There are two major differences in the various translations. First, some say that Keichu made 100 carts, others say that his carts had a hundred spokes. Aitken Roshi explains that the key word is "100 fu," which means "100 spokes." Shibayama Roshi, Cleary, and Sekida Roshi interpret and translate the word strictly as spokes. Yamada Roshi and Aitken Roshi interpret "...the word fu as a counter for carts—literally, a hundred spoke of carts, as we would say a hundred head of cattle."

I don't see how either translation would change the impact of the koan, so I'll skip these differences. However, I consider the second difference major. It occurs in the last four words of the koan as translated by Kudo-Shibayama Roshi: "...what will it be?" The differences are as follows:

Aitken Roshi: ... what would be vividly apparent?

Yamada Roshi: ... what would he make clear about the cart?

Sekida Roshi: ... what would you have?

Cleary: ... what does this clarify?

Shibayama Roshi says in his comments that many take this koan to be about shunyata, i.e. everything is primarily empty. But note, Gettan does not ask what **became**, (past tense) of the cart, which seems to be where the other translators are at. Instead Gettan asks, "... what will **it** be?" **Future tense!** And of course we all know that **it** does not refer to the cart but to whoever struggles with this koan. You and you and you and me!

If you take away my eyes, my ears, my nose, my tongue, my arms, my legs, my heart and the rest of my organs, what will I be?

Not what has become of me. But what will I become?

As some of you know, some time ago, just before I found out I had pulmonary fibrosis, I began studying the baroque flute. For the past years I have been working on the embouchure hole in which I blow in order to hopefully create a sound, on the correspondences between the fingers of my hands and the seven holes or openings in the body of the flute, the black dots on a large piece of paper with a variety of codes which classify as clef, notes, slurs, sharps, flats, etc.

My painstaking effort has been hampered by the fibrosis that has reduced the efficiency of my lungs to one-third its original capacity.

Putting all these parts together sometimes results in something approaching a song or melody. The irony is I have to mess and tinker and work with each of these parts until I become so familiar with them that I no longer need to think of them.

Like Keichu's cart, when I can discard embouchure, holes, musical notation, and completely do away with them all, then only does music happen. When I stop thinking of the parts and let go of them, they come together.

Thinking, therefore, results in dualism; not thinking results in unity, or oneness.

Now Mumon's poem makes a little sense.

When the vividly working wheel turns
Even an expert is lost,
Four directions, above, and below:
South, north, east, and west.

When music happens there are no parts, no flute, no music-sheet, no performer. When the wheel turns there is no cart, no driver, no spokes, no road—in all the ten directions.

Shibayama Roshi uses a similar example of horsemanship, and you know the other examples such as archery, the writing of a poem, the washing of dishes. Aitken Roshi quotes Shibayama Roshi, but doesn't go as far. He says,

Archery, Aikido, Tai-chi, Tea Ceremony, and a thousand other creative skills are wonderful Samadhi devices. But don't suppose Zen in the Art of Archery is really Zen. It is not. It is archery, raised to an exquisite point, and it stops there. Oneness is a trap for a tiger! Oneness doesn't do it. You must become intimate, and this means taking all the parts away.

Shibayama Roshi makes it clear. All of this is simply forgetting oneself at that particular time—it is the merging of subject and object at that particular time—but it is not Zen. It does not answer the question **what will it be?** It is not Zen.

Zen, says Shibayama Roshi is

...a fundamental change in the whole personality, by which one attains realization (which is called satori) and lives a new Zen life as a new Zen person.

And so when all is taken away—when we can drop body and drop mind—then the wheel of the dharma will turn within us and we are born again.

So, when you get to this koan, if you come to daisan and present it as emptiness you'll be summarily thrown out.

So, how will you present it?



There is a cart whose wheels have a hundred spokes. Remove the spokes and remove the axle then what will it be?

Case 9. Ch'ing-jang's Nonattained Buddha

A monk asked Ch'ing-jang, "The Buddha of All Pervading Wisdom did zazen on the Bodhi Seat for ten kalpas, but the Dharma of the Buddha did not appear and he did attain Buddhahood. Why?"

Ch'ing-jang said, "Great question."

The monk persisted, "But he did zazen on the bodhi seat; why didn't he attain Buddhahood?"

Ch'ing-jang said, "He is a nonattained buddha."

A few notes of some of the terms used in this case.

The Buddha of All Pervading, Surpassing Wisdom appears in the seventh chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*, the Parable of the Conjured City. The pertinent paragraph reads as follows:

The Buddha declared to the bhikkhus: "The Buddha Victorious through Great Penetrating Knowledge had a life-span of five hundred and forty myriad millions of nayutas of kalpas. When that Buddha was seated on the Platform of the Way, after having smashed Mara's army, just as he was about to gain *aññuttarasamyaksambodhi*, still the Buddha-dharmas did not appear before him. In this way, from one minor kalpa up through ten minor kalpas he sat cross-legged, body and mind immobile; yet the Bodhidharma's still did not appear before him.

(At the end of the ten kalpas, the Buddha of Supremely pervading, Surpassing Wisdom sat on his Bodhi seat for another ten kalpas and then attained supreme perfect enlightenment. He then taught the dharma going from one level to the next until he reached the level of the dharma as expressed in the *Lotus Sutra*, which is considered the highest level of all. His sixteen sons then all eventually attained buddhahood. The ninth became Amitabha Buddha, and the sixteenth became Shakyamuni Buddha.)

The Bodhi Seat. The Bodhi seat is the place where Shakyamuni prepared a place for himself under the Bodhi tree when he decided that he would not get up until he attained enlightenment. The Bodhi seat, in its wider application of meaning is the place where you and I sit when we do zazen. It is the place where we are sitting. It is any place where we sit in a determined fashion in order to do zazen, or become one removing, what separates subject and object.

A **kalpa** is a very long time. There are many beautiful definitions. The one I like best comes from Aitken Roshi. A kalpa is the time involved in emptying a container that is a mile wide, a mile long, and a mile high, full of poppy seeds. Remove a single poppy seed every century and when the container is empty, that is a kalpa. Another definition is the same dimension—mile by mile by mile—only this time it is a block of marble. An angel comes down once a year and brushes the tip of her wings against the marble. When the marble is gone, that is a kalpa.

Reflections

This koan reminds me of the young Mazu who was intensively sitting to become a Buddha. His teacher came into the zendo and saw him very seriously sitting. He asked him, "What are you doing?"

Mazu responded, "I'm trying to become a Buddha."

"Ahhhhh," said the teacher and left the zendo.

Later he returned carrying a brick in one hand and a stone in his other hand. He sat opposite Mazu and began rubbing the stone on the brick. After a what seemed like a kalpa, Mazu burst out, "What are **you** doing Teacher?"

"I'm trying to make this brick become a mirror."

And Mazu saw it. He bowed to the teacher and relaxed.

Then there's the story told in the *Surangama Sutra* of Yajñadatta.

Yajñadatta was a very handsome prince. And he was also vain. He loved to look at himself in a mirror. So mirrors were placed in every room of the palace. Wherever he went he could look in a mirror and see his beautiful face. His attendants had just about enough of Yajñadatta's vanity so one day they decided to trick him. They blacked out all of the mirrors in the palace. Next morning when Yajñadatta woke up, he as usual, went straight to the bedroom mirror. But he saw nothing. So he went into another room. And saw nothing. He went from room to room.

Each time he looked in a mirror there was nothing there. He became so bewildered that he thought he had lost his head. He began to scream, "I've lost my head. I've lost my head," running from room to room. Finally one of his attendants grabbed him and smacked him full across the face. "Oh," said, Yajñadatta, in great joy, "here it is. I haven't lost it after all. It was here all the time." (Yu)

Are we Yajñadatta? Not only do we think we've lost something—we never really believed we had it! And what is that something we never had? Or if we had it, or discovered it, why do we think we lost it?

We rub rub rub the bricks of our hearts with stones in order to create a heart. And that's crazy. As crazy as Yajñadatta. How can we lose our hearts? And I don't mean the organ. I mean heart in the sense of hsin or heart-mind. The heart of the Heart Sutra. It's like dignity. We all have a deep sense of dignity. It is deep inside our hearts. Our hsin. The major teaching Margaret and I gave inmates of the prisons we went to was that their dignity was there. They hadn't lost it. They may think they didn't have it. But it was there. Deep in their hearts. No bars could imprison dignity. And with zazen, slowly, slowly, one by one, they began to rediscover their dignity. Until like Yajñadatta, in great joy they knew they had it. And knowing it, they were able to hold their heads high. When they walked kinhin their walk was straight and with dignity. And they were able to deal with their confinement in a new way. Now they were able to see the distressed plight of the guards who treated them like vermin. Because now they knew they were not vermin. They were men. Men with hearts beating dignity.

And so there's no becoming a Buddha no matter how many kalpas we take trying become a Buddha. We already are Buddha. Never mind that the *Lotus Sutra* story says that the Buddha of Supremely Pervading became a Buddha after another ten kalpas. The way I read it, it took him another ten kalpas to finally realize he already was a Buddha!

There's another teaching in this koan.

The monk said, "But he did zazen on the bodhi seat; why couldn't he attain buddhahood?"

Does this sound familiar?

I've passed over three hundred koans.

How many more are there?

I'm still not enlightened!

I've been sitting for over ten years.

I'm still not enlightened!

How much more can one do?

And here's one I've heard a few times:

I've been on Mu for over five years.

And I still don't get it!

So what's going on here? How many koans do we have to go through before we get it? Before we finish? Back to Yajñadatta. There's no "getting it"

because we already have it. Well, if we have it why don't we know it? And more to the point, why are we sitting seven hours every day during retreat? For what? Well you all know Dogen Zenji's famous answer. We don't sit to **get** enlightened. We sit because we **are** enlightened. OK? But somehow that doesn't quite make it does it? There must be something to all this zazen. But what is it?

I tell you dear friends. I don't know.

And yet I know something happens when you do zazen.

Let me tell you a story about an inmate. This was a big white guy. Probably about six foot six, weighing close to three hundred pounds. He was very suspicious of me at first. He thought I probably was another do-gooder social-worker-type. But he soon saw that I wasn't much good at all. So he accepted me. Eventually, he decided to go for Jukai. He came smack against the first of the ten grave precepts.

I vow to follow the way of not killing.

He said it was impossible for him to take this precept. He went into the details of his criminal past which I won't share with you. Enough to say it had a lot of violence in it. I told him the precept is a precept of the present not of the past. The thing is are you willing to follow the way of not killing NOW? Today? At this very moment? And go moment to moment? Day to day? Are you willing to try? And he said he'd give it a shot. (Pardon the pun.)

Please bear in mind that along with the study of the precepts he was having a steady dose of zazen. He sat in his tiny cell every morning and every evening. He sat with the sangha once every week. And he sat the weekend and weeklong retreats at the prison. So his zazen was solid.

He come to daisan and told me, Something's happening. I don't know what. But something's happening. I told him, Yes, I see it. It's zazen working in you. Like yeast that changes the structure of flour and turns it into the sweetest, freshest bread. Let the zazen work.

Well eventually, he was transferred to another prison up in north New York State. And the first thing he did there was get a little Zen group started. And he wrote to us. And Margaret and I went up and sat with that group. He was transferred again. I think he had about three transfers over a three or four year period. And in each new prison he formed a new Zen group. He was the Zen Johnny Appleseed.

The first prison he went to after Eastern was the pits. It has the reputation of being the worst of the worst prisons. One day he was told to leave his cell and go to the yard. A guard accompanied him. The walk through the halls would take about ten minutes. Then another guard showed up and joined them on the walk. The inmate knew something was wrong. This was not the time when the population was out. He was alone with two guards. Then there were three. Then there were six. He knew he was in trouble. Then they began taunting him. They began calling him dirty names. They began to make sexual jibes. They were itching for him to retaliate and take a swing at them so that they could justifiably whack him with their batons. He was working on Mu at that time. And he focused hard on Mu. He was silently responding to their abuse internally with Mu Mu Mu Mu Mu. They told him to lie down on the floor and take his clothes off. He did so with Mu Mu Mu Mu.

They circled him and continued their abuse. Finally, they told him to dress, get up, and go to the yard.

I want you to know that if he had fought he would have caused a lot of damage to those guards. He could easily have taken at least two of them he was so strong. But he didn't. He went instead for Mu and for non-violence.

This is the power of zazen. Zazen will change your lives. Be careful. Zazen is powerful. And it's so subtle you won't know it's working in you. Like yeast.

This is why we do zazen. This is why we are enlightened. This is why it's just fine to be a nonattained Buddha. There's nothing to attain. It's all here. We just need to get out of the way and let the yeast work.



A monk asked Ch'ing-jang, "The Buddha of All Pervading Wisdom did zazen on the Bodhi Seat for ten kalpas, but the Dharma of the Buddha did not appear and he did attain Buddhahood. Why?"

Ch'ing-jang said, "Great question."

The monk persisted, "But he did zazen on the bodhi seat; why didn't he attain Buddhahood?"

Ch'ing-jang said, "He is a nonattained buddha."

Case 10. Qingshui, Poor and Alone

Qingshui said to Caoshan, Master, "I am poor and alone. Please help me."

Caoshan said, "Venerable Qingshui!"

"Yes?" Qingshui responded.

Caoshan said, "You've had three cups of the best wine of Qingyuan, why do you say you haven't wet your lips."

Reflections

Caoshan (in Japanese Sozan) was a student of Dongshan (in Japanese Tozan). Together they formed what became the Soto sect. The name Soto is a combination of the first two letters of their names.

Immediately upon working with this koan several things struck me. The first is what I like to call the ritual of Call and Response. A ritual in which the readiness of the student is tested by the teacher. The first recorded Call and Response is registered between Mahakashapa and Ananda in the third case of the *Denkoroku*.

The second patriarch was the Venerable Ananda. He asked the Venerable Kashyapa, "Elder Dharma brother, did the World-honored One transmit anything else to you besides the gold brocade robe?"

Kashyapa called, "Ananda!"

Ananda replied.

Kashyapa said, "Knock down the flag pole in front of the gate."

Ananda was greatly awakened.

The second is the phrase, "poor and alone." It reminds me of Zhaozhou's statement upon being enlightened.

Zhaozhou asked Nanquan, "What is the Way?"

"Your everyday mind is the Way."

"Can I reach it?"

"If you try to reach it, you will miss it."

"If I don't try to reach it, how can I know it?"

"The Way has nothing to do with knowing it, or not knowing. Knowing is deluded consciousness, and not knowing it is non-differentiation. When you enter the real Way without doubt, it will be like the great sky—like vastness itself. How could it be right to argue within oneself whether it is right or wrong?"

Hearing this Zhaozhou experienced a deep realization. He was seventeen years old. His description of the experience was: "Suddenly I was ruined and homeless."

Aitken Roshi makes a great deal of Qingshui's "poor and alone" state of being. He compares it with the "Dark Night of the Soul" experienced and described by St. John of the Cross. And with David who speaks of being in the Valley of the Shadow of Death. And with Meister Eckhart's description of what it truly means to be "poor in spirit " in his piece "Beati Pauperes Spiritu," which Margaret translated. Here are Eckhart's words:

Now pay close attention! I have frequently said, and great teachers say it also: the person should be so free of all things, inner and outer, that he can be a place for God, wherein God can work. Now, however, I say it differently. It is thus: if a person is empty of all things, of all creatures, of himself and of God, and yet it is still true of him that God can still find a place to work within him, that person is not poor in the truest poverty. For God does not intend that a person have a place within himself where God can work; rather, it is poverty of spirit when the person is so empty of God and of all of His works, that God, if he wishes to work in the soul, is Himself the place wherein He will work—and this He does gladly. For if God finds a person this poor, God works His own works, and the person bears God within himself, and God is Himself the place of His works; the person is a pure God-bearer in his works, in view of the fact that God is One who works within Himself. Just here, in this poverty, the person attains that eternal being that he has been, that he now is, and that he will eternally remain.

Shibayama Roshi, on the other hand focuses on the challenge Qingshui poses to Caoshan. In his commentary he says,

Needless to say, the "poverty" Seizei (Japanese for Qingshui) talks of does not retain its literal meaning. "I do not have either satori or ignorance, heaven or hell, subject or object. I am pure and immaculate and even a helping hand is unable to do anything for me. How would you save a poor man like me?" The monk is challenging Sozan (Japanese for Caoshan) with this searching question so he can fathom Sozan's response. In other words, thrusting his static insight of poverty at Sozan, the monk wants to see how Sozan will respond.

And Caoshan responds with the Call and Response ritual. And Qingshui successfully completes the ritual in the same way Ananda did, by responding immediately, in much the same way a mirror immediately reflects the image before it! Without thought. Without preparing. Without the slightest hesitation. And that's the point of this wonderful ritual.

Sometimes people who come to daisan sit before me in deep silence. It feels like they are trying to bring themselves to the "right" place to be before beginning daisan. I am often tempted to break that spell by clanging the bell, ending that daisan session. I much prefer that you sit down and blurt it out. Be your clumsy, inefficient, bumbling, self. Because that bumbling self is the enlightened self. We always forget Shakyamuni's revolutionary discovery upon his own enlightenment:

I, and the great earth, and beings
simultaneously achieve the Way.

This includes everyone of us. Here. Now. Just as we are. Some of us bumble. Some of us scatter-brain. Some of us pontificate. Some of us are new to zazen. Some of us are old hands. Some of us this. Some of us that. It

doesn't matter! All of us, together, simultaneously achieve the Way. All of us are inextricably bound to Shakyamuni's enlightenment. All of us have tasted the rarest wine that has ever been brewed. Our lips drip with this wonderful wine. So we don't have to wait until we're ready. We're ready just as we are. Please let us all trust ourselves. Please let us all be kind to ourselves. Please let us all love ourselves.

Yamada Roshi has a wonderful way of putting it.⁴ He says,

In Buddhism salvation is not, "Knock and it shall be opened, seek and you shall find," but the realization that, "though you knock not, it is already open; though you seek not, it is already found."

Another wonderful example is given to us by Bankei.

A student approached Bankei and said, "My wisdom is tightly confined within me and I am unable to make use of it. How can I use it?"

Bankei said to him, "My friend, come closer to me, please."

When the student came a few steps closer, Bankei said, "How wonderfully well you are using it."

Finally, Shibayama Roshi regales us with a few words from an old Japanese folk song:

I'm tipsy, tipsy indeed, with one glass of wine,

⁴ This quote is from a series of lectures made by Yamada Roshi on the MMK in 1976. Quoted by Thomas Kirchner in his book of koans, *Entangling Vines*, page 59.

Tipsy I am with a glass of wine I have not drunk.



Qingshui said to Caoshan, Master, "I am poor and alone. Please help me."

Caoshan said, "Venerable Qingshui!"

"Yes?" Qingshui responded.

Caoshan said, "You've had three cups of the best wine of Qingyuan, why do you say you haven't wet your lips?"

Case 11. Zhaozhou Examines the Hermits

Zhaozhou went to a hermit's hut and shouted, "Anybody in? Anybody in?" The hermit thrust up his fist. Zhaozhou said, "The water is too shallow for a ship to anchor." He left the hut.

Again he went to another hermit's hut and shouted, "Anybody in? Anybody in?" This hermit, too, thrust up his fist. Zhaozhou said, "Freely you give, freely you take away. Freely you kill, freely you give life." He made a profound bow.

Reflections

In this commentary I'm going to present a list of observations which came to me as I was reflecting and working with this koan. Then I'll try to put it all together, or maybe ask you to put it together.

This koan reminds me of Wumenkuan Case 26 two monks raising the blinds.

The Case

A monk once went to Daihogen of Seiryō before the midday meal to ask for instruction. Hogen pointed to the bamboo blinds with his hand. At that moment, two monks who were there went over to the blinds and rolled them up in the same manner. Hogen said, "One has gained, one has lost."

Mumon's Commentary

Just tell me, which one has gained and which one has lost? If you have one eye opened concerning this point, you will know where National Teacher Seiryō failed. Nevertheless, you should not inquire into this problem in connection with gain or loss.

The Verse

The blind being rolled up,
bright clarity penetrates the great empty space.

Yet the great empty space
still does not match the principle of our sect;

It is far better to throw away emptiness
and everything completely,
And with a tight fit,
never to let the wind pass through.

And so on to the present case.

Anybody in? Anybody in?

Who or what is Anybody?

Yamada Roshi says Anybody is Buddha-nature, the true self, etc

Shibayama Roshi tells us that in classical Japanese, the salutation would be

Ariya? Ariya?

Are you there? Are you there?

He also suggests that the thrusting up of the arms are similar to Gutei's finger.

What about the two hermits? Nyogen Sensaki says there was only one hermit.

Are there indeed two?

Or are they one?

Are we dealing with one body?

Are they our body.

Zhaozhou's body?

Are they different yet the same?

Are they the same yet different at the same time?

Zhaozhou's comments to the two hermits are also different and yet the same.

Like the foot before and the foot behind

Zhaozhou's comment to the second monk is like the Shuso speech about the Shippei at the Shuso Hosen ceremony.

Sensei: How will you use this shippei?

Shuso: Freely, give life and taking it away.

Zhaozhou says:

Freely you give, freely you take away;

freely you kill, freely you give life.

The sword is also Manjushri's sword that cuts through delusion.

The sword is also found in case 194 in *Entangling Vines*,

Xutang took the high seat and said, "This staff always talks big, saying, 'I can bind and I can release; I can kill and I can give life?' "

Wumen's poem specifically refers to the shippei

Eye like a shooting star;
Activity like lightning;
The sword that kills;
The sword that gives life.

Mumon's comments are revealing:

If you say that one hermit is superior to the other, you have not yet got the Zen eye. Or if you say there is no difference between the two, you have not yet got the zen eye either.

So we have the same yet different/different yet the same which amounts to OneBody.

Zhaozhou's contradictory comments seem to be the way he responds to a situation, at one time positively, Yes; and at another time, negatively, No. Like his answers to the famous question, "Does a dog have Buddha-nature?"

So one question can be,

is there a difference between Yes and No?

Or between opposites?

Is there a difference between darkness and light?

Is there a difference between form and emptiness?

The "Sandokai" teaches,

Light is also darkness
But do not move with it as darkness
Darkness is light; do not see it as light.
Light and darkness are not one, not two.

The "Heart Sutra" teaches in lines 6-9

O Shariputra form is no other than emptiness,
Emptiness no other than form.
Form is precisely emptiness,
Emptiness precisely form

In line 12 the sutra teaches that

O Shariputra all things are expressions of emptiness;

And then negates the Four Noble Truths.

Then later in line sixteen the sutra teaches that emptiness is not form, and then blithely proceeds to negate the skandas.

So what do we have here?

What would you say is the major teaching of this koan?

What does Zhaozhou mean by his salutation upon entering the huts of the hermits?

Are the upraised arms like Gutei's finger?

Meaning what?

Is there a difference between the two hermits?

Are there two hermits?

Is there only one hermit?

Is Zhaozhou contradicting himself?

Is this a koan of OneBody?

In which way?

If so, does the one body include Zhaozhou?

Or only the two hermits?

Does it include the universe?

What about the thoughts about the shippei?

How did the shippei get into the koan?

In what way does the koan act like Manjushri's sword?

Are the upraised arms and fists the shippei?

Is Gutei's finger a shippei?



Zhaozhou went to a hermit's hut and shouted, "Anybody in? Anybody in?" The hermit thrust up his fist. Zhaozhou said, "The water is too shallow for a ship to anchor." He left the hut.

Again he went to another hermit's hut and shouted, "Anybody in? Anybody in?" This hermit, too, thrust up his fist. Zhaozhou said, "Freely you give, freely you take away. Freely you kill, freely you give life." He made a profound bow.

Case 12. Zuigen calls "Master"

Every day Zuigen would call himself. "Master!"

"Yes!"

"Wake up!"

"Yes."

"Don't be deceived by anyone."

"Yes!"

Reflections

There are several translations of this koan. The text above is put together from the various translations.

It looks like my version is an interpretation, for in each of the other versions there is no assumption that Zuigen is asleep and needs to wake up. There is simply the statement that one should be awake. What is being said is not to awaken but to be in the enlightened state. Being in connection with one's true self. Being in the place of the Unborn. Being in the place of the Buddha Mind. Being in the place of the absolute that is contained and penetrated by the relative. Each of the other five versions seem to be a reminder that this is the place to be at, and that it is very easy to slip in and out of this state with just one errant thought. One word said in impatience and anger, and one slips into the realm of the Fighting Demons. One feeling of greed or

envy, and one slips into the realm of the Hungry Ghosts. Having reached the enlightened state, having arrived at any level of achievement, either in the Zen way, or any other way, there is no guarantee one can remain there. One needs to maintain constant vigilance.

Practice does not stop with enlightenment. That's because there is no goal to practice. Practice itself is the Enlightened state. This statement suggests the questions: Are you practicing? Are you in the state of practice? Are you practicing the Dharma?

One of the mistakes we make is that when we receive any public recognition like an advanced degree: a Ph.D., an MD, a degree in one of the sciences or mathematics. "Now I've got the Ph. D, and I know it." Secretly, what is usually also said, or at least implied as well is "...and all I need to know!"

Just the reverse is so. In the sciences, one needs to constantly be up to date with the flood of new information, new discoveries, new medicines, new treatments, new experiments. There is no resting on one's laurels here. Practice is a continuous and active process. And so my, "Wake up!" does not necessarily mean that, Zuigen is asleep, but that one needs to be awake, and actively practicing, at all times.

We then turn to the next statement, "Do not being deceived by anyone." It's interesting that the versions of Cleary and Sekida Roshi are similar: "Henceforward," and "From now on," don't be "deceived," or "fooled," by anyone. These two statements seem to indicate there is a continuum. This very moment is the next moment of the continuum. And each moment is complete in itself. We should renew our practice each moment of our lives.

"Do not be deceived by others," echoes the great teaching of the wonderful gatha, "Atta Dipa."

Take refuge in yourself.

Take refuge in the Dharma.

This is the great teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha, who declared in his last sermon that he never taught anything. When he was asked who was to lead the Sangha? Who was to be the guide of the Sangha? Who will instruct the Sangha? He responded, "Look within yourselves. Take refuge in yourselves. Take refuge in the Dharma. You are the Buddha." What a beautiful teaching.

In one of the first dokusan, or private interview I had with the late Maezumi Roshi, I entered the dokusan room bursting with commitment and love for Zen. I wanted to demonstrate the depth of my love and my commitment, and literally threw myself at Roshi's feet, declaring my unswerving loyalty to him. He brusquely responded, "No! Be loyal to no person. Be loyal only to the Dharma! Give yourself completely to the Dharma, and only to the Dharma!" To this day I bow in reverence to his words.

This takes us back to the previous statement of the enlightened state. The enlightened state is our "natural" state. It is the state we inherit from our parents when we are born. It is our "original" state. Our "original face." Buddhism does not have the concept of original sin; it flips the coin completely to maintain we are born with original grace! Original Enlightenment! Our original face is the face of the Buddha. Of the awakened one. And it is here within. And it is always here. Always available. Zuigen's comment, "Do not be deceived by others," pointedly tells us not to turn from

what we have within us, to the teachings or guidance of the ways of others. We have it all within. Each of us has it.

Going back to the first word of the koan. In each case the word is, "Master!" Zuigen calls himself, "Master!" Of course, "Master," is a translation of the title he had. Today we would use the comparable titles, "Roshi!" or "Sensei!" What is being said with this word "Master!?" Notice the word in each case is followed by an exclamation mark! It is not just "Master." It is "Master!" Who is Master! Who is Roshi! Who is Sensei! Who are You! Who is calling upon Roshi, Master, Sensei, you? This is not the muttering of a homeless-street schizophrenic. This is the profound statement of the Enlightened One. This is a statement comparable in its profundity of the statement found in Exodus 3: 13-14: "I am that I am!" The "I" being the "I" of eternity. The "I" of Heaven. The "I" of all creations throughout space and time. It is comparable to the statement of Don Quixote who says, "I know who I am." I know who **"I"** am. I know, I have met my original face. I have seen it. I am not blinded by it. This is the "I" we are talking about. This is the master we are talking about.

This koan is a panegyric of the awakened state. Of the Unborn. This koan presents the Unborn in its rawness, beauty, and power.

We have not yet commented on Zuigen's responses. Only Cleary makes the responses a consistent, "Yes!" Every day Zuigen would call to himself, "Master!" And he would answer himself, "Yes?" Then he would say, "Be awake, be alert!" "Yes." "From now on, don't be fooled by anyone?" "Yes, yes!" My only quarrel with Cleary would be the question mark to the first "Yes." I would remove it (as do all the other translators) and replace it with an exclamation point! Changing the "Yes?" to "Yes!" From "What is it?" to "I

am here, present and ready!" All the other versions have the last response as "No!" I think Cleary hits the mark with his interpretation and translation as "Yes, yes!" For the "Yes," itself, in each case, is a statement of complete affirmation. James Joyce, when writing *Ulysses*, wanted to end this phenomenal work of art with the most positive word in the English language. He chose the word "Yes." Think of this word. "Yes" takes in the entire universe. "Yes," allows all things to happen. "Yes," is complete and positive openness. "Yes," means no opinions, no views, no thoughts, no prejudices. No enlightenment. **Yes!**



Every day Zuigen would call himself. "Master!"

"Yes!"

"Wake up!"

"Yes."

"Don't be deceived by anyone."

"Yes!"

Case 13. Deshan: Bowls In Hand

The Case

Deshan one day went to the dining hall with his bowls in his hand. Xuefeng asked him, "Where are you going with your bowls, Old Man? The bell hasn't rung and the drum hasn't sounded." Deshan went back to his room.

Xuefeng told Yantou about this. Yantou said, "As great as he is, Deshan still doesn't know the last word."

Deshan heard about the conversation between Xuefeng and Yantou. He sent for Yantou and asked, "Don't you approve of this old man?" Yantou leaned over and whispered something into Deshan's ear. Deshan remained silent.

When Deshan sat before the sangha next time, his dharma talk was different. Yantou rose from his seat and went to the front of the hall. He laughed loudly and said, "How wonderful! Our Old Man finally knows the last word. Now, no one on earth can beat him! And yet Deshan has only three more years to live.

And Deshan died in three years.

Wumen's Comments

As for the last word of Zen, neither Yantou nor Deshan has ever heard of it, even in a dream. When I examine it carefully, they are like puppets set on a shelf.

Reflections

This time I will not offer any commentary or interpretation of the koan. Instead I will engage in a leisurely circumambulation of the koan—looking at this and that—ruminating. If you're interested you may also look up the little booklet in the entrance room entitled, "On Koan Study," to find what I mean by "circumambulating" a koan.

In various translations there are different spellings of the names of the players in this koan:

Tokusan = Te-shan = Deshan: 81 years old (died at age 83)

Seppo = Xuefang (who was tenzo): 41 years old

Ganto = Yantou: 35 years old

Deshan was a contemporary of Linchi. He was the famous roughhouse Zen Master who gave thirty blows of the stick no matter what answer is given.

He was the conceited *Diamond Sutra* scholar who was embarrassed by the question of a mere female innkeeper and therefore burnt all his books.

Here are the koans in which Deshan appears or is cited.

Entangling Vines Case 24

A monk asked Mian Xianjue, "What is the meaning of 'Deshan Carries His Bowls'?"

The master answered, "No meaning."

"Then why," asked the monk, "did Deshan carry his bowls down from the monks' hall?"

"If he wants to go, he goes; if he wants to sit, he sits," Mian replied.

Wumenkuan Case 28

Te-shan visited Lung-t'an and questioned him sincerely far into the night. It grew late and Lung-t'an said, "Why don't you retire?" Te-shan made his bows and lifted the blinds to withdraw, but was met by darkness. Turning back, he said, "It is dark outside."

Lung-t'an lit a paper candle and handed it to Te-shan. Te-shan was about to take it when Lung-t'an blew it out. At this, Te-shan had sudden realization and made bows.

Lung-t'an said, "What truth did you discern?"

Te-shan said, "From now on I will not doubt the words of an old priest who is renowned everywhere under the sun."

The next day Lung-t'an took the high seat before his assembly and said, "I see a brave fellow among you monks. His fangs are like a sword-tree. His mouth is like a blood-bowl. Give him a blow and he won't turn his head. Someday he will climb the highest peak and establish our Way there."

Te-shan brought his notes on the *Diamond Sutra* before the Dharma Hall and held up a torch, saying, "Even though you have exhausted the abstruse doctrines, it is like placing a hair in vast space. Even though you have learned all the secrets of the world, it is like letting a single drop of water fall into an enormous valley." And he burned up all his notes. Then, making his bows, he took leave of his teacher.

More on the "Final Word"

Entangling Vines Case 179

Wuman Huikai commented on the koan "Deshan carries how bowls":

As for the "final word," neither Yantou nor Deshan have ever given it a thought. If you look closely, it is like a puppet show.

The verse:

If you understand the first word,
You understand the final word.
But first or final
It is not a word.

Note: Yamamoto comments by citing the koan: "As the Buddha was about to enter Parinirvana, Manjushri asked him to turn the wheel of the dharma one more time. The Buddha admonished him, saying 'For forty-nine years I have dwelt in the world, but I have yet to preach a single word.'"

Blue Cliff Record Case 51

Yantou comments, "If you wish to know the final word, just this! Just this!"

When Hsueh Feng was living in a hut, there were two monks who came to pay their respects. Seeing them coming, he pushed open the door of the hut with his hand, popped out, and said, "What is it?"

A monk also said, "What is it?" Feng lowered his head and went back inside the hut.

Later the monk came to Yantou. Tou asked, "Where are you coming from?"

The monk said, "I've come from Ling Nan."

Tou said, "Did you ever go to Hsueh Feng?"

The monk said, "I went there."

Tou said, "What did he have to say?" The monk recounted the preceding story.

Tou said, "What did he say?"

The monk said, "He said nothing; he lowered his head and went back inside the hut."

Tou said, "Alas! It's too bad I didn't tell him the last word before; if I had told him, no one on earth could cope with old Hsueh."

At the end of the summer the monk again brought up the preceding story to ask for instruction. Tou said, "Why didn't you ask earlier?"

The monk said, "I didn't dare to be casual."

Tou said, "Though Hsueh Feng is born of the same lineage as me he doesn't die in the same lineage as me. If you want to know the last word, just this is it."

Blue Cliff Record Case 28

Nan Ch'uan went to see Master Nirvana of Pai Chi Mountain.

Chang asked, "Have all the sages since antiquity had a truth that they haven't spoken for people?"

Ch'uan said, "They have."

Chang said, "What is the truth that hasn't been spoken for people?"

Ch'uan said, "It's not mind, it's not buddha, it's not any thing."

Chang said, "You said it."

Ch'uan said, "I am just thus. What about you, Teacher?"

Chang said, "I am not a great man of knowledge either: how would I know whether it has been spoken or not?"

Ch'uan said, "I don't understand."

Chang said, "I've already spoken too much for you."

Shibayama Roshi-Sumiko Kudo translation of Mumon's poem:

If you understand the first word of Zen
You will know the last word.
The last word or the first word—
"It" is not a word.

A key phrase in the koan is "... knows the last word" and is variously translated as,

realized the last word

knows the last sentence

knows the final word

(literally the word after the end, the word beyond all words)

grasped the last word of zen

knows the last word

understands the last word

not yet knows the last word

got hold of the last word

This leads me to the following questions:

What is the last word?

Are the first word/last word shadows of other pairs like

reality/absolute

form/emptiness

yin/yang

etc?

What did Yantou whisper (or secretly reveal) to Deshan?

Why in secret?

Is it a secret word?

Is there a secret word?

What about Shakyamuni's open hand rather than a closed fist
(or secret word)?

What about Yantou's prophecy that Deshan had only three more
years to live? And indeed Deshan died three years after the
prophecy.

What does Yantou's prophecy have to do with the koan?

What does Deshan's death have to do with the koan?
(In my first rewrite I omitted it. Aitken Roshi's translation also
omits it.)

In what way was Deshan's dharma talk "different?"

Why did Yantou whisper to Deshan?

Did he whisper because others were in the room and he didn't
want them to hear?

What was so secret that it required a secret?

Or was it a plot? Hatched by Yantou?

Did Deshan agree to the plot with his silence?

Does Wumen's comments about Yantou and Deshan being like "puppets on a stage" give rise to the theory that they were in cahoots?

If so, cahoots about what?

And who is pulling the strings of the puppets?

And so I have finished my circumambulating ruminations. Finished chewing the cud of this koan. Now it's time to let the koan work on me. Chew me into a cud. And maybe spit me out. For more leads into how to work with koans please see the little booklet, "On Koan Study."



Deshan one day went to the dining hall with his bowls in his hand. Xuefeng asked him, "Where are you going with your bowls, Old Man? The bell hasn't rung and the drum hasn't sounded." Deshan went back to his room.

Xuefeng told Yantou about this. Yantou said, "As great as he is, Deshan still doesn't know the last word."

Deshan heard about the conversation between Xuefeng and Yantou. He sent for Yantou and asked, "Don't you approve of this old man?" Yantou leaned over and whispered something into Deshan's ear. Deshan remained silent.

When Deshan sat before the sangha next time, his dharma talk was different. Yantou rose from his seat and went to the front of the hall. He laughed loudly and said, "How wonderful! Our Old Man finally knows the last word. Now, no one on earth can beat him! And yet Deshan has only three more years to live.

And Deshan died in three years.

Case 14. Nanquan Kills the Cat

Nanquan came by a group of monks of the eastern and western halls who were fighting over a cat. He stepped into the middle of them, picked up the cat and said, "OK, now you monks say the right word and I'll spare the cat. If not, I'll kill it. Quick now, say it?" Nobody spoke. Nanquan killed the cat.

The evening when Zhaozhou returned to the monastery he went to Nanquan's room. Nanquan told him what happened. Without a word, Zhaozhou took off his sandals, put them on his head, turned around and walked out of the room. As he was leaving Nanquan said, "If only you had been here, I wouldn't have killed the cat."

Reflections

We westerners usually have a hard time with this koan. A contemporary Zen Master, Zenkei Shibayama Roshi, says the reason is that we see the koan from the point of view of ethics. And the koan is not about ethics at all. When I was given this koan to work on, I was a pacifist. I had all the proper pacifist credentials. I was a Conscientious Objector during the Korean War. I had been a member of the Religious Society of Friends—a Quaker—for 20 years, before turning to Zen Buddhism. My pacifist pedigree was impeccable and pure. When I finally received approval for my presentation and understanding of the koan, I no longer was a pacifist!

Then, at Tokudo, when I became a Novice Zen Priest, I asked permission, which was given, to include in my vows, a vow of non-violence.

Now, some twenty years later, I include a vow of non-violence in the precept-study leading to Jukai—lay-ordination—as well as Tokudo—Junior Priest Ordination. In order to receive the precepts Treetop students are required to deal with the vow of non-violence. But I no longer speak of pacifism!

What is this all about? There's a famous Zen saying, concerning three stages of Zen practice. In the first stage, when one first begins to practice, mountains are mountains, and rivers are rivers. Later as one gets into the practice, one enters the second stage, and realizes that mountains are no longer mountains, and rivers are no longer rivers. Much later as one arrives as some understanding of practice, one enters the third stage, and realizes that mountains are mountains, and rivers are rivers. But don't think that the first stage and the third stage are the same. The intervening second stage changes everything. What has changed? What is the difference between the first and third stage?

Let's closely look at the koan.

The monks of the eastern and western halls
were quarreling about a cat.

There is some controversy about what the quarrel was about. In *The Transmission of the Lamp* page 259, the text reads:

On one occasion monks from the two halls,
eastern and western were quarreling over the ownership of a kitten.

However all the other versions of the koan leave the cause of the quarrel vague. Some speculate that the monks may have been arguing about whether the cat had Buddha-nature or not, like in the koan Mu. (In this case, would the answer be "Meow.") One can imagine some such levity, even among "serious" Zen monks.

If the *Lamp* is correct, then there is a right and wrong to the issue. A similar case—but with more at stake—was brought before King Solomon. (I Kings 3: 16-28) Two women claimed a baby as their own. Solomon asked for a sword and threatened to divide the baby in two giving each mother half the baby. The false mother agreed with the king's judgment to split the baby in half. The real mother gave up her claim to the baby, and asked the king not to kill it, and give it to the other mother. We all know the result.

The koan continues:

Nanquan came by. He stepped right into the middle of the quarrel, picked up the cat and said, "OK, now! You monks, if you can say the right word, I'll spare the cat. If not, I'll kill it. Quick now, say it?" Nobody spoke. Nanquan killed the cat.

The rightful owners of the cat—if the argument was about ownership—could have responded as the real mother did to Solomon, and give up their claim. That would have been their "right word." But they didn't. Nobody spoke. Nobody had the right word. So maybe the issue wasn't ownership. Perhaps the argument was theological in nature, maybe even along the lines of intrinsic Buddha Nature.

One of the ways to work with koans is to become each of the participants and elements of the koan. At one meditation session, you would be one of the monks from the western hall. At another session, you would be one of the monks from the eastern hall. At another session, you would be Nanquan. At another, the cat. At another, the knife or sword. Then you would be Zhaozhou, and later, his sandals.

Another way to work with koans is to ask questions.

What is the "right word?"

What is **a** right word?

What is the cat?

What is the knife or sword?

What is the killing?

What is being killed?

Who is doing the killing?

Is there any killing?

Another way to study koans is to boil down the koan to one word. This koan specifically requires you to do so. But now it's a matter of life and death. The life and death of the cat is at stake. What word can keep Nanquan from killing the cat? What word can keep Manjushri, who also wields a sword,

from killing us? What is being killed? In daisan, ultimately, you cannot complete this koan until you declare the “right” word.

Nobody spoke. Nanquan killed the cat.

O.K. So, we **are** Westerners, and we **are** troubled by the ethics of the *koan*, and we don’t care what Zen Masters say. We **will** deal with the ethics! So let’s!

Many Zen masters have written about this koan, and many **have** made reference to ethic. D. T. Suzuki, Yasutani, and Aitken Roshi, say that in their opinion Nanquan did not kill the cat. Even Dogen Zenji hints the same. The usual reasoning is that disappointed at the lack of response from the monks, Nanquan, drops the cat and in disgust leaves the monks with their mouths open—or in this case, shut. I side with the above masters, because that’s the version my temperament prefers. And also, because in my own work on this koan I came to see that the issue was not the killing or non-killing of the cat.

Another way to work with koans is to try to see the various components of the koan in terms of the absolute and relative.

What is the absolute in this koan?

What is the relative?

How are they related?

Is the argument over the cat absolute or relative?

Is the cat the absolute or the relative?

Is the killing the absolute or the relative?

What about the monks?

Nanquan?

Zhaozhou?

His sandals?

His sandals on his feet?

His sandals on his head?

Dogen Zenji's comments on this koan and are most pertinent. The text is in the form of a dialogue between Dogen Zenji and his *dharma* successor Ejo.

Dogen Zenji said, "If I had been Nansen [Nanquan], I would have said, 'If you cannot speak, I will kill it; even if you can speak, I will kill it. Who would fight over a cat? Who can save the cat? On behalf of the students, I would have said, 'We are not able to speak, Master. Go ahead and kill the cat!' Or, I would have said for them, 'Master, you only know about cutting it (the cat) into two with one stroke, yet you do not know about cutting it into one with one stroke.'

Ejo asked, "How do you cut it into one with one stroke?"

Dogen Zenji said, "The cat itself."

Dogen Zenji added, "If I had been Nansen, when the students could not answer, I would have released the cat saying that the students had already spoken. An ancient master said, 'When the great-function manifests itself, no fixed rules exist.'

Dogen Zenji also said, "This action of Nansen's, that is, cutting the cat, is a manifestation of the great-function of the buddha-dharma. This is a pivot-word. If it were not a pivot-word, it could not be said that mountains, rivers, and the great earth are the excellent pure and bright Mind. Or it could not be said that Mind itself is the Buddha. Upon hearing of this pivot-word, see the cat itself as nothing but the Buddha-body. Upon hearing this word, students must immediately enter enlightenment."

Dogen Zenji also said, "This action, that is, cutting the cat, is no other than Buddha's action."

Ejo said, "What shall we call it?"

Dogen Zenji said, "Call it cutting the cat."

Ejo said, "Is it a crime or not?"

Dogen Zenji said, "Yes, it is a crime."

Ejo inquired, "How are we able to be released from it?"

Dogen Zenji said, "Buddha's action and the criminal action are separate, yet they both occur in one action." (Okumura 28-30)

We see in this quote, the interweaving of relative and absolute. The cat is both the Buddhadharma and the pivot (or right) word. The killing of the cat is both the relative and absolute. How can killing the cat be both a crime and the act of the Buddha at the same time? In what way is the cat the Buddhadharma? And what is the catword? The pivot-word? The right word? Later, Zhaozhou returned to the monastery. He entered Nanquan's room. Nanquan told him what happened. Without a word, Zhaozhou took off his sandals, put them on his head, turned around and walked out of the room. As he was leaving Nanquan said, "If only you had been here, I would not have killed the cat."

In the *Blue Cliff Record*, this part of the koan is presented as a separate koan. Here, it is the second part of one koan. There has been much speculation about Zhaozhou's act.

Without a word, Zhaozhou took off his sandals, put them on his head, turned around and walked out of the room.

What was Zhaozhou's understanding of the story told to him by Nanquan? What did Nanquan understand Zhaozhou's act-response to be?

If only you had been here, I would not have killed the cat.

Remember, Nanquan asked his students to say, "the right word." In what way was Zhaozhou's act, "the right word?"

Aitken Roshi suggests that in some parts of China, placing the sandals on the head is a form of mourning. Mourning for the cat? Why did Nanquan say he would not have killed the cat because of an act of mourning? Zhaozhou's act would have **prevented** the killing of the cat. So Zhaozhou's act, in some way was, "the right word?" Of course, *double entendre* could be at play here. Zhaozhou's act could have been both, "the right word," as well as an act of mourning

Why the sandals on the head? Sandals belong on the feet.

Why the topsy-turvy?

Is topsy-turvy Zhaozhou's commentary on the situation?

What is topsy-turvy about the two groups of monks arguing over a cat?

What is topsy-turvy about their not being able to say, "the right word?"

Where is the absolute and relative in the situation?

Is there something topsy-turvy about the position of absolute and relative here?

The wielding of the sword takes us to Manjushri. Manjushri is usually the image of the *zendo* where meditation practice takes place. In one hand he holds a copy of a book containing *Prajña Paramita* sutras, that represent ultimate wisdom. In the other hand is a sword, that cuts through the darkness of ignorance, that cuts away delusion, that cuts away everything that stands in the way of wisdom—of totally placing oneself in zazen—in

Shikan-Taza. What must the monks of the two halls cut away in order to gain true wisdom and see and say the right word? What attachments and delusions were they caught up in?

What attachments and delusions are you caught up in? Pacifism was the major "attachment" I had to work with in my wrestle with this koan. The Buddha teaches that we are not only to abandon evil; we are also to abandon the good. And he advises us not to have "views." Not having any "views," we can truly see. We hold on to that which "works." That which we know to be "true." Especially if we have managed to achieve a kensho (insight-enlightenment) experience during the course of hard work on a koan. We think we have something. We've achieved something. But, it's got to go! It's a view! It works! And so it must go! Pacifism was all of these things for me. Everything I encountered—every new thought, experience, sensation, discovery, teaching—everything had to be measured and evaluated through the filter of my pacifism. Pacifism was my "view." And so, I couldn't see. I couldn't see a thing for what it was because I was seeing through the prism of Pacifism. Pacifism was my attachment and my delusion!

What's yours?

Cut it away, no matter what it is? No matter how precious it is! No matter how long you have held it close to your heart. Cut away all delusion. Cut away all ignorance. Cut away all knowledge. Become naked—stripped of everything that prevents you from seeing, and saying, "the right word."

And finally, what is "the right word?"



Nanquan came by a group of monks of the eastern and western halls who were fighting over a cat. He stepped into the middle of them, picked up the cat and said, "OK, now you monks say the right word and I'll spare the cat. If not, I'll kill it. Quick now, say it?" Nobody spoke. Nanquan killed the cat.

The evening when Zhaozhou returned to the monastery he went to Nanquan's room. Nanquan told him what happened. Without a word, Zhaozhou took off his sandals, put them on his head, turned around and walked out of the room. As he was leaving Nanquan said, "If only you had been here, I wouldn't have killed the cat."

Here is another treatment of this koan.

One of the projects I am working on is a fictional journal or diary of Zhaozhou. This is written as if he is writing. It is written from his point of view.

March 796

What kind of a place is this? What kind of monks are these baldheaded fatheads? And what kind of Zen Master is this Old Man Nanquan? Yesterday just about the most terrible thing happened. I was sent out by the cook to buy mushrooms for the kitchen. I was out all day. I got back to the monastery just in time for the evening meditation. Later I entered the interview room, after I made my bows and sat before Master Nanquan, he told me what happened that day. It seems the monks of the eastern and western halls were fighting over the monastery cat. This cat has been around for a month. It just suddenly showed up and came into the monastery one day. It was skinny. You could see her bones she was so emaciated. She was a gray cat and had long black whiskers. Everybody took to her. Everybody saw to it that she got fed and always had something to drink. And everybody competed to pet the cat. We called her Mau. Soon, Mau grew some skin, put on weight, and even some fat on her bones. Well, you can imagine, in no time at all, Mau had the run of the monastery. She bossed everybody around, including Old Man Nanquan. And everybody loved Mau. She came and went wherever she wished. She would even enter the meditation hall, pick out a nice pillow and mat, make herself comfortable, and settle down for a snooze. Many's the time I would sneak a glance at that sleeping cat in the early dawn hours of meditation with envy, watching her peacefully sleep. She had it made, that Mau.

So they were fighting over whether Mau should belong to the eastern hall or the western hall monks. Master Nanquan happened to walk along the hallways when he heard the shouts of the monks. He went over to them to see what was going on. As he approached, he heard them arguing over which group Mau belongs to. So without saying a word, he stepped right into the middle of the two groups, picked up Mau, cradled Mau in his arms, took out a knife from beneath his robes and said, "If any one of you can say the right word, I'll spare the cat. If not, I'll kill it. Now quick, say it?" Nobody spoke. So the master slit Mau's throat!

I couldn't believe my ears. That's what he told me! That's what he told me! "So I slit Mau's throat," he said.

When I heard his words, I said to myself, What the hell is this? What kind of monks are these guys? That they would fight over Mau. And seeing Mau about to be killed, why couldn't one of them have said, "Don't kill Mau. We're the fatheads! Why take it out on Mau?" Why couldn't anyone of those idiot monks have said something like that? It could have saved Mau's life. And then, to top it all, how the hell can one kill a fellow sentient being in order to make a Zen point? In order to present a Zen teaching? What kind of a teaching is this? What kind of a teacher is this? Is the Dharma, the Teaching—is the Way outside of right and wrong? Of justice and injustice? Of compassion? Isn't the Buddha Way the way of peace and compassion and kindness to all sentient beings? Do we recklessly, arrogantly, exploit other sentient beings, in this case a cat, so that we can make a Zen point, express a Zen teaching? OK. So the monks of the eastern and western hall are idiots! But they probably were all shocked by the drastic measure the Master took. They were frozen when he picked Mau up and held a knife to her throat. I'm sure they couldn't believe what they were seeing—what they were

witnessing. So they were speechless, frozen to the spot. I can understand that. And then Master Nanquan cuts Mau's throat, drops Mau at their feet, and calmly walks away. **What the hell is this?**

I was dumb and speechless. Tears welled up in my eyes and rolled down my face. Master looked at me and said, "How about you? Could you have saved the cat?" Not saying a word, I rose, took my sandals from the corner of the room, put them on my head, turned and left the room. As I was leaving, the Master called out, "Ahhh, what a pity, Dongshen, if you had been there, you would have saved the cat." With these words ringing in my ears, I walked right through the meditation hall, went outside, sat in front of the cypress tree in the front yard, and wept.

This morning, as I made my way to the dining room for breakfast, what do I see, but Mau, lapping up a saucer-full of milk in front of the kitchen door. So he hadn't killed Mau. She is alive. It was all just a story? A trap? It was all meant to press my buttons? I am dumbfounded. Why did the master do this? What is the master teaching me? I entered the kitchen and spoke to the cook. "I thought Master Nanquan killed Mau."

"What?" he said, "What are you talking about? Why should Master kill Mau?"

"He told me so himself. He said the monks of the eastern and western halls were fighting over Mau, and that he picked up the cat and threatened to kill it, if nobody could say the right word of Zen. He said nobody did so he killed Mau."

"Beats me," said the cook. "I never heard anything about it. Of course, those crazy monks are always fighting over Mau, but, as you can see there's Mau, alive and well."

I spent the rest of the day sitting with this. In the meditation hall, I caught glances of the Master, sitting up there in his high seat. His face was solid and impassive. Not a hint of what was going on. During slow walking time I again caught a glimpse of his face. No change in his expression. Stone. I tried to catch him looking at me. I expected to see him smirking. But no. There was nothing. What the hell is going on?

During the evening sit, when my turn came, I went to the interview room. I entered. As soon as I finished making my bows, Nanquan said, "Miaow!!!"

I was dumbfounded. I didn't know what to say. And I was angry. Angry at the Master's tomfoolery, and I impulsively grabbed the stick from his hands and raised it to hit him with it. He raised his arms and hands in mock horror and said, "Ahh, so now Dongshen kills the cat!"

I put the stick down. Ashamed. I realized then that I myself was not free of the emotions of anger, suspicion, mistrust, and even of killing. For indeed I wanted to strike the Master dead, so angry was I. "I think I'm beginning to understand," I said.

"What do you understand?"

"You pushed all my buttons. I have the three poisons running wild inside me. I've got to get them out of me, out of my heart, out of my gut. I'm full of judgments. Judging the monks. Judging you. Judging even dear Mau."

"And what if I had slit Mau's throat?"

"You would have slit Mau's throat."

"And was that good or bad?"

"You would have slit Mau's throat."

"Yes, you begin to understand."

I made my bows and left. Returning to my place in the meditation hall I sat down and sat with the knowledge that if there is a fathead in the monastery it is I. I realized that I had a head full of opinions of right and wrong, or what is moral and what is immoral, of what is appropriate and what is not appropriate, and of what is good and what is evil. I had opinions on just about everything imaginable. So I have to empty my self of my opinions, of my cherished principles of right and wrong, moral and immoral, appropriate and inappropriate. Get to the place of no trace. No trace. No opinions. No fault. Get to the place of *shunyata*. Emptiness. That's what Mau is all about.

I also realized that my venerable Master is a trickster. He likes to have fun. His teaching is fun. So I better learn what it is to have fun with the Dharma.

He teaches the dharma physically. So I better learn how to physically express the Dharma, and study with this tricky Zen Master.



Nanquan came by a group of monks of the eastern and western halls who were fighting over a cat. He stepped into the middle of them, picked up the cat and said, "OK, now you monks say the right word and I'll spare the cat. If not, I'll kill it. Quick now, say it?" Nobody spoke. Nanquan killed the cat.

The evening when Zhaozhou returned to the monastery he went to Nanquan's room. Nanquan told him what happened. Without a word, Zhaozhou took off his sandals, put them on his head, turned around and walked out of the room. As he was leaving Nanquan said, "If only you had been here, I wouldn't have killed the cat."

Case 15. Dongshan's "Three-Score Blows"

Kattoshu Case 196

(Kirchner)

When Dongshan Shouchu first met Yunmen, Yunmen asked, "Where did you just come from?"

Dongshan answered, "From Chadu."

"Where did you spend the training season?" Yunmen asked.

Dongshan said, "At Baoci in Hunan."

Yunmen asked, "And when did you leave there?"

"August twenty-fifth," Dongshan answered.

Yunmen said, "You're spared three-score blows of my stick. Go to the meditation hall."

After the evening lecture, Dongshan inquired privately of Yunmen, "Where was my error?"

Yunmen said, "You rice bag! Wandering about like that from Jiangxi to Hunan!"

At these words Dongshan attained a clear, deep awakening. He said, "Some day I'll go where there's no one around and build

myself a hut; I'll store no rice and plant no vegetables but will receive worthy friends coming and going from all directions. Pulling out their pegs and yanking out their wedges, snatching away their grubby hats and ripping off their smelly robes, I'll make them clean and free, I'll make them people with nothing to do."

Yunmen said, "You're no larger than a coconut, yet how big your mouth is!" Dongshan then departed.

From *Zen's Chinese Heritage*. The Masters and their Teachings. Translated by Andy Ferguson.

Upon their first meeting, Yunmen asked Dongshan Shouchu, "Where did you come from?"

Shouchu replied, "From Chadu."

Yunmen said, "Where did you spend the summer?"

Shouchu said, "At Baoci Temple in Hunan."

Yunmen then asked, "When did you leave there?"

Shouchu said, "The twenty-fifth day of the eighth month."

Yunmen said, "I spare you three blows with the staff."

The next day Shouchu inquired to Yunmen about the previous day's conversation.

"Yesterday the master said he would spare me three blows of the staff. I don't know what mistake I committed."

Yunmen said, "Rice bag!"⁵ Will you go on like this throughout Jianzhi and Hunan?"⁶

At these words, Shouchu experienced great enlightenment.

Shouchu then said, "From this time forward, I forsake any abode; I'll store not a grain of rice, nor plant even a stalk of vegetable. Receiving what comes from the ten directions, I'll use it to pull out nails and draw out wedges.⁷ Taking off the greasy hat and smelly shirt, I'll spread the teaching freely. Is it not joyous to be a monk unconcerned with the world's affairs!"

Yunmen said, "Your body's as big as a palm tree, your mouth is wide like a tiger's"

Shouchu then bowed.

⁵ The term "rice bag" alludes to a monk who doesn't seriously pursue practice, but merely consumes the monastery's rice each day. A similar term of derision is "clothes hanger."

⁶ Jiangxi and Hunan are provinces in south central China where a great number of Zen temples existed.

⁷ To "pull out nails and draw out wedges" means to liberate beings.

Reflections

There are two Dongshan's in the Wumenkuan. The first one is Dongshan Liangjie. He is one of the founder's of the Soto sect, and the one who wrote the "Song of the Jewel Mirror Awareness" which is in our sutra books. He also is the one who developed the "Teaching of the Five Ranks," which greatly impressed Zen Master Hakuin Zenji. His students worked on the Five Ranks upon completion of koan study. We follow the same practice.

The Dongshan of this koan lived 100 years later. He is Dongshan Shouchu. After the event cited in this koan he went on to become a Zen master and was famous for several terse responses in the koan literature. Here are some examples:

A monk asked, "What is it when one takes the distant journey?"

Shouchu said, "If the weather is clear you can't go. Wait until the rain soaks your head."

A monk asked, "What did all the ancient holy ones do?"

Shouchu said, "Enter the mud. Enter the water."

A monk asked, "What is Shouchu's sword?"

Shouchu said, "Why?"

The person said, "This student wants to know.":

Shouchu said, "Wrong!"

And probably, his most famous koan

A monk asked, "What is Buddha?"

Shouchu said, "Three pounds of hemp."

Yunmen is a Rinzai master who lived around eighty years after Lin-chi. He appears in many koans in both the *Mumonkan* and the *Hekiganroku*—the *Blue Cliff Record*. Probably his most famous koan was when he was asked by a monk, "What is the Buddha?" and he replied, "A dried shit-stick!" Which is a flat stick used to wipe oneself after defecating.

What strikes me about this fifteenth koan of the *Wumenkuan* is the highly developed use of structure and metaphor.

There are six parts to the koan.

Part 1

The three questions of the Dongshan.

The three answers of Yunmen.

The sixty blows.

Part 2

What I call the "Dark Night of Dongshan's Soul," which he spent intensely focusing on what his fault was when Yunmen humiliated him by "sparing" him sixty blows.

Part 3

The next morning.
Dongshan 's question.
Yunmen's answer.

Part 4

Dongshan's awakening.

There are two other parts to the koan, which I feel are a sort of coda to the koan, so I won't deal with them. They are,

Part 5

Dongshan's resolve upon awakening.

Part 6

Yunmen's "coconut" response to Dongshan's resolve.

Then, there are many metaphors in the koan.

Using the Shibayama Roshi-Kudo translation. I will read the koan, line by line, with all of the above in mind

When Tozan came to have an interview with Unmon,
Unmon asked "Where have you been recently?"

The first question. As you know, it is well known that zen master's usually speak in terms of the absolute. So their words are metaphors. All commentators to this koan agree that Yunmen is inquiring about the state of Dongshan's (Tozan) understanding. He is probing, to ascertain, where Dongshan is in his zen practice.

"At Sado, Master," Tozan replied.

And Dongshan completely misses the point. Instead of replying to the metaphor in the question, he replies to the words. Instead of joining Yunmen, leaping to the absolute, he slips into the relative. Strike one for Dongshan.

"Where did you stay during the last ge-period?"

And so Yunmen throws another pitch. This time he gives Dongshan a great clue. The ball is right in the middle of the plate. He asks Dongshan about the *ge* Sesshin or the annual three-month Ango. As you all know, Sesshin is the most powerful time of zazen. Break-throughs, or kenshos or satori experiences, when they happen, usually do so during such retreats. So Yunmen is again probing. What did you experience during that retreat? Instead of hitting Yunmen's fast ball in the absolute, Dongshan swings and misses—stuck in the relative and replies,

"At Hozu of Konan."

I think Yunmen must have been rolling his eyes by now. This guy is so dim! What else can I do? What else can I say? Do I need to put the ball on a tee for him to hit it? Did absolutely nothing happen during that retreat for him? Does he really have nothing to say about it? O well, and he once again asks,

"When did you leave there?"

And old mudsticker replies,

"On the twenty-fifth of August."

And, exasperated, Yunmen exclaims.

"I give you sixty blows with my stick?"

Some translations read, "I spare you sixty blows." Meaning Dongshan is not even worth the bother of sullyng the kyosaku with his back. And Dongshan is stunned. He goes to his room. In some translations the above colloquy took place in the assembly hall with many students in there. And so the final rebuke, being public, truly stung Dongshan. And he took this humiliation with him to his room. Many commentators of the koan, following Wumen's commentary, suggest Dongshan now goes through his "Dark Night of the Soul." Over and over again he asks himself, "What did I do wrong? What did I say wrong? He tossed and turned on his cot, unable to sleep. He spent the entire night in anguish. In doubt. In humiliation. His sharp pointed focus throughout the night was the question, the doubt:

Where did I go wrong? What was my fault?

How could I ever show my face again?

He wanted to crawl into a hole and disappear. Instead, he crawls out of his hole, climbs his hill of humiliation and bat in hand, stands again at the plate, and says,

"Yesterday you gave me sixty blows with your stick.
I do not know where my fault was."

Yunmen sees by Dongshan's bloodshot eyes that he's ripe. All that's needed is one more pitch, right between those eyes. He shouts,

*"You rice-bag! Have you been prowling about like that from
Kosei to Konan?"*

You ricebag. You're nothing but a zen-groupie, fluttering about one zen place after another. Never going deep anywhere. Wasting your time and the time of the teachers you've bothered with your mediocrity!

Home run!

At this Tozan was enlightened.



When Dongshan Shouchu first met Yunmen, Yunmen asked, "Where did you just come from?"

Dongshan answered, "From Chadu."

"Where did you spend the training season?" Yunmen asked.

Dongshan said, "At Baoci in Hunan."

Yunmen asked, "And when did you leave there?"

"August twenty-fifth," Dongshan answered.

Yunmen said, "You're spared three-score blows of my stick. Go to the meditation hall."

After the evening lecture, Dongshan inquired privately of Yunmen, "Where was my error?"

Yunmen said, "You rice bag! Wandering about like that from Jiangxi to Hunan!"

At these words Dongshan attained a clear, deep awakening.

Case 16. The Sound of the Bell and the Seven-Panel Robe

Yunmen said, "The world is vast and wide like this.
Why do we put on our seven-panel robe at the sound of the
bell?"

Reflections

There are two sentences in this koan. One is tempted to see one sentence in the realm of the absolute, and the other in the realm of the relative. The question is which is which. The first is a declarative sentence, the second is an interrogative, beginning with the mysterious and impenetrable word "Why?" We've run into Why koans before, the most famous one is one of the "Simple Koans," "Why is there no cat in Da Vinci's painting of the Last Supper?" Many of you have stumbled over this cat. And at the risk of once again giving away a koan I'll tell you that one of the teachings of Zen is to remove all Whys from its vocabulary. So if we do so we get "There is no cat in Da Vinci's painting of the Last Supper." And, "We put on our kesa at the sound of the bell." No whys ands ifs or buts.

We pick up the phone when it rings, and say, "Hello."

The sun rises in the East and sets in the West.

The moon is full tonight.

Placing our hand over the flame of a candle, it burns.

And so forth. You can see that if you place a Why at the beginning of each of these statements with a question mark at the end you can easily segue to deep metaphysical waters.

And yet something in the makeup of our DNA seems to impel us to ask the Why questions. We're not satisfied with just this or just that. We want to know why just this? Why just that?

Zen is about letting go. Letting go of our ego's, our opinions, our wants, our likes, our dislikes, of whatever it is we grasp, we hold on to—and letting go of our "Whys."

And why let go?

Shakyamuni once picked up a few leaves from the ground and held them in his hand. He told his disciples, You see these leaves. There are just a few of them. These are the teachings I have given you. Now look around you at the forest. Look at the thousands of trees in the forest. Look at the millions of leaves on the trees. Those are the teachings I have not given you. So like Hamlet's statement to Horatio,

There are more things in Heaven and Earth
than are to be found in your Philosophy.

There's no way we can learn all of the teachings. Even the magnificent encyclopedic mind of Da Vinci realized that what he knew was only a scratch on the vastness of the universe. Even if we limit our sights and restrict ourselves just to Buddhism. Take the literature of Buddhism. It is said that if one were to read for twenty-four hours a day—every day of a life which

reached the age of one hundred, one would not be able to read all of the books of Buddhism. There's no way we can begin to grasp Yunmen's vastness. Aitken Roshi has a beautiful passage in his commentary.

When Yunmen says "See how vast and wide the world is!" he is not referring, say, to the world bounded by the Ko'olau Mountains and the horizon of the Pacific Ocean, but to countless universes in endless dimensions, seen and unseen. He means your consciousness of countless universes, known and unknown. When you truly appreciate Buddha nature pervading the whole universe, then it has pervaded you too. You are one with the majesty of the universe. Suspicions are gone, grudges are gone, self-punishment is gone—concern about schedule, doubts about motives, all have disappeared in the original garden where the morning stars sing together and all the sons and daughters of God shout for joy. That is the world so vast and wide—at least for a moment!

Dogen Zenji in *Eihei Koroku*, 1.48 writes,

This mountain monk has not passed through many monasteries. Somehow I just met my late teacher Tiantong [Rujing]. However, I was not deceived by Tiantong. But Tiantong was deceived by this mountain monk.

Recently, I returned to my homeland with empty hands.

And so this mountain monk has no Buddha dharma.

Trusting fate, I just spend my time.

Morning after morning the sun rises in the east.

Evening after evening, the moon sets in the west.

The clouds disperse and mountain valleys are still.

After the rain, the mountains in the four directions are close.

Every four years is a leap year.

A rooster crows toward sunrise.

And so we have the world with its unimaginable vastness and beauty and we have the simple act.

You respond to a bell
Without actually hearing the bell
You put on your kesa
And you sit.

You respond, without thought,
To a call of your name,
With Yes,
In the way Ananda responded to Mahakashyapa.

You pick up the telephone as it is ringing,
without hearing the ring.
Sometimes you pick up the phone
before the ringing begins.

You hike to the top of a hill in the early evening and smack—

in the face of a crescent moon with its sister star.

Aaahhh

Sweeping the floor

Cutting firewood

Mowing the lawn

Brushing the teeth

How vast the universe

There are more things in Heaven and Earth



Yunmen said, "The world is vast and wide like this.
Why do we put on our kesas at the sound of the bell?"

Case 17. The National Master's Three Calls

(Ferguson 51-52)

One day the National Teacher called to his attendant. The attendant responded. The National Teacher called three times, and three times the attendant responded.

Then the National Teacher said, "Have I been ungrateful to you, or have you been ungrateful to me?"

([Later], a monk asked Zen master Xuansha Shibeij, "What was the meaning of the National Teacher's three calls to his attendant?"

Xuansha said, "The attendant understood."

Zen master Yunju Ci said, "Do you say that the attendant understood or not? If you say he understood, [remember that] the National Teacher said, 'You've been ungrateful to me.' If you say he didn't understand, [remember that] Xuansha said, 'Only the attendant understood.' How would you explain this?"

Zen master Xuanjue queried a monk about this saying, "What was it that the attendant understood?"

The monk said, "If he didn't understand, how could he have answered in that manner?"

Xuanjue said, "You understand a little bit." He also said, "If you can explain this then you'll see Xuansha."

A monk asked Fayan, "What was the meaning of the National Teacher's three calls to his attendant?"

Fayan said, "Get out of here! Come again some other time."

Yunju Ci said, "If Fayan spoke that way did he understand the National Teacher's meaning or not?"

A monk asked Zhaozhou, "What was the meaning of the National Teacher's three calls."

Zhaozhou said, "It's as if someone secretly writes a word, and though the word isn't known, the writing style is obvious."

Reflections

Nanyang Huizhang was a Dharma successor of Huineng. He lived into his 90s. After Huineng died, he retired to live in the mountains in a small temple and had only one student. But he nevertheless somehow became famous and the emperor made him go to Ch'angan, the capital. Eventually, he became the teacher of the emperor and other notables of the capital and was given the title of National Teacher. We've met him in other koans, the most famous of which was the one where a magician claimed to read the mind of others and Nanyang refuted him.

Aitken Roshi, interestingly tells us that it was Nanyang's tomb Hsiangyen was taking care of when the "tock" of a falling pebble opened his mind.

There are three major parts to this koan. The first part consists of the three calls of Nanyang to his attendant. The second part consists of the attendant's response to the calls. And the third is Nanyang's final statement.

Aitken Roshi has a very helpful paraphrase of the koan.

"Oshin!" (the attendant's name.)

Oshin comes up to the teacher's quarters from the monastery below, bows, and said, "Yes, Master?"

"Oh, there you are. Thank you for coming, but I don't need you right now." Then a little later,

"Oshin!"

Oshin drops what he is doing and comes again, "Yes, Master?"

"Oh, thank you. You may return now." Oshin bows and returns below, and again there is the call,

"Oshin!"

Again he come up and responds, "Yes, Master?"

Aitken Roshi follows-up with a very interesting footnote.

This part of the case seem quite important on first reading, and indeed it can be related to experiments conducted by Japanese psychologists back in the 1960s. They lined up veteran monks on one side of the room and a control group of medical students with no meditation experience on the other, and hooked them all up to brain-wave machines. They told the monks to do zazen and the students just to sit there with their eyes closed. Alpha waves appeared on the charts on both sides. When the experimenters set up a clicking sound every fifteen seconds or so, interruptions to the alpha waves appeared on all the charts. But whereas the control group showed a pattern of habituation—a big jump the first time, followed by successively smaller responses, and finally no response at all—the monks showed the same alpha breaks at each click. This outcome was very interesting for the psychologists. Though the clicks were the same in quality, each sound was fresh and new for the monks, whereas those in the control group became inured and didn't notice them after awhile.

So this takes care of parts one and two. Like the experimenters, Nanyang was testing his attendant Oshin's awareness. Testing to see if Oshin truly was present at that very moment. Each call of his name was a new call—was the first call. Nanyang then gave Oshin a backhanded compliment with his statement.

“Have I been ungrateful to you, or have you been ungrateful to me?”

If there is a key word in this koan it certainly is found in this statement.

In Andy Ferguson's translation that word is "ungrateful." I looked at other translations. The word comes out as, "done you wrong," "disappointing," "betraying," "transgressed," "apologize," "let you down," "ungrateful," "standing close with my back to you." I especially like the first one, "done you wrong," because it reminds me of Mae West. And then I had fun putting her in Nanyang's place, and myself in Oshin's place, and redid the koan. I found I was "present" each time Mae West called.

But now back to the key word.

Thomas Kirchner has a helpful footnote. He says that the Chinese ideogram for the key word has many nuances, including "betray," "go against," "opposite," "transgress," "against," etc.

I think the first thing one can try with any koan is to turn the words around. Instead of the negative, turn it to the positive.

And so the statement now becomes,

"Have I been grateful to you,
or have you been grateful to me?"

Cleary has an interesting paraphrase of the National Teacher's statement,

"I thought I hadn't taught you anything;
now I see you haven't learned anything."

Finally there is Zhaozhou's puzzling comment.

Zhaozhou said, "It's as if someone secretly writes a word,
and though the word isn't known, the writing style is obvious."

Shibayama Roshi has another translation.

It is like a person writing characters
in darkness.
Characters may not be formed,
Yet the traces have already been left.

What does this mean? Is the person writing characters on a piece of paper in darkness? Or, are the characters being written in the air in darkness? And what is the "It" which precedes Zhaozhou's comment? Is "It" the unnamable? The Unborn? The Buddhamind? The Buddhadharma? The Inner Light? The Christ within?

Zhaozhou raises the ante the ultimate sphere. We now have Nanyang inquiring about the Unborn rather than about readiness. Each call is a call to the Unborn. And a call of the Unborn. And by calling one transgresses, betrays, goes against, etc.

As soon as you say the word "God," you transgress against God. You betray God. For who can know God? As soon as you speak of the Unborn you transgress against the Unborn. You betray the Unborn. For who can know the Unborn? Who knows the Buddhadharma?

Vimalakirti knew with his thunderous silence.

So maybe turning the key word to its opposite is a mistake?



One day the National Teacher called to his attendant. The attendant responded. The National Teacher called three times, and three times the attendant responded.

Then the National Teacher said, "Have I been ungrateful to you, or have you been ungrateful to me?"

Case 18. Dongshan's Three Pounds of Hemp

(Kirchner)

The Case

A monk asked Dongshan Shouchu, "What is Buddha?"

Dongshan answered, "Three pounds of hemp."

Mumon's Commentary

Old Dongshan realized a bit of clam Zen. Slightly opening the two halves of the shell, he exposed his liver and intestines. This may be so, but tell me where do you see Dongshan?

The Verse

Three pounds of hemp juts forth!
Words are intimate and the mind is even more intimate.
Who speaks about right and wrong
Is a person of right and wrong.

Reflections

A very brief koan. Utmost simplicity. Few words are needed. The mirror metaphor works. How does a mirror work? It reflects what is placed before it. Without comment. Without editorializing. If the face is dirty, the mirror reflects a dirty face. If the face is clean, the mirror reflects a clean face. Fat or skinny. The mirror reflects fat or skinny. There is no judgment. O, you

ought to lose weight. O, you're too skinny, have something to eat. O, you're a murderer, I won't show your face. O, you're a Republican, says the Democratic mirror, I won't reflect your image. O, you're a Democrat, says the Republican mirror, I won't reflect your image. The mirror is the mirror mind of Shakyamuni Buddha who declared,

Everybody, all sentient beings, right now, at this very moment, and at every moment, is enlightened.

No ands, ifs, or buts. Everyone and everything. Just as is.

Does this mean there's no room for improvement? Does this mean we need not clean up the pollution and dirt we've smeared into the sky the oceans the forests the trails our homes our lives? Yes, it means just that, as we reach down on the trail and pick up a beer can, to recycle later when we finish our walk. Reaching down is enlightenment. Putting the beer can in the recycle bin of cans is enlightenment.

Dongshan was measuring out flax preparatory to making a robe, and a monk asked him, "What is the Buddha?"

"Three pounds," he said at that point, then a moment later, "Four pounds," then, Five, six, seven, and so forth. Each moment Buddha. Each Buddha moment. Moment by moment. Buddha by Buddha.

Wumen says it.

Old Dongshan realized a bit of clam Zen. Slightly opening the two halves of the shell, he exposed his liver and intestines. This may be so, but tell me where do you see Dongshan?

Three pounds of hemp juts forth!
Words are intimate and the mind
 is even more intimate.
Who speaks about right and wrong
Is a person of right and wrong.

A clam opens and all is revealed.

That's Dongshan's three pounds of hemp.

Words are intimate but the mind is more intimate.

But no words are more intimate yet.

And there is no mind.

Speaking right and wrong
0-makes a person of right and wrong.

Entangles one into vines of opinions and views.

A vine is not a mirror.

A mirror has no views.

Drop right and wrong and then you can see.

Drop right and wrong and there is no need for mind.

No need for Buddha.

Just three pounds of hemp.

Just three pounds.

Just three.

Just.

A monk asked Dongshan Shouchu, "What is Buddha?"

Dongshan answered, "Three pounds of hemp."

Case 19. Ordinary Mind is the Way

(Kirchner Case 111)

Zhaozhou Congshen asked Nanquan Puyuan, "What is the Way?"

Nanquan said, "Ordinary mind is the Way."

Zhaozhou asked, "Can we deliberately strive toward this?"

Nanquan said, "To strive toward it is to turn away."

Zhaozhou said, "Without striving, how can we know the Way?"

Nanquan said, "The Way has nothing to do with knowing or not-knowing. 'Knowing' is delusion, 'not-knowing' is apathy.⁸ If you really attain the Way-without-doubt, it is vast and boundless like open space. How can you speak of affirmation and negation?"

At these words Zhaozhou was deeply enlightened.

Reflections

Some time ago I wrote a fictional biography of Zhaozhou. Here is the section of the biography which deals with this koan.

⁸ "Apathy" translates the Chinese ideograph which indicates a lack of content or function. Other possible translations include "oblivion" and "blankness."



To say that I began my Ch'an practice is not really saying much. Because they don't teach you anything here. They just tell you here's your place. Here's where you sit, eat, and sleep. Here's where you piss and shit. And that's it. They don't tell you what to do, or how to do it. They don't tell you what it's all about. I asked the monk who brought me to my place in the hall what I should do? He gruffly said, "Watch the others." And that's it. And so I do just that. When the monks sit to meditate, I sit to meditate. I watch how they cross and fold their legs. And I cross and fold my legs. I watch how they place their hands on their laps. And I place my hands on my lap. When the monks rise from their seats to do slow walking, which they do as if in a sleepwalking trance, I rise and do the same. When they chant sutras, I chant sutras. I watch how they hold their books, and hold mine the same way. And so I learn by watching. But I don't know what I'm doing or why.

Eventually, I managed to speak with one of the younger monks who was willing to talk to me and he told me about counting the breath when you meditate. You count until you get to ten and then you go back to one. And they say to stop all thinking. And so that's what I try to do. And that's my Ch'an practice.

The meditation hall is dark, cold, and windy. The wind blows through the cracks in the wall. I hear they keep it this way to keep the monks awake. This way, they say, we focus on how cold it is and avoid stray and random thinking. I have all I could do just to try to keep myself warm. Never mind trying counting of my breaths or settling my mind. Who the hell cares about the breath or the mind when it's freezing? It's so cold that I could see my breath. I could see the exhaled breath of all the monks sitting in the hall. Then there's that crazy monk with his stick who goes around whacking people all over the place. Ouch, that whack on a cold back stings like icy fire. Anything to keep warm I guess is the trick around here.

They say there's a can with hot coals in the Master's private interview room. I've got to get there. Maybe if I can I'll get warm. It was only after two years that I was first allowed to see the Master face-to-face. Then it happened again. The Master's attendant pointed at me, so I rose from my pillow and followed him. Outside the Master's room the attendant told me how to enter the room and how to bow. He then told me I should ask the Master a question.

So I entered the interview room. Yes, it's true, there's the can with the hot coals. I did my bows but I didn't know what to do or say next.

"Well," said the Master, "get on with it? What do you want?"

I didn't know what to say. I was so cold. "I want to ask you about the Way?" I blurted out.

"What about the Way?"

I didn't know what to say—how to prolong this interview and not get thrown out before I could get warm.

"I don't know. What is it? What are we talking about when we say the Way? Everybody here says this is the Way, that is the Way. And I don't know what they're talking about? What is the Way?"

Master Nanquan must have seen that my question came from nowhere, so he said, "It's easy. It's whatever you're doing. That's the Way."

I couldn't believe my ears. Is this guy kidding? I just about shouted, "That's the Way? That's it?"

"Yes, that's it?"

"No more?"

"No more."

"I don't get it," I said. "If it's what I'm doing—because, to tell you the truth—all I'm doing is trying to put you on and get warm. So how is that the way?" Now I had him.

The Master replied, "Whatever you're doing, even if you don't know what you're doing, even if what you're doing is putting me on, that's the way."

"Well what about lying and cheating?"

"Nothing to do with the way."

"What about not lying and not cheating? Telling the truth!"

"Nothing to do with the way."

What crap! What's he talking about? "I don't get it, I said."

"You can't get it," he said, "as soon as you try to get it you lose it."

"But if I don't get it, how will I ever know it?"

"Know it!" he said, "The Way has nothing to do with knowing it or not-knowing it. How can anybody really know anything? What do we know? How do we know? Through our senses. Through our eyes, our ears, our nose, our fingers. And our senses lie. We never really see the things we think we see. We never hear the things we think we hear. Ask ten people who see and hear the same thing and you get ten different accounts of what they saw or heard. Also with non-knowing. That's just a blank."

"So then, what the hell is the Way!" I shouted.

I can't really describe what happened when the Master next spoke. There was, I can only call it, a sweetness in his words that I have never before experienced. He spoke quietly. His words seemed like a caress. He said, "I can't tell you exactly. It's like space, clear and empty and full. It's like the light of the moon. Clear and bright. That's what truth is really about. It's something you can't force in any way. And it's right here. (And he pointed with his stick.) In your heart. In the questions you ask."

Hearing these words, I broke out into a sweat. Pointing to my heart I said, "Here?"

The Master said, "Yes."

I couldn't believe it. Does he mean to say I have it? I am the Way? The Truth? The Light? It's in my heart? In my breathing? In my questions? In my walking? In my looking at the moon? In my sleeping? In my eating? In my pissing and shitting even!?

I said again, pointing to my heart, "Here?"

He said, "Yes."

I bowed deeply to my Master, Nanquan. I was warm now. But not warm from the hot coals of the can. The heat came from inside me. From deep inside. I rose from the pillow, made another full bow and left the room. I didn't go back to the hall. Instead I went outside. I looked up into the sky. The moon was

full. And my mind suddenly flooded with the brilliance of the full moon. I could no longer see or hear or speak or think. I dropped down on my knees, covered my flooded eyes, and knew what it meant to be ruined and homeless.

I knew that whatever the Way is, that is the way I have to go. So the next time I was able to see the Master I asked to receive the precepts. Nanquan told me I had to go the Precept-Giving Altar at Shaolin Monastery on Sung Mountain. That's where Bodhidharma used to live. Where he sat in front of the walls of the monastery for nine years. They say his legs shrunk up on him. What a Way. And yet, I know it's for me. Even if it means my legs shrink. So I went to Shaolin Monastery and received the precepts. Then I returned to Nanquan's monastery.



Zhaozhou Congshen asked Nanquan Puyuan, "What is the Way?"

Nanquan said, "Ordinary mind is the Way."

Zhaozhou asked, "Can we deliberately strive toward this?"

Nanquan said, "To strive toward it is to turn away."

Zhaozhou said, "Without striving, how can we know the Way?"

Nanquan said, "The Way has nothing to do with knowing or not-knowing. 'Knowing' is delusion, 'not-knowing' is apathy.⁹ If you really attain the Way-without-doubt, it is vast and boundless like open space. How can you speak of affirmation and negation?"

At these words Zhaozhou was deeply enlightened.

⁹ "Apathy" translates the Chinese ideograph which indicates a lack of content or function. Other possible translations include "oblivion" and "blankness."

Case 20. A Man of Great Strength

The Case

Master Shogen said, "Why is it that a man of great strength does not lift up his legs? He also said, "It is not with the tongue that we speak."

Mumon's Commentary

"It should be said that Shogen poured out all that he had in his intestines and belly. But there is nobody who can recognize this. Even if there were someone who realized this immediately; if he came to me, he would be given a bitter blow. Why? Take a look! If you want to know whether it is pure gold or not, you must look at it in the midst of fire."

The Verse

Raising a leg, I upturn the Scented Ocean,
Lowering my head, I look down on the four dhyana heavens;
There is no place to put this whole body,
Please finish this poem in your own words.

Case 150 Kattoshu

Songyuan's Three Turning Phrases

Songyuan Chongyue, in three turning-phrases, asked:

How is it that those of great strength
don't lift their legs?¹⁰

How is it that, when talking,
they don't speak with their tongues?¹¹

How is it that the clear-eyed
can't sever the red thread under their feet?¹²

Yamada Roshi's translation of the Three Turning Words are:

Why is it that a man of great strength
does not lift up his leg?

It is not with the tongue that we speak.

Why is it that the crimson lines of a clearly
enlightened person never cease to flow?

¹⁰ Yamada Roshi. Why, when helping others, don't enlightened people move?

¹¹ Yamada Roshi: Why, when imparting the teachings, don't enlightened people speak?

¹² "the red thread underfoot" refers to the worldly passions and deluded thoughts, or to karmic acts.

Reflections

Shogen dates: 1132-1202. He was a contemporary of Wumen. The present Rinzai school traces its descent through him.

Shogen tested all of his disciples with his three turning words. Not one passed, so he put his dharma robe away and died without a successor. Thirty or forty years later the Emperor ordered a zen master by the name of Sekki to go to Shogen's monastery. He was considered worthy so he removed the dharma robe out of its case and succeeded Shogen

Both Harada and Yasutani roshi took "great strength" to mean great enlightenment.

A deeply enlightened person is not conscious of self when doing something. You all know the phrases: when eating—eat; when walking—walk; when pissing—piss; etc. Like when a sprinter runs he or she forgets the legs. When an invalid walks, he or she remembers the legs.

Shibayama Roshi tells of the centipede who was asked how it could coordinate all the numerous feet with such precision. Then the centipede was no longer able to move and died.

Like a baseball player in a batting slump. What causes a slump? Yogi Berra declares that its moving from not thinking about hitting to thinking about hitting. He says it's all half-mental.

The same is true in Koan Study. Being stuck in a koan is like being in a batting slump. Yogi Berra said it. It's all half-mental. Stop thinking. It was

pathetic to see A-Rod, reputed to be the best player and hitter in baseball today, and yet just about all of 2006 he was in a slump.

How do you get out of a batting slump? How do you get unstuck from a koan?

The one who has the answer to these questions would become a millionaire!

So with some you when you're stuck with a koan. But you're not alone now, or in the past. Wuman was with Mu for eight years. I was with the essence of this very moment for eight months.

Don't despair. Hang in! You're not stupid. You're not dim. Hang in! The slump will pass. You'll get a hit., then hit with follow hit! Then you'll be in your stride.

Shibayama Roshi quotes Dogen Zenji.

Master Dogen Zenji said, "Extinction of thinking and doing is nothing other than every from of doing and acting. Abandonment of words and letters is nothing other than every word and phrase." For Master Dogen Zenji, extinction of thinking and doing did not mean to be like wood or a stone by annihilating his thinking and doing, but for him it was to be Absolute subjectivity and to be free in all doings and actings. For Dogen Zenji, abandonment of words and letters was not to be dead silent without moving his tongue; it was, for him, to be the free master of speech and silence. Yet he leaves no trace of any

doing or speaking. This is certainly the wonderful life of the man of great strength.



Master Shogen said, "Why is it that a man of great strength does not lift up his legs? He also said, "It is not with the tongue that we speak."

Case 21. Yunmen's Dry Piece of Shit

(Kirchner Case 21)

A monk asked Yunmen Wenyan, "What is buddha?"

Yunmen answered, "A dry piece of shit."

Reflections

Yunmen Wenyan (864-949)

According to Thomas Kirchner, Yunmen was the last of the Tang period Zen giants. As a young monk he wanted to study with Muzhou Daoming. He knocked on Muzhou's door for three days and finally the door opened. Muzhou grabbed Yunmen and shouted, "Speak! Speak!" He was frozen. Muzhou then shouted, "Good for nothing!" and slammed the door on Yunmen's leg, breaking it. At that moment he was enlightened, but he remained a cripple for the rest of his life.

Later when Yunmen became a teacher he was known for his one word answers and for asking and answering his own questions.

Here are some examples.

Yunmen took the high seat and said, "What is it 'to hear sound and realize the Way; to see form and enlighten the mind'?"

Raising his hand, Yunmen said, "Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva brings money and buys a sesame rice-cake." Lowering his hand, he said, "Actually, it's a dumpling." (Kattoshu Case 96)

One day Yunmen asked, "In the Zen school, how do we promote the teachings?"

In place of the assembly he answered, "Mooooo."
(Kirchner Case 160)

Yunmen addressed the assembly, saying, "Split in two, break it in three. Where then is my needlebox? Where then are my nostrils? Pick them up one by one and bring them here to me."

On behalf of the audience he said, "Above, between, below." (Kirchner Case 236)

Here are some of his one word answers, usually they are called one-word barriers.

A monk asked, "What is Zen?"
Yunmen said, "Yes."

The monk said, "What is Dao?"
Yunmen said, "Attain."

A monk asked, "If one's parents won't allow it then one can't leave home. How can one leave home?"
Yunmen said, "Shallow."

The monk said, "I don't understand."
Yunmen said, "Deep." (Ferguson 262)

A monk asked Yunmen, "What is talk transcending the buddhas and patriarchs?"

Yunmen said, "Sesame cake."
(*Book of Serenity*, Case 78)

What is the true Dharma eye?
"Universal."

What is the sword of Yunmen?
"Ancestral."

What is the straight path of Yunmen?
"Intimate!" (Aitken Roshi 138)

Some of you may remember that we've already met Yunmen in two former koans In case fifteen he spares Dongshan sixty blows, and in case sixteen he asks why we put on our kesas at the sound of the bell.



A monk asked Yunmen Wenyan, "What is buddha?"
Yunmen answered, "A dry piece of shit."

There are two other places where one can find a echoes of this koan. I wouldn't be surprised if Yunmen knew these references. The first is in the saying of Chuangtzu.

Master Tungkuo asked Chuangtzu, "This thing called the Way—
where does it exist?"

Chuangtzu said, "There's no place it doesn't exist."

"Come," said Master Tungkuo, "you must be more specific!"

"It is in the ant."

"As low a thing as that?"

"It is in the panic grass."

"But that's lower still!"

"It is in the tiles and shards."

"How can it be so low?"

"It is in the piss and shit!"

Master Tungkuo made no reply.

(Watson 240 and 241)

Later, it appears in the teachings of Linchi.

From the High Seat, the master said: "Upon the lump of red
flesh three is a True Man of no Status who ceaselessly goes out

and in through the gates of your face. Those who have not yet recognized him, look out, look out!”

A monk came forward and asked: “What is the True Man of no Status?” The master descended from the meditation cushion, grabbed the monk and said: “Speak, speak!” The monk hesitated. The master released him and said: “What a shitstick this True Man of no Status is!” Then he withdrew to his quarters.” (Schloegl 15, number 3).

And so we have this simple koan and the unconscious memories Yunmen may have called upon that inspired his answer to the monk.

Shibayama Roshi thinks that the monk is being precious about his zen practice and sees it in grandiose terms. He wants to move forward to complete enlightenment. He wants to know it and to get it!

And another memory comes. The interview between Emperor Wu and Bodhidharma who had just come to China.

The Emperor, impressed with himself and his good deeds, tells Bodhidharma that he has funded the building of many Buddhist Temples, has funded the translation of many Buddhist Sacred Sutras, and so forth, and he asks Bodhidharma what merit he will get as a result of his good works.. Bodhidharma gruffly responds, “No merit at all!”

“What,” says the Emperor. “Then, how do you understand the holy Buddhist truths?”

“Nothing to it—vast emptiness. And nothing holy about it at all.”

And so we have a similar situation in this koan. Another Emperor Wu, another man of no rank, another Tungkuo.

Now with all of the memories I’ve given to you, tell me how will you present this simple wonderful koan?



A monk asked Yunmen Wenyan, “What is buddha?”
Yunmen answered, “A dry piece of shit.”

Case 22. Kashyapa's Flagpole

Kirchner Case 144 Mahakashapa's Temple Flagpole

Ananda asked Mahakashyapa, "Aside from passing on the brocade robe, was there any dharma the Buddha transmitted to you?"

Mahakashyapa called, "Ananda!"

"Yes," replied Ananda.

Mahakashyapa said, "Take down the flagpole at the temple gate!"

At these words Ananda attained a great realization.

Reflections

This koan also is the third case of the *Dentoroku*, Transmission of the Lamp. I have written about this case in my book *Zen Light*, a book of commentaries on the cases.

Before turning to the koan let me tell you something about Kashyapa.

Kashyapa was born into a wealthy brahmin family. By the age of eight he had already mastered the rules of Brahminic religious practice and was actively engaged in the pursuit of the arts of music, dance, and mathematics. He grew up to be strong, wealthy, and pampered, and like

Shakyamuni, became bored with his luxurious life. So he thought he would try a religious life. But his parents were opposed. Since he had reached the age of twenty, they tried to get him to marry. Kashyapa resisted. His parents continued to pressure him. Kashyapa then came up with a great idea. He hired a sculptor to make a lifesized figure of a beautiful woman, perfect in every way. He presented the sculpture to his parents and told them that if they could find someone as beautiful he would marry her.

His parents had the country searched. Eventually they found someone who not only matched but exceeded the beauty of the sculpture. Her name was Bhadda Kapilani. She also was the daughter of a wealthy brahmin family. Bhadda wasn't interested in getting married. She also wanted to pursue the religious life. But she had to obey her parents and eventually was forced to marry Kashyapa.

Of course, Kashyapa and Bhadda very soon discovered that they were one mind so they decided to live a religious life within the confines of their marriage and agreed to a life of celibacy.

By the time both sets of parents died, Kashyapa and Bhadda inherited great wealth, property, and slaves. They were one of the wealthiest families of India.

Then it happened. One day while Kashyapa was inspecting his fields he saw a sight similar to the one Shakyamuni saw as a child. Kashyapa saw his slaves plowing the fields and the upturned earth exposed worms which were swooped up by devouring birds. Kashyapa saw that life was nothing but suffering. That life was dependent upon killing. That the life of one was dependent the killing of another. He shared his distress with his slaves and

asked them, "Who will bear the consequences of such evil?" Their response to him was, "You will."

At that moment Kashyapa decided everything must go. He must rid himself of everything that can lead to the killing of others—must somehow break the cycle of death. He returned home and told Bhadda of his experience. He told her he wanted to renounce all of his possessions and leave them all to her.

Bhadda was amazed because she had had a similar experience. She had her slaves lay out sesame seeds to dry in the sun. Before long, insects were attracted by the seeds, and crows and other birds ate the insects. And the same thoughts of death and killing came to her. She also asked her slaves about responsibility and was given the same answer. "You are responsible." So she decided to give up everything.

And so Bhadda and Kashyapa shaved each other's head, donned the saffron robes of religious beggars and left their estate.

It's not clear how they disposed of their enormous property and wealth. Probably they gave it all away. But the old stories say that they freed all of their slaves and provided them with the means to live fruitful lives.

They then traveled together like other beggars of India. It soon became evident that a man and a woman traveling together raised quite a bit of suspicion and gossip, especially since even with a shaved head Bhadda was extremely beautiful. They discussed the problem. And one day when they came to a fork in the road they decided to part. He to take one road. She to take the other.

Bhadda eventually found a group of women who had banded together and formed a religious order among themselves. She lived in this community for several years. Eventually, Shakyamuni created an order for women. Bhadda heard Shakyamuni teach and immediately joined his order of bhikkhunis or nuns.

Bhadda quickly distinguished herself and became one of the leading nuns. Her job was to train younger nuns in the monastic discipline. Other nuns became jealous of her, first because of her great beauty, second because of her great intelligence, third because she had become a wonderful preacher of the dharma. And so they spread nasty rumors about Bhadda.

Bhadda ignored all the jealousy and nastiness about her and treated the offending nuns with detachment and compassion. She simply went about her life.

After Kashyapa left Bhadda he continued walking along the road. Eventually, he came across a man sleeping beneath a tree. He stopped to look at him and said to himself that he had never seen such a noble person. The man exuded peace, tranquility, and compassion. Kashyapa recognized that this person must be the Enlightened One—the Buddha. Indeed he was.

Shakyamuni work up and saw Kashyapa standing above him, looking deep into his eyes. They connected. Kashyapa then asked the Buddha if he could become his student. Shakyamuni rose, stood before Kashyapa and said, “Yes,” and ordained Kashyapa on the spot with the single word, “Come.” And Kashyapa followed the Buddha.

Later in the day when they stopped for a rest Kashyapa took off his robes and lay them down for Shakyamuni to sit on. Shakyamuni commented that

the robes were very fine and soft. Kashyapa looked at Shakyamuni robes and saw that they were old, torn, and sewn together in small strips, so he begged Shakyamuni to exchange robes. They did so. Kashyapa decided never again to wear fine or expensive robes and he adopted a strict ascetic vow of poverty.

Eventually he became so poor that his robes were rags. He ate little and became very thin. Other students of the sangha avoided him and some shunned him because he was so shoddy, shabby, and probably stank a little. Good old Shakyamuni saw the treatment Kashyapa was receiving. So the next time he gave a dharma talk, he asked Ananda, his attendant to prepare his seat. He then invited Kashyapa to sit beside him during his dharma talk. From that day whenever Kashyapa was present he was asked by Shakyamuni to share his seat during his dharma talks. Kashyapa was no longer shunned by the other students of Shakyamuni.

There is much more to the story of Kashyapa and if you're interested you may find it in a Wisdom publication, *Great Disciples of the Buddha*.

As a footnote to this story, there is no record that Bhadda and Kashyapa ever made contact after they both joined the sangha. But I wonder about their hearts.

And so back to the koan.

This is another "transmission" koan like *Wumenkuan* Number six, and twentythree. Here is number six.

Buddha Holds up a Flower

The Case

When the World-Honored One gave a sermon at Mount Gurakuta, he held up a flower.

Everyone was silent. Kashyapa smiled.

The World-Honored One said, "I have the heart of the true Dharma, the mind of nirvana, the form of no-form, the gate of the Dharma. It does not depend on letters. It is transmitted outside all teachings. Now I give it to Mahakashyapa."

And here is number twentythree.

Not thinking of Good or Evil

The Sixth Patriarch of Zen was pursued by Elder Ming all the way to a mountain ridge. When the Patriarch saw Ming coming, he cast the robe and bowl [of the patriarchate] onto a rock and said, "This robe symbolizes faith; could it be right to fight over it? You can take it away."

Ming tried to pick it up, but it was immovable as a mountain. Vacillating, in fear, Ming said, "I have come for the Teaching, not the robe. Please instruct me."

The Patriarch said, "Not thinking good, not thinking evil, right at this very moment, what is your original face?"

Ming immediately attained great enlightenment. His whole body ran with sweat. In tears, he bowed and asked, "Is there any meaning beyond the esoteric intent of the esoteric words you have just spoken?"

The Patriarch said, "What I have just told you is not esoteric. If you turn your attention around to your own state, the secret is after all in you."

Ming said, "Though I went along with the assembly at Huangmei, in reality I had not seen into my own state. Now that you have pointed out a way of entry, I am like a person who drinks water and knows for himself whether it is warm or cool. Now you are my teacher."

The Patriarch said, "If you are thus, then you and I alike are students of the Fifth Patriarch. Keep it well on your own."

It is also interesting to consider what are called the "flame poems" written by the ancestors at the time of transmission. Here are poems written by Shakyamuni, Mahakashyapa, and Ananda.

Shakyamuni Buddha to Mahakashyapa

The original dharma of all dharmas
is no-dharma;

The dharma of no-dharma is also a dharma.
Now, when no-dharma is transmitted,
How can this dharma be the dharma?

Mahakashyapa to Ananda

O dharma, original dharma!
In you is no dharma or non-dharma.
How, within the one dharma,
Could there be a dharma or a non-dharma?

Ananda to Shanakavasa and Madhyantika

Here is the dharma originally transmitted.
When it is transmitted, it is called non-dharma.
Individually each of us
must be enlightened to it.
When we are awake to the truth,
Even the non-dharma does not exist.

It seems clear to me and I hope to all of you that all of the koans as well as the flame poems irrefutably state that there is no content to transmission. And yet all of the koans begin with the wrong supposition that some things are transmitted, like brocade robes, and secret teachings. And as a matter of fact, in the transmission process today, brocade robes and secret teachings **are** given to students by their teachers. And as to secret documents, I have binders full of such documents. They are known as kirigami. Kirigami is a Japanese word similar to the word origami, which means pieces of folded

paper made into designs. Kirigami means pieces of paper on which notes are written.

At the very end of the training of potential dharma heirs the teacher begins the process of kirigami transmission. The teacher gives one of the documents, or kirigami, given to him by his teacher, to the student. The student makes a hand copy of the kirigami. He then returns both the teachers' and his copy to the teacher. They discuss the kirigami, or rather the data of the document. If the teacher is satisfied that the student understands what has been copied she places her seal on the kirigami of the student. Thus that kirigami has been transmitted. Then another kirigami is given to the student and the process continues. The kirigami in our lineage contain teachings as well as liturgical instructions which have been passed down for many generations, probably some kirigami reach back to Dogen Zenji himself. And they are all secret.

I was once at a meeting of teachers-in-training, held at Greyston Seminary. At that meeting I brought up the issue of the secrecy of kirigami. I questioned if that was really necessary. It reminded me of the time when the text of the Bible was to remain in the original Latin and Greek and kept away from the common people. We all know what happened. The Bible was translated into the native languages of the times and ushered in the Reformation. Perhaps the open publication of kirigami could have such an effect on Zen?

And so we have one koan after another, one flame poem after another, clearly teaching that there are no secrets. That nothing is transmitted. And nothing is to be transmitted.

While the subject of the koan is transmission, the “means” or vehicle of the koan is what I have named “Call and Response” as in Case ten of the Wumenkuan.

Qingshui, Poor and Alone

Qingshui said to Caoshan, Master, “I am poor and alone. Please help me.”

Caoshan said, “Venerable Qingshui!”

“Yes?” Qingshui responded.

Caoshan said, “You’ve had three cups of the best wine of Qingyuan, why do you say you haven’t wet your lips.”

The same thing happens in our koan. Kashyapa ignores the question of Ananda and goes right to the heart of his heart. For Ananda clearly knows transmission is mind to mind and not document to document. Not brocade robe to brocade robe. Knowing this and knowing Ananda knows this Kashyapa brushes aside the brocade question and calls his name. Ananda understands and responds “Yes,” without thought, without interposing more questions or doubts, much in the same way a mirror reflects what is before it instantaneously. Kashyapa and Ananda are one mind. Transmission happens.



Ananda asked Mahakashyapa, "Aside from passing on the brocade robe, was there any dharma the Buddha transmitted to you?"

Mahakashyapa called, "Ananda!"

"Yes," replied Ananda.

Mahakashyapa said, "Take down the flagpole at the temple gate!"

At these words Ananda attained a great realization.

Case 23. Think Neither Good Nor Evil

The following words are Margaret's. It is the presentation she made at her *Shuso Hossen*.

I have liked this koan from the very first time I heard it, back when we were living at Greyston Seminary, some twenty years ago. At that time, I didn't see much overlap between Buddhism and Christianity, and almost all koans left me pretty cold. But this one was a real story with deeds of derring-do, excitement, interesting characters. And it asked questions that I could understand as relevant to me, a Christian. In short, it spoke to me. When I knew, that I would be giving this [Shuso Hossen] talk, I knew that this would be the koan I would choose. Later, I said to myself, "There are so many beautiful koans in the *Wumenkuan*." So I looked through them all again. And still this one sang to me.

For those of you who don't know it, let me give the background of this koan. Those of you who know it all too well, please bear with me.

Shakyamuni Buddha was born in India around 500 B.C. About 1000 years later, Bodhidharma went from India to northern China. Although Buddhism was probably already present in China, or at least in southern China, in our lineage, Bodhidharma is credited with having brought Buddhism to China, and he is known as the First Patriarch. The lineage is passed from teacher to student through succeeding 'generations.' This story is about the Sixth Patriarch, the sixth generation in descent from Bodhidharma.

Huineng, who was destined to become the Sixth Patriarch, was born in 638 in southern China. There is probably as much legend as history surrounding

his life, but it is a great tale in any case. His father died when he was a small boy, and he and his mother were left in dire poverty. He had no formal education, and by tradition, he was illiterate. He made a meager living for himself and his mother, working as a woodcutter. One day, while delivering firewood, he heard a man in the street reciting the *Diamond Sutra*. On hearing the line, "Let your mind flow freely without dwelling on anything," he had a sudden deep realization. Huineng asked the man where he had gotten this from, and was told, "From Obai." Huineng then found someone to look after his mother and walked hundreds of miles to Obai, which was in the north of China.

You may have noticed that in the koan, 'Obai' is used both as a place name and as a person's name. It was the practice in China to call a teacher by the name of the place where his temple was, in this case, Obai. This was the temple of the Fifth Patriarch called Obai in Japanese or Huangmei in Chinese. The actual name of the Fifth Patriarch was Hungjen, but I will stick with the title 'Obai', since it is so much easier.

It was true in China, as in so many cultures, witness the United States, that the northerners looked down on the southerners, considering them ignorant peasants, bumbling bumpkins. When Huineng reached Obai, he had the following conversation with the Fifth Patriarch. "Why have you come here?"

"To become a Buddha."

"Where are you from?"

"From the South?"

“The people of the South don’t have Buddha-nature.”

To which Huineng replied, “Though there is south and north for humans, how can there be for Buddha-nature?” At this, Obai saw what a profound understanding of the Dharma Huineng had. But he was an illiterate woodcutter and a layman, as well as a barbarian from the south. Because of this, to protect Huineng from the jealousy of the monks, Obai assigned him to work in the rice mill, separating the rice from the bran.

Several months or years later, Obai, decided that he needed to look for a successor. He announced a contest, stating that whoever wished to compete should write a poem demonstrating his understanding of the teaching. The senior monk at the monastery was Jinshu, and everyone expected him to be the successor. Jinshu composed a poem but, not having the courage to bring it to Obai, he wrote it on the wall, without signing it. This is his poem:

The body is the tree of bodhi,
The mind is like the stand of a bright mirror.
Moment by moment wipe the mirror carefully,
Never let dust collect on it.

Huineng asked a monk to read Jinshu’s poem to him, and then composed a verse of his own and asked the monk to write it on the wall under Jinshu’s, also anonymously. This is Huineng’s verse:

Bodhi is not originally a tree,
Nor has the bright mirror a stand.
Originally there is nothing,
So where can any dust collect?

When Obai saw the two verses, he knew immediately who the two authors were, and again recognized the depth of Huineng's understanding. And once again, because of the jealousy of the monks, he feared for Huineng's life. Therefore, Obai went to him in the middle of the night, made him his successor, and gave Huineng his robe and bowl as symbols of transmission. Obai then told Huineng that he must flee the monastery and not return for many years. According to the legend, in the middle of the night, Obai accompanied Huineng to the river, rowed him across, and bade him farewell.

Huineng is said to have lived with a group of trappers for ten years, setting traps with them during the day, and slipping out at night to free whatever animals had been caught. He even tried to get the trappers to eat vegetarian food. After fifteen years of living in hiding, he returned to the monastery and was recognized as Obai's successor, and as the Sixth Patriarch.

This koan, obviously, picks up the story as Huineng, carrying Obai's robe and bowl, is fleeing from the monastery. According to the tradition, two hundred of the monks were chasing him for two months, but only Myo was able to catch up with him. Myo had been a general in the army before becoming a monk. He was a big, strapping fellow, and a fast runner. Huineng saw him coming and probably knew he was done for if he kept on running. He turned, set the robe and bowl down, and said, "This robe represents the Buddha's teaching. We can't compete for it. We may as well fight over who owns the wind. Take it. It's yours." And Myo bent down to pick up the robe. The robe is the kesa, the same as the one Sensei is wearing, weighing only a few pounds. A small child could easily carry it. But this mighty general Myo was unable to budge it. He who was in a blind rage was now overwhelmed by terror, and said, "I came for the teaching, not the robe." Whenever I read this line, I always want to say to Myo, "Yeah, right, you came for the

teaching!. You came for the robe, and with murderous intent.” But at that moment, he was ready to hear, and Huineng saw it. He said, “Think neither good nor evil. At that very moment, what is the primal face of Monk Myo?”

Our minds present us with a constant barrage of duality, of judgment: This/that, right/wrong, yellow/red, tasty/yucky, nice/mean, good/evil and on and on and on. We need an opening, a way to cut through all this to come to the place where we can ‘think neither good nor evil,’ the space between thoughts, if we are ever to awaken to our own true nature. With Huineng, in one moment of hearing truth he broke through, and was able to recognize it and make it his own, but I suspect that this is extremely rare. For some of us, this opening comes with an experience of beauty— listening to a symphony, seeing a brilliant sunset, hearing a bird song as if for the first time. We say of such moments, “I lost myself in that beauty.” Or “The world stood still.” What actually stood still was the mind. What actually got lost for that moment was the mind.

We may not all have such mind-stopping experiences of beauty, but there is another opening that everyone experiences—moments of high emotion. Moments of terror—that instant just before your car collides with another, when the doctor tells you that you have cancer, or even just when those flashing red lights pull up behind you on the highway. We say of such moments, “My heart stood still.” But again, what stood still was our mind. There is no thought at all in those instants, just fear.

For me, as for Monk Myo, anger is often a way in. Anger arises in me with lightening speed and amazing ferocity. I cannot tell you how often I have gotten frustrated with a koan and Mui has said, “Go deeper.” The next time, I come back enraged, he gives me a malicious little smile, and nudges me

with that nasty stick of his, and I explode—and in that explosion, the koan reveals itself to me.

“On Trust in the Heart,” a poem that we sometimes chant has the lines:

Stop talking, stop thinking,
And there is nothing you will not understand.

It sounds easy, but how do you stop talking or thinking? We can't always be in peak moments of beauty or in moments of high emotion. How do we get there?

Sitting in meditation, of course, helps to quiet the mind and predisposes us for such moments. And a good teacher can recognize when we are 'ripe,' and give us that extra little push. But, finally, I think it is always grace, freely given, that allows us to open. Moments of beauty that lift us out of ourselves we can easily recognize as grace, as gift. But moments of terror or anger? I think these, too are gifts, given to open us, to push us into that space between breaths, that space where there is no thought.

“On Trust in the Heart” says of Primal Truth:

Whether we see it or fail to see it,
It is manifest always and everywhere.

It is grace that underlies our very existence, “manifest always and everywhere.” And it is the same grace that opens us to see, to recognize, what has surrounded us all along. Whether it comes completely spontaneously—'out of the blue', we say—or whether it is a moment of

beauty, a moment of terror or fury, mental exhaustion after weeks of pushing against a koan, or the push of a good teacher, it is all grace. And what we open to is that same grace, freely given.

For Monk Myo, grace came in his moment of fury and terror. Suddenly, there was no thought, just powerful emotion. Huineng saw the opening and jumped on it, saying, "Right now! In this space between thoughts, what is your true nature?" And Myo's whole world broke apart, his mind broke open, and he saw. He recognized his primal face, his own self. The text says, "His whole body was covered with sweat. In tears, he bowed..." He was overcome with gratitude.

In his commentary on this case, Mumon says that Huineng is like a kindly grandmother "who peels a fresh litchee, removes the seed, and puts it into your mouth so that all you have to do is swallow it." Huineng's kindness is indeed touching. Here he is confronted by a man who has been chasing him for two months, planning to take the robe and bowl, and kill him if he has to. Yet, Huineng saw that Myo was ready, and he opened the dharma gates for him.

Then Myo asked, "Besides these secret words and teachings you have just given me, is there anything deeper?" And Huineng replied, "There is nothing secret at all. Reflect on your own face—'Atta Dipa'—look within—and the secret will be found within yourself. There is nothing you will not understand."

There is nothing secret. It is all within you. How much we don't want this to be true! We expect enlightenment, our true nature, the kingdom of heaven, to be magical, mysterious, esoteric. And most of all, we expect it to be

somewhere else. Out there. Something to be sought outside ourselves, something to be acquired or attained.

“Look within.” That’s the last place we want to look. We will do almost anything to avoid sitting still and looking within. We would much rather read long and often wearisome books. Or travel to exotic places and study with esoteric teachers. Hoping that somehow wisdom, enlightenment can be transplanted from them to us.

I personally have studied with Sufi sheiks, Tibetan lamas, esoteric Christian groups, psychics, energy healers, and two out-and-out charlatans, often at great inconvenience and expense, rather than look within. Not that they have not been helpful. Even the charlatans taught me to trust my own instincts—although I had to do it twice. And the real teachers all said, in one way or another, “You have to find it for yourself.”

Why is it that we would rather look anywhere but within? Well, first of all, it is incredibly hard work, all this sitting still. It takes hours, years of patient endurance, discipline, and commitment to sit and observe the banal drivel that fills our minds before our minds learn to sit quietly.

Then we are terrified of what we may find within ourselves. And it is true that much of what we discover about ourselves is quite unpleasant. If we sit long and hard enough, we realize that we, personally, are capable of the worst atrocities imaginable. We are no different than Adolph Hitler, Timothy McVeigh, or even George W. Bush. We come face-to-face with how much greed, hatred, arrogance, ignorance, and just plain stupidity we contain. But to learn that we are sinners, capable of great sin, is at least juicy.

But for me, at least, and I suspect for a lot of people, the real fear is that I will discover that I am nothing special. I am not an eagle or a swan or a goldfinch, or even a turkey vulture, but rather I am an ordinary, nondescript, dull gray-brown sparrow, without even a proper song. Nothing juicy about it. I think it is our very ordinariness that we run from. In fact, I suspect that people who spend their lives climbing Mount Everest or driving race cars are attempting to prove to themselves that they are outstanding, special, different from all the others—that they are afraid to face their own ordinariness.

The trouble is that we have eyes to see, but are completely blind, ears to hear, but are stone deaf.

There is a kind of round black beetle, no bigger than a sixteenth of an inch, that often comes on our deck when we eat supper out there. Since there are hundreds of them, they don't get into the food, and they don't bite, I have spent some time observing them. They look like mobile black pinheads, all identical. Yet, like all beetles, they have a hard shell over their wings, which they have to lift up in order to fly, with a pair of tiny wings underneath. They each have six nearly microscopic legs, which they somehow manage to coordinate to walk, and two even smaller antennae. Inside these tiny bodies is a miniscule heart, pumping a nanoliter of beetle-y blood. And somehow, even though they appear identical to me, they clearly are able to figure out which beetles are boys and which are girls. How extraordinary! Yet how often have I brushed them away, dismissing these tiny creatures a 'just little black beetles.'

Or the Queen Anne's lace that I have put on the altar today, this most common of roadside weeds. Each flower is actually a bouquet of hundreds of

tiny white flowerets. And in the very center, there is always one red one. Tradition has it that this is where Queen Anne pricked her finger while making lace. Beautiful!. Yet, how often have I pulled these out of the garden, with one thought, "Just weeds!"

We completely miss how astonishingly extraordinary the ordinary is. Everything we look at, from the galaxies to the subatomic particles, is astoundingly complex, created with infinite exquisite detail, which we discover if we are willing to examine it closely.

How much more exquisite is that miracle that we so often fail to see, that we constantly overlook, but which is always present to us—our very selves!. Our bodies, wondrously made. And our minds and hearts! When we look within, we discover that every, every thing is present within us, from the most distant star to the nearest blade of grass. It is all there. Christ, Buddha, Primal Truth, the Kingdom of Heaven, all there within me, within you. Completely accessible, if we only look. "If you reflect on your own true face, the secret—all secrets—will be found in yourself."

And we can experience it for ourselves. Look at what Myo says at that moment of recognition, "I am like a man who drinks water and knows for himself whether it is cold or warm." I have seen for myself!. It is no longer what I have read or been told or have believed. It is what I have experienced! I have tasted the water myself, I have seen the face of God with my own eyes!. What a miracle!

And this is possible for each one of us!. It is our birthright. The Kingdom of Heaven is there, present to us, within us, at all times and in all places.

Waiting for us to open our eyes, to taste and see the goodness of the Lord, to drink the water for ourselves.

The trick is, of course, that we have to want it with our whole heart. We have to be willing to sacrifice *everything* in order to have that one pearl of great price. Jesus said, "Seek first—seek *only*—the Kingdom of God, and all the rest will be added unto you." *All* the rest. It will be given, full measure, pressed down, running over. It is there, surrounding us, waiting for us. But we have to want it.

But when we do open to it, we see that we are surrounded by, filled with, magic, mystery. The most ordinary things are wondrous indeed. It is all filled with beauty, joy. It is all grace. And it has all been there all along, waiting for us to taste for ourselves.

Finally, as Huineng says, we must "be mindful and hold fast to what we have realized." Continue looking within. There is no limit to what we will discover. Look within!. The entire universe is ours, is our very own true self. There is nothing we will not understand.

Case 24. Detachment From Words

(Kirchner Case 89)

Fengxue Yanzhao was asked by a monk. "Speech and silence partake of both transcendence and functioning, so how can we proceed without transgressing?"

Fengxue answered, "I always remember Jiangnan in the third month, partridges calling amidst all the flowers so fragrant."

Reflections

First there's a very helpful note in Kirchner's translation of the koan.

Note: "Transcendence and functioning" translates (two Chinese ideograms) a term first used by the fifth century Chinese monk Sengzhao. The word (literally, "separate" or "removed") indicates the world of the noumenal, separate from all forms, names, and phenomena; (literally, "subtle" or "fine") indicates the mysterious and infinitely subtle functioning of this absolute truth in the world of phenomena. Thus (the two ideograms) denote the aspects of absolute, transcendent reality and its manifestations in the realm of things. The questioner is thus asking, "Express the ultimate through silence, and you're limited to the noumenal. Express it in words, and you're limited to the phenomenal. So how can one function in true freedom without erring on either side?"

Yamada Roshi also has another very helpful sentence in his commentary on the koan. He identifies the two ideograms as "ri" and "mi" (some translators say "bi"), and translates them to mean "ri" for the noumenal and "mi" for the phenomenal. Or speech and silence. Or subject and object. Yamada Roshi's quote,

We should know that subject and object are intrinsically one. This is the most fundamental point of Buddhist Teaching. It is the satori of Zen. To intuit, experience, and realize this fact is the main reason for doing zazen.

Yamada Roshi therefore brings us to the "Heart Sutra" formula of form and emptiness.

He also tells us that speech doesn't only happen with the mouth and tongue. He's of course right. It happens with the eyes, the expression of the face, the movements of the hands, the clenching and unclenching of fists, the shifting of the body and legs, the slumping of the shoulders, the back, etc.—all revealing the state of the mind and the thoughts of the mind—this is speech. And so there is speech in silence.

Can there be a place of no thought? Can silence be a place of no thought? I certainly have not had that experience. When we teach zazen we tell people that there are two types of thought: random and reflective. Random thinking goes on all the time. They are the thoughts that pop up in the mind at all times. They pop into and out of the mind without pause or hindrance. Reflective thinking happens when we latch on to one of these random thoughts, hold on to it and work and develop it. This is the type of thinking we say in beginning zen meditation training that one tries to avoid. And so it

seems silence includes random thoughts but not reflective thoughts. And so it seems that silence is tainted.

I think all I have said, coupled Yamada Roshi's insights, reveal that there is speech in silence and silence in speech. Indeed, Yamada Roshi goes further to say along with the Heart Sutra that silence and speech are one. That there is no duality. It is the monk who mistakenly causes the separation between speech and silence, between subject and object. The monk's question makes no sense.

Fengxue's response makes sense. He is not speaking. He is in the springtime surrounded by hundreds of fragrant flowers among which partridges are singing. He could just as well have said, Aaaaah!

This is silence in speech.



Fengxue Yanzhao was asked by a monk. "Speech and silence partake of both transcendence and functioning, so how can we proceed without transgressing?"

Fengxue answered, "I always remember Jiangnan in the third month, partridges calling amidst all the flowers so fragrant."

Case 25. Sermon from the Third Seat

(Cleary)

The Case

Master Yangshan dreamed that he went to where the future Buddha Maitreya was, and was assigned to the third seat.

Then one of the saints there struck a gavel and said, Today it is the turn of the one in the third seat to preach.

So Yangshan got up, struck the gavel, and said, The teaching of the universal vehicle is beyond all propositions and denials. Listen clearly!

Wumen Says,

Tell me, was this preaching or not? Open your mouth and you miss; but keep your mouth closed and you lose. If you neither open nor shut it—108,000.

Wumen's Verse

In the bright sunlight on a clear day
He speaks of a dream in a dream.
Making up wonders,
He fools the whole crowd.

Zen Master Benjiao's Verse

Talking about emptiness in a dream
is very unusual;
How is it possible to get beyond
all propositions and denials?
At that time, if he could have upheld
the Buddha's direction,
What need would there have been
to strike the gavel in the hall?

(Kirchner Case 90)

In a dream Yangshan Huiji went to the place of Maitreya Bodhisattva and was assigned the second seat. One of the venerable monks there struck a gavel and said, Today the person in the second seat will lecture on the dharma.

Yangshan rose, struck the gavel, and said, The Mahayana teaching transcends the four propositions and the one-hundred negations. Listen carefully! Listen carefully!

Kirchner notes: the four propositions and the one-hundred negations were formulated by the Buddhist thinker Nagarjuna as an explanation of the doctrine of emptiness of *shunyata*. The four propositions are one, many, being, and nonbeing. The one-hundred negations comprise the sum total of the various ways in which these propositions may be negated.

“Listen carefully, listen carefully” translates the Chinese ideograms which can be more literally rendered as, This is true, this is true.

My **Reflections** will be more explanatory notes or information about the elements in this koan.

The four propositions have also been rendered as

Yes

No

Both yes and no

Neither yes or no.

Another rendering could be,

1

2

Both 1 & 2

Neither 1 or 2.

And the hundred negations are ways in which these four propositions, can be negated. Aitken Roshi suggests,

...four negatives for each of the propositions—not, not not, neither not nor not not, and both not and not not—making sixteen. Then each of these sixteen is found in the past, present, and future. This makes forty-eight. These have either appeared or have not yet appeared, so that makes ninety-six. Negate the original four and you get the Hundred Negations.

Maitreya is the future Buddha who will appear at the end of time. Maitreya waits in the Tushita Heaven in deep samadhi, gradually evolving with all beings toward his ultimate role as world teacher.

As to the seat. Usually the seats in an assembly, or a zendo, are allocated according to seniority. The first seat is always the seat of the Buddha, or teacher. The second seat is usually the seat of the head monk, or Shuso of the temple. The third seat is either for an honored guest or as in this case the speaker for the session.

In the *Book of Serenity*, instead of the propositions and negations, Yangshan says, "... beyond all predication."

Predication can be used both as a noun or a verb and means something which is proclaimed, declared, or made known; something that is affirmed or denied. So I think there is not a different take from the more explicit propositions and negations which are declarations or affirmations.

The striking of the board works much the same way in which we strike the han or densho to announce that zazen or service is imminent. Also, we strike the block of wood, as in the Shuso ceremony to indicate either that something important is coming, or that something has definitely ended.

The 108,00 is a typical Buddhist way of saying infinite.



In a dream Yangshan Huiji went to the place of Maitreya Bodhisattva and was assigned the second seat. One of the venerable monks there struck a gavel and said, Today the person in the second seat will lecture on the dharma.

Yangshan rose, struck the gavel, and said, The Mahayana teaching transcends the four propositions and the one-hundred negations. Listen carefully! Listen carefully!

And now the dream element in the koan.

Of all the commentators of this koan Shibayama Roshi comes up with an interesting possibility. He says that Yangshan is not really dreaming but that he is experiencing *makyo*. Makyo is an experience or feeling which may come to you during zazen. Makyo's can be hallucinations involving sounds, odors, prophetic visions, movements, and even levitation. In a way it is like daydreaming. Like Walter Mitty, who while driving, stops for a red light, looks up and sees a billboard of an aviator and then tapatika tapatika tapatika he becomes a famous and brave war pilot and does heroic deeds. Sometimes people who experience makyo fall into the trap of being seduced

by the makyo and believe that something very special has happened to them. Some believe, Aha. Now I am Enlightened and then turn their focus on the makyo and tapatika tapatika tapatika proceed to build a cathedral of the makyo. All of which takes you from the practice or your koan. Makyo experience immediately should be brought to daisan and dealt with together with the teacher.

The *Book of Serenity* has a wonderful quote.

When deluded,
you're like a Knight in a dream;
After enlightenment,
like a peasant rising from sleep.

I prefer the straight dream motif.

While dreaming
we don't know the dream is unreal.

After we wake up
we realize the dream was unreal.

Wumen's Verse

In the bright sunlight on a clear day
He speaks of a dream in a dream.
Making up wonders,
He fools the whole crowd.

So who was Yangshan? He was one of the great Tang zen masters. His dates were 807-883. He lived during the time of Zhaozhou and all the other zen masters we find in the koans. He was a student of Guishan who was a student of Baizhang. Both Guishan and Yangshan were famous for being down to earth and for being iconoclasts. One of my favorite koans of his is about the rhinoceros fan, where he asks his attendant to bring him the rhinoceros fan. The attendant says the fan is missing or broken or something, and Yangshan says, well then bring me the rhinoceros.

He was also determined and stubborn. He had a Huike-like moment when he was in his twenties. He asked his parents' permission to become a monk. They refused. So he cut off two of his fingers and presented them to his parents. They allowed him to become a monk.

This is the guy who had this makyo or dream.



In a dream Yangshan Huiji went to the place of Maitreya Bodhisattva and was assigned the second seat. One of the venerable monks there struck a gavel and said, Today the person in the second seat will lecture on the dharma.

Yangshan rose, struck the gavel, and said, The Mahayana teaching transcends the four propositions and the one-hundred negations. Listen carefully! Listen carefully!



Now, what do you make of it?

Why all the fuss?

What's the heart of the koan?

The dream? If upon awakening the dream is unreal, is Yangshan's sermon unreal as well?

Is it untrue?

What does it mean to be beyond all predication, to transcend the four propositions and hundred negations?

Does waking from the dream say this ain't so?

Does waking from the dream say that emptiness is not what everybody, including Nagarjuna, says it is?

Does waking from the dream say that emptiness is not the point at all?

What **is** the point?

I've said enough. Now you can chew on the koan.



In a dream Yangshan Huiji went to the place of Maitreya Bodhisattva and was assigned the second seat. One of the venerable monks there struck a gavel and said, Today the person in the second seat will lecture on the dharma.

Yangshan rose, struck the gavel, and said, The Mahayana teaching transcends the four propositions and the one-hundred negations. Listen carefully! Listen carefully!

Case 26. Two Monks Roll up the Blinds

(Aitken Roshi)

The great Fa-yen of Ch'ing-liang took the high seat before the midday meal to preach to his assembly. Raising his hand he pointed to the bamboo blinds. Two monks went and rolled them up in the same manner. Fa-yen said, "One gains; one loses."

Case 39 Two Monks Roll Up a Bamboo Shade

(Kirchner)

When the monks had gathered in the hall before the midday meal to hear Fayen Wenyi, the master pointed to the bamboo blinds. At this, two monks went and rolled them up, both in the same manner. Fayen said, "One gains, one loses."

Reflections

Looking at this koan very closely I see a dramatic production. a play.

Here's the setup.

1. Monks gather in the hall before the midday meal to listen to Zen Master Fayen Wenyi deliver a dharma talk. Everybody stands before him. In those days you listened to a dharma talk on your feet and not on the splendid comfort of a zafu and zabuton.

2. Instead of speaking, Fayen points to the bamboo blinds. For the sake of illustration I see one blind on his left and one blind on his right. So his points

with his right fore-finger to the right and with his left fore-finger to the left. Fayen, if the monastery is built according to tradition, is sitting at the Northern side of the room facing South. His left finger points East his right finger points West.

3. Seeing this, two monks go to the blinds—they could either be two monks among the group of monks standing before Fayen ready to receive his dharma talk, or they could be two attendants, standing on either side of Fayen, ready to serve him. One monk goes East the other West.

4. The monks roll up the bamboo blinds. Here one must look very closely. All translators agree. Most translators say about the monks' movements, ... **in the same manner**. Sekida Roshi's translation uses the adverb, **simultaneously**. Shibayama Roshi/Kudo uses the adverb, **alike**. This means that the movements of the monk's were **identical**. Not two but one.

So we have two monks doing something exactly alike at the same time. Like Soto Service. When we bow there is one bow. When we chant there is one sound. When we gassho there is one gassho. All at the same time. Six seven eight sixty seventy eighty people bow, chant, gassho together. All one bow, one chant, one gassho.

5. Fayen then says, completing the dramatic production,

One gains

One loses

Or simply,

One gain

One loss

In discussing this koan with Margaret she suggests another possibility. Could it be that Fayen is not talking about the blindrolling monks? Perhaps he is talking about One?

One gains

One loses

Or simply,

One gain

One loss

One body

We are one body

Yet each of us different

Yet we are the same

The same yet different

Gain

Loss

No gain

No loss

Both at the same time

So this is a koan of one body

The dharma talk of Fayen

A play

Three actors

Ten directions

Four words



When the monks had gathered in the hall before the midday meal to hear Fayan Wenyi, the master pointed to the bamboo blinds. At this, two monks went and rolled them up, both in the same manner. Fayan said, "One gains, one loses."

Case 27. It Is Not Mind or Buddha

There are two versions of this koan. First the *Wumenkuan*, shorter version, and then the Kattoshu version which is similar to the version in the *Hekiganroku* or *Blue Cliff Record*. In the *Wumenkuan* version Nanquan takes the lead and is the Master. In the *Hekiganroku* Nanquan calls Weizheng the Master and does not have the lead even though as in both cases he is asked the question.

The questioner in the longer version is Baizhang Weizheng. Weizheng is a dharma heir of Baizhang Huai-hai of fox lore. He also is the older dharma brother of Nanquan to whom he is speaking. I also assume that he is senior to Nanquan since Nanquan calls him Master.

From the *Wumenkuan*.

A monk asked Master Nanquan, "Is there a truth not spoken to people?"

Nanquan said, "There is."

The monk asked, "What is the truth not spoken to people?"

Nanquan said, "It is not mind, it is not Buddha, it is not a thing."

Wumen Says,

Confronted with this question, Nanquan could only put forth all he had; he was quite a dotard.

Wumen's Verse

Meticulous instruction diminishes your virtue;
The unspoken truly has effect.
Even if the oceans transmute,
It's never conveyed to you.

(Kirchner Case 202)

Baizhang Weizheng asked Nanquan Puyan, "Is there a dharma that enlightened teachers everywhere have never expressed to people?"

Nanquan said, "There is."

Weizhang asked, "What is it?"

Nanquan answered, "Not-mind, not-buddha, [not-things]."

Weizhang said, "You've just expressed it!"

Nanquan said, "That's the way I see it; how about you?"

Weizheng replied, "I'm not an 'enlightened teacher'. How could I know whether there's a dharma that has or hasn't been expressed?"

Nanquan said, "I don't understand. Please, master, explain."

Weizheng responded, "I've already explained more than enough."

Reflections

I think the heart of this koan is the search for the truth, dharma, or teaching that has not yet been taught, or never expressed, or hasn't been spoken, or not been preached, or that they didn't tell you about. That's how various translators expressed the heart of this koan. And it brings me to other wonderful stories. The first is koan Number 32 in the *Wumenkuan*, A Non-Buddhist Questions the Buddha.

Here it is in the Shibayama Roshi-Kudo translation,

A non-Buddhist once asked the World-Honored One, I do not ask for words, nor do I ask for no-words. The World-Honored One remained seated. The non-Buddhist praised him, saying, The great compassion of the World-Honored One has dispelled the clouds of my ignorance and enabled me to be enlightened.

There is more to the koan, but I'll stop here because this is the part which relates to the present koan.

The second situation occurs in the *Vimalakirti Nirdeśa Sutra*, from the translation by Robert Thurman.

The scene is the sick room of Vimalakirti. Manjurshi, together with a group of bodhisattvas all have reluctantly come to visit the sick layman because of the insistence of Shakyamuni. Reluctant because Vimalakirti was very wise

and usually showed up the ignorance of the great Arahats, Shariputra, Ananda, and all the other heavy disciples of Shakyamuni. In chapter nine, Vimalakirti asks each of the Bodhisattvas present to express the nature of the non-dual Dharma, or the truth, or the absolute state, free from all dualities, relativities and contraries. Each does so and makes a magnificent presentation. Finally, it is Manjushri's turn to speak. He says,

Good sirs, you have all spoken well. Nevertheless, all your explanations are themselves dualistic. To know no one teaching, to express nothing, to say nothing, to explain nothing, to announce nothing, to indicate nothing, and to designate nothing —that is the entrance into nonduality.

Then, the crown prince Manjushri said to the Vimalakirti, We have all given our own teachings, noble sir. Now, may you elucidate the teaching of the entrance into the principle of nonduality!

Thereupon, the Vimalakirti kept his silence, saying nothing at all.

The crown prince Manjushri applauded Vimalakirti, Excellent! Excellent, noble sir! This is indeed the entrance into the nonduality of the bodhisattvas. Here there is no use for syllables, sounds, and ideas.

When these teachings had been declared, five thousand bodhisattvas entered the door of the Dharma of nonduality and attained tolerance of the birthlessness of things.

Then we have the oft quoted statement of Shakyamuni himself who after teaching for forty years summed it all up by saying he never said anything and gave no teachings. This is beautifully expressed in the flame poem he transmitted to Mahkashyapa.

The original dharma of all dharmas is no-dharma;
The dharma of no-dharma is also a dharma.
Now, when no-dharma is transmitted,
How can this dharma be the dharma?

So with all of this as background our koan comes to life. Now a careful reading of the koan.

A monk asked Master Nanquan, Is there a truth not spoken to people?

Are we talking about an unspoken truth, or a hidden truth?

Are we talking about Noble Silence?

The silences of Shakyamuni and Vimalakirti?

Nanquan said, There is.

There is?

How can something which is not there be there?

Is it somewhere else? Or nowhere?

The monk asked, What is the truth not spoken to people?

The challenge!

What is the not spoken truth?

If it's not spoken how can you say there is a not spoken truth?

We are back to silence.

Is silence a something or a nothing?

Can you point to silence?

Can you hold silence in your hand?

Can you hear silence?

Nanquan said, It is not mind, it is not Buddha, it is not a thing.

Please notice the first word of each crucial phrase:

It is not mind,

It is not Buddha,

It is not a thing.

And so what is **IT?**

We have an answer similar to the answer of Manjushri.

To know no one teaching, to express nothing, to say nothing, to explain nothing, to announce nothing, to indicate nothing, and to designate nothing—that is the entrance into nonduality.

And so Nanquan comes up short.

What's missing are the noble silences of Shakyamuni and Vimalakirti.

This is clearly expressed by the continued colloquy.

Weizhang said, "You've just expressed it!"

Nanquan said, "That's the way I see it; how about you?"

Weizheng replied, "I'm not an Enlightened Teacher. How could I know whether there's a dharma that has or hasn't been expressed?"

Do I detect a note of irony?

Nanquan said, "I don't understand. Please, master, explain."

Weizheng responded, "I've already explained more than enough."

Yup, irony.



From the *Wumenkuan*

A monk asked Master Nanquan, "Is there a truth not spoken to people?"

Nanquan said, "There is."

The monk asked, "What is the truth not spoken to people?"

Nanquan said, "It is not mind, it is not Buddha, it is not a thing."

From the *Kattoshu*

Baizhang Weizheng asked Nanquan Puyan, "Is there a dharma that enlightened teachers everywhere have never expressed to people?"

Nanquan said, "There is."

Weizhang asked, "What is it?"

Nanquan answered, "Not-mind, not-buddha, [not-things]."

Weizhang said, "You've just expressed it!"

Nanquan said, "That's the way I see it; how about you?"

Weizheng replied, "I'm not an 'enlightened teacher'. How could I know whether there's a dharma that has or hasn't been expressed?"

Nanquan said, "I don't understand. Please, master, explain."

Weizheng responded, "I've already explained more than enough."

Case 28. Long Have I Heard

(Cleary)

Once Deshan questioned Master Longtan until late at night. Longtan said, It is late; why don't you retire?

So Deshan said good-bye and raised the screen to go. Seeing that it was pitch dark outside, he turned around and said, It's dark outside.

So Longtan lit a paper torch and handed it to Deshan. As Deshan reached out to take the lamp, Longtan blew it out.

At this Deshan suddenly had an insight. He bowed to Longtan, who asked him, What principle have you seen?

Deshan said, From now on I won't doubt the utterances of the Zen masters.

The next day Longtan went up in the hall and said, There is someone here whose fangs are like sword trees, whose mouth is like a bowl of blood. Even if you hit him with a stick he won't turn his head. Some day he will establish our Way on the summit of a solitary peak.

Deshan subsequently placed his commentaries in front of the teaching hall, took up a torch, and said, Even to investigate all the mystic discernments is like a hair tossed into space; even to exhaust the pivotal workings of the world is like a drop thrown

into a gigantic canyon. Then he burned his commentaries, bowed, and left.

Wumen Says,

Before he left northern China, Deshan was in a state of high dudgeon; he made his way South, determined to destroy the teaching of a special transmission outside of doctrine.

On the road, Deshan asked a woman if he could buy some refreshments from her. She said, What writings are you carrying in your knapsack, O Worthy?

Deshan replied that they were commentaries on the Diamond Cutter Scripture.

The woman said, How about where it says in that scripture, Past mind cannot be grasped, present mind cannot be grasped, future mind cannot be grasped—which mind do you want to refresh, O Worthy?

Faced with this question, Deshan could only frown. But even so, he did not die at the woman's words; he asked her if there were any Zen teachers around. The woman said there was a master Longtan a couple of miles away.

When he got to Longtan, Deshan experienced complete defeat. It could be said that his earlier words did not match his later talk.

As for Longtan, he very much seems to have been unconscious of being unseemly, because of his compassion for a child. Seeing the other had some live embers in him, Longtan hurriedly took some foul water and doused him, putting the fire out. When you look, it's a laughable scene.

Wumen's Verse

Hearing the name is not like seeing the face,
Seeing the face is not like hearing the name.

Zen Master Baiyun's Verse

When light and dark overcome each other,
that is not worth talking about;
As long as there is any interpretation,
this is not yet intimacy.
When the paper torch went out, the eyes emerged,
Breaking through the empire of China,
finding no one at all.

Zen Master Baoning's Verse

All at once a cascade comes down before the cliff;
In the middle of the night,
the sun is bright in the palm of his hand.
Opening wide his mouth,
he expresses the energy of spirit;
With whom will he travel freely throughout the world?

Zen Master Dahong's Verse

When light and dark form each other,
things are vague and remote;
Who would have known
the back of his head would gush
with spiritual light?
All in all he drew the line, cutting off the path
of a thousand distinctions;
South, North, East, West,
he arrives at his native village.

Reflections

When I told Margaret I was working on this koan, she commented on how beautiful it was and how simple and straightforward. I blanched, saying that I think the koan is complicated. In fact I think this is not just one simple koan, there are at least three koans here, and then there's the question of Wumen's commentary and verse, not counting the verses of the other zen masters Cleary adds.

As to the complexity of the koan—to prove my point I found twelve different versions or accounts of the koan, or of various parts of the koan. They are by Thomas Cleary, whose rendition is used above, Aitken Roshi, Yoel Hoffman, Thomas Yuho Kirchner, Zenkei Shibayama Roshi, Katsuki Sekida Roshi, and Koun Yamada Roshi. In addition the koan appears in the *Hekiganroku*, or *Blue Cliff Record* on version of which is translated by both the Cleary brothers, and the other by Katsuki Sekida Roshi. Hakuin Zenji has a version in his *Secrets of the Blue Cliff Record*, and Dogen Zenji dedicates

an entire fascicle of the *Shobogenzo* to the koan in an essay entitled *Shinfukatoku* in which he not only provides another version of the koan but engages in some creative rewriting playing the parts of the cake seller and Deshan. In addition he has a version of the koan, together with a capping poem, in the *Eihei Koroku*, of which there are two translations, one by Taigen Dan Leighton and Shohaku Okumura, and one by Yuho Yokoi.

So you can see the koan is very well represented in the literature of koan genre. To further prove my complexity argument the various translators and commentators have different titles for the koan. They are,

Cleary	Long Have I heard
Aitken Roshi	Lung-t'an: Renowned Far and Wide
Hoffman	Yet I Should Not Be Rash
Kirchner	Deshan Burns the Commentaries
Cleary	Te Shan Carrying His Bundle (BCR 4)
Sekida Roshi	Tokusan Visits Isan (BCR 4)
Shibayama Roshi	Well-Known Ryutan
Sekida Roshi	Ryutan Blows Out the Candle
Yamada Roshi	Ryutan's Name Echoed Long
Hakuin Zenji	Bundle and All
Dogen Zenji	Ungraspable Mind
Dogen Zenji	A True Dragon Appears in the Dark (EK)

As you can see from these titles, most of the commentators have a different koan in mind. Or at any rate focus on one of the three or possibly four koans I see in this koan. They are,

1. Deshan and the cake seller

2. Deshan and Longtan and darkness
3. Deshan burns his *Diamond Sutra* commentaries
4. Wumen's capping poem

We've met Deshan before in koan study. Deshan is in the prime of his teaching career in the koan in which he declares that whatever is said deserves thirty blows and whatever is not said deserves thirty blows. He is a contemporary of Linchi and like Linchi his teaching is explosive. Then in his anecdote he bumbles along with his eating bowls too early for the meal and bumbles back to his room when a student tells him the five strikes of the meal bell had not been struck.

The Deshan of our present koan is full of the brash of youth. He is an intellectual representative of the elegant culture of northern China. He is one who knows. And he especially knows the *Diamond Sutra*. He lectures all over the place on the sutra. He knows it so well that he is called and calls himself the King of the Diamond Sutra. He has it made. And then he hears about some new fangled notion in the barbarous south where reputed zen masters do away with all books. Do away with all scripture. Do away with all sutras. Do away even with the *Diamond Sutra*. So he heads south to meet these barbarian zen thugs and do away with their heretical notions and teachings.

He loads his precious commentaries on the *Diamond Sutra* in a large backpack and heads south. Somewhere along the way he stops at a roadside refreshment stand to rest. And the first koan begins. From this point on the imagery of light and darkness take over. He wants to buy some sweet cakes. They are called *tenjin* in Chinese. *Tenjin*, however, has a double meaning. It also means that which points to and lights up the mind. The woman who

made the cakes and runs the refreshment stand sees the heavy load Deshan is carrying. "What's that you're lugging along with you?"

"These are my books. These are my commentaries on the *Diamond Sutra*." He tells her he is known as the King of the Diamond Sutra. And then to the astonishment of Deshan this roadside vendor, this barbarian of the south, even lower than a barbarian—a woman—quotes the *Diamond Sutra* to him! He is outraged. She tells him, "The sutra speaks of past mind, present mind, and future mind. Which mind do you plan to refresh or *tenjin* yourself with?" Which mind will the *tenjin* enlighten?

Deshan is staggered by the clever word play of this miserably ignorant barbarian woman, as well as by her knowledge of the *Diamond Sutra*. Wow! Where did she learn that? Instead of answering he says, "Is there a zen teacher around here?" She tells him. And off he goes, his confidence shaken, to see this zen teacher. He's now not so sure of himself.

The initial meeting with Longtan involves more word play. *Long* mean dragon and *Tan* means lake. And the old cockiness comes back. He tells Longtan, "I heard there was a dragon and a lake here but I see neither dragon nor lake."

And Longtan untroubled simply tells Deshan, "Here I am." And again Deshan stumbles.

He stays at Longtan's monastery and studies with him. The koan tells us that he spends many hours studying, and he must have been considered quite special because he is allowed to study privately with Longtan in Longtan's room. We now come to the second koan. Longtan tells Deshan, "Enough already it's late. Go to your room."

Deshan obediently rises, opens the door and steps outside. It must be near midnight. Darkness overwhelms. He heads back into the room. "I can't see a thing," he says. "It's too dark outside." And so Longtan gives him a paper lantern with a candle in it and lights it. Deshan receives it and Longtan blows out the candle. Again darkness overwhelms. And now Deshan sees! He sees what he saw he didn't see. Darkness revealed his ignorance. His was the darkness which he saw as light. But Shitou warns not to see as light. And Deshan begins to have a glimmer.

Later on Wumen comments on this saying, "Longtan found a live coal in Deshan and poured water on it extinguishing it." Thereby plunging Deshan into complete darkness. Darkness where nothing is left. Where there is not the slightest flicker. Nothing. This is emptiness. This is unknowing. This is not knowing. This is enlightenment. The imagery astounds.

Next morning the third koan. In his talk to the sangha Longtan praises Deshan. He says that someday in the future Longtan will teach. Someday in the future. There is still much work to do.

Deshan then brings his backpack, empties its diamond contents on the floor and burns them. More imagery. Deshan then tells the sangha that all of the sutras all of the learning is like flinging a hair into space like a flickering candle light in the vast darkness like a drop of water in the depths of a ravine.

Finally there is Wumen's enigmatic poem. Cleary only has two lines. The other translators have four. Here's the Shibayama Roshi/Kudo version,

Far better seeing the face than hearing the name;
Far better hearing the name than seeing the face.
Though he saved his nose,
Alas, he has lost his eyes!

The imagery again. Seeing the face. Losing the eyes one is blind. Light and Darkness. Better to see than hear. But if blind better to hear since you can't see. You may have saved your nose or life. But you are blind.

Wumen's poem is the final beautiful cap of this astoundingly beautiful koan.



Once Deshan questioned Master Longtan until late at night.
Longtan said, "It is late; why don't you retire?"

So Deshan said good-bye and raised the screen to go. Seeing that it was pitch dark outside, he turned around and said, "It's dark outside."

So Longtan lit a paper torch and handed it to Deshan. As Deshan reached out to take the lamp, Longtan blew it out.

At this Deshan suddenly had an insight. He bowed to Longtan, who asked him, "What principle have you seen?"

Deshan said, "From now on I won't doubt the utterances of the Zen masters."

The next day Longtan went up in the hall and said, "There is someone here whose fangs are like sword trees, whose mouth is like a bowl of blood. Even if you hit him with a stick he won't turn his head. Some day he will establish our Way on the summit of a solitary peak."

Deshan subsequently placed his commentaries in front of the teaching hall, took up a torch, and said, "Even to investigate all the mystic discernments is like a hair tossed into space; even to exhaust the pivotal workings of the world is like a drop thrown into a gigantic canyon." Then he burned his commentaries, bowed, and left.

Case 29. Not the Wind, Not the Banner

Once when the wind was whipping the banner of a temple, the Sixth Patriarch of Zen witnessed two monks debating about it. One said the banner was moving, one said the wind was moving.

They argued back and forth without attaining the principle, so the Patriarch said, "This is not the movement of the wind, nor the movement of the banner; it is the movement of your minds."

The two monks were both awestruck.

Wumen Says

It is not the wind moving, not the banner moving, not the mind moving: Where do you see the Zen patriarch? If you can see intimately here, then you will realize that the monks were buying iron but not gold, while the Zen patriarch, unable to conceal his enlightenment, divulged it on this occasion.

Wumen's Verse

Wind, banner, minds moving—
Their crimes are listed on one indictment.
If you only know how to open your mouth,
You won't realize when you're trapped in words.

Zen Master Baling Said

The Zen master said it is not the wind moving, and not the banner moving. If it is not the wind or the banner, where is it evident?

If there is anyone who can play the host for the Zen master, come forth and meet with me.

Case 91 The Sixth Patriarch's Banner in the Wind

(Kirchner)

The Sixth Patriarch saw a banner flapping in the wind. Two monks were arguing, one saying that the banner was moving, the other that the wind was moving. They argued back and forth and were unable to come to any agreement.

The Sixth Patriarch said, It isn't the banner that moves, nor is it the wind that moves. It's your minds that move. The two monks were astonished.

More background information from Zenkei Shibayama Roshi's *Zen Comments on the Wumenkuan*. p 212.

Long ago in China there was a nun called Myoshin, who was a disciple of Master Gyozan Ejaku. She was in charge of a guest house outside the temple. One day seventeen monks came from the faraway country of Shoku to see Master Gyozan, and they stayed at her lodging house. In the evening they got together by

the fireside and began discussing the koan of Neither the Wind Nor the Flag. Nun Myoshin, listening to their talk, disapproved of all of them, saying, You seventeen donkeys have never come across Buddhism even in a dream. What a pity? In reply to their request for instruction, she declared, It is neither the wind nor the flag nor the mind that is moving. Her clear voice went straight to their hearts, and the seventeen monks were all enlightened. They expressed their heartfelt gratitude and returned to Shoku without seeing Master Gyozan.

Reflections

This is a very famous koan. It is the first record of Huineng coming out of hiding in accordance with instructions he received from the Fifth Patriarch, Hongren. And an auspicious coming out it was. Because of it he was recognized as something special, received ordination on the spot and was recognized as the Sixth Patriarch.

The usual take on this koan is that Huineng is telling the monks that the movement of the flag is taking place in their minds since all that exists is mind. But this is too simplistic and as that wonderful nun Myoshin said, It's not the flag, or, wind, or mind that's moving. So, what moves? What does Huineng mean by his statement? Myoshin seems to be saying that all have missed it, the two monks as well as Huineng himself. And Wumen agrees with her in his comments and poem.

It is not the wind moving,
not the banner moving,
not the mind moving:

Wind, banner, minds moving—
Their crimes are listed on one indictment.
If you only know how to open your mouth,
You won't realize when you're trapped in words.

Here's a list of key words in the koan as well as a list of what is suggested by these words

Words
Wind
Flag
Mind
Movement

Suggested Words

Relative
Absolute
Subject
Object
OneBody
It

Stephen Heine in his book *Dogen and the Koan Tradition*, (p. 215) comments that Dogen Zenji employs the rhetorical device of synecdoche, which means using a part of a whole as a metaphor for that whole. For instance when someone says they just bought new wheels they mean they bought a new car.

In the case of the koan Dogen Zenji says when Huineng tells the monks that their minds are moving what he really is saying is that **they themselves are moving**. Dogen Zenji's comments are found in the *Shobogenzo* fascicle, *Inmo*. Nishijima and Cross translate the pertinent section,

The thirty-third patriarch, Zen Master Daikan, before having his head shaved, is lodging at Hossho-ji temple in Kosho. Two monks there are having a discussion. One monk says, The flag is moving.

The other monk says, The wind is moving.

As the discussion goes endlessly back and forth like this, the Sixth Patriarch says, It is beyond the wind moving and beyond the flag moving. Hearing this, the two monks are instantly convinced.

These two monks had come from India. With these words, then, the Sixth Patriarch is saying that **the wind** and **the flag** and **the moving**, all exist as the mind. Even today, although [people] hear the Sixth Patriarch's words they do not know the Sixth Patriarch's words: how much less could they express the Sixth Patriarch's expression of the truth? Why do I say so? Because, hearing the words **You are the mind moving**, to say that **You are the mind moving** just means **Your minds are moving**, is not to see the Sixth Patriarch, is not to know the Sixth Patriarch, and is not to be the dharma-descendants of the Sixth Patriarch. Now, as the children and grandchildren of the Sixth Patriarch, speaking the truth of the Sixth Patriarch,

speaking with the physical body, hair and skin, of the Sixth Patriarch, we should say as follows: The words **You are the mind moving** are fine as they are, but we could also express it as **You are moving**. Why do we say so? Because **what is moving** is **moving**, and because **you** are **you**. We say so because [**you**] **already are people who are it**.

(From *Master Dogen's Shobogenzo*, Book 2, Translated by Gudo Nishijima & Chodo Cross, "Inmo" It, paragraph 97, pp. 123-124.)

So we come back to that wonderful nun Myoshin who tells the visiting monks

It's not the flag

It's not the wind

It's not the mind

But she stops short. If not flag, wind, or mind,
what is moving?

Once again the key word is **it**. What is **it**?

Myoshin says,

It's not the flag

It's not the wind

It's not the mind.

So what is **it**?

I suggest **it** is,

flagwindmindmonksHuinengMyoshineveryonehere
andsoforth

or another way of saying it is,

supercalafragialisticexpialadocious

It is the whole universe. The monks separated the flag from the wind. The monks put hyphens in between the long word I just made, flag-wind-mind-monks-Huineng-Myoshin-everyone-here-and-so-forth. If you put hyphens into supercalafragialisticexpialadocious you get nonsense. You kill the word. The hyphens makes it all tidy. They separate the word into different entities. Hyphens also separate subject from the object. Thereby destroying flag and wind. The monks moved away from the fluttering flag with their cerebral analysis of what was happening. When one sees a bright red sunset on the horizon of the sea one simply sees in awe. If anything is said it is, Ahhhh! Perhaps one may touch ones heart with the hand. The monks substituted flapping tongues for flapping flags. And the wind they created stank. By their analytical argument they moved away from flag, wind, sunset, reality itself. And so Huineng told them they themselves were moving. And they got it!



The Sixth Patriarch saw a banner flapping in the wind. Two monks were arguing, one saying that the banner was moving, the other that the wind was moving. They argued back and forth and were unable to come to any agreement.

The Sixth Patriarch said, It isn't the banner that moves, nor is it the wind that moves. It's your minds that move. The two monks were astonished.

Cases 30 and 33. Mind and Buddha

(Kirchner Case 5 Mazu's, This Very Mind)

Damei Fachang of Ming Province asked Mazu Daoyi, "What is buddha?"

Mazu answered, "This very mind is buddha."

Later another monk asked Mazu, "What is buddha?"

The master replied, "Not mind, not buddha."

This is probably one of the most quoted teachings of Zen. And many zen masters have turned to this koan and written about it. The bulk of my presentation will consist of quotes from some of these teachers. Then finally, I will add a few comments of my own.

From the biography of Mazu Daoyi in *Kattoshu*.

Mazu Daoyi was a native of Sichuan; his family name was Ma. He is said to have been of impressive physical appearance, with a stride like a bull's, a gaze like a tiger's, a tongue that could cover his nose, and two marks on the soles of his feet in the shape of wheels. He was the sole dharma heir of Nanyue Huairang. ... Mazu was central in shaping Zen training methods, employing, among other things, the shout and the stick in an effort to shake his trainees out of their ordinary consciousness.

...

Mazu is said to have produced 139 dharma heirs, the most important of whom for later Zen history was Baizhang Huaihai.... Other eminent disciples included Nanquan Puyuan and Damei Fachang.

From *Dentroroku* Book Six 187

One day [Mazu] said to the congregation,

You brothers should each apprehend that your mind is the Buddha. This mind of yours is the Buddha mind. When Bodhidharma came from Southern India to China and transmitted the supreme teaching of One Mind, he enabled us to comprehend the meaning of enlightenment. He also imprinted the mind-ground of humanity upon us by quoting the passages of the *Lankavatara Sutra*. Perhaps you do not believe in yourselves because of the mistaken, upside-down view that each of you has—the view of, mind within yourself. Therefore it is said in the *Lankavatara Sutra*,

The Buddha-word takes mind as its essential and no-gate as its doctrine.

It is also said,

Those who seek for the truth must realize the fact that there is no Buddha outside mind, and there is no mind apart from Buddha.

Do not accept the good and reject the bad; depend neither on purity at one extreme nor on impurity at the other extreme. Then you will realize the voidness of the nature of sin, and that there is nothing to be grasped at in each moment. Nothing has self-nature, and the triple worlds (the realm of desires, the realm of form, and the realm of spirit) are but mind; all the myriad manifestations of the universe are that which is imprinted by one thing—namely, mind. All that is seen is no other than mind. However, this mind is not merely self-existent; it is also dependent on the plurality of material existences. It is a principle and at the same time it is a matter of practice; that is to say, it is subjective and at the same time it is objective. In other words, the life is not the life. One who comprehends this mind lives, dresses, and eats in accordance with what is proper in each situation, and passes the time in spontaneity. To understand my teaching, listen to this poem:

Mind-ground expresses itself
in accordance with the time.
Bodhi is identical to it.
The principle and its application
are interfused without impediment.
(there is) life,
and at the same time, not life.

A monk asked, "Master why do you preach that mind is Buddha?"

The Master answered, "Because I have to stop a baby from crying."

The monk asked again, "What would you say when the crying stops?"

The Master answered, I would say, "There is neither mind nor Buddha."

The monk asked, "How would you direct one who has gone beyond both statements?"

The Master replied, "I would say that it is not a thing."

The monk asked, "How would you direct one who belongs to none of these and suddenly comes to ask about the Tao?"

The Master answered, "I would say that one comprehend the great Tao."

From the biography of Damei Fachang in *Kattoshu*.

Damei Fachang was a native of Xiangyang in present-day Hubei. He studied Buddhist doctrine for thirty years before entering the assembly under Mazu Daoyi; he was awakened by Mazu's statement, "Mind is buddha." After receiving dharma transmission from Mazu he practiced in seclusion for forty years on Mount Damei (Great Plum Mountain) in modern Zhejiang. A

monk sent by Mazu asked, "What is it Mazu said that brought you to live on this mountain?"

Damei replied, "Mazu told me, Mind is buddha."

"Recently Master Mazu teaches differently," said the monk. "Now he says, 'Not mind, not Buddha!'"

Damei responded, "That old monk, forever confusing people! Even if he says, 'Not mind, not Buddha,' I'll stick with, 'Mind is Buddha!'"

When the monk reported this to Mazu, Mazu said, "Monks, the plum is ripe (Damei means Great Plum)." Damei later founded the monastery Husheng si, where an assembly of 600 to 700 monks gathered under him. He taught:

Monks, strive to reach the root; do not chase after the branches. Reach the root, and the rest will follow. If you wish to perceive the root, just see into your own mind. This mind is the source of all, both mundane and super-mundane. When mind arises the various dharmas arise; when mind is extinguished, the various dharmas disappear. If you give rise to the mind that is unattached to good and evil, all things are in their true state.

From Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*. A translation of the *Eihei Koroku*.

I remember, Nanquan said to his assembly, "Master Kiangsi [Mazu Dao-i] said, 'This very mind is Buddha,' but he also said, 'No mind, no Buddha.' I do not speak like this. This is not mind, this is not Buddha; this is not a thing. I also say that mind is not buddha; wisdom is not the way. I also say that ordinary mind is the way."

The teacher Dogen Zenji said, These two elders have spoken like this, but elder Eihei does not speak that way either, now I ask you Kiangsi [Mazu] and Nanquan, what kind of place is this where you expound mind, expound the way, expound things, expound Buddha, and expound not Buddha, not mind?

You should know that the single entirety is not at all two things. In the ten directions, the solitary [reality] appears, perceived as mountains and rivers. We cannot say whether this is Buddha-nature or causes and conditions. Why is it like this? To repay the money for the rice you have eaten. Ultimately, what is it?

After a pause Dogen Zenji said, Bottle gourds entwine with bottle gourds. (EK 4-292)

*

The mind itself is Buddha is very difficult to understand. Mind is fences, walls, tiles, and pebbles, and Buddha is a glob of mud or a clump of soil. Kiangsi [Mazu] expressed trailing mud and dripping water; Damei realized lurking in the grasses and sticking to trees. Where can we find this mind itself is Buddha? (EK 4-319)

Mazu said, "Ordinary mind is the way." What is this ordinary mind? You should know that this ordinary mind is visiting teachers and inquiring about the say, seeking Dharma and asking about Zen, putting on robes and eating rice, continuing and ceasing activities, chanting Buddha's name and reciting sutras, speaking and silence, waking and sleeping, holding attachments and releasing them—all of these are nothing other than ordinary mind. However, how can we arbitrarily abstract [some ordinary mind] from these?

...

We should know that from birth to death we think of eating and drinking, we avoid cold and love warmth; from infancy to adulthood we are either angry or joyful as we leave and return through gain and loss. All of these are not obstructions thanks to the one great way. (EK 8 2DW)

*

Mazu said, "This very mind itself is Buddha."

Suddenly, while walking alone,
he forgot the path.
Turning to look,
how could he have gotten stuck here?

How many times did he sell,
and have to buy himself?

So lovely,
the mountain bamboo rousing cool wind.
(EK 9-75)

*

The ancestors in India said that no-mind is Buddha. Kiangsi Mazu said, "This mind itself is Buddha." Mazu said that this mind itself is Buddha; however, he was not saying that the monkey-mind and horse-will themselves are Buddha. Many students in modern times understand this mistakenly. Someone said that once you return to, "This mind itself is Buddha," you will not have another birth. Understanding like this is the same as the view of extinction of those outside the way.

*

After a pause Dogen Zenji said, "What is the essential meaning of, 'This mind itself is Buddha?' Wanting to stop an infant from crying, it is a single punch that kills the baby." (EK 5-354)

This very mind, this very Buddha is madness. Directly pointing to the human mind is also as distant as heaven from earth, like desiring to exhaust the water of the gigantic ocean with three scoops. At this instant, these are exposed as wild-fox Zen. (EK 5-368)

Finally, a quote from Shibayama Roshi 216.

Mind is Buddha, was not necessarily original with Master Baso [Mazu}. In *Shinno-mei*, written by Fa-daishi probably before Bodhidharma came to China, there is the following passage:

If you realize the origin, you will attain mind. If you attain mind, you will see Buddha. Mind is Buddha; Buddha is mind.

He also says,

You truth-seeker, look into your own mind. If you realize that Buddha is in yourself, you will not seek after him outwardly. Mind is Buddha; Buddha is mind. If your mind is clear, you will realize Buddha.

Shibayama Roshi also quotes Hakuin Zenji who says,

Mind is Buddha is like a dragon without horns.
No mind no Buddha is like a snake with horns.

Reflections

Damei Fachang of Ming Province asked Mazu Daoyi, "What is buddha?"

Mazu answered, "This very mind is buddha."

Later another monk asked Mazu, "What is buddha?"

The master replied, "Not mind, not buddha."

The first question and answer is koan 30 of the *Wumenkuan*; the second question and answer is koan 33.

As Shibayama Roshi tells us the teaching of Mind is Buddha has been around China way before Mazu extending far back before the time of Bodhidharma, which is roughly more than ten generations back. However, Mazu was the

first of the Tang teachers to make this the heart of his teaching. Pun intended.

According to the *Shambala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen*,

The Chinese character *hsin*, can be translated by, heart, consciousness, soul, mind, sense interiority, thought and so on. In Zen it means mind, heart, and spirit, or else absolute reality...

We then hear this teaching beautifully presented especially by Mazu and Nanquan and Dogen Zenji and many other zen masters. And today this teaching remains the heart of zen teaching.

But there seems to be a contradiction between the first answer

Mind is Buddha

And the second,

No mind, no Buddha

And yet, here is no contradiction. Like waves and particles are both true expressions of light. Mind is Buddha and No mind, no Buddha both equally express the Light. The Inner Light. And the wonderful Mazu quote about stopping the baby from crying is says it all.

We are babies. All of us. And so we feed on the pabulum of "Mind is Buddha."
Some of us, however, may grow up. Then we are feed on the meat of "No
mind, no Buddha."

That's all there is to it.

So like the Heart Sutra which is the greatest affirmation and the greatest
denial both at the same time. And affirmation and denial are true. Both
reflect the heart of the Inner Light of Buddha-Nature.

At the Maine State Prison, the Buddhist group there is very much devoted to
the Heart Sutra, as well as to the Four Noble Truths, the eightfold path, the
paramitas, and the precepts. They went to the trouble of having these
documents made into plastic sheets and reverently hang them on the walls
when they meet. I didn't have the heart to tell them that the very Heart
Sutra they love so much actually denies and destroys the teachings of the
Four Noble Truths and the precepts and the basic teachings of Buddhism. I
didn't have the heart to tell them about Dogen Zenji's teachings.

Dogen Zenji teaches that the teaching of "Mind is Buddha" is madness and
kills the baby!

This very mind, this very Buddha is madness. Directly pointing
to the human mind is also as distant as heaven from earth, like
desiring to exhaust the water of the gigantic ocean with three
scoops. At this instant, these are exposed as wild-fox Zen. (EK
5-368)

After a pause Dogen Zenji said, "What is the essential meaning of, 'This mind itself is Buddha?' Wanting to stop an infant from crying, it is a single punch that kills the baby." (EK 5-354)

What does Dogen Zenji mean?

Madness!

Kills!

Kills what is within us!

Like Jesus said.

We need to die, to be killed.

We need to embrace the BuddhaMind that kills.

Embrace the Buddhamind that kills the Buddhamind.

Then maybe there's a chance for life.



Damei Fachang of Ming Province asked Mazu Daoyi, "What is buddha?"

Mazu answered, "This very mind is buddha."

Later another monk asked Mazu, "What is buddha?"

The master replied, "Not mind, not buddha."

Case 31. Zhaozhou Checks a Woman

(Kirchner Case 12)

An old woman lived by the road to Mount Tai. A monk asked her,
"Which way is the road to Mount Tai?"

"Straight ahead," the old woman said.

When the monk had taken a few steps the woman commented,
"A good monk, yet off he goes!"

Later a monk told Zhaozhou Congshen about this. Zhaozhou
said, "Let me check this old woman for you."

The next day Zhaozhou went and asked the woman the same
question, and she gave the same reply. Zhaozhou returned and
said to the assembly, "I've seen through that old woman of
Mount Tai."

Reflections

First some background material and notes.

The Master (Zhaozhou) was planning a visit to Wu T'ai Shan (sometimes
called Ching Liang Shan: a sacred mountain dedicated to Manjushri and his
golden lion.) Another monk wrote a poem to discourage him from going. It
read:

What green mountain anywhere

is not a place for training?
Why bother to trudge with a staff
to Mount Ching Ling?
Even if the Golden Lion reveals itself
in the clouds,
This is not auspicious when looked at
with the true eye.

The Master asked him, "What is the true eye?" The monk could find no answer.

Master Fa Yen commented in place of the monk, "Pray brother, accept my humble affection."

Master Hsien of T'ung An commented in place of the monk, "Your eye." (*Dentoroko* 348-349.)

A quote from Linchi.

Once there was a student who climbed Mount Godai in search of Manjushri. How he deceived himself! There is no Manjushri on Mount Godai. Do you want to know Manjushri? He is here right before your eyes functioning ceaselessly without change, everywhere clearly perceptible and beyond doubt. This is the living Manjushri. And a moment of the light of non-differentiation in your heart, this is the true Samantabhadra everywhere and always. If for a moment your heart of itself gets released from its bonds, everywhere is deliverance; this is the dharma-Samadhi Kannon (Avalokiteshvara). Mutually they appear as

master and companions; and simultaneously they appear as one in three and three in one. Only when one can understand this is one fit to read the Teachings. (Schloegl 31-32)

And now my Reflections

This is supposed to be a simple case. And yet Hakuin Zenji considered it one of his Nanto koans—or the koans which are difficult to solve, and Harada Roshi said it took him between seven and eight years before he could see this koan clearly.

There are two words I choose to describe this koan. They are “ambiguity” and “incompleteness.” The koan is ambiguous. Something seems to be left out. The punchline is missing. After Zhaozhou returns to the monastery and tells his monks that he has examined the old woman he stops. He doesn’t say in what way he examined the old woman. He doesn’t say what his conclusions are. Much more difficult than the koan in which he visits the two hermits who thrust their fists up in an identical manner. Zhaozhou finds one lacking and the other not. In this case however, Zhaozhou says the same thing that the monks said to the old woman. And when Zhaozhou leaves she makes the same disparaging comment she made to the monk. So everything is the same. And yet Zhaozhou claims that he had investigated this old woman. Basta!

Then we have Hakuin Zenji, who according to Shibayama Roshi, says that we should realize that everybody seems to think that Zhaozhou investigated the old woman however nobody seems to realize that the old woman investigated Zhaozhou! And there’s good old Wuman in his commentary posing the encounter between the old woman and the monk and then

between the old woman and Zhaozhou as a contest. As a game of go or chess or as warfare.

I think all of this is extraneous to the koan. There's nothing in the koan upon which we can base the conclusion that it is a contest. And the other issue is whether or not the old woman was speaking derisively of the monks (most translators have a group of monks rather than one) when they asked for directions to Mount Wutai. It seems to me that one can make a case that she did speak in derision, because the monks took her words that way. Otherwise why would they have complained to Zhaozhou and why would Zhaozhou tell them that he would check out the old woman?

Another telling clue to the koan that Stephen Heine points out is that the Chinese character for the word translated as "Old Woman" is the same character for the word, "Witch." So this old woman could be a supernatural being. She joins the women who appear in koan literature who dumfound learned monks. We had an experience of this in the koan in which Deshan, who considered himself to be the King of the Diamond Sutra was baffled by an old woman's question.

So we see a bit of old-boy sexism in the use of this character for women. Another sexist indication is the fact that the old women both in this and other cases are not dignified with names, much less pedigree.

So what do we make of this koan? How do we see it? The monks stop off somewhere near Mount Wutai and ask the old woman for directions and she says, "Go straight ahead." As they turn to leave and begin walking, she says, "Ahhuh, another monk going about this way."

Most commentators latch on to the old woman's response, "Go straight ahead," as a metaphor. A metaphor for the practice of the Way. So the questions of the various monks may be, "How does one practice the way?" Go straight ahead.

And then we get the wonderful quote of Linchi who forbade his monks from going on pilgrimages to Mount Wutai—climbing twisted trails—looking for the Dharma, looking for Manjushri, looking for Samantabhadra, Avalokiteshvara.

And so the old woman may be pointing out to the monks that rather than climbing the switchback trails of the mountain all they need to do is go straight ahead. Straight into their own hearts. There will they find Manjushri astride his golden lion.

Is this what the koan is all about? If so why the investigation by Zhaozhou? Why after Zhaozhou asks the same question she responds in the same way with the same words? Why no commentary by Zhaozhou as he made in scores of other koans, scores of other encounters with monks, laypeople, ministers and kings, and even women whom he always treats with respect and sometimes with a touch of humor? Why no commendation of the old woman? Saying, "Thank you, You hit the nail on the head!" Or, "Thank you, the monks were deeply enlightened." Or, "Thank you for your wisdom and kindness for pointing out my own blindness." Why is this or any coda left out?

And that's the ambiguity and the incompleteness of this koan. Many of the commentaries say that the key to the koan is in what Zhaozhou saw in the old woman. But how are we to know what he saw since there isn't a clue?

Again, what is this koan about? Is it about one body? About practice? Is the teaching of the koan simply that, All is contained within? If so, why not say so? Why not indicate this in some way? Why did it take Harada Roshi seven to eight years to figure this koan out? Why did Hakuin i Zenji include it in his Nanto koans? And in what way was the old woman investigating Zhaozhou?

I think a little fabrication is necessary. First of all Mount Wutai was located close to the monastery of Kuan Yin where Zhaozhou and his monks lived. And Zhaozhou was a famous teacher. So it is not beyond the realm of possibility to say that this old woman knew Zhaozhou. So when Zhaozhou went to "investigate" her he went to see somebody he knew. And somebody who knew him. They could have been friends.. Could it be that Zhaozhou said to her, "My monks have been complaining. Each time they ask you a simple question about the way up the mountain you chew them out. What's up?"

And perhaps she says, Well, you ask me the question. And he does, "Which way to Wutai?"

She says, "Straight ahead!"

He turns around and leaves. Is his turning a turning of exasperation? Or of understanding? Probably exasperation because of her comment, the same disparaging comment she made to the monks? No difference.

So what did Zhaozhou see in the old woman? And what did the old woman see in Zhaozhou? She knew he was a great Ch'an Master. Did she pull something over on him? And did Zhaozhou recognize that she did?

These are some of the questions this wonderful exasperating koan ask. I need more years to work on it before I can see it clearly. After all I've only spent a week or so on this koan this time. The beauty of koan study is that there's something to chew on probably for the rest of our lives. Sure, we can make a presentation, as I have made on this koan, and it was accepted by my teacher. And others have made presentations to me and I accepted their presentations. And yet there's more.

What is that more?



An old woman lived by the road to Mount Tai. A monk asked her, "Which way is the road to Mount Tai?"

"Straight ahead," the old woman said.

When the monk had taken a few steps the woman commented, "A good monk, yet off he goes!"

Later a monk told Zhaozhou Congshen about this. Zhaozhou said, "Let me check this old woman for you."

The next day Zhaozhou went and asked the woman the same question, and she gave the same reply. Zhaozhou returned and said to the assembly, "I've seen through that old woman of Mount Tai."

Case 32. An Outsider Questions Buddha

(Cleary)

An outsider questioned Buddha in these terms: "I do not ask about the spoken, I do not ask about the unspoken."

The Buddha just sat there.

The outsider said in praise, "World Honored One, you are very kind, very compassionate; opening up the clouds of my confusion, you have enabled me to attain penetration." Then he paid respects and left.

Ananda subsequently asked Buddha, "What did the outsider realize, that he uttered this praise and left?"

Buddha said, "Like a good horse, he goes as soon as he sees the mere shadow of a whip."

Wumen Says,

Ananda was a disciple of Buddha, but even so he did not match the outsider's insight.

Now tell me, how far apart are an outsider and a disciple of Buddha?

Wumen's Verse

Walking on a sword blade,
Running on an ice edge,
Without going through any steps
He lets go over a cliff.

Reflections

There are three players in this koan. First there is Shakyamuni; second, there is Ananda, Shakyamuni's attendant, or jisha; third there is an Outsider, or a Hindu, as Hakuin Zenji calls him.

The koan consists of the Outsider asking Shakyamuni a question. Shakyamuni responds to the question with silence.

The Outsider hears the silence and lavishly praises Shakyamuni, telling him because of the answer he has gained, "Entry," or has achieved enlightenment.

Then after the Outsider leaves, and Shakyamuni and Ananda are alone, Ananda, confused, asks Shakyamuni what the Outsider understood by Shakyamuni's silence. Shakyamuni responds with a metaphor of four horses, which is explicitly described in one of the Pali sutras, the *Anguttara Nikaya*.

First let's consider the Outsider's question.

An outsider asked the Buddha, "I do not ask about the spoken or the unspoken."

What does this mean?

What is the spoken or the unspoken?

The spoken what?

The unspoken what?

Sekida Roshi says words signify affirmation; nonwords signify negation.

Clery says, words signify realization that transcends understanding of the relative world and the absolute truth.

Yamada Roshi says, words signify phenomena and nowords signify no beings, or emptiness. And he takes us to the ubiquitous formula of the Heart Sutra, Form is emptiness, Emptiness is form.

Then comes Shakyamuni's silence. We've encountered this silence before. When he responded to the list of metaphysical questions of Malunkaputta with silence, often referred to as his Noble Silence. Also, silence in the old Pali sutras usually means assent. For instance there are many records of invitations to Shakyamuni and his disciples to come dine with one person or another, and the usual response is silence, which the sutras explain, means assent.

Then there's the thunderous silence of Vimalakirti which I have written about in other koan reflections, particularly in Case 27. It is "Not Mind or Buddha," p. 8 and following. In this famous situation silence is an expression of the nature of the non-dual Dharma, or the truth, or the absolute state, free from

all dualities, relativities, and contraries. Or simply of the Absolute, which is neither spoken nor unspoken.

Ananda's bewilderment follows. The question here is, how come Ananda didn't understand? He's been with Shakyamuni for years. Closer than anybody. He's heard all of the sermons. Was with him when Malunkaputta asked all those questions. Was one of the disciples Shakyamuni asked to go visit Vimalakirti. And like all of the other disciples he was reprimanded by Vimalakirti, and reported to Shakyamuni,

When I heard these (Vimalakirti's) words, I wondered if I had previously misheard and misunderstood the Buddha, and I was very much ashamed. (Thurman 33)

However, Ananda did to go Vimalakirti, as did all the other disciples, and he experienced Vimalakirti's great silence. And apparently understood. For listen to Manjushri's words,

The crown prince Manjushri applauded Vimalakirti, Excellent! Excellent, noble sir! This is indeed the entrance into the nonduality of the bodhisattvas. Here there is no use for syllables, sounds, and ideas.

So how come Ananda still doesn't understand? The fact is, he simply didn't see. How many of us have been stuck in a koan and could not get it? How many of us have tangled with that ridiculous cat that was not in the painting of da Vinci's Last Supper? How many of us have spent years on Mu? And then finally, how many of us have slapped our foreheads, exclaimed about ourselves, "What a fathead!" For it is so simple. Our own minds and thoughts

and views get in the way so that we cannot see. And Ananda couldn't see. But he had the balls to realize that, and asked his teacher to explain.

Then follows Shakyamuni's beautiful explanation.

The Buddha said, "Like a good horse, he goes as soon as he sees the shadow of the whip."

As I mentioned earlier, Shakyamuni is referring to a wonderful short sutra, the *Anguttara Nikaya*. Here it is in its entirety,

Patoda Sutta—The Goad-stick

There are these four types of excellent thoroughbred horses to be found existing in the world. Which four? There is the case where an excellent thoroughbred horse, on seeing the shadow of the goad-stick, is stirred & agitated, [thinking,] "I wonder what task the trainer will have me do today? What should I do in response?" Some excellent thoroughbred horses are like this. And this is the first type of excellent thoroughbred horse to be found existing in the world.

Then again there is the case where an excellent thoroughbred horse is not stirred & agitated on seeing the shadow of the goad-stick, but when his coat is pricked [with the goad stick] he is stirred & agitated, [thinking,] "I wonder what task the trainer will have me do today? What should I do in response?" Some excellent thoroughbred horses are like this. And this is the

second type of excellent thoroughbred horse to be found existing in the world.

Then again there is the case where an excellent thoroughbred horse is not stirred & agitated on seeing the shadow of the goad-stick, or when his coat is pricked, but when his hide is pricked [with the goad stick] he is stirred & agitated, [thinking,] "I wonder what task the trainer will have me do today? What should I do in response?" Some excellent thoroughbred horses are like this.

And this is the third type of excellent thoroughbred horse to be found existing in the world.

Then again there is the case where an excellent thoroughbred horse is not stirred & agitated on seeing the shadow of the goad-stick, or when his coat is pricked, or when his hide is pricked, but when his bone is pricked [with the goad stick] he is stirred & agitated, [thinking,] "I wonder what task the trainer will have me do today? What should I do in response?" Some excellent thoroughbred horses are like this. And this is the fourth type of excellent thoroughbred horse to be found existing in the world.

These are the four types of excellent thoroughbred horse to be found existing in the world.

Now, there are these four types of excellent thoroughbred persons to be found existing in the world. Which four?

There is the case where a certain excellent thoroughbred person hears, "In that town or village over there a man or woman is in pain or has died." He is stirred & agitated by that. Stirred, he becomes appropriately resolute. Resolute, he both realizes with his body the highest truth and, having penetrated it with discernment, sees. This type of excellent thoroughbred person, I tell you, is like the excellent thoroughbred horse who, on seeing the shadow of the goad-stick, is stirred & agitated. Some excellent thoroughbred people are like this. And this is the first type of excellent thoroughbred person to be found existing in the world.

Then again there is the case where a certain excellent thoroughbred person does not hear, "In that town or village over there a man or woman is in pain or has died." But he himself sees a man or woman in pain or dead. He is stirred & agitated by that. Stirred, he becomes appropriately resolute. Resolute, he both realizes with his body the highest truth and, having penetrated it with discernment, sees. This type of excellent thoroughbred person, I tell you, is like the excellent thoroughbred horse who, when its coat is pricked with the goad-stick, is stirred & agitated. Some excellent thoroughbred people are like this. And this is the second type of excellent thoroughbred person to be found existing in the world.

Then again there is the case where a certain excellent thoroughbred person does not hear, "In that town or village over there a man or woman is in pain or has died." And he himself does not see a man or woman in pain or dead. But he sees one of his own blood relatives in pain or dead. He is stirred &

agitated by that. Stirred, he becomes appropriately resolute. Resolute, he both realizes with his body the highest truth and, having penetrated it with discernment, sees. This type of excellent thoroughbred person, I tell you, is like the excellent thoroughbred horse who, when its hide is pricked with the goad-stick, is stirred & agitated. Some excellent thoroughbred people are like this. And this is the third type of excellent thoroughbred person to be found existing in the world.

Then again there is the case where a certain excellent thoroughbred person does not hear, "In that town or village over there a man or woman is in pain or has died." And he himself does not see a man or woman in pain or dead, nor does he see one of his own blood relatives in pain or dead. But he himself is touched by bodily feelings that are painful, fierce, sharp, wracking, repellent, disagreeable, life-threatening. He is stirred & agitated by that. Stirred, he becomes appropriately resolute. Resolute, he both realizes with his body the highest truth and, having penetrated it with discernment, sees. This type of excellent thoroughbred person, I tell you, is like the excellent thoroughbred horse who, when its bone is pricked with the goad-stick, is stirred & agitated. Some excellent thoroughbred people are like this. And this is the fourth type of excellent thoroughbred person to be found existing in the world.

These are the four types of excellent thoroughbred persons to be found existing in the world. (*Anguttara Nikaya* IV.113)

And so the question to each of us is which of the four excellent thoroughbred persons am I.

Am I the first one who hears about the sick and needy and immediately acts?

Am I the second one who sees a sick and needy one before me and then acts?

Am I the third one whose own son or daughter or wife or mother or father or other relative is struck with illness and need and then acts?

Am I the fourth one who is the one who is twisted with pain and illness and need and then acts?

Do I see the four thoroughbred horses?

And if I see I am number four what can I do to become number three? Two? One?



An outsider questioned Buddha in these terms: I do not ask about the spoken, I do not ask about the unspoken.

The Buddha just sat there.

The outsider said in praise, World Honored One, you are very kind, very compassionate; opening up the clouds of my

confusion, you have enabled me to attain penetration. Then he paid respects and left.

Ananda subsequently asked Buddha, What did the outsider realize, that he uttered this praise and left?

Buddha said, Like a good horse, he goes as soon as he sees the mere shadow of a whip.



I realize I've finished these reflections on the koan, but I want to add something else which admittedly is outside the koan. I am impressed not only by the response of the Buddha to Ananda, but also by the fact that the Buddha highly praised the so called Outsider, and didn't at all try to get him to join the Sangha. Buddha didn't try to convert the Outsider. Buddha recognized the deep spirituality of the Outsider and respected and honored it. Here is a wonderful example of what we so called sophisticated ones today call interfaith understanding. There's no "I'm right and you're wrong." The Outsider may have been, as Hakuin Zenji suggests, a Hindu, or he may have been a Jain, which was another religious path contemporary with Shakyamuni. Many people came to Shakyamuni from these and other religious expressions. And he did not try to convert them. In fact there are famous instances where he actively discouraged followers of other paths to stick to their own ways and to their respected teachers.

I love the absence of arrogance.

Case 34. Knowledge Is Not the Way

Nanquan said, "Mind is not Buddha, knowledge is not the Way."

Wumen Says,

It might be said of Nanquan that was so old he had no shame; the minute he opened his foul mouth he advertised the family disgrace. Even so, few are those who know enough to be grateful.

Wumen's Verse

When the sky clears, the sun emerges;
When it rains, the ground gets wet.
He wholeheartedly told it all,
Only fearing incomplete faith.

Reflections

Nanquan Puyan (748-835) became a novice at the age of nine and took the full precepts at age thirty. He first devoted himself to the study of the Vinaya, then the teachings of the *Lankavatara Sutra* and *Avatamsaka Sutra*, and the teachings of Nagarjuna. He then became a student of Mazu Daoyi.

In 795 after transmission, Nanquan built himself a hermitage on Mount Nanquan and remained on the mountain for the next thirty years. His most memorable dharma heir was Zhaozhou Congshen.

Nanquan is most known for the koan about killing the cat. And earned a reputation, because of this koan, of harshness and cruelty. However, when viewed in the light of many other koans in which he is featured, a great deal of humor appears. There are stories or koans about his locking himself in a room and refusing to leave until one of the monks utters a true word of zen. And Zhaozhou simply says, "What a beautiful blue sky there is today." And Nanquan opens the door. In another koan he compares the true Way to a buffalo down in the fields munching grass. And in the final koan recorded of his life a monk asks him, "A hundred years from now where will you be?" Nanquan says, "I shall be a water buffalo at the foot of the hill." The monk then asks, "Will it be Ok if I follow you?" "Yes," responds Nanquan, "but have some grass in your mouth." All of which suggests that the actual killing of the cat was a metaphor rather than fact.

There is an echo in the present koan of the great Mazu's major teaching:

Mind is Buddha.

The teaching goes through several mutations.

Koan 30.

Mazu says, "This very mind is buddha."

Koan 33.

Mazu is asked, "What is buddha?"

He responds, "Not mind, not buddha."

Koan 41.

Bodhidharma is asked by Huiko to cure his troubled mind. Bodhidharma tells Huiko to bring his mind to him and he will do it. Huiko tells Bodhidharma he can't find his mind. And Bodhidharma then says, I have pacified your mind.

Koan 19.

Nanquan says, "Ordinary mind is the Way."

Koan 27.

Nanquan says, "It is not mind, it is not Buddha, it is not a thing."

Finally, there is Nanquan's beautiful description of mind in his colloquy with Zhaozhou, after which Zhaozhou becomes enlightened.

Zhaozhou asks Nanquan, "What is the Way?"

Nanquan responds, "The Way has nothing to do with knowing it or not-knowing it. How can anybody really know anything? What do we know? How do we know? Through our senses. Through our eyes, our ears, our nose, our fingers. And our senses lie. We never really see the things we think we see. We never hear the things we think we hear. Ask ten people who see and hear the same thing and you get ten different accounts of what they saw or heard. Also with non-knowing. That's just a blank. I can't tell you exactly what the Way is. I can only tell you what I think it's like. It's like space, clear and empty and full. It's like the light of the moon, clear and bright. That's what truth is really about. It's something you can't force in any way. And it's right here. (And

he pointed with his stick.) In your heart. In the questions you ask.”

Nanquan Puyuan said, “Mind is not buddha, wisdom is not the Way.”
The koan boils down to four words.

mind,
buddha,
way, and
wisdom, or knowledge, knowing, or reason.

Aitken Roshi says that all four words are briars, faulty expressions that can lead us astray...yet they can also guide us if we are ready for them.

Mind is not buddha
Wisdom is not the way

Shuffling the words we can get,

Mind is not the way
Wisdom is not buddha

Mind is not wisdom
Buddha is not the way

Mind is not mind
Wisdom is not wisdom

Way is not the Way

Buddha is not buddha

What we have is negation. But is this nihilism? Do we have a rejection of all religious principle? Of all principle? Or do we have a rejection of language as a means of describing anything—anything that is really of substance

I think we have simple statements.

Whatever we say falls short.

Whatever we say about a leaf is not a leaf.

Whatever we say about love is not love.

Whatever we say about it is not it.

Whatever we say about God is not God.

Whatever we say about mind is not mind.

Whatever we say about the way is not the way.

Whatever we say about wisdom is not wisdom.

“Words Words Words,” says Hamlet to Polonius. Words are empty. Language is empty. Back to the Heart Sutra,

Therefore, O Shariputra, in emptiness [there is] no form, no sensation, no concept, no conditioning force, no consciousness,

no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body [or] mind, no form, sound, scent, taste, touch-object (*sparstavya*) [or] mind-object (*dharma*), no realm of the eye (*cakshur-chatu*) (and so on up to) no realm of mind-consciousness (*manovijñana-dhatu*), no ignorance, nor destruction of ignorance (and so on up to) no old age and death, no destruction of old age and death, no suffering, arising [of suffering], [or] path, no knowledge (*jñana*), no attainment (*prapti*) and no non-attainment (*aprapti*).
(Nattier.)

And I dare to add,

no words!



Nanquan Puyuan said, "Mind is not buddha, wisdom is not the Way."

Case 35. Wu-tsu: Which is the True Ch'ien?

(Aitken Roshi)

The Case

Wu-tsu asked a monk, The woman Ch'ien and her spirit separated. Which is the true Ch'ien?

Wu-men's Commentary

If you realize the true one, then you'll know that emerging from one husk and entering another is like a traveler putting up at an inn. If this is still not clear, don't rush about recklessly. When you suddenly separate into earth, water, fire, and air, you'll be like a crab dropped into boiling water, struggling with your seven hands and eight legs. Don't say I never told you,.

Wu-men's Verse

The moon and the clouds are the same;
Mountains and valleys are different.
All are blessed, all are blessed.
Is this one? Is this two?

Reflections

The source of this koan is an old Tang tale. Here it is.

Qiannu and Wang Zhou were cousins. As children they often played together. And they were very much alike in many ways. So much so that once while they were playing Qiannu's father said to them that seemed as if they were married. Qiannu and Zhou took this comment as a sort of engagement. As they grew older they realized that they were indeed in love. This confirmed for them their belief that they were destined to be husband and wife.

As she entered her teens Qiannu became more and more beautiful. So much so that soon many men of the village desired her. And many men soon called upon Qiannu's father to ask for her in marriage.

He finally decided upon a young, handsome, wealthy man of the village, who also had a great job as a government official. So a marriage was arranged between Qiannu and this man. Qiannu was distressed. She all along thought that Zhou was to be her husband. But her father who had completely forgotten the stray remark she made to the cousins when they were children told Qiannu that Zhou was most unsuitable. He was poor. He made a living by chopping wood and selling it for firewood. There was no way in which he could afford to raise a family or bring honor to Qiannu or to himself.

Zhou on the other hand was miserable. Totally rejected he sung into a funk. He couldn't stand to see the young handsome government official go to Qiannu's home and be cordially received. And then the thought that soon they would be married and soon he would be living in the same village with them was intolerable for him. So he decided he must leave the village. He packed up all of his meager belongings, and quietly left the village. He went to the river, rented a boat and began his journey down the river. He thought he would go as far away as possible or at least three or four villages down the river.

As the boat was sailing down the river he heard a voice. He looked at the bank along the river and saw Qiannu running as fast as she could waving her hands and shouting his name, Zhou! Zhou! Zhou! Don't leave me! Don't leave me! Don't leave me! He had the captain stop the boat. He went ashore he ran to Qiannu and they embraced. They declared their love for one another and both returned to the boat. They continued their journey and went to a remote village down the river.

They married and lived happily together for five years. They had two children. Being a young mother and nursing and raising her little children made Qiannu realize how deep the love of a parent for their children could be. And she began to feel for her father and how miserable and upset he must be with her for having disobeyed him, rejecting the husband he had selected for him and deserted him.

Qiannu shared her feelings of remorse with Zhou. He also felt a similar regret and together they decided to return to their original home village and ask Qiannu's father to forgive them. Perhaps now that he was a grandfather he may do it for their sake.

So they set sail for the south. Before arriving they decided that Zhou should go alone to the Father's home and try to gain his forgiveness.

He did. He went down on his knees and remorsefully told his father-in-law everything. How Qiannu and he had escaped together. How they had formed a new life in a new village. How now his father-in-law was a grandfather to two beautiful children. And that Qiannu was waiting on board the boat for his forgiveness.

The Father was amazed. But how can that be, he said. Qiannu can't be on board a boat. She's here, inside, sick in bed. She never left home. In fact, on the very day that you, Zhou, left the village and sailed away, Qiannu took to her bed and entered into a deep coma. She has been that way to this very day. He then took Zhou into Qiannu's room, and there she was lying quite still in a deep sleep.

This is impossible said Zhou, I just left Qiannu on the boat. She's been with me for the past five years. Come with me, he said to his father-in-law. And they both ran to the boat. Seeing them coming Qiannu went ashore to meet them. She went down on

her knees before her father and asked him to forgive her. He lifted her up and said, Yes, of course I forgive you. But there's nothing to forgive, because, I don't understand. Please, quick, come with me.

So they all went to Father's house. As they came near the house, the Qiannu who was in bed for the past five years rose, and went outside and walked towards the three figures who were approaching the house. As they met the two Qiannu's met and became one body.

The three—Father, Zhou, and Qiannu were dumbfounded. What just happened they asked each other? Father said, I now know that the Qiannu who was in bed must have been merely a body whose spirit had left her.

Zhou said, but the Qiannu who was my wife was not a spirit, but flesh and blood. And she gave birth to our two children. How could a spirit give birth?

And Qiannu said, I really never knew I was at home in bed. I saw Zhou leave bitterly disappointed. And that night I dreamed that I followed him and ran after his boat. But now I don't know if I was the one who remained in bed or the one who followed the boat.

And there the story ends and the koan begins.



The Case

Wu-tsu asked a monk, The woman Ch'ien and her spirit separated. Which is the true Ch'ien?

Wu-men's Commentary

If you realize the true one, then you'll know that emerging from one husk and entering another is like a traveler putting up at an inn. If this is still not clear, don't rush about recklessly. When you suddenly separate into earth, water, fire, and air, you'll be like a crab dropped into boiling water, struggling with your seven hands and eight legs. Don't say I never told you.

Wu-men's Verse

The moon and the clouds are the same;
Mountains and valleys are different.
All are blessed, all are blessed.
Is this one? Is this two?

Reflections

Knowing Margaret as I do, I bet the first words that would come out of her mouth about this koan would be, Not One! Not Two! Interestingly, while typing this I made a typo and got, Now One! Now Two!

But let's go further.

Two Qiannu's. One in bed. The other married to Zhou. Which is the real Qiannu?

Can there be more than one Qiannu?

Could they have been identical twins? Nothing in the story supports that. Well then, can there be more than one Qiannu?

Can there be more than one Stef?

I can just hear Margaret and probably most of you, wringing your hands at this suggestion, and saying, Shakesperherily, "Heaven forefend!"

How many I's are there in one Stef?

I am a husband.

I am a zen teacher.

I am not a zen teacher.

I am a father

I am a somewhat flutist.

I am a somewhat jazz player

I am a pacifist
I am not a pacifist
I am a klutz
I am a fathead
And so forth.

So which is the real I? Are all real? All together? Or is each I one of Wumen's husks?

I'm also reminded of Eugene O'Neill having some of his characters speak in different voices placing a different mask on their faces with each voice.

How many I's can each of you identify in yourselves?

And which is the real you? The real I?

What is the true reality? The real reality?

Can a person be in two places at the same time?

Shakespeare again has Hamlet say to Horatio, "There more things in heaven and earth than are to be found in your philosophy."

And again in the same play Hamlet teases Polonius about the clouds in the sky. Are these the same clouds that Wumen sees?

The new physics even has multiple histories taking place at the same time in different spheres of existence. Listen to that? I turn to classic Buddhist clichés to try to explain the new physics! It is said that alongside the history

we are now experiencing, there could be another which has Babe Ruth never being traded to the Yankees and leading the Red Sox to one world series after another. And there could be another history alongside that one in another sphere of existence. So if all of this is possible or even conceivable in some form or another why is it not possible for there to be not one but two Qiannus?

It all boils down to just what the hell is reality? Which Qiannu is the real Qiannu?

Does Not One Not Two mean nobody's real?

Or is the answer the typo, Now One Now Two?



The Case

Wu-tsu asked a monk, The woman Ch'ien and her spirit separated. Which is the true Ch'ien?

Wu-men's Commentary

If you realize the true one, then you'll know that emerging from one husk and entering another is like a traveler putting up at an inn. If this is still not clear, don't rush about recklessly. When you suddenly separate into earth, water, fire, and air, you'll be

like a crab dropped into boiling water, struggling with your seven hands and eight legs. Don't say I never told you.

Wu-men's Verse

The moon and the clouds are the same;
Mountains and valleys are different.
All are blessed, all are blessed.
Is this one? Is this two?

Case 36. Meeting Adepts on the Road

(Cleary)

Wuzu said, "On the road, when you encounter people who have attained the Way, you do not face them with speech or silence. So tell me, how do you face them?"

Wumen Says,

If you can answer intimately here, that will no doubt be a joy and a pleasure; but if not, you should keep an eye out everywhere.

Wumen's Verse

On the road, meeting people who've attained the Way,
You do not face them with speech or silence:
Punch them right in the jaw;
If they understand directly, then they understand.

(Kirchner Case 259)

Wuzu Fayan said, "If you meet an accomplished wayfarer on the road, don't respond with either speech or silence. So tell me, how would you respond?"

Reflections

This koan resonates with the echoes that vibrate within it.

Hear Shakyamuni and his noble and profound silences.

Hear the thundering silence of Vimalakirti.

Hear the mighty Linchi who insists that when we meet the Buddha on road we must kill him! (Or punch him in the jaw!)

Then again Linchi tells us that upon meeting someone who is infused with Dao we must refuse to take up the Dao.

Hear the silence of Yuima when asked by Manjushri, "What is your view of the dharmagate of not-two?"

And MMK 24 Detachment from words. "Speech and silence partake of both transcendence and functioning, so how can we proceed without transgressing."

And finally the very structure of the terms, speech and silence take us back to the most famous dualism, Form and emptiness.

So, if not with speech and silence, how so you respond?

My offering is a teaching of George Fox who told his fellow Quakers to meet one another in that which is eternal. This could have more of a zen flavor if the words could be, "Meet one another in that which is empty."



Wuzu Fayan said, "If you meet an accomplished wayfarer on the road, don't respond with either speech or silence. So tell me, how would you respond?"

Case 37. Zhaozhou and the Cypress Tree

A monk asked Zhaozhou, "What is the true meaning of Chan?"

Zhaozhou said, "The cypress tree in the yard."

Reflections

The koan of the cypress tree in the yard expresses the inexpressible. How is that done? Here's a hint. No matter how often you say the word "fire," your mouth will not burst into flames. And yet, in koan study, your mouth **must** burst into flames in order for you to get it! How do you do that?

Turn to the "Heart Sutra."

Form is not other than emptiness.

Emptiness is not other than form.

Form is precisely emptiness.

Emptiness is precisely form.

There is no duality.

There is no "form."

No "emptiness."

Form is contained in emptiness

Emptiness is contained in form.

The absolute and relative interpenetrate. The trick is to find that point of interpenetration in the relative and present that in terms of the koan.

This is exactly what Zhaozhou did with his response.

For Zhaozhou that point was the cypress tree in the garden. What is that point for you?

What is the point of interpenetration of the absolute and relative in your life and being right now, at this very moment?

This is what you must focus on in zazen.

This is what you must present in daisan! Don't give me words and theories. Don't talk about gardens or cypress trees. Don't talk about what the right questions are. Don't talk. Show me your point of interpenetration!

Does that point relate to the question?

Having said all this, let's rephrase the monk's question.

A monk asked Zhaozhou,

"What is Zen?"

"Who am I?"

"What is Truth?"

"What is enlightenment?"

"Am I enlightened?"

"Are you enlightened?"

"Is anyone enlightened?"

"Is my true self eternal?"

"If my true self is eternal, what happens to it when I die?"

"If my true self is not eternal, what happens to **it** when I die?"

Etc.

Shades of Malunkyaputta! In Sutta sixty-three, of the *Majjhima Nikaya*. A monk by the name of Malunkyaputta was troubled by similar questions. He wondered why Shakyamuni, "set aside and rejected," the following issues and questions:

The world is eternal;

The world is not eternal;

The world is finite;

The world is infinite;

The soul is the same as the body;

The soul is one thing and the body another;

After death a Tathagata exists;

After death a Tathagata does not exist;

After death a Tathagata both exists and does not exist;

After death a Tathagata neither exists and does not exist.

Malunkyaputta is troubled by these questions and he confronts the Buddha. He says that if Shakyamuni does not clarify them he will, "abandon the training and return to the low life." Shakyamuni tells him that he has left these questions, "undeclared" because they are, "unbeneficial," and do not belong to the, "fundamentals of the holy life," and, "do not lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbana."

The Buddha tells Malunkyaputta the parable of the wounded man:

Suppose, Malunkyaputta, a man were wounded by an arrow thickly smeared with poison, and his friends and companions, his kinsmen and relatives, brought a surgeon to treat him. The man

would say: "I will not let the surgeon pull out this arrow until I know whether the man who wounded me was a noble or a Brahmin or a merchant or a worker." And he would say: "I will not let the surgeon pull out this arrow until I know the name and clan of the man who wounded me; ...until I know the man who wounded me was tall or short or of middle height; ...until I know whether the man who wounded me was dark or brown or golden-skinned; ... until I know whether the man who wounded me lives in such a village or town or city; ...until I know whether the bow that wounded me was a long bow or a crossbow; ...until I know whether the bowstring that wounded me was fiber or reed or sinew or hemp or bark; ...until I know whether the shaft that wounded me was wild or cultivated; ...until I know with what kind of feathers the shaft that wounded me was fitted—whether those of a vulture or a crow or a hawk or a peacock or a stork; ...until I know with what kind of sinew the shaft that wounded me was bound—whether that of an ox or a buffalo or a lion or a monkey; ...until I know what kind of arrow it was that wounded me—whether it was hoof-tipped or curved or barbed or calf-toothed or oleander."

All this would still not be known to that man and meanwhile he would die. So too, Malunkyaputta, if anyone should say thus: "I will not lead the holy life under the Blessed One until the Blessed One declares to me: "the world is eternal"... or, "after death a Tathagata neither exists nor does not exist," that would still remain undeclared by the Tathagata and meanwhile that person would die.

"And what have I declared," says the Buddha?

"This is suffering," I have declared.

"This is the origin of suffering," I have declared.

"This is the cessation," I have declared.

"This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering," I have declared.

Zhaozhou similarly, does not bother with the monk's question. Instead he turns to the cypress tree in the garden!

The cypress tree is the here and now.

The here and now is this very moment.

The cypress tree is the intersecting point
of the relative and absolute.

The cypress tree is what will lead you to enlightenment.

The cypress tree is enlightenment itself!

Show me your cypress tree! Now!



A monk asked Zhaozhou, "What is the true meaning of Chan?"

Zhaozhou said, "The cypress tree in the yard."

Case 38. The Ox Passing Through the Window Screen

(Cleary)

Wuzu said, "It is as if an ox had passed through a window screen: It's head, horns, and four hooves have all passed through; why can't the tail pass through?"

Wumen Says,

If here you can shift into reverse, set a single eye, and speak a pivotal word, you will be able to requite the favors you receive and help all beings. Otherwise, you have to pay further attention to the tail before you get it.

Wumen's Verse

If it goes on past, it falls into a pit;
If it comes back, then it is spoiled.
This little tail
Is very strange indeed.

Kattoshu Case 16 An Ox Goes Through a Lattice Window

(Kirchner)

Wuzu Fayan said, It's as though a water buffalo is passing through a lattice window. Its head, horns, and four legs have all gone through. Why can't the tail go through?

Reflections

Poems by Dogen Zenji

Picture it, but to no avail.
When the world collapses,
It is indestructible.

This world is but the tail of a buffalo
passing through a window.
The tail is the mind,
Which knows neither passing nor not-passing.
(Shibayama Roshi p. 267)

Another poem (Heine. *Zen Poetry of Dogen*. p. 113, 49-J)

The world—
Like an elephant's tail
Not passing through the window,
Although no one is there
Holding it back.

More Dogen Zenji.

...

Long ago Master Foyan [Qinguan] became fundraiser monk at Wuweijun, and once hit his heel in the street and had some realization. After returning [to his temple], he brought this up to [his teacher] Wuzu [Fayan]. Later, when he was staying at the guest house, one night during sitting he stirred the fire, and

suddenly had a forceful realization. Although this was the case, whenever he entered the [teacher's] room he was never able to enter deeply to the inner sanctum. Calmly he asked Wuzu for instruction. Wuzu said, I will express it for you with a parable. It is just like a person pulling an ox, and the ox passes by the window. Both horns and four hooves pass by, but only the tail cannot pass by.

Wuzu instructed Foyan like this. Both horns and four hooves have passed by. Why is it that only the tail cannot pass by? People, **look at this in detail in your Zen practice.**

[As an aside please note that here Dogen Zenji directs his monks to work on a koan during zazen.]

The World-Honored One said, For example it is like a great elephant passing by a window. The entire body has gone by, but only the tail cannot get by. Worldly people are also like this. Home-leavers entering the way who altogether abandon associations, but only are not yet able to abandon name and gain, are like the elephant's tail not able to pass by.

Because of this [remaining attachment], we transmigrate through the six destinies in the three realms [desire, form, and formless], and are tossed around through birth and death. Therefore, although the elephant spoken of by the World-Honored One and the ox spoken by Wuzu are different, yet they are the same. Thus we should know that if the tail has not yet been studied in practice, the horns also have not yet been

studied. If the horns have already passed by, the tail has already passed by. Great assembly, do you wish to understand the meaning of horns and tail?

After a pause Dogen Zenji said: Leading the ox along, do not seek for a perfect balance point. The three realms are like duckweed floating on the water. Studying the way, the tail has not yet passed by; on what day will the entire body pass by the window?

Great assembly, you have been standing for a long while. I respectfully hope you will take good care.



This koan is a tapestry of metaphors. The first words of the koan set the metaphor stage.

“It’s as though”

Here’s a list of metaphor/words.

Buffalo	essential nature/me
Lattice window	enlightenment/barrier/koan
Head	mind/skandhas/especially form
Horns	cutting of delusion/delusion
Four legs	compass points/resting places
Tail	clinging to whatever/formless form of reality/mind

And then there is the ubiquitous **IT!** What is IT?

The key to this koan is contained in IT. What is it? What is the subject of the koan? What is Wuzu talking about? It seems to me when you put all the metaphors together—buffalo, lattice window, head, hors, four legs, and tail—you get a process. What is this process? I believe it is the process of everyday living. The process of everyday practice. The process of zazen. The process of koan study. The koan therefore seems to be saying that no matter what the process is and no matter how successful you are in your practice of zazen, koan study, sutra memorization—movement from Student to Jukai to Shuso to Denkai to Denbo to Sensei to Roshi to whatever—there is always the tail. The tail never makes it. You've got it all. But the tail. The tail is always there. And what is the tail. It is our everyday life. Our washing of dishes. Our mowing of lawns. Our stubbing of toes. Our flubbing of koans. Our trials our errors our mistakes. Our mortality. No matter how enlightened we may be or think we may be there is always the tail our tail the corrective. It strips us to an unwanted humility. It forces us to see ourselves as fatheads. As Gerard Manly Hopkins' weeds. And long live those weeds. And long will those weeds live. There is no escape. There is no weeding.

This koan poses another Why trap. Why can't the tail go through? As with all Whys? Remove it. And you have simply. The tail can't go through. Because the tail is the ubiquitous IT—our humanity. And long live the weeds!



Wuzu Fayan said, It's as though a water buffalo is passing through a lattice window. Its head, horns, and four legs have all gone through. Why can't the tail go through?

Case 39. Trapped in Words

(Cleary)

A monk asked Yunmen about the line, "Radiant light silently illuminates the universe."

Before the monk had even finished, Yunmen abruptly said, "Aren't these the words of the scholar Zhang Zhuo?"

The monk replied, "Yes."

Yunmen said, "You're trapped in words."

Later, Zen master Sixin brought this up and said, "Now tell me, where did the monk get trapped in words?"

Wumen Says,

If you can see the radical strictness of Yunmen's action, and why the monk got bogged down in words, then you can be a teacher of humans and celestial spirits. But if you still do not understand, you cannot even save yourself.

Wumen's Verse

He casts his hood in the swift current;
One greedy for the bait bites.
As soon as the seam of his mouth opens,
He's lost his natural life.

Zen Master Sushan's Verse

Questioning, answering, free from partiality:
How can an iron wall or silver mountain be penetrated?
Conceding and denying depend on the time;
he says "You're trapped in words,"
Eventually causing a thousand ages to stir
the wind of lament.

Zen Master Songyuan's Verse

Clearly he depicts it for you to see:
The meaning is on the hook, not in the pan.
Even if a stone man can open his mouth,
He still doesn't realize he's been fooled by his tongue.

Reflections

First thing I noticed is that all translations ask the question, Where, or at what point, or when did the monk get trapped in words, or misspoke? Shibayama Roshi/Kudo instead translate the question as, Why had the monk missed it?

The controlling assumption of this koan is that the monk is parroting Chosetsu's poem. If so, then everything falls into place, and Yunmen's admonition makes sense. Is the quoting of someone else's words always to be considered as parroting? If so, then we are all parrots. So what is the teaching of this koan.

Know that when we move our tongues, no matter what we may be saying, we miss it! It's not only when we quote others. It's whenever we say anything. Whenever we try to understand and present that understanding. Whatever words we use miss.

Knowing this we therefore use words, miss, know that we miss and we continue to use words for words are all we have. Somewhere Shakyamuni says there are realms of existence in other galaxies where communication takes place through the medium of not words but aroma. Can one miss with aroma as well?



Unmon Says, You Have Missed It

(Shibayama Roshi/Kudo)

A monk once wanted to ask Unmon a question and started to say, The light serenely shines over the whole universe. Before he had even finished the first line, Unmon suddenly interrupted, Isn't that the poem of Chosetsu Shusai? The monk answered, Yes, it is. Unmon said, You have missed it!

Later Master Shishin took up this koan and said, Now tell me, why has the monk missed it?

Case 40. Kicking Over a Water Pitcher

(Cleary)

Master Guishan started out in the community of Master Baizhang serving as the chief cook. Baizhang was going to appoint him to be the master of Great Gui Mountain, and so requested him and the leader of the assembly to utter a saying to the community, in order that the most extraordinary individual could be the one to go.

Baizhang picked up a water pitcher, set it on a rock, and posed this question: "If you cannot call it a water pitcher, what do you call it?"

The leader of the assembly said, "It cannot be called a wooden upright bolt."

Baizhang then asked Guishan. Guishan immediately kicked over the pitcher and left.

Baizhang smiled and said, "The leader of the assembly has lost the mountain." And so he had Guishan start Zen teaching on that mountain.

Wumen Says,

Guishan was courageous, but he could not leap clear of Baizhang's snare. When you bring the matter up for examination, he finds convenience in the heavy, not in the light.

How so? Look! He removed his bandanna and took up iron
fettters.

Wumen's Verse

Tossing aside his basket and ladle,
He gives a direct thrust, no beating around the bush.
Baizhang's double barrier cannot stop him;
The point of his foot kicks out Buddhas without number.

Zen Master Shaozhao's Verse

What determines the hero is the water jug;
At the point of minutest distinction,
there are no more emotions.
Great peace is originally for the general to bring about,
But the general is not allowed to see great peace.

Zen Master Tongzhao's Verse

The great function needs an expert to know;
On the spot, one kick put an end to doubt.
What a pity those who do not succeed in Zen
Do nothing but judge right and wrong at the jug.

*

First some background. From the *Dentoroko—The Transmission of the Lamp*.
Early Masters. Translated by Sohaku Ogata. Book Nine, pages. 297-299.

Master Kuei Shan, Ling Yu, of T'an State was a native of Chang Ch'i: his surname was Chao. At the age of fifteen he left his parents to become a homeless monk and had his head shaved by Vinaya Master Fa Ch'ang of Chien Shan Temple of that state. He was given the Precepts at Lung Hsing Temple of Kan State, where he studied sutras and Vinaya texts of the Mahayana and Hinayana schools.

At twenty-three years of age he went to the Western River and leaned Ch'an meditation from Master Po Chang Ta Chih. Po Chang gave him one look and permitted him to enter into his room. Thereafter Ling Yu occupied the highest place among the students.

One day when he was attending Master Po Chang, he was asked, "Who is there?"

He replied, "I am Ling Yu."

Po Chang said, "Poke the stove. Is there any fire?"

Ling Yu poked the ashes and said, "There is no fire."

Po Chang got up himself, poked deeper into the stove, and found a small ember. Holding it up (in the tongs), he displayed it and demanded, "Is this not fire?"

At this Ling Yu attained enlightenment. Bowing in appreciation, he described his understanding to the master.

Po Chang remarked, "It is no other than a fork (or junction) in the present moment. The scriptures tell us that if one wishes to behold the Buddha-nature, one must observe the synchronicity of the (primary) cause and subsidiary causes of his being. When that moment comes, one awakens from the dream, recalls that which has been forgotten, and sees things as one's own and not to be gained from outside. Therefore our Patriarch said that after the enlightenment experience a man is the same as he was before the experience. Neither mind nor objects exist, but there are no thoughts discriminating between falsities. In common men and in sages the original mind and the dharma are complete in themselves. Now that you have this comprehension, cherish it."

*

At that time a monk named Szu Ma came from Hunan. Besides studying Ch'an , he specialized in the mirrors of human relationships and engaged in geographical research. Po Chang was establishing temples in many places and had to make a decision so he said to Szu Ma, "I wish to go to Kuei Mountain. What that be good?"

Szu Ma answered, "Mount Kuei is situated in an excellent environment. One thousand five hundred disciples might congregate there. It is not the place, however, where you should live Master."

"Why is that?" asked Po Chang.

Szu Ma said, "Master, you are a bone man while that is a flesh mountain (you would be a round peg in a square hole), If you were to live there, not more than a thousand students would gather."

Po Chang asked, "Is there anyone among my congregation who would be suitable to live there (as abbot)?"

The monk said, "Let me see them all one by one."

Po Chang sent his attendant to summon the Chief Monk, Fa Lin. (When he arrived) he asked (Szu Ma), "What do you think of this man?"

Szu Ma made Fa Lin speak in a loud voice, speak in a low voice, and walk a few paces. Then he answered, "This man is no good."

Then the man in charge of cooking, Ling Yu, as summoned. Szu Ma declared, "This is the right man to be master of Kuei Shan Monastery."

That very night Po Chang called Ling Yu to his room and confided, "My preaching destiny is here. Kuei Shan is an excellent environment for you to live in and carry on our teaching, thereby liberating future generations."

When Fa Lin heard about this, he protested, "I have the honor of being Chief Monk of this congregation. Why should it be Brother

Ling Yu who receives the appointment as master of the new monastery at Kuei Shan?"

Po Chang said, "He who makes the finest response to my question, in the presence of the congregation, shall be made the abbot." Then, pointing to a water pitcher, he said, "Without calling this a pitched, what do you call it."

Fa Lin answered, "It should not be called a piece of wood."

Po Chang did not accept this, and asked Ling Yu the question.

Ling Yu kicked over the pitcher.

Smiling, Po Chang remarked, "Our Chief Monk has been left behind by Brother Kuei Shan."

*

Subsequently Ling Yu, now Master Kuei Shan, was sent to Kuei Mountain, a high place far away from human dwellings. His companions were the wild monkeys and his food supply consisted of chestnuts and acorns.

Yamada Roshi, in his commentary, tells us that Kueishan then went to Mount Kueishan and did not immediately build a large monastery. Instead, he built small hut and practices on the mountain in the hut for the next eight years. But nobody came. Discouraged, he decided to leave and go somewhere else. As he was leaving a tiger came and pulled him back to the hut. And so Kueishan remained. Then several days later three monks arrived. Eventually, the numbers increased until the predicted fifteen hundred was reached.

Yamada Roshi goes on to ask, "What does this story teach?" Content is more important than the container. It's not the grand monasteries that matter, but their contents. Zhaozhou illustrates this in several koans during his pilgrimage after he left Nanquan's monastery.

One day Chao-chou visited Shuyu's lecture hall. He ascended the platform with his staff and looked from east to west, then from west to east. "What are you doing?" Shuyu asked.

"I am measuring the water," Chao-chou answered.

"There is no water, not even a drop. How can you measure it?" Shuyu answered.

Chao-chou leaned his staff against the wall and left.

*

When Chao-chou was a pilgrim, he arrived at a temple. As soon as he entered the gate and met with the head priest, he said, "Is there? Is there?"

The priest raised his fist.

Chao-chou said, "It is hard to anchor my boat in this shallow water." He went away. He arrived at another temple, met the head priest, and said, "Is there? Is there?"

The head priest raised his fist.

Chao-chou said, "It can give, it can grab, it can expand, it can condense."

Yamada Roshi concludes his commentary poignantly with the following words.

In olden days, the content of the Buddha dharma was so substantial that beautiful temples and monasteries came into being naturally as it container. Nowadays, the content of Buddha's Way has become doubtful, so maintaining the exterior is very difficult. It is indeed regrettable that today most Japanese temples and monasteries must exhibit their gardens and antiques in order to survive.

Reflections

The trouble with this koan is that it has been corrupted by thousands upon thousands of zen students, laypeople, nuns, and monks, and even many so-called teachers, authorized or self-proclaimed.

It is one of the koans that has given rise to the development of zen-stink. People coming to daisan responding to their koan with a shout or a clapping of hands or a magnificent sweeping abrupt gesture of arms and hands or legs or other such zen-cliché-nonsense. I don't accept zen-stink of others. I only accept your own stink. This is what Bankei was talking about when he said koan study is like washing oneself in someone else's dirty water.

Koan study is about finding who you are, not about finding out about who someone else is. It's not about counting someone else's money as Shakyamuni put it.

The first encounter between Kueishan and Baizhang illustrates this. Kueishan was in deep samadhi in the zendo. Baizhang walked over to him and said, "Who are you?"

Kueishan gave his name.

Baizhang probed deeper. "Go to the fireplace and bring me a live coal."

Kueishan tried. But found nothing. He told Baizhang, "The ashes are cold. There's nothing there."

Baizhang then poked the ashes and came out with a live coal. "What about this?"

And Kueishan got it! And immediately became enlightened. The red spark was there within him. Zazen couldn't bring it for he had to see it. He had to dig deep into the ashes of his being to find it and digging deep saw, felt, and knew what he had and what was him.

Don't use another's' words.

Don't stink another's' stink.

Look deep inside yourself.

Dig deep into the ashes of your being.

There you will find the red coal.

There you will find Christ.

There you will find Buddha.

Step into the daisan room with confidence—because you have the coal.

Because you are the coal.

Relay on the coal within.

The coal is your word.

It is the answer to the koan you are working on.

When you're working on a koan and memorize it and read and study all the commentaries then forge the koan. Forget the commentaries. The commentaries are ashes. These so-called reflections of mind are ashes. The koan itself is a pile of ashes. Zazen itself is ashes.

Dig through the ashes of zazen, commentaries, koan, reflections, and get to the coal. Get to your own coal and don't give up seeking until you burn.

Then you have found it.

Then enter the daisan room burning and show Margaret or me your wounds.



Master Guishan started out in the community of Master Baizhang serving as the chief cook. Baizhang was going to appoint him to be the master of Great Gui Mountain, and so requested him and the leader of the assembly to utter a saying to the community, in order that the most extraordinary individual could be the one to go.

Baizhang picked up a water pitcher, set it on a rock, and posed this question: "If you cannot call it a water pitcher, what do you call it?"

The leader of the assembly said, "It cannot be called a wooden upright bolt."

Baizhang then asked Guishan. Guishan immediately kicked over the pitcher and left.

Baizhang smiled and said, "The leader of the assembly has lost the mountain." And so he had Guishan start Zen teaching on that mountain.

Case 41. Pacifying the Mind

(Cleary)

As the founder of Zen faced a wall, his future successor stood in the snow, cut off his arm, and said, "My mind is not yet at peace. Please pacify my mind."

The founder said, "Bring me your mind, and I will pacify it for you."

The successor said, "I have looked for my mind, and cannot find it."

The founder said, "I have pacified your mind for you."

Wumen Said,

The founder of Zen sailed thousands of miles over the ocean, coming to China by stages; this might be called "raising waves without wind." In the end he got a student, but he turned out to be handicapped. Too bad! "The imbecile doesn't even know the motto on a penny."

Wumen's Verse

Coming from the West, directly pointing,
The matter arose from entrusting a charge.
Stirring up the Zen communities,
After all it's you.

From the Kattoshu

Case 1 Pacifying the Mind of the Second Patriarch

Huike, the Second Patriarch, said to Bodhidharma, "My mind is not yet at rest. Master, I implore you, set my mind to rest."

The Master replied, "Bring your mind here and I'll set it to rest for you."

Huike said, "I've searched for my mind, but am unable to find it."

"There," said the master, "I've set your mind to rest."

Background

The second ancestral great teacher [Dazu Huike] asked the first ancestor [Bodhidharma], "My mind is not yet calm. Would the teacher pacify it?"

The [first] ancestor said, "Bring your mind, and I will pacify you."

[Dazu Huike] said, "Seeking my mind I cannot grasp it."

The [first] ancestor said, "I have finished pacifying your mind."

When all is totally clear, nothing need be cleared.
Where all is hidden and dark, is utter confusion.

Seeking a teacher by the side of the path,
he accidentally met himself.
Enticed by calm water, he walked a bit
in the clouds.

Dogen Zenji. (Leighton 9.89)

*

Great Teacher Second Ancestor [Dazu Huike] once had a
layperson [the future third ancestor, Jianzhi Sengcan] ask him,
“This disciple’s body is bound up in illness. Master, please help
me repent for my sins.”

The ancestor said, “Bring me your sins, and I will repent them
[for you].”

After a pause the layperson said, “Looking for my sins, they are
ungraspable.”

The ancestor said, “I have finished repenting sins for you. You
should live in reliance on Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.”

Our sins and crimes fill the skies,
yet cannot be found anywhere.
The sins and crimes filling the skies are
fine and beneficial.
Suddenly right here, another encounter,
The clear wind of the single way blows freely. (EK. 5)

From the *Dentoroku. The Transmission of the Lamp*. Translated by Sohaku Ogata, pp. 68-69.

Residing at Shao Lin Temple of Sung Mountain, Master Bodhidharma sat [in meditation] facing the wall all day long in silence. People wondered who he was and called him the Wall-Gazing Brahmin.

At that time there was a Buddhist monk named Shen Kuang who was widely informed and who had been living in Loyang for a long time. He read (great) quantities of all kinds of books which told of the profound Principle. He sighed and said, "The teachings of Confucius and Laotze are but customs and etiquette, and the books of Changtze and Changes still do not plumb the depths of the wonderful Principle. Lately I hear that Master Dharma is living in Shao Lin Temple. With this supreme man so near I should reach the deeper realms (of understanding)." Then he went to him, wanting to be instructed from morning till night. The Master, however, would give him no instruction, but sat in meditation all the time facing the wall.

Kuang thought to himself: "Men of old sought the Way by smashing their bones to take out the marrow, slashing their veins to feed hungry [animals], spreading hairs to cover the muddy road in order to let the spiritual man pass through safely, or leaping off a cliff to feed a hungry tigress. All through the ages people have behaved like this. Who am I?"

On December 9th of that year it snowed heavily in the night. Shen Kuang stood firmly without moving [in the yard of Shao Lin Temple]. By dawn of the next day, the falling snow had piled so deep that it reached his knees.

Master Bodhidharma then took pity on him and asked him, "What are you seeking, standing in the snow for this long time?" Shen Kuang sobbed, and in tears begged him, "Please Master, have mercy. Open the gate of nectar. Deliver the message that liberates sentient beings!"

The Master said, "The supreme, unequaled, spiritual Way of the Buddhas is accessible only after vast eons of striving to overcome the impossible and to bear the unbearable. How could a man of small virtue, little wisdom, slight interest, and slow mind attain the True Vehicle? Striving for it would be vain effort."

After listening to this exhortation from the Master, Shen Kuang secretly took a sharp knife and cut off his own left arm, placing it in front of the Master.

Realizing that he was good vessel for the dharma, the Master said, "All Buddhas in search of the Way have begun by ignoring their bodies for the sake for the Dharma. Now you have cut off your arm in front of me. You may have the right disposition."

The Master then renamed him Hui K'o. Hui K'o said, "May I hear about the dharma-seal of the Buddha?"

The Master said, "The dharma-seal is not something which can be heard about from others."

Hui K'ò said, "My mind is not yet at peace. Pray set it at peace for me, Master!"

The Master said, "Bring me your mind, and I will set it at peace for you."

Hui K'ò answered, "I have searched for it, but in the end it is unobtainable."

The Master said, "Your mind has been set at peace."

*

After Bodhidharma entrusted his teaching to Shao Lin Temple and returned to the West, Hui K'ò continued the profound teaching and searched widely for a dharma heir.

In the second year of T'ien P'ing of Northern Ch'i (535 A.D.), a layman over forty years old suddenly arrived. He did not announce his name but behaved with perfect etiquette and said, "I have been stricken (with illness) by heaven. Pray, Master, repent for my sin (on my behalf)."

The Patriarch said, "If you can bring me your sin, I will repent for it."

After a little while the layman answered, "Sin is not obtainable, although I have searched for it."

The Patriarch said, "I have repented for your sin. You should live by the Buddha, the dharma, and the Sangha."

Reflections

This koan highlights a problem each of us faces daily: a restless and often troubled mind. Our minds spin like tops, alighting here and there and everywhere. Far from the *Diamond Sutra's* ideal mind which alights nowhere. Even the most ridiculously insignificant things are capable of becoming labyrinthian subjects in our minds. Often our minds are roaring tumultuously waves swinging and crashing about, tearing apart any crafts around: especially the lowly kayaks. But even the great sea monster aircraft carriers which are as large as some cities on dry land and are chock full of tumultuous ideas and notions and opinions and beliefs and certainties and plans and ambitions and disappointments and you name it you cite it you have it yes even these great monsters can be capsized by the waves of our minds. The waves of our seaminds are our thoughts. We think thoughts about everything and anything. Even the least significant does not escape our thought Gestapo. Dogen Zenji speaks of sitting as if there is a fire on top of our heads. But he never said anything about having a tornado inside our heads.

What makes this so outrageous is the fact that this koan is essentially telling us that there is no such thing as mind. Or, at any rate, if there is, then there's no place to find it. But you may object, and rightly so, "Of course there's a mind! If not, then what the hell are we talking about?" OK, I say, but Bodhidharma challenges each of us to search for our mind and bring it to him. Bring it to daisan. Bring it to breakfast. Bring it to bed. Bring it wherever you think of going. But bringing it anywhere just can't happen

because since the day of Bodhidharma's challenge no one has been able to bring the mind anywhere because nobody's been able to find it.

Most of us think that the mind is somehow connected with the brain which activates and controls and directs and informs every part of our body. But is it? Does the mind equal the brain?

Margaret once told me a story of a young girl who had been raped and murdered. The killer escaped and was never identified or found. The parents of the child did not want their child's life to be without meaning, so they donated her healthy heart to a another child the same age whose own heart was badly damaged. She would soon die with it. The heart transplant was successful. The new child completely accepted the new healthy heart of the raped and murdered child.

Later, after recovering from her operation, the child with the new heart identified and named the murderer of the other child.

How did she do it? The transfer from one child to the other was a heart—not a brain. So, would the heart be the repository of the mind?

If so, where? Where in the heart? Which ventricle contains the mind? The left one? The right one? Could it be in the arteries? The veins? The blood coursing through the arteries and veins? What about the heart beat? Could that be the mind? Where? Where? Where? And we come smack again to Bodhidharma's challenge.

Further research goes on to assert that each cell of our body contains everything. Everything that makes for life. Does this mean that the mind is

contained in each cell of our being? Of our body? Is it in the liver? The stomach? The intestines as well as the odiferous occupants of those organs? Is it in our fingernails? Our lungs? Our sexual parts? If it had been a lung or liver transplant would that rapist-murderer have been identified and named? But our cellular structure is in constant flux. Our cells are constantly dying and being born again. Constantly being replaced by new cells. How does this happen? Where do the new cells come from? And does mind come with them? Where do the dead cells go? And does mind go with them?

And good old Bodhidharma continues to harass us, "Where is the mind? Bring it to me?"

So what then is this mind mind mind that all the zen masters, and ancestors talking about?

And finally, how can our tormented minds rest in peace?

This is the crux of the koan.



Huike, the Second Patriarch, said to Bodhidharma, "My mind is not yet at rest. Master, I implore you, set my mind to rest."

The Master replied, "Bring your mind here and I'll set it to rest for you."

Case 42. A Woman Comes Out of Absorption

(Kirchner. Case 56)

Long ago Manjushri went to a gathering of buddhas just as they were returning to their own domains. However, one woman remained sitting in samadhi near the seat of Shakyamuni Buddha.

Manjushri asked Shakyamuni, "Why can a woman get near the Buddha's seat when I cannot?"

Shakyamuni replied, "Just wake the woman up, bring her out of samadhi, and ask her yourself?"

Manjushri circled the woman three times, snapped his fingers once, raised her into the Brahma Heaven, and employed all of his supernatural powers, but he was unable to bring her out of samadhi.

Shakyamuni then said, "Even a hundred thousand Manjushri's wouldn't be able to bring this woman out of samadhi. Down below, past as many worlds as there are grains of sand in four billion two-hundred million Ganges Rivers, there is a bodhisattva named Delusion who is able to bring her out.

At that moment Delusion emerged from out of the ground and paid homage to Shakyamuni. Then, as instructed by the Buddha, he went before the woman and snapped his fingers once. At this the woman emerged from samadhi.

Background

Manjushri is the bodhisattva of Wisdom. Usually, he holds a sutra in one hand and a sword in the other. The sword cuts away delusion. He rides a lion which is symbolic of power and majesty. Sometimes he/she is depicted androgynously. When depicted with the Buddha, Manjushri stands on Buddha's left, and Samantabhadra, who is the bodhisattva of Virtue, stands on Buddha's right.

The Bodhisattva Delusion is called Momyo in Japanese. Yamada Roshi says that Momyo means "unenlightened." Aitken Roshi calls Momyo the bodhisattva of Delusive Wisdom, which sounds like an oxymoron to me.

Samadhi, according to the *Shambala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen*, is a Sanskrit word which literally means "establish, make firm" collectedness of the mind on a single object through (gradual) calming of mental activity. Samadhi is a nondualistic state of consciousness in which the consciousness of the experiencing "subject" becomes one with the experienced "object" — thus is *only* experiential content.

...

Three supermundane types of samadhi are distinguished that have as their goal emptiness, the state of no-characteristics, freedom from attachment to the object, and the attainment of nirvana. Any other form of samadhi, even in the highest stages of absorption is considered worldly.

Aitken Roshi on samadhi.

What is samadhi? As a technical term, it is a deep zazen condition. But more broadly, all conditions are samadhi. Samadhi really means "one with the universe."

People in mental hospitals are in samadhi. They are not completely out of touch. The trees, the grass—all are in samadhi. Like animals and birds, they are one with the universe. Then what is "great samadhi"? it is the samadhi of no obstructions. The dragon of great samadhi takes pleasure in the vast and fathomless Dharma of shells and lichen and smiling children.

Reflections

Mumon sees this koan as a play. He says,

Old Shakya plays a country drama on stage, but people of shallow realization cannot appreciate it. Just tell me: Manjushri is the teacher of the Seven Buddhas; why can't he bring the woman out of samadhi while Momyo, who is a bodhisattva in the beginning stage, can? If you can grasp this completely, you will realize that surging delusive consciousness is nothing other than the greatest samadhi.

The question I have is where does this play take place? Upon what stage? I believe the stage of this play is in our minds. I believe this play is not a play but a dream. And in the dream world all characters play each other. All characters are the same yet different. All characters are the dreamer.

And so, I am the Buddha, the Awakened one. I am Manjushri, the bodhisattva of Wisdom. I am the Woman in Samadhi, the Everyone of Humanity. And I am Momyo the bodhisattva of Delusion.

As the androgynous Manjushri I cannot awaken myself, the woman in samadhi, because I am in the samadhi of the very highest level of wisdom. As Momyo, the bodhisattva of Delusion, my samadhi is the samadhi of delusion and so I wake up. Notice, however the play on words. In each case I am the awakened one, the Buddha. In or out of samadhi I am the awakened one, the Buddha. So this koan is not about the failure of Manjushri and the success of Momyo. Because Manjushri and Momyo are the same. The same yet different. Different yet the same. Not one not two.

Case 95 of the *Kattoshu* nails this down.

A monk asked Xutang, "Manjushri was the teacher of the Seven Buddhas. Why was he unable to bring the woman out of samadhi?"

The master answered, "It was because his household spirits obstructed him."

In his notes Kirchner informs that household spirits are ancestral spirits that generally work for the benefit of their descendants, but occasionally their actions hurt the family fortunes. In the present case, "household spirits" refers to Manjushri's wisdom, which put him so far above the level of the disciple that he was unable to help her out of samadhi.

The monk continued, "And why was Delusion, a low-level sravaka, able to make her emerge?"

"A half-sheet of paper is just right for wrapping," replied the master.

Here Kirchner notes that just as small objects are more easily wrapped with small pieces of paper than with large ones, so less mature students are often best helped by bodhisattvas near their own level.

Yamada Roshi's commentary on Women's verse completes the case.

One can awaken her, the other cannot;
Both have their own freedom.
A god-mask here and a devil-mask there;
Even in failure, an elegant performance.

Both Manjushri and Momyo have their respective freedoms. When Manjushri failed to awaken the woman, he was free not to awaken her. When Momyo succeeded in waking her, he was free to wake her. For a horse, it is freedom to gallop. For a snake, it is freedom to crawl, not gallop. But it is still freedom for a snake not to be able to gallop. Failure to gallop is an elegant performance for a snake. Take the example of a jet plane about to take off. A hundred thousand Manjushri's might not be able to get it started, but a jet pilot could do so very easily.

Sometimes we are millionaires, sometimes paupers. Still, our essential nature does not change at all. We are always in the center of perfect freedom.



Long ago Manjushri went to a gathering of buddhas just as they were returning to their own domains. However, one woman remained sitting in samadhi near the seat of Shakyamuni Buddha.

Manjushri asked Shakyamuni, "Why can a woman get near the Buddha's seat when I cannot?"

Shakyamuni replied, "Just wake the woman up, bring her out of samadhi, and ask her yourself?"

Manjushri circled the woman three times, snapped his fingers once, raised her into the Brahma Heaven, and employed all of his supernatural powers, but he was unable to bring her out of samadhi.

Shakyamuni then said, "Even a hundred thousand Manjushri's wouldn't be able to bring this woman out of samadhi. Down below, past as many worlds as there are grains of sand in four billion two-hundred million Ganges Rivers, there is a bodhisattva named Delusion who is able to bring her out.

At that moment Delusion emerged from out of the ground and paid homage to Shakyamuni. Then, as instructed by the Buddha, he went before the woman and snapped his fingers once. At this the woman emerged from samadhi.

Case 43. Shou-shan's Short Bamboo Staff

(Kirchner Case 142 Shoushan's Stick)

Shoushan Shengnian of Ruzhou held up his stick and said to the assembly, "Everyone, call this a stick and you're caught in its name; say it's not a stick and you deny what it is. So, everyone, what do you call it?"

The Priest Shexian Guixing, who at the time was studying under Shoushan, went up and seized the stick, broke it in half, and threw down the pieces. "What is this?" he asked.

Shoushan said, "Blind!"

Commenting on this story, Dahui said, "Quick, speak! Quick, speak!"

Case 43 Shou-shan's Short Bamboo Staff

Aitken Roshi's translation

The priest Shou-shan held up his short bamboo staff before his assembly and said, "You monks, if you call this a staff, you're entangled. If you don't call this a staff, you ignore the fact. Tell me, what do you call it?"

Reflections

First a comment on the translations of the text. Most translators omit the “coda” and end the koan with Shoushan’s question. This brings us back to Case 40 “Kicking Over a Pitcher.” In that koan a similar situation is set up. Baizhang places a water pitcher on the floor and challenges his student’s to name it. And Kueishan’s response is to simply kick over the water pitcher and leave the place.

I am also reminded of Zhaozhou’s response to a situation when a leg of a table broke. He simply picked up a piece of wood from the firewood stack and replaced the leg with it.

This dilemma of the koan also reminds me of the story of the Emperor’s New Clothes that were made with invisible cloth. Everybody was so sophisticated, clinging to their build-in sets of labels and concepts; with their own ideas of the wonder of the invisible cloth and so they did not see the nakedness of the Emperor. It took a child who was not stuck, or to use Aitken Roshi’s key word, “entangled” in labels, views, and concepts, to see that the Emperor was naked.

I am also brought back to good old Shakyamuni himself, who tells us that our views prevent us from seeing. This teaching is repeated by the ancestors. Huineng tells us that

Erroneous views keep us in defilement
While right views remove us from it,
But when we are in a position to discard both of them
We are then absolutely pure.

And later he nails it down

Right views are called 'transcendental.'
Erroneous views are called 'worldly.'
When all views, right or erroneous, are discarded
Then the essence of Bodhi appears.

Most of the commentators of this koan see the major teaching to be a lesson in the dilemma of dualism. Relative and absolute truth. Wisdom and compassion. Form and emptiness. Right and wrong. Hot and cold. This and that. The fact is that we live in the world of dualism. And to make matters worse the scales are tipped in the favor of the relative. One way to escape this dilemma is by not-attaching and not-knowing and not-having any views. If we are able to think and act and speak from this place of not-knowing, non-attachment, not-having any views then we can see. The trick of having views is that we distort what we see before us with what views or labels we have created and are stored and fixed in our minds like the courtiers of the Emperor who were unable to see his nakedness.

There's another wonderful example of the entanglement of views. My sister, Angie, was visiting us from Italy. Margaret and I and mama and Angie were doing what mama and Angie liked best to do: shopping. We took them to a wonderful gourmet Italian vegetable market. Angie loved it. She stopped before every exotic and wonderful vegetable and where possible, nibbled. She was entranced by a tray filled with the tiniest black grapes. She nibbled. And exclaimed, "Oh, how sweet!" "Mama," she said, "taste these grapes, how sweet they are."

"No," mama said. "Tiny grapes are sour." Angie asked Margaret and me to taste. We did, and confirmed her taste buds.

"Mama, these grapes are very sweet," we said to her.

"No," mama insisted. "Tiny grapes are sour."

"But mama, taste them for yourself and you'll see that they're sweet."

Well after going back and forth several times mama relented and carefully placed two or three of the tiny grapes in her mouth. She immediately spat them out!

"Tswat," she spat. "Sour!" she said!

And that was that.

And so we see that we need to be in the place of not-knowing, non-attachment, not having any views in order to see that the Emperor has no clothes, that the grapes are sweet, and that the shippei or stick is a shippei or stick.

Shibayama Roshi beautifully sums up the heart of this koan with a poem from Master Shian.

Hundreds of mountains with no birds flying at all,
Thousands of lanes with no human traces whatever.
An old man in a solitary boat, in his straw hat and coat,
Is angling alone on a snowy river.



The priest Shou-shan held up his short bamboo staff before his assembly and said, "You monks, if you call this a staff, you're entangled. If you don't call this a staff, you ignore the fact. Tell me, what do you call it?"

Case 44. The Staff

(Cleary)

Master Baqiao said to a group, "If you have a staff, I will give you a staff; if you have no staff, I will take your staff away."

Wumen Says,

It helps you across a river where the bridges are out, and gets you back to the village when there is no moon. If you call it a staff, you go to hell fast as an arrow.

Wumen's Verse

The depths and shallows everywhere
Are all within his grip:
Holding up the sky and bracing the earth,
Wherever he is he makes Zen flourish.

Reflections

This koan strikes a lot of bells. Here are some of them.

First from the Cleary translation.

Zen Master Dahui's Verse

At the crossroads
he does business with what's at hand;

But if you want to haggle,
you stumble by in ignorance.

Zen Master Wuzhou's Verse

Bajiao raised his staff,
Startling all creation:
Shrimp may fly past the heavens,
But eyebrows are still above eyes.

Zen Master Kentang's Verse

In a village where the wells are poisoned
The water should not even be tasted;
Even with a single drop of it
The whole family dies.

Now from the Kattoshu.

(Kirchner Case 79 Bajiao' Staff)

Bajiao Huiqing said to the assembly, "If you have a staff, I'll give you a staff, if you have no staff, I'll take the staff away."

Xutang Zhiyu commented, "Each one of you, throw this staff away."

He then said, "Now tell me, are any of these three turning-phrases better than the others?" He made a rap with the bottom of his whisk.

The Book of Serenity, Case 57

Venerable Yanyang asked Zhaozhou, "When not a single thing is brought, then what?"

Zhaozhou said, "Put it down."

Yanyang said, "If I don't bring a single thing, what should I put down?"

Zhaozhou said, "Then carry it out."

From Zhaozhou koans (Green)

Someone asked, "When you do not carry a single thing with you, how is it then?"

Chao-chou said, "Put it down!"

*

A monk asked, "What is the meaning of the ancestor [Bodhidharma] coming from the West?"

The Master struck the leg of his seat.

The monk then again, "Is it not 'this'?"
The Master said, "If it is, you take it away."

Finally, from Luke 19.11-27

While they were listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable, because he was now close to Jerusalem and they thought the reign of God might dawn at any moment.

He said, 'A man of noble birth went on a long journey abroad, to be appointed king and then return. But first he called ten of his servants and gave them a pound each, saying, "Trade with this while I am away."

His fellow-citizens hated him, and they sent a delegation on his heels to say, "We do not want this man as our king." However, back he came as king, and sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, to see what profit each had made.

The first came and said, "Your pound, sir, has made ten more."

"Well done," he replied; "you are a good servant. You have shown yourself trustworthy in a very small matter, and you shall have charge of ten cities."

The second came and said, "Your pound, sir, has made five more"; and he also was told,

"You too, take charge of five cities."

The third came and said, "Here is your pound, sir; I kept it put away in a handkerchief. I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man: you draw out what you never put in and reap what you did not sow."

"You rascal!" he replied; "I will judge you by your own words. You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, that I draw out what I never put in, and reap what I did not sow? The why did you not put my money on deposit, and I could have claimed it with interest when I came back?" Turning to his attendants he said, "Take the pound from him and give it to the man with ten."

"But, sir," they replied, "he has ten already."

"I tell you," he went on, "the man who has will always be given more; but the man who has not will forfeit even what he has. But as for those enemies of mine who did not want me for their king, bring them here and slaughter them in my presence." '

Finally, we have Psalm 23, with the words,

Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

The staff is indeed a very old and deep archetype. In Buddhism it is one of the seven gifts given at the time of transmission to a dharma heir. It is called the *shujo*. The others are, the *kesa*, or the outer robe of the priest which in our lineage is made by the priest; the *kuromo*, which is the under robe; the *hossu*, or fly whisk; the *kotsu*, which is the stick Margaret and I always have in our hands when we teach; the *shippei*, which is used at the time of *Shuso*

Hossen; and the sutras. In our tradition the sutra transmitted is the “*Sandokai*” of Shitou Xiqian.

The shujo or staff is used as a walking stick. It is used when crossing a stream to see how deep the water is. It has been used metaphorically in many koans to sound the depth of the dharma at a place. Zhaozhou has famously used it this way many times. When traveling, usually there are bells placed on top of the staff, to alert animals of your coming. The staff is a support. In Sicilian the word, “u bastuneddu,” the little staff, is the word used when a son is born. This bastuneddu will take care of the parents in their old age.

In Buddhism the staff represents all of this and more. It is the one truth which pervades the universe. It is original Buddhanature. It is the true self. It is the fundamental “It.”

And then there are Wumen’s beautiful simple words.

It helps you across a river where the bridges are out, and gets you back to the village when there is no moon. If you call it a staff, you go to hell fast as an arrow.



So we have the koan. If you have a staff I will give you one. If you don’t have a staff I will take it away.

Tell me, do you have a staff?

Case 45. Who Is That?

(Cleary)

Wuzu said, "The past and future Buddhas are servants of another. Tell me, who is that?"

Wumen Says,

If you can see that one clearly, it will be like bumping into your own father at a crossroads; you don't have to ask anyone else whether or not that's the one.

Wumen's Verse

Don't draw another's bow,
Don't ride another's horse,
Don't discuss others' errors,
Don't mind others' business.

(Kirchner Case 3 Wuzu's "Slaves of Another")

Wuzu of Mount Dong said to the assembly, "Even Shakyamuni and Maitreya are merely someone's slaves. Tell me, who is it?"

Reflections

This koan startles me with its beauty and its simplicity. It is interesting that Wuman places this koan near the end of his collection of forty-eight koan. It is number forty-five. Almost a postscript. As if to say, "Yes, you've gotten all

the koans that have preceded these last four koans, but don't forget this one, don't forget **it.**"

There are three players in the koan, not counting old Wuzu himself: Shakyamuni, Maitreya, and "it."

The various translators use different pronouns for the last word of the koan. As you can see Cleary uses "that." Kirchner uses "it." One also finds, "he," "him," "that one," and "that other." You don't find "she." And I'll put her there. She belongs there along with all the others.

I am also struck with Wumen's beautiful commentary and poem which truly goes to the heart of this and of all koan study—in fact—goes to the heart of zen practice.

If you can see that one clearly, it will be like bumping into your own father at a crossroads; you don't have to ask anyone else whether or not that's the one.

Don't draw another's bow,
Don't ride another's horse,
Don't discuss others' errors,
Don't mind others' business.

Of course you know by now that that it, he, him, her, she, that one, that other is none other than Atta Dipa. You, yourself. You, yourself are greater than Shakyamuni, or the past. You, yourself are greater than Maitreya, or the future. The past and future don't exist. There is only you, yourself now, here, present, in your own skin, with your own bones, with your blood coursing through your veins and arteries, pumping life in your heart,

bringing lifesaving oxygen into every cell of your body. Yes, indeed, every cell of your body is greater than Shakyamuni, Maitreya, and all of the ancestors. Every cell of your body is all that is. Is all there is. Is all.

No need to draw another's bow.

No need to ride another's horse.

You know yourself and recognize yourself as you would your father or your mother. You are you. Here and now. Atta Dipa



Wuzu said, "The past and future Buddhas are servants of another. Tell me, who is that?"

Wumen Says,

If you can see that one clearly, it will be like bumping into your own father at a crossroads; you don't have to ask anyone else whether or not that's the one.

Wumen's Verse

Don't draw another's bow,
Don't ride another's horse,
Don't discuss others' errors,
Don't mind others' business.

Case 46. Stepping off The One Hundred-Foot Pole

How do you step forward from a Hundred Foot Pole?

Reflections

In all translated versions of this koan the question is, How? Now if I was on top of a hundred foot pole, my question would be, **Why**? The question, How? presupposes it is possible to step off the hundred foot pole. Presumably, it is possible to step off this pole and not break your neck.

This koan, How do you step from a hundred foot pole? brings to mind the famous words of Søren Kierkegaard in which he challenges the reader to leap into the absurd. Faith, for Kierkegaard, is to leap. And the absurd is the realm in which God dwells. For Buddhists it would be the realm of the unknown, the realm of emptiness. Emptiness, where all things exist, and where everything is possible. Bearing this in mind, we step off the pole because we are enlightened. We step into the absurd realm of emptiness. And yes, in so doing, we do lose our life! Jesus said it:

Whoever cares for his own safety is lost;
but if a man will let himself be lost for my sake, that man is safe.¹³

What is the hundred foot pole?

What is it that we cling to desperately with all our might?

¹³ Luke 9:25

Why don't we want to let go of it?

Why is it necessary to let go?

From time to time I like to do group koan study. I ask each member of the group to present a koan publicly, to enact it as a charade, and to give their understanding in that enactment. Then after each person makes their presentation, we go on to talk about the koan and what we saw. I gave this koan once to the prison group of the Dragon Gate Sangha. Most of the student-inmates made various attempts to let go of the pole, but instead, they hung on for dear life and could not let go. In each case they would say, "I'd be crazy to let go 'cause I'll kill myself."

One of the presentations was startling. This inmate-student got up, picked up an imaginary spade and started digging. He dug and dug and dug. Finally, he turned to the group and said, "I don't have a hundred foot pole, I have a hundred foot hole." And he jumped in. Then he clawed the sides of the hole in a desperate effort to climb out. He spoke to all of us. He later said in the discussion, that in that hole was all of his shit and he stank of it. All attempts on his part to get out sank him deeper and deeper. His presentation told us that we are attached to the familiar—even though that familiar is shit. And it told us that we have a deep fear of the unknown—even though we are assured that the unknown may be the holy realm of emptiness—the realm inhabited by God, the angels, and the bodhisattvas—the realm where we will realize our salvation and our true selves.

We cling to the pole of our delusions because we do not have faith. We do not believe there is a God in the Heaven of our hearts who cares for us and loves us. We look at the actions of man throughout time and don't believe in

God, or in his mercy. We don't believe that we are OneBody, for if we did we would not make war. We would not harm one another; we would not destroy our environment.

Having said all this, we turn again to the koan, knowing our lives depend upon stepping off the hundred foot pole.



So,

How do you step forward from a Hundred Foot Pole?

Case 47. Tou-shuai's Three Barriers

(Aitken Roshi)

The Case

The priest Tou-shuai set up three barriers in order to examine his students:

"You make your way through the darkness of abandoned grasses in a single-minded search for your self-nature. Now, honored one, where is your nature?"

"When you have realized your self-nature, you are free of birth and death. When the light of your eye falls, how are you free?"

"When you are free of birth and death, you know where to go. When your four elements scatter, where do you go?"

Wu-Men's Comment

If you can rightly give the three turning words here, you will be master in all the varied circumstances and will deal with your affinities in accord with the Buddha Dharma. If you have not resolved the matter yet, the food you bold down won't sustain you. Chew it well, and you won't be hungry.

Wu-Men's Verse

One nien sees eternity;
eternity is equal to now;
If you see through this one nien
you see through the one who sees.

Reflections

The first thing that struck me in this koan is the similarity between the last line of Wumen's verse and a famous line of Meister Eckhart. Here they are.

Wumen: you see through the one who sees.

Eckhart: The eye through which I see God is the same eye through which God sees me.

Also while I'm with Wumen's marvelous poem I feel that his poem is a rephrasing of the first of the Treetop "Simple Koans" that many of you have worked on:

What is the essence or root of this very moment?

With the beautiful words of Wumen's poem as a backdrop, on with the case.

The Tree Barriers are

1. Where is your true nature?

2. When you die how are you free?

3. After you die where do you or your nature go?

The First Barrier

Self Nature say all the commentators on this koan is "Kensho." It's enlightenment. It's realization. It's "Ahhhhhhh!"

So the first barrier is the process of zen practice. Zen practice with a lot of work in it. And after much work (Wumen's hard chewing—which may be a metaphor for koan study) you experience Kensho, or you get a first glimpse of who and what you really are. And what do you see? (Remember Eckhart's seeing.)

And what is the process. Very simple it is a process of letting go. Whatever it is you have or think you have, let it go. Whatever accomplishments you have attained, let them go.

As an aside, I have had students who have attained *kensho*. When someone does get such an insight I ask the student to write it down. I then record it in a little file I have of student kensho's (there are very few). Then I urge the student to immediately let go of the kensho. In one case the student tried to let go, but couldn't. The student returned again and again to that kensho. The student thought "I've got it. I know it. That's all there it!" And all subsequent koan study turned in one form or another to that wonderful kensho. To use an overused metaphor, the student's cup was full. There no longer was room for teaching. So I had to let go of the student.

So please it's so important to work hard on this barrier and let whatever you have go. Let whatever you are go. Are you a poet? Let it go. Are you a concern musician? Let it go. Are you a professional therapist? Let it go. Are you a zen teacher? Let it go. Are you a skilled technician? Let it go. A carpenter, mechanic, salesman, doctor, nurse, whatever, let it go, let it go. Are you this? Let it go. Are you that? Let it go. Let it go.

Have you found your true nature? Let it go. Have you finally struggled through the hundreds of koans successfully? Let them all go.

Whatever it is, let it go.

And what is left when you have let go of everything? Let go of that. Let go of what you don't have. Let go of letting go. Until there is no letting and no going.

Then you have some inkling of an insight into the dimensions of the first barrier. And let go of that as well! Let go of the first barrier!

The Second Barrier

When you die how are you free? When all is gone are birth and death also gone? Bankei tells us when the time for death comes, just die. Let go of dying itself and die.

The Third Barrier

After you die where do you or your nature go?

If you are free of birth and death, as the second barrier says, you will know where you will go after you die.

There seems to be a loopy contradiction here. Being free from birth and death seems to say there is no birth and death, and the Heart Sutra stubbornly proclaims: "...no old age and death."

But there is old age and death. I am 77 years old and I am edging towards death. So what does it mean to be free of birth and death?

I say it means to let go of being 77 years old. Let go of edging towards death. Let go of death itself. Let go of birth. Let go of my own heartbeat. Let go of my feeble breaths. Then there is the persistent question of the third barrier, where do you go? Where am I going?

I think the best advice I can offer is Shakyamuni's noble silence. In my case it may be a puny silence.

And yet—as you all know, I have been looking and thinking of this third barrier ever since I was diagnosed as having IPF: idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis. And while I don't know and insistently say I don't know where I will go after death, there is a place within me that feels like a fertilized egg or seed—full of possibilities and potential. That somehow somewhere this seed will die and be planted somewhere somehow and someday somewhere will sprout and blossom in some form or non-form in ways I or humanity have never conceived of or can possibly imagine.

And knowing and feeling and experiencing the dynamic potentiality of the exciting possibilities of this seed I know that the best way to deal with it is to let go of it. To forget it. To let go of the potentialities. The possibilities.

It is January 2008 as I write these words. We have just experienced a dramatic snow storm. The grounds around our house are covered with mounds of snow. Now I'll strap my liquid oxygen tank on my back, start up the snowblower and blow away some of the snow before the next storm comes.



The priest Tou-shuai set up three barriers in order to examine his students:

"You make your way through the darkness of abandoned grasses in a single-minded search for your self-nature. Now, honored one, where is your nature?"

"When you have realized your self-nature, you are free of birth and death. When the light of your eye falls, how are you free?"

"When you are free of birth and death, you know where to go. When your four elements scatter, where do you go?"

Wu-Men's Comment

If you can rightly give the three turning words here, you will be master in all the varied circumstances and will deal with your affinities in accord with the Buddha Dharma. If you have not resolved the matter yet, the food you bolt down won't sustain you. Chew it well, and you won't be hungry.

Wu-Men's Verse

One nien sees eternity;
eternity is equal to now;
If you see through this one nien
you see through the one who sees.

Case 48. One Road

(Cleary)my.netscape.com

A monk asked Master Qianfeng, "The Blessed Ones of the ten directions have one road of nirvana. Where is the road?"

Qianfeng raised his staff, drew a line, and said, "Here."

Subsequently the monk asked Master Yunmen for further instruction. Yunmen held up a fan and said, "This fan leaps up to the thirty-third heaven and bumps into the nose of the chief of the celestial rulers; the carp of the eastern sea are given a blow, and it rains buckets."

Wumen Says,

One sifts dirt and raises dust on the bottom of the deepest sea; one rouses waves and floods the sky at the top of the highest mountain. Holding still, letting go, each puts forth a single hand to help set up a way to the source. It was very much like two racers bumping into each other. In all the world there could be no one who matches up, but from the point of view of the absolute eye, even those two great elders did not know the road at all.

Wumen's Verse

You've already arrived before you take a step:

It's already explained before a word is said.

Even if you keep on top of the situation with every move,

Still you should know there's an opening higher beyond.

From *Zen's Chinese Heritage*, translated by Andy Ferguson

A monk asked, "There are temples in the ten directions and there is a single road to the gate of nirvana. Where does this road begin?"

Qianfeng raised his staff and drew a circle in the air, saying, "Right here."

([Later,] a monk asked Yunmen to explain this. Yunmen picked up a fan and said, "This fan leaps into heaven and blocks the nostrils of the heavenly king. Strike the fish in the Eastern Sea but once, and the rain falls in a downpour! Do you understand?")

Reflections

There are two parts to this koan. One: Where is the Way? Two: Yunmen's illustrations as answer to One. Then we have Wumen's marvelous verse the first two lines of which say it all.

You've already arrived before you take a step.

It's already explained before a word is said.

These lines are the line Qianfeng made in the air with his staff. They are part one of the koan.

The third and fourth lines point to Yunmen's illustrations.

Even if you keep on top of the situation
with every move,
Still you should know there's an opening
higher beyond.

Whatever is here and now in your zen practice before your eyes reaches the
furthest star in the universe and affects that star which affects the entire
universe.

Whatever is here and now in your zen practice reaches the depths of the
ocean which rises as dew and moisture sending cascades of rain on the
opposite side of the globe.

This is the explosive potential of zen practice.

And yet zen practice is fleeting and ineffable as the trail made by the flight of
a sparrow. This is the emptiness of nirvana. The emptiness of your true
nature. The emptiness which is the heart of all creation in all of the
universes of creation past present and future. It is the tip of a finger drawing
the invisible indelible line of the Way in the air.



A monk asked, "There are temples in the ten directions and
there is a single road to the gate of nirvana. Where does this
road begin?"

Qianfeng raised his staff and drew a circle in the air, saying,
"Right here."

([Later,] a monk asked Yunmen to explain this. Yunmen picked up a fan and said, "This fan leaps into heaven and blocks the nostrils of the heavenly king. Strike the fish in the Eastern Sea but once, and the rain falls in a downpour! Do you understand?")

Works Consulted

Aitken Roshi, Robert. tr., with commentary. *The Gateless Barrier* The Wu-Men Kuan (Wumenkuan). San Francisco. North Point Press, 1990.

Anguttara Nikaya. Available on line. Part of the Pali Canon.

Barragato, Margaret. tr. "Beati Pauperes Spiritu." Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit. Available at Treetop Zen Center.

Barragato, Stefano. *Zen Light*. Tuttle. Boston. 1997.

The New English Bible. With the Apocrypha. Oxford University Press. Cambridge University Press. 1970.

Cleary, Thomas. tr., with commentary. *No Barrier* Unlocking the Zen Koan. New York. Bantam Books, 1993.

---. tr., and introduction. *Book of Serenity* Hudson, NY Lindisfarne Press, 1990.

---. tr., and introduction. *Transmission of Light*. Zen in the Art of Enlightenment by Zen Master Keizan. North Point Press. San Francisco. 1990.

---. & J. C Cleary tr., *The Blue Cliff Record*. Shambala. Boston. 1992.

Cook, Francis H., tr. *The Record of Transmitting the Light*. Center Publications. Los Angeles. 1991.

Ferguson, Andy. tr. *Zen's Chinese heritage. The Masters and their Teachings.* Wisdom Publications. Boston. 2000.

Heine, Steven. *Shifting Shape Shaping Text.* Philosophy and Folklore in the Fox Koan. University of Hawai'i Press. Honolulu 1999.

---. *Dogen and the Koan Tradition. A Tale of two Shobogenzo Texts.* State University of New York Press. Albany. 1994.

---, *The Zen Poetry of Dogen.* Tuttle. 1997.

Hoffman, Yoel. *Radical Zen. The Sayings of Joshu.* Autumn Press. Brookline MA 1978.

---. *The Sound of One Hand. 281 Koans With Answers.* Bantam Books. 1977.

Hurvitz, Leon. tr. *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma (The Lotus Sutra)* Translated from the Chinese of Kumarajiva. Columbia University Press. New York. 1976.

Kirchner, Thomas Yuho. tr. *Entangling Vines. Zen Koans of the Shumon Kattoshu.* Tenryu-Ji Institute for Philosophy and Religion. 2004.

Leighton, Taigen Dan & Shohaku Okumura. trs. *Dogen's Extensive Record.* A Translation of the Eihei Koroku. Wisdom Publications. Boston. 2004.

Ñanamoli, Bhikkhu and Bhikkhu Bodhi. *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha. A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya.* Wisdom Publications. Boston. 1995.

Nishijima, Gudo Wafu, Chodo Cross. trs. *Master Dogen's Shobogenzo*. Book 1-4. Windbell Publications. Woods Hole MA. 1994,

Ogata, Sohaku. tr. *The Transmission of the Lamp*. Early Masters. Compiled by Tao Yuan, a Ch'an Monk of the Sung Dynasty. Longwood Academic. Wakefield, New Hampshire. 1990.

Okumura, Shohaku. tr. *Shobogenzo Zuimonki*. Kyoto Soto Zen Center. Tokyo, Japan. 1995.

"On Koan Study." Treetop Zen Center "tract."

Schloegl, Irmgard. tr. *The Zen Teaching of Rinzai*. Shambala. Berkeley. 1976.

Sekida Roshi, Katsuki. tr., with commentaries. *Two Zen Classics*. Wumenkuan & Hekiganroku. New York. Weatherhill, 1977.

The Shambala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen. Shambala. Boston. 1991

Shibayama Roshi, Zenkei. tr., with commentary. *Zen Comments on the Wumenkuan*. New York. New American Library, 1975.

Soeng, Mu. tr. *The Diamond Sutra*. Transforming the Way We Perceive The World. Wisdom Publication. Boston. 2000.

Starr, Mirabai. tr. 2002. *Dark Night of the Soul*. St. John of the Cross. New Translation with introduction. Riverhead Books.

Suzuki, Daisetz Teitaro. tr. *The Lankavatara Sutra*. A Mahayana Text. Motilal Banarsidass Publishers. India. Delhi. 1999.

Thurman, Robert A. F. tr. *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti*. A Mahayana Scripture. The Pennsylvania State University Press. University Park and London. 1983.

Norman Waddell and Masao Abe, tr. *The Heart of Dogen's Shobogenzo*. State University of New York Press. 2002.

Watson, Burton. tr. *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*. Columbia University Press. New York. 1968.

Wu, John C. H. *The Golden Age of Zen*. Image Books. Doubleday. New York. 1996.

www.treetopzencenter.org. *Wild Strawberry*, "Jataka Tales," "Shanti."

Yamada Roshi, Koun. tr., with commentary. *Gateless Gate*. Los Angeles: Center Publications, 1979.

Yu, Lu K'uan. tr. *The Surangama Sutra*. B. I. Publications. Bombay. 1966

"Zen Services." Regularly chanted at the Treetop Zen Center. 2006.