THE GATELESS GATE

THE CLASSIC BOOK OF ZEN KOANS

KŌUN YAMADA

With a foreword by RUBEN L.F. HABITO, author of *Living Zen, Loving God*

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Foreword

Kōun Yamada Roshi (1906-1989), author of this volume of Zen talks on a thirteenth-century collection of koans entitled *Gateless Gate (Wumen-kuan)*, will likely be remembered as one of the great Zen Masters of the twentieth century. Longtime head of the Sanbo Kyodan "Association of the Teaching of the Three Treasures" Zen community and main Dharma successor to Hakuun Yasutani Roshi (1885-1973), his teaching career spanned nearly three decades from the early 1960s up to his death. His own Dharma heirs are now leading Zen communities in Japan, America, and many other parts of the world.

Kōun Yamada made a little-noticed debut in a Western-language publication, *The Three Pillars of Zen,* which he compiled and translated with Akira Kubota (now Ji'un Roshi, current head of Sanbo Kyodan) and Philip Kapleau. Published under the latter's name in 1965, that book, which has now come to be a staple in Zen reading in the West, included an account of Kōun Yamada's Zen enlightenment experience (*kensho* in Japanese). That account was written in 1953 under the by-line of "Mr. K.Y, a Japanese executive, age 47." This great man is also referred to by Rick Fields in his seminal work *How the Swans Came to the Lake* simply as the "cigar-smoking hospital administrator who was Yasutani's disciple."

From 1970 to 1989 living in Japan, I had the unique privilege of being able to practice Zen and receive regular guidance from Yamada Roshi. I continue to look back with profound gratitude to those years I sat in zazen with many others at San-un Zendo, the small Zen hall he had built with his wife, Kazue Yamada, adjacent to their own home, in Kamakura. The zendo was one hour by train southwest of Tokyo. San-un means "Three Clouds," referring to the Zen names of the three founding Teachers of the Sanbō Kyōdan, namely, Daiun Harada ("Great Cloud"), Hakuun Yasutani ("White Cloud"), and Kōun Yamada ("Cultivating Cloud").

The culture and atmosphere at San-un Zendo, the setting where much of what is described in *Three Pillars of Zen* takes place, was marked early on by an emphasis on the attainment of kensho, an event that without doubt becomes a turning-point in a person's life of Zen.

However, from the late seventies up to his death in 1989, Yamada Roshi's teaching gradually shifted in focus, from the Zen enlightenment experience as such, to the personalization and genuine embodiment of this experience in the ongoing life of the true practitioner. So, although the experience of kensho may happen in the flash of an instant, its effective actualization in a person's daily life is considered to be the never ending task of a lifetime.

Yamada Roshi often noted that of those who may have had such an initial breakthrough experience, some get sidetracked from the path of awakening, as they idealize that experience, memorialize it, and cling to it. Holding on to one's kensho in this way becomes another kind of attachment that can be much more pernicious than other more mundane kinds. Thus, Yamada Roshi came to place great importance on vigilance in practice and continuing work with koans. Genuine fruit of Zen practice, he repeatedly maintained, is manifested when a human being is able to experience an emptying of one's ego, and truly live out one's humanity with a humble heart, at peace with oneself, at peace with the universe, and with a mind of boundless compassion.

It was in this later phase of his teaching career that Yamada Roshi came to address not just matters of practice geared toward attaining enlightenment, but likewise issues of daily life and contemporary society as the context for embodying this enlightenment. These included themes such as world poverty and social injustice, global peace, harmony among religions, and numerous other social and global concerns. The engagement with these issues was for Yamada Roshi a natural outflow of his life of Zen. His was a perspective grounded in the wisdom of seeing things clearly and a deep compassion for all beings in the universe enlightened by this wisdom. This was what he sought to convey to his Zen students. In short, the question of how a Zen practitioner is to live in daily life and relate to events of this world was a recurrent theme in his talks and public comments in this later phase.

Each *teisho* in *The Gateless Gate* gives the reader a glimpse into the depth and breadth of the Zen experience and vision of Kōun Yamada Roshi. These talks will no doubt inspire those who are already engaged in Zen practice to a continued deepening of their experience, and also invite those who are not yet so engaged, to perhaps give it a try.

Ruben L.F. Habito (Keiun-ken)
Maria Kannon Zen Center, Dallas, Texas

Preface to the Wisdom Edition

I am very happy that Wisdom Publications has decided to publish this new edition of *The Gateless Gate,* a collection of teisho by Kōun Yamada Roshi in English. The first edition of the book was printed in 1979, a quarter of a century ago. This book has been and will continue to be a trusted guide to all sincere Zen practitioners who wish to find out their own essential nature following the footpath of Shakyamuni Buddha.

Kōun Yamada Roshi had an experience of great enlightenment in 1953 at the age of forty-six. At one point when he was around seventy years old, I had a chance to talk with him privately, and he showed me a work of his own calligraphy that read, “Practice another 30 years.” He said that this would be his motto for his own future Zen practice. Thus he taught me that the enlightenment was very important for our Zen practice, but “digesting” the experience into our daily life was far more important than the experience itself. I was deeply impressed. The teachings in this book can doubtlessly be applied to all people who find themselves on the sincere way of Zen practice.

How could one become a true Zen person? The answer can found in Kōun Yamada Roshi’s teisho on the first case in this book. Please study it diligently.

Kubota Ji’un
President of the Sanbō Kyōdan
Winter 2004

Preface to the Wisdom Edition

Kōun Yamada Roshi was not only my father but also my Zen master for over thirty years. The fact that his *Gateless Gate* has been appreciated by many Zen practitioners abroad is a source of great joy for me, and also, as it seems, a very significant matter in many ways.

I happened to be with Kōun Yamada Roshi at the very moment of his enlightenment experience. The depth of his enlightenment experience was no doubt equal to those of the great ancient ancestors, called "old buddhas," in the history of Zen. Only a person of such clear and deep experience could present the world of enlightenment with the sharpness and unequivocal clarity, not to mention the lucid straightforwardness, seen in this book.

The universality of *The Gateless Gate* makes it a valuable work in an era when Zen is becoming more and more global. I believe that this new edition of *The Gateless Gate* will continue to contribute a great deal to spreading the true Buddhist Dharma.

Lastly, let me express my gratitude to Migaku Sato for preparing this new edition and to Josh Bartok, editor at Wisdom Publications, for arranging to publish it.

Masamichi Yamada
Ryōun-ken
Winter 2004

Author's Preface to the First Edition

It has been several years since I first began presenting English *teishō* on the second and fourth Saturdays of each month to the non-Japanese members of the San'un Zendo. So far, I have delivered two series of *teishō* on the *Gateless Gate* and presently am giving a series on the Blue *Cliff Record.* This book is the second series of *Gateless Gate teishō* with a number of additions and changes. I am very happy to have this chance to publish the book through the efforts of Maezumi Roshi and his staff and would like here to offer them my heartfelt thanks.

The entrance into Zen is the grasping of one's essential nature. It is absolutely impossible, however, to come to a clear understanding of our essential nature by any intellectual or philosophical method. It is accomplished only by the experience of self-realization through zazen. And the koans used in Zen can be seen through only when looked at from the essential point of view. Therefore to the person whose enlightened eye has not been opened, Zen koans seem impractical, illogical, and against common sense. Once this eye has opened, however, all koans express natural matters and relate the most obvious of realities.

The individual cases of the *Gateless Gate* are each famous in their own right and are immediately comprehendible to persons who have had a true enlightenment. I think such persons will be able to read this book with great interest. For those lacking this experience, however, the koan will probably seem like gibberish. Nonetheless, even a person with no Zen realization who reads on with patience will experience an upwelling of desire to see the Zen world with his or her own eyes. This is greatly to be welcomed; indeed, an important function of these *teishō* lies in promoting this urge.

It is no exaggeration to say that Zen is on the verge of completely dying out here in Japan. Some people may think I am stretching the point, but, sad to say, this is the actual state of affairs. How have things come to such a state? I believe we can offer two main reasons for this. First, there is the fact that teachers have sometimes confirmed as kensho the obviously incomplete experience of their students. The responsibility for this lies not with the student but with the teacher. The task of determining whether or not a certain experience is a true Zen realization is a grave responsibility and rests solely in the hands of the person assuming guidance. Should the Zen realization of the teacher not be clear and that person use his or her own incomplete experience as the basis for determining the realization of another, the result is the confirmation of an incomplete experience as kensho. We have here a case of the blind leading the blind.

The second stems from the Zen teacher not truly realizing that the Zen path

is endless and that, no matter how far one progresses along it, there is always a “limitless beyond.” Although in a state of incomplete enlightenment, these teachers are satisfied with having completed koan study “in the room,” and they lose the brave and determined spirit necessary for the continued striving toward a pure and stainless state of Buddhahood.

I have inherited the teachings and Dharma line of Harada Daiun Roshi. This line extends from Harada Daiun (Great Cloud) Roshi through Yasutani Haku‘un (White Cloud) Roshi on down to myself, Yamada Kōun (Plowing Cloud). The three “un” in these names are the three clouds from which we derive the name of our *dōjō* (training hall), the San’un (Three Clouds) Zendo.

Both Harada Roshi and Yasutani Roshi stressed the extreme importance of the kensho experience. I feel this to have been both an alarm sounded against the decline in the significance accorded to kensho in the modern current of Zen and a manifestation of the great compassion of the bodhisattvas to save all sentient creatures. I earnestly pray that the present work will in no way harm the true Zen Buddhism transmitted to me by these two great masters. As the same time, I pray that it will provide some inspiration for a number of its readers earnestly to seek the way of Zen.

In closing, I would like to thank Ms. Brigitte D’Ortschy and Sister Elaine MacInnes, who provided so much valuable advice and assistance toward making my imperfect English a more complete product, and Ms. Joan Rieck and Mr. Paul Shepherd, who took time from busy schedules to type and make corrections and suggestions in the manuscript and proofs.

Yamada Kōun
San’un Zendo
Kamakura, July 1979

Note on Chinese and Japanese Therms

For ease of reference and pronunciation, proper and place names have been given in Japanese instead of Chinese throughout the text of the *Gateless Gate,* e.g., “Zen” rather than “Ch’an.” The historical Introduction and the vertical lineage charts give both Japanese and Chinese readings, the latter in parentheses, e.g., “Mumon Ekai (Wu-men Hui-k’ai).” The glossaries at the end of the book give complete correlations, Japanese to Chinese and Chinese to Japanese. Because of their increasing familiarity and frequency of use and their specific meaning, the following terms have been regarded as English words and, accordingly, have been left untranslated and unitalicized: koan, mondo, roshi, zazen, kensho, and satori. For the reader new to Zen parlance, the sense of these terms is explained in the Foreword, Author’s Preface, Preface by Father Enomiya-Lassalle, and the Introduction by Thomas Cleary.

In the title of this book the word “commentary” is used. This is an English translation of the word *teishō*, which is a technical Buddhist term in Japanese for a direct expression of the Buddha mind. In its strictest sense, *teishō* are nondualistic and are thus distinguished from Dharma talks, which are ordinary lectures on Buddhist topics. It is not explanatory or analytical in intent but a presentation of the awakened state itself. The word “commentary” does not do justice to the powerful *teishō* of Yamada Roshi transcribed and printed here as the *Gateless Gate.*

Shūan's Prepace

If it is called "gateless," everybody on the great earth will be able to enter within. If it is said that "there is no gate," our dear master should not have chosen this title. He dared besides to add several footnotes, which is like putting one hat on top of another. He also urged old Shū to praise it. This would mean to press the sap out of dried-up bamboo and spread it on a children's book such as this one. Throw it away without waiting for me to throw it away myself. Don't let even a drop of it fall on the world. Even Usui who gallops a thousand miles would never be able to pursue it.

Written by Shūan Chin Ken at the end of July,
the first year of Jōtei (1228 A.D.).

TEISHO ON SHŪAN'S PREFACE

Shūan Chin Ken is thought to have been born in 1197 A.D., during the reign of Emperor Neisō of the Southern Sung dynasty, and to have died at the age of forty-five in 1241 A.D., during the reign of Emperor Risō.

His family name is Chin, his personal name is Ken, and his courtesy name is Chūwa. Shūan is his Zen name.

It is said that he was precociously bright and passed the government civil service examination at around twenty years of age. He was later appointed to such high government positions as member of the editorial staff for national history in the privy council and as local governor. Shūan is reputed to have been a man of high culture and refined taste, having a special fondness for landscape gardening.

We cannot find any trace of his Zen study in ancient Zen literature, but from this preface we can assume that he must have been a very close acquaintance of Mumon and have had a deep understanding of Zen.

Now let us come back to his preface.

"If it is called 'gateless,' everybody on the great earth will be able to enter within. If it is said that 'there is no gate,' our dear master should not have chosen this title."

What Shūan means is the following:

"Dear Master, you titled the book *Gateless Gate*. On the one hand you say 'gateless.' If there is no gate, everybody will be able to enter within freely. Why is it necessary to preach anything more? That would be nonsense. On the other hand, you say there is a gate. If there is a gate, why do you say, 'gateless'? Isn't that unreasonable? Your first words — in other words, the title of the book — must, therefore, be self-contradictory from the beginning."

All koans, including the forty-eight cases in this book, are barriers set up by

the Buddhas and the patriarchs of the past. It is impossible for the ordinary person to pass through them. If you want to pass through these barriers, you must realize your own self-nature. This is called self-realization or enlightenment, satori or kensho in Japanese. When you once attain true self-realization, these barriers disappear in an instant as though they were nothing but mirages, and you will find that from the very beginning you have always been in a world where there is neither inside nor outside. That is what "gateless" means. Therefore, all koans are impassable barriers for those who are unenlightened, but for the enlightened there is no gate at all. They can come in and go out quite freely.

Mumon himself says in his commentary on the first case of this book:

"For the practice of Zen, you must pass the barrier set up by the ancient patriarchs of Zen. To attain to marvelous enlightenment, you must completely extinguish all thoughts of the ordinary mind."

What I said earlier is speaking from the point of view of the process by which we progress upwards through the practice of zazen, but when I speak from the point of view of the essential world, all beings are within it from the beginning.

It is related that the bodhisattva Manjusri was once standing at the gate, and seeing him, Shakyamuni Buddha called to him, "Manju, Manju, why don't you come inside the gate?" Manjusri replied, "I don't see anything outside the gate."

Let us return to the preface, which says:

"He dared besides to add several footnotes, which is like putting one hat on top of another."

"Footnotes" means the commentaries and verses which Mumon added to every case. The first hat means the book itself, and the second means the whole of the commentaries and verses added to it. The first hat is itself useless. Far more useless is a second hat placed on top of the first.

Shuan is speaking from the essential point of view. His form of expression is extremely paradoxical. He seems to speak ill of Mumon but only on the surface. In his heart, he deeply appreciates Mumon's work. Paradoxical and ironic expressions of this kind appear often in Zen writings and should not be taken literally or superficially.

Shūan goes on to say:

"He also urged old Shū to praise it. This would mean to press the sap out of dried-up bamboo and spread it on a children's book such as this one. Throw it away without waiting for me to throw it away myself. Don't let even a drop of it fall on the world. Even Usui who gallops a thousand miles would never be able to pursue it."

He means that Mumon urged him to write the preface to praise the book, but that is totally foolish and useless, for it would mean to squeeze the sap out of

dried-up bamboo — a metaphor for something totally absurd — and spread it on a silly children's book such as this. Throw the book away, otherwise I will do it myself. Don't allow even one copy of the book to appear in the world. Once you commit the fault of letting a copy fall into the world, even an excellent steed such as Usui who gallops a thousand miles would never be able to pursue it.

Usui is the name of a fine horse owned by the famous Chinese hero-general Kōu. Shūan means that once the fault is committed of allowing even one copy of the book to appear in the world, that fault can never be rectified.

Dedication to the Throne

On the 5th of January, in the 2nd year of Jōtei (1229), [1] I reverently celebrated the sacred anniversary of your Majesty. I, your subject, monk Ekai,[2] on the 5th of November of last year, published commentaries on the forty-eight koans given by the Buddhas and patriarchs. I dedicate this book to the throne, praying for your Majesty's eternal health and prosperity.

I respectfully express my wish that your Majesty's sacred wisdom may be as bright as the sun and the moon, your royal life as long as that of the universe. May all the people of the eight directions sing the praises of the highly virtuous emperor, and the four seas enjoy your supremely blessed reign.

Respectfully written by
Your subject, monk Ekai,
The Dharma transmitter,
Former abbot of Kudoku-Hōin'yūji Zen temple
Dedicated to Empress Jii[3]

NOTES

1 Five years after the enthronement of Emperor Risō of the Southern Sung. Two years earlier, Dōgen Zenji had returned to Japan from China.

2 Mumon Ekai was the compiler of the *Mumonkan*. Mumon was his Zen name, Ekai his personal name as a monk. He was born in 1183 A.D. during the reign of Emperor Kōsō of the Southern Sung dynasty and died in 1260 at the age of seventy-eight.

Mumon lived in the period of decline of the power of the Southern Sung dynasty due to increasing pressure from two neighboring states, Kin and Gen.

He was ordained as a monk by Master Tenryū. He later studied under Master Gatsurin Shikan and was given the koan, "Dog, Buddha nature" which appears in the *Gateless Gate* as the first case. He worked persistently on this koan for six years. It is said that when he felt sleepy or in low spirits, he would bump his head against a pillar. One day, standing near the Dharma hall, he heard the sound of the drum signaling lunchtime and was suddenly enlightened. He wrote the following poem about that experience:

A peal of thunder under the bright blue sky!
The multitude of living beings on earth have opened their eyes.
All things in the world bow alike.
Mount Sumeru jumps up and dances Sandai.

(Sandai is a kind of dancing, extremely lively in its movements.) The next day,

Mumon presented his understanding of the koan to Master Gatsurin, who confirmed his enlightenment. Mumon eventually succeeded to the Dharma of his master.

When Mumon was sixty-four he founded Gokoku-ninnō Zen Ie temple by order of the emperor. Though he desired to spend his last years in quiet retirement near West Lake, his seclusion was regularly disturbed by visitors eager for instruction.

Mumon's biographer describes him as follows: "The master looked thin but of clear spirit. His words were artless but profound. His hair was dark, his beard long and rough. He wore a shabby and dirty robe." In his monastery, Mumon was referred to as the "Founder of the Way."

3 Twelve years after the death of Empress Jii (wife of the third emperor Kōsō of the Southern Sung dynasty and mother of the fourth emperor, Neisō), a temple was erected for the repose of her soul. Master Gatsurin was invited to be its first abbot. This temple was called Hōin'yuji Zen Temple.

Mumon's Preface

THE GATELESS GATE OF THE ZEN SECT

Zen makes the words and the mind of Buddha its foundation. It makes no-gate the gate of Dharma. It is no-gate from the start. How can we pass through it? Haven't you ever heard the old saying, "Things that come in through the gate are not family treasures"? What is gained by causation is continuously going on, forming and disintegrating.

Such remarks are just like raising heavy waves when there is no wind or gouging a wound into fine skin. How much more ridiculous to adhere to words and phrases or try to understand by means of the intellect. It is exactly like trying to strike the moon with a stick or to scratch an itchy spot on the foot through the surface of the shoe. What concern do they have with reality?

In the summer of the first year of Jōtei (1228) I, Ekai, was at Ryūshō in Tōka[1] as head monk. At that time, the monks asked me to instruct them. I finally took up the koans[2] of the ancient masters and used them as brickbats to knock at the gate, inducing the students according to their capability and aspiration. I recorded those koans, and they have unwillingly formed a collection.

From the start, I did not arrange them in any order. They amount to forty-eight cases in all. I call them as a whole, *Mumonkan* (the *Gateless Gate*). If a man is a fellow of valor, he will rush straight into the barrier like a dagger. Even Nada,[3] the eight-armed demon, will not be able to hold him back. Even the Four Sevens of the West and the Two Threes of the East[4] will beg for their lives on seeing his face from afar.

If he hesitates, however, he is like a man who watches a horse pass by outside a window. If he blinks his eyes, it is already gone.

THE VERSE

The great Way has no gate;
There are a thousand different roads.
If you pass through this barrier once,
You will walk independently in the universe.

TEISHŌ ON MUMON'S PREFACE

“The Gateless Gate of the Zen Sect”

Since ancient times there have been two different interpretations of these opening words of the *Mumonkan.* One view takes these words to be the title of the book, and the other view takes them to be the beginning of the book. If we take the latter view, the opening of the book becomes: “The gateless gate of the Zen sect makes the words and mind of Buddha its foundation.” That is quite understandable. I shall, however, take the traditional and commonly accepted view that these words are the title of the book.

“Zen makes the words and the mind of Buddha its foundation.”

The foundation of Zen is the words and mind of Buddha. The words and mind of Buddha, however, become reduced simply to the mind of Buddha because the words arose from the mind as the explanation of its experience. But we must recognize that from the essential point of view there is no difference between the mind of Buddha and that of us ordinary people. So Hakuin Zenji says in his *Song of Zazen:* “All living beings are intrinsically Buddha.”

“It makes no-gate the gate of Dharma.”

For unenlightened people, every koan is a barrier. For the enlightened person, however, there is no gate, no barrier at all. This is because the essential world is totally void. We cannot see anything there. There is neither gate nor barrier, and so-called enlightened people are those who have realized this fact.

“Things that come in through the gate are not family treasures. What is gained by causation is continuously going on, forming and disintegrating.”

The “family treasure” is the treasure endowed within us which is no other than our essential nature. “Things that come in through the gate” means experiential knowledge gained through the intellect.

Things that come in through the gate and that which is gained by causation are both appearances in the phenomenal world and are constantly changing. There is another world, on the other hand, called the essential world, which is totally empty. When we look at the world from the essential point of view, there is nothing to be seen at all. That empty world is no other than our essential nature.

“Such remarks are just like raising heavy waves when there is no wind or gouging a wound into fine skin.”

Even making such a statement is like raising waves on the tranquil sea or making a wound in fine skin. It is not only superfluous but also rather harmful.

“How much more ridiculous to adhere to words and phrases or try to understand by means of the intellect. It is exactly like trying to strike the moon with a stick or to scratch an itchy spot on the foot through the surface of the shoe. What concern do they have with reality?”

The essential world cannot be grasped by intellectual contemplation or by reasoning or philosophical conceptualization. There is no way other than to realize it in our own living experience. It is, therefore, quite foolish to try to understand it by following the meaning of words. It can never be attained that way. It is just like trying to strike the moon with a stick or scratch an itchy spot on the foot through the surface of the shoe — we cannot touch the spot at all.

At the end, Mumon says:

"If a man is a fellow of valor, he will rush straight into the barrier like a dagger. Even Nada, the eight-armed demon, will not be able to hold him back. Even the Four Sevens of the West and the Two Threes of the East will beg for their lives on seeing his face from afar."

Someone who wants to attain enlightenment must be brave. He must rush into the crowd of enemies with a dagger. In the practice of Zen, enemies are our delusive thoughts and passions. The brave practitioners working on the koan Mu plunge into their delusive thoughts and passions with the sharp sword of Mu. When you devote yourself to the practice of Mu with your whole heart, all delusive thoughts and passions will be cut off and disappear. From ancient times, it is said, therefore, that Mu is Jōshū's sharpest sword. (See the first Case of this book.) Nobody can hinder him. Even the strongest demon or patriarchs of the highest virtue, when they see such a brave person in the distance, will beg for their lives in wonder.

"If he hesitates, however, he is like a man who watches a horse pass by outside a window. If he blinks his eyes, it is already gone."

To blink one's eyes means to move the brain with doubt for even an instant. What Mumon means here is: "If one tries to understand it intellectually for even a moment, the real truth of our essential nature will be lost in that instant."

ON THE VERSE

"The great Way has no gate."

"The great Way" means the essential world. The essential world is no other than our essential nature. There is no gate in our essential nature.

"There are a thousand different roads."

"Roads" refer to koans. Every koan is a road which leads everybody to the essential world, namely to great enlightenment.

"If you pass through this barrier once,

You will walk independently in the universe."

When one realizes the essential world through great enlightenment, one is for the first time a man of true freedom. He or she can walk independently through the universe whenever and wherever.

NOTES

1 The Zen temple Ryūshō was one of the most famous in China, located at Mt. Kōshin in Sekkō province. Tōka refers to eastern China.

2 Koan (Kung-an): “Ko” means public or official or governmental. “An” means a document pertaining to examinations. Literally, a koan is an official document possessing an authority upon which everyone can rely. In Zen, it is the highest truth expressed by the Buddhas and patriarchs. Concretely, koans are words or phrases intended to guide or instruct, questions and answers (mondo) or remarks made by Buddha and the patriarchs. Koans have the power to cut off the student’s delusive thinking, opening his eyes to true reality. See also pp. ooo, 000000.

3 Eight-armed Nada is a demon in Indian mythology, son of Vaisravana, a guardian of the true Dharma. Nada has four faces, eight arms, and possesses great strength.

4 The twenty-eight Indian and six Chinese patriarchs.

1

Jōshū's Dog

THE CASE

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

Joshu said, "Mu!"

MUMON'S COMMENTARY

For the practice of Zen, you must pass the barrier set up by the ancient patriarchs of Zen. To attain to marvelous enlightenment, you must completely extinguish all thoughts of the ordinary mind. If you have not passed the barrier and have not extinguished all thoughts, you are a phantom haunting the weeds and trees. Now, just tell me, what is the barrier set up by the patriarchs? Merely this Mu — the one barrier of our sect. So it has come to be called "The Gateless Barrier of the Zen Sect."

Those who have passed the barrier are able not only to see Joshu face to face but also to walk hand in hand with the whole descending line of patriarchs and be eyebrow to eyebrow with them. You will see with the same eye that they see with, hear with the same ear that they hear with. Wouldn't it be a wonderful joy? Isn't there anyone who wants to pass this barrier? Then concentrate your whole self into this Mu, making your whole body with its 360 bones and joints and 84,000 pores into a solid lump of doubt. Day and night, without ceasing, keep digging into it, but don't take it as "nothingness" or as "being" or "non-being." It must be like a red-hot iron ball which you have gulped down and which you try to vomit up but cannot. You must extinguish all delusive thoughts and beliefs which you have cherished up to the present. After a certain period of such efforts, Mu will come to fruition, and inside and out will become one naturally. You will then be like a dumb man who has had a dream. You will know yourself and for yourself only.

Then all of a sudden, Mu will break open. It will astonish the heavens and shake the earth. It will be just as if you had snatched the great sword of General Kan: If you meet a Buddha, you will kill him. If you meet a patriarch, you will kill him. Though you may stand on the brink of life and death, you will enjoy the great freedom. In the six realms and the four modes of birth, you will

live in the samadhi of innocent play.

Now, how should you concentrate on Mu? Exhaust every ounce of energy you have in doing it. And if you do not give up on the way, you will be enlightened the way a candle in front of the altar is lighted by one touch of fire.

THE VERSE

Dog-Buddha nature!
The perfect manifestation, the absolute command.
A little "has" or "has not,"
And body is lost! Life is lost!

TEISHŌ ON THE CASE

Jōshū Jūshin was one of the greatest and most famous Zen masters in ancient China. Actually, Jōshū is the name of the place where his monastery was located. He was born in 778 A.D., in the reign of Emperor Daisō of the T'ang dynasty, and died in 897 at the age of 120. When only eighteen years of age, he attained a great kensho and for the next forty years continued to practice Zen under the eminent master Nansen (famous for killing a cat; see Case 14). Nansen died when Jōshū was about sixty years old. Jōshū then started traveling around the country, searching for good Zen masters in order to deepen his Zen experience through Dharma combats with them. When he was about eighty years of age, he settled down for the first time in a small monastery, where he stayed for about forty years, devoting this remaining period of his life to instructing Zen practitioners.

Jōshū's Zen had a unique characteristic that came to be called "lips-and-mouth Zen." When instructing his disciples, he did not beat them with a stick as Tokusan did nor did he shout "kwatz!" as other Zen masters such as Rinzai used to do. He would give his instructions in such a low voice that it was sometimes almost a whisper. His words, though simple and quietly spoken, had power like the sharpest of swords to cut through his disciples' delusions. It is said that as he spoke, a sparkling light came from his lips and mouth.

Dōgen Zenji, who criticized other Zen masters severely, paid the highest respect to Jōshū, calling him "Jōshū, an old Buddha!"

The story is as you read it: Once a monk asked Jōshū, "Does a dog have Buddha nature?" Jōshū answered, "Mu!" The Chinese character means "nothing," or "nonbeing," or "to have nothing." Therefore, if we take this answer literally, it means, "No, a dog does not have Buddha nature."

But that is not right. Why not? Because Shakyamuni Buddha declared that

all living beings have Buddha nature. According to the sutras, when Shakyamuni Buddha attained his great enlightenment, he was astonished by the magnificence of the essential universe and, quite beside himself, exclaimed, "All living beings have Buddha nature! But owing to their delusions, they cannot recognize this."

The monk in the story could not believe these words. To him Buddha nature was the most venerable, most highly developed personality, and a Buddha was one who had achieved this perfect personality. How then could a dog have Buddha nature? How could a dog be as perfect as Buddha? He could not believe that such a thing was possible, so he asked Jōshū sincerely, "Does a dog have Buddha nature?" And Jōshū answered, "Mu!"

Jōshū, great as he was, could not deny Shakyamuni's affirmation. Therefore his answer does not mean that a dog lacks Buddha nature.

Then what does Mu mean?

This is the point of the koan. If you try to find any special meaning in Mu, you miss Jōshū and you'll never meet him. You'll never be able to pass through the barrier of Mu. So what should be done? That is the question! Zen practitioners must try to find the answer by themselves and present it to the roshi. In almost all Japanese zendo, the explanation of Mu will stop at this point. However, I'll tell you this: Mu has no meaning whatsoever. If you want to solve the problem of Mu, you must become one with it! You must forget yourself in working on it. Your consciousness must be completely absorbed in your practice of Mu.

ON MUMON'S COMMENTARY

Mumon teaches us very forcefully but very kindly how to practice Mu. He himself attained great enlightenment after practicing Mu heart and soul for six years. This commentary is his *teishō* on the koan Mu and is a vivid account of his own experience. Read it many times and you will learn the true way to practice Mu.

Mumon says, "For the practice of Zen, you must pass the barrier set up by the patriarchs of Zen."

The barriers set up by Zen patriarchs are called koans. Among them, the koan Mu is exemplary. It may, indeed, be one of the best, for it is very simple and leaves almost no room for concepts to enter. That is the most desirable requisite for a koan.

Mumon continues: "To attain to marvelous enlightenment, you must completely extinguish all thoughts of the ordinary mind. If you have not passed the barrier and have not extinguished all thoughts, you are a phantom haunting the weeds and trees."

“A phantom haunting the weeds and trees” means a person who has no firmly established view of life and the world. In China, as well as in Japan, phantoms or ghosts are thought to have no legs. They are unable to stand by themselves and are always floating about among the undergrowth or among trees such as willows.

Since the time of Jōshū, innumerable Zen students, in both China and Japan, have come to enlightenment by practicing Mu. In Japanese, practicing Mu is called *tantei* or *nentei*, which means, “solely taking hold of.” Do it totally to the very end. And what is the end? It is, of course, nothing other than enlightenment itself. You must persevere until you attain it. Concentrate your whole energy on Mu. By “energy” I do not mean physical energy but the spiritual energy necessary to keep from letting go of Mu. While you are practicing the *nentei* of Mu you must be constantly and clearly conscious of Mu. Identify yourself with it. Become truly one with Mu. Melt yourself into Mu. To do this, you must forget everything, even yourself, in Mu.

Referring to this stage, Mumon says, “Concentrate your whole self into this Mu, making your whole body with its 360 bones and joints and 84,000 pores into a solid lump of doubt.” In old Chinese physiology, the human body was thought to have 360 bones and 84,000 pores, but in the present day the numbers are simply taken to mean the whole human body. Being absorbed in Mu, you should extinguish the awareness of “I”. All concepts and dualistic ideas, such as subject and object, you and I, inside and out, good and bad, the Buddha and living beings — all these must completely disappear from your consciousness. When absorption in Mu has become pure and complete, your body and soul will become like one solid iron ball of Mu. Referring to this state, Mumon says, “It [Mu] must be like a red-hot iron ball which you have gulped down and which you try to vomit up but cannot.”

When this happens, don’t stop! Don’t be concerned! Press on! Then suddenly the ball of Mu will break open and your true self will spring forth instantly, in a flash!

Mumon says, “It will astonish the heavens and shake the earth.”

You will feel as though the whole universe has totally collapsed. Strange as it may seem, this experience has the power to free you from the agonies of the world. It emancipates you from anxiety over all worldly suffering. You feel as though the heavy burdens you have been carrying in mind and body have suddenly fallen away. It is a great surprise. The joy and happiness at that time are beyond all words, and there are no philosophies or theories attached to it. This is the enlightenment, the satori of Zen. Once you have attained this experience, you will become perfectly free.

Mumon says, “It will be just as if you had snatched the great sword of General Kan: If you meet a Buddha, you will kill him. If you meet a patriarch, you will kill him. Though you may stand on the brink of life and death, you will enjoy the great freedom. In the six realms and the four modes of birth, you will

live in the samadhi of innocent play."

General Kan was a celebrated warrior under Emperor Ryūhō, founder of the Han dynasty. He brandished a great sword, cutting down numerous enemies. He is still worshipped as a deity of war in China. The wonderfully free state of mind of someone who attains deep realization through practicing Mu is here compared to the mind of one who deprives General Kan of his sword.

It is hardly necessary to add that when Mumon says, "If you meet a Buddha, you will kill him. If you meet a patriarch, you will kill him," he is not talking about killing Buddhas and patriarchs bodily. His words refer to eradicating all concepts about Buddhas and patriarchs.

The six realms mentioned by Mumon are the six different stages of existence according to ancient Buddhist philosophy. These are: hell, the world of hungry ghosts, the world of beasts, the world of fighting spirits, the world of human beings, and the world of gods and devas. As for the four modes of birth, it was once thought in Indian physiology that the modes of birth of all living beings could be classified into four types: viviparous, oviparous, from moisture, and metamorphic. So the phrase "In the six realms and four modes of birth" means all the circumstances of one's life, whatever they may be.

ON THE VERSE

Dog — Buddha nature!
The perfect manifestation, the absolute command.
A little "has" or "has not,"
And body is lost! Life is lost!

"Dog — Buddha nature!" The main case is condensed into one phrase. It is nothing other than Mu. Dog, Buddha nature, and Mu are totally one. It is the perfect manifestation, the absolute command. By this, our true self is perfectly manifested with absolute authority to cut off all delusions. If you think that Jōshū's answer means the dog does not have Buddha nature, you are quite wrong. For when Jōshū answered "Mu!" he was far removed from the world of dualistic concepts. Therefore the verse says, "A little 'has' or 'has not', and body is lost! Life is lost!" If you have the slightest thought about the dog having or not having Buddha nature, your essential life will be killed by that thought. Now, just show me: Dog — Buddha nature!

2

Hyakujō and the Fox

THE CASE

Whenever Master Hyakujō delivered a sermon, an old man was always there listening with the monks. When they left, he left too. One day, however, he remained behind. The master asked him, "What man are you, standing in front of me?" The old man replied, "Indeed, I am not a man. In the past, in the time of Kashyapa Buddha,[1] I lived on this mountain (as a Zen priest). On one occasion a monk asked me, 'Does a perfectly enlightened person fall under the law of cause and effect or not?' I answered, 'He does not.' Because of this answer, I fell into the state of a fox for 500 lives. Now, I beg you, Master, please say a turning word[2] on my behalf and release me from the body of a fox." Then he asked, "Does a perfectly enlightened person fall under the law of cause and effect or not?" The master answered, "The law of cause and effect cannot be obscured." Upon hearing this, the old man immediately became deeply enlightened. Making his bows, he said, "I have now been released from the body of the fox and will be behind the mountain. I dare to make a request of the Master. Please perform my funeral as you would for a deceased priest."

The master had the Ino[3] strike the anvil[4] with a gavel and announce to the monks that after the meal there would be a funeral service for a deceased priest. The monks wondered, saying, "All are healthy. No one is sick in the infirmary. What's this all about?" After the meal, the master led the monks to the foot of a rock behind the mountain and with his staff poked out the dead body of a fox. He then performed the ceremony of cremation.

That evening the master ascended the rostrum in the hall and told the monks the whole story. Obaku thereupon asked, "The man of old missed the turning word and fell to the state of a fox for 500 lives. Suppose every time he answered he made no mistakes, what would happen then?" The master said, "Just come nearer and I'll tell you." Obaku then went up to the master and slapped him. The master clapped his hands and, laughing aloud, said, "I thought the barbarian's beard was red, but here is a barbarian with a red beard!"

MUMON'S COMMENTARY

Not falling under the law of cause and effect — for what reason had he fallen into the state of a fox? The law of cause and effect cannot be obscured — for what reason has he been released from a fox's body? If in regard to this you have the one eye, then you will understand that the former Hyakujō enjoyed 500 lives of grace as a fox.

THE VERSE

Not falling, not obscuring,
Two faces, one die.
Not obscuring, not falling,
A thousand mistakes, ten thousand mistakes.

TEISHO ON THE CASE

Like Jōshū and many other Zen masters in ancient China, Hyakujō got his name from the mountain where his monastery was located. Born in 720, during the reign of Emperor Gensō of the T'ang dynasty, he died in 814 at the age of ninety-four. He was a disciple of the great Zen master Baso. It is said that Baso had eighty-three Dharma successors, among whom Hyakujō and Nansen are the most famous. Like Jōshū, Hyakujō experienced a great kensho when he was only eighteen years of age.

Hyakujo was the first formally to compile a list of monastery rules and regulations for Zen practitioners. In English its title would be *Hyakujō's Pure Rules.* These famous regulations continue to exert a great influence on monastic life. Hyakujō's motto, "A day of no work, a day of no eating," is also well-known, and its spirit is still alive in Zen monasteries today.

Ōbaku, who appears in this koan, was the teacher of the famous Zen master Rinzai. He also appears in Case II of the *Blue Cliff Record,* where you can appreciate the dignified character of his Zen. Ōbaku is one of the great masters in the history of Zen in China. His real name was Kiun, but he was called Ōbaku after the mountain where his monastery was located. Ōbaku entered the priesthood when he was a small boy and eventually became a Dharma successor of master Hyakujō. Tradition says he was a man of large stature and commanding presence, with a protuberance on his forehead.[5] His voice was said to be loud and sonorous. His celebrated sermons are collected in the chronicle called *The Transmission of Mind as the Essence of Dharma* (Denshin-Hōyō).

As koans go, the story is rather long, and it might be better to read it as a drama. But what connection does this story have with Zen Buddhism? We

should know that from the point of view of Buddhism — that is, from Shakyamuni's great enlightened eye — all things, including human beings, have two aspects. One is the phenomenal and the other is the essential. In accordance with the law of cause and effect, all phenomena are constantly changing. The word "hō" (*fa* in Chinese) means law. In Buddhism it also has the meaning of "things." This is because things are changing rapidly and constantly according to the law of cause and effect. They have no definite form. On the other hand, the essential nature of things does not change, no matter how much the phenomena change. Take yourself. Sometimes you might be rich, sometimes poor, sometimes healthy, sometimes sick. If you are young now, you'll soon be old. Some people are born into high estate, others low. But these differences are all phenomenal. Whether you are healthy or sick, your essential nature is always the same. You may think I am talking about two different worlds. Undoubtedly they are two different aspects, but they are two aspects of one substance. From the very beginning, they are intrinsically one.

Now, owing to his delusive answer, the old man, who had also been called Hyakujō, became a fox for 500 lives but was able to return to the human state through the merits of the latter Hyakujō's words. The phenomenal changes were from man to fox and from fox to man, but there is no change in the essential nature. It is always the same, from the very beginning, now, and on into the endless future. It is something like a person being born as a baby, then becoming a child, then a youth, then a person in the prime of life, and finally an old person.

What is one's essential nature? It is not merely an idea or a philosophy; it is an actual fact which can be seen only by the direct experience of enlightenment. Zen always treats things from the aspect of this essential nature. Therefore every koan should be approached in this way.

Getting back to our koan. Ōbaku comes on stage. He was the leading monk of the monastery at the time and was out when the affair happened. He did not return until after the funeral and heard the story of the fox from Hyakujō. Ōbaku asked, "The man of old missed the turning word and fell to the state of a fox for 500 lives. Suppose every time he answered he made no mistakes, what would happen then?" This is a fearful question. Ōbaku is trying to examine his master.

Hyakujō replied, "Just come nearer and I'll tell you."

Ōbaku went up to Hyakujō and slapped the master's face. This is an interesting example of Dharma combat between a master and a disciple. However, as my teacher Yasutani Roshi once told me regarding Ōbaku's action, "You shouldn't think that Ōbaku actually slapped the master's face. He would merely have made the gesture of doing so as a response in Dharma combat. As a disciple, he would have stopped his hand before it reached Hyakujō's face in deference to the position of his master. This was the

teaching of my reverend master, Harada Roshi."

Hyakujō clapped his hands with joy. He acknowledged that his disciple had advanced in enlightenment as far as he had and said, "I thought the barbarian's beard was red, but here is a barbarian with a red beard!"

This is a strange expression. What does it mean? In everyday language, it would read something like this: "I think I am a deeply enlightened man, and I acknowledge that you, too, are deeply enlightened." Hyakujō recognized that Ōbaku had presented the genuine activity of his essential nature in a most lively way without even a trace of delusive thought or feeling adhering to it.

ON MUMON'S COMMENTARY

"Not falling under the law of cause and effect — for what reason had he fallen into the state of a fox? The law of cause and effect cannot be obscured — for what reason has he been released from a fox's body? If in regard to this you have the one eye, then you will understand that the former Hyakujō enjoyed 500 lives of grace as a fox."

The former Hyakujō fell into the state of a fox for 500 lives because of his answer that an enlightened person does not fall under the law of cause and effect. But why? He was released from a fox's body by hearing the sermon of the latter Hyakujō, who said that the law of cause and effect cannot be covered up for an enlightened person. But why? If you have the eye to see through the point of the matter, you will understand that the fox life of 500 lives is nonetheless the life of grace.

This is because when Hyakujō was a fox, he was the only fox in the whole universe, and when he was restored to manhood, he was the only man in the whole universe. In spite of phenomenal changes, the essential nature does not change in the slightest from the beginning.

ON THE VERSE

Not falling, not obscuring,
Two faces, one die.
Not obscuring, not falling,
A thousand mistakes, ten thousand mistakes.

As you know, a die (dice in the plural) has six faces and when you throw it, sometimes a one appears, sometimes a four, sometimes a six. Each time a different face may appear, but the die is at all times one and the same.

“Not obscuring, not falling, a thousand mistakes, ten thousand mistakes.” Sometimes the form of a fox appears, sometimes the form of a man, but the essential nature is always one. This is very simple logic and easily understood. But Zen requires us to recognize the fact by our living experience, to grasp our essential nature by our mind’s eye, so to speak. If you understand only through ideas or concepts, both aspects are wrong. If even a little thinking is mingled in the experience, it is wrong! All wrong!

NOTES

1 Kashyapa Buddha is the sixth of the Seven Buddhas of Antiquity, Shakyamuni being the seventh. Here we may understand that “the time of Kashyapa Buddha” means long, long ago.

2 A turning word *(tengo)* is a word or phrase which has the power to turn delusions into enlightenment.

3 Ino (Chinese: *wei-na;* Sanskrit: *karmandana)* is an official position and title in a Zen monastery, being the monk in charge of rules, regulations, and the registry of monks.

4 In order to make an announcement in the temple, the monks often used a kind of wooden anvil (“byakutsui”), which was about 120 cm tall, cut octagonally and made slimmer toward the top surface. A gavel, which was also cut in octagonal shape, was used to strike the center of the surface of the anvil hard after first moving it several times in a spiral on the anvil’s surface.

5 Ōbaku, in order to teach himself true humbleness, constantly prostrated himself before the Buddhist altar, whereby hitting the floor with his forehead so hard that there eventually formed a protuberance, which came to be known as one of his physical features.

3

Gutei's One Finger

THE CASE

Whatever he was asked about Zen, Master Gutei simply stuck up one finger.

He had a boy attendant whom a visitor asked, "What kind of teaching does your master give?" The boy held up one finger too. Hearing of this, Gutei cut off the boy's finger with a knife. As the boy ran away, screaming with pain, Gutei called to him. When the boy turned his head, Gutei stuck up one finger. The boy was suddenly enlightened.

When Gutei was about to die, he said to the assembled monks, "I received this one-finger Zen from Tenryū.[1] I've used it all my life but have not exhausted it." Having said this, he entered nirvana.

MUMON'S COMMENTARY

The enlightenment of Gutei and the boy have nothing to do with the tip of a finger. If you realize this, Tenryū, Gutei, the boy, and you yourself are all run through with one skewer.

THE VERSE

Old Tenryū made a fool of Gutei,
Who cut the boy with a sharp blade.
The mountain deity Korei raised his hand, and lo, without effort,
Great Mount Ka with its many ridges was split in two!

TEISHŌ ON THE CASE

Gutei's name was originally a nickname given him because he was always chanting the *Gutei Butsumo Dharani.* The dates of his birth and death are not recorded, but he was undoubtedly a contemporary of Ōbaku and Rinzai. As a sincere Buddhist priest, Gutei earnestly attended to his daily duties, but when

the following incident happened, he was not yet enlightened.

In the temples and monasteries of ancient China, it was customary for a guest, in greeting a host, to walk around the seated master and with head bared, to bow deeply. One day a nun called Jissai, which means “true world,” came into Gutei’s room. She walked around his seat three times. Then, without taking off her bamboo hat, she stood in front of him and said, “If you can say a word that satisfies me, I will take off my bamboo hat and make a bow.” Gutei could say nothing. The nun did not bow or remove her hat.

It is not so difficult for ordinary people to find something to say in such a situation. What would you say? You could use any greeting at all, such as, “Welcome,” or “How do you do?” or “I’m glad to meet you.” Gutei thought he should say something smacking of Zen, but he could not think of a single word, so he remained silent. Sincere as he was, he could not pass the gate set up by the nun because he had not yet experienced enlightenment.

The nun challenged him three times and still Gutei could not come up with a response. As she was preparing to leave, Gutei, worried about the lateness of the hour, kindly said, “It’s already dark. Why don’t you stay here for the night.” The nun rejoined, “If you can say something, I’ll stay.” Gutei was again dumbstruck. The nun departed.

After she left, Gutei was terribly ashamed and chided himself, “I have the form of a man, but I lack a man’s spirit. I couldn’t answer even one word upon her examination.” He made up his mind then to start on a journey to search for good Zen masters and to undergo severe Zen training with them.

During the last night in his own monastery, Gutei had a strange dream. The reigning deity of the locality appeared to him and said, “Do not leave. In a few days, an incarnate bodhisattva will come here and preach to you about the Dharma.”

And so it happened. The very next day, the Zen master Tenryū came to the monastery. Gutei welcomed him with great respect and related in detail the story of the nun, his own decision, and the ensuing dream. Upon hearing this, Tenryū stuck up a finger. At that instant, Gutei experienced deep enlightenment.

The point of this koan is just holding up one finger. What does it mean?

There is an ancient Zen text called *Believing in Mind* (Shinjin-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 Tenryū 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 Tenryū 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.

ON MUMON'S COMMENTARY

"The enlightenment of Gutei and the boy have nothing to do with the tip of a finger. If you realize this, Tenryū Gutei, the boy, and you yourself are all run through with one skewer."

Mumon says that the enlightenment of Gutei and the boy have nothing to do with the tip of a finger. The finger was merely the medium. It provided the stimulus or shock which brought Gutei and the boy attendant to enlightenment. Shakyamuni Buddha attained his great enlightenment when he saw the twinkling light of Venus in the eastern sky. Kyōgen came to realization when he heard the sound of a small pebble bouncing against bamboo. The pink blossoms of distant peach trees triggered Reiun's sight into Sight after thirty years of hard Zen practice.

These people all came to enlightenment through various means. In each case mentioned, realization made the person aware that his self nature is empty, limitless, and one with the whole universe. You cannot find enlightenment in the tip of a finger. When you experience satori, you will come to realize the same thing. Then Tenryū, Gutei, the boy, and you yourself will all be run through with one skewer.

ON THE VERSE

Old Tenryū made a fool of Gutei,
Who cut the boy with a sharp blade.
The mountain deity Korei raised his hand, and lo, without effort,
Great Mount Ka with its many ridges was split in two!

What does "Old Tenryū made a foot of Gutei" mean? It is an example of the type of irony of which Zen is very fond. It can be explained by calling to mind Shakyamuni Buddha's declaration that all living beings have Buddha nature. Hakuin Zenji put it another way: "Every living being is intrinsically Buddha." Gutei is, of course, a living being. That being so, what need is there to try to bring him to enlightenment by holding up a finger? Isn't it sheer nonsense to try to make a Buddha out of a Buddha? So this expression could be paraphrased, "You rascal, Tenryū — you are making sport of poor Gutei!" Other interpretations of this phrase are that Gutei makes a fool of old Tenryū, and that old Tenryū and Gutei together make fools of us all. I think you can understand that, in principle, these three interpretations are not different from one another.

"The mountain deity Korei raised his hand, and lo, without effort, Great Mount Ka with its many ridges was split in two!" According to a Chinese

legend, Korei, a mountain deity of great strength, divided Great Mount Ka in two — one part Mt. Shuyō, the other Mt. Ka — by the mere touch of his hand, thereby allowing the waters of the Yellow River to flow through. In the same way, Tenryū, by sticking up one finger, broke Gutei's myriad-piled delusions (concepts, philosophies, etc.) into pieces. When one finger is held up, the essential world appears, annihilating all delusions.

NOTE

1 Nothing is known about Master Tenryū except for the following mondo (question-and-answer exchange) held between a monk and him.

> A monk asked, "How can I get out of the three worlds?" [In Buddhist philosophy, the three delusive worlds are those of desire, form, and no-form.] Master Tenryū said, "Where are you right now?"

Tenryū is supposed to have had Master Taibai Hōjō as his teacher.

4

The Barbarian Has No Beard

THE CASE

Wakuan said, “Why has the western barbarian no beard?”

MUMON’S COMMENTARY

If you practice Zen, you must actually practice it. If you become enlightened, it must be the real experience of enlightenment. You see this barbarian once face to face; then for the first time, you will be able to acknowledge him. But if you say that you see him face to face, in that instant there is division into two.

THE VERSE

In front of a fool
Do not talk about dreams;
The barbarian has no beard:
It’s adding obscurity to clarity.

TEISHŌ ON THE CASE

Master Wakuan Shitai lived from 1108 to 1179. He died at the age of seventy-two, four years before Mumon, the author of the *Gateless Gate,* was born. Wakuan is in the Rinzai line of Zen.

In ancient China, all non-Chinese, and even the Chinese living on the southwest frontier, were called “hu” or barbarian. In this case, the western barbarian could be Bodhidharma, the first patriarch to come to China from India.

If we take the western barbarian to mean Bodhidharma, the case would read, “Why does Bodhidharma have no beard?” Pictures of Bodhidharma are well known, and not only does he always have a beard but a very thick beard indeed! Wakuan was well aware of this. Why then does he say that

Bodhidharma has no beard?

Everything has two aspects, phenomenal and essential. The phenomenal Bodhidharma has a beard, but the essential Bodhidharma has no beard. To realize this, you must grasp by experience the essential nature of Bodhidharma.

What is this essential nature? Who has it? What is it like?

All existence has its essential nature — every person, every thing, the whole universe. There is no difference between people's essential nature and the essential nature of things and the universe. It is all the same. When you attain true self-realization, you will acknowledge that this is true. There is no dualistic opposition in the essential nature, such as subject and object, good and bad, Buddha and ordinary man, enlightenment and delusion. The essential nature has no form, no color, no weight, no length, no place, no concepts, no taint or blemish attached to it. It is perfectly pure.

The essential nature cannot be destroyed, even by karmic fire. If the whole universe were to be completely destroyed, the essential nature would continue to exist because it is empty. It is nonsubstantial. It cannot be seen with the eyes, heard with the ears, or touched with the hands. No one can identify the spot where it is.

Just reflect for a moment on your own mind, which is the same thing as your consciousness. You cannot tell where your mind is. Some people point to their head, but that is their brain. It is not the mind. Actually, nobody knows where the mind is, but we do know its functions. It sees, it walks, it thinks. This mind or consciousness of your everyday life is the entrance to the essence of the vast, limitless universe.

We cannot locate our essential nature because it is zero, yet it has infinite capabilities. It can see with eyes, walk with legs, think with a brain, and digest food with a stomach. It weeps when it is sad and laughs when it is happy. Though it is zero, no one can deny its existence. It is one with phenomena. The essential nature and phenomena are one from the very beginning. That is why the *Hannya Shingyō,* or *Prajna Paramita Sutra,*[1] can say, "Form is nothing but emptiness; emptiness is nothing but form."

Yet our essential nature is not a thought or a philosophical concept. It cannot be grasped by our physical senses, but it is an existing reality. It can be comprehended only in direct experience. This experience is kensho or satori, the enlightenment of Zen.

As mentioned above, the gateway to our essential nature is our consciousness. We can enter its boundless world by way of inner concentration. When you touch your beard with your hand, does your mind have a beard? The mind is the agent controlling the movement of your hand. You can see your hand. You can touch your beard. You can recognize everything that is yours — your fingers, your head, etc. But where is the You

itself? Not the possessive or genitive you, but the nominative You. You yourself is no other than your mind, and your mind has no beard! So what Wakuan is really saying to us is "Bodhidharma's essential nature has no beard."

You must come to know this through realization. Everybody knows about the phenomenal world, but only a few truly enlightened people know about the essential nature of the universe. Zen always treats reality from this point of view, that is, the essential point of view, and generally speaking, every koan should be approached from this angle.

ON MUMON'S COMMENTARY

"If you practice Zen, you must actually practice it. If you become enlightened, it must be the real experience of enlightenment. You see this barbarian once face to face; then for the first time you will be able to acknowledge him. But if you say that you see him face to face, in that instant there is division into two."

"You see this barbarian once face to face; then for the first time you will be able to acknowledge him." When you live naturally, without delusions, you are a Buddha, seeing with the eyes of Buddha.

"But if you say that you see him face to face, in that instant there is division into two." When you feel that you have seen him face to face, there are two faces. The one face has been divided into two by the concept. When you are occupied with some conceptual activity, you are no longer a Buddha but an ordinary sentient being.

ON THE VERSE

In front of a fool
Do not talk about dreams;
The barbarian has no beard:
It's adding obscurity to clarity.

"In front of a fool, do not talk about dreams." The strange words of Wakuan mean that the fool will take the dream for reality and come to cherish a lot of ideas about it.

"The barbarian has no beard These words themselves are no other than the beard. You are self-sufficient and complete as you are so long as you have no beard. But if, upon hearing Wakuan's words, you use your brains and doubt even a bit, a beard will sprout and your essential clarity will be obscured by it.

NOTE

1 Usually it is called “Heart Sutra.” The full Sanskrit title “Mahaprajna-Paramita-Hrdaya-Sutra” means literally “The Core (in this sense: “heart”)-Sutra (of all Sutras) on the great Wisdom of Salvation.”

5

Kyōgen's Man Up a Tree

THE CASE

Master Kyōgen said, "It's like a man up a tree, hanging from a branch by his mouth; his hands cannot grasp a branch, his feet won't reach a bough. Suppose there is another man under the tree who asks him, 'What is the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming from the west?' If he does not respond, he goes against the wish of the questioner. If he answers, he will lose his life. At such a time, how should he respond?"

MUMON'S COMMENTARY

Even if your eloquence flows like a river, it is of no use. Even if you can expound the whole body of the sutras, it is of no avail. If you can respond to it fittingly, you will give life to those who have been dead, and put to death those who have been alive. If, however, you are unable to do this, wait for Maitreya to come and ask him.

THE VERSE

Kyōgen is really absurd,
His perversity knows no bounds;
He stops up the monks' mouths,
Making his whole body into the glaring eyes of a demon.

TEISHŌ ON THE CASE

Kyōgen Chikan was a disciple of Isan Reiyū, one of the founders of the Igyō sect of Zen in China. He was a very intelligent and learned man, but his erudition must have been a hindrance, for he did not come to enlightenment early.

Isan, knowing this, said to Kyōgen one day, "What is your essential face

Kyōgen is really absurd,
His perversity knows no bounds;
He stops up the monks' mouths,
Making his whole body into the glaring eyes of a demon.

"His perversity knows no bounds" means that Kyōgen's intention is to kill all the illusions of his disciples and thereby save them. In fact, his perversity is the epitome of kindness. This is an example of Mumon's irony.

"He stops up the monks' mouths, making his whole body into the glaring eyes of a demon." Kyōgen surveys them with glaring eyes, waiting to see if anyone can respond fittingly. But there is not a monk who can utter a word. They are all sitting as silent as shells.

6

Buddha Holds Up a Flower

THE CASE

Once in ancient times, when the World-Honored One was at Mount Grdhrakūta,[1] he held up a flower, twirled it, and showed it to the assemblage.

At this, they all remained silent. Only the venerable Kashyapa broke into a smile.

The World-Honored One said: "I have the eye treasury of the true Dharma, the marvelous mind of nirvana, the true form of no-form, the subtle gate of the Dharma. It does not depend on letters, being specially transmitted outside all teachings. Now I entrust Mahakashyapa with this."

MUMON'S COMMENTARY

The golden-faced Gautama insolently suppressed noble people and made them lowly. He sells dog's flesh under the label of sheep's head. I thought there should be something of particular merit in it. If at that time, however, all those attending had smiled, how would the eye treasury of the true Dharma have been transmitted? Or if Kashyapa had not smiled, how would he have been entrusted with it?

If you say that the eye treasury of the true Dharma can be transmitted, then that is as if the golden-faced old man is swindling country people at the town gate. If you say it cannot be transmitted, then why did Buddha say he entrusted only Kashyapa with it?

THE VERSE

In handling a flower,
The tail o the snake mani fested itself.
Kashyapa breaks into a smile,
Nobody on earth or in heaven knows wbat to do.


image
not
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entire screen. The movie as a whole is the flowing continuity.

In the same way your life is the continuity of standing up, sitting down, laughing, sleeping, waking up, drinking, eating, and, of course, being born and dying. That is the continuity of the whole universe. Now, I presume you understand what Jōshū means when he says, "Wash your bowls." I repeat, our life is nothing but the continuity of these actions, and they are nothing but the continuity of the whole universe.

ON MUMON'S COMMENTARY

"Jōshū, opening his mouth, showed his gall bladder and revealed his heart and liver. If the monk, hearing it, did not really grasp the fact, he would mistake a bell for a pot."

Mumon's first sentence means that when Jōshū says, "Wash your bowls," he is showing us his whole interior, that is, the very truth of Zen, which he has realized. By the second sentence, he means that if the monk's understanding of what Jōshū said was intellectual, failing to grasp the truth, he mistook a pot for a bell or a glass bead for a pearl.

N THE VERSE

Just because it is so clear,
It takes us longer to realize it.
If you quickly acknowledge that the candlelight is fire,
You will find that the rice has long been cooked.

The fact is very simple. It is just as you see, just as you hear. There is no other secret, no other mystery, no other truth. But it is so simple that most people cannot appreciate the reality and tend to think there must be something deeper, something different. "If you quickly acknowledge that the candlelight is fire, you will find that the rice has long been cooked." Fire refers to the essential nature, candlelight to the action of washing bowls, and the rice again to the essential or Buddha nature. So this stanza means if you acknowledge, on the spot, that the action of washing bowls is nothing other than the manifestation of the essential nature itself, you will find that your essential nature has long been accomplished. Actually, not only washing bowls but standing up, sitting down, eating, drinking, laughing, crying, a stone, a pillar, a flower, a plant — each and everything in the universe is nothing other than the perfect manifestation of the essential nature. If you realize this fact, you will find that your own self nature exists in completeness, from the beginningless